

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Thursday, March 27

Senior Menu: Beef noodle stroganoff, mixed vegetables, pineapple, cookie, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza.  
School Lunch: Old school chili, cornbread.

## Friday, March 28

Senior Menu: Meatballs, mashed potato and gravy, carrots, strawberry ambrosia, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: Egg wraps.  
School Lunch: Garlic cheese bread, cooked carrots.

## Groton Daily Independent

**PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445**

**Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460**



## Saturday, March 29

### Sunday, March 30

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

St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's, 9 a.m.; at Zion, 11 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:45 a.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.; Choir, 6 p.m.

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

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

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

### Monday, March 31

Senior Menu: Pork cutlet, creamy noodles, California Blend, fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Breakfast sliders.

School Lunch: Chicken breast, mashed potatoes.

First Allowable Day of Girls Golf

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

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# 1440

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

## Full Signal Chat Released

The Atlantic released the full Signal group chat between US national security leaders yesterday, providing more details about the recent security breach as intelligence officials continued testifying before the House Intelligence Committee.

The group chat between 18 senior officials, including national security advisor Mike Waltz and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, accidentally added The Atlantic's Editor-in-Chief Jeffrey Goldberg to its chain discussing military strategy. Screenshots from the text conversation on Signal, an open-source messaging app, revealed sensitive military information, including the planned timeline for warplane launches and weapon details for an attack against Yemeni Houthi rebels before US military personnel were airborne. Senate Democrats argue the new details contradict claims from Tuesday's testimonies that no classified information was shared in the group. The White House and intelligence chiefs maintain nothing classified was posted.

Days after the text exchanges, a Pentagon-wide advisory warned of vulnerability within Signal, claiming it was a target of Russian hacking groups.

## MLB Opening Day

The 2025 Major League Baseball season begins today, with 28 of the league's 30 teams taking the field. The action starts with the Milwaukee Brewers heading to the New York Yankees (3 pm ET, ESPN), with marquee matchups including the Boston Red Sox at the Texas Rangers and the Los Angeles Dodgers hosting the Detroit Tigers (7 pm ET, ESPN).

One of the biggest storylines entering the season is whether the defending champion Dodgers can repeat as World Series winners and break the all-time single-year wins record. The feat is held by the 1906 Chicago Cubs at 116 wins (tied by the 2001 Seattle Mariners)—but Dodgers shortstop Miguel Rojas has said he thinks the club could win 120 games this year. Meanwhile, the Yankees—who lost to the Dodgers in last year's World Series—look to rebound from a Game Five meltdown that led to the series loss.

Two teams—the (formerly Oakland) Athletics and the Tampa Bay Rays—will spend their seasons without a home stadium as they transition locations.

## Ghost Gun Ruling

The Supreme Court yesterday upheld regulations of ghost gun kits, or disassembled guns designed to be built at home. The 2022 rule treats dealers and manufacturers of the kits as subject to the 1968 Gun Control Act, requiring them to place traceable serial numbers on kit parts, conduct background checks on potential buyers, and more.

Law enforcement has recorded a steep rise in privately made firearms recovered at crime scenes since 2016, prompting the Biden administration to regulate them. Gun rights advocates challenged the rule, arguing the kits are for hobbyists and do not meet the definition of a firearm as written in the 1968 act. In his majority opinion, Justice Neil Gorsuch claimed the ease with which the kits are assembled—in many cases in less than 30 minutes—meets the act's definition of a firearm.

In separate dissents, Justices Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito argued disassembled kits do not meet the statutory definition. During oral arguments, Alito had suggested viewing a ghost gun kit as a firearm is like calling eggs, ham, and onions an omelet.

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## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

NCAA men's basketball tournament Sweet 16 round kicks off today; see full schedule and preview.  
Previously announced National Women's Soccer League franchise renamed Boston Legacy FC.

YouTube tops Disney for first time on Nielsen's TV distributor rankings, which aggregates total TV viewership by media company.

Lady Gaga announces her first arena concert tour since 2018 with dates revealed for North America and Europe.

Yolanda Saldivar, woman convicted of 1995 murder of music legend Selena Quintanilla-Pérez, up for parole for first time after serving 30 years in prison.

## Science & Technology

Mathematician Masaki Kashiwara awarded the 2025 Abel Prize—the field's equivalent to the Nobel Prize—for his work in bringing together multiple types of math to investigate the concept of symmetry.

New study reveals how individual cells respond to stress, and the mechanisms that lead to either cell death or resumption of normal activity; findings may lead to new treatments for cancer and neurodegenerative diseases.

Research finds obesity reduces the amount of neurotensin, a brain chemical involved in pleasure response, suggesting the body has a built-in mechanism to counter overeating.

## Business & Markets

US stock markets close lower (S&P 500 -1.1%, Dow -0.3%, Nasdaq -2.1%).

President Donald Trump announces 25% tariffs on imported cars, up from current tariffs of 2.5%; nearly half of cars sold in the US are imported.

Wall Street posts record \$47.5B in bonuses for 2024.

GameStop shares close up 12% after retailer says it will invest corporate cash into bitcoin; follows move by software company MicroStrategy, the largest corporate holder of bitcoin.

Dollar Tree selling Family Dollar brand for roughly \$1B to private equity firms Brigade Capital Management and Macellum Capital Management.

## Politics & World Affairs

Federal appeals court holds temporary block on use of Alien Enemies Act for deportations.

Senate confirms Marty Makary as head of the Food and Drug Administration by vote of 56-44.

Vice President JD Vance, second lady Usha Vance to visit US Space Force outpost in Greenland tomorrow.

Death toll rises to 24 from deadliest wildfires in southeastern South Korea; over 27,000 people evacuated and an ancient Buddhist temple among 200 buildings damaged or destroyed.

South Korea's government found responsible for decades of fraud and abuse in foreign adoption program, per report.

Brazil Supreme Court panel orders former President Jair Bolsonaro to stand trial following an alleged attempt to stay in office after his 2022 election defeat.



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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

**Teenager or adult Easter basket - \$25**



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



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Rainbow basket - \$25



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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## April 2025 Groton Community Calendar

### Tuesday, April 1

Senior Menu: Hamburger gravy on rice, corn, peaches, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: Egg Omelets  
School Lunch: Hot dogs, chips.  
NSU Indoor Track Meet, 3 p.m.  
City Council meeting, 7 p.m.  
United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Ladies Aid LWML, 1:30 p.m.

### Wednesday, April 2

Senior Menu: Chicken cordon blue hotdish, Capri blend, vanilla pudding with oranges, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: Cereal.  
School Lunch: Chicken piccata, rice.  
Groton Chamber meeting, City Hall, noon  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.; Sarah Circle, 5 p.m.; Soup Supper, 6 p.m. (League is host); worship, 7 p.m.  
Groton United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.  
Groton C&MA: Kid's Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study, 7 p.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation 3:45 p.m.; Supper, 6 p.m.; Lent Service, 7 p.m.

### Thursday, April 3

Senior Menu: Salisbury steak, mashed potato with gravy, carrots, fruit, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: Pancake on a stick.  
School Lunch: Chicken nuggets, mashed potatoes.  
State FFA Convention, SDSU  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Nigeria Circle, 2 p.m.

### Friday, April 4

Senior Menu: Lemon baked fish, parsley buttered potatoes mixed vegetables, tropical fruit, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: Egg bake.  
School Lunch: Fish nuggets, tri taters.  
State FFA Convention, SDSU

### Saturday, April 5

State FFA Convention, SDSU  
Dueling Duo at Groton Legion, 6 p.m.

### Sunday, April 6

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; Last day of Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.; Choir, 6 p.m.  
United Methodist: Worship with communion at Conde, 8:15 a.m.; at Groton, 9:30 a.m.; at Britton, 11:15 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:30 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 10:30 a.m.  
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m.; SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.  
First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.  
Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship, 10:30 a.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Worship with communion at St. John's, 9 a.m.; and Zion, 11 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:45 a.m.  
POPS Concert, 2 p.m. and 5 p.m.  
Pancake Sunday, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Groton Community Center  
Baseball at Redfield, Varsity at 2 p.m., JV at 4 p.m.

### Monday, April 7

Senior Menu: Ham with pineapple, au gratin, glazed carrots, Easter cake, dinner roll.  
School Breakfast: French toast.  
School Lunch: Chicken pasta, cooked broccoli.  
Smarter Balance Testing for Grades 6-8 and 11 (ELA and Math)  
Baseball at Madison, 7 p.m.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

### Tuesday, April 8

Senior Menu: BBQ riblet on bun, mac n' cheese, winter blend, pears, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: Scones.  
School Lunch: Tacos  
Smarter Balance Testing for Grades 6-8 and 11 (ELA and Math)  
Track at Ipswich, 2 p.m.

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Emmanuel Lutheran: Council, 6 p.m.  
United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

## Wednesday, April 9

Senior Menu: Roast beef, masehd potatoes with gravy, monterey blend, fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Oatmeal.

School Lunch: Cheese nachos, salas, refried beans.

Smarter Balance Testing for Grades 6-8 and 11 (ELA and Math)

Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.; Soup Supper, 6 p.m. (Sunday School is host), worship, 7 p.m.

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

St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.; Supper, 6 p.m.; Lent, 7 p.m.

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

## Thursday, April 10

Senior Menu: Taco salad with chips, Mexican rice with black beans, cherry fluff, breadstick.

School Breakfast: Biscuits.

School Lunch: Hamburgers, fries.

Smarter Balance Testing for Grades 6-8 and 11 (ELA and Math)

Track at Mobridge-Pollock, 11 a.m.

Groton Lions Club meeting, 6 p.m. 104 N Main

## Friday, April 11

Senior Menu: Chicken tetazzine, peas, pineapple, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Egg Omelets.

School Lunch: Tuna. Noodle hot dish, green beans.

Smarter Balance Testing for Grades 6-8 and 11 (ELA and Math)

## Saturday, April 12

Prom

Lions Easter Egg Hunt, 10 a.m., city park

Firemen's Spring Social, 7 p.m., Groton Fire Hall

## Sunday, April 13

PALM SUNDAY

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m. (Procession of the Palms by youth)

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

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

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

Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship, 10:30 a.m.; Easter Cantata with Aberdeen Alliance joining Groton in Groton, 6:30 p.m. Title is "Calvary's Love Story."

St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's, 9 a.m.; at Zion, 11 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:45 a.m.

Baseball at Clark, 3:30 p.m.

JV Baseball at Sisseton, 2 p.m. (DH)

## Monday, April 14

Senior Menu: Spanish rice, green beans, peaches, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Stuffed bagels.

School Lunch: French bread pizza, peas.

School Board Meeting, 7 p.m.

Smarter Balance Testing for grades 5, 8 11 (Science)

Groton Senior Citizens Meet, 1 p.m., Groton Community Center

Baseball at Northville, 5:30 p.m. (DH)

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

## Tuesday, April 15

Senior Menu: Ham rotini bake, peas and carrots, five cup salad, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Waffles.

School Lunch: Sloppy joes, baked beans.

Smarter Balance Testing for grades 5, 8 11 (Science)

Track at Clear Lake, 2 p.m.

Junior High Track at Milbank, 4 p.m.

City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.

United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.



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## Wednesday, April 16

Senior Menu: Ranch chicken, wild rice, catalina blend, fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Muffins.

School Lunch: Chicken pot pie, biscuits.

Smarter Balance Testing for grades 5, 8 11 (Science)

Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.; League, 6:30 p.m.; Stations of the Cross at Catholic Church)

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

St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.

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

## Thursday, April 17

Senior Menu: Breaded chicken sandwich, tri-taters, mixed vegetables, cake with strawberries.

School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza.

School Lunch: Lasagna bake, garlic toast, corn.

Smarter Balance Testing for grades 5, 8 11 (Science)

Track at Milbank, 3:30 p.m.

Junior High Track at Sisseton, 2 p.m.

Girls Golf at Mobridge-Pollock, 10 a.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 7 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Maundy Thursday service at St. John's, 9 a.m.

United Methodist: Maundy Thursday service at Conde, 7 p.m.

## Friday, April 18

GOOD FRIDAY

Groton C&MA: Service, 7 p.m.

NO SCHOOL - Easter Break

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 7 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Good Friday Service at St. John's, 7 p.m.

United Methodist: Good Friday service at Britton, 6 p.m.

## Saturday, April 19

## Sunday, April 20

EASTER

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 7 a.m.; Breakfast by league; Worship with communion, 9:30 a.m.; 1st communion for fifth graders.

United Methodist: Worship at Conde, 8:15 a.m.; at Groton, 9:30 a.m.; at Britton, 11:15 a.m.; No Sunday School; Coffee Hour, 10:30 a.m.

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

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

Groton CM&A: Easter Breakfast, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 10:30 a.m. (No Sunday School)

St. John's Lutheran: Sunrise service at St. John's, 7 a.m.; Worship with communion at St. John's, 9 a.m.; and at Zion, 11 a.m.; No Sunday School.

## Monday, April 21

Senior Menu: Chicken and rice casserole, broccoli, fruit cocktail, whole wheat bread.

NO SCHOOL - Easter Break

Groton Senior Citizens Meet, 1 p.m., Groton Community Center

Baseball at Miller, Varsity at 6 p.m.; JV at 8 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Christian Literature Circle, 7:30 p.m.

## Tuesday, April 22

Senior Menu: Swiss steak, mashed potatoes with gravy, baby carrots, waldorf salad, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Egg omelets.

School Lunch: Pasta with meat sauce.

Smarter Balance Testing. Grades 3-5 (ELA and Math)

Girls Golf at Milbank, 10 a.m.

Track at Britton-Hecla, 2 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.

United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

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## Wednesday, April 23

Senior Menu: Lasagna bake, tossed salad, fresh fruit, garlic toast.

School Breakfast: Cereal.

School Lunch: Cheese pizza, green beans.

Smarter Balance Testing. Grades 3-5 (ELA and Math)

FCCLA Banquet, 6 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.

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

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

## Thursday, April 24

Senior Menu: Bratwurst on bun, sauerkraut, corn, fruited Jell-O.

School Breakfast: Pancake on a stick.

School Lunch: Chicken and noodles, mixed vegetables.

Smarter Balance Testing. Grades 3-5 (ELA and Math)

Track at Redfield, 10 a.m.

Middle School Spring Concert, 7 p.m.

## Friday, April 25

Senior Menu: Chicken caccalatore, rice pilaf, Italian belnd, apple sauce, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Egg bake.

School Lunch: Beef vegetable soup, sandwich.

Smarter Balance Testing. Grades 3-5 (ELA and Math)

Junior High Track at Groton Area, 2 p.m.

Baseball hosts. Warner/Ipswich/Northwestern/Frederick, 5:30 p.m.

## Saturday, April 26

Track at Ipswich, 10 a.m.

## Sunday, April 27

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.

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

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m.; SEAS

Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

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

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

St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's, 9 a.m.; at Zion, 11 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:45 a.m.

Baseball at Canova, 2 p.m.

JV Baseball hosts Sioux Valley, 2 p.m. (DH)

## Monday, April 28

Senior Menu: Goulash, green beans, fruit, cookie, breadstick.

School Breakfast: French toast.

School Lunch: Corn dogs, baked beans.

School Board Meeting, 7 p.m.

Junior High Track at Britton-Hecla, 3:30 p.m.

Groton Senior Citizens Meet, Noon Potluck., Groton Community Center

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

## Tuesday, April 29

Senior Menu: Scallped potato with ham, mixed vegetables, mandarin orange salad, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Scones.

School Lunch: Chicken strips, fries.

Track at Groton Area, 11 a.m.

Elementary Spring Concert, 7 p.m.

United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

## Wednesday, April 30

Senior Menu: Pork chop, creamy noodles, winter blend, pineapple, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Oatmeal.

School Lunch: Quesadilla, santa fe corn.

Baseball hosts Sioux Valley, 6 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.

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

St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.

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



## Rounds Named 5th Most Effective Republican Senator for 118th Congress

**Rounds named a top lawmaker in defense, agriculture and Indian Affairs issues**

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Mike Rounds (R-S.D.) was named as one of the top-five most effective Republican lawmakers in the 118th Congress by the Center for Effective Lawmaking (CEL). The CEL score is based on metrics such as substance of bills introduced, their progression throughout the legislative process and how many were signed into law.

In addition to being recognized as one of the top-five most effective Republican lawmakers in the Senate, Rounds was also named:

- 2nd most effective Republican on Agricultural issues (9th overall)
- 3rd most effective Republican on Indian Affairs issues (6th overall)
- 3rd most effective Republican on Labor and Employment issues (6th overall)
- 4th most effective Republican on Defense issues (6th overall)
- 14th most effective Senator overall

"As lawmakers, one of the most important parts of our jobs is writing and introducing substantive bills and shepherding them through the legislative process with the ultimate goal of getting them signed into law," said Rounds. "We were successful in getting results for the people of South Dakota in the 118th Congress across policy areas ranging from agriculture to national security and defense.

"As a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, a large part of my daily work is focused on national security. Each year, the committee works to compose the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which authorizes funding to support our national defense programs as well as our men and women in uniform and their families. This past year, I authored 40 individual provisions that were included in the NDAA. The bill also included \$282 million in projects at Ellsworth Air Force Base and \$2.6 billion for procurement of B-21 Raider bombers which will be based at Ellsworth. We also included a number of provisions related to cybersecurity and artificial intelligence efforts to support our national defense.

"South Dakota is also home to a robust agriculture industry. Despite not serving on the Senate Agriculture Committee, I continue to work on introducing legislation that supports our farmers and ranchers that call South Dakota home. This includes supporting American-made products all the way from the farm to the shelves at the grocery store.

"In addition, as the only member of the South Dakota delegation serving on the Indian Affairs committee, I'm committed to working with all nine tribes in South Dakota on legislation that helps tribal members while also upholding tribal sovereignty. This includes legislation that improves the Indian Health Service and addresses the ongoing public safety crisis on reservations. Last Congress, our legislation, the Native American Direct Loan (NADL) Improvement Act, was signed into law, which reformed the NADL program administered by the VA to make it more accessible to Native American veterans living on tribal trust land.

"There is still plenty of work to be done on all of these issues and more in the current Congress. I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues in the Senate to get results for the people of South Dakota."

## Names Released in Lincoln County Fatal Crash

What: Two vehicle fatal crash

Where: US Highway 18, mile marker 429, near Lennox, SD

When: 10:29 a.m., Thursday, March 20, 2025

Driver 1: Zackery Tyler Crelly, 21-year-old male from Viborg, SD, fatal injuries

Vehicle 1: 2003 Honda Civic

Seat belt Used: Under investigation

Driver 2: Wade Bruce Stockwell, 57-year-old male from Parker, SD, no injuries

Vehicle 2: Semi with oversize load/farm equipment

Seat belt Used: Yes

Passenger 2a: Linda Rae Countryman, 75-year-old female from Sioux Falls, SD, no injuries

Seat belt Used: Yes

Lincoln County, S.D.- A Viborg, SD man passed away Saturday evening from injuries sustained in a two-vehicle crash Thursday, March 20 near Lennox, SD.

Preliminary crash information indicates Zackery Tyler Crelly, the driver of a 2003 Honda Civic, was traveling eastbound on US Highway 18 and drifted into the westbound lane, colliding with an oncoming semi hauling farm equipment. Semi driver Wade Bruce Stockwell and a passenger in the truck, Linda Rae Countryman, were not injured. Crelly was taken to a Sioux Falls hospital and passed away as a result of his injuries on the evening of March 22.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol is investigating the crash. All information released so far is only preliminary.

The Highway Patrol is an agency of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.



**SOUTH DAKOTA  
NEWS WATCH**

Inform. Enlighten. Illuminate.

## Fact brief: Is the entire state of South Dakota in a drought?

Yes.

As of March 18, 2025, 100% of South Dakota is under drought conditions with 42% of the state under severe or extreme drought.

During the same time last year, 11% of the state was experiencing drought with no areas under severe or extreme drought.

Each week, federal government drought experts check several variables including precipitation, temperatures, soil moisture, water levels in streams and lakes and snow cover to determine drought conditions.

Experts predict that South Dakota drought conditions will persist for at least another month.

With dry conditions and high wind gusts, the fire danger index has repeatedly been listed this season as very high for both eastern grasslands and the Black Hills area.

While 37% of the U.S. is suffering from drought conditions, no other state is completely drought-ridden like South Dakota.

Currently, 55% of North Dakota is under a drought.





## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### Carbon pipeline company files for pause or dismissal of legal fights in South Dakota

Moves follow state's adoption of a ban on eminent domain for CO2 projects

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MARCH 26, 2025 3:55 PM



**Bret Dublinske, a lawyer for Summit Carbon Solutions, argues before the South Dakota Supreme Court on March 19, 2024. The case dealt with eminent domain and other related issues.** (Dave Bordewyk/South Dakota NewsMedia Association)

A carbon dioxide pipeline company has asked courts to pause or dismiss its pending legal fights against landowners and a state regulator in South Dakota after the state's adoption of a law that prevents the company from using eminent domain.

Eminent domain is a legal process for acquiring access to land for projects that have a public benefit, with compensation for landowners determined by a court. It's commonly used for projects such as electrical power lines, water pipelines, oil pipelines and highways.

Some South Dakota landowners who oppose the Summit Carbon Solutions project sued to stop the company from surveying their property. They argued that doing so without just compensation was unconstitutional because soil sampling and other invasive practices would occur.

Summit said it had a right to survey the land because it had eminent domain authority. The company sued some landowners as well. The disputes ultimately reached the South Dakota Supreme Court, which determined Summit had not yet proven it meets the legal qualification for using eminent domain, and sent the cases back to lower courts. Lawsuits in which Summit no longer needed to survey the land in question – because an agreement was reached or the route was changed – were then dismissed, leaving four cases remaining.

Summit filed a motion to dismiss those cases on March 20, two weeks after Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden signed the bill barring carbon pipeline projects from using eminent domain.

#### Regulator case paused

Meanwhile, a judge has paused Summit's legal effort to remove an elected state regulator from its pipeline permitting case. Summit alleged the regulator has a conflict of interest. The company cited the

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eminent domain ban as part of its rationale for seeking a stay in the case.

South Dakota Public Utilities Commissioner Kristie Fiegen's sister-in-law is part of a trust that owns land on the proposed pipeline route. Fiegen declined to recuse herself from Summit's permit application, and Summit sued to disqualify her from considering the permit.

Both Summit and the state agreed to indefinitely stay the case, and a judge entered the stay on March 14.

## Permit pause sought

Summit has also requested a pause for "review and adjustment" of its permit proceedings with the South Dakota Public Utilities Commission. The commission rejected Summit's first application in 2023, largely due to the route's conflicts with local ordinances that mandate minimum distances between pipelines and existing features. Summit later adjusted its route and reapplied.

The eminent domain ban has been hailed as a victory by some landowners who have resisted Iowa-based Summit's proposed \$9 billion project. The pipeline would transport carbon dioxide emissions from dozens of ethanol plants in five states to an underground storage site in North Dakota. It would qualify for billions in federal tax credits incentivizing the sequestration of heat-trapping greenhouse gas emissions.

The project has permits in North Dakota, Minnesota and Iowa, although some permits are being challenged in court. Nebraska does not have a permitting process.

Summit has said it is not giving up on the project.

"In South Dakota, recent legislative changes have temporarily slowed our timeline, but they have not altered our vision or our determination," said Summit CEO Lee Blank in a press release. "We remain confident that our project is moving forward in a way that benefits farmers, ethanol producers, and rural communities."

*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.*

## Thune and Rounds vote yes as FDA, NIH nominees are confirmed

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - MARCH 26, 2025 4:34 PM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate confirmed President Donald Trump's nominees to lead the Food and Drug Administration and the National Institutes of Health.

Senators voted 53-47 along party lines Tuesday evening to confirm Jayanta Bhattacharya as director of the NIH before voting 56-44 to approve Martin Makary as FDA commissioner.

Democratic Sens. Dick Durbin of Illinois as well as Maggie Hassan and Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire were the only three members of their party to vote for Makary.

Shaheen said during an interview Wednesday that while she has reservations about how the Trump administration might try to change access to medication abortion, she felt Makary was qualified to lead the FDA.

"Well, I'm very concerned about what this administration might do about mifepristone," Shaheen said. "But, I thought it was important to have someone in that role who has the scientific background and ability to run the agency."

Hassan declined to answer questions about her vote when asked about it Wednesday afternoon by States Newsroom. Her office declined to send a written statement from the senator, offering only a response from a spokesperson.

Senate confirmation came just weeks after the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, or HELP, Committee voted to advance Makary and Bhattacharya.

Sen. John Hickenlooper, D-Colo., voted in committee to send Makary's nomination to the floor, but switched to opposing his confirmation on Tuesday.

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Hickenlooper said during a brief interview with States Newsroom on Wednesday that he ultimately couldn't support Makary over his comments about medication abortion. But he said nothing significant happened between his yes vote in committee and his no vote on the floor.

"I agonized over it. I could have easily gone back and voted yes," Hickenlooper said. "You know, at some point when I see him, I'll apologize and say, 'You know, that was a hard vote for me. But I really wish you would have been more demonstrative about specifically mifepristone, because I think that's a big issue that the FDA is going to take on.'"

Hickenlooper said he spoke with his staff and his wife over Makary's comments about access to medication abortion before he cast his no vote on the Senate floor.

"I realized that he serves at the pleasure of the president, so what the president says he's probably going to have to do," Hickenlooper said. "But for me, I just became more and more uncomfortable that he wouldn't make a few statements to say that, you know, this is not something that is a medical reinterpretation for political purposes. He should have said something."



**Jayanta Bhattacharya, President Donald Trump's nominee to be director of the National Institutes of Health, speaks at his confirmation hearing before the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions on Capitol Hill on March 5, 2025 in Washington, D.C.** (Photo by

Andrew Harnik/Getty Images)

## Abortion pill

Makary will have considerable authority at the FDA to determine if access to medication abortion remains as it is now, if the agency changes prescribing guidelines, or even pulls its approval.

During his confirmation hearing in early March, Makary testified he hadn't yet decided how he would approach that aspect of the job.

"I have no preconceived plans on mifepristone policy except to take a solid, hard look at the data and to meet with the professional career scientists who have reviewed the data at the FDA," Makary said at the time.

Medication abortion is a two-drug regimen consisting of mifepristone and misoprostol that accounts for about 63% of all pregnancy terminations within the United States, according to research from the Guttmacher Institute.

The FDA originally approved mifepristone in 2000 and changed its prescribing guidelines in 2016 and 2021. It is currently approved for use up to 10 weeks gestation and can be prescribed via telehealth and shipped to patients.

Sixteen major medical organizations — including the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the American Medical Association and the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine — affirmed to the U.S. Supreme Court last year that mifepristone is safe and effective.

"The scientific evidence is overwhelming: major adverse events occur in less than 0.32% of patients," the medical organizations wrote in a 45-page brief. "The risk of death is almost non-existent."



## Goals for NIH

Bhattacharya testified during his confirmation hearing that he has five goals for the NIH, including focusing the agency's research on chronic diseases and funding the "most innovative biomedical research agenda possible."

"The NIH is the crown jewel of American biomedical sciences, with a long and illustrious history of supporting breakthroughs in biology and medicine," Bhattacharya said at the time. "I have the utmost respect for the NIH scientists and staff over the decades who have contributed to this success."

But, he said, "American biomedical sciences are at a crossroads" following the coronavirus pandemic.

Bhattacharya said during his hearing he would ensure NIH's scientific research is replicable, that it has a culture that respects "free speech in science and scientific dissent" and that it regulates "risky research that has the possibility of causing a pandemic."

"While the vast majority of biomedical research poses no risk of harm to research subjects or the public, the NIH must ensure that it never supports work that might cause harm."

*Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.*

## COMMENTARY

# Noem's successor hits 'reset' after she insisted there was 'No Going Back'

by Seth Tupper

For a condemnation of Kristi Noem's performance as governor, just look at what her former lieutenant governor is doing.

You won't get him to admit that, of course. Larry Rhoden insists Noem did "great things" for South Dakota.

Yet Rhoden has also positioned himself as Governor Reset after taking inspiration from a Native American tribal leader, Chairman J. Garrett Renville of the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate.

Noem's departure to serve in President Donald Trump's Cabinet was imminent when Renville delivered a State of the Tribes address to the Legislature on Jan. 15.

"Today, let's reset," Renville said, sensing an opportunity for better state-tribal relations. "Today, let's



**Gov. Kristi Noem speaks during a bill signing ceremony March 6, 2024, at the Capitol in Pierre as Lt. Gov. Larry Rhoden looks on.**

(David Bordewyk/South Dakota NewsMedia Association)

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rebuild. Today, let's start to listen and actually hear."

Rhoden could have fired back. That's what Noem did two years ago after Crow Creek Tribal Chairman Peter Lengkeek used his State of the Tribes address to call for better state-tribal collaboration. Her office retaliated against Lengkeek with an 800-word email to the media saying his speech was a "message of division" that perpetuated "false narratives."

When Rhoden delivered his first address to the Legislature as governor on Jan. 28, he chose to respond differently than Noem. He quoted Renville's reset invitation and accepted it.

"I could not agree more," Rhoden said. "We've had our ups and downs over the years, but I am asking our tribal leaders to make a fresh start with me."

Then he took the reset theme and ran with it, using it repeatedly in his public communications.

"I see so much division today — even between those within the same political party," Rhoden said in a Feb. 28 press release. "As South Dakotans, we need to regain perspective and unite. We need to talk with each other and not at each other. We need to reset."

During his first two months as governor, Rhoden pushed the reset button so often that his fingers must be cramped and blistered.

He pushed reset on Noem's penchant for filling her staff with out-of-state ideologues, instead choosing two lifelong South Dakotans with deep experience in state government — Matt Michels and Tony Venhuizen — for two of his first and most important hires (Michels as senior adviser and counsel, and Venhuizen as lieutenant governor).

He pushed reset on Noem's combative relationship with the media, holding more press conferences during his first two months in office than Noem did during her last two years.

He pushed reset on several years of sharply rising property taxes by quickly ushering his own plan into law, after Noem failed to even propose an idea.

He pushed reset on property rights by signing a ban on eminent domain for carbon dioxide pipelines, after Noem let the issue fester and divide her party to such an extent that 14 Republican legislators lost to challengers in the June primary election.

He pushed reset on Noem's vindictive attempt to cut state support for South Dakota Public Broadcasting, and he appears ready to sign a budget restoring full funding.

He pushed reset on Noem's usurpation of legislative power with his signing of three bills — proposed by Chris Karr, a top-ranking state senator — that require greater legislative oversight of state budget transfers, building projects and leases.

And he pushed reset on Noem's prison debacle by forming a "Project Prison Reset" task force to study South Dakota's correctional system, after Noem spent and obligated a total of \$54 million pursuing an \$825 million prison construction plan that lost support during this year's legislative session.

In other areas, Rhoden has missed opportunities for resets by following Noem's misguided lead. He signed bills allowing concealed pistols at colleges and bars. He approved legislation inviting self-appointed toilet police to clog up the courts with lawsuits accusing people of using the wrong restroom. He praised-President Donald Trump's Oval Office tantrum against the president of Ukraine.

But even those who disagree with some of Rhoden's decisions would have to admit he's showing how much governors can do, and how quickly they can get it done, when they focus on the job they've got and strive for civility instead of sowing division.

Noem declared last year in the title of her infamous book — the one with the slain dog and goat and the imaginary meeting with Kim Jong Un — that Trump broke politics for the better and there's "No Going Back."

