

Groton Daily Independent

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Thursday, March 5

Senior Menu: Hot beef combos, mashed potatoes, fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Biscuit.

School Lunch: Chicken tacos, refried beans.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Nigeria Circle, 2 p.m.

2nd Grade BB, 5 p.m., elementary gym

4th Grade BB, 6 p.m., HS Gym

GBB SoDak 16, Groton vs. SF Christian, 7 p.m., Madison



Friday, March 6

Senior Menu: Tuna noodles, peas, fruit, biscuit.

School Breakfast: Doughnuts.

School Lunch: Cheese pizza, green beans.

World Day of Prayer

FFA @ Redfield CDE

Region 1A Boys Basketball, 7 p.m., Arena. Groton vs. Milbank

Saturday, March 7

Pickleball, 9:30 a.m., Elementary Gym

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

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1440

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

Gen Z on the Ballot

Nepal will elect its new government today, the first vote since last year's youth-led protests toppled the government. Many candidates are running as independents, with the lead candidate supporting a new technocratic coalition over established communist and center-left parties.

The frontrunner among young people is 36-year-old Balendra Shah, a millennial rapper and former Kathmandu mayor, running against ousted Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli. Nearly 160 Gen Z candidates are running across the country, about half as independents. Many joined cause with the National Independent Party, a centrist coalition emphasizing government reform and digital fluency. A top consideration for voters is the economy; youth unemployment stands at over 20%, and roughly one-fourth of gross domestic product comes from remittances.

When Gen Z Nepalis protested a social media ban last year, the crackdown left nearly 80 people dead and forced Oli to resign in two days. The protests were part of a wider trend of youth uprisings, including in Madagascar, Bulgaria, Morocco, and Iran.

War Powers Resolution

The US Senate failed to advance a war powers resolution to limit President Donald Trump's authority to wage war with Iran, with 53 voting in favor, short of the 60 votes needed.

The vote came after Turkey said NATO forces shot down an Iranian missile headed into its airspace. Earlier in the day, the Pentagon confirmed the US Navy had torpedoed an Iranian warship in the Indian Ocean near Sri Lanka. The attack late Tuesday marked the first time a US submarine has downed an enemy ship since World War II. There were more than 170 people aboard the ship named IRIS Dena and nicknamed "Soleimani"—after the late Iranian general killed by the US in 2020. Sri Lankan authorities reportedly rescued 32 survivors; roughly 140 are still missing as of this writing.

Separately, Mojtaba Khamenei, the son of Iran's former Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, emerged as the leading contender to succeed his father.

The Maternal Mind

Women's brains lose nearly 5% of their gray matter on average during pregnancy, according to the largest-ever study of pregnancy-related brain changes published yesterday. Researchers say the change—which is partially reversible after six months—may be preparing women for motherhood.

Brain scans from 127 women before, during, and after pregnancy revealed that most of the gray matter loss occurs in a brain network associated with self-reflection, empathy, and rest. Women who shed more gray matter were more likely to report bonding well with their newborns, suggesting an evolutionary adaptation to childbirth. The study authors hope their findings will contribute to a detailed map of how the brain transitions into motherhood, which could help treat conditions like postpartum depression and improve attachment between infants and caregivers.

Another study published last month found that women pregnant with a second child experience unique changes in brain networks tied to paying attention and responding to stimuli, skills useful when caring for multiple children.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Football coach Lou Holtz, known for rebuilding struggling teams, dies at age 89.

English golfer Luke Donald named European captain for 2027 Ryder Cup, becoming the first captain in 30 years to lead three straight Cups and potentially the first ever to win all three.

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Gayle King signs new deal with "CBS Mornings," ending months of speculation about a potential exit following Skydance's acquisition of CBS last year; King has cohosted the morning show since 2012.

Sean "Diddy" Combs shaves over one month off his 50-month prison sentence after completing a rehab program; his new release date is April 25, 2028.

Science & Technology

Father files the first wrongful-death lawsuit tied to Google Gemini, accusing chatbot maker Alphabet of fueling delusions that led his son to die by suicide.

Bill Gates-backed nuclear reactor in Wyoming becomes the first commercial reactor approved for construction by the federal government in eight years.

Fertilizer byproduct nitrous oxide, known to be a potent greenhouse gas, may harm microbial communities that impact plant growth; finding could inform optimal farming practices.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close up (S&P 500 +0.8%, Dow +0.5%, Nasdaq +1.3%).

President Donald Trump formally nominates Kevin Warsh to chair the Federal Reserve Board.

Morgan Stanley reportedly lays off 2,500 people, 3% of its workforce, over the past week; cuts are spread across the bank's three major divisions.

Elon Musk testifies in shareholder trial over claims he made false and misleading statements to sink Twitter's stock before purchasing it for \$44B in 2022.

Coinbase shares rise 14.6% after Trump expresses support for bill enabling interest-like returns on stablecoins.

Politics & World Affairs

House Ethics Committee launches ethics probe into Tony Gonzales (R, TX-23) after congressional investigators find substantial evidence Gonzales had an affair with a female staffer; news comes as Gonzales faces a runoff in May.

Greek court upholds ruling convicting 42 leaders of neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party of acting as a criminal organization; party was once Greece's third-most popular.

Independent researcher claims she has found a marble bust by Michelangelo in a Roman church; Renaissance scholars await verification.

Need a **Babysitter** or **House Cleaner**?

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The advertisement features a colorful illustration of a teddy bear, a baby bottle, and a stack of colorful blocks on the left, and a yellow bucket filled with cleaning supplies like a spray bottle, a broom, and gloves on the right. Below these are three banners with the text above. At the bottom, a red car is driving on a winding road through a green field with a small house in the background.



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Groton
Area
Tigers
Groton, SD

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For more info: GDILIVE.COM

Girls SoDak16

Groton Area vs.
Sioux Falls Christian
at Madison High School
Thurs., March 5, 7 p.m.



Name Released in Lawrence County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash
Where: Interstate 90, exit 10, Spearfish, SD
When: 8:05 p.m. Saturday, February 28, 2026

Vehicle 1: 2012 Toyota Highlander
Driver 1: Mark Alan Anderson, 65-year-old male from Spearfish, SD, fatal injuries
Seat belt Used: No

Lawrence County, S.D.- A Spearfish man died in a single vehicle crash Saturday evening near I-90 exit 10 and US 85 in Spearfish.

Preliminary crash information indicates Mark Alan Anderson, the driver of a 2012 Toyota Highlander, was traveling west on I-90 and took Exit 10 to the intersection with US 85. The vehicle continued westbound across US 85, entering the west ditch, vaulted a fence, then went into the Brook View Road ditch where it overturned and came to rest on its roof. The driver was ejected.

Anderson was transported to Spearfish Monument Health where he was pronounced deceased.

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.

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Single: \$35.15 per month or \$319.50 per year
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Student: \$35.15 per month
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2-Person: \$59.78 per month
Family: \$72.43 per month
Senior/PT: \$20 per month



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Call or Text Tina at 605/397-7285

Same rates for several years!

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Groton Chamber of Commerce

March 4, 2026

12pm City Hall

- Members present: Katelyn Nehlich, Douglas Heinrich, Ashley Bentz, April Abeln, and Carol Kutter
 - The minutes from the previous meeting were approved by Heinrich and seconded by Kutter. All members present voted aye.
 - The treasurer's report was given. Dacotah Bank checking account balance is \$32,093.70 in addition to the \$10,000 CD. The bucks account balance is about \$3,200. \$8,200 has been received in dues for 2026. The report was approved by Heinrich and seconded by Abeln. All members present voted aye.
 - A thank you was received from the Carnival of Silver Skates for the donation.
 - Abeln made an email motion prior to the meeting, Katelyn seconded to advertise post season basketball games with GDI Live. All members present voted aye.
 - \$4,071.38 has been raised for our seesaw. Enrich Groton SoDak Inc. has offered to donate all the sales and donations in April 2026 at Common Cents.
 - 1 spot remains on the Hwy 12 sign for our 5-year contracts. Motion by Abeln and seconded by Kutter to proceed with filling that last spot with the logo from the 4 wood hwy signs. All members present voted aye.
 - Members present were gifted with Beauty Brew drinks today due to a Thrivent Action Team applied for by Abeln. Dairy Queen burgers will be served at the next meeting and cans of soda. Ken's Food Fair will be ordered for the May meeting with the Thrivent monies.
 - Abeln will ask the Aberdeen Chamber to take materials to Watertown on April 27th for the literature drop for Chamber rack cards to be included in the Publication Program again for 2026.
 - Motion by Kutter and seconded by Heinrich to place a ½ page generic ad in the Yellowstone Trail Guide. All members present voted aye.
 - Motion by Abeln and seconded by Nehlich to donate \$250 to the Groton Soccer Association for 10 new jerseys with our logo placed on the sleeve. All members present voted aye.
 - Motion by Heinrich and seconded by Abeln to donate \$300 to Groton HOSA for their Belize Mission Trip. All members present voted aye.
 - Motion by Abeln and seconded by Heinrich to donate \$100 to the Yelduz Shrine for circus tickets. All members present voted aye.
 - Motion by Heinrich and seconded by Kutter to donate \$100 in Bucks to the Firemens Spring Social. All members present voted aye.
 - A new business welcome will be held at Cloverly Home De cor on March 10th at 5:30pm. Following the welcome, scholarship applications will be reviewed at Topper's building on Main Street. Pizza will be served.
 - Other new business welcomes will be held with the new owners of Rosewood Court, Michael and Regan Shilhanek and possibly with Becky Kotzer for her new Experiences by Design travel business.
 - Motion by Abeln and seconded by Kutter to gift embroidered towels to the Council, Mayor and City Attorney. All members present voted aye.
 - It was mentioned that the scholarship meet and greet photo opportunity is set for May 13th at 1:30pm in the GHS library.
 - Next Meeting: April 1st, 12pm at City Hall
- Upcoming events:
- 03/15/2026 Groton HOSA Go for the Green 5K, Community Center 1pm
 - 03/22/2026 Puzzle, Popcorn & Pop Challenge, Wage Memorial Library 1pm
 - 03/28/2026 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt, City Park 10am
 - 03/28/2026 Dueling Duo Baseball/Softball Fundraiser, Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm
 - 04/18/2026 Prom, GHS Arena
 - 04/18/2026 Groton Firemens Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

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Effort to ask voters to limit South Dakota lieutenant governor's authority fails in state House

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

The South Dakota House of Representatives on Wednesday rejected a resolution that would have placed a constitutional amendment on the ballot asking voters if the lieutenant governor should be stripped of his role as the Senate's presiding officer.

Tensions between the lieutenant governor and the state Senate have simmered in 2026 due to the health-related absence of Sioux Falls Republican Sen. Arch Beal. Without him, the likelihood of a tie in the 35-member Senate has increased.

In order for a bill to pass the Senate, the state constitution requires a yes vote from the majority of elected senators — 18 of the 35 — not a majority of the senators in the chamber at the time of the vote.

The constitution also says the lieutenant governor, as presiding officer of the Senate, only gets a vote when members are equally divided.

The effort to push a constitutional amendment onto the general election emerged amid multiple 17-17 vote controversies. After some senators challenged Lt. Gov. Tony Venhuizen's authority to break ties, Gov. Larry Rhoden asked the Supreme Court for guidance. The court confirmed that the lieutenant governor can cast tie-breaking votes.

Supporters of the resolution said letting senators choose their own presiding officer would create a more independent Senate. In the absence of the lieutenant governor, the Senate is led by the Senate President Pro Tempore, currently Sioux Falls Republican Chris Karr.

Backers of the resolution in the House, like Rep. Marty Overweg, R-New Holland, noted that the governor was only recently allowed to appoint their own lieutenant governor — and, by extension, the president of the senate — rather than having the position elected by delegates at the South Dakota Republican Party's state convention.

"I firmly think having the branches of government completely separate, checking on each other, is the right way to go," Overweg said.

Opponents, like Rep. Chris Kassin, R-Vermillion, said the change would be a major rewrite of the state's constitution, and warned against adding another issue to an already long November 2026 ballot.

"This is not a minor tweak," Kassin said. "It is a fundamental change to the constitutional structure of South Dakota. It removes the lieutenant governor as the presiding officer of the Senate. A role placed there by design, not by accident."

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.

South Dakota senators endorse 'alternative setting' for aggressive and violent students

BY: MEGHAN O'BRIEN

PIERRE — Students who are aggressive or violent in the classroom could be sent to an alternative setting if Gov. Larry Rhoden signs two bills passed this week by South Dakota lawmakers.

Violence and verbal abuse toward teachers from students is rising, according to South Dakota Secretary of Education Joe Graves. He cited data from the Pew Research Center that says more than two-thirds of teachers nationally have been yelled at or verbally threatened by a student.

Graves told lawmakers about concerns from educators in the state.

"If I were a teacher, just starting out, there is no way I would stay in the profession if I knew this is what I would be dealing with until retirement," Graves said Tuesday in a Senate Education Committee hearing.

The Senate voted 33-1 to advance a bill that would allow a school board to send students who engage in "aggressive or violent" behavior to an alternative learning setting.

School boards could assign a student to learn at home, a different classroom or a different building.

The bill does not allow school boards to reassign students who are protected by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. But the bill should have more protections for students with disabilities, argued Cole Uecker, executive director for Disability Rights South Dakota.

Schools could "see this as an opportunity to remove children who have behaviors related to their disability," Uecker said, "as opposed to going through the hard work of finding eligibility and coverage for special education services."

Money offered for alternative settings

A second bill, that some supporters describe as a companion bill to the first, would give the state Department of Education \$2 million to grant to a qualified nonprofit to serve as an alternative learning option for students with behavioral health concerns. That bill passed 30-4.

The bill's title is "An Act to make an appropriation for a non-residential, school-based, therapeutic services facility in Brown County." It does not specify which group would receive the grant funding, but one of the nonprofits that could apply for a grant, Children's Home Society, has day school locations in Sioux Falls and Rapid City and is considering adding services in Aberdeen.

An Aberdeen building would be able to serve 24 students in a non-residential, day facility. Sen. Michael Rohl, R-Aberdeen, said it could begin taking in students this fall.

"It allows us to focus on individuals who need this help," Rohl said. "We're also allowing the rest of our students to have access to a safe learning environment."

Supporters said the facility would free up space at similar buildings in Rapid City and Sioux Falls and allow students from northeast South Dakota to receive behavioral health help closer to home.

Both bills were supported by the House of Representatives and now await final approval from Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden.

Other juvenile justice actions

The House Judiciary Committee approved Senate Bill 79 on Wednesday. The bill would let a judge put a minor in Department of Corrections custody for certain gun and weapon crimes. The judge could only do so if "no viable alternative exists," and has found the child is at serious risk of physically harming someone. It passed the House Judiciary Committee on a 9-3 vote.

The House of Representatives voted 37-30 to reject a bill that would have appropriated \$50,000 to the state's Department of Corrections to study juvenile correctional and residential facilities outside the state.

Meghan O'Brien is the audio reporter for South Dakota Searchlight where she covers the state government and its impact on South Dakotans. She's previously reported in Nebraska with a focus on health care and rural communities across the state.

South Dakota governor, legislative leaders roll out property tax plan with one week left of session

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER

South Dakota Gov. Larry Rhoden has thrown his support behind a plan to use revenues from an upcoming increase in the statewide sales tax rate to offset homeowner property taxes — something his administration opposed earlier this legislative session.

The shift in positions is part of a broader agreement between the executive branch and legislative leaders on how to best address property tax relief.

Rhoden's preferred approach to property taxes had, until this week, focused on a bill to let counties use a half-percent sales tax to offset property taxes.

"This relief should be felt in both the short term and the long term," Rhoden told lawmakers on the House State Affairs Committee on Wednesday. "It should be realized for all South Dakota homeowners and targeted even more to those that were hit the hardest with rising taxes. And it should also make property taxes more predictable and transparent for South Dakotans."

The plan ties together five bills:

Senate Bill 245, which would put revenue from a scheduled sales tax increase from 4.2% to 4.5% next year into a relief fund for owner-occupied property taxes, and use nearly \$56 million in one-time money to seed the fund.

Senate Bill 96, the Rhoden-recommended bill on voluntary county sales tax increases.

House Bill 1253, which caps annual property assessment growth at 5% for five-year increments, resetting assessments back to market value every five years.

House Bill 1323, which gives citizens 10 more days to gather signatures to refer a school board's decision to opt out of the state's property tax cap.