How richly ironic it is, then, that her handpicked successor has been "going back" ever since she left, by resetting the state to its pre-Noem brand of politics and accomplishing more in two months than she did in some whole years of her administration.

*Seth is editor-in-chief of South Dakota Searchlight. He was previously a supervising senior producer for South Dakota Public Broadcasting and a newspaper journalist in Rapid City and Mitchell.*

## Trump adds 25% tariff on foreign-made autos, light trucks

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - MARCH 26, 2025 6:05 PM

President Donald Trump signed an executive order Wednesday to impose a 25% tariff on imported cars and light trucks.

Trump, who campaigned on bringing down consumer costs, said during an Oval Office signing event the additional tax on foreign goods would spur U.S. production.

Asked if, like other tariffs Trump's threatened, trade partners could do anything to avoid the fee on cars and trucks, Trump answered no. This tariff will remain in place until he leaves office, he said, and was meant to protect the U.S. industry.

"I think our automobile business will flourish like it's never flourished before," he said.

The tariff will go into effect April 2, he said. It will add to – not replace – any other applicable existing tariffs, he said.

"We're going to charge countries for doing business in our country and taking our jobs, taking our wealth, taking a lot of things they've been taking over the years," he said. "They've taken so much out of our country, friend and foe alike. And frankly, friend has been oftentimes much worse than foe."

The measure could bring in \$100 billion in tax revenue, a White House aide said during the Oval Office event.

Trump said the administration would have "very strong policing" to enforce the tariffs.

Trump said he did not seek advice from White House adviser Elon Musk, the CEO of U.S. electric car-maker Tesla, because "he might have a conflict."

Trump said the tariffs may be good or neutral for Tesla, which he noted had large plants in Texas and California.

"Anybody that has plants in the United States it's going to be good for," he said.

*Jacob covers federal policy as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Based in Oregon, he focuses on Western issues. His coverage areas include climate, energy development, public lands and infrastructure.*



**President Donald Trump speaks at the Justice Department on March 14, 2025, in Washington, D.C.** (Photo by Andrew

Harnik/Getty Images)



## 'Signalgate' group chat revealed precise attack timeline, surveillance of target

BY: JACOB FISCHLER AND JENNIFER SHUTT - MARCH 26, 2025 4:46 PM

WASHINGTON — The now-famous group chat made up of high-ranking Trump administration national security officials and a journalist included a precise timeline of U.S. bombing of Houthi targets in Yemen, and revealed one of the targets of the attack was under surveillance, according to a release of the entire text chain The Atlantic published Wednesday.

Despite the newly revealed details of the leaked chat, administration officials, including President Donald Trump himself, continued to downplay the seriousness of the breach, and Republicans in Congress refused to join Democrats in calls for Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth to step down.

Administration officials argued the texts lacked key information and that the "attack plans" revealed in the chat were less damaging than "war plans," the term Editor-in-Chief Jeffrey Goldberg used to refer to information he'd decided to withhold for national security reasons. Trump aides also implied the magazine — which has endorsed Trump's opponent in each of his elections — was spinning the entire episode to discredit the administration.

What's been dubbed "Signalgate" began when The Atlantic on Monday published a stunning account by Goldberg of his apparently accidental inclusion in a group chat on the messaging app Signal, titled "The Trump Administration Accidentally Texted Me Its War Plans."

The others in the chat were senior administration officials discussing the upcoming war operation.

Administration leaders on Tuesday denied, including in testimony before Congress, that the chat contained classified information. The magazine then published a report Wednesday by Goldberg and staff writer Shane Harris that purported to include virtually the entire transcript of the chat until Goldberg's voluntary exit.

The administration position was inconsistent with the screenshots published in The Atlantic of detailed and explicit messages in the chat. At the Capitol, concerns were raised even among the administration's usually obsequious GOP allies in Congress, with U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Roger Wicker saying the information in the chat should have been classified.

"The information as published recently appears to me to be of such a sensitive nature that, based on

TIME NOW (1144et): Weather is FAVORABLE. Just CONFIRMED w/ CENTCOM we are a GO for mission launch.

1215et: F-18s LAUNCH (1st strike package)

1345: "Trigger Based" F-18 1st Strike Window Starts (Target Terrorist is @ his Known Location so SHOULD BE ON TIME) also, Strike Drones Launch (MO)

1415: LAUNCH (2nd strike package)

1415: Strike on Target (THIS IS

**U.S. Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi, D-Ill., points to text messages by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth during an annual worldwide threats assessment hearing at the Longworth House Office Building on March 26, 2025, in Washington, D.C. The hearing held by the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence addressed top aides inadvertently including Jeffrey Goldberg, the editor-in-chief for The Atlantic magazine, on a high level Trump administration Signal group chat discussing plans to bomb Houthi targets in Yemen.** (Photo by Kayla Bartkowski/Getty Images)

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my knowledge, I would have wanted to classify it," Wicker, a Mississippi Republican, told reporters on the Hill Wednesday.

## **Attack details revealed**

In the initial story, Goldberg reported National Security Advisor Michael Waltz on March 11 added the journalist to a group chat on Signal that included Vice President J.D. Vance, Hegseth, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard, CIA Director John Ratcliffe, Waltz and others.

Goldberg in the first story withheld details of the chat that he said could have compromised intelligence-gathering and military operations.

But after a day of administration figures claiming the Signal chat did not reveal classified material, while smearing Goldberg, the magazine published the entire thread with one redaction: the name of Ratcliffe's chief of staff, at the request of a CIA spokesperson.

The unredacted messages show Hegseth shared plans of the bombing campaign about 30 minutes before the first planes took off on March 15 and two hours before the start of the window of opportunity for hitting a target.

"TEAM UPDATE," Hegseth wrote in the chat on the day of the strike, according to the Atlantic's Wednesday story. "TIME NOW (1144et): Weather is FAVORABLE. Just CONFIRMED w/CENTCOM we are a GO for mission launch."

In the same message, Hegseth laid out a timeline of the attack, including confirmation that a target was at his expected location.

"Target Terrorist is @ his Known Location so SHOULD BE ON TIME," Hegseth wrote.

He also noted that the mission's operational security was "clean."

Two hours and 15 minutes later, Waltz told the group that bombs had destroyed a building where the Houthi "top missile guy" was thought to be present.

"The first target – their top missile guy – we had positive ID of him walking into his girlfriend's building and it's now collapsed," Waltz wrote.

## **Tuesday denials led to publishing**

At a previously scheduled U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee hearing Tuesday, Gabbard said that no classified information was discussed in the chat.

Trump echoed that message and Hegseth said, "Nobody was texting war plans and that's all I have to say about that."

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt wrote on social media:

"Here are the facts about his latest story: 1. No 'war plans' were discussed. 2. No classified material was sent to the thread. 3. The White House Counsel's Office has provided guidance on a number of different platforms for President Trump's top officials to communicate as safely and efficiently as possible."

Gabbard and Ratcliffe told the Senate Intelligence Committee they did not recall specific weapons systems or the timing of the operation being discussed in the chat.

But the transcript published by The Atlantic showed Hegseth's down-to-the-minute timeline of the launch of F-18 aircraft.

The denials led to the magazine's decision to publish the full transcript Wednesday, Goldberg and Harris wrote.

"The statements by Hegseth, Gabbard, Ratcliffe, and Trump — combined with the assertions made by numerous administration officials that we are lying about the content of the Signal texts — have led us to believe that people should see the texts in order to reach their own conclusions," they wrote.

"There is a clear public interest in disclosing the sort of information that Trump advisers included in nonsecure communications channels, especially because senior administration figures are attempting to downplay the significance of the messages that were shared."

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## **'No names. No targets.'**

But Hegseth and other administration officials continued to deny the growing controversy was serious Wednesday.

"So, let's (sic) me get this straight," Hegseth wrote on X Wednesday. "The Atlantic released the so-called 'war plans' and those 'plans' include: No names. No targets. No locations. No units. No routes. No sources. No methods. And no classified information.

"Those are some really shitty war plans."

Waltz posted a similar message.

"No locations," he wrote. "No sources & methods. NO WAR PLANS. Foreign partners had already been notified that strikes were imminent. BOTTOM LINE: President Trump is protecting America and our interests."

White House Counselor Alina Habba told reporters shortly after the second Atlantic story posted on Wednesday morning the issue had been overblown.

"We stand by Mike Waltz; he's doing a tremendous job," she said, according to a White House pool report. "I think this is a distraction."

## **Bipartisan call for investigation**

Leading members of Congress, though, were treating the matter with more seriousness.

Wicker said he and Armed Services ranking Democrat Sen. Jack Reed of Rhode Island had agreed on next steps, which included a letter to the administration asking for an expedited inspector general report on the matter.

He also said they were requesting "a senior person" come to a secure facility on Capitol Hill to provide a classified briefing to the committee to confirm the reporting was accurate.

Asked what the consequence should be for Hegseth if the transcript of the chat was accurate, Wicker took a forgiving tone.

"I make a lot of mistakes in my life," he said. "And I've found that it's best when I just own up to it and say 'I'm human, I made a mistake.' And I'm glad in this case no real damage was done. I think that's probably the approach of the administration right up to the president."

He also said that no targets or specific timing were mentioned.

Alaska Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski, a moderate who has voiced criticism of Trump more often than most GOP colleagues, wrote in an X post Wednesday that the incident should be a "wake-up call" to prioritize operational security.

"I am appalled by the egregious security breach from top administration officials," she wrote. "Their disregard for stringent safeguards and secure channels could have compromised a high-stakes operation and put our servicemembers at risk. I hope this serves as a wake-up call that operational security must be a top priority for everyone—especially our leaders."

## **Dems urge Hegseth's resignation**

Many Democrats went further, calling for Hegseth to resign over the use of an unclassified messaging platform to discuss impending military action.

Gabbard and others noted the Defense secretary can decide what information is classified to argue that the chat did not include classified information.

But critics said whether or not the information was technically classified, its disclosure would put service members at greater risk.

"Advance strike times are sensitive and classified because they put American military directly at risk," Intelligence Committee Vice Chairman Mark Warner, a Virginia Democrat, wrote on social media Wednesday. "The Secretary of Defense was blasting them out to unknown numbers over unclassified channels. It's sloppy, careless, and dangerous. He should resign."

Warner spokeswoman Rachel Cohen added that, despite the administration's denials, the information



revealed in The Atlantic would compromise intelligence sources and methods.

"They can keep repeating this but it's not true," she wrote, responding to Hegseth's post. "Those messages, as released by the Atlantic, are source revealing, and include targeting and weapons information that would have, at the very least, been considered at the 'secret' classification level."

The top Democrats in the U.S. House and U.S. Senate, Hakeem Jeffries and Chuck Schumer, both of New York, also called for Hegseth to lose his job.

"The secretary of Defense should be fired immediately if he's not man enough to own up to his mistakes and resign in disgrace," Jeffries said on MSNBC Wednesday.

"I agree he should be fired," Schumer told reporters at the Capitol.

Jacob covers federal policy as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Based in Oregon, he focuses on Western issues. His coverage areas include climate, energy development, public lands and infrastructure.

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## Looming X-date for U.S. default on the debt projected to arrive this summer

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - MARCH 26, 2025 12:37 PM

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump and Congress have until August or September to reach agreement and act on the debt limit, the Congressional Budget Office forecast Wednesday.

Otherwise the United States would default for the first time in history, likely leading to a global financial crisis.

The nonpartisan CBO projection is similar to an estimate published earlier this week by the Bipartisan Policy Center think tank, which expects the X-date will occur between mid-July and early October.

The previous debt limit suspension expired in January, but the Treasury Department has been able to keep paying all the government's bills through accounting maneuvers called extraordinary measures. When those run out, the country would hit the X-date and a default would begin.

The four-page CBO report says the default range "is uncertain" because how much money the federal government brings in as well as how much it spends at a given time is difficult to track.

"If the government's borrowing needs are significantly greater than CBO projects, the Treasury's resources



**President Donald Trump and Congress have until August or September to reach agreement and act on the debt limit, the Congressional Budget Office forecast Wednesday.** (Stock photo/

Getty Images Plus)

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could be exhausted in late May or sometime in June, before tax payments due in mid-June are received or before additional extraordinary measures become available on June 30," the report states. "Conversely, if borrowing needs fall short of the amounts in CBO's projections, the extraordinary measures will permit the Treasury to continue financing government activities longer than expected."

## GOP bill on tap

Republicans in Congress are hoping to approve a massive bill in the months ahead that would extend the 2017 tax law, creating \$4.5 trillion in new deficits. The package is also supposed to appropriate hundreds of billions of dollars to the Department of Defense and border security initiatives.

GOP lawmakers hope to pay for some of those increases in the deficit through spending cuts, but are far from agreement on how best to do that.

The debt limit allows the Treasury Department to borrow money to pay all of the country's bills in full and on time. The federal government must borrow money to pay for spending that Congress has approved that isn't funded by taxes or other fees.

During the last full fiscal year, that imbalance between revenue and spending, also called the deficit, totalled \$1.8 trillion. Over decades, annual deficits have added up to a \$36.2 trillion national debt.

Congress failing to raise or suspend the debt limit before the default date would limit the Treasury Department to spending only the cash it had on hand, a scenario with much broader implications than a partial government shutdown.

A default could lead the federal government to delay or simply never make payments on thousands of federal accounts, including Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, troop pay, federal employee salaries and much more.

The Treasury Department writes on its website that not raising the debt limit by a specific dollar amount or suspending the debt limit through a future date "would have catastrophic economic consequences."

A Government Accountability Office report lists off several negative repercussions of a default, including that it could trigger runs on banks and money market funds, that it would likely reduce lending to households and businesses, that it would lead to a substantial downgrade to the country's sovereign credit rating and that it would likely lead to a significant and potentially long-lasting recession.

## Treasury projection in May

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent plans to send his department's default date projection to Congress in May, though he wrote in a March letter that lawmakers should get to work sooner rather than later.

"The period of time that cash and extraordinary measures may last is subject to considerable uncertainty due to a variety of factors, including the unpredictability of tax receipts and the normal changes of forecasting the payments and receipts of the U.S. government months into the future," Bessent wrote. "We expect to provide an update during the first half of May, after the majority of receipts from the April income tax filing season have been received."

Bessent then urged lawmakers "to act promptly to protect the full faith and credit of the United States."

Republican leaders in Congress and the Trump administration have just a few more months to decide how they want to handle this year's debt limit debate.

House Republicans included a proposal in their budget resolution to raise the debt limit by \$4 trillion later this year, when GOP lawmakers draft the bill to extend the 2017 tax cuts. But the Senate has yet to agree to that blueprint.

Republicans raising the debt limit through the complicated budget reconciliation process would require support from nearly every GOP lawmaker in Congress, since the party holds a paper-thin majority in the House and just 53 seats in the Senate.

Nearly two years ago, when Congress sent the last debt limit bill to the White House, 71 House Republicans and 31 GOP senators voted against approval.

The other option is for Republicans and Democrats to negotiate a bipartisan agreement on the debt limit

that can get the support of at least 60 senators to move past the legislative filibuster.

*Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.*

## U.S. Supreme Court in 7-2 ruling upholds Biden administration regulation on ghost guns

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - MARCH 26, 2025 10:33 AM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Supreme Court Wednesday overwhelmingly upheld a Biden-era regulation governing kits that can be assembled into untraceable firearms, also known as ghost guns.

In the 7-2 decision, Justice Neil Gorsuch, the author of the opinion, said that the regulation from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives is “not inconsistent” with the Gun Control Act of 1968. The rule was written during the administration of former President Joe Biden.

In his opinion, Gorsuch said that the Gun Control Act allows the ATF to regulate “any weapon . . . which will or is designed to or may readily be converted to expel a projectile by the action of an explosive.”

“Neither the rule of lenity nor constitutional avoidance applies where, as here, the statute’s text, context, and structure make clear it reaches some weapon parts kits and unfinished frames or receivers,” he continued.

Conservative Justices Samuel Alito and Clarence Thomas wrote a dissent.

The case, *Bondi v. VanDerStok*, renamed to reflect Trump administration Attorney General Pam Bondi, raised the question before the high court as to whether a 2022 rule issued by ATF overstepped in expanding the definition of “firearms” to include “ghost guns” under a federal firearms law.

Wednesday’s ruling falls out of line with recent gun-related cases before the conservative-led Supreme Court that struck down a ban on bump stocks and struck down a New York law that banned concealed carry.

The nine justices initially heard oral arguments back in October.

Ghost guns are firearms without serial numbers. The kits can easily be bought online and quickly assembled in parts.

Law enforcement officials use serial numbers to track guns that are used in crimes and have raised concerns about how ghost guns can impede investigations involving firearms.

The regulation that was challenged by gun advocacy groups did not ban ghost guns, but instead required manufacturers of those firearm kits or parts to add a serial number to the products, as well as conduct



**The U.S. Supreme Court, as seen on Oct. 9, 2024.** (Photo by

Jane Norman/States Newsroom)



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background checks on potential buyers.

The ATF rule also clarified those kits are considered covered by the 1968 Gun Control Act under the definition of a "firearm."

## 'Buy Build Shoot' kits

Gorsuch noted in his opinion that the statute in the Gun Control Act gives the ATF the authority to regulate any weapon designed to "expel a projectile by the action of an explosive" through two requirements.

The first is that there needs to be a "weapon." The second is that "weapon" has to meet one of three criteria.

"It must be able to expel a projectile by the action of an explosive, designed to do so, or susceptible of ready conversion to operate that way," he said.

The appeals court interpreted the ATF regulation as invalid because "no weapon parts kit" can meet those two requirements. Gorsuch said the high court did not agree.

"We disagree because, to our eyes, at least some kits will satisfy both," he said.

In the Supreme Court's reasoning, Gorsuch pointed to an example of a ghost gun kit – a Polymer80's "Buy Build Shoot" kit.

He noted the kit came with all the tools needed to build a "Glock-variant semiautomatic pistol."

"And it is so easy to assemble that, in an ATF test, an individual who had never before encountered the kit was able to produce a gun from it in 21 minutes using only 'common' tools and instructions found in publicly available YouTube videos," Gorsuch said.

He said when assessing if the "Buy Build Shoot" kit applies to the two requirements, he first questioned if the word "weapon" could apply to a kit.

"Reflecting as much, everyday speakers sometimes use artifact nouns to refer to unfinished objects—at least when their intended function is clear," he wrote. "A friend might speak of the table he just bought at IKEA, even though hours of assembly remain ahead of him."

Gorsuch said the same logic can apply to the kit.

"But even as sold, the kit comes with all necessary components, and its intended function as instrument of combat is obvious," he said. "Really, the kit's name says it all: 'Buy Build Shoot.'"

As for the second requirement, Gorsuch noted the kit met it because "a person without any specialized knowledge can convert a starter gun into a working firearm using everyday tools in less than an hour."

## Thomas dissent

Justice Thomas argued that firearm kits do not meet "the statutory definition of 'firearm.'"

Thomas also wrote the opinion on a 2022 decision that greatly expanded the Second Amendment by determining the New York concealed carry law violated the 14th Amendment of the Constitution.

"The majority instead blesses the Government's overreach based on a series of errors regarding both the standard of review and the interpretation of the statute," he wrote in his dissent Wednesday. "Congress could have authorized ATF to regulate any part of a firearm or any object readily convertible into one. But, it did not."

He argued that the ATF regulation rewrites what a "frame" and "receiver" is on a weapon. Thomas wrote that ghost guns do not meet this definition because they are "unfinished."

Thomas also pushed back against the majority opinion on how easy it is to assemble a firearm through a kit.

"Special tools and an indeterminate amount of time are required to convert an unfinished weapon-parts kit into a functional weapon," he said. "Thus, even assuming that the ordinary meaning of 'weapon' does not resolve whether the term includes weapon-parts kits, at minimum the term 'weapon' cannot encompass weapon-parts kits in 'the same way' it covers disassembled firearms."

*Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her areas of coverage include politics and policy, lobbying, elections and campaign finance.*

## Mining is an environmental and human rights nightmare. Battery recycling can ease that.

BY: TIK ROOT, GRIST - MARCH 26, 2025 9:03 AM

Rows of dead batteries stretch across some 30 acres of high desert, organized in piles and boxes that are covered to shield them from the western Nevada sun. This vast field is where Redwood Materials stores the batteries it harvests from electric vehicles, laptops, toothbrushes, and the litany of other gadgets powered by lithium-ion technology. They now await recycling at what is the largest such facility in the country.

Redwood was founded in 2017 by former Tesla executive JB Straubel and says it processes about three-quarters of all lithium-ion batteries recycled in the United States. It is among a growing number of operations that shred the packs that power modern life into what is called “black mass,” then recoup upwards of 95% of the lithium, cobalt, nickel, and other minerals they contain. Every ounce they recover is an ounce that doesn’t need to be dug from the ground.

Recycling could significantly reduce the need to extract virgin material, a process that is riddled with human rights and environmental concerns, such as the reliance on open pit mines in developing countries. Even beyond those worries, the Earth contains a finite source of minerals, and skyrocketing demand will squeeze supplies. The world currently extracts about 180,000 metric tons of lithium each year — and demand is expected to hit nearly 10 times that by 2050, as adoption of electric vehicles, battery storage, and other technology needed for a green transition surges. At those levels, there are only enough known reserves to last about 15 years. The projected runway for cobalt is even shorter.

Before hitting these theoretical limits, though, demand for the metals is likely to outstrip the world’s ability to economically and ethically mine them, said Beatrice Browning, an expert on battery recycling at Benchmark Mineral Intelligence, which tracks the industry. “Recycling is going to plug that gap,” she told Grist.

Given these trends, the most remarkable thing about Redwood isn’t that it exists, but that it didn’t exist sooner. As the United States belatedly embraces the economic, national security, and environmental benefits that domestic battery recycling offers, it is trying to claw back market share from countries like South Korea, Japan, and especially China, which has a decades-long head start.

“There is this race in terms of EV recycling that people are trying to capitalize on,” said Brian Cunningham, program manager for battery research and development at the Department of Energy. “Everybody understands that, in the long term, developing these robust supply chains is going to be incredibly reliant on battery recycling.”



**Consumer batteries at Redwood’s facility prepared for recycling.** (Photo courtesy of Redwood Materials)

### Eye on the future

Straubel’s recycling journey began while he was still the chief technology officer at Tesla, which he co-

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founded with Elon Musk, and three others, in 2003. One of his roles was establishing the company's first domestic battery manufacturing facility, Gigafactory Nevada. Material for Tesla's batteries came from mines around the world, and Straubel understood that the trend would accelerate alongside demand for EVs, which has quintupled in number in the U.S. since 2020. He also knew that, in the years ahead, a growing number of electric vehicles would reach the end of their lives. According to consulting firm Circular Energy Storage, the world's supply of retired batteries is expected to grow tenfold by 2030.

"[We] need to be planning ahead and really keeping an eye toward what that future looks like, to be ready to recycle every one of those batteries," Straubel said in 2023. "The worst thing we could do is go to all this destruction and trouble to mine it, refine it, build the product and then throw it away."

Last year, Redwood says it recycled 20 gigawatt-hours of lithium-ion batteries, or the equivalent of about a quarter-million EVs, generating \$200 million in revenue. In addition to its headquarters in Carson City, Nevada, Redwood is building a campus in South Carolina. It isn't alone in looking to expand. Ascend Elements, Cirba Solutions, Blue Whale Materials, and Li-Cycle are among a number of recyclers operating, or planning to operate, facilities in at least nine states across the country. More than 50 startups worldwide have attracted billions in investment in recent years. (Much of this outlay was driven by Biden-era legislation that Republicans are considering repealing, though it remains unclear just what such action might mean for spending already planned or underway.)

Despite the boom, the reuse revolution won't come quickly.

Benchmark projects that recycled lithium and cobalt will account for a bit more than one-quarter of the global supply of those metals by 2040. A closed system in which battery manufacturers use only recycled material is considerably further off, because any increase in the number of old packs available to recycle will be outstripped by the need for new ones.

Global demand for EV batteries, for example, is growing by about 24% per year and won't level off until sometime after 2040 — the point at which Benchmark's forecast ends and growth is still forecast at 6% per year. The battery powering an EV can last well over a decade or more, so there will be a lag before the supply of recycled material catches up to demand.

Even today, the world's recycling capacity outpaces the supply of batteries available to recycle, leaving everyone clambering to find more. That has meant waiting for EV batteries to reach the end of their lives, and attempting to recycle the small batteries in everyday gadgets that are often trashed. The dearth of material available for recycling is often attributed to the idea that only 5% of lithium batteries make it to companies like Redwood Materials. But the provenance of that number, cited everywhere from the Department of Energy and Ames National Laboratory to The New York Times and Grist, is murky.

"If you ever ask, 'Where did that 5% number come from?' no one can really track back to the data," said Bryant Polzin, a process engineer at Argonne National Laboratory. Like other Department of Energy employees or affiliates quoted in this story, he spoke to Grist before President Trump was inaugurated. "I think it was just kind of a game of telephone."

Argonne's research pegs the recycling rate for all lithium-ion batteries originating in the U.S. at 54% — 10% domestically and 44% in China — though it notes that data reliability remains an issue. Even that number, though, falls considerably short of what's possible: 99% of lead acid batteries, like those used to start cars, in the United States are recycled, according to the Battery Council International trade association.

Redwood works with many automakers, including Toyota, BMW and Volkswagen, to gather EV batteries, and goes into the field to collect others from automotive repair shops, salvage yards, and the like. Policy tweaks could help recyclers acquire more. In California, for example, a state working group recommended more clearly delineating when various entities in the supply chain — from the battery supplier and auto manufacturer to a dismantler or refurbisher — are responsible for ensuring a battery is recovered, reused, or recycled. This, the report said, could reduce the risk of "stranded" resources.

So far, though, this seems to be a rare occurrence. The much bigger hindrance to EV recycling in the U.S. is simply that there aren't enough old batteries to meet the demand for new ones. As that waiting game unfolds, recycling those often discarded as household waste could help bridge the gap.



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## Collection is a challenge

Small lithium-ion batteries power everything from phones and electric toothbrushes to toys. By Benchmark's estimate, about 5% of virgin lithium is used in consumer devices, but when they die, many of them are squirreled away in a drawer or trashed.

"A lot of household stuff does get chucked in the waste, and they're not getting recycled," said Andy Latham, the founder of Salvage Wire, a consulting firm focused on automotive battery recycling. Beyond being wasteful, dropping old batteries in the trash can be dangerous; scores of garbage trucks in cities from New York to Oregon have caught fire in recent years due to improperly disposed e-waste.

Data on just how much lithium is simply thrown away or hoarded remains elusive. But Latham says, in the short-term, batteries in portable electronics are "probably just as much, if not more of a factor" as those in EVs when it comes to advancing recycling. Redwood Materials, for one, is hoovering up as many as it can. It works with nonprofits and others to funnel them to its Nevada campus and hopes to establish drop-off locations at big-box retailers, similar to can and bottle collection in some states.

"Collection is definitely the biggest challenge," said Alexis Georgeson, Redwood Materials' vice president of government relations and policy. "It's really a problem of how you get consumers to clean out their junk drawers."

Until more people do that, recyclers count on a somewhat ironic source of material: Scraps from factories that make new batteries. One of Redwood's primary feedstocks are the bits and pieces left over during the manufacturing process in places like Tesla's Gigafactory, Georgeson said. Benchmark estimates that such leftovers represent about 84% of the material all battery recyclers use today.

The authors of the Argonne paper underscored how vital this material is: "If no scrap was available," they wrote, "the development of the U.S. recycling industry might be significantly delayed."

As more EVs hit the end of the road, consumer electronics are collected in greater numbers, and battery manufacturing yields less scrap as it grows more efficient, the composition of the material will adjust. New battery technologies could also have an impact, with emerging solid-state batteries, for example, expected to create more production waste in the short term but less in the long term. But few doubt recycling will be a thriving business that could help the country cut carbon emissions and decrease its dependency on places like China, Chile, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo for increasingly vital minerals. It's a future that American policymakers are trying to shape, hasten, and prepare for.

Although under threat from President Donald Trump's administration, both the Biden-era bipartisan infrastructure law and Inflation Reduction Act, or IRA, explicitly aim to bring battery manufacturing to the United States. They provided billions of dollars in grants and tax credits to incentivize building out domestic capacity (often in Republican congressional districts). The consumer-facing EV tax credit also requires that manufacturers source a minimum amount of both minerals and components locally. The government has been investing hundreds of millions of dollars in battery recycling as well, including Department of Energy support for everything from collection systems for small electronics to research into improving recycling technology.

"The work that we are funding is to really make those processes more efficient and economical," said Jake Herb, technology development manager at the agency's Vehicle Technologies Office. One success story is Ascend Elements, which Department of Energy funding helped grow from a Worcester Polytechnic Institute startup into a major player in the domestic industry. The department offered to loan Redwood Materials \$2 billion to expand its factory, though the company declined the additional investment and says it has not accepted any federal funding. A robust domestic industry ensures that "we're able to reclaim more materials [and] keep more of those materials domestic in the U.S.," Herb said.

## Federal role is unclear

Several challenges remain as the country sprints toward that goal.

One hurdle is figuring out when recycling is the best option. Argonne National Laboratory's "battery

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material use hierarchy” puts recycling near the bottom of its list of possible outcomes. It’s better to find alternate uses for batteries, especially those from EVs, like refurbishing them for use in another car or directing them to less intensive applications, such as for energy storage.

“It would provide a much more economical solution to consumers,” said Vince Edivan, executive director of the Automotive Recyclers Association.

Still, this so-called “second life” market remains nascent in the U.S. Edivan says automakers could boost it by making it easier for salvage yards to assess a battery’s condition to determine whether it can be reused or should be recycled. They often consider that information proprietary, he said. “We’re shredding perfectly good batteries because we don’t know the state of health.”

Battery recycling comes with another danger as well: fire. Dismantling and recovering batteries involves highly volatile processes. Last fall, a recycling plant in Missouri sparked a blaze that led many residents to evacuate. Thousands of dead fish washed up downstream of the plant.

It’s somewhat hazy who is supposed to regulate this rapidly growing industry. The Environmental Protection Agency considers lithium-ion batteries hazardous waste, which dictates how they should and shouldn’t be disposed of, but doesn’t directly address recycling. In 2021, Argonne signed on to help develop lithium recycling standards, though the status of that effort remains unclear. The task will likely fall to a patchwork of federal, state, and local authorities, which must keep the public both safe and confident in a process that will be critical to the country’s — and the climate’s — future.

Perhaps the biggest challenge to creating a full-cycle loop in the United States is that before any reclaimed material can be used in a battery, it must be refined into an intermediary product, such as cathode, which makes up approximately 40% of a battery’s value. “You can’t send lithium to a Gigafactory,” said Georgeson. “It is like sending sand to a computer factory.”

At the moment, no one is making cathode in the U.S. at scale — manufacturers are buying it from Asia. Redwood, Ascend Elements, and others are ramping up cathode facilities that should be online in the coming years (Panasonic plans to use Redwood cathode at its new battery plant in Kansas). But, for now, they are frequently selling their raw material abroad.

Georgeson sees federal policy as key to helping, or hindering, efforts to plug the cathode hole in the supply chain. One impediment has been a Treasury Department ruling that allows cathode sourced from allied countries to also qualify for the EV tax credit. That, she said, has pushed billions in business and investments to countries like South Korea instead of the United States.

It remains unclear exactly how the new administration will impact the industry, but President Trump could certainly upend it. If Congress rolls back the IRA’s investment and production tax credits, it could significantly handicap America’s burgeoning recycling buildout. On the other hand, tariffs, particularly aimed at China, could tip the economic scales toward American producers and recyclers by making imported batteries and their components more expensive.