House Bill 1051, which reduces the maximum tax levies for school districts.

Four of the five bills were endorsed Wednesday by legislative committees. HB 1051 awaits a hearing with the Legislature's Joint Appropriations Committee.

Sales tax increase to offset property taxes proposal revived

Senate Bill 245 was introduced as a vehicle bill, meaning a bill with boilerplate language that can be used to introduce new policies late in the legislative session.

The bill's vague original language earned Senate support on Feb. 24. The House State Affairs Committee amended it to reintroduce a concept similar to one that failed in the Senate last month 16-17.

In addition to capturing increased sales tax revenues to deposit into a "homeowner property tax reduction fund," the new bill would seed that fund with \$56 million in one time money. The fund would be used to reduce tax levies for school districts.

House Speaker Jon Hansen, R-Dell Rapids, is sponsoring the bill. Hansen and Rhoden are competing against each other, along with U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson and Toby Doeden, for this year's Republican nomination for governor.

Hansen said he'd hoped to keep the state's sales tax rate at 4.2% and use other means to reduce property taxes statewide. He told lawmakers on the committee that the "next best thing" is to dedicate the scheduled increase toward lowering property taxes.

The original bill to capture the increased sales tax to offset property taxes was Senate Bill 118, which the Rhoden administration opposed.

Steven Kohler, with the state Bureau of Finance and Management, told lawmakers at the time that diverting sales tax money would remove lawmakers' discretion to use the revenue for funding increases to education, Medicaid providers or state employees.

Senate Majority Leader Jim Mehlhaff voted against SB 118 but told South Dakota Searchlight after Wednesday's meeting that he supports SB 245.

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"I don't love everything about it," Mehlhaff said, pointing specifically to the \$56 million it allocates in one-time money. "But I'm willing to support it to deliver some property tax relief."

The bill passed the House State Affairs Committee 11-2. It'll head to the House floor next. If it passes, the Senate would need to vote to accept the amendments.

County sales tax bill passes committee

SB 245 would result in up to 15% average reduction in property taxes per household across the state, South Dakota Bureau of Finance and Management Commissioner Jim Terwilliger told lawmakers on Wednesday.

Senate Bill 96, the governor's proposal to allow counties to set up to a half-percent sales tax, would add another reduction, depending on the county, Terwilliger said. Some counties, based on the governor's website outlining the proposal, could save more than 20% per household — as high as 35% in Bennett County.

Combined, the two bills make "a very, very powerful package," Terwilliger said. Savings would appear as a credit on property tax bills, he said.

Counties would be able to implement a new half-percent tax either by a vote of a county commission or a vote of the public.

Nathan Sanderson, executive director with the South Dakota Retailers Association, spoke against the bill, saying the organization prefers Senate Bill 245. Another member of the public, John Cunningham, said the bill provides more relief to wealthy homeowners, rather than low income renters or homeowners.

The bill passed 12-1 and heads to the House floor.

Effort caps assessment increases during five-year periods

House Bill 1253, introduced by Rep. Scott Odenbach, R-Spearfish, originally sought to require counties to use an eight-year market average to set taxable values for non-agricultural properties.

It was amended on Wednesday to cap annual increases at 5%. Currently, properties are assessed on market value annually. If the bill passed, homeowners would be protected from unpredictable increases in assessments each year. The bill would reset assessments at the market value of the property after five years.

The goal, Odenbach told members of the Senate Taxation Committee on Wednesday, is to prevent double-digit increases in property taxes seen in recent years and improve transparency in how mill levies that impact property taxes are set.

South Dakota Department of Revenue Secretary Mike Houdyshell spoke in support of the amended bill after opposing it earlier in the legislative session. Setting a reassessment period establishes a "catch up provision" to equalize properties, Houdyshell said, something other assessment cap bills proposed this session and last did not do.

Opponents included directors of equalization from across the state and representatives of farming and business groups. They said the bill would shift the property tax burden onto agricultural properties.

Pennington County Director of Equalization Shannon Rittberger said the change would cost thousands of dollars in software changes, and said he expects public outrage when assessments reset to market value, which could cause increases of more than 5% that year.

"I don't like this bill because I don't think it'll change property taxes," Rittberger said. "It'll move it around and it'll head toward that cliff."

Houdyshell said there are likely "mechanical and logistical" details that will need to be worked on before the bill can be signed by the governor.

The bill passed 5-2 and heads to the Senate floor.

Makenzie Huber is a lifelong South Dakotan who regularly reports on the intersection of politics and policy with health, education, social services and Indigenous affairs. Her work with South Dakota Searchlight earned her the title of South Dakota's Outstanding Young Journalist in 2024, and she was a 2024 finalist for the national Livingston Awards.

Ban on advertising, selling of abortion pills one vote away from governor's desk

BY: MEGHAN O'BRIEN

PIERRE — A bill to criminalize the sale or advertisement of “an article or thing” designed to perform an abortion is on its way to the South Dakota Senate.

The Senate State Affairs Committee voted 8-1 Wednesday to advance it. If it succeeds in the Senate, it will go to the governor's desk for final approval.

The bill would ban the administering, prescribing or obtaining “any medicine, drug, or substance” or using “any instrument or other means with intent thereby to procure an abortion,” unless there's “appropriate and reasonable medical judgment that performance of an abortion is necessary” to preserve the life of a pregnant woman.

Each violation would be a felony, punishable by two years in prison, a \$4,000 fine or both.

The bill, sponsored by Rep. John Hughes, R-Sioux Falls, comes after the state's attorney general asked a state judge to stop an advertising campaign. Last December, a New York-based nonprofit, Mayday Health, began putting up signs at gas pumps with links to information about abortion pills with the tagline “Pregnant? Don't want to be?”

“Gas stations and restrooms should stick to advertising condoms and not be used to advertise abortion pills to be delivered to South Dakotans,” Hughes told the committee. “This is reckless and dangerous commercial conduct.”

The bill would also empower the state's attorney general to sue a person or group that administers, prescribes or procures “any medicine, drug, or substance or uses or employs any instrument or other means with intent thereby to procure an abortion” for a person. A judge could issue \$10,000 fines for each violation.

South Dakota Republican Attorney General Marty Jackley and Ian Fury, a senior advisor to Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden also backed the bill.

Supporters said the pills are unsafe and that advertisements advocate that people do not seek in-person assistance or advice from physicians.

Mifepristone and misoprostol, commonly used in medication abortions, are also used for pain management and post-miscarriage care.

OBGYN Emma Bye said she struggles now to obtain those drugs for legal and standard procedures. This bill would restrict those drugs further.

“No patient, anywhere in our state should be going through a devastating miscarriage and be made to feel like a criminal, or that they are doing something unlawful while getting treatment for a miscarriage,” Bye said.

In the last twenty-four hours, Bye said she'd performed four separate procedures that used the would-be-banned medications or instruments.

“This bill will make it increasingly difficult to even access or have manufacturers be willing to even ship us needed instruments and medical equipment for fear of retribution,” Bye said.

The South Dakota State Medical Association also spoke against the bill, citing concerns that it would have a chilling effect on healthcare for pregnant people.

South Dakota lawmakers adopted an abortion trigger ban in 2005 that took effect in 2022, after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*. Abortions are prohibited in the state, unless the mother's life is threatened by a pregnancy. State lawmakers also passed legislation in 2022 banning “medical abortion by telemedicine.”

In 2023, medication abortions accounted for 63% of abortions in the country, according to data from the Guttmacher Institute. The drugs mifepristone and misoprostol, commonly used in medication abortions, are also listed on the World Health Organizations' list of essential medicines. Last year, the U.S. Supreme Court rejected an attempt by anti-abortion medical organizations to overturn the Food and Drug Administration's prescribing guidelines for mifepristone.

Earlier this year, a federal judge declined to intervene in the state's ongoing legal case against Mayday Health.

Meghan O'Brien is the audio reporter for South Dakota Searchlight where she covers the state government and its impact on South Dakotans. She's previously reported in Nebraska with a focus on health care and rural communities across the state.

US Senate rejects limits on Trump war powers, as Hegseth vows 'death and destruction' for Iran

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — Senate Republicans and a single Democrat blocked a War Powers Resolution Wednesday aimed at limiting President Donald Trump's joint war with Israel in Iran that has taken the lives of six American troops and killed top Iranian leaders.