Redwood, for one, is optimistic that its goal of onshoring both battery recycling and cathode production aligns with Trump’s goals of putting “America first.” Straubel has said that the Trump administration could do a lot to encourage a more robust domestic supply chain, including making the battery origin requirements of the EV tax credit more stringent — rather than scrapping the incentive entirely.

Getting the policy wrong, the company argues, will put the U.S. at the mercy of others in a future where battery recycling will only become more critical.

Blanca Begert contributed reporting to this story. This story is part of the Grist series Unearthed: The Mining Issue, which examines the global race to extract critical minerals for the clean energy transition.

## How to get rid of your e-waste

Lithium-ion batteries can be found in laptops, phones, toothbrushes, Bluetooth speakers, and power tools, just to name a few things. But many people aren’t sure what to do with these gadgets once they die. Instead of tossing them in the trash, which can be dangerous, experts say to recycle them. Here’s how.

The nonprofit Call2Recycle operates some 16,000 sites nationwide where people can drop off their devices at no cost — at libraries, garbage dumps, and big box stores like Staples. The organization collected 5.4

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million pounds of rechargeable batteries in 2023, and provides an online map to find a recycling location near you. Earth 911, Green Gadgets, and GreenCitizen also have locators.

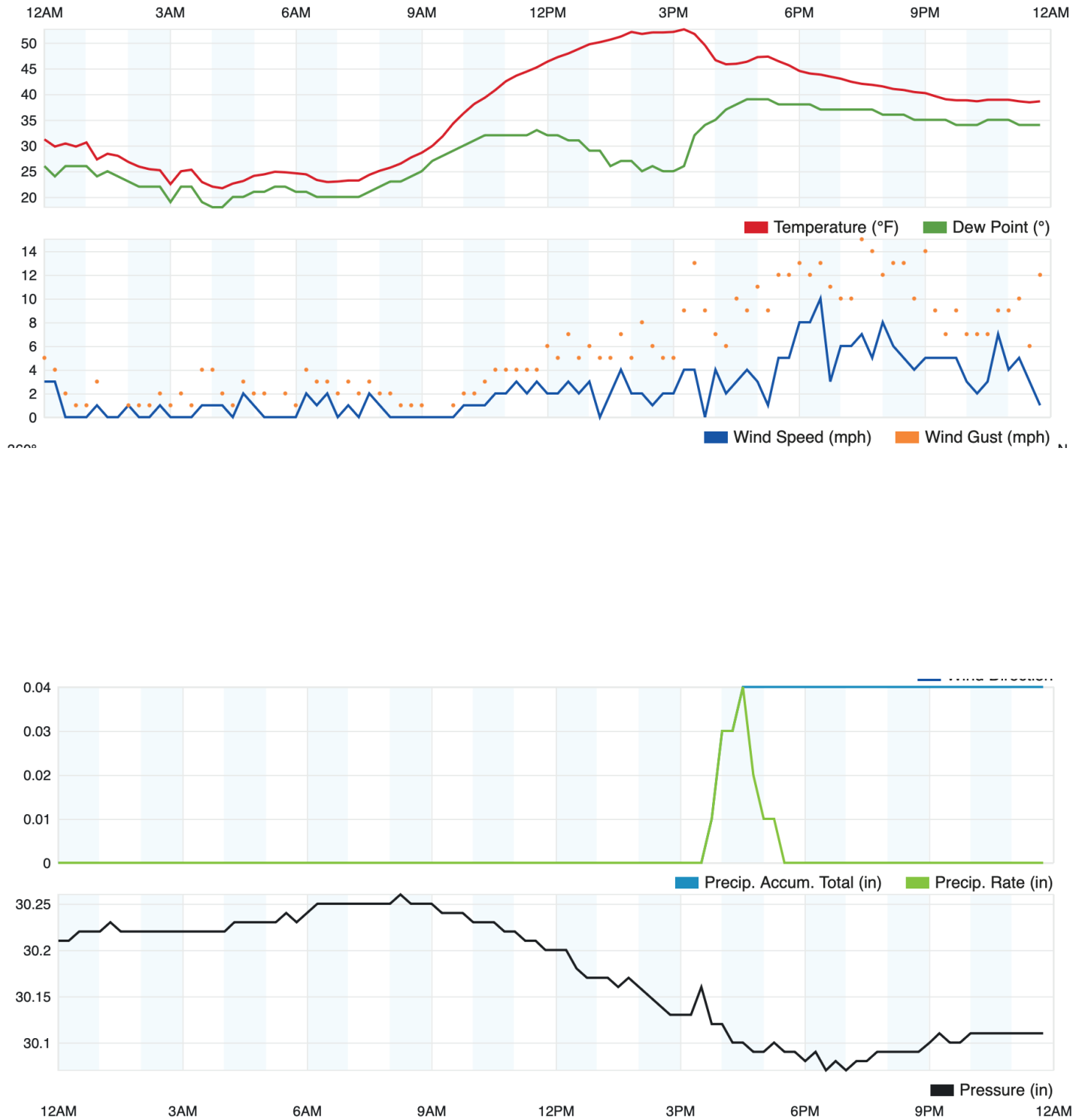
Some cities offer curbside pickup, making recycling even easier. Call2Recycle, Electronic Recycling International, and others will take them by mail, usually for a fee. "Batteries sitting in a junk drawer or a box in the basement can accidentally cause a fire," said Mia Roethlein, an environmental analyst at the Department of Environmental Conservation in Vermont, a national recycling leader. "Bring them to one of the free battery collection locations as soon as they are no longer usable."



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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



**High: 64 °F**

Sunny

Tonight



**Low: 41 °F**

Increasing  
Clouds

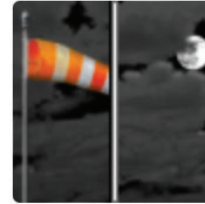
Friday



**High: 63 °F**

Mostly Cloudy  
then Partly  
Sunny and  
Breezy

Friday Night



**Low: 28 °F**

Mostly Cloudy  
and Blustery  
then Mostly  
Cloudy

Saturday



**High: 39 °F**

Chance Wintry  
Mix and  
Breezy

## Rest of the Week

Thursday



Decreasing  
Clouds

Highs: 60-70°  
Lows: 40-50°

Friday



Rain moving in  
late Friday night

Highs: 62-77°  
Lows: 25-32°

Spring is in the air as temperatures for the rest of the week will range in the 60s and 70s! Rain showers over portions of northeastern SD into west central MN will continue through the afternoon into the early evening before moving out of the area. Otherwise, dry for Thursday with rain moving in late Friday night.

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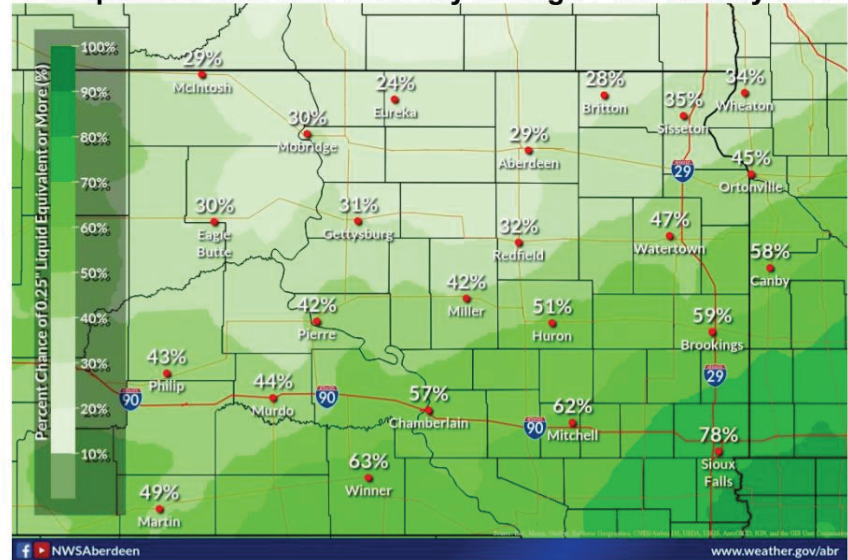
## Rain, Snow, and Wintry Mix This Weekend

March 26, 2025  
3:25 PM

### Key Messages

- Rain developing late Friday night will transition to snow on Saturday before ending Sunday morning
  - Probability of 24 hr water equivalent of 0.25" or more is highest (35-55%) south of a line from Pierre to Sisseton
- There is a low probability (less than 20% chance) of freezing rain and sleet occurring during the transition between rain and snow early Saturday morning
- Snow accumulation of 1" or more ranges from 20-40%, mainly south of U.S. Highway 14, as well as along the eastern slopes of the Sisseton Hills

### 24 Hour Probability of 0.25" or more of Water Equivalent Precipitation from 7am Saturday through 7 am Sunday CDT



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

A system moves into the area late Friday night through Sunday. This will bring rain to start before transitioning to snow on Saturday, ending Sunday morning. There is a 20% chance or less for freezing rain and sleet during the transition period early Saturday morning. Probability of liquid > 0.25" is highest (35-55%) south of a line from Pierre to Sisseton.



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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 53 °F at 3:14 PM**

**Low Temp: 22 °F at 4:03 AM**

**Wind: 14 mph at 3:18 PM**

**Precip: : 0.00**

Day length: 12 hours, 36 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 83 in 1946

Record Low: -12 in 1913

Average High: 48

Average Low: 24

Average Precip in March.: 0.74

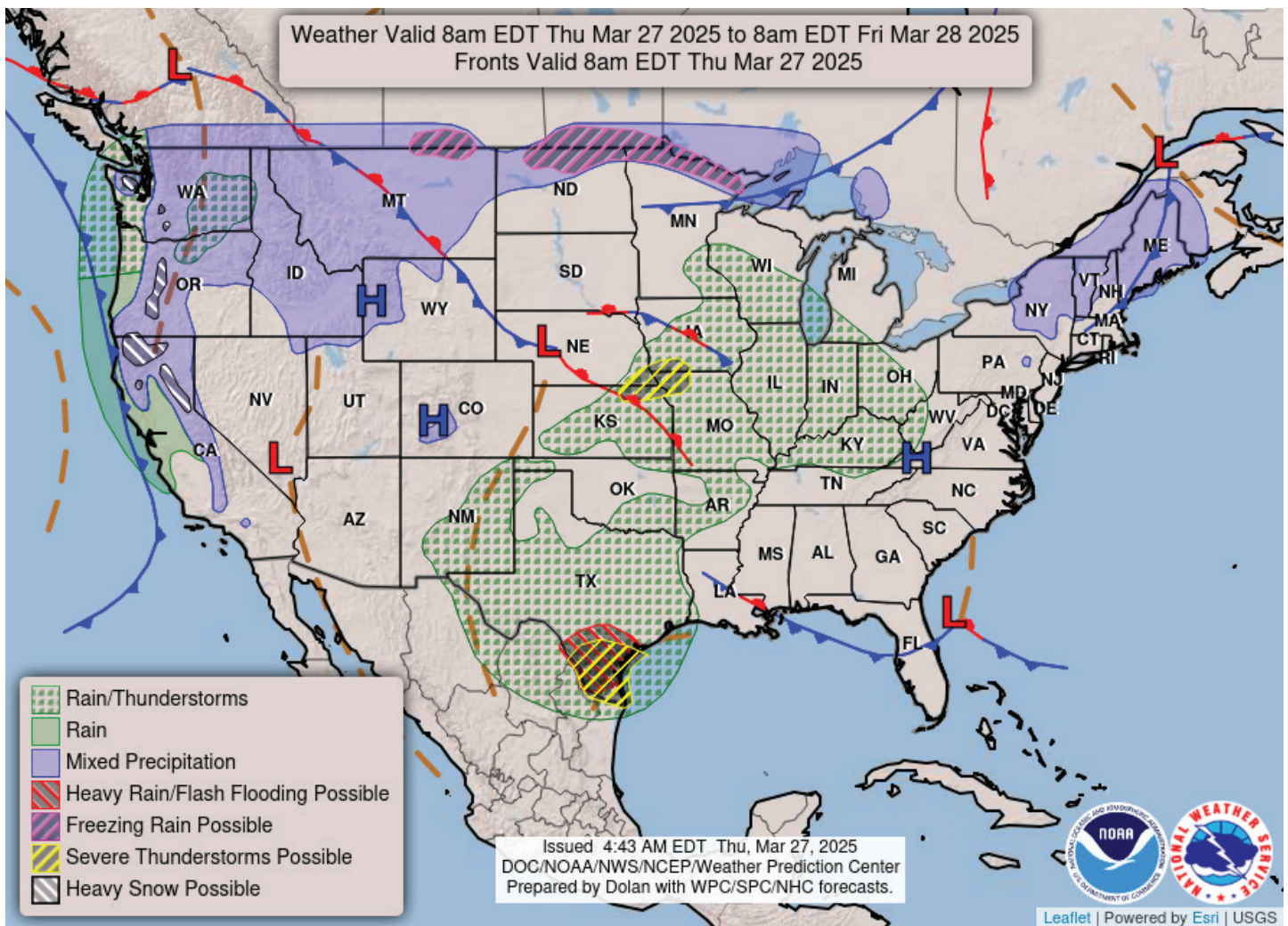
Precip to date in March.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 1.91

Precip Year to Date: 0.45

Sunset Tonight: 7:55:45 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:17:32 am



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## Today in Weather History

March 27th, 1993: Rain and rapid snowmelt caused the Big Sioux and Vermillion Rivers to rise to 1 to 8 feet above flood stage from March 26th through March 31st, 1993. The worst flooding occurred in far southeast South Dakota, where large farmland areas were under water. The floodwaters closed at least four state highways in southeast South Dakota and blocked dozens of more minor roads in the east. Large chunks of ice on the Big Sioux led to many temporary ice jams. The ice jams took out fences and washed out roads. In some areas, the ice had to be pushed off the streets with tractors.

1890 - An outbreak of tornadoes occurred in the Ohio Valley. One of the tornadoes struck Louisville KY killing 78 persons and causing four million dollars damage. (David Ludlum)

1950 - A three day snowstorm in the High Plains Region finally came to an end. The storm produced 34 inches of snow in 24 hours at Dumont, located in the Black Hills of South Dakota, and a total of 50 inches. (David Ludlum)

1984 - The temperature at Brownsville, TX, soared to 106 degrees, and Cotulla, TX, reached 108 degrees, equalling the March record for the U.S. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - The second blizzard in less than a week hit eastern Colorado and western Kansas. Snowfall totals ranged up to 24 inches at San Isabel CO. Winds gusted to 50 mph at Goodland KS. The high winds piled snow into massive drifts, closing roads for days and killing thousands of cattle. Snow drifts thirty feet high were reported in northwest Kansas. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Temperatures rose quickly, then dropped just as rapidly, in the central U.S. Eight cities reported record high temperatures for the date as readings soared into the 80s. In southeastern Colorado, the temperature at Lamar CO reached 91 degrees. Strong southerly winds gusted to 63 mph at Gage OK. Strong northwesterly winds, gusting to 61 mph at Goodland KS, then proceeded to usher much colder air into the area. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Afternoon and evening thunderstorms produced severe weather in the south central U.S. Two tornadoes were reported, and there were 77 other reports of large hail and damaging winds. Baseball size hail was reported at Willow OK and Bartlesville OK. Twenty-six cities in the central and eastern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date, including Yankton SD with a reading of 84 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Temperatures dipped into the teens and single numbers in the northeastern U.S. Scranton PA tied their record for the date with a morning low of 18 degrees. Temperatures warmed into the 60s and lower 70s in the Pacific Northwest. The afternoon high of 65 degrees at Astoria OR equalled their record for the date. (The National Weather Summary)

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## FROZEN ASSETS

Years ago a fire destroyed a large warehouse that contained many tons of ice. Although the firemen had tens of thousands of gallons of water available to extinguish the fire, they could not be used. The ice was in "cold storage" and beyond reach. The building burned to the ground even though it was full of "frozen water."

God has given each one of us unique gifts and talents, skills and abilities, to do His work. We all are as different as our fingerprints and designed to do things that honor Him. Too often we imagine that what He wants us to do is beyond our capabilities.

We tend to see problems and issues that would require massive amounts of money or large numbers of people to bring change. We look beyond the immediate to the distant, even unimaginable, and find excuses not to do what God places before us.

If you recall the beginning of the earthly ministry of Jesus, He invited ordinary men to join Him in His extra-ordinary work. They had no special training but they did have a special commitment. We know that they were committed because we read that "they spent time with Jesus." These "ordinary men" put aside their personal interests and began to see life through His eyes. He taught them to see the spiritual needs of others and how to meet those needs.

If we are willing to "spend time with Jesus," follow Him closely, listen to Him carefully, and pray to Him sincerely, we will be able to do the same.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to always be alert for opportunities to tell others of Your love, salvation, and hope. If we love You, we will follow You and serve You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Jesus called out to them, "Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!" Matthew 4:19

*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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[paypal.me/paperpaul](https://paypal.me/paperpaul)

Pay with Venmo: @paperpaul    Phone Number to Confirm: 7460



## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.25.25

1 5 17 39 62 8

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$20,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 29 Mins  
23 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.26.25

16 19 30 37 47 6

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$27,470,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 44  
Mins 23 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.26.25

8 12 15 39 44 15

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 59 Mins 23  
Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.26.25

3 14 24 30 31

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$80,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 59  
Mins 23 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.26.25

26 32 41 51 66 22

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 28  
Mins 23 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.26.25

5 20 29 39 53 6

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$515,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 28  
Mins 23 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

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## Upcoming Groton Events

03/22/2025 Spring Vendor Fair at the GHS Gym 10am-2pm  
03/29/2025 Men's Singles Bowling Tournament at the Jungle 10am, 1pm & 4pm  
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  
04/12/2025 Groton Firemens Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)  
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  
07/09/2025 Legion Auxiliary #39 Salad Buffet & Dessert Bar at the Groton Legion 11am-1pm  
07/11-13/25 2025 VFW 12U Class B State Baseball Tournament  
07/13/2025 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm  
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  
08/14/2025 Family Fun Fest, Downtown Main Street 5:30-7:30pm (2nd Thursday)  
08/23/2025 Glacial Tournament at Olive Grove  
09/05/2025 Homecoming Parade 1pm  
09/06/2025 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm  
09/07/2025 Sunflower Classic Couples Scramble at Olive Grove  
10/10/2025 Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am  
10/11/2025 Pumpkin Fest 10am-3pm City Park  
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

### **South Dakota makes it tougher for recreational vehicle voters to participate in elections**

By SARAH RAZA Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — In South Dakota, you will now need to live in the state for 30 consecutive days to be eligible to vote in the state's elections, thanks to a bill the governor signed into law on Tuesday.

Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden signed bill HB 1066 along with several other bills aimed at promoting "free and fair elections." The bill requires that an individual must have stayed in one permanent dwelling in the state, where one typically lives and sleeps, for 30 consecutive days to be eligible to vote. The requirement used to be just one night until a bill signed in 2023 changed the requirement to 30 nonconsecutive days.

"South Dakota continues to be an example of free and fair elections," he said in a statement. "America is founded on the principle of freedom, and I am proud that we live in a nation and a state where we can choose our leaders."

This bill aims to prevent full-time travelers, dubbed "RV voters," from participating in state elections. Some travelers who do not have permanent residency in any state like to establish their residency in South Dakota because the state has no income tax and relatively lower car registration fees. Staying just one night in South Dakota is still enough to establish residency for purposes such as a driver's license, but it is not enough to meet the voting eligibility requirements, said Brad Reiners, a spokesperson from the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.

Proponents of the bill argued that travelers who don't actually live in the state shouldn't be allowed to participate in state elections, while critics say longer residency requirements violate the idea that everyone gets to vote.

"This is a serious issue for new residents who have occupations that require them to travel frequently, residents who have family in another state needing care or regular visits, etc.," said Samantha Chapman, advocacy manager at the ACLU of South Dakota.

However, the governor signed another bill, HB 1208, that allows those with mailing addresses in the state, but no physical abode, to receive a federal-only absentee ballot that would allow them to cast votes in the presidential and congressional elections.

### **Federal cuts roundup: The impact on South Dakota**

South Dakota News Watch undefined

Sioux Falls, SD (South Dakota News Watch)

After DOGE job cuts and an ongoing staffing shortage, former National Park Service employee Sydney Hansen isn't sure whether anyone will be available to lead popular cave tours at Jewel Cave National Monument in the Black Hills moving forward.

Or, for that matter, if anyone will be on the job to pull weeds at the park.

Hansen, 24, was hired as a physical science technician at Jewel Cave in June and was using her master's degree in geology to do research on caves, rocks and soil at the national monument site. She also "wore many hats" at the park, leading discussions to educate the public, working to protect habitat of endangered species and managing invasive species at the park, which included removing weeds from the property.

On Feb. 14, Hansen was in the final stages of training to lead cave tours in preparation of the upcoming summer tourist season. Jewel Cave and Wind Cave national parks are both low on staff to take visitors on the tours, she said.

After emerging from a cave, she received a text message to report to the park office, where she found an email saying she had been terminated from her position.

"My heart just dropped," she recalled in an interview with News Watch. "We were told we were safe if

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we had a good employee evaluation, so I felt pretty good.”

According to recent reports, the park service has eliminated 1,000 jobs and accepted 700 early retirement offers from employees as part of the DOGE employment crackdown. The effects of the cuts are being felt around the country, as visitor centers closed at sites in Arizona, some parks restricted open hours and patron wait times have increased.

Hansen worries for the many park service employees who lost their jobs, but also about what the cuts will mean for the parks and the public. A hiring freeze in the park service won’t help fill any gaps, she said.

“It’s only going to get worse, and I can’t even imagine how some of these busy parks are going to operate this summer,” she said. “They’re going to be hurting.”

The most hurtful part of losing her job was the reason the termination letter cited: “The Department determined that you have failed to demonstrate fitness or qualifications for continued employment.”

In an October job performance review Hansen provided to News Watch, she received an overall rating of “exceeds expectations” and was complimented repeatedly by her supervisor.

Hansen is uncertain about her future and might seek a job as a substitute teacher to make ends meet. When hired at Jewel Cave, she bought a house in nearby Newcastle, Wyoming, and only has enough money to pay bills for about two months.

“I’m still definitely upset about it and unsure where I’m going to go next because there’s not a lot of jobs in the geology field,” she said.

Obtaining details about job cuts within the NPS has been difficult. The state is home to several parks and monuments, including Jewel Caves, Wind Cave, Badlands and Mount Rushmore.

An official at Badlands National Park directed inquiries to a spokeswoman from the NPS Midwest regional office, which oversees South Dakota facilities. The spokeswoman did not return a call from News Watch seeking information or comment.

The employee cuts in NPS drew the attention and ire of a group of 22 Democratic U.S. senators who wrote a letter to Interior Secretary Doug Burgum on Feb. 7, urging him to undo cuts to staffing at national parks and monuments.

The letter asked Burgum to rescind deferred resignations, early retirement officers and the revocation of offers to seasonal employees within the NPS.

Beyond those position cuts, NPS had rescinded employment offers to about 6,000 seasonal employees who help manage the surge in visitors to parks and monuments in the summer, though the Trump administration said it has since reversed the seasonal worker cuts.

But if the seasonal workers are not hired as promised, the senators warned that, “visitor centers may close, bathrooms will be filthy, campgrounds may close, guided tours will be cut back or altogether cancelled, emergency response times will drop, and visitor services like safety advice, trail recommendations and interpretation will be unavailable.”

The senators noted that in the 2010s, the NPS cut its staffing by 15% at a time when park visitation rose by 15%. The culmination of probationary position cuts, early retirements and threats to eliminate seasonal staffing could put parks and monuments in “chaos.”

A Department of Interior report said that in 2023, the national park system attracted 325.5 million visitors and generated \$55.6 billion in economic impact. Parks also supported 415,400 local jobs and generated \$26.4 billion in revenue for communities surrounding the parks.

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## South Korea struggles to contain wildfires that have killed 27

By YONG JUN CHANG, HYUNG-JIN KIM and KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

CHEONGSONG, South Korea (AP) — Helicopters dumped water over a burning forest in South Korea on Thursday as fire crews struggled to contain the country's worst-ever wildfires, which have killed 27 people, forced at least 37,000 others to flee their homes and destroyed more than 300 structures.

Multiple wildfires fueled by strong winds and dry weather have been raging across South Korea's southeastern regions since last Friday. The government has mobilized thousands of personnel, dozens of helicopters and other equipment to extinguish the blazes, but gusty winds are hampering their efforts.

Rain was expected later Thursday. But Korea Forest Service chief Lim Sang-seop said the amount — less than 5 millimeters (0.2 inches) is forecast — likely won't help much in extinguishing the wildfires.

The fatalities include a pilot whose helicopter crashed during efforts to contain a fire Wednesday and four firefighters and other workers who died earlier after being trapped by fast-moving flames.

Authorities haven't disclosed details of the civilian dead, except that they are mostly in their 60s or older who found it difficult to escape quickly or who even refused orders to evacuate. They suspect human error caused several of the wildfires, including cases where people started fires while clearing overgrown grass from family tombs or with sparks during welding work.

Lee Han-kyung, deputy head of the government's disaster response center, told a meeting Thursday that the wildfires have again disclosed "the reality of climate crisis that we have yet experienced," according to Yonhap news agency. Calls to his center were unanswered.

Scientists say the warming atmosphere around the world is driving ever more extreme weather events, including wildfires, flooding, droughts, hurricanes and heat waves that are killing people and causing billions of dollars in damage every year.

The wildfires have burned 36,010 hectares (88,980 acres) of land, the disaster response center said Thursday. Observers say that's the worst figure of its kind in South Korea. The center said the blazes have also injured 32 people, destroyed 325 buildings and structures and forced more than 37,180 people to evacuate.

As of Thursday morning, the center said authorities were mobilizing more than 9,000 people and about 120 helicopters to battle the wildfires.

In Cheongsong, one of the fire-hit areas, thick plumes of smoke were bellowing from Juwang Mountain on Thursday morning. Helicopters repeatedly hovered over the mountain, dropping water. The amount of smoke later appeared to have diminished.

At a Buddhist temple near the mountain, workers covered a stone pagoda and other structures with fire-resistant materials, while firefighters poured water on sites near the temple.

The hardest-hit areas include Andong city and the neighboring counties of Uiseong and Sancheong, and the city of Ulsan.

On Wednesday night, strong winds and smoke-filled skies forced authorities in the southeastern city of Andong to order evacuations in two villages, including Puncheon, home to the Hahoe folk village — a UNESCO World Heritage Site founded around the 14th-15th century. Hikers were advised to leave the scenic Jiri Mountain as another fire spread closer.

The fires in the past week have destroyed houses, factories and some historic structures. In Uiseong, about 20 of the 30 structures at the Gounsa temple complex, which was said to be originally built in the 7th century, have burned. Among them were two state-designated "treasures" — a pavilion-shaped building erected overlooking a stream in 1668, and a Joseon dynasty structure built in 1904 to mark the longevity of a king.

The Korea Forest Service wildfire warning is at its highest level, requiring local governments to assign more workers to emergency response, tighten entry restrictions for forests and parks, and recommend that military units withhold live-fire exercises.



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## North Korea sent 3,000 more troops to Russia, according to South's assessment

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea sent around 3,000 additional troops to Russia in January and February in continued support for Russian President Vladimir Putin's war on Ukraine, South Korea's military said Thursday in its latest assessment.

The South's Joint Chiefs of Staff said North Korea has also been sending more missiles, artillery equipment and ammunition to help Russia and that North Korea could increase its weapons supplies further depending on the war situation. Russia and Ukraine recently agreed on a limited ceasefire, though both sides have accused each other of violations.

The military equipment North Korea has sent to Russia includes a "considerable amount" of short-range ballistic missiles, 170 millimeter self-propelled howitzers and around 220 units of 240 millimeter multiple rocket launchers.

North Korea has sent approximately 11,000 military personnel to fight in the war against Ukraine in its first involvement in a large-scale conflict since the 1950-53 Korean War, and the Joint Chiefs assessed that around 4,000 of them have been killed or wounded.

South Korea's National Intelligence Service previously attributed the high North Korean casualties to the troops' likely struggles in adapting to drones and other elements of modern warfare. North Korean troops are further disadvantaged by the crude tactics of their Russian commanders, who have sent them into assault campaigns without providing rear-fire support, the spy agency told lawmakers in January.

Still, Ukrainian military and intelligence officials have assessed that the North Koreans are gaining crucial battlefield experience and have been key to Russia's strategy of overwhelming Ukraine by throwing large numbers of soldiers into the battle for Kursk.

The South Korean military report came after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un expressed his unwavering support for Russia's war in Ukraine during a meeting with a top Russian security official, Sergei Shoigu, last week in Pyongyang. State media reports said Kim and Shoigu reaffirmed their commitment to uphold a major mutual defense treaty agreed upon last year. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Rudenko told Russian media on Thursday that the governments were discussing a potential visit by Kim to Moscow but did not specify when it might take place.

"We always talk to everyone about exchanging visits. We are always preparing," he told RIA Novosti.

Kim showcases new military drones

Kim's military support of Russia has raised concerns that he may receive Russian technology transfers in return, further strengthening the threat posed by his nuclear-armed military. Experts say drones are among the potential areas where North Korea might seek to acquire Russian technology and know-how.

North Korean state media said Thursday that Kim observed tests of newly developed reconnaissance and attack drones this week and called for their increased production. Kim in recent months has been emphasizing the development of drones, and the tests were the latest display of his country's growing military capabilities.

Photos released by North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency showed Kim observing what appeared to be a large reconnaissance drone roughly resembling Boeing's E-7 Wedgetail airborne warning and control aircraft. Other images showed exploding drones crashing into military vehicles used as targets.

The agency said the test demonstrated the reconnaissance drone's ability to track multiple targets and monitor troop movements on land and at sea, potentially enhancing North Korea's intelligence-gathering operations and ability to neutralize enemy threats. The report said the new exploding drones are designed for various attack missions and feature unspecified artificial intelligence capabilities.

Kim expressed satisfaction with the drones' performance and approved plans to expand production, emphasizing that drones and AI should be "top" priorities in efforts to advance his armed forces and adapt them to modern warfare, KCNA said. The agency said the tests took place as Kim visited a drone technology complex and an electronic warfare research group on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Kim previously inspected other demonstrations of drones that explode on impact in November and August last year.

When asked about the new reconnaissance drone, which North Korean state media unveiled for the first time, Lee Sung Joon, spokesperson for South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that the North likely modified an existing aircraft to create an early-warning drone and may have used certain components from Russia. He said North Korea was possibly exaggerating the capabilities of the drone.

"As you can see, it looks quite cumbersome and we assess that it's likely vulnerable to interception," Lee said during a briefing, without elaborating further on the assessment. \_\_\_ AP writer Dasha Litvinova in Tallinn, Estonia, contributed to this report.

## **Police use force to break up protests at a university in Turkey's capital**

By ROBERT BADENDIECK Associated Press

ISTANBUL (AP) — Police used pepper spray, plastic pellets and water cannon against protesters in Turkey's capital early Thursday, potentially reigniting tensions after two days of relative calm in the country's biggest anti-government protests in over a decade.

The demonstrations began last week following the arrest of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu, a key rival to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Imamoglu, jailed pending trial on corruption charges many see as politically motivated, is also accused of supporting terrorism. The government insists the judiciary is independent, but critics say the evidence is based on secret witnesses and lacks credibility.