The resolution failed 47-52, with Sen. Rand Paul, R- Ky., the only Republican to cosponsor the measure, joining Democrats in challenging Trump's war in Iran.

Sen. John Fetterman, D-Pa., was the lone Democrat to break with his party and vote against moving ahead with the measure.

The vote came five days after Trump ordered the military to join Israel in surprise strikes on Iran that killed its Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Pentagon officials say the administration does not plan to let up on the continuing offensive.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said earlier Wednesday that U.S. B-1, B-2 and B-52 aircraft, as well as Predator drones, will fly with Israeli airpower "day and night" to deploy "death and destruction from the sky all day long."

Republicans have largely fallen in line to support Trump's actions and have panned the War Powers Resolution that would compel the president to answer to Capitol Hill on moving forward in Iran.

Democrats assert Trump's war in Iran is illegal, violating the Constitution's Article I power given to Congress to declare war. Republicans maintain Trump acted well within war powers granted to the president in Article II of the Constitution.

'Members of the Senate, this is war'

The 1973 War Powers Resolution mandates the president report to Congress within 48 hours of deploying troops. If after 60 days from first notice Congress has not authorized a war or passed legislation related to the military action, the president's use of armed forces is automatically terminated.

Congress passed the act to rein in presidential war powers, despite a veto from President Richard Nixon amid the ongoing Vietnam War. Congress overrode the veto.

Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., said on the floor ahead of the vote that Republicans want "to give the president an easy pass around the Constitution."

"You can't stand up and say, this is one and done, and no troops are engaged in hostilities against Iran. Members of the Senate, this is war. The president of the United States has called it a war against Iran," said Kaine, who sits on the Senate Committee on Armed Services.

Kaine sponsored the War Powers Resolution alongside Paul.

Kaine said on the floor that during a classified briefing from the administration Tuesday, he asked officials if the recent pattern of military interventions in Venezuela and now Iran meant "that you believe you never need to come to Congress to wage war against anyone, anywhere."

"No one" refuted his point, he said.

Briefings for Congress

Administration officials briefed all members of Congress Tuesday, for the first time since the war began. Officials had briefed congressional leaders and intelligence committee heads.

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Sen. Gary Peters, D-Mich., who also sits on the Armed Services Committee, said ahead of the vote the Constitution "leaves no room for doubt that Congress, not the president, has the sole power to declare war."

"And that check is in place for a very important reason. Our founders did not want to place the immense power over whether or not to go to war in the hands of just one individual," Peters said.

Sen. Jim Risch, R-Idaho, said on the floor ahead of the vote the vast majority of presidents in American history "have ordered kinetic acts, just like President Trump has done, without going to Congress."

"This isn't new," said Risch, who chairs the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs.

Lindsey Graham again lauds Trump

In lengthy comments on the Senate floor prior to the vote, Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., praised Trump's decisions on Iran and argued the War Powers Resolution violates the Constitution.

"To my Democratic colleagues, what you're proposing will cause chaos for every commander-in-chief that follows," said Graham, a Trump ally who has been outspoken in support of the war all week.

Graham said if Congress wants to stop Trump's war in Iran, it can do so by cutting funding during the annual appropriations process.

"The president, as commander-in-chief, has the ability to use our armed forces to protect our nation. And Congress, if we disagree with that choice, has the ability to terminate the action, taking the money away, and that's the check and balance that was created a long time ago," Graham said.

Speaker Johnson says US not at war

The U.S. House is expected to take up the War Powers Resolution Thursday. Mike Johnson, R-La., told reporters multiple times this week he expects it to fail.

During a morning press conference, Johnson said he doesn't believe the military is "at war right now" and argued that Congress limiting the president's ability to continue attacking Iran "would put the country in serious harm."

Johnson brushed aside the possibility that Americans may vote Republicans out of power during November's midterm elections if the war drags on, especially without a formal authorization from Congress.

"I think they'll reward it politically, but if people get a bad taste in their mouth for what happened back here in the first part of the year in Iran, they just do," he said. "But we know, and history will record that we did the right thing."

Johnson added that he believes lawmakers voting against continued military action in Iran "would be a terrible, dangerous idea."

A War Powers Resolution to halt Trump's military actions in Venezuela narrowly failed in January in both the House and Senate.

Ground troops?

The White House maintains Iran rejected any negotiations with the U.S. on reining in its nuclear program, and that the objective of the war launched over the weekend is to destroy Iran's current weapons capacity and missile production, and "end their pathway to nuclear weapons," White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said Wednesday.

The press secretary said American ground troops are "not part of the current plan" but did not rule out that it's an option "on the table."

Leavitt denied any claims that the goal of the offensive is regime change, despite the killing of some of Iran's leaders.

Leavitt said during the press briefing that the U.S. bombing of Iran's nuclear facilities in June, dubbed Operation Midnight Hammer, "obliterated Iran's three major nuclear sites."

"Yet the terrorist Iranian regime has remained fully committed to rebuilding its nuclear program," she said.

Iranian authorities said in November the nation was no longer enriching uranium, according to The Associated Press. The AP further reported the reclusive government has blocked international inspectors

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from assessing its four nuclear enrichment facilities, citing a confidential report journalists viewed from the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Control of the skies, sinking a ship

Hegseth underlined Wednesday morning the U.S. will not slow down its offensive in Iran, already having struck 2,000 targets, and that more troops and airpower will arrive Wednesday.

The secretary said the U.S. and Israel will have "complete control of the Iranian skies" within a few days.

Hegseth also showed a video of an apparent U.S. submarine strike in the Indian Ocean on Iran's "prize ship," sinking it.

General Dan Caine, chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the submarine used a single torpedo to sink the ship — the first time a U.S. submarine has done so since World War II, he said.

U.S. Central Command wrote on social media that it had "struck or sunk to the bottom of the ocean" more than 20 Iranian regime ships.

The Pentagon cited a significant decrease in Iran's retaliatory strikes. The regime launched rockets and drones on civilian sites throughout the Persian Gulf states beginning Sunday, and on regional U.S. military bases.

Caine said to date, Iran's missile and drone strikes respectively dropped 86% and 73% from the first day of fighting.

A drone attack killed six U.S. troops Sunday at a commercial port in Kuwait, a U.S. ally.

Caine said the remains of the six U.S. soldiers will return to the U.S. "as soon as possible." The Pentagon publicly identified four late Wednesday, and Caine said the military will release the names of the other two troops killed "as soon as we can ensure that all of those families have been properly notified."

Leavitt said Trump will attend the transfer of the troops' remains upon arrival at Dover Air Force Base in Delaware.

Hegseth bashes media

Hegseth said the Pentagon moved 90% of U.S. troops out of the range of Iran's missile reach prior to the war.

"We've taken control of Iran's airspace and waterways without boots on the ground. We control their fate, but when a few drones get through or tragic things happen, it's front-page news. I get it. The press only wants to make the president look bad," he said.

Both Hegseth and Leavitt declined to provide details about a strike Saturday on an elementary school in southern Iran that local authorities said killed 168 people, many of them children.

"All I can say is that we're investigating that. We, of course, never target civilian targets," Hegseth said.

When pressed on whether it was a U.S. or Israeli munition that struck the school, Hegseth replied: "We're investigating it."

Jennifer Shutt contributed to this report.

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

Day after grilling by GOP senators, Noem has easier time with US House panel

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA

WASHINGTON — U.S. House Republicans spent a Wednesday oversight hearing with Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem blasting local governments for policies that limit immigration cooperation, while Democrats slammed her leadership of the department, saying it led to the deaths of two U.S. citizens in Minneapolis.

House Republicans were more friendly to Noem than GOP senators who on Tuesday pressed, and at times yelled at, her for her quick judgment in labeling those killed in Minneapolis — Renee Good, a poet and mother of three, and Alex Pretti, an intensive care unit nurse — as domestic terrorists. Senators were also critical of slow responses from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

At the House Judiciary Committee hearing, Chairman Jim Jordan of Ohio blamed the Biden administration for immigration policies Jordan said created a crisis and slammed local jurisdictions that decline to assist the federal government in immigration enforcement, often referred to as sanctuary cities.

He referred to that as “the dumbest policy I have ever heard,” and vowed that Congress would ban it.

During the nearly six-hour hearing, Noem said she agreed, and supported Republicans’ efforts to move forward with legislation to prevent states and local governments from resisting immigration enforcement.

“Illegal aliens that come into this country know where they can go where elected officials will protect them,” she said.

Republicans also criticized Democrats for refusing to approve funding for the Department of Homeland Security for fiscal year 2026 unless there are changes to immigration enforcement tactics. Democrats took a hard line on the issue following Pretti’s death in late January.

The House Wednesday voted 211-209 to advance a DHS funding bill. A final vote is expected Thursday.

‘Blankie’ left on jet

The top Democrat on the panel, Jamie Raskin of Maryland, took up a litany of issues with Noem, starting with a report from the Wall Street Journal that detailed how special government employee and top Noem adviser Corey Lewandowski fired a U.S. Coast Guard pilot after Noem’s blanket was left behind on a prior flight.

The pilot had to be rehired because no one else could fly the plane, according to the WSJ story.

“Apparently when your special blanket, your blankie, was left on one of the government jets and not transported over to the new one, your special government employee, Corey Lewandowski, chivalrously stepped forward to fire the pilot — mid-air,” Raskin said. “But then he had to be rehired immediately because there was no one else who could fly the two of you on the rest of the journey home.”

Noem denied the story.

Florida Democratic Rep. Jared Moskowitz, pressed Noem about multiple media reports that she currently has a romantic relationship with Lewandowski and raised concerns about how much authority Lewandowski has at the agency.

“You go off and you attack conservative women, and you say that we’re either stupid or we’re sluts,” Noem said, but did not answer if she was having an affair.

Moskowitz also said he got Noem a “new Coast Guard blankie” and held up a packaged blanket with the emblem of the Coast Guard.

FEMA problems

As in Tuesday’s Senate hearing, Noem was again grilled by a North Carolina lawmaker over delays in FEMA assistance, with Democratic Rep. Deborah K. Ross filling the role Wednesday.

Ross said that thousands of residents in western North Carolina are still waiting for Noem to approve additional FEMA funding that Congress provided in a separate disaster relief funding law after Hurricane

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Helene in 2024.

"These delays in paying out this desperately needed recovery funds are simply unacceptable, and you heard that from my Republican senator, (Thom) Tillis, yesterday," Ross said.

Ross slammed Noem for instituting a policy to require any FEMA contract costing more than \$100,000 to be approved by her first.

Ross said that policy "has contributed to many of these delays, creating a bottleneck, blocking reimbursement for hundreds of millions of dollars of disaster funding that stand directly between North Carolinians and that relief."

Noem blamed former President Joe Biden for not sending disaster relief money to the state, saying he "failed North Carolina," and that the state had received billions more under the Trump administration.

"Because we appropriated the money!" Ross shouted.

In late December 2024, Congress passed a separate disaster relief package that Biden signed into law in the final month of his term.

Minneapolis questions

Noem was pressed by Raskin about referring to Good and Pretti, both 37 years old and shot and killed by federal immigration agents, as domestic terrorists.

"I want to give you a chance before the entire country to correct your false and defamatory claim based on what you know today, Madam Secretary, were Renee Good and Alex Pretti domestic terrorists?" Raskin asked.

Noem did not answer repeated questions from Raskin if she believed Good and Pretti were domestic terrorists, but said "what happened in Minnesota in those two incidents was an absolute tragedy."

Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include immigration, congressional policy and legal challenges with a focus on how those policies impact the lives of immigrants and migrants coming to the U.S.

Governor relents, signs bill to pursue SNAP soda ban for South Dakota

Veto-proof majorities backed restrictions despite executive branch opposition

BY: JOHN HULT

PIERRE — South Dakota will move to ban the purchase of sugary drinks with food assistance benefits after Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden signed a bill he'd opposed into law in the face of its veto-proof support in both chambers of the South Dakota Legislature.

House Bill 1056 will require the state to seek a waiver from the federal government to remove sweetened beverages, with the exception of milk and some fruit juices, from the list of items that can be purchased through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

SNAP is a federal program for people with low incomes that delivers monthly benefits through cards that function like debit cards. Nearly any kind of consumable food or drink, save prepared foods and alcohol, is eligible for purchase through SNAP.

Proponents of banning the use of SNAP for sweetened drinks argued that program participants are often also covered by Medicaid, a federal health insurance program for those with low incomes or disabilities, and that the drinks contribute to health and dental problems taxpayers pay to treat. The cost of Medicaid is split between the state and federal government.

Under the waiver, SNAP benefits could still be used for milk and some fruit juices, but not for any other kind of sweetened beverage, including diet drinks or sports drinks like Gatorade and Powerade.

Rhoden opposed the ban as it moved through the state Senate and House of Representatives. The administrative costs associated with restricting soda purchases would be too high, he said. A fiscal note prepared by the Legislative Research Council said hiring the staff and paying for the software necessary to implement a ban would cost the state \$310,000 in the first two years, and about a quarter million dol-

lars annually thereafter, though representatives from Rhoden's office told lawmakers during committee hearings that the cost could be higher.

Other opponents, including the South Dakota Retailers Association, suggested some stores would opt out of accepting SNAP benefits in the face of administrative complications.

The bill's proponents said the state will easily recoup any losses by paying less in medical care for soda-related health problems.

The bill passed the House of Representatives 58-11 and passed the Senate 27-6. Both margins were higher than the two-thirds support necessary to override a gubernatorial veto.

In a news release announcing his decision to sign HB 1056 into law, Rhoden said he agrees "with the Legislature's and the Trump Administration's goal of encouraging healthier food choices."

"However, I disagree that a state waiver is the right approach. Lasting SNAP reform requires federal action, not a patchwork of state waivers," Rhoden's statement said.

Former President Joe Biden's administration had opposed waivers for state-level SNAP soda bans, but President Donald Trump's administration has signaled its intention to process them.

Rhoden pointed to the 2026 passage of a resolution by state lawmakers urging the federal government to review SNAP nutrition guidelines as evidence that "90% of the Legislature recognizes that SNAP reform must occur at the federal level." Seven of South Dakota's 101 lawmakers voted against the resolution.

Any federal action on SNAP would invalidate state-level waivers, Rhoden's press release said, and South Dakota will bear the administrative costs in the meantime.

"If the federal government finally does its job and fixes this problem, this law should be repealed to avoid more costs to South Dakota taxpayers," Rhoden said.

In a statement sent to South Dakota Searchlight, HB 1056's prime sponsor said she and her fellow lawmakers sent the right message on SNAP with their support for the bill.

"The Legislature passed this bill with veto-proof margins because the facts were clear and the need was urgent," said Rep. Taylor Rehfeldt, R-Sioux Falls. "Following the president's call for states to strengthen the integrity of the SNAP program and encourage healthier choices, lawmakers led to deliver a policy that promotes better outcomes and protects taxpayers, even though the governor opposed the effort every step of the way."

John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.

South Dakota lawmakers push bill criminalizing deepfakes nearer to governor's desk

Talk of political memes, concerns about overreach spur amendment in state House

BY: JOHN HULT

PIERRE — A bill from South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley to criminalize the creation or sharing of deepfakes was amended this week to more clearly define what constitutes nudity before it reaches Gov. Larry Rhoden's desk.

The amendment, added on the floor of the House of Representatives, came in response to concerns about unintended consequences.

Senate Bill 41 creates a class of felony crime for the creation or distribution of images digitally altered to depict a person in a state of nudity or involved in a sexually explicit act, commonly referred to as deepfakes.

In testimony in the House Judiciary Committee on Monday in Pierre, Jackley pointed to the case of Mark Rathbun, a former Division of Motor Vehicles employee who is accused of taking images of women and girls from state databases and creating sexual images.

"This is real, and it's something that we unfortunately are seeing happen in our state," Jackley said.

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The judiciary committee voted 8-3 to send the bill to the House floor but not before a discussion on its potential to criminalize political memes.

The bill's definition of nudity originally encompassed a partial state of nudity. Fort Pierre Republican Rep. Will Mortenson asked Jackley if that would include a fabricated topless photo. Jackley said yes. Then Mortenson asked if a fabricated image of Democratic Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker without a shirt, if shared by President Donald Trump on social media, would put the president in line for felony charges.

Jackley said a Pritzker image wouldn't qualify because Pritzker is male, but Mortenson pushed back.