Early Thursday, student demonstrators tried to march and gathered to read a statement near the gates at Middle East Technical University, pro-opposition broadcaster Halk TV and local media reported. They were met by security forces who deployed pepper spray, water cannon and plastic pellets. A standoff ensued where the students hid behind a barricade of dumpsters until the police charged to detain them.

Melih Meric, a legislator with Imamoglu's Republican People's Party or CHP, was seen soaked with water and suffering from pepper spray exposure. "My student friends only wanted to make a press statement, but the police strictly did not allow it, this is the result," Meric said in social media videos.

Officials have not said how many people were detained.

Also Thursday, eight journalists who were jailed awaiting trial after covering the protests were released, a media freedom group said. Seven who were detained Tuesday in morning raids on their homes were released in Istanbul following appeals, the Media and Law Studies Association said, while an eighth was freed in the western port city of Izmir.

CHP leader Ozgur Ozel had promised that lawmakers would stand alongside protesters in the hope of lowering tensions. He also warned Tuesday that if the police provoked demonstrators, he would "call for 500,000 people to (come to) the place that will disturb" the authorities the most.

At least 1,400 people were detained in the first six days of the protests, the interior minister said Tuesday.

Demonstrations involving hundreds of thousands have swept across major cities, including opposition-organized rallies outside Istanbul City Hall. Other major protests have been held in Istanbul's districts of Kadikoy and Sisli districts in recent days.

Meanwhile, Imamoglu, speaking from prison via social media Wednesday, denounced police violence against protesters, "I cannot call them police because my honorable police would not commit this cruelty to the young children of the nation," he said.

Imamoglu has been confirmed as the CHP's candidate for presidential elections due in 2028 but which could come earlier. He has performed well in recent polls against Erdogan, for whom his election as mayor of Turkey's largest city in 2019 was a major blow.

## **South Sudan opposition says its leader Machar has been arrested as UN warns of a renewed civil war**

By DENG MACHOL Associated Press

JUBA, South Sudan (AP) — South Sudan's main opposition party said its leader Riek Machar has been arrested as the U.N. called on all parties to uphold the 2018 agreement that ended the country's civil war.

The U.N. had warned on Monday that the country was teetering on the edge of a renewed civil war after fighting in the north between an armed group allied to Machar and government forces.

Machar was "in confinement by the government" and his life was "at risk," opposition spokesperson Pal Mai Deng said in a video address to the media Wednesday night.

The head of the U.N mission in South Sudan, Nicholas Haysom, said following reports of the detention of Machar, all parties should "exercise restraint and uphold the Revitalized Peace Agreement."

South Sudan's five-year civil war, in which 400,000 people were killed, ended in a 2018 peace agreement that brought President Salva Kiir and Machar together in a unity government. Machar is one of the five vice presidents in the country.

Tensions have been increasing between Kiir and Machar's parties and escalated in March when the White Army, an armed group loyal to Machar, overran an army base in Upper Nile state and attacked a U.N helicopter.

The government responded with airstrikes, warning any civilian in the area where the army group is based to vacate or "face consequences."

More than a dozen people have died since the airstrikes started in mid-March and the UN warned of a renewed civil war if the leaders do not put the country's interests first.

"Tonight, the country's leaders stand on the brink of relapsing into widespread conflict or taking the country forward towards peace, recovery and democracy in the spirit of the consensus that was reached in 2018 when they signed and committed to implementing a Revitalized Peace Agreement," Haysom said in a statement on Wednesday night.

An opposition official described 20 heavily armed vehicles arriving at Machar's home where he was arrested alongside his wife.

"His bodyguards were disarmed, and an arrest warrant was delivered to him under unclear charges," said Reath Muoch Tang, an official in the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army - In Opposition.

The U.S. State Department's bureau of African affairs in a statement on X urged Kiir to reverse the house arrest and "prevent further escalation of the situation."

In early March, several of Machar's senior allies were arrested by security forces, an action his supporters condemned as a "grave violation" of the peace deal.

Germany and Norway have temporarily closed their respective embassies in Juba. The U.S Embassy further reduced its minimal staff due to security threats and advised Americans who are in the country to prepare to shelter should the "situation deteriorate further." The British Embassy also said it had temporarily reduced its staff with consular services "severely limited."

## **NATO clarifies comments that four missing US soldiers had died during training in Lithuania**

By VANESSA GERA and LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — NATO on Wednesday clarified comments that Secretary-General Mark Rutte made earlier in the day, when he suggested that four U.S. soldiers who went missing while training in Lithuania had died, even though the U.S. Army said their fate was not yet confirmed.

"The search is ongoing," NATO said in a statement posted on X. "We regret any confusion about remarks @SecGenNATO delivered on this today. He was referring to emerging news reports & was not confirming the fate of the missing, which is still unknown."

The U.S. Army said the Hercules armored vehicle the four U.S. soldiers were in during a training exercise



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had been found submerged in a body of water. It said recovery efforts were underway by U.S. Army and Lithuanian Armed Forces and civilian agencies.

The soldiers, all from 1st Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division, were conducting tactical training when they went missing.

Asked Wednesday evening by reporters if he had been briefed about the missing soldiers, President Donald Trump said, "No, I haven't."

During a trip to Warsaw, Rutte told reporters that he had received word of the deaths of the four soldiers while he was delivering a lecture, and that his thoughts were with their families and with the United States.

"This is still early news so we do not know the details. This is really terrible news and our thoughts are with the families and loved ones," Rutte said in Warsaw.

Lithuanian public broadcaster LRT reported that the four U.S. soldiers and their vehicle were reported missing Tuesday afternoon during an exercise at the General Silvestras Žukauskas training ground in Pabradė, a town located less than 10 kilometers (6 miles) from the border with Belarus.

The Baltic countries of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia are all NATO members and have often had chilly ties with Russia, a key ally of Belarus, since declaring independence from the Soviet Union in 1990.

Relations soured further over Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda has been one of the most outspoken supporters of Ukraine in its fight against Russian President Vladimir Putin's forces.

## **Middle East latest: Israeli strikes kill a family of 6 and a Hamas spokesman in Gaza**

By The Associated Press undefined

Israeli strikes overnight and into Thursday killed a family of six and a Hamas spokesman in the Gaza Strip.

A strike hit the tent where Abdel-Latif al-Qanoua was staying in the Jabaliya area of northern Gaza, killing him, according to Basem Naim, another Hamas official.

Another strike near Gaza City killed four children and their parents, according to the emergency service of Gaza's Health Ministry.

Israel ended its ceasefire with Hamas last week, launching a surprise wave of strikes that killed hundreds of Palestinians. It has vowed to escalate the offensive if Hamas does not release hostages, disarm and leave the territory.

Hamas has said it will only release the remaining 59 hostages — 24 of whom are believed to be alive — in exchange for a lasting ceasefire and an Israeli withdrawal.

## **Brazil ex-President Bolsonaro will stand trial over an alleged coup plan. Here's what happens next**

By GABRIELA SÁ PESSOA Associated Press

SAO PAULO (AP) — A panel of Brazil Supreme Court justices unanimously ruled that former President Jair Bolsonaro and seven of his associates will stand trial on five counts, including attempting to stage a coup after the far-right leader lost the 2022 election.

The panel will review existing evidence, potentially gather new evidence and hear testimonies. Legal experts estimate that Bolsonaro could be sentenced to up to 40 years in prison, though his actual jail time — if convicted — would be less than that due to procedural considerations.

Here's what to know about what will happen after Wednesday's ruling:

What charges does Bolsonaro face?

Bolsonaro will stand trial on the counts of attempting to stage a coup, involvement in an armed criminal organization, attempted violent abolition of the democratic rule of law, damage characterized by violence and a serious threat against the state's assets, and deterioration of listed heritage.

The five-justices panel of Brazil's Supreme Court ruled based on the indictment by Prosecutor-General,

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Paulo Gonet. His formal accusation came from a federal police investigation that placed Bolsonaro on the top of a criminal organization that had been active since at least 2021.

Gonet also accused Bolsonaro of supporting a plan that allegedly included poisoning his successor, current President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, and killing Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes.

When does the trial start and what will happen?

While a specific trial date has not been set, the chairman of the Supreme Court panel is expected to outline the procedural framework in the coming days.

Eloísa Machado, a law professor at the Fundacao Getulio Vargas university in Sao Paulo, explained that the evidentiary phase of the criminal case, which includes defendant interrogations, witness testimony and further procedures such as expert examinations, begins. Many of those procedures will be conducted by auxiliary judges.

"Then, the rapporteur prepares a report and requests a trial date," Machado said. "After this stage, prosecutors and defense attorneys will present their final arguments before the court rules on whether to acquit or convict."

Bolsonaro's defense team had requested the case to be sent to the full Supreme Court, not just on the 5-justice panel, which could drag a ruling into 2026 as all 11 justices would have their say on the case. The request was denied.

Who will judge Bolsonaro?

Brazil's top court is using one of its two permanent 5-justice panels to put Bolsonaro on trial. None of the five was appointed by Bolsonaro.

As rapporteur of the case, justice de Moraes brought the charges to the one he sits on.

The other four justices are Cármen Lúcia, considered one of the harshest on criminal cases; Cristiano Zanin, the chairman of the panel and Lula's attorney between 2013 and 2023; Flávio Dino, appointed by the leftist president in 2023 after serving as his justice minister; and Luiz Fux, the court's chief-justice between 2020 and 2022, considered a moderate.

Will Bolsonaro go to jail?

Brazilian criminal law mandates that arrests occur only after a final, unappealable conviction.

The Supreme Court of Brazil, being the final appeals tribunal for criminal cases involving public authorities, possesses ultimate jurisdiction over Bolsonaro's case.

If the former president takes any action that hampers the court's ability to deliver its ruling, such as seeking shelter in an embassy, he could be arrested before the trial ends.

What has Bolsonaro said?

Bolsonaro, who has been banned from running for office until 2030 for abuse of power and undermining confidence in the country's voting system, has denied wrongdoing and claims he is the target of political persecution.

"If I go to jail, I will give you a lot of work," Bolsonaro said after Wednesday's Supreme Court's decision.

Have other Brazilian presidents stood trial?

Lula was convicted of corruption and money laundering by low court judge Sergio Moro in 2017, and had his sentence later upheld by a group of magistrates. He served more than a year and seven months in prison and was released after the Supreme Court changed its jurisprudence to forbid jail time for any Brazilian until all appeals are exhausted.

In 2021, the same court annulled Lula's sentence as it found Moro to be biased. Moro left his position as a federal judge to become Bolsonaro's justice minister.

Michel Temer, who governed between 2016 and 2018 after Dilma Rousseff was impeached, was acquitted by a federal court in 2024 in a corruption and money laundering case. He was briefly arrested in 2019 under the accusation of profiting from fraudulent contracts between state-run Eletronuclear and companies AF Consult Ltd and Engevix during his time as vice president.

Fernando Collor, who governed between 1990 and his impeachment in 1992, was sentenced to eight years and ten months in jail in 2023 for his role in a corruption scheme at then state-run BR Distribuidora. The sentence was upheld by the Supreme Court last year, but Collor is yet to be imprisoned.

High-ranking military will be tried for the first time before the Supreme Court

The inclusion of high-ranking military officials to stand trial in Brazil's top court is unprecedented, as the country's transition from a military dictatorship to democracy in the 1980s was marked by a sweeping amnesty for military personnel.

Four high-ranking military officials who operated under Bolsonaro will stand trial. These are former Defense Minister Paulo Sérgio Nogueira; former Navy commander Almir Garnier Santos; retired Gen. Augusto Heleno, who headed the Institutional Security Office; and retired Gen. Walter Braga Netto, who served as Bolsonaro's chief of staff and defense minister.

"Four-star generals accused of plotting a coup are now likely to be convicted and punished under Brazil's democratic legal system," said João Roberto Martins Filho, a political science professor at the Federal University of Sao Carlos and former president of the Brazilian Association of Defense Studies. "Anyone who attempts a military-backed coup and fails could face consequences like what we're seeing now. They could end in prison."

## Mali embraces solar power for rural areas but the challenges are still vast

By BABA AHMED Associated Press

KARAN, Mali (AP) — A solar power plant in this rural corner of Mali has jolted a village to life and awakened dreams of steady power in other areas of this West African nation as it sees unprecedented growth in renewable energy.

The border village of Karan and its 3,000 people used to go days without electricity. Now, enough power is available around the clock to run small video gaming centers and boost commercial activities.

The electricity comes from a mini-grid of dozens of panels and storage batteries operated by WeLight, a Madagascan rural electrification startup, since 2021.

"Before the solar power came to the village, I ran my bakery with a generator," said Samba Diakité. Running the diesel-powered generator used to cost \$100 a day. He said he now saves more than half of that amount and has a daily income of \$124.

But experts say the rest of Mali — and much of West Africa — has a long way to go before seeing similar progress. Many rural areas remain without electricity, affecting everything from students' evening homework to business investment.

Only 53% of Mali's population had access to electricity as of 2021, according to the latest data from the World Bank. In rural areas, access is as low as 25%, according to Abdoulaye Makan Sissoko, an official with Mali's rural electrification agency.

Studies have shown that achieving universal access to electricity in Mali would require an investment of around \$1.3 billion to extend networks and create more mini-grids, Sissoko said.

Solar power is a recent development in the country. The government is encouraging the use of it by exempting equipment from customs duties and promising to subsidize the price of solar kits. Without such subsidies, solar energy in Mali is about twice the price of the traditional fossil fuel energy used in cities.

For now, people pay a subscription ranging from \$30 to \$164 for a meter and pay about \$0.50 per kilowatt.

The rural electrification agency says 32 mini-solar plants like the one in Karan are in four regions in Mali's south and southwest of the country, providing power for more than 2 million people, and are run by WeLight and German-owned Africa GreenTec.

"We started with 48 connections and now we have more than 200. We had to expand our generation capacity and distribution network to meet demand," said Brice Bado, WeLight's sales manager, speaking about Karan.

Mali's government has recognized the need for electricity. This year, it approved raising money from telephone, mobile money and alcohol sales and usage fees to boost electricity production. In March, telephone companies announced a 10% levy on telephone and internet credit top-ups and a 1% levy on



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mobile money cash withdrawals.

But the country's political crisis has also affected the push to expand electricity access. After two coups, the relationship between the military-run government and some foreign partners deteriorated, leading to the withdrawal of key ones.

Among them was France, which along with the European Union had a \$39.5 million rural electrification project called PHARE in a startup phase. It is now cancelled.

There were also rural electrification projects financed by the Islamic Development Bank to electrify 24 villages awarded to French company Sagecom, but the military government ordered the bank to revoke the contracts and reopen the bidding process, according to Sissoko with the rural electrification agency. Now the project is being cancelled, he said.

Meanwhile, the World Bank last year suspended \$60 million in financing to support Mali's state-owned energy company over a dispute with the military government about financing arrangements.

Political instability is one reason why countries in the Sahel — the arid strip south of the Sahara desert — have not been able to achieve electrification goals, along with insecurity and poor governance, said Beverly Ochieng, a security analyst with the London-based Control Risks.

Insecurity caused by extremist attacks is another challenge to expansion in Mali, especially in the north, limiting the areas where companies can safely set up solar mini-grids.

"Energy needs continue to grow at a rate of between 4 to 10%, depending on the countries, and this combination of factors makes the Sahel and Mali a difficult environment to support the development of sustainable projects," Ochieng said.

Nonetheless, the solar plant has brought some relief to Karan, one of the villages selected based on data provided by Mali's rural electrification agency.

Issa Doumbia, wearing goggles as he welded a metal door, recalled how he used to spend \$16 to \$23 a day on diesel for a generator but now spends \$8 thanks to solar power.

"There's not much of a market to make big profits. So, I would like to see the price of electricity go down," he said.

As night fell, trader Mah Konaré spread lettuce, tomatoes and cucumbers on a table along the main road. Her business has been extended with the help of the new streetlights.

"Beyond myself, these streetlights bring security to the village," she said. "I now feel safe when my father goes to the mosque at night."

## Trump says Signal chat isn't 'really an FBI thing.' The FBI has a long history of such inquiries

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — FBI Director Kash Patel was not part of a Signal chat in which other Trump administration national security officials discussed detailed attack plans, but that didn't spare him from being questioned by lawmakers this week about whether the nation's premier law enforcement agency would investigate.

Patel made no such commitments during the course of two days of Senate and House hearings. Instead, he testified that he had not personally reviewed the text messages that were inadvertently shared with the editor-in-chief for The Atlantic who was mistakenly included on an unclassified Signal chat.

That Patel would be grilled on what the FBI might do was hardly surprising.

Even as President Donald Trump insisted "it's not really an FBI thing," the reality is that the FBI and Justice Department for decades have been responsible for enforcing Espionage Act statutes governing the mishandling — whether intentional or negligent — of national defense information like the kind shared on Signal, a publicly available app that provides encrypted communications but is not approved for classified information.

The Justice Department has broad discretion to open an investigation, though it remains unclear whether Attorney General Pam Bondi, who introduced Trump at a Justice Department event this month, would

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authorize such an inquiry. Trump administration officials insist that the details shared were not classified, though the Espionage Act technically criminalizes the mishandling of any information deemed to be closely held national defense information even if not classified.

Multiple high-profile figures have found themselves under investigation in recent years over their handling of government secrets, but the differences in the underlying facts and the outcomes make it impossible to prognosticate what might happen in this instance or whether any accountability can be expected. There's also precedent for public officials either to avoid criminal charges or be spared meaningful punishment.

"In terms of prior investigations, there were set-out standards that the department always looked at and tried to follow when making determinations about which types of disclosures they were going to pursue," said former Justice Department prosecutor Michael Zweiback, who has handled classified information investigations.

Those factors include the sensitivity of the information exposed and the willfulness of the conduct.

A look at just a few of the notable prior investigations:

Hillary Clinton

The 2016 Democratic presidential nominee was investigated but not charged for her use of a private email server for the sake of convenience during her time as secretary of state in the Obama administration. There appear to be some parallels with the Signal chat episode.

The politically fraught criminal investigation was initiated by a 2015 referral from the intelligence agencies' internal watchdog, which alerted the FBI to the presence of potentially hundreds of emails containing classified information on that server. Law enforcement then set out to determine whether Clinton, or her aides, had transmitted classified information on a server not meant to host such material.

The overall conclusions were something of a mixed bag.

Then-FBI Director James Comey, in a highly unusual public statement, asserted that the bureau had found evidence that Clinton was "extremely careless" in her handling of classified information but recommended against charges because he said officials could not prove that she intended to break the law or knew that the information she and her aides were communicating about was classified.

The decision was derided by Republicans who thought the Obama administration Justice Department had let a fellow Democrat off the hook. Among those critical were some of the very same participants in the Signal chat as well as Bondi, who as Florida's attorney general spoke at the 2016 Republican National Convention and mimicked the audience chant of "Lock her up!"

David Petraeus

Among the biggest names to actually get charged is David Petraeus, the former CIA director sentenced in 2015 to two years' probation for disclosing classified information to a biographer with whom he was having an extramarital affair.

That material consisted of eight binders of classified information that Petraeus improperly kept in his house from his time as the top military commander in Afghanistan. Among the secret details in the "black books" were the names of covert operatives, the coalition war strategy and notes about Petraeus' discussions with President Barack Obama and the National Security Council, prosecutors have said.

Petraeus, a retired four-star Army general who led U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, wound up pleading guilty to a single misdemeanor count of unauthorized retention and removal of classified material as part of a deal with Justice Department prosecutors. Some national security experts said it smacked of a double-standard for its lenient outcome.

Comey himself would later complain about the resolution, writing in a 2018 book that he argued to the Justice Department that Petraeus should have also been charged with a felony for lying to the FBI.

"A poor person, an unknown person — say a young black Baptist minister from Richmond — would be charged with a felony and sent to jail," he said.

Jeffrey Sterling

A former CIA officer, Sterling was convicted of leaking to a reporter details of a secret mission to thwart Iran's nuclear ambitions by slipping flawed nuclear blueprints to the Iranians through a Russian intermediary.

He was sentenced in 2015 to 3 1/2 years in prison, a punishment whistleblower advocates and other supporters decried as impossible to square with Petraeus' misdemeanor guilty plea just a month earlier.

The details of the operation disclosed by Sterling were published by journalist James Risen in his 2006 book "State of War."

Sterling was charged in 2010, but the trial was delayed for years, in part because of legal wrangling about whether Risen could be forced to testify. Ultimately, prosecutors chose not to call Risen as a witness, despite winning legal battles allowing them to do so.

## **Homeland Security Secretary Noem visits the El Salvador prison where deported Venezuelans are held**

By REBECCA SANTANA and ALEX BRANDON Associated Press

TECOLUCA, El Salvador (AP) — U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem on Wednesday visited the high-security El Salvador prison where Venezuelans who the Trump administration alleges are gang members have been held since their removal from the United States. The tour included two crowded cell blocks, the armory and an isolation unit.

Noem's trip to the prison — where inmates are packed into cells and never allowed outside — comes as the Trump administration seeks to show it is deporting people it describes as the "worst of the worst."

The Trump administration is arguing in federal court that it was justified in sending the Venezuelans to El Salvador, while activists say officials have sent them to a prison rife with human rights abuses while presenting little evidence that they were part of the Venezuelan Tren de Aragua gang.

Noem notably dodged questions by the press about if the Venezuelan deportees were going to be in the prison indefinitely and if the Venezuelans could ever be brought back to the U.S. if a court orders the administration to do so.

"We're going to let the courts play out," she told reporters following the visit.

Noem toured an area holding some of the Venezuelans accused of being gang members. In the sweltering building, the men in white T-shirts and shorts stared silently from their cell, then were heard shouting an indiscernible chant when she left.

In a cell block holding Salvadoran prisoners, about a dozen were lined up by guards near the front of their cell and told to remove their T-shirts and face masks. The men were heavily tattooed, some bearing the letters MS, for the Mara Salvatrucha gang, on their chests.

After listening to Salvadoran officials, Noem turned her back to the cell and recorded a video message.

If an immigrant commits a crime, "this is one of the consequences you could face," Noem said. "First of all, do not come to our country illegally. You will be removed and you will be prosecuted. But know that this facility is one of the tools in our toolkit that we will use if you commit crimes against the American people."

Noem also met with El Salvador President Nayib Bukele, a populist who has gained right-wing admiration in the U.S. due to his crackdown on the country's gangs, despite the democratic and due process implications that have come with it.

"This unprecedented relationship we have with El Salvador is going to be a model for other countries on how they can work with America," Noem said to reporters Wednesday.

Since taking office, Noem has frequently been front and center in efforts to highlight the immigration crackdown. She took part in immigration enforcement operations, rode horses with Border Patrol agents and was the face of a television campaign warning people in the country illegally to self-deport.

Noem's Wednesday visit is part of a three-day trip. She'll also travel to Colombia and Mexico.

The Venezuelans were removed from the U.S. this month after Trump invoked the Alien Enemies Act of 1798 and said the U.S. was being invaded by the Tren de Aragua gang. The Alien Enemies Act gives the president wartime powers and allows noncitizens to be deported without the opportunity to go before an immigration or federal court judge.

An appeals court Wednesday kept in place an order barring the administration from deporting more Venezuelan immigrants to El Salvador under the Alien Enemies Act.



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A central outstanding question about the deportees' status is when and how they could ever be released from the prison, called the Terrorism Confinement Center, as they are not serving sentences. They no longer appear in U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's online detainee locator and have not appeared before a judge in El Salvador.

The Trump administration refers to them as the "worst of the worst" but hasn't identified who was deported or provided evidence that they're gang members.

Relatives of some of the deportees have categorically denied any gang affiliation. The Venezuelan government and a group called the Families of Immigrants Committee in Venezuela hired a lawyer to help free those held in El Salvador. A lawyer for the firm, which currently represents about 30 Venezuelans, said they aren't gang members and have no criminal records.

The U.S. government has acknowledged that many do not have such records.

Flights were in the air March 15 when a federal judge issued a verbal order temporarily barring the deportations and ordered planes to return to the U.S.

The Trump administration has argued that the judge's verbal directions did not count, that only his written order needed to be followed and that it couldn't apply to flights that had already left the U.S.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters that about 261 people were deported on the flights, including 137 under the Alien Enemies Act.

Bukele opened the prison in 2023 as he made the Central American country's stark, harsh prisons a trademark of his fight against crime. The facility has eight sprawling pavilions and can hold up to 40,000 inmates. Each cell can fit 65 to 70 prisoners.

Prisoners can't have visitors. There are no workshops or educational programs.

El Salvador hasn't had diplomatic relations with Venezuela since 2019, so the Venezuelans imprisoned there do not have consular support from their government.

Video released by El Salvador's government after the deportees' arrival 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.

They were later shown at the prison 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.

For three years, El Salvador has been operating under a state of emergency that suspends fundamental rights as Bukele wages an all-out assault on the country's powerful street gangs. During that time, some 84,000 people have been arrested, accused of gang ties and jailed, often without due process.

Bukele offered to hold U.S. deportees in the prison when U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio visited in February.

At the prison Wednesday, El Salvador Justice Minister Gustavo Villatoro showed Noem a cell holding Salvadorans he said had been there since the prison opened. "No one expects that these people can go back to society and behave," he said.

## The AP and the Trump administration are due back in court in their fight over White House access

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Associated Press is returning to a federal courtroom on Thursday to ask a judge to restore its full access to presidential events, after the White House retaliated against the news outlet last month for not following President Trump's executive order to rename the Gulf of Mexico.

In a hearing last month, U.S. District Court Judge Trevor N. McFadden refused the AP's request for an injunction to stop the White House from barring reporters and photographers from events in the Oval Office and Air Force One. He urged the Trump administration to reconsider its ban before Thursday's hearing. It hasn't.

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"It seems pretty clearly viewpoint discrimination," McFadden told the government's attorney at the time. The AP has sued Trump's team for punishing a news organization for using speech that it doesn't like. The news outlet said it would still refer to the Gulf of Mexico in its style guidance to clients around the world, while also noting that Trump has ordered it renamed the Gulf of America.

"For anyone who thinks the Associated Press's lawsuit against President Trump's White House is about the name of a body of water, think bigger," Julie Pace, the AP's executive editor, wrote in an op-ed for the Wall Street Journal on Wednesday. "It's really about whether the government can control what you say."

The White House said it has the right to decide who gets to question the president, and has taken steps to take over a duty that has been handled by journalists for decades.

The president has dismissed the AP as a group of "radical left lunatics" and said that "we're going to keep them out until such time as they agree that it's the Gulf of America."

The AP has still covered the president, and has been permitted in White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt's press briefings, but the ban has cost the organization time in reporting and impeded its efforts to get still images. Even if McFadden rules in favor of the news organization, it's unclear how the White House will respond to the judge's order.

The White House Correspondents' Association has asked its members to show solidarity with the AP on Thursday, perhaps by showing up at the courtroom or wearing a pin that signifies the importance of the First Amendment.

The case is one of several aggressive moves the second Trump administration has taken against the press since his return to office, including FCC investigations against ABC, CBS and NBC News, dismantling the government-run Voice of America and threatening funding for public broadcasters PBS and NPR.

A Trump executive order to change the name of the United States' largest mountain back to Mount McKinley from Denali is being recognized by the AP. Trump has the authority to do so because the mountain is completely within the country he oversees, AP has said.

Writing in the Journal, Pace said the AP didn't ask for the fight and made efforts to resolve the issue before going to court, but needed to stand on principle.

"If we don't step up to defend Americans' right to speak freely," she wrote, "who will?"

## **Turkish student at Tufts University detained, video shows masked people handcuffing her**

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ, KATHY McCORMACK and MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

SOMERVILLE, Mass. (AP) — A Turkish national and doctoral student at Tufts University has been detained by U.S. Department of Homeland Security agents without explanation, her lawyer said Wednesday.

Rumeysa Ozturk, 30, had just left her home in Somerville on Tuesday night when she was stopped, lawyer Mahsa Khanbabai said in a petition filed in Boston federal court.

Video obtained by The Associated Press appears to show six people, their faces covered, taking away Ozturk's phone as she yells and is handcuffed.

"We're the police," members of the group are heard saying in the video.

A man is heard asking, "Why are you hiding your faces?"

Khanbabai said Ozturk, who is Muslim, was meeting friends for iftar, a meal that breaks a fast at sunset during Ramadan.

"We are unaware of her whereabouts and have not been able to contact her. No charges have been filed against Rumeysa to date that we are aware of," Khanbabai said in a statement. Ozturk has a visa allowing her to study in the United States, Khanbabai said.

'This isn't public safety, it's intimidation'

Neighbors said they were rattled by the arrest, which happened at 5:30 p.m. on a residential block.

"It looked like a kidnapping," said Michael Mathis, a 32-year-old software engineer whose surveillance camera captured the arrest. "They approach her and start grabbing her with their faces covered. They're

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covering their faces. They're in unmarked vehicles."

Tufts University President Sunil Kumar said in a statement that the school learned that authorities detained an international graduate student and the student's visa had been terminated.

"The university had no pre-knowledge of this incident and did not share any information with federal authorities prior to the event," Kumar said.

Kumar did not name the student, but university spokesperson Patrick Collins confirmed that Ozturk is a doctoral student in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences.

Democratic U.S. Rep. Ayanna Pressley called the arrest "a horrifying violation of Rumeysa's constitutional rights to due process and free speech."

"She must be immediately released," Pressley said in a statement. "We won't stand by while the Trump Administration continues to abduct students with legal status and attack our fundamental freedoms."

Massachusetts Attorney General Andrea Joy Campbell called the video "disturbing."

"Based on what we now know, it is alarming that the federal administration chose to ambush and detain her, apparently targeting a law-abiding individual because of her political views," she said. "This isn't public safety, it's intimidation that will, and should, be closely scrutinized in court."

Court says not to remove Ozturk from the state, but she is listed as being held in Louisiana

U.S. District Judge Indira Talwani issued an order giving the government until Friday to answer why Ozturk was being detained. Talwani also ordered that Ozturk not be moved outside the District of Massachusetts without 48 hours advance notice.

But as of Wednesday evening, the U.S. Immigration and Custom Enforcement's online detainee locator system listed her as being held at the South Louisiana ICE Processing Center in Basile, Louisiana.

A senior DHS spokesperson confirmed Ozturk's detention and the termination of her visa.

"DHS and (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) investigations found Ozturk engaged in activities in support of Hamas, a foreign terrorist organization that relishes the killing of Americans. A visa is a privilege, not a right. Glorifying and supporting terrorists who kill Americans is grounds for visa issuance to be terminated. This is common sense security," the spokesperson told the AP.

Ozturk cowrote article criticizing university response to Palestinian issues

Ozturk was one of four students last March who wrote an op-ed in The Tufts Daily criticizing the university's response to its community union Senate passing resolutions that demanded Tufts "acknowledge the Palestinian genocide," disclose its investments and divest from companies with direct or indirect ties to Israel.

Friends said Ozturk was not otherwise closely involved in protests against Israel. But after the piece was published, her name, photo and work history were featured by Canary Mission, a website that says it documents people who "promote hatred of the U.S.A., Israel and Jews on North American college campuses." The op-ed was the only cited example of "anti-Israel activism" by Ozturk.

Students and faculty elsewhere also have recently had visas revoked or been blocked from entering the U.S. because they attended demonstrations or publicly expressed support for Palestinians. President Donald Trump's administration has cited a seldom-invoked statute authorizing the secretary of state to revoke visas of noncitizens who could be considered a threat to foreign policy interests.

Supporters rally in Somerville

Hundreds of people demonstrated in a park later Wednesday, with speaker after speaker demanding her release and accusing both major political parties of failing to protect immigrants and stand up for Palestinians.

"Free Rumeysa Ozturk now," the crowd chanted, along with traditional protest slogans such as "Free, free Palestine." Many held Palestinian flags and homemade signs supporting her and opposing ICE.

Zoi Andalcio, a Somerville business owner, said he came out with his wife and 3-year-old son to speak against the "maddening" arrest of Ozturk and others.

"I'm outraged like everybody else about these disappearances, kidnappings of legal noncitizens, who may or may not have spoken out against the atrocious foreign policy of the United States government," Andalcio said.



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Roz Nazzaro, who held a sign that read "Hands Off," said she fears the country is heading into an era of "Nazism" in which just disappear.

"There is no distinction between undocumented immigrants, documented immigrants, green cards," said Nazzaro, a retired college administrator from Winchester, Massachusetts. "It's going to be the citizens next, if you're the wrong color, wear a hijab."

'She's never spoken badly to anyone'

Before attending Tufts, Ozturk obtained a master's from the Developmental Psychology program at Teachers College at Columbia University in New York, according to an alumni spotlight article in 2021.

Reyyan Bilge, a psychology professor at Northeastern University and friend, described Ozturk as a "soft spoken, kind and gentle soul," deeply focused on research and not closely involved in the campus protests.

The two first met at Istanbul Sehir University, where Bilge supervised her thesis, before working on cognitive research and publishing papers together. They remained close after Ozturk arrived in the United States on a Fulbright Scholarship in 2018.

"Over the 10 years I've known her, she's never spoken badly to anyone else, let alone being antisemitic or racist," Bilge said.

Turkish diplomats contact State Department and ICE

The Turkish Embassy in Washington said it was keeping in regular contact with Ozturk's family, monitoring the situation closely and engaged in "initiatives" with the State Department and ICE.

It added in a statement on the social platform X that it was making "every effort" to provide consular services and legal support to protect its citizens' rights.

## Climate change and overfishing threaten Vietnam's ancient tradition of making fish sauce

By ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL Associated Press

DA NANG, Vietnam (AP) — Bui Van Phong faced a choice when the Vietnam War ended 50 years ago: Stay in his small village, helping his parents carry on the family's centuries-old tradition of making fish sauce, or join the hundreds of thousands of people fleeing his country for a better life.

Phong chose to stay behind and nurtured a business making the beloved condiment, known as nuoc mam in Vietnam, that is now in its fourth generation with his son, Bui Van Phu, 41, at the helm. Fish sauce from the village has been recognized by Vietnam as an indelible part of the country's heritage and the younger Bui is acutely aware of what that means.

"It isn't just the quality of fish sauce. It is also the historical value," he said.

But that heritage is under threat, and not only from giant conglomerates that mass-produce fish sauce in factories. Climate change and overfishing are making it harder to catch the anchovies essential to the condiment that underlies so much of Vietnam and southeast Asia's food.

Anchovies thrive in large schools in nutrient-rich waters near the shore. But climate change is warming the oceans, depleting oxygen levels in the water. Scientists have long feared that this would lead to smaller fish, as large fish that need more oxygen may migrate or adapt over time by shrinking. Renato Salvatelli, who studies fisheries at the Christian-Albrecht University of Kiel in Germany, said his research into warmer periods millennia ago found support for this in the fossil record.

"If we continue with this trend of deoxygenation, anchovies will not be OK with that," he said. "Every species has a limit."

Breaching that limit will have global consequences.

Warming oceans threaten the ocean ecology and the marine life that inhabits it. It may result in the proliferation of smaller, less nutritious fish and increase costs of fishing and consequently food. Anchovies, for instance, have an outsized role on marine ecology. They're food for other fish that people eat, like mackerel. They are also vital to make fish meal, used to feed farmed fish.

Overfishing compounds the problem, and geopolitical tensions in the contested waters of the South China Sea — responsible for about 12% of the global fish catch — make management difficult. The de-

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destructive industrial fishing practice of dragging large nets along the seabed, scooping up everything in a net's path, has prevailed since the 1980s. But despite increased fishing, the amount of fish being caught has stagnated, according to a 2020 analysis of fishing trends.

Even if the world can limit long-term global warming to 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit (1.5 degrees Celsius) above pre-industrial levels and halve fishing intensity, the South China Sea will still lose more than a fifth of its fish stocks, warned a 2021 assessment by scientists from the University of British Columbia in Canada. In the most pessimistic scenario — temperatures rising by 7.7 degrees Fahrenheit (4.3 degrees) — nearly all the fish disappear.

Phu, who teaches information technology by day, also works hard to perfect the fish sauce art handed down by his ancestors.

The anchovies are usually caught between January to March when they congregate off the coast of Da Nang. If they are the right species and size, they get mixed gently with sea salt and put in special terra cotta barrels. Sometimes worms or other ingredients are added to bring in different flavors. Phu ferments this for up to 18 months — stirring the mix several times a week — before it can be strained, bottled and sold to customers.

The sea salt imparts different flavor depending on where it comes from. So does the amount of salt used, and makers have their own recipes; the Bui family uses three parts fish to one part salt. The time allowed for fermentation, and the potential addition of other fish, also affect the flavor of the final product.

But it is harder to get the perfect anchovies. The fish catch has decreased — fishermen in markets across Vietnam rue the fact that much of the fish they sell now was considered bait-size in previous decades — and it's only the good relationships he has with anchovy fishermen that allow him to get the fish directly, avoiding high market prices. The unmistakable aroma of fermenting fish cloaks the homes of families that still make traditional fish sauce. But Phu said that many families are thinking of getting out of the business because of high anchovy prices.

That may affect Vietnamese plans for a bigger share of the global fish sauce market — projected to increase in value from \$18.5 billion in 2023 to nearly \$29 billion by 2032, according to a report by Intropective Market Research. Vietnam, along with Thailand, is the world's largest exporter of fish sauce and is hoping improvements in food safety to satisfy standards in lucrative markets like the U.S., Europe and Japan will help cement a national brand that helps advertise Vietnamese culture to the world.

It's hard to overemphasize how deeply the condiment is enmeshed in Vietnamese culture. Students living abroad speak of how its taste transports them back home and a top chef says it's the foundation for flavor in the country's cuisine. The varying taste of different brews also means everyone — from top businessmen to daily wage workers — has their own opinions about which is the best.

Phu said that each family has their own secrets about making fish sauce. And, nearly fifty years since his father chose to stay back and take care of the family business, he'd like to pass those on to his own son. But he knows that it'll depend on whether enough anchovies thrive in the sea for the craft to be viable.

"Fish sauce to me is not just a condiment for cooking. But it is our craft, our culture, our tradition that need to be preserved, safeguarded and inherited," he said.

## Trump places 25% tariff on imported autos, expecting to raise \$100 billion in tax revenues

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said Wednesday he was placing 25% tariffs on auto imports, a move the White House claims would foster domestic manufacturing but could also put a financial squeeze on automakers that depend on global supply chains.

"This will continue to spur growth," Trump told reporters. "We'll effectively be charging a 25% tariff."

The tariffs, which the White House expects to raise \$100 billion in revenue annually, could be complicated as even U.S. automakers source their components from around the world. The tax hike starting in April means automakers could face higher costs and lower sales, though Trump argues that the tariffs will lead

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to more factories opening in the United States and the end of what he judges to be a “ridiculous” supply chain in which auto parts and finished vehicles are manufactured across the United States, Canada and Mexico.

To underscore his seriousness about the tariffs directive he signed, Trump said, “This is permanent.”

Shares in General Motors fell roughly 3% in Wednesday trading. Ford’s stock was up slightly. Shares in Stellantis, the owner of Jeep and Chrysler, dropped nearly 3.6%.

Trump has long said that tariffs against auto imports would be a defining policy of his presidency, betting that the costs created by the taxes would cause more production to relocate to the United States while helping narrow the budget deficit. But U.S. and foreign automakers have plants around the world to accommodate global sales while maintaining competitive prices — and it could take years for companies to design, build and open the new factories that Trump is promising.

“We’re looking at much higher vehicle prices,” said economist Mary Lovely, senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics. “We’re going to see reduced choice. ... These kinds of taxes fall more heavily on the middle and working class.”

She said more households will be priced out of the new car market — where prices already average about \$49,000 — and will have to hang on to aging vehicles.

The tariffs on autos would start being collected on April 3, Trump said. If the taxes are fully passed onto consumers, the average auto price on an imported vehicle could jump by \$12,500, a sum that could feed into overall inflation. Trump was voted back into the White House last year because voters believed he could bring down prices.

Foreign leaders were quick to criticize the tariffs, a sign that Trump could be intensifying a broader trade war that could damage growth worldwide.

“This is a very direct attack,” Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said. “We will defend our workers. We will defend our companies. We will defend our country.”

In Brussels, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen expressed regret at the U.S. decision to target auto exports from Europe and vowed that the bloc would protect consumers and businesses.

“Tariffs are taxes — bad for businesses, worse for consumers equally in the U.S. and the European Union,” she said in a statement, adding that the EU’s executive branch would assess the impact of the move, as well as other U.S. tariffs planned for coming days.

As Trump announced the new tariffs, he indicated that he would like to provide a new incentive to help car buyers by allowing them to deduct from their federal income taxes the interest paid on auto loans, so long as their vehicles were made in America. That deduction would eat into some of the revenues that could be generated by the tariffs.

The new tariffs would apply to both finished autos and parts used in the vehicles, according to a White House official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the taxes on a call with reporters. The tariffs would be on top of any existing taxes and were legally based on a 2019 Commerce Department investigation that occurred during Trump’s first term on national security grounds.

For autos and parts under the USMCA trade pact applying to the United States, Mexico and Canada, the 25% tariffs would only apply to non-U.S. content.

The administration is reasoning that there is excess capacity at U.S. automakers that will enable them to ramp up production to avoid the tariffs by manufacturing more domestically, with the official noting that automakers have known since the Trump campaign that tariffs were coming.

The auto tariffs are part of a broader reshaping of global relations by Trump, who plans to impose what he calls “reciprocal” taxes on April 2 that would match the tariffs, sales taxes charged by other nations.

Trump has already placed a 20% import tax on all imports from China for its role in the production of fentanyl. He similarly placed 25% tariffs on Mexico and Canada, with a lower 10% tax on Canadian energy products. Parts of the Mexico and Canada tariffs have been suspended, including the taxes on autos, after automakers objected and Trump responded by giving them a 30-day reprieve that is set to expire in April.

The president has also imposed 25% tariffs on all steel and aluminum imports, removing the exemptions from his earlier 2018 taxes on the metals. He also plans tariffs on computer chips, pharmaceutical



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drugs, lumber and copper.

His taxes risk igniting a broader global trade war with escalating retaliations that could crush global trade, potentially hurting economic growth while raising prices for families and businesses as some of the costs of the taxes get passed along by importers. When the European Union retaliated with plans for a 50% tariff on U.S. spirits, Trump responded by planning a 200% tax on alcoholic beverages from the EU.

Trump also intends to place a 25% tariff on countries that import oil from Venezuela, even though the United States also imports oil from that nation.

Trump's aides maintain that the tariffs on Canada and Mexico are about stopping illegal immigration and drug smuggling. But the administration also wants to use the tariff revenues to lower the budget deficit and assert America's preeminence as the world's largest economy.

The president on Monday cited plans by South Korean automaker Hyundai to build a \$5.8 billion steel plant in Louisiana as evidence that tariffs would bring back manufacturing jobs.

Slightly more than 1 million people are employed domestically in the manufacturing of motor vehicles and parts, about 320,000 fewer than in 2000, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. An additional 2.1 million people work at auto and parts dealerships.

The United States last year imported nearly 8 million cars and light trucks worth \$244 billion. Mexico, Japan and South Korea were the top sources of foreign vehicles. Imports of auto parts came to more than \$197 billion, led by Mexico, Canada and China, according to the Commerce Department.

## **Palestinians protest Hamas in a rare public show of dissent in Gaza**

By SAMY MAGDY, FATMA KHALED and SARAH EL DEEB Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Thousands of Palestinians marched between the wreckage of a heavily destroyed town in northern Gaza on Wednesday in the second day of anti-war protests, with many chanting against Hamas in a rare display of public anger against the militant group.

The protests, which centered mainly on Gaza's north, appeared to be aimed generally against the war, with protesters calling for an end to 17 months of deadly fighting with Israel that has made life in Gaza insufferable.

But protesters also leveled unusually direct and public criticism of Hamas, which has quashed dissent violently in the past in Gaza, a territory it still rules months into the war with Israel.

In the town of Beit Lahiya, where a similar protest took place Tuesday, about 3,000 people demonstrated, with many chanting "the people want the fall of Hamas." In the hard-hit Shijaiyah neighborhood of Gaza City, dozens of men chanted "Out, out out! Hamas get out!"

"Our children have been killed. Our houses have been destroyed," said Abed Radwan, who said he joined the protest in Beit Lahiya "against the war, against Hamas, and the (Palestinian political) factions, against Israel and against the world's silence."

Ammar Hassan, who took part in a protest Tuesday, said it started as an anti-war protest with a few dozen people but swelled to more than 2,000, with people chanting against Hamas.

"It's the only party we can affect," he said by phone. "Protests won't stop the (Israeli) occupation, but it can affect Hamas."

The militant group has violently cracked down on previous protests. This time no outright intervention was apparent, perhaps because Hamas is keeping a lower profile since Israel resumed its war against it.

Senior Hamas official Bassem Naim, in a post on Facebook, wrote that people had the right to protest but that their focus should be on the "criminal aggressor," Israel.

'We want to stop the killing'

Family elders from Beit Lahiya expressed support for the protests against Israel's renewed offensive and its tightened blockade on all supplies into Gaza. Their statement said the community fully supports armed resistance against Israel.

"The protest was not about politics. It was about people's lives," said Mohammed Abu Saker, a father of three from the nearby town of Beit Hanoun, who joined a demonstration Tuesday.

"We want to stop the killing and displacement, no matter the price. We can't stop Israel from killing us,

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but we can press Hamas to give concessions," he said.

A similar protest occurred in the heavily destroyed area of Jabaliya on Tuesday, according to witnesses.

One protester in Jabaliya, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of retribution, said they joined the demonstration because "everyone failed us."

They said they chanted against Israel, Hamas, the Western-backed Palestinian Authority and Arab mediators. They said there were no Hamas security forces at the protest but scuffles broke out between supporters and opponents of the group.

Later, they said they regretted participating because of Israeli media coverage, which emphasized the opposition to Hamas.

Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz urged Palestinians to join the protests.

"You too should demand the removal of Hamas from Gaza and the immediate release of all Israeli hostages. That is the only way to stop the war," he said.

A 19-year-old Palestinian, who also spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of retribution said he planned to join demonstrations on Wednesday. His mother has cancer and his 10-year-old brother is hospitalized with cerebral palsy, and he said the family has been displaced multiple times since their home was destroyed.

"People are angry at the whole world," including the United States, Israel and Hamas, he said. "We want Hamas to resolve this situation, return the hostages and end this whole thing."

Renewed fighting brings more death and displacement

The protests erupted a week after Israel ended its ceasefire with Hamas by launching a surprise wave of strikes that killed hundreds of people. Earlier this month, Israel halted deliveries of food, fuel, medicine and humanitarian aid to Gaza's roughly 2 million Palestinians.

Israel has vowed to escalate the war until Hamas returns the 59 hostages it still holds — 24 of them believed to be alive. Israel is also demanding that the group give up power, disarm and send its leaders into exile.

Hamas has said it will only release the remaining captives in exchange for Palestinian prisoners, a lasting ceasefire and an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza.

The war was triggered by Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack into Israel, in which Palestinian militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted 251.

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed over 50,000 people, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not say how many were civilians or combatants. Israel's bombardment and ground operations have caused vast destruction and at their height displaced some 90% of Gaza's population.

Hamas won a landslide victory in the last Palestinian elections, held in 2006. It seized power in Gaza from the Western-backed Palestinian Authority, dominated by the secular Fatah movement, the following year after months of factional unrest and a week of heavy street battles.

Rights groups say both the Palestinian Authority and Hamas violently suppress dissent, quashing protests in the areas they control and jailing and torturing critics.

## Things to know about the limited ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine brokered by the US

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — After three days of intense negotiations, the Trump administration, Ukraine and Russia agreed to a limited ceasefire in which the key details, including what was covered and how it will start, were disputed by the warring sides, indicating the road to a complete truce will be long and mired with contention.

The negotiations focused on easing Black Sea shipping and halting long-range strikes on energy infrastructure, relatively low-hanging fruit that both sides had experience in negotiating before the U.S. brokered indirect talks.

While much is yet unknown, here is a breakdown of the key elements of the partial ceasefire and what

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is at stake in the coming weeks as talks continue.

The limited ceasefire began with a rocky start

Conflicting statements emerged immediately after the talks on Tuesday. Both sides differed on the start time of halting strikes on energy sites and accused the other of violating the ceasefire.

Russia also conditioned its part in opening Black Sea shipping on the U.S. lifting sanctions, which Kyiv dismissed.

Russian officials have greeted the results of the talks with optimism, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy described it as a good start, though some Ukrainian officials have expressed discontent.

"Something tells me this is more advantageous for the enemy," Ukrainian lawmaker Yaroslav Zheleznyak told the Interfax Ukraine news agency.

Stopping fighting around Black Sea shipping routes

The U.S. said Tuesday it had reached a tentative agreement with Ukraine and Russia to stop fighting and ensure safe navigation in the Black Sea in separate talks with the two sides.

Details of the deal were not released, including how or when it was to be implemented and monitored, but it appeared to mark another attempt to ensure safe Black Sea shipping after a 2022 agreement that was brokered by the U.N. and Turkey was halted by Russia one year later, in July 2023.

Russia said the Black Sea deal announced Tuesday could only be implemented after sanctions against the Russian Agricultural Bank and other financial institutions involved in food and fertilizer trade were lifted and their access to the SWIFT system of international payments was ensured.

Zelenskyy said Moscow was lying about the terms of the agreement, despite the U.S. later saying it would help restore Russia's access to the world market for agricultural and fertilizer exports.

It's unclear how the Black Sea deal would benefit Ukraine

While the benefits to Russia are clear, Ukrainian officials questioned how the Black Sea deal announced Tuesday would profit them. It isn't clear, for instance, if it would also halt attacks on Ukrainian ports.

"Personally, I don't think this will significantly boost our export capacity. Frankly speaking, thanks to Ukrainian naval drones, we have considerably expanded our capabilities in the Black Sea," Ukrainian lawmaker Zhelezniak said.

That's because Ukraine took matters into its own hands after Russia backed out in 2023 of the earlier deal to ensure safe Black Sea shipping. Ukraine carved out a trade route requiring ships to sail near the coast lines of Bulgaria and Romania, guided by the Ukrainian Navy. At the same time, Ukrainian forces launched a campaign of sea drone attacks to further push back Russia's fleet.

"Unfortunately," Zhelezniak said, the new deal "worsens our position in terms of influence in the Black Sea."

Trading blame over halting of energy strikes

The ceasefire also included a halt to long-range strikes on energy infrastructure, but sharp differences emerged immediately after Tuesday's announcement over when the halt to fighting would begin.

Moscow said the ceasefire had started on March 18 and accused Kyiv of violating the terms by striking energy sites inside Russia, a charge that Ukraine's General Staff denied on Wednesday.

The Kremlin later posted a list of the types of facilities covered by the limited ceasefire.

It included refineries, oil and gas pipelines, oil storage facilities, including pump stations, power-generating and transmitting infrastructure, as well as power plants, substations, transformers, distribution switchgear, nuclear power plants and hydropower plant dams.

## Judge says extreme heat in Texas prisons is unconstitutional but doesn't order they install AC

By JIM VERTUNO Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — A federal judge on Wednesday found the extreme heat in Texas prisons is "plainly unconstitutional," but declined to order the state to immediately start installing air conditioning, which could cost billions.



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The judge affirmed claims brought by advocates of people incarcerated in the state, where summer heat routinely soars above 100 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees Celsius). But they will have to continue pressing their lawsuit later in a trial.

The lawsuit was initially filed in 2023 by Bernie Tiede, the former mortician serving a life sentence whose murder case inspired the movie "Bernie." Several prisoners' rights groups then asked to join his legal fight and expand it.

The lawsuit argues the heat in the state facilities amounts to cruel and unusual punishment, and seeks to force the state to install air conditioning.

Jeff Edwards, lead attorney for prisoners and advocates, called the judge's order a victory, even if it didn't require an immediate fix.

"We proved our case," Edwards said. "The court made it very clear what the state is doing is unconstitutional and endangering the lives of those they are supposed to be protecting ... This is step one in changing the Texas prison system."

Edwards said advocates will push for relief for prisoners as quickly as possible. "I'm regretful we can't protect them with temporary relief this summer, but we will move as fast as we can," he said.

Texas has more than 130,000 people serving time in prisons, more than any state in the U.S. Only about a third of roughly 100 prison units are fully air conditioned and the rest have either partial or no electrical cooling.

"This case concerns the plainly unconstitutional treatment of some of the most vulnerable, marginalized members of our society," U.S. District Judge Robert Pitman wrote in his ruling on a temporary injunction request. "The Court is of the view that excessive heat is likely serving as a form of unconstitutional punishment."

But the judge said that ordering the state to spend "hundreds of millions, if not billions, of dollars to install permanent air conditioning in every (prison)," could not be accomplished before it expired in 90 days.

It would take months to install temporary air conditioning, and could even delay a permanent solution, the judge wrote.

Pitman said he expects the case will proceed to trial, where advocates for prisoners can continue to argue their case.

He also issued a warning to the state that they will likely win at trial, and that the state could face an order to install air conditioning.

The judge also noted that the state Legislature, which is in session through May and writes the two-year state budget, is also considering bills that would require air conditioning to be installed in prisons.

But the Republican-majority Legislature has been hearing complaints about extreme heat in prisons for years and has not addressed the issue. In 2018, the state was ordered to install air conditioning at a unit for older prisoners and those that are medically vulnerable.

Officials at the Texas Department of Criminal Justice did not immediately respond to emails seeking comment.

Texas is not alone in facing lawsuits over dangerously hot prisons. Cases also have been filed in Louisiana and New Mexico. One filed in July in Georgia alleged a man died in July 2023 after he was left in an outdoor cell for hours without water, shade or ice.

A November 2022 study by researchers at Brown, Boston and Harvard universities found that 13% — or 271 — of the deaths in Texas prisons without universal AC between 2001 and 2019 may be attributed to extreme heat. Prisoner advocates say those numbers are only likely to increase as the state faces more extreme weather and heat due to climate change.

Last year in a hearing, people who were formerly incarcerated testified about their experiences in hot prison buildings where they said temperatures reach above 120 degrees Fahrenheit (48.9 Celsius).

They testified some inmates would splash toilet water on themselves to cool off, fake suicide attempts to be moved to cooler medical areas, or even deliberately set fires so that guards would be forced to hose down cells.

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"It's sad it takes a federal court to come in and change things," Edwards said Wednesday. "This is not a Spanish galley in the 1600s, this is 2025."

Texas Department of Criminal Justice Director Bryan Collier has acknowledged that heat was a factor in three deaths from multiple causes in 2023, and that prison staff and inmates sometimes fall ill from high temperatures.

But the state disputed the hundreds of deaths in recent years alleged by the prisoner advocates, and argues Texas has implemented effective heat mitigation measures, such as providing fans, towels and access to cooler "respite" areas.

Collier also insisted he would like to have air conditioning installed across the prison system, but that state lawmakers have never agreed to spend enough money to do that.

## **Appeals court won't lift order that barred Trump administration from deportations under wartime law**

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal appeals court refused Wednesday to lift an order barring the Trump administration from deporting Venezuelan migrants to El Salvador under an 18th century wartime law.

A split three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit wouldn't block a March 15 order temporarily prohibiting deportations under the Alien Enemies Act of 1798.

Invoking the law for the first time since World War II, President Donald Trump's administration deported hundreds of people under a presidential proclamation calling the Tren de Aragua gang an invading force.

The Justice Department appealed after U.S. District Judge James Boasberg blocked more deportations and ordered planeloads of Venezuelan immigrants to return to the U.S. That did not happen.

Attorneys from the American Civil Liberties Union filed the lawsuit on behalf of five Venezuelan noncitizens who were being held in Texas.

The case has become a flashpoint amid escalating tension between the White House and the federal courts.

Judges Karen LeCraft Henderson and Patricia Millett voted to reject the government's request to lift the order. Each wrote concurring opinions. Judge Justin Walker, a Trump nominee, wrote a dissenting opinion.

Millett, who was nominated by Democratic President Barack Obama, said Boasberg's order merely froze the status quo "until weighty and unprecedented legal issues can be addressed" through an upcoming hearing.

"There is neither jurisdiction nor reason for this court to interfere at this very preliminary stage or to allow the government to singlehandedly moot the Plaintiffs' claims by immediately removing them beyond the reach of their lawyers or the court."

Henderson, who was nominated by Republican President George H.W. Bush, said the court's ruling doesn't prevent the government from arresting and detaining migrants under Trump's proclamation.

"Lifting the injunctions risks exiling plaintiffs to a land that is not their country of origin," she wrote. "Indeed, at oral argument before this Court, the government in no uncertain terms conveyed that — were the injunction lifted — it would immediately begin deporting plaintiffs without notice."

Walker said the plaintiffs' claims belong in Texas, where they are detained.

"The Government has also shown that the district court's orders threaten irreparable harm to delicate negotiations with foreign powers on matters concerning national security," he wrote.

Democracy Forward president and CEO Skye Perryman, whose legal advocacy group also represents the plaintiffs, said Wednesday's ruling is "an important step for due process and the protection of the American people."

"President Trump is bound by the laws of this nation, and those laws do not permit him to use wartime powers when the United States is not at war and has not been invaded to remove individuals from the country with no process at all," Perryman said in a statement.

Boasberg, the chief judge of the federal district court in Washington, has vowed to determine whether

the government defied his order to turn planes around. The administration has invoked a "state secrets privilege" and refused to give Boasberg any additional information about the deportations.

Trump and his allies have called for impeaching Boasberg. In a rare statement, Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts said that "impeachment is not an appropriate response to disagreement concerning a judicial decision."

The Alien Enemies Act allows noncitizens to be deported without the opportunity for a hearing before an immigration or federal court judge.

Boasberg ruled that immigrants facing deportation must get an opportunity to challenge their designations as alleged gang members. His ruling said there is "a strong public interest in preventing the mistaken deportation of people based on categories they have no right to challenge."

## Macron says a proposed European force for Ukraine could 'respond' if attacked by Russia

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — French President Emmanuel Macron said Wednesday that a proposed European armed force for possible deployment in Ukraine in tandem with an eventual peace deal could "respond" to a Russian attack if Moscow launched one.

Macron spoke after talks with Ukraine's president and ahead of a summit in Paris of some 30 nations on Thursday that will discuss the proposed force for Ukraine that Macron suggested could be deployed in "important towns" and elsewhere.

"If there was again a generalized aggression against Ukrainian soil, these armies would, in fact, be under attack and then it's our usual framework of engagement," Macron said. "Our soldiers, when they are engaged and deployed, are there to react and respond to the decisions of the commander in chief and, if they are in a conflict situation, to respond to it."

Macron, together with U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer, has been driving an effort to build a coalition of nations willing in one way or another to support the deployment of an armed force in Ukraine, with the aim of securing a lasting peace by dissuading Russia from attacking the country again.

Macron didn't specify what sort of response he envisaged in the eventuality of a Russian attack.

He said the proposed European forces wouldn't be stationed on the frontlines in Ukraine, "nor be engaged on the first day opposite Russian forces." They would "be forces that dissuade the Russians from attacking again. And by holding important towns, strategic bases, mark the clear support from several European governments and allies," he said.

"So we are not on the frontlines, we don't go to fight, but we are there to guarantee a lasting peace. It's a pacifist approach," he said. "The only ones who would, at that moment, trigger a conflict, a bellicose situation, would be the Russians if they decided again to launch an aggression."

Macron is expecting 31 delegations around the table Thursday morning at the presidential Elysee Palace. That's more than the French leader gathered for a first meeting in Paris in February — evidence that the coalition to help Ukraine, possibly with boots on the ground, is gathering steam, according to the presidential office.

Trump administration isn't keen

The big elephant in the room will be the country that's missing: the United States.

U.S. President Donald Trump's administration has shown no public enthusiasm for the coalition's discussions about potentially sending troops into Ukraine after an eventual ceasefire to help make peace stick. Trump's special envoy, Steve Witkoff, has dismissed the idea of a European deployment or even the need for it.

"It's a combination of a posture and a pose and a combination of also being simplistic," he said in an interview with former Fox News host Tucker Carlson.

That's not the view in Europe. The shared premise upon which the coalition is being built is that Russian President Vladimir Putin's actions in Ukraine — starting with the illegal seizure of the Crimean Peninsula



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in 2014 and culminating in the 2022 full-scale invasion that unleashed all-out war — shows that he cannot be trusted and that a European force could help dissuade another attack.

Ukraine's leader envisages multi-missioned force

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Macron both suggest that a foreign contingent in Ukraine could also provide military training, something allies already have been doing outside Ukraine, preparing more than 75,000 Ukrainian troops for battle against Russia's larger and expanding military and helping to make up for some of Ukraine's losses from more than three years of intense fighting.

"Primarily, any contingent consists of combat units, but they are above all intended to control the situation, monitor it, carry out joint training, and also to prevent any desire by Russia to return with renewed waves of aggression," Zelenskyy said at Wednesday's news conference with Macron.

European officials say that in any peace-deal scenario, Ukraine's first line of defense against any future Russian aggression would be Ukraine's own army. The 27-nation European Union is pressing ahead with a so-called steel "porcupine strategy" aimed at making Ukraine an even tougher nut for Russia to crack, by strengthening its armed forces and defense industry. Britain is also pledging continued military aid so Ukraine can keep fighting if peace talks fail or a ceasefire is broken.

Macron announced a new package of defense aid for Ukraine that he said was worth 2 billion euros (US\$ 2.15 billion) and will include light tanks, air defense and anti-tank missiles and other weaponry and support.

Boots on the ground

The basket of possible options that European military chiefs and planners have been looking at includes an array of scenarios they have been preparing for government leaders to consider and, ultimately, green light.

A possible option that France has been pushing would be a deployment by coalition members of a sizable force in central Ukraine, somewhere along the Dnieper River, away from frontlines, said a French official who spoke on condition of anonymity about the closed-door discussions.

The official said other possible options being examined are deploying a support force even further away from the fronts, in Ukraine's far west, or in a neighboring country.

British officials have said a force could consist of between 10,000 and 30,000 troops — which would be a considerable effort for nations that shrank their militaries after the Cold War but are now rearming.

## Trump has begun another trade war. Here's a timeline of how we got here

By WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Long-threatened tariffs from U.S. President Donald Trump have plunged the country into a global trade war — all while on-again, off-again new levies continue to escalate uncertainty.

Trump is no stranger to tariffs. He launched a trade war during his first term, taking particular aim at China by putting taxes on most of its goods. Beijing responded with its own retaliatory tariffs on U.S. products ranging from fruit to automotive imports. Trump also used the threat of more tariffs to force Canada and Mexico to renegotiate a North American trade pact, called the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement, in 2020.

When President Joe Biden took office, he preserved most of the tariffs Trump previously enacted against China, in addition to imposing some new restrictions — but his administration claimed to take a more targeted approach.

Fast-forward to today and economists stress there could be greater consequences on businesses and economies worldwide under Trump's more sweeping tariffs this time around — and that higher prices will likely leave consumers footing the bill. There's also been a sense of whiplash from Trump's back-and-forth tariff threats and responding retaliation, including some recently-postponed taxes on goods from America's largest trading partners.