He noted that partially nude fabrications would be a felony if done with the intent to "self-gratify or alarm, annoy, embarrass, harass, invade the privacy of, threaten, or cause emotional, financial, physical, psychological, or reputational harm to that individual."

Nothing in the bill specified that a person in a digitally fabricated topless image must be female.

"We just said that half-nude is a state of nudity, and so now he's shirtless, and the point of this is to embarrass this guy," Mortenson said of his topless Pritzker meme scenario.

Mortenson voted against the bill in committee but brought an amendment Tuesday to define nudity as inclusive of male or female genitalia, buttocks or the female nipple.

The amendment passed, but it did not address every concern about the bill.

Democratic Rep. Kady Wittman of Sioux Falls asked Jackley during the bill's committee hearing why he didn't use it to enhance penalties for people who film others in states of undress or participating in sexual activity against their will.

That behavior is a felony if it involves the recording of a minor, or if it happens repeatedly. The new penalties for deepfakes would be added to the same chapter of South Dakota law.

"Why is the first time hidden recording a misdemeanor generally, but a digitally fabricated image would automatically be a classified felony," said Wittman.

Jackley said he feels that the creation of digitally manipulated sexual images, even if they aren't shared, signals "significant criminal intent." He told South Dakota Searchlight after the committee meeting that he's open to addressing that issue, but that SB 41's primary purpose was to target deepfakes.

On the House floor, Wittman was one of two representatives to say the bill's felony penalties could be unnecessarily harsh in instances where young people make "a stupid decision" and create a deepfake.

"I feel like, in a lot of situations, this bill covers behavior that could be covered by a lower level of offense," Wittman said.

Supporters countered that the creation of fake nudes can do real psychological damage to real people, and that the state needs to clearly signal that doing so is a serious crime.

"It's only fun and games until it happens to you," said Rep. Mary Fitzgerald, R-St. Onge.

The bill passed the House 60-6. It now moves to the state Senate, which passed the bill 32-0 on Jan. 16. The Senate would need to approve the amended version of the bill before it could be delivered to Gov. Larry Rhoden to sign or veto.

John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.

Republicans stand by Trump's war against Iran, reject war powers role for Congress

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT AND ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — Republican lawmakers said Tuesday after classified briefings on Capitol Hill they don't intend to limit President Donald Trump's ability to continue the war in Iran, though some said sending in ground troops would be a step too far.

Democrats argued that military and administration officials shared no clear objectives or exit strategy

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for the war, making debate and a vote in Congress more important.

"When there is no set plan ... you end up with an endless war, you end up with mission creep, you end up with all kinds of problems," Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said. "What's really needed is a public debate so the American people, who already are very much against this, can see what we have seen."

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., said during an afternoon press conference before the briefing that he doesn't believe Congress needs to declare or authorize the war.

"No, I think the president has the authority that he needs to conduct the activities and the operations that are currently underway there," he said. "As you know, there's a lot of controversy around, questions around the War Powers Act. But I think the president is acting in the best interest of the nation and our national security interests by ensuring that he's protecting Americans and American bases and installations in that region, as well as those of our allies."

Lawmakers received closed-door briefings from Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Dan Caine, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Central Intelligence Agency Director John Ratcliffe.

Tim Kaine, Rand Paul push war powers vote

The Senate is expected to vote Wednesday on a War Powers Resolution co-sponsored by Virginia Democratic Sen. Tim Kaine and Kentucky Republican Sen. Rand Paul that would direct the administration "to remove the United States Armed Forces from hostilities within or against Iran, unless explicitly authorized by a declaration of war or a specific authorization for use of military force."

The House will vote later this week, likely Thursday, on a similar proposal from Kentucky Republican Rep. Thomas Massie and California Democratic Rep. Ro Khanna. Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., has said that effort doesn't have the support to take effect.

Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Roger Wicker, R-Miss., said as he was walking out of the afternoon briefing that the Trump administration will not rule out boots on the ground.

Wicker said he doesn't believe Congress would need to authorize U.S. troops in Iran, though he declined to answer a question about why he thinks the president holds the authority for a ground war not approved by lawmakers.

A report from the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service notes that while Article I, Section 8, Clause 11 of the Constitution grants Congress the power to declare war, that authority "has been heavily debated."

"The Supreme Court has observed that only Congress has the power to declare war, but the implications of this exclusive assignment are not well-settled," the report says. "In particular, the relationship between Congress's power to declare war and the President's war powers granted under Article II of the Constitution is the subject of significant disagreement."

'This is a massive operation and rapidly changing'

Louisiana Republican Sen. Bill Cassidy said he doesn't "think the American people want to see troops on the ground. I don't think that's the case. And although they left open that possibility, it seems not to be something they're emphasizing."

Missouri Republican Sen. Josh Hawley said he believes Congress would need to authorize U.S. troops on the ground in Iran, something he's unlikely to support.

"I find it difficult to imagine a scenario where I would," he said.

Hawley said the classified briefing left the impression the Trump administration's war in Iran will continue for some time.

"I think there'll be a lot more to come, because one of the things I took away from this is, this is a massive operation and rapidly changing," he said.

Alaska Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski said it "was an important briefing that we had today and it is a situation that is clearly evolving rapidly."

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North Dakota Republican Sen. John Hoeven declined to answer a question about whether he would support Trump sending U.S. troops into Iran.

"Well, again, that's an option, and if and when it would occur, we could deal with it at that point," he said. "But I think at this point, there's no indication of that."

Oklahoma Republican Sen. Markwayne Mullin said that Hegseth is "not going to limit any options to the president" when asked about the possibility of U.S. troops on the ground in Iran.

Mullin described the role Congress plays in authorizing the administration's offensive in Iran as "debatable."

"We're not going to take away the authority of the president of the United States to be able to be the commander-in-chief. ... We don't need 535 commanders," Mullin said.

Lindsey Graham 'never felt better about how this ends'

Arizona Democratic Sen. Mark Kelly, a retired Navy captain, said the level of interceptor stockpiles is a "big concern."

"We do not have an unlimited supply and the Iranians do have the ability to make a lot of Shahed drones, ballistic missiles, medium-range, short-range. And they've got a huge stockpile," Kelly said. "So at some point, we're probably already in this, this becomes a math problem. And how can we resupply air defense munitions? Where are they going to come from? How does that affect other theaters?"

The Trump administration pulling from the Indo-Pacific Command, for example, Kelly said, would leave troops in that region of the world "more vulnerable."

"We don't have an unlimited supply. They're shooting a lot of stuff," he said. "Certainly, the number has gone down somewhat over time. But the math on this currently seems to be an issue."

Senate Appropriations Committee ranking member Patty Murray, D-Wash., said the administration has yet to ask Congress to provide additional funding for the war.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., exited the briefing saying he "never felt better about how this ends."

Graham said he spoke with Arab leaders by phone earlier in the day and "they're going to get in the fight in a more direct way."

Graham also spoke directly to the cameras, in case Trump was watching, he said, to encourage the president to join Israel in bombing Iranian-backed Hezbollah fighters in Lebanon.

"Not only take the mothership of Iran down, also take the proxy of Hezbollah. Settle the score," Graham said.

Mike Johnson defends Trump constitutional authority

Johnson said Trump took advantage of "a narrow and unique opportunity" to attack Iran over the weekend, and that he was "well within his constitutional authority to do what he has done."

"We had counsel from the (Department of Justice) here tonight, who said very well, very clearly — fell just short of citing the specific case law — but explained that this has been the tradition for decades."

Johnson said the U.S. joint war with Israel in Iran has been "very effective thus far" and described the proposed War Powers Resolution as "dangerous."

The U.S. mission in Iran "needs to be completed," he said. "We don't need Congress getting in the way of that."

Rep. Nancy Mace, R-S.C., who sits on the House Armed Services Committee, said she is a "no for now" on the Wars Powers Resolution vote later this week.

"But if this thing goes beyond a few weeks, I'm going to have a lot more concerns," Mace said, adding that boots on the ground "would be a very different conversation."

"That's not where we are today. That's not what I heard in the briefing," Mace said, declining to provide more details from the classified meeting. "I feel very good and very confident about where we are roughly just over 100 hours into the strikes in this conflict."