Here's a timeline of how we got here:

January 20

Trump is sworn into office. In his inaugural address, he again promises to "tariff and tax foreign countries

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to enrich our citizens.” And he reiterates plans to create an agency called the External Revenue Service, which has yet to be established.

On his first day in office, Trump also says he expects to put 25% tariffs on Canada and Mexico starting on Feb. 1, while declining to immediately flesh out plans for taxing Chinese imports.

January 26

Trump threatens 25% tariffs on all Colombia imports and other retaliatory measures after President Gustavo Petro’s rejects two U.S. military aircraft carrying migrants to the country, accusing Trump of not treating immigrants with dignity during deportation.

In response, Petro also announces a retaliatory 25% increase in Colombian tariffs on U.S. goods. But Colombia later reversed its decision and accepted the flights carrying migrants. The two countries soon signaled a halt in the trade dispute.

February 1

Trump signs an executive order to impose tariffs on imports from Mexico, Canada and China — 10% on all imports from China and 25% on imports from Mexico and Canada starting Feb. 4. Trump invoked this power by declaring a national emergency — ostensibly over undocumented immigration and drug trafficking. The levies on Canada and Mexico threaten to blow up Trump’s own USMCA trade deal, which allowed many products to cross North American borders duty free.

The action prompts swift outrage from all three countries, with promises of retaliatory measures.

February 3

Trump agrees to a 30-day pause on his tariff threats against Mexico and Canada, with both trading partners taking steps to appease Trump’s concerns about border security and drug trafficking.

February 4

Trump’s new 10% tariffs on all Chinese imports to the U.S. still go into effect. China retaliates the same day by announcing a flurry of countermeasures, including sweeping new duties on a variety of American goods and an anti-monopoly investigation into Google.

China’s 15% tariffs on coal and liquefied natural gas products, and a 10% levy on crude oil, agricultural machinery and large-engine cars imported from the U.S., take effect Feb. 10.

February 10

Trump announces plans to hike steel and aluminum tariffs. He removes the exemptions from his 2018 tariffs on steel, meaning that all steel imports will be taxed at a minimum of 25%, and also raises his 2018 aluminum tariffs to 25% from 10% set to go into effect March 12.

February 13

Trump announces a plan for “reciprocal” tariffs — promising to increase U.S. tariffs to match the tax rates that other countries charge on imports “for purposes of fairness.” Economists warn that the reciprocal tariffs, set to overturn decades of trade policy, could create chaos for global businesses.

Beyond China, Canada and Mexico, he indicates that additional countries, such as India, won’t be spared from higher tariffs. And in the following weeks, Trump suggests that European countries could face a 25% levy as part of these efforts.

February 25

Trump signed an executive order instructing the Commerce Department to consider whether a tariff on imported copper is needed to protect national security. He cites the material’s use in U.S. defense, infrastructure and emerging technologies.

March 1

Trump signs an additional executive order instructing the Commerce Department to consider whether tariffs on lumber and timber are also needed to protect national security, arguing that the construction industry and military depend on a strong supply of wooden products in the U.S.

March 4

Trump’s 25% tariffs on imports from Canada and Mexico go into effect, though he limits the levy to 10% on Canadian energy. He also doubles the tariff on all Chinese imports to 20%.

All three countries promise retaliatory measures. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announces

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tariffs on more than \$100 billion of American goods over the course of 21 days. And Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum says her country would respond with its own retaliatory tariffs on U.S. goods without specifying the targeted products immediately, signaling hopes to de-escalate.

China, meanwhile, imposes tariffs of up to 15% on a wide array of key U.S. farm exports. It also expands the number of U.S. companies subject to export controls and other restrictions by about two dozen.

March 5

Trump grants a one-month exemption on his new tariffs impacting goods from Mexico and Canada for U.S. automakers. The pause arrives after the president spoke with leaders of the "Big 3" automakers — Ford, General Motors and Stellantis.

March 6

In a wider extension, Trump postpones 25% tariffs on many imports from Mexico and some imports from Canada for a month. But he still plans to impose "reciprocal" tariffs starting on April 2.

Trump credited Sheinbaum with making progress on border security and drug smuggling as a reason for again pausing tariffs. His actions also thaw relations with Canada somewhat, although outrage and uncertainty over the trade war remains. Still, after its initial retaliatory tariffs of \$30 billion Canadian (US\$21 billion) on U.S. goods, the government said it had suspended its second wave of retaliatory tariffs worth \$125 billion Canadian (US\$87 billion).

March 10

China retaliates against Trump's tariffs by imposing additional 15% taxes on key American farm products, including chicken, pork, soybeans and beef. The escalating trade tensions push stocks lower on Monday as investors worry about the pain Trump's trade wars risk inflicting on the American economy.

The Chinese tariffs were a response to Trump's decision to double the levy on Chinese imports to 20% on March 4. China's Commerce Ministry had earlier said that goods already in transit would be exempt from the retaliatory tariffs until April 12.

March 12

Trump increases tariffs on all steel and aluminum imports to 25%, removing exemptions from his 2018 tariffs on the metals in addition to increasing the tariffs on aluminum from 10%.

The European Union takes retaliatory trade action promising new duties on U.S. industrial and farm products. The measures will cover goods from the United States worth some 26 billion euros (\$28 billion), and not just steel and aluminum products, but also textiles, home appliances and agricultural goods. Motorcycles, bourbon, peanut butter and jeans will be hit, as they were during Trump's first term. The 27-member bloc later says it will delay this retaliatory action until mid-April.

March 13

Trump threatens a 200% tariff on European wine, Champagne and spirits if the European Union goes forward with a planned 50% tariff on American whiskey.

The European import tax, which was unveiled in response to steel and aluminum tariffs by the U.S. administration, is expected to go into effect April 1, just ahead of separate reciprocal tariffs that Trump plans to place on the EU.

March 24

Trump says he will place a 25% tariff on all imports from any country that buys oil or gas from Venezuela, in addition to imposing new tariffs on the South American country itself, starting April 2.

The tariffs would most likely add to the taxes facing China, which in 2023 bought 68% of the oil exported by Venezuela, per the U.S. Energy Information Administration. But a number of countries also receive oil from Venezuela — including the United States itself.

March 26

Trump says he is placing 25% tariffs on auto imports, a move that the White House claims would foster domestic manufacturing. But it could also put a financial squeeze on automakers that depend on global supply chains.



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## Soto, Snell and Holmes debut for new teams, Skenes makes his first opening-day start

By RONALD BLUM AP Baseball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Juan Soto, Blake Snell and Clay Holmes debut for new teams, Paul Skenes makes his first opening-day start at age 22 and Sandy Alcántara returns from Tommy John surgery.

A week after the defending champion Los Angeles Dodgers swept an opening two-game series over the Chicago Cubs in Tokyo, 26 other teams get underway Thursday on opening day in the U.S. and Canada.

One day later the Rays and Rockies become the final clubs to take the field, given extra time while Tampa Bay moved into the New York Yankees' Steinbrenner Field, its temporary home this season after Hurricane Milton destroyed Tropicana Field's roof.

With Oakland stripped from its name, the cityless Athletics start the first of at least three years at a makeshift minor league home in Sacramento when they host the Cubs on Monday. But first, the A's start at Seattle with Luis Severino on the mound after he agreed to a team-record \$67 million, three-year contract.

Across the majors, Miami's Clayton McCullough makes his major league managing debut and Cincinnati's Terry Francona and Will Venable of the Chicago White Sox start tenures with new teams.

Starting pitchers feature a Zack, Zach and Zac.

Banged up Yankees open at home after AL pennant

Action begins in the Bronx when Carlos Rodón makes his first opening day start for the defending AL champion New York Yankees, who are without three-fifths of their starting rotation following injuries to Gerrit Cole, Luis Gil and Clarke Schmidt. In addition, Giancarlo Stanton and DJ LeMahieu are hurt.

Freddy Peralta pitches for Milwaukee, which could see former closer Devin Williams for the first time since he buckled in the ninth inning of NL Wild Card Series Game 3, when he allowed a go-ahead, three-run homer to the Mets' Pete Alonso.

\$765 million reasons to pay attention

Soto signed a record \$765 million, 15-year contract to leave the Yankees and join the Mets, who totaled \$1.36 billion in payroll and luxury tax over four years under owner Steve Cohen but remain without a title since 1986.

New York is 41-22 in openers, at .651 the best winning percentage of any franchise. After losing their first eight, the Mets have won 41 of their last 55.

Holmes left the Yankees for a \$38 million, three-year deal with the Mets and will make his first start since 2018 with Pittsburgh. Framber Valdez will be on the mound for the Astros.

Raising the flag

After winning their second title in a five-year span and eighth overall, the Dodgers lift the World Series flag above Chavez Ravine before their home opener against Detroit.

Snell, a 2018 and '23 Cy Young Award winner, joined Los Angeles for a \$182 million, five-year contract that was part of a spending spree in which the Dodgers committed \$458.5 million to nine players. AL Cy Young winner Tarik Skubal starts for the Tigers, who won 15 of their final 20 games last season, then swept Houston in a Wild Card Series and lost to Cleveland in a five-game Division Series.

First of many?

Skenes, the NL Rookie of the Year, will be at 22 years, 302 days when he takes the mound at Miami, the youngest opening day starting pitcher since the Marlins' José Fernández at 21-243 in 2014.

Alcántara makes his first appearance for Miami since Sept. 3, 2023. The 2022 NL Cy Young winner had Tommy John surgery that Oct. 6. Clayton McCullough makes his debut as Marlins manager after replacing Skip Schumaker.

Sale starts opener for Braves

NL Cy Young winner Chris Sale starts his sixth opener, but first for Atlanta after three for the White Sox and two for Boston. With Yu Darvish sidelined by elbow inflammation, Michael King start for the Padres — he pitched seven scoreless innings against the Braves with 12 strikeouts in last year's Wild Card Series opener.

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New faces for the Red Sox

Garrett Crochet starts for Boston at Texas following his offseason acquisition from the White Sox, who started the left-hander in the opener of what turned into a record 121-loss season last year. Alex Bregman takes over at third base after agreeing to a \$120 million, three-year contract, while Rafael Devers moves to designated hitter and 22-year-old Kristian Campbell appeared set to start at second base in his major league debut.

Nathan Eovaldi becomes the first pitcher to make consecutive opening day starts for Texas since Kevin Millwood from 2006-09.

Gallen starts for Diamondbacks against Cubs

Zac Gallen was picked over Corbin Burnes to start for Arizona against the Cubs, making his third straight opening day start. Justin Steele makes his second start of the season for Chicago after allowing five runs over four innings in the second game loss to the Dodgers last week.

On the road, before heading to temporary home

Before starting their Sacramento tenancy on Monday against the Cubs, the vagabond Athletics open at Seattle with Severino, the third straight pitcher to make his A's debut by starting opening day after Kyle Muller and Alex Wood.

Coming off his first All-Star selection, Logan Gilbert starts his first Seattle opener. Dan Wilson begins his first full season as Mariners manager after replacing Scott Servais last August.

Blue Jays seek sixth straight opening day win

José Berríos starts his fifth opener and joins Jimmy Key, Dave Stieb and Roy Halladay as the only pitchers to start three for Toronto, who have the longest opening day winning streak in the big leagues. Outfielder Anthony Santander debuts for the Blue Jays.

Zach Eflin, acquired from the Rays last summer, will be on the mound for the Orioles and will become the fourth pitcher since 1900 to start consecutive openers against the same opponent for different teams, according to the Elias Sports Bureau. The others were Sad Sam Jones, Wes Ferrell and Madison Bumgarner.

Kikuchi becomes record third Japanese pitcher to start 2025 opener

Making his Los Angeles Angels debut, Kikuchi follows opening starts in Japan last week by the Dodgers' Yoshinobu Yamamoto and the Cubs' Shota Imanaga.

Sean Burke, a 25-year-old right-hander who made his first three big league starts last September, becomes the sixth pitcher in 70 years to start an opener with three or fewer big league starts, according to Elias, after Crochet, Tanner Scheppers, David Nied, Al Holland and Fernando Valenzuela.

Wheeler starts second straight Phillies opener

Zack Wheeler at 34 becomes the oldest Philadelphia pitcher to make consecutive opening day starts since Halladay pitched his third straight in 2012. MacKenzie Gore at 26 will be the Nationals' youngest opening day starter since Stephen Strasburg in 2014.

Ragans starts second straight opener for Royals

Cole Ragans at 27 will be the youngest Kansas City pitcher to start two openers in a row since 27-year-old Jeff Suppan pitched his third straight in 2002. In an AL Central matchup, Tanner Bibee starts for Cleveland after agreeing to a \$48 million, five-year contract.

Francona back in dugout with Reds

Francona starts his 24th season as a big league manager at age 65 after taking a season off and regaining his health following 11 seasons with Cleveland. Hunter Greene starts for the Reds, who have opened exclusively with right-handers since 1999.

Shortstop Willy Adames debuts for the Giants after signing a \$182 million, seven-year contract for a team run by former star catcher Buster Posey.

López starts third straight opener for Twins

Pablo López becomes the first Minnesota pitcher to start three openers in a row since Brad Radke's seven from 1999-2005. Sonny Gray starts his fourth opener and first for St. Louis after outings for Oakland and Cincinnati. The Cardinals open their last season under president of baseball operations John Mozeliak,

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who has been in charge since October 2007 and will be replaced next fall by Chaim Bloom.

Eyes on batters

In the third season of restrictions on defensive shifts and larger bases, focus will be on offense.

Last year's final batting average of .2433 was higher in the post-1900 era than only .237 in 1968, .239 in 1908, .242 in 1967 and .2427 in 2022.

Robot umpires on the horizon

This could be the last opening day without robot umpires looking over the men calling balls and strikes

A spring training test of the Automated Ball-Strike System received a mostly positive initial reception and could lead to regular-season use in 2026.

## Supreme Court upholds Biden rule requiring serial numbers and background checks for ghost guns

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Wednesday upheld a Biden administration regulation on the nearly impossible-to-trace weapons called ghost guns, clearing the way for continued serial numbers, background checks and age verification requirements for buying the kits online.

The 7-2 opinion found that existing gun laws allow regulation of the kits increasingly linked to crime. It comes after President Donald Trump ordered a review of federal gun policy that could undermine or reverse regulations championed by his predecessor.

Sales of the homemade firearms grew exponentially as kits allowing for easy at-home building came into the market, Justice Neil Gorsuch wrote in the majority opinion. "Some home hobbyists enjoy assembling them. But criminals also find them attractive," he said.

The number of ghost guns found at crime scenes around the country has also soared, according to federal data. Fewer than 1,700 were recovered by law enforcement in 2017, but that number grew to 27,000 in 2023, according to Justice Department data.

Since the federal rule was finalized, though, ghost gun numbers have flattened out or declined in several major cities, including New York, Los Angeles, Philadelphia and Baltimore, according to court documents. Manufacturing of miscellaneous gun parts also dropped 36% overall, the Justice Department has said.

Ghost guns are any privately made firearms without the serial numbers that allow police to trace weapons used in crime. The 2022 regulation was focused on kits sold online with everything needed to build a functioning firearm — sometimes in less than 30 minutes, according to court documents.

Ghost guns have been used in high-profile crimes, including a mass shooting carried out with an AR-15-style ghost gun in Philadelphia that left five people dead. Police believe a ghost gun used in the slaying of UnitedHealthcare's CEO in Manhattan was made on a 3D printer rather than assembled from a kit of the kind at the center of the Supreme Court case.

Finalized at the direction of then-President Joe Biden, the "frame and receiver" rule requires companies to treat the kits like other firearms by adding serial numbers, running background checks and verifying that buyers are 21 or older.

Gun groups challenged the rule in court in the case known as *Garland v. VanDerStok*. Most crimes are committed with traditional firearms, not ghost guns, they argued. It's legal for people to build their own firearms at home, the challengers said, arguing that the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives overstepped its authority by trying to regulate the kits.

The Supreme Court majority disagreed, pointing out that the law gives the ATF the power to regulate items that can be quickly made into working firearms.

"The 'Buy Build Shoot' kit can be 'readily converted' into a firearm too, for it requires no more time, effort, expertise, or specialized tools to complete," Gorsuch wrote, referring to a specific product.

Some kits may take more time to build into guns and therefore fall outside the ATF's power, he wrote, but many popular kits are subject to regulation.

In response to the ruling, a Justice Department spokesperson said the administration would "continue



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to support and defend the Second Amendment rights of all Americans."

Gun safety groups celebrated the ruling, with Everytown Law executive director Eric Tirschwell saying the rule also had broad support from law enforcement. "Fundamentally, today's decision confirms the ghost gun industry is dead as a viable business model," he said.

A Michigan woman whose son lost an eye when he was accidentally shot by a friend who bought a ghost gun before he was old enough to legally buy a typical weapon also applauded. "We are deeply relieved by today's ruling, which will help ensure that a tragedy like ours never happens again," she said.

New Jersey Attorney General Matt Platkin said the ATF policy is a major factor in two years of record-low numbers of shootings in his state. "These are common-sense regulations on ghost guns that all too often end up in the hands of felons," he said.

The court previously expanded Second Amendment rights with a finding that modern gun regulations must fit within historical traditions. The justices also struck down a firearm regulation from President Donald Trump's first administration, a ban on gun accessories known as bump stocks that enable rapid fire.

In a dissent, Justice Clarence Thomas wrote that the ghost gun rule should meet the same fate. The kits, he wrote, are only firearm parts and shouldn't be subject to a regulation that could open the door to rules on other popular weapons. "Congress could have authorized ATF to regulate any part of a firearm or any object readily convertible into one," he wrote. "But, it did not."

Justice Samuel Alito also filed his own dissent.

## 'Avengers: Doomsday' cast includes Hemsworth's Thor, Mackie's Cap, Fantastic Four and original X-Men

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Chris Hemsworth's Thor, Anthony Mackie's Captain America, Sebastian Stan's Bucky Barnes, Paul Rudd's Ant-Man and Tom Hiddleston's Loki are all back in the Avengers ensemble, where they'll be joined by several of cinema's original X-Men.

The five veterans of the Marvel Cinematic Universe are in the cast of 2026's "Avengers: Doomsday," Marvel announced in a series of social media videos that the company rolled out slowly on Wednesday.

Patrick Stewart, 84, who played Professor X in the Fox's early 2000s "X-Men" films, and 85-year-old Ian McKellen, who played his arch-nemesis Magneto, are also in the "Doomsday" cast as Disney and Marvel seek to take advantage of the acquisition of Fox's movie library. Kelsey Grammer, who played Hank "Beast" McCoy, was also announced, as was Rebecca "Mystique" Romijn, James "Cyclops" Marsden and Alan "Nightcrawler" Cumming.

Their characters were taken on by younger actors in the 2010s "X-Men" series reboot, and their inclusion is sure to cause serious fan speculation about the direction and timelines of "Avengers: Doomsday."

The more senior superheroes will be joined by more recent additions, including some who have yet to make their MCU debuts.

Vanessa Kirby, set to play the Invisible Woman Sue Storm in this July's "Fantastic Four: First Steps," is also set for "Avengers: Doomsday." Pedro Pascal as Reed Richards will join the Avengers too. And they'll be joined in both movies by Ebon Moss-Bachrach, who is playing Ben Grimm, aka the Thing, and Joseph Quinn, who plays Johnny Storm, aka the Human Torch.

Simu Liu, who played the title character in 2021's "Shang Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings," is also in the newly announced cast, as is Tenoch Huerta Mejía, who played the aquatic antagonist Namor in "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever." Letitia Wright, who plays Shuri in the "Black Panther" films, will also be back among the Avengers, as will her "Black Panther" castmate Winston Duke.

Florence Pugh, who will reprise her MCU role as Yelena Belova in the forthcoming "Thunderbolts" will reprise her again in "Doomsday." David Harbour, Wyatt Russell, Hannah John-Kamen and Lewis Pullman will also be in both films.

Danny Ramirez, who has assumed the Marvel mantle of Falcon, is also in the cast.

Some of the biggest and most anticipated names were not among the 27 names announced, though

Marvel and Disney could be sitting on them for now.

There was no mention of Hugh Jackman's Wolverine or Ryan Reynolds' Deadpool, though the announcement did include Channing Tatum, who played the X-Men's Gambit in last year's "Deadpool & Wolverine."

Nor did the name Tom Holland appear. His Spider-Man became an Avenger in previous films on loan from owner Sony, whose complicated relationship with Marvel has made the character a sticking point.

Robert Downey Jr. revealed last summer that he'll be returning to the MCU to play the villain Doctor Doom in the next set of "Avengers" films.

"Avengers: Domsday," set for release in May 2026, will be the fifth "Avengers" movie, and the first since 2019's "Avengers Endgame" became one of the highest grossing film of all time.

Marvel has been struggling to recover its cultural buzz and box office mojo ever since, with hopes that the forthcoming ensemble films will bring back the magic that dominated cinema for more than a decade.

## **Frito-Lay recalls Tostitos chips in 13 states because they may contain undeclared milk**

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

Frito-Lay is recalling a limited number of Tostitos tortilla chips because they may contain undeclared milk.

The company said Wednesday that the recall includes less than 1,300 13-ounce bags of Tostitos Cantina Traditional Yellow Corn Tortilla Chips. The bags could contain nacho cheese-flavored tortilla chips, which are made with milk.

Frito-Lay said there have been no reported allergic reactions related to the recall. People with an allergy or severe sensitivity to milk could have a serious reaction if they eat the chips and should throw them away immediately, Frito-Lay said.

Plano, Texas-based Frito-Lay, a division of PepsiCo, said the affected bags were distributed to a mix of retailers in 13 states: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia.

Consumers would have been able to purchase the chips as early as March 7. All of the affected bags have a "guaranteed fresh" date of May 20.

## **The Atlantic releases the Signal chat showing Hegseth's detailed attack plans against the Houthis**

By TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Atlantic on Wednesday released the entire Signal chat among senior national security officials, showing that Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth provided the exact timings of warplane launches and when bombs would drop — before the men and women flying those attacks against Yemen's Houthis this month on behalf of the United States were airborne.

The disclosure follows two intense days during which leaders of President Donald Trump's intelligence and defense agencies have struggled to explain how details — that current and former U.S. officials have said would have been classified — wound up on an unclassified Signal chat that included Atlantic Editor-in-Chief Jeffrey Goldberg,

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt has said no classified information was posted to the Signal chat.

Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said he and Rhode Island Sen. Jack Reed, the committee's top Democrat, plan to send a letter to the Trump administration requesting an inspector general investigation into the use of Signal. They seek a classified briefing with a top administration official "who can speak to the facts" of the episode.

Top military official was not included in the chat

The chat was also notable for who it excluded: the only military attendee of the principals committee,

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the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Adm. Christopher Grady is currently serving in that position in an acting capacity because Trump fired former chairman Gen. CQ Brown Jr. in February.

National security adviser Mike Waltz was authorized to decide whether to include the Joint Chiefs chairman in the principals committee discussion, "based on the policy relevance of attendees to the issues being considered, the need for secrecy on sensitive matters, staffing needs, and other considerations," the White House said in a Jan. 20 memo.

The Pentagon said it would not comment on the issue, and it was not immediately clear why Grady, currently serving as the president's top military adviser, would not be included in a discussion on military strikes.

Hegseth has refused to say whether he posted classified information onto Signal. He is traveling in the Indo-Pacific and to date has only scoffed at questions, saying he did not reveal "war plans." Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard and CIA Director John Ratcliffe told members of the Senate Intelligence Committee on Tuesday that it was up to Hegseth to determine whether the information he was posting was classified or not.

Very specific texts were revealed

What was revealed was jaw-dropping in its specificity and includes the type of information that is kept to a very close hold to protect the operational security of a military strike. But Hegseth's spokesman, Sean Parnell, said in a statement Wednesday that "there were no classified materials or war plans shared. The Secretary was merely updating the group on a plan that was underway."

The Pentagon and White House have tried to deflect criticism by attacking Goldberg and The Atlantic. The magazine and Goldberg, however, repeatedly reached out to the White House before and after publication to gain additional context on the Signal chat and ensure that publishing the full texts would not cause harm. In a response, Goldberg reported Wednesday, Leavitt described some of the information as sensitive and said the White House would prefer it not be published.

In the group chat, Hegseth posted multiple details about the impending strike, using military language and laying out when a "strike window" starts, where a "target terrorist" was located, the time elements around the attack and when various weapons and aircraft would be used in the strike. He mentioned that the U.S. was "currently clean" on operational security."

"Godspeed to our Warriors," he wrote.

"1215et: F-18s LAUNCH (1st strike package)"

"1345: 'Trigger Based' F-18 1st Strike Window Starts (Target Terrorist is @ his Known Location so SHOULD BE ON TIME – also, Strike Drones Launch (MQ-9s)"

"1410: More F-18s LAUNCH (2nd strike package)"

"1415: Strike Drones on Target (THIS IS WHEN THE FIRST BOMBS WILL DEFINITELY DROP, pending earlier 'Trigger Based' targets)"

"1536 F-18 2nd Strike Starts – also, first sea-based Tomahawks launched."

"MORE TO FOLLOW (per timeline)"

"We are currently clean on OPSEC" — that is, operational security.

A strike package includes the personnel and weapons used in an attack, including Navy F-18 fighter aircraft. MQ-9s are armed drones. Tomahawks are ship-launched cruise missiles.

Goldberg has said he asked the White House if it opposed publication and that the White House responded that it would prefer he did not publish.

Signal is encrypted but can be vulnerable

Signal is a publicly available app that provides encrypted communications, but it can be hacked. It is not approved for carrying classified information. On March 14, one day before the strikes, the Defense Department cautioned personnel about the vulnerability of Signal, specifically that Russia was attempting to hack the app, according to a U.S. official who was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

One known vulnerability is that a malicious actor, with access to a person's phone, can link his or her device to the user's Signal and essentially monitor messages remotely in real time.

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 'state secrets privilege' sounds mysterious. Here's what it is and how it works**

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration is invoking a powerful tool in seeking to cut off a judge's inquiry into whether it defied his order to turn around planes carrying Venezuelan migrants who were being deported from the United States.

The Justice Department said in court papers Monday that it was invoking the "state secrets privilege" in refusing to provide details demanded by U.S. District Judge James Boasberg about flights that carried the migrants to El Salvador earlier this month.

The claim often functions as a prevailing legal authority that has been used to limit or file lawsuits against the government when it says military or national security interests are at risk.

In 2022, the Supreme Court dismissed a lawsuit filed by a detainee at Guantanamo Bay who was captured after the Sept. 11 attacks and tortured by the CIA abroad. The court agreed with the government's invocation of "state secrets" and ruled that information about the treatment of the detainee, Abu Zubaydah, must remain secret even though much of it has been widely reported.

Where does the state secrets privilege come from?

The legal doctrine has its roots in a contract between President Abraham Lincoln and a spy for the Union during the Civil War.

After the spy's estate sued for money owed for his wartime service, the Supreme Court ruled in 1876 that some subject matters, including involving espionage, are so sensitive that courts have no business even hearing lawsuits.

During the Cold War, the court also declared that some pieces of evidence sought in lawsuits must remain secret.

After their husbands died in the crash of a B-29 bomber, three widows sued for the accident report. In 1953, the justices allowed the executive branch to withhold, even from the court, details about the crash because officials said it was on a secret mission to test new equipment.

What does the deportation case have to do with state secrets?

The current case began when President Donald Trump invoked a rarely used 18th century law, the Alien Enemies Act, to enable the quick deportation of Venezuelan migrants who were declared to be members of the Tren de Aragua gang.

Boasberg, the chief judge of the federal district court in Washington, held an emergency hearing after lawyers for some migrants who feared deportation sued. The judge forbade any additional deportations and ordered "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."

Even as the administration appeals the entirety of Boasberg's order, the dispute is over its compliance with the judge's command.

Boasberg had asked for details about the flights, including when the planes took off and landed, and how many people were aboard.

The administration said Monday it would not answer his questions. Disclosure of the information, even just to Boasberg in a secure setting, "would cause significant harm to the foreign relations and national security interests of the United States," Attorney General Pam Bondi wrote in a court filing.

Judges often deal with classified information



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Boasberg is more accustomed to dealing with sensitive national security information than most federal judges. He previously served as the presiding judge of the secretive court that reviews government surveillance programs.

He told government lawyers at one hearing that they could file their answer “under seal,” meaning not for public disclosure. He also said he would look at any sensitive information in the courthouse’s security facility known as a SCIF.

But the administration told the judge that his review of the material in any setting is unnecessary and inappropriate.

But haven’t administration officials already spoken publicly about the flights?

It’s true that administration officials recirculated a posting from Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele after Boasberg’s initial order. “Oopsie...Too late,” Bukele wrote on X. Secretary of State Marco Rubio tweeted that the U.S. had sent more than 250 people to El Salvador.

But courts have held that public comments do not always amount to official confirmation of the same information. That is what the Supreme Court decided in the Zubaydah case, over a dissent by Justice Neil Gorsuch.

“Nothing in the case suggests that requiring the government to acknowledge what the world already knows to be true” would endanger national security, Gorsuch wrote, joined by Justice Sonia Sotomayor.

Indeed, despite Rubio’s post, the Justice Department wrote, “Official confirmation of any of those allegations would pose a distinct threat to foreign relations and national security.”

Critics of the use of the state secrets claim say it often is an effort to prevent embarrassing revelations.

“That’s probably what’s happening here,” Shayana Kadidal, a human rights lawyer who has challenged state secrets assertions, wrote in an email. “They let the flights leave despite knowing full well that the judge had ordered them turned around, and are doing this to avoid a contempt finding.”

Is that the end of the matter?

The administration thinks so. It cited the Supreme Court’s decision last year that gave presidents broad immunity from prosecution for official actions and helped Trump avoid a criminal trial on charges of interference with the 2020 election.

The president’s “execution of his Article II duties — which ‘are of unrivaled gravity and breadth’ and include ‘managing matters related to terrorism . . . and immigration’ — requires the ‘utmost discretion and sensitivity,’” the Justice Department wrote.

The Supreme Court has told judges to assess whether the government’s claim is appropriate.

In practice, when Cabinet-level officials assert that state secrets are at risk, as they have in the current case, judges often comply.

“Basically as long as they can get a cabinet official to sign off (personally) to a declaration, game over,” Kadidal wrote.

## Dollar Tree offloads Family Dollar chain for \$1 billion, ending a decade-long effort to find a fit

By MICHELLE CHAPMAN AP Business News

Dollar Tree’s decade-long effort to fold the Family Dollar chain into its business is ending after agreeing to sell the bargain store chain to a pair of private equity firms for \$1 billion.

Dollar Tree Inc. bought Family Dollar with its over 7,000 stores ten years ago for more than \$8 billion.

Neil Saunders, managing director of GlobalData, said that Dollar Tree struggled with supply chain issues, poor store locations and other operational difficulties ever since making the acquisition.

“Basically, Dollar Tree bit off far more than it could chew,” he said.

Last year Dollar Tree announced that it planned to close hundreds of Family Dollar stores.

Family Dollar carries a range of household staples, from food to laundry detergent. The stores are largely located in underserved, urban areas. Store closings that are underway, and those that may take place

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under new ownership, are likely to have an outsized impact on customers living in those areas.

Access to affordable, essential goods may become more challenging for lower income families as more Family Dollar stores close, said Marshal Cohen, chief industry advisor at Circana, a market research firm

"The lower income consumer will be losing a critical place to be able to purchase value products," Cohen said. "They're losing the breadth of the assortment and the depth of the discount and the convenience."

The mom and pop stores found in such densely populated urban areas have less selection and prices are typically higher, Cohen said.

Dollar Tree had been scouting options for Family Dollar for a while and said Wednesday that the sale to Brigade Capital Management and Macellum Capital Management will allow it to focus on its core business.

"This is a major milestone in our multiyear transformation journey to help us fully achieve our potential," said Mike Creedon, who was made permanent chief executive officer of Dollar Tree late last year.

During a conference call, Creedon noted how Dollar Tree and Family Dollar are "two different businesses with limited synergies." The sale will now allow each one to concentrate on its specific needs, he added.

Dollar Tree, whose customer base is about 50% middle-income shoppers, are found in many suburban locations. Its shelves are more likely to feature seasonal goods, party supplies, crafts and snacks.

The sale will likely free Dollar Tree to focus on its core customers, Truist Securities analyst Scot Ciccarelli believes.

"Family Dollar turnaround efforts had been consuming massive amounts of both management focus and financial resources and now the company can focus all of its efforts toward growing and optimizing Dollar Tree," he wrote in a client note.

Bargain chains like Dollar Tree, which have raised some of their prices in recent years, are finding that they have little room to maneuver. Americans have tightened their spending as consumer confidence in the economy slides.

Family Dollar, which moved its headquarters from North Carolina to Chesapeake, Virginia, after the sale to Dollar Tree, will maintain its headquarters in Virginia.

Saunders said Brigade and Macellum have to fix several issues at Family Dollar, including pricing that isn't as sharp as many of its rivals and a customer base that isn't as loyal.

The deal is expected to close later in the second quarter.

Arun Sundaram, an analyst with CFRA Research, said in a client note that the Family Dollar sale is the right move for Dollar Tree, which has historically generated stronger sales, profitability and cash flow.

But Sundaram cautioned that Dollar Tree has increased exposure to tariff risks due to its higher concentration in general merchandise categories than Family Dollar.

While about half of the chain's customer base is middle income shoppers, Creedon said that higher-income customers in store aisles are becoming more frequent.

"We are seeing stronger demand from higher income customers who increasingly see Dollar Tree as a cost effective source for an expanding range of products," he said.

Creedon said Dollar Tree has taken steps like negotiating cost concessions and diversifying where it imports goods from to mitigate more than 90% of the impact of the Trump administration's 10% tariff on Chinese imports announced last month. That tariff would have cost the company \$15-\$20 million monthly, Creedon said.

Another 10% tariff on goods from China that was announced this month, along with 25% tariffs on Canada and Mexico, would potentially have about another \$20 million monthly impact. Creedon said it's working to mitigate the impact of the latest round of tariffs, which aren't reflected in Dollar Tree's 2025 outlook.

Shares of Dollar Tree rose 3% Wednesday.

## Accuser tells a trial that actor Gérard Depardieu groped her bottom and breasts on film set

By SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — A woman accusing French actor Gérard Depardieu of sexual assault told a landmark trial in Paris on Wednesday that he groped her buttocks and her breasts several times on a film set. Three other accusers told the court they suffered similar gestures in separate incidents.

Depardieu, 76, is accused of groping a 54-year-old set dresser and a 34-year-old assistant during filming in 2021 of "Les Volets Verts" ("The Green Shutters"). He denies any sexual assault.

The third day of the trial focused on the testimony of the younger plaintiff, who detailed three separate incidents. She said Depardieu first groped her bottom when she was alone with him for a brief moment as they were heading towards the film set.

"Out of the blue, he put his hand on my butt," she said, adding she said nothing because she was "under shock" and "petrified."

In a second incident, she said Depardieu suddenly put both his hands on her breasts: "I said 'No.' I was scared." She also described telling Depardieu "no" during a third similar incident.

The plaintiff said she reported the issue to her direct manager, who then alerted others in charge of the film production, prompting anger from the actor.

She said she then "minimized" the issue because she wanted to continue to do her job, adding she aimed at "handling it on her own, be strong."

She later decided to file a formal complaint out of solidarity with the other plaintiff and because, she said, "I want people to hear the truth."

Depardieu repeatedly denied the allegations on Wednesday in court, saying: "I'm not like that."

"I think that maybe, I don't know, she was wary because of my reputation of being vulgar, crude, rude," Depardieu said. "But I'm not only that. I still respect people."

The actor also told the court that he is almost always accompanied by aides on the film set, including his body guard, and suggested that he would rarely find himself alone with a film worker.

The trial continues Thursday, with the verdict expected at a later date.

The actor faces up to five years in prison and a fine of 75,000 euros (\$81,000) if convicted.

A witness says she attended an alleged assault

On Tuesday, Depardieu acknowledged that he had used vulgar and sexualized language with the set dresser who accused him of sexual assault. He said he grabbed her hips during an argument, but denied that his behavior was sexual.

A film worker said Wednesday she attended that scene, describing the set dresser as "stuck in-between the legs" of Depardieu.

"My brain bugged," she said, "I thought: it's not possible that I'm actually seeing this."

She said she realized she attended "an aggression" and reported it to the film management. Days later, she asked the other plaintiff about Depardieu's attitude, leading her to detail the other incidents.

The Associated Press doesn't identify by name people who say they were sexually assaulted unless they consent to. Neither women has done so in this case.

Three other accusers testify

Two women, a journalist and a former costume designer, testified that they were sexually assaulted by Depardieu in 2007 and 2014 -- but one didn't file a police complaint and the other alleged assault was covered by the statute of limitations.

A third woman, comedian Sarah Brooks, alleged that Depardieu put his hand inside her shorts and inside her pants as they were posing for a photo ten years ago. She said she pushed back his hand and "he did it again."

She did not file a formal complaint because she was 20 and felt she could not speak up against the world-famous actor. Brooks has in recent years publicly accused Depardieu of sexual assault.

Some expressed support towards Depardieu

This week's trial is the first time one of the more than 20 accusations of misconduct against Depardieu has reached court. Some cases were dropped because of a lack of evidence or the statute of limitations.

Some figures in the French cinema world have expressed their support towards Depardieu.

French actor Fanny Ardant, who described herself as a longtime friend of the actor, agreed his words may be rude and vulgar, yet said she never attended any gesture she found "shocking."

"What I want to say in this courtroom is that I know that the world has changed, that society has changed, that standards are no longer the same," Ardant said.

"There are things we've tolerated that are no longer tolerable."

## **Black women's hair products are in the safety spotlight. Here's what to know**

By KENYA HUNTER AP Health Writer

ATLANTA (AP) — Black women around the world gather in salons, dorm rooms and living rooms for hours at a time to get synthetic braids put in their hair. But they're wondering if the convenience and fashion benefits are being outweighed by potential health hazards.

The question circulating on social media and in the Black community follows on the heels of a proposed federal rule — that's still in limbo after multiple delays — to ban the carcinogen formaldehyde in hair-straightening chemicals.

There's a thin body of research into the potential issues of using synthetic hair for braids. The latest addition is an independent study from Consumer Reports into chemicals found in braiding products. Some say the findings are concerning, but others are hesitant to make recommendations in part because the methodology did not go through a typical study review process.

All of the experts who spoke with The Associated Press did agree more research is needed into synthetic braids and other products Black women often use in or on their hair. Here's a look at what's known, what's not known and what you might want to do in the meantime.

**What's known about synthetic braids?**

Experts say it's difficult to draw conclusions from prior studies. The Consumer Reports study, which was published in late February, said there were dangerous chemicals like lead, benzene and other carcinogens in 10 of the most popular synthetic braiding products.

While experts said the presence of the chemicals is concerning and confusing, they noted the study didn't go through the rigorous scrutiny that it takes to get published in a peer-reviewed science or medical journal.

Javon Ford, a cosmetic chemist who talks about his work on social media, questioned the report's findings, saying "the data set is so limited." Consumer Reports only sampled two of each product, despite thousands on the market.

James Rogers, the head of product safety at Consumer Reports who led the study, said his hope was to get the information out there because of the lack of research. He noted that it was a pilot project, but that "we thought the results were important enough to start the conversation."

Research published in 2020 in the journal Environmental Health Insights showed synthetic hair let off volatile organic compounds — chemicals that can easily evaporate into the air — when heated. Synthetic hair is sealed when braided, either by burning it or dipping it in hot water. That study detected many of the same chemicals named in the Consumer Reports study, like the known carcinogen benzene.

**What isn't known about synthetic braids?**

Experts can't answer whether the products are truly safe — but that's because there's so little research out there.

There's also little government oversight on the products, which leaves manufacturers to ensure that they're safe. Consumer Reports is petitioning the Food and Drug Administration to begin regulating synthetic braiding hair.

Jasmine McDonald, a professor of epidemiology at Columbia University who has studied the health impacts of chemical hair straighteners, said the Consumer Reports study shouldn't invoke fear but aware-



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ness about the potential harms of braiding hair, the lack of federal regulations and the minimal research.

"I think that in our culture, we sometimes normalize things to the point where we don't see the harm ... the more that we can raise awareness that some of these cultural routines could potentially provide harm is us having the potential to stop that harm," McDonald said.

What should I use on my hair?

If you're concerned about using synthetic braiding hair or straightening chemicals, there are other hair-styles to try.

You can use Brazilian wool hair instead of synthetic hair, said Gloria Okpurukre, who owns Anointed Fingers braiding salon in Fayetteville, Georgia. You can also braid your real hair, but don't expect the same results.

"The purpose of adding the hair is for volume and length," Okpurukre said. "A lot of people, their hair starts thinning out and they need to add something to make it look nice."

Some synthetic brands use banana fiber to create the hair, which companies say are less irritating to the scalp. But Ford said you won't necessarily avoid chemicals just because you switch brands.

Raven Baxter, a molecular biologist who has talked about braiding hair on social media, opted to stop using synthetic braiding products because of the lack of information — both on the packaging or in research studies. Now, she uses single-ingredient products in her hair care routine, like aloe vera gel and vegetable glycerin.

"A lot of the work that scientists do, we're able to do it because a funder deemed it as important to support that research," she said, adding, "until we have funders that value the things that we're concerned about, we're not necessarily going to get the research published that concerns us."

McDonald suggested staying away from products that contain PFAS, parabens and other "forever chemicals."

She also said consumers can determine what's in the products and their relative safety by looking at online databases, like the Breast Cancer Prevention Partners' Campaign for Safe Cosmetics.

## Goalie interference is back in the spotlight as NHL playoff races and emotions about it heat up

By PAT GRAHAM and STEPHEN WHYNO AP Sports Writers

Earlier during what is likely to be his third Vezina Trophy-winning season, Connor Hellebuyck pretty much gave up trying to figure out exactly what constitutes goaltender interference.

Winnipeg's star goaltender has served on competition committees. He has given spiels and offered clips as exhibits to explain what should or should not be called. Still, he has remained baffled by what is and what isn't interference — and he is not alone.

"I've really tried my best to help over the last four or five years," Hellebuyck said after a goaltender interference challenge went against him and the Jets in a fall win. "I've tried to help. I've tried to make it more black and white."

Just because your favorite NHL goaltender gets bumped, nudged, pushed, crashed into, goes down with injury or even loses their helmet when a goal is scored doesn't mean it necessarily will be goaltender interference. Or sometimes it will be and not count after video review, like the New York Islanders having a potential game-winning goal against Columbus disallowed Monday night, much to coach and Hall of Fame goalie Patrick Roy's dismay.

Goalie interference was a prime topic at the general managers' spring meeting last week, with agreement on situation room decisions in 52 of the 54 video clips shown and plenty of what senior executive VP of hockey operations Colin Campbell called "colorful discussions." Commissioner Gary Bettman said finding a consensus constituted a vote of confidence on behalf of GMs.

"All the debates about consistency and not understanding, the managers understand fully well," Bettman said. "There was only one that was unanimous, which tells you that it is a judgment call and there's going to be lots of opinions."

What is goalie interference?

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"I know what I think it is," Colorado goaltender Mackenzie Blackwood said of interference. "But I don't know that's what it actually is."

Director of officiating Stephen Walkom and other executives have told teams to be sure they have video evidence to overturn a call on the ice before making a coach's challenge. Losing a challenge is a minor penalty.

"These aren't black and white," VP of hockey operations Kris King said. "There's a lot of judgment, not only from the guy calling it in real time but also from us, as well, when we're looking at these plays."

It is spelled out under section 69.1 in the NHL rulebook: "Goals should be disallowed only if: (1) an attacking player, either by his positioning or by contact, impairs the goalkeeper's ability to move freely within his crease or defend his goal; or (2) an attacking player initiates intentional or deliberate contact with a goalkeeper, inside or outside of his goal crease."

Then there is this clause: "Incidental contact with a goalkeeper will be permitted, and resulting goals allowed, when such contact is initiated outside of the goal crease, provided the attacking player has made a reasonable effort to avoid such contact."

That has opened the door to all sorts of interpretation. NHL senior director of hockey ops Kay Whitmore, a retired goalie like Roy, called it "a convoluted rule."

Through the first 1,048 games this season, there were 105 coach's challenges for goalie interference, with the call being upheld 45 times and overturned 60. Last season, there were 88, with 40 upheld and 48 overturned, up from 85 in 2022-23 with 43 upheld and 42 overturned.

"Any time you have a coach's challenge, someone's mad," Campbell said. "We'll get a manager saying or a coach, 'Well, I saw that play three weeks ago in a Winnipeg-Edmonton game, it's the same thing tonight.' We say: 'No, they're all snowflakes. They're similar but not exactly the same.'"

Sorting through the confusion

There's enough gray area in the interpretation of the rule that Florida coach Paul Maurice has a checklist he goes through prior to a challenge. First, he quickly consults with goaltender coach Rob Tallas, who looks at the play from a goalie's point of view. Then, the video team gets involved — is there indisputable evidence? All those factors combine with this — a gut feeling.

"Do I think that's goal interference?" Maurice said.

All of this is supposed to take place within about 30 seconds before the game moves on. And the process goes out the window if Panthers goalie Sergei Bobrovsky is "sour" — Maurice's word — about a play.

"I'm probably calling it regardless of whether I think he's right or wrong," Maurice said.

Unless, of course, it's the postseason.

"When you get into the playoffs, that's not true. I'll look at it and think, 'Am I getting this call, or am I not?'" Maurice explained. "Then I'll make that decision."

Avalanche coach Jared Bednar was incensed earlier this season over a collision in a game against Buffalo. Colorado goaltender Scott Wedgewood was hurt and down on the ice after Sabres forward Zach Benson crashed into Avalanche center Parker Kelly and fell into Wedgewood's right leg.

Benson got up, gained possession of the puck and scored with Wedgewood still down and inside the goal. Bednar didn't like the lag time with his goalie down and challenged for goaltender interference. It was purely out of spite.

"It gives them another chance to do the right thing," Bednar said. "The goal shouldn't have counted, and so, yeah, I was mad. So we just did it."

Bednar talked to the league the next day. They understood the other's point of view, even if they did still disagree.

"There's lots of things that we look for," Bednar said. "Does he go in on his own, does he get pushed in? Does the goalie have time to get reset? You've always got to look at the blue paint, too. There's a bunch of things."

The league's criteria involves whether contact was intentional or incidental, occurred in or out of the crease, if the defending player caused it and whether the goaltender had a chance to reset.

"It's pretty complex," Walkom said, confident the standard has been communicated to teams. "We're not

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far off. Maybe originally when we started, there was some differences of opinion, but there really isn't now."

Technically, nachos on the ice aren't included in the rules provisions for goaltender interference. A tray of nachos was tossed onto the ice from the stands in the middle of the play in Edmonton. Corey Perry weaved past the container and scored as Capitals goalie Logan Thompson pointed out the food to officials.

"That's a first," Washington coach Spencer Carbery told reporters. "I don't think I've ever seen nachos on the ice in a National Hockey League game."

## A year after the Baltimore bridge collapse, a long road to recovery is ahead

By LEA SKENE and BRIAN WITTE Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — A year after the catastrophic collapse of Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge, Maryland leaders are honoring the six construction workers who were killed when the road they were repairing buckled underneath them.

Police were able to stop traffic moments before a cargo ship plowed into the bridge, but they didn't alert the road crew in time.

"Everyone working on the scene shared that same priority — those men we lost in the water," Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott said during an anniversary ceremony Wednesday, recalling the horror that followed the collapse.

"While this day is a day of mourning, it is not a day of grief alone," Scott said. "It is a day to commemorate the strength, resilience and that Baltimore grit that we showed the world in that moment."

After the collapse, the Port of Baltimore was closed for months as debris blocked its main shipping channel. It made an impressive rebound during the second half of 2024, but now the Trump administration's tariffs could threaten its ongoing recovery.

Just last week, federal investigators criticized the Maryland Transportation Authority for failing to address the bridge's vulnerability to ship strikes — despite major changes in maritime shipping since it opened to traffic in 1977. They called upon other bridge owners to learn from the example.

For Maryland drivers, it's been a year without the Key Bridge, which connected various industrial communities north and south of Baltimore, allowing people to bypass downtown. Traffic has since increased significantly on alternate routes.

Named after the man who penned the national anthem, the Key Bridge was a beloved feature of Baltimore's skyline and a symbol of its proud working-class history.

Here's what to know about the bridge's collapse — and its replacement.

When disaster struck

It was just after 2 a.m. on March 26, 2024, when Gov. Wes Moore got a call from his chief of staff, Fagan Harris. His words weren't easy to grasp: "Governor, I'm sorry to tell you, but the Key Bridge is gone," Moore recounted to The Associated Press.

"What do you mean 'gone?'" the governor remembered asking.

Moore soon learned that a ship had lost power and crashed into one of the bridge's supporting columns, killing the six workers who were filling potholes that night.

Once he grasped the scale of the tragedy, Moore said, the morning became a stream of phone calls.

"We remember the cold morning in March that changed our state forever, and we remember the tears we shed and the uncertainty that we all felt," Moore said during remarks Wednesday.

But the initial shock was followed by heroism, he added, as first responders rushed to the scene.

In the weeks and months that followed, people gathered by the water's edge and watched as crews worked diligently to clear the wreckage.

The main shipping channel to the Port of Baltimore reopened in just 11 weeks.

Honoring the victims

On Tuesday, city and state leaders invited the victims' families to visit the collapse site for a wreath-laying ceremony.

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Relatives boarded a boat that chugged steadily toward the mouth of the Patapsco River where the Key Bridge once stood. As they approached its skeletal remains, the mood turned somber, punctuated by the sound of two women weeping.

One by one, family members stepped to the back of the boat and tossed wreaths of yellow and white flowers into the water, watching them drift away.

The six men were all Latino immigrants who came to the U.S. seeking better wages and brighter futures. Most had lived in the country for many years, working hard to support their families.

That's exactly what they were doing before their untimely deaths — "just doing their job," said Baltimore police Det. Aaron Jackson, a member of the department's dive team who helped recover the bodies during a painstaking search effort that lasted several weeks.

"They deserve our utmost respect," Maryland Transportation Secretary Paul Wiedefeld said.

A new bridge in the works

Officials say the new bridge should be finished sometime in 2028.

They unveiled designs last month for what will become Maryland's first cable-stayed bridge. It could cost upwards of \$1.7 billion but Congress has agreed to cover the full price tag for rebuilding.

Crews have been conducting soil testing and other work to finalize the designs. They plan to demolish the remaining pieces of the Key Bridge this spring.

Officials have said the designs will include the latest in pier protection technology, which has become increasingly important as cargo ships continue to get bigger and carry more cargo. The bridge will also be taller to provide more clearance.

Baltimore's port rebounds

Last month, the port said 2024 was one of its most productive years — with 45.9 million tons of cargo passing through its facilities — second only to the year before, which saw a record 52.3 million tons.

The port also processed more farm and construction machinery than any other port in the country again in 2024. It ranked second for cars and light trucks, officials said.

Daraius Irani, chief economist for the Regional Economic Studies Institute at Towson University, described the rebound as "sort of a miracle."

But the implementation of tariffs by the Trump administration could reduce imports there, a quarter of which come from Mexico, Canada and China, he said. Fewer goods passing through the ports would reduce revenue.

Ongoing federal investigations

The National Transportation Safety Board, which is investigating what caused the collapse, said its final report could be released in fall 2025.

Meanwhile, the board issued urgent safety recommendations last week, telling bridge owners to conduct vulnerability assessments. The recommendations apply to 30 owners of 68 bridges across 19 states.

The board is still investigating what caused the cargo ship to lose power as it approached the bridge. Investigators have said a loose cable could have caused electrical issues. The ship experienced two black-outs before it left the port en route to Sri Lanka.

The FBI also opened a criminal investigation into the circumstances leading up to the collapse but officials haven't yet provided any updates.

Maria del Carmen Castellón, whose husband was among those killed, called on federal authorities to deliver justice.

"Concrete and steel can be replaced," said Maria Martinez, Maryland's special secretary of small, minority and women business affairs, reading a message from Castellón. "The laughter of a father, the embrace of a husband, the future of six men — these are lost forever."



## Gabbard calls Signal chats a 'mistake' as Trump officials face grilling over leaked military plan

By DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard said Wednesday it was a “mistake” for national security officials to discuss sensitive military plans on a group text chain that also included a journalist — a leak that has roiled President Donald Trump’s national security leadership.

Speaking before the House Intelligence Committee, Gabbard said the conversation included “candid and sensitive” information about military strikes against Houthi rebels in Yemen. But as she told senators during testimony on Tuesday, she said the texts did not contain any classified information.

“It was a mistake that a reporter was inadvertently added,” Gabbard said.

Wednesday’s hearing was called to discuss an updated report on national security threats facing the U.S. Instead, much of the focus was on the text chain, which included Gabbard, CIA Director John Ratcliffe, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, Vice President JD Vance and other top officials.

Jeffrey Goldberg, the editor-in-chief of The Atlantic, was also added, and on Wednesday his publication released more details from the chats, showing the level of detail they offered about the strikes.

Democrats have demanded an investigation into the sloppy communication, saying it may have exposed sensitive military information that could have jeopardized the mission or put U.S. service members at risk.

The National Security Council has said it will investigate the matter, which Trump on Tuesday downplayed as a “glitch.” Goldberg said he received the Signal invitation from Mike Waltz, Trump’s national security adviser, who was in the group chat and has taken responsibility for the lapse.

Even though the texts contained detailed information on military actions, Gabbard, Ratcliffe and the White House have all said none of the information was classified — an assertion Democrats flatly rejected on Wednesday.

“You all know that’s a lie,” Rep. Joaquin Castro, D-Texas, told Ratcliffe and Gabbard, who said that any decisions to classify or declassify military information falls to the secretary of defense.

Several Democrats on the panel said Hegseth should resign because of the leak.

“This is classified information. It’s a weapon system, as well as a sequence of strikes, as well as details of the operations,” said Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi, a Democrat from Illinois. “He needs to resign immediately.”

Ratcliffe defended his use of Signal as “appropriate” and said questions over the Signal leak have overshadowed the military operation targeting the Houthis.

“What is most important is that the mission was a remarkable success,” he told lawmakers. “That’s what did happen, not what possibly could have happened.”

The discussion at times grew heated as Ratcliffe and Democratic lawmakers spoke over one another. At one point, Rep. Jimmy Gomez, an Illinois Democrat, asked whether he knew whether Hegseth was drinking alcohol when he participated in the chat.

“I think that’s an offensive line of questioning,” Ratcliffe angrily replied. “The answer is no.”

Ratcliffe and Gomez then began shouting over each other as Gomez sought to ask a follow-up question. “We want to know if his performance is compromised,” Gomez said.

Wednesday’s hearing was called to discuss the intelligence community’s annual report on threats to American national security. The report lists China, Russia, Iran and North Korea as strategic adversaries, and notes that drug cartels and transnational criminal organizations pose other threats to Americans.

The presentations from top Trump appointees reflect Trump’s foreign policy priorities, including a focus on combating the flow of fentanyl, illegal immigration and human trafficking, and are taking place as Trump attempts to work out a ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine three years after Russia’s invasion.

## Founders of Black-owned brands adapt their hopes and business plans for a post-DEI era

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The co-founders of a company that makes lip products for darker skin tones no longer hope to get their line into Target. A brother and sister who make jigsaw puzzles celebrating Black subjects wonder if they need to offer “neutral” images like landscapes to keep growing.

Pound Cake and Puzzles of Color are among the small businesses whose owners are rethinking their plans as major U.S. companies weaken their diversity, equity and inclusion programs. The initiatives mostly date from the end President Donald Trump’s first term and entered a new era with the dawn of his second one.

Some Black-owned brands suspect big retail chains will drop partnerships they pursued after the police killing of a Black man in 2020 reignited mass protests against racial injustice. In today’s anti-DEI climate, other entrepreneurs worry about personal repercussions or feel pressure to cancel contracts with retreating retailers.

“It becomes a question of, are the big box stores going to be there? Do we even make any attempt to talk to these people?” Ericka Chambers, one of the siblings behind Puzzles of Color, said. “We are really having to evaluate our strategy in how we expand and how we want to get in front of new customers.”

A fighting chance for Black-owned brands

Chambers and her brother, William Jones, started turning the work of artists of color into frameable puzzles the same year a video captured a white Minneapolis police officer kneeling on George Floyd’s neck. Amid the Black Lives Matter protests over Floyd’s death, a fashion designer challenged large retailers to devote 15% of their shelf space and purchasing power to Black businesses.

The Fifteen Percent Pledge helped bring Puzzles of Color’s creations to Macy’s and Nordstrom’s websites in 2022. Last year, they made it into select Barnes & Noble stores. Chambers said she’s confident in the companies’ commitments but recalled a backlash after news outlets covered the brand, which is based in Texas.

“It does make us think about how we envision ourselves as far as the safety of not wanting to be attacked, because some people are very vocal about being anti-DEI,” Chambers said.

Vibrant depictions of Black women account for many of her and Jones’ puzzles. The pair figured they needed to provide more abstract designs for certain Barnes & Noble locations to give Puzzles of Color “a little bit of a fighting chance.”

Discontent over corporate diversity

The first prominent names in U.S. retail to end or retool their diversity programs surfaced last summer amid threats of legal challenges and negative publicity from DEI critics, who argue that setting hiring, promotion and supplier diversity goals for underrepresented groups constitutes reverse discrimination.

After Trump won a second term in November, Walmart joined the corporate pullback. Target’s suspension of its comparable DEI targets in January stung Black and LGBTQ+ customers harder, largely because they regarded the Minneapolis-based company as more of a natural ally.

The company said it would continue working with a diverse range of businesses. Philadelphia-based Pound Cake’s co-founders, Camille Bell and Johnny Velazquez, said they don’t think they would agree at this point if the retailer offered to stock their lipsticks and lip oils.

“Target would have been a great boost to our business’s growth,” Velazquez said. “We’ll just find it elsewhere.”

To boycott or not?

Target’s stance has created a dilemma for brand founders with existing distribution deals. One is Play Pits, a natural deodorant for children that Maryland resident Chantel Powell launched in 2021. The product is found in about 360 Target stores.

The retailer’s DEI program “allowed us to employ amazing people, give back to our community, and exhibit Black excellence on and off the shelves,” Powell wrote on LinkedIn as civil rights leaders talked about boycotting Target.

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She and some other product creators highlighted the impact boycotts might have on their businesses. They urged upset customers to intentionally limit their purchases to items from Black-owned enterprises. Some activists understood; others pushed the brands to join the protest by cutting ties with Target.

"The conversation around Black brands, that they should pull out of the retailers that they're in, is unrealistic," Powell said this month as a 40-day, church-organized Target boycott was underway. "We signed up to be in business. I understand why people are having that conversation of boycotts. As a Black founder, I also understand the side of how it can be detrimental."

## Navigating the post-DEI landscape

The owner of a Black-owned sexual wellness business with its own line of condoms has a slightly different take. Target started carrying B Condoms in 2020, and founder Jason Panda said the company told him late last year that it didn't intend to keep the prophylactics in the 304 stores that stocked them.

Panda says he isn't worried. The product is available through Amazon and in more than 7,000 CVS stores, he said. What's more, contracts with non-profit organizations and local governments that distribute condoms for free are the cornerstone of the business he established in 2011, Panda said.

"My money has never really come from mainstream," he said. "We're going to be protected as long as I can maintain my relationship with my community."

Brianna Arps, who founded the fragrance brand Moodeaux in 2021, notices fewer grants available to Black brand creators these days. She used to apply for 10 to 15 every week or two; the number is down to five to seven, Arps said.

"A lot of the organizations that had been really vocal about supporting (Black businesses) have either quietly or outwardly pulled back," she said.

Moodeaux was the first Black-owned perfume brand to get its perfumes into Urban Outfitters and Credo Beauty, which specializes in natural vegan products. In the current environment, Arps is looking to expand her brand's presence independent shops and to support other Black fragrance lovers.

"The resiliency of brands like ours and founders like myself will still exist," she said.

## Accentuating the positive

Aurora James, the founder of the Fifteen Percent Pledge, said nearly 30 major companies that joined the initiative remain committed to it, including Bloomingdale's, beauty retailer Sephora, J. Crew and Gap.

Ulta Beauty, another pledge signatory, and Credo Beauty carry Pound Cake products. Velazquez and Belle want to use social media to direct their followers to support retailers like Ulta and to bolster their online sales.

"It's going to be fostering the community that we have and growing that," Velazquez said.

While making a strategic decision "to appeal to a broader audience" when selecting puzzles for Barnes & Noble, Chambers said she plans to introduce Black faces and experiences to the chain's bookstores over time, in boxes of 500, 750 and 1,000 pieces.

In the meantime, Puzzles of Color expanded its "Pride" collection as a response to the DEI backlash. The subjects include Harriet Tubman, a mother and daughter tending a garden, and a little girl in a beauty supply store gazing up at hair accessories.

"Do we lean in all the way?" Chambers asks herself. "Part of why we started this was because we didn't see enough Black people in puzzles."

## Captured Ukrainians convicted on terrorism charges by Russia in what Kyiv called a sham trial

By The Associated Press undefined

Russia on Wednesday convicted 23 captured Ukrainians on terrorism charges stemming from the war in Ukraine in a military court trial that Kyiv denounced as a sham and a violation of international law.

The defendants included current or former fighters of the elite Azov brigade, which Russia designated a terrorist group, and those who worked there as cooks or support personnel, according to Russian media

reports and rights activists.

Memorial, a prominent Russian human rights group, designated the defendants as political prisoners. It said some of them were captured in 2022 during fighting in the Ukrainian port city of Mariupol, where they held out at the Azovstal steel mill under siege by Russian troops. Others were detained as they tried to leave the city after it was overrun by Russian forces, the group said.

Only 12 defendants were in court Wednesday in the city of Rostov-on-Don, while 11 others, including nine women, returned to Ukraine in prisoner exchanges and were convicted in absentia. One other defendant died in custody last year and the case against him was closed.

All had been charged with staging a violent coup d'état and organizing the activities of a terrorist organization. Some faced an additional charge of training to carry out terrorist activities.

Those convicted were given prison sentences ranging from 13 to 23 years. The 12 men still in Russian custody will serve their time in maximum security penal colonies, according to the court. According to Russian independent news site Mediazona, all 12 plan to appeal the verdict.

Memorial has said "none of the defendants in the case are accused of any war crimes: they are all being tried for the very fact of serving" in Azov at one time or another.

Ukraine's human rights envoy, Dmytro Lubinets, denounced the proceedings when they began in June 2023 as "another sham trial" held for Russia's "own amusement."