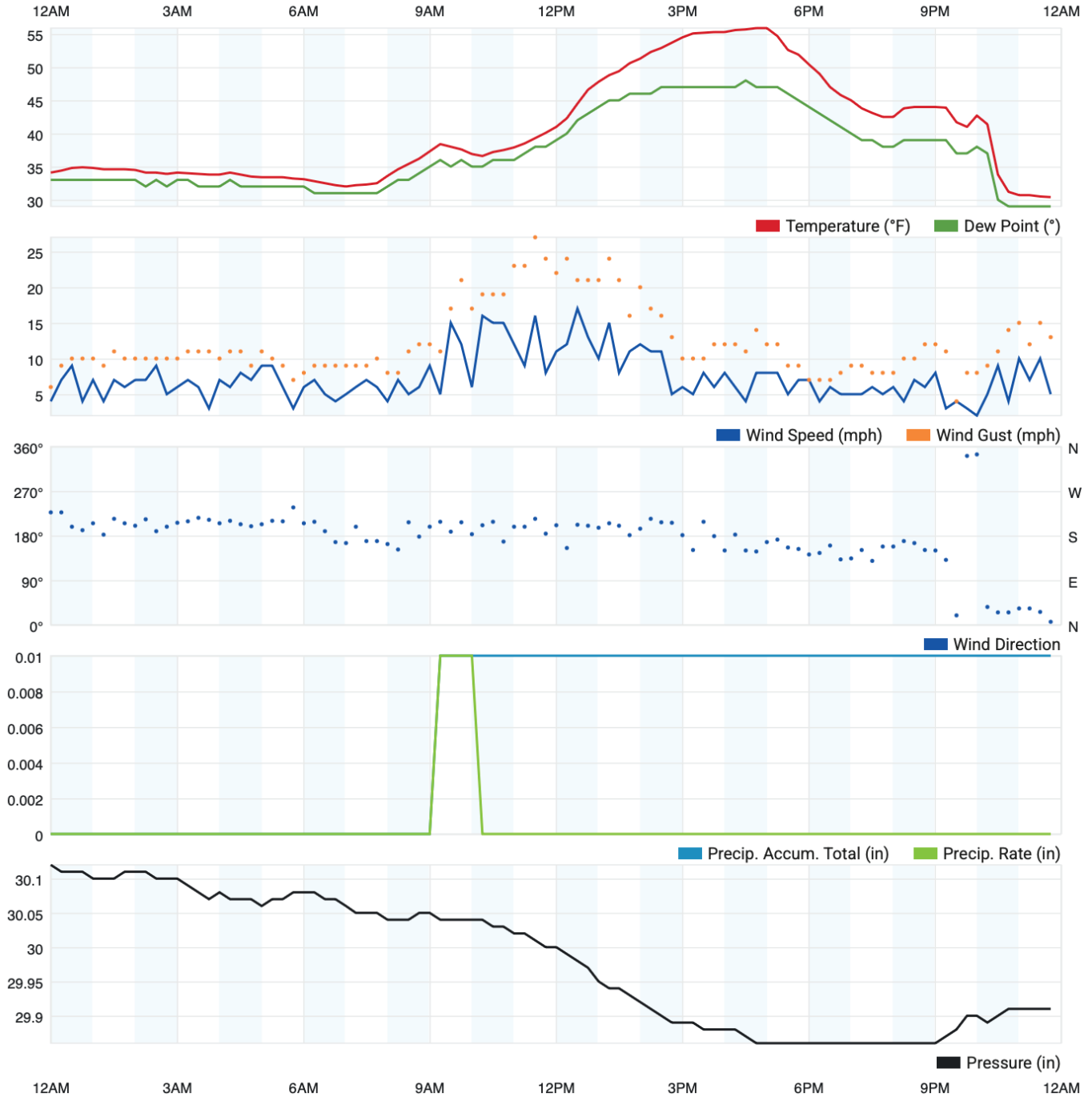
Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

March 4, 2026



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Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
High: 56 °F	Low: 30 °F	High: 32 °F	Low: 20 °F	High: 44 °F
Dense Freezing Fog and Areas Dense Fog then Partly Sunny	Chance Rain and Patchy Fog	Wintry Mix Likely and Patchy Blowing Snow	Chance Snow and Patchy Blowing Snow then Mostly Cloudy	Sunny

Wintry Weather Returns on Friday

Rain, Snow, and Freezing Rain All Possible

March 5, 2026 3:18 AM

Key Messages

- A storm system is expected to move into the area on Friday.
 - Rain, Snow, and Freezing Rain** will all be possible.
 - Eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota could see the most precipitation.
- There is still some uncertainty with this system!
 - Details such as the intensity and track of the low varies between models, therefore, low confidence on amounts, and changeover of rain to snow at this time.**
- Northerly winds gusting up to 35 mph are expected during this event, peaking in the afternoon over central South Dakota.
 - Patchy blowing snow is possible in areas of falling snow which may cause reductions to visibility at times.
- Be sure to stay up to date with the latest forecast for your area at weather.gov/abr.

Estimated Timing of Precipitation Types

	3/5 Thu		3/6 Fri						3/7 Sat				
	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am
Aberdeen	25%		35%	50%	50%	55%	55%	30%	30%				
Britton	25%	40%	30%	55%	60%	60%	60%	35%	35%				
Chamberlain	25%	45%	20%	60%	60%	70%	70%	50%	50%	15%	15%		
Clark	15%	25%	50%	40%	65%	65%	75%	75%	55%	55%	25%	25%	
Eagle Butte			15%	40%	40%	40%	40%						
Eureka	15%	15%	20%	35%	35%	40%	40%	15%	15%				
Gettysburg	20%	20%	20%	45%	45%	50%	50%	25%	25%				
McIntosh				20%	20%	20%	20%						
Milbank	20%	40%	45%	70%	70%	75%	75%	55%	55%	30%	30%		
Miller	20%	35%	35%	55%	55%	65%	65%	45%	45%				
Mobridge				30%	30%	35%	35%						
Murdo			15%	25%	60%	60%	70%	35%	35%				
Pierre	15%		20%	45%	45%	60%	60%	30%	30%				
Redfield	20%	20%	40%	60%	60%	65%	65%	45%	45%	15%	15%		
Sisseton	20%	35%	45%	60%	60%	70%	70%	40%	40%	20%	20%		
Watertown	20%	20%	45%	55%	70%	70%	75%	75%	55%	55%	30%	30%	
Webster	25%	40%	45%	65%	65%	70%	70%	45%	45%	20%	20%		
Wheaton			35%	45%	70%	70%	70%	45%	45%	25%	25%		

Legend: - Rain + (Green), - Fz Rain + (Purple), - Wintry Mix + (Orange), - Snow + (Blue)



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

A storm system will track across the area tonight through Friday night, with the potential for rain, freezing rain, and snow. There is uncertainty in the intensity of the low at this moment. Therefore, there is lower confidence in precipitation amounts and the timing of the changeover from rain to freezing rain to snow.

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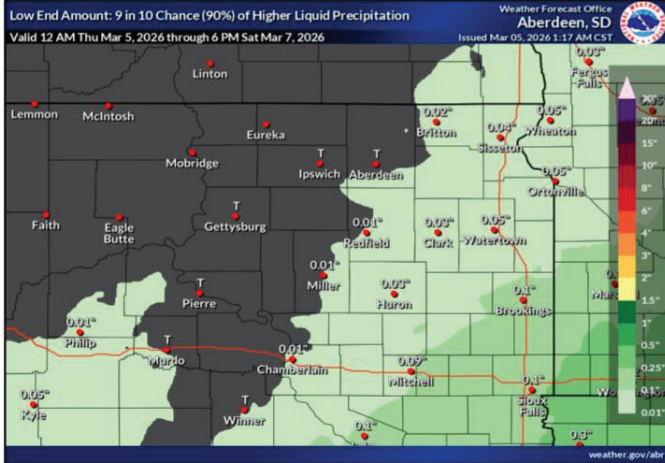
Friday Precipitation Scenarios

March 5, 2026
3:22 AM

Change from rain to snow expected, with the potential for freezing rain or a wintry mix in between.