"Russia' and 'fair justice' have nothing in common. The world must respond to such shameful sham trials of Ukrainian defenders," Lubinets said at the time. "It is obvious to everyone that those who should be in the dock are not those defending themselves but those who initiated the aggression, those who invaded foreign land with weapons, and those who arrived with tanks on the territory of an independent state!"

That same month, Ukraine's presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak said on X that the trial of combatants amounted to "an official war crime" warranting a response from the International Criminal Court.

Petro Yatsenko, a representative of the Ukrainian Coordination Center for the Treatment of POWs, echoed his sentiment in remarks quoted by the Hromadske news outlet, saying the proceedings violated the Geneva Conventions on the treatment of prisoners of war.

Rostov-on-Don, the site of the court, is home to Russia's Southern Military District, about 100 kilometers (60 miles) east of the Ukrainian border.

Mediazona reported that the defendants testified of abuse behind bars, saying they were severely beaten and had bones broken, were interrogated with bags over their heads, were given food laced with household chemicals, and were forced to stand all day long and sing the Russian anthem.

These allegations are in line with reports by Russian and international human rights groups that detail systematic abuse of Ukrainian POWs and civilian captives in Russian custody.

## **A handful of March Madness coaches stand out for their fashion choices amid a sea of casual attire**

By KRISTIE RIEKEN AP Sports Writer

Notre Dame's Niele Ivey is doing it the way she learned how to coach, pacing the sideline in stylish attire in a time when most coaches favor far more casual attire.

"When I first got into coaching, I learned under a Hall of Fame coach," Ivey said. "Being coached under Coach (Muffet) McGraw, her whole staff dressed up. Coaching with her we dressed up. That's kind of the fabric of Notre Dame, and what I'm used to style-wise."

As the NCAA Tournament heats up, the styles of Ivey, LSU's Kim Mulkey, Alabama's Nate Oats and South Carolina's Dawn Staley stand out in a sea of coaches in team polo shirts and quarter-zip pullovers. There are a handful of coaches on the men's side who evoke memories of a time when John Wooden, John Thompson and Denny Crum roamed the sidelines immaculately dressed.

Oats, who routinely reminds fans of former Crimson Tide coach Wimp Sanderson with his colorful tailored sports coats, will stand out on the men's side in the Sweet 16. Fans saw two other throwbacks — Texas



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A&M's Buzz Williams and Rick Pitino of St. John's — before the Aggies and the Red Storm were eliminated in the second round last weekend.

"I don't fish, I don't golf, I don't hunt, I don't do all the things that you're supposed to do as a hobby," Williams recently said when asked about his dapper attire. "That's just always been my hobby."

Most coaches moved to casual sideline attire during the COVID-19 pandemic and many simply never went back to dressing up for games. Count Auburn coach Bruce Pearl among those who have completely abandoned sideline suits after wearing them for years.

Some think that not dressing up on the sideline is disrespectful to the game. But for Pearl it's simply a matter of comfort.

"Think about what a suit is," he said. "You put on a 100% cotton shirt and you button it all the way at the top, OK? And then what you do is you put a tie on and then you bring it all the way up and then you choke yourself with it, then you throw a coat on it. And then you go out there and you coach and you just sweat through it."

Ivey and Pitino just believe in 'dressing up'

Like Williams, Pitino always dresses up for games and has been doing it throughout a career that's spanned decades. His duds have inspired others to follow in his footsteps, notably former assistants UCLA coach Mick Cronin and Kevin Willard, the Maryland coach.

And though the 72-year-old Pitino loves his suits and will never change his sideline attire, he won't stand for anybody who criticizes the casual coaching look.

"It's my preference to just dress up rather than dress down," Pitino said. "My son ( newly named Xavier coach Richard Pitino ), who is the closest person to me in coaching, he wears a quarter-zip and he looks great. He's more comfortable doing that, and I've just been doing it for so many years — 50 years — that I believe in dressing up."

The elder Pitino made headlines for his attire when he suited up in an all-white Armani ensemble for St. John's whiteout at Madison Square Garden on Feb. 16. His players raved about the suit after the 79-73 win and Jimmy Fallon wore an identical one alongside Pitino during a skit that opened "The Tonight Show" earlier this month.

Pitino said his stark white suits are one small way he connects with fans.

"The white suits started at Kentucky, and I did it just to join in with the fans, join in with the student body, just as a fun thing," he said. "They're all different suits, different outfits throughout the years and I'm just having fun with everybody. It's a fun thing. Everybody laughs about it. Everybody has fun."

Ivey noted that fashion has taken on a life of its own the last couple of years.

"You get a chance to really showcase your personality," the coach of the Irish said. "For me, I like to look nice. I feel the way you look, you play good, feel good, and also just bringing power and elegance to the sideline."

Houston's Sampson was once chided for wearing sweatpants

Kelvin Sampson, the 69-year-old Houston coach, wore suits on the sideline for decades before the pandemic. Though he'd be in a full suit at tipoff, he'd famously rip off his tie before the first TV timeout in almost every game while coaching at Oklahoma and Indiana.

Though casual wear is the norm for college coaches these days, Sampson admits he might have taken it a bit too far. He said that Arizona coach Tommy Lloyd, a quarter-zip-wearer himself, once chided him for wearing sweatpants on the sideline.

"I really hadn't noticed that I was wearing sweatpants," Sampson said. "So, I went to more of ... I guess athletic slacks, whatever they call it golf pants, whatever. So, people get on me for the way I look on the sidelines sometimes, but I don't really care."

On the women's side some of the male coaches have adopted a more casual look since the pandemic. But the style of many of the female coaches has become part of the game narrative, led by Ivey, Staley and Mulkey.

Staley has become a style icon in the last few years as her team has won two of the last three national

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titles. The former standout player was photographed on the front row at the Gucci show sitting alongside NFL star Stefon Diggs at Milan Fashion Week last year.

"I dress for comfort. Anything I wear I'm comfortable, like I could probably have on the entire day," Staley said. "So it's more geared to comfort. I'm so glad I don't have to wear heels anymore."

Staley doesn't know what people will see her don next.

"I will try on an outfit. If it's really nice, I might save it for a later round," she said. "Sometimes I haven't been able to wear them because we don't advance. But I have quite a few just ideas. I can't wait until the season is over because I can clean my closet. It's not in a good position right now."

Mulkey's outfits becoming must-see TV

Many fans can't wait to see what bold, unpredictable outfit Mulkey will be wearing when she walks out of the LSU locker room.

That includes Michigan coach Kim Barnes Arico, who has found herself in the fan fashion zone when coaching against Mulkey.

"We've had to play against each other a lot. I always wonder when we're playing against her, 'What's the wear going to be?' I know it's something that people think about," Barnes Arico said. "But for me, I try to do it a little bit for our players. Even in the locker room just now, C'mon, coach, put the hat on. They want to get a selfie. It's fun. I think it's good to have some fun with it."

"But I'm not Kim Mulkey. I'm the other Kim," Barnes Arico said with a laugh.

Ivey is also one of one, and she takes pride in continuing the Notre Dame fashion tradition.

"I feel very confident in the choices that I choose as far as clothing, fashion," Ivey said. "It's fun, but also I feel powerful. It's just something that has been a fabric of myself being a part of this program for a long time."

## 3D printed and factory-built homes could help tackle housing crisis

By JESSE BEDAYN Associated Press/Report for America

DENVER (AP) — As Americans struggle under backbreaking rental prices, builders are turning to innovative ways to churn out more housing, from 3D printing to assembling homes in an indoor factory to using hemp — yes, the marijuana cousin — to make building blocks for walls.

It's a response to the country's shortfall of millions of homes that has led to skyrocketing prices, plunging millions into poverty.

"There's not enough homes to purchase and there's not enough places to rent. Period," said Adrienne Todman, the acting secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development under former President Joe Biden.

One way to quickly build more is embrace these types of innovations, Todman said. "I can only imagine what our housing situation would be like now if we could have made a decision to be more aggressive in adopting this type of housing" decades ago.

So what are these new ways of building homes? And can they help reduce the cost of new housing, leading to lower rents?

Factory-built housing put together in a week

In a cavernous, metal hall, Eric Schaefer stood in front of a long row of modular homes that moved through the plant, similar to a car on an assembly line.

At a series of stations, workers lay flooring, erected framing, added roofs and screwed on drywall. Everything from electrical wiring to plumbing to kitchen countertops were in place before the homes were shrink-wrapped and ready to be shipped.

The business in the Colorado Rocky Mountains, Fading West, has pumped out more than 500 homes in its just over three years of operation, each taking just five to seven days to build, even in the coldest winter months, Schaefer said.

Once assembled in the plant, the narrow townhouse-style homes with white trim, balconies and front porches, are about 90% done. At their final destination they are move-in ready within six weeks, Schaefer

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said.

The company works with towns, counties and housing nonprofits to help address the shortage of affordable homes, mostly for workers who've been squeezed out by sky-high prices in ritzy mountain towns.

That includes Eagle, Colorado, not far from the Vail ski resort, where Fading West worked with Habitat for Humanity to install modular homes at affordable rents for teachers and other school district employees. The homes tend to be on the smaller side, but can be multifamily or single family.

"You can build faster. The faster you build — even at a high quality — means the lower the price," Schaefer said. "We see this as one of the pieces to the puzzle in helping solve the affordable housing crisis."

There's a hefty upfront cost to build the factory, and part of the challenge is a lack of state and federal investment, he said. A patchwork of building codes governing how a structure can be built also makes it difficult, requiring changes to the construction depending on the town or county it is being sent to.

Manufactured housing is similar to modular housing, but the units are constructed on a chassis — like a trailer — and they aren't subject to the same local building codes. That's part of the reason they are used more broadly across the U.S.

Roughly 100,000 manufactured homes were shipped to states in 2024, up from some 60,000 a decade earlier, according to Census Bureau data. Estimates of modular homes built annually often put them below 20,000.

3D printing is innovative but still 'a long game'

Yes, there's technology to 3D print homes.

A computer-controlled robotic arm equipped with a hose and nozzle moves back and forth, oozing lines of concrete, one on top of the other, as it builds up the wall of a home. It can go relatively quickly and form curved walls unlike concrete blocks.

Grant Hamel, CEO and co-founder of VeroTouch, stood inside one of the homes his company built, the wall behind him made out of rolling layers of concrete, distinct to a 3D printer. The technology could eventually reduce labor costs and the time it takes to build an abode, but is farther off than manufactured or modular methods from making a dent in the housing crisis.

It's "a long game, to start chipping away at those prices at every step of the construction process," Hamel said.

The 3D printers are expensive, and so are the engineers and other skilled employees needed to run them, said Ali Memari, director of the Pennsylvania Housing Research Center, whose work has partly focused on 3D printing. It's also not recognized by international building codes, which puts up more red tape.

The technology is also generally restricted to single-story structures, unless traditional building methods are used as well, Memari said.

It's "a technology at its beginning, it has room to grow, especially when it is recognized in code," Memari said. "The challenges that I mentioned exist, and they have to be addressed by the research community."

A hemp-and-lime mixture called hempcrete has 'a bright future'

Hemp — the plant related to marijuana — is being used more and more in the construction of walls.

The hemp is mixed with other materials, most importantly the mineral lime, forming "hempcrete," a natural insulation that's mold- and fire-resistant and can act as outer wall, insulation and inner wall.

Hempcrete still requires wood studs to frame the walls, but it replaces three wall-building components with just one, said Memari, also a professor at Penn State University's Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering. Memari is now helping oversee research into making hempcrete that doesn't need the wood studs.

As much as a million hemp plants to be used for hempcrete can grow on one acre in a matter of months as opposed to trees, which can take years or decades to grow.

The plant is part of the cannabis family but has far less of the psychoactive component, THC, found in marijuana. In 2018, Congress legalized the production of certain types of hemp. Last year, the International Code Council, which develops international building codes used by all 50 states, adopted hempcrete as an insulation.

Confusion over the legality of growing hemp and the price tag of the machine required to process the plant, called a decorticator, are barriers to hempcrete becoming more widespread in housing construction, Memari said.

Still, he said, "hempcrete has a bright future."

## **Change in itinerary for US Vice President JD Vance brings cautious relief for Greenland and Denmark**

By JOSH BOAK, DAVID KEYTON AND DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

Greenland and Denmark appeared cautiously relieved early Wednesday by the news that U.S. Vice President JD Vance and his wife are changing their itinerary for their visit to Greenland Friday, reducing the likelihood that they will cross paths with residents angered by the Trump administration's attempts to annex the vast Arctic island, a semi-autonomous Danish territory.

The couple will now visit the U.S. Space Force outpost at Pituffik, on the northwest coast of Greenland, instead of Usha Vance's previously announced solo trip to the Avannaata Qimussersu dogsled race in Sisimiut.

President Donald Trump irked much of Europe by suggesting that the United States should in some form control the self-governing, mineral-rich territory of Denmark, a U.S. ally and NATO member. As the nautical gateway to the Arctic and North Atlantic approaches to North America, Greenland has broader strategic value as both China and Russia seek access to its waterways and natural resources.

Trump, in an interview Wednesday on "The Vince Show," repeated his desire for U.S. control of Greenland. Asked if the people there are "eager" to become U.S. citizens, Trump said he didn't know "but I think we have to do it, and we have to convince them."

The vice president's decision to visit a U.S. military base in Greenland has removed the risk of violating potential diplomatic taboos by sending a delegation to another country without an official invitation. Yet Vance has also criticized long-standing European allies for relying on military support from the United States, openly antagonizing partners in ways that have generated concerns about the reliability of the U.S.

During his first term, Trump floated the idea of purchasing the world's largest island, even as Denmark insisted it wasn't for sale. The people of Greenland also have firmly rejected Trump's plans.

Timing of Vance's visit stirred concerns

Anne Merrild, a Greenlander and an expert on Arctic politics and development, said recent anti-U.S. demonstrations in Nuuk might have scared the Trump administration enough to revise the trip to avoid interactions with angry Greenlanders.

Still, Merrild said, even a visit to the space base shows that the U.S. administration still considers annexing Greenland to be on the table.

"It's a signal to the whole world, it's a strong signal to Denmark, it's a signal to Greenland," she said. "And of course it's also an internal signal to the U.S., that this is something that we're pursuing."

Vance is allowed to visit the base, said Marc Jacobsen, a professor at the Royal Danish Defense College, because of a 1951 agreement between Denmark and the U.S. regarding the defense of Greenland.

Jacobsen said the timing is controversial, particularly because coalition negotiations are ongoing to form a government after the election earlier this month.

Ahead of the vice president's announcement that he would join his wife, discontent from the governments of Greenland and Denmark had been growing sharper, with the Greenland government posting on Facebook Monday night that it had "not extended any invitations for any visits, neither private nor official."

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen told Danish national broadcasts Tuesday that the visit was "unacceptable pressure."

No clear end game

Peter Viggo Jakobsen, associate professor at the Danish Defense Academy, said the trip's flip-flop continues to cause major confusion on the island. The U.S. has not articulated specific demands from Greenland



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or Denmark at this point.

"We have no idea what the end game is," Jakobsen said.

In Greenland, the political group the most sympathetic to the U.S. president, the Naleraq party that advocates a swift path toward independence, has now been excluded from coalition talks to form the next government. The Trump administration's aspirations for Greenland could backfire and push the more mild parties closer to Denmark.

"But now Trump has scared most Greenlanders away from this idea about a close relationship to the United States because they don't trust him," Jakobsen added.

Funding is key

One of the biggest remaining hurdles to Greenland's independence is diversifying the economy, where fishing accounts for 90% of exports. In the meantime, Greenland receives an annual block grant from Denmark of around 3.5 billion kroner (\$506 million), which is more than half the public budget, to cover the island's Nordic-style social programs, including free health care.

It's therefore better for Greenland, strategically, to threaten Denmark with independence and a referendum than actually do it, Jakobsen said. As long as the threat is there, Greenland can push for more concessions and more money from Denmark.

If the island pins all its hopes on the U.S., Greenlanders have no guarantee they will be better off or have any power in a future relationship with America, he said.

"In that sense, Trump is the Danish realm's best friend at the moment," Jakobsen added.

## Numbers to know for each of the 16 teams remaining in March Madness

By STEVE MEGARGEE AP Sports Writer

The smaller the number, the larger the impact at this year's NCAA Tournament.

Arkansas, the No. 10 seed in the West Region, is the only double-digit seed still alive heading into the regional semifinals. All four No. 1 seeds and three of the four No. 2 seeds are still standing.

But the seeds aren't the only numbers that bear watching as the tournament enters its second week. Here's a look at a notable statistic for each of the remaining 16 teams, starting with the two regions playing Thursday.

East

Alabama: The Crimson Tide score a Division I-leading 90.8 points per game. The 90-81 first-round victory over Robert Morris marked the DI-leading 19th time this season they've scored at least 90 points.

BYU: The Cougars outrebounded each of their first two tournament opponents by nine boards, and they have a plus-6.2 rebound margin this season that ranks 19th in Division I. They now face Alabama, which ranks 20th nationally with a plus-6.1 rebound margin. The Tide beat Robert Morris despite getting outrebounded.

Arizona: Caleb Love scored 28 points when North Carolina beat Duke 81-77 in the 2022 Final Four. He hasn't been as successful the four times he's faced Duke since that game, twice with North Carolina and twice with Arizona. Love has averaged 10.5 points in those four games while shooting a combined 14 of 50 overall and 4 of 27 from 3-point range. Love's teams went 1-3 against Duke in those games. Love faces Duke again in a regional semifinal.

Duke: The Blue Devils have a net rating of plus-39 according to kenpom.com. That represents the highest net rating for any team since Duke in 1998-99 had a rating of plus-43.01. Net rating is calculated by subtracting a team's defensive efficiency from its offensive efficiency. The resulting number – 39 in Duke's case – measures its expected margin of victory over an average team.

West

Florida: Walter Clayton Jr. has gone 22 of 43 from 3-point range over his last five games (13 of 26 in the Southeastern Conference Tournament and 9 of 17 in the NCAA Tournament). The former Iona guard has

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gone 16 of 33 from 3-point range in four career NCAA games.

Maryland: Derik Queen, who made a buzzer beater against Colorado State in the second round, puts up 16.2 points per game for the highest scoring average of any Maryland freshman since 1947-48. Queen is actually behind only Joe Smith, who had 19.4 points per game in 1994-95 before getting taken first overall in the 1995 draft.

Arkansas: John Calipari is the third coach to take four different schools to the Sweet 16. He got here eight times with Kentucky, four times with Memphis and three times with UMass. The other coaches to accomplish this feat were Eddie Sutton (six times with Oklahoma State, four with Arkansas, two with Kentucky and once with Creighton) and Lon Kruger (twice with Oklahoma and once each with Kansas State, Florida and UNLV).

Texas Tech: The Red Raiders play in the Big 12 and Arkansas is in the SEC, but they used to be rivals in the old Southwest Conference. They've faced each other 80 times before, and the series is tied at 40-all.

Midwest

Houston: The Cougars have the nation's longest active streak with six straight Sweet 16 appearances. Gonzaga had the longest streak with nine straight regional semifinal berths before losing 81-76 to Houston in the round of 32.

Purdue: Trey Kaufman-Renn has made 287 baskets this season to lead all Division I players. Zach Edey, Kaufman-Renn's former Purdue teammate, led Division I last season with 336 baskets.

Kentucky: Not a single player on Kentucky's roster scored a point for the Wildcats last season. The only other power conference team that didn't return any of its scoring production from last season was Louisville, which lost to Creighton in the first round.

Tennessee: Chaz Lanier has gone 7 of 12 from 3-point range in the first two rounds and has a school-record 120 3-pointers this season, the sixth-highest total in Southeastern Conference history. The SEC record is held by Auburn's Bryce Brown with 141 in 2018-19. Lanier went a combined 3 of 17 from 3-point range in Tennessee's two regular-season losses to Kentucky, its Sweet 16 opponent.

South

Auburn: Johni Broome is the only player in Division I men's basketball history to have 2,500 points, 1,500 rebounds plus 400 blocks in his career. Broome, a fifth-year senior who spent two seasons at Morehead State and three at Auburn, is averaging 18.4 points, 10.7 rebounds and 2.2 blocks this season.

Michigan: Tre Donaldson came to Michigan after spending two seasons at Auburn, the Wolverines' Sweet 16 opponent. After averaging 6.7 points, 3.4 assists and 2.4 rebounds at Auburn last season, the 6-3 guard averages 11.5 points, 4.2 assists and 3.6 rebounds for Michigan.

Mississippi: Sean Pedulla has scored at least 19 points in each of his three career NCAA games. He scored 19 points in just 19 minutes while playing for Virginia Tech in a first-round loss to Texas in 2022, and he has collected 20 points in each of the first two rounds this season.

Michigan State: The Spartans have outscored their first two NCAA opponents 96-66 in the second half. That includes a 71-63 victory over New Mexico in which they trailed by two points at halftime. Now they face an Ole Miss team that has outscored its first two tournament opponents 84-55 in the first half.

## At least 24 dead as wildfires ravage southern South Korea and force thousands to evacuate

By KIM TONG-HYUNG and HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Wind-driven wildfires that were among South Korea's worst ever have ravaged the country's southern regions, killing 24 people, destroying more than 300 structures and forcing 28,800 residents to evacuate, officials said Wednesday.

The death toll included a pilot who died after a helicopter crashed during efforts to contain a blaze in the southeastern town of Uiseong, one of the hardest-hit areas. The aircraft had no other crew members. Police said that most of the dead are those in their 60s and 70s.

The National Fire Agency said at least 26 people sustained varying degrees of injuries.

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An ancient Buddhist temple, houses, factories and vehicles were destroyed in the wildfires that have burned 17,752 hectares (43,866 acres), the government's emergency response center said.

In a televised address, South Korea's acting President Han Duck-soo said the wildfires that began last Friday were worse than many previous ones.

"Damages are snowballing," Han said. "There are concerns that we'll have wildfire damages that we've never experienced, so we have to concentrate all our capabilities to put out the wildfires in the rest of this week."

Han said crews struggled to extinguish the wildfires because strong winds swept the areas overnight. He also said about 4,650 firefighters, soldiers and other personnel were working Wednesday with the help of about 130 helicopters, adding that "a small amount" of 5-10 millimeters (0.1-0.3 inches) of rain was expected Thursday.

As of Wednesday evening, firefighters were tackling at least six active wildfires, including in the south-eastern coastal town of Yeongdeok, which alerted residents of the nearest village to evacuate to an indoor gymnasium.

Strong winds and smoke-filled skies forced authorities in the southeastern city of Andong to order evacuations in two villages, including Puncheon, home to the Hahoe folk village — a UNESCO World Heritage Site founded around the 14th-15th century. Hikers were advised to leave the scenic Jiri Mountain, one of the country's largest national parks, as another fire spread closer.

Observers say the ongoing wildfires are the third biggest in South Korea's history in terms of land burned. The largest fires were in Andong, the neighboring counties of Uiseong and Sancheong, and the city of Ulsan.

On Tuesday, officials said firefighters had extinguished most of the flames from the largest wildfires in those areas, but wind and dry conditions allowed them to spread again.

The blaze in Uiseong destroyed about 20 of the 30 buildings and structures at Gounsa, a temple said to be originally built in the 7th century. Among the burned structures were two state-designated "treasures" — a pavilion-shaped building erected overlooking a stream in 1668, and a Joseon dynasty structure built in 1904 to mark the longevity of a king.

Meanwhile, the Justice Ministry said it protectively removed 500 inmates from a detention center in Cheongsong, another southern town, but no damages were reported to the facility.

The Korea Forest Service said it had raised its wildfire warning to the highest level nationwide, requiring local governments to assign more workers to emergency response, tighten entry restrictions for forests and parks, and recommend that military units withhold live-fire exercises.

Among the dead were four firefighters and government workers who died in Sancheong on Saturday after being trapped by fast-moving flames driven by strong winds, according to officials.

Government officials suspect human error caused several of the fires, possibly due to the use of fire while clearing overgrown grass in family tombs or sparks from welding work.

## Perpetual adoration is a growing Catholic trend. A Holy Year event is scheduled for the weekend

By GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO Associated Press

HIALEAH, Fla. (AP) — Twice a week, Luisa Arguello and her husband spend from 2 a.m. to 3 a.m. praying in the perpetual adoration chapel at St. Benedict Catholic Church, tucked on a quiet palm-fringed residential street in the Miami suburb of Hialeah.

"Your body clock gets used to it. You feel that the Lord embraces you, and everything changes," said Arguello, who has been the chapel's coordinator since it opened in 2019. "I don't feel the same as when I started. Adoration takes you to the presence of the Lord."

In hundreds of parishes across the United States and elsewhere, growing numbers of Catholics are taking shifts before the Blessed Sacrament — which they believe is the presence of Christ, not just a symbol — on view in dedicated chapels 24/7. Thousands more churches have regular adoration hours or days.

The Vatican is marking a special Holy Year event Friday into Saturday about the practice — "24 hours for

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the Lord" — and churches around the world will offer continuous adoration then, including Miami's iconic "La Ermita" sanctuary. In the United States last summer, thousands of pilgrims walked through multiple states to gather at the National Eucharistic Congress, the first such event in more than 80 years.

For many St. Benedict parishioners, adoration is already a practice as standard as going to Mass — except that it feels quieter and more personal.

"If you don't give up 15 minutes a day to foster this friendship with the Lord, how are you going to spend eternity in heaven with him?" said Alfredo Janson.

Every day from 6 a.m. to 7 a.m. before work as a communications engineer, Janson goes to the tiny chapel. Ten chairs face a sunburst-shaped monstrance — the vessel where an unusually large consecrated host is displayed.

He calls the orchid-adorned chapel "the factory of miracles" — like the healing of his brother in Nicaragua from a severe case of COVID-19, one of the many causes he's prayed for.

There are 400 adorers like Janson at the mostly Cuban American, working-class parish, who commit to at least one hour a week and often act as substitutes if someone can't make their hour. Church law forbids leaving the Blessed Sacrament unattended in the monstrance.

Their commitment allows the chapel to be open for those who might have just a few minutes to stop before or after school, work or worship services. Like most, it's open to anyone except from midnight to 6 a.m., where only registered adorers can enter for security reasons. Plans to expand it are in the works.

"Without the whole community, this wouldn't be possible," Janson said.

The Rev. Yonhatan Londoño said the chapel is "an oasis" for many, a place where happy or sad tears can fall freely. But he often reminds his flock that prayer is not an individual endeavor.

"This is the point of the chapel, that people may enter into communion," said Londoño. In the two years he's been the parish priest, he has ditched the cassock he sometimes wore for a black guayabera shirt with the clerical collar, also in the spirit of the church meeting people where they are.

His predecessor at St. Benedict started the perpetual adoration chapel. When churches were shuttered during the COVID-19 lockdown, he took the monstrance through the neighborhood streets on the back of a pickup truck.

That's in line with centuries of tradition — during the 16th century plague in Milan, Italy, St. Charles Borromeo exposed the host on altars outside so people could find comfort in the presence, said Timothy O'Malley, academic director of the University of Notre Dame's Center for Liturgy.

The practice of adoration traces back to the early church. It blossomed in the Middle Ages after the church instituted the feast of Corpus Christi — Body of Christ in Latin — the celebration of the belief that when bread and wine are consecrated during the eucharistic sacrament, Christ becomes truly present in them.

Major processions with the Blessed Sacrament, and often far-from-sober citywide festivities, are still celebrated today on that solemnity, which falls in late spring, especially in Latin America and Spain. Spain also has a century-old tradition of overnight adoration, said Fermín Labarga, church history professor at University of Navarra.

As a youth in his native Argentina, Pope Francis went to nighttime adoration with his brother and he instituted the call for the "24 hours" Lenten practice early in his papacy. Late in his, St. John Paul II wrote of the importance of adoration, lamenting that in some regions it was abandoned.

"The worship of the Eucharist outside of the Mass is of inestimable value for the life of the Church," his 2003 encyclical read. "It is pleasant to spend time with him (Christ) ... to feel the infinite love present in his heart."

It's that "affective encounter with Christ" outside of the ritual requirements of worship that attracts growing numbers of people and especially youth like today's Notre Dame students, said O'Malley.

"They have a lot of anxiety and here they have an object — of course, I would say a person — but that they can focus all their attention toward, who is there for them to be present to in silence, tech-free," he said. "Some just sit and talk ... like they're with a friend."

For Miami-area pastor Rev. Alejandro Rodríguez Artola, that's the appeal that distinguishes adoration



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from Mass, which virtually all adorers also attend.

"Mass has activities, Mass has other families, a social element," said Rodríguez, whose last three parishes all had adoration chapels. "People like the tranquility and intimacy of feeling he's speaking to nobody else but them."

When 15 years ago he was assigned to pastor a shrinking congregation whose church had been gutted by fire, he decided to include a chapel in the rebuilding – and said people still text him today to thank him, saying as many as 20 people are often crammed in it.

Today he leads St. Thomas the Apostle in a suburb of Miami, which had perpetual adoration for more than two decades and still hosts it for about 12 hours each weekday. That allows many families with children in St. Thomas' school to pop in before classes or after sports practice, along with commuters.

"I think it's the anchor," Rodríguez said of the adoration chapel. "A church building spends most of the week empty, but this doesn't."

On a recent early afternoon at St. Benedict's chapel, some faithful prayed the rosary while others read Scriptures or knelt in silent recollection.

"I just feel like looking at him, and that he is the one talking to me," said Lastenia Vivas, who carries one of the midnight-to-1 a.m. shifts. "Sometimes one arrives tired, but the peace that you feel here is unique."

## **Today in History: March 27**

### **Will Smith slaps Chris Rock during Oscars telecast**

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, March 27, the 86th day of 2025. There are 279 days left in the year.

On March 27, 2022, Will Smith slapped Chris Rock on stage at the 94th Academy Awards ceremony, winning the Oscar for best actor just minutes later. (Smith later resigned from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and received a 10-year ban from the Oscars.)

In 1794, Congress approved the "Act to provide a Naval Armament" of six armed ships, which provided the foundation of the permanent U.S. Navy.

In 1912, in Washington D.C., first lady Helen Herron Taft and the wife of Japan's ambassador to the United States, Viscountess Chinda, planted the first two of 3,000 cherry trees given to the U.S. as a gift by the mayor of Tokyo.

In 1939, the first NCAA men's Division I basketball championship game was held, with the University of Oregon defeating Ohio State, 46-33.

In 1964, Alaska was hit by a magnitude 9.2 earthquake (still the strongest on record in North America) and tsunamis that together claimed over 130 lives.

In 1968, Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin, the first man to orbit the Earth in 1961, died when his MiG-15 jet crashed during a routine training flight near Moscow; he was 34.

In 1973, "The Godfather" won the Academy Award for best picture of 1972, but its star, Marlon Brando, refused to accept his Oscar for best actor and, in what would become one of the Oscars' most famous moments, sent in his place actor and activist Sacheen Littlefeather, who spoke out about the depiction of Native Americans in Hollywood.

In 1975, construction began on the Trans-Alaska Pipeline; the 800-mile (1,290-kilometer) pipeline was completed just over two years later.

In 1977, in aviation's deadliest disaster, 583 people were killed when a KLM Boeing 747, attempting to take off in heavy fog, crashed into a Pan Am 747 on an airport runway on the Canary Island of Tenerife.

In 1980, 123 workers died when a North Sea floating oil field platform, the Alexander Kielland, capsized during a storm.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Michael York is 83. Film director Quentin Tarantino is 62. Singer Mariah Carey is 56. Actor Pauley Perrette is 56. Actor Nathan Fillion is 54. Singer Fergie is 50. Former MLB catcher Buster Posey is 38. Singer Jessie J is 37. Actor-singer Halle Bailey is 25.