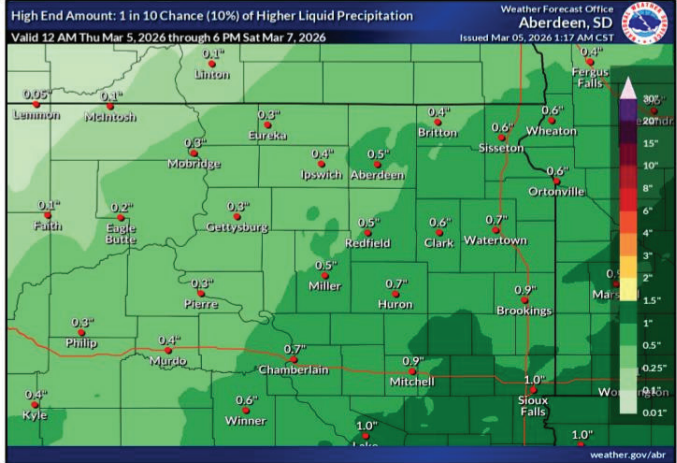
Factors Favoring Lower End Rain Amounts

- An eastern, shift of the storm track or weaker low pressure system would place less precipitation in our region.
- Any eastern shift could cause an earlier transition to snow and less freezing rain.



Factors Favoring Higher End Rain Amounts

- A western shift of the storm track or stronger low pressure system would place more precipitation in our region.
- Any western shift could cause a later transition to snow and more freezing rain.



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

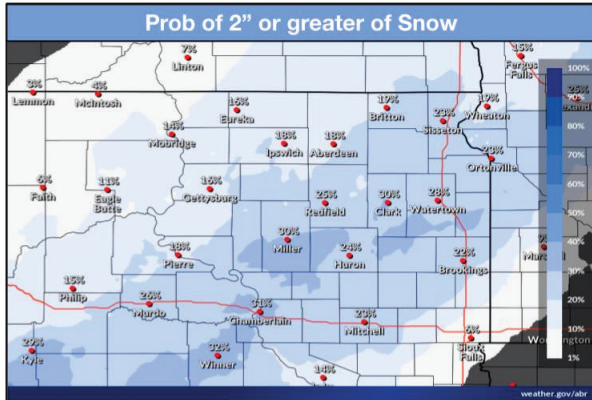
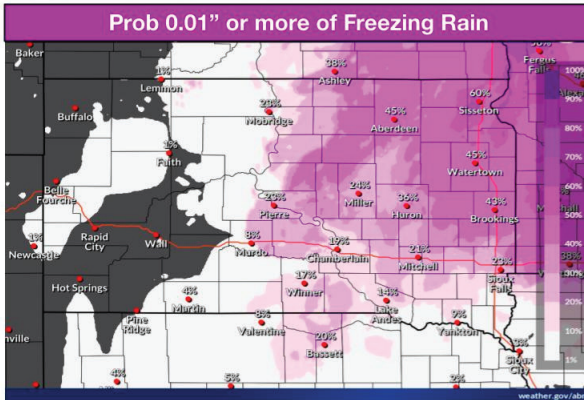
There is uncertainty in the precipitation amounts and transition in type from this system depending on where the storm tracks and the intensity of the low pressure system. If the low is weaker or the storm track shifts east, then there will be less precipitation over the region with an earlier transition to snow and less freezing rain possible. On the other hand, if the low is stronger or there is a western shift in the storm track, then there will be more precipitation with a later transition to snow and more freezing rain.



Probability of Freezing Rain and Snow Amounts

March 5, 2026
3:23 AM

Change from rain to snow expected, with the potential for freezing rain or a wintry mix in between.



- While amounts are still somewhat uncertain eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota could see higher amounts.
- Be sure to stay up to date with the latest forecast for your area, as precipitation totals may change significantly with each forecast update.
- **Freezing rain and snow may make roads slippery and travel difficult!** Use caution if you are traveling on Friday!



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Groton Daily Independent

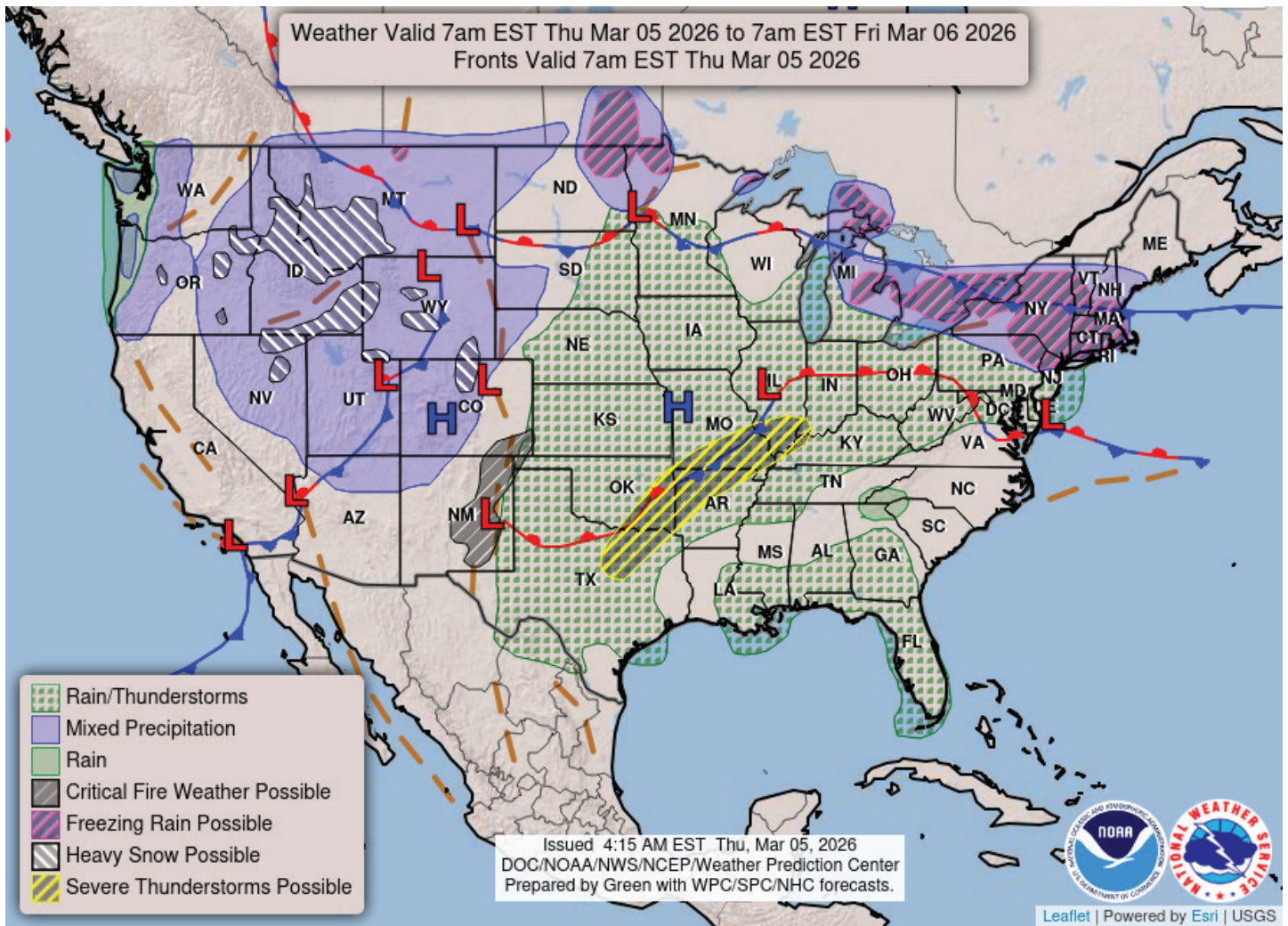
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 56 °F at 4:49 PM
Low Temp: 30 °F at 11:21 PM
Wind: 28 mph at 11:31 AM
Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 74 in 2000
Record Low: -22 in 1919
Average High: 36
Average Low: 14
Average Precip in Mar.: 0.12
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 1.29
Precip Year to Date: 1.33
Sunset Tonight: 6.24 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:01 am



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Today in Weather History

March 2-5th, 1966: The historic blizzard of 1966, which started on March 2nd, ended in the Dakotas. North Dakota saw severe livestock losses, with an estimated 18,500 cattle, 7,500 sheep, and 600 hogs killed. On a farm in eastern North Dakota, 7,000 turkeys perished. The total damage to livestock was estimated at nearly \$4 million. In South Dakota, an estimated 50,000 cattle, 46,000 sheep, and 1,800 hogs were killed by this storm. Most of the deaths occurred in the state's central and northern parts.

1960 — Eastern Massachusetts greatest March snowstorm of record began to abate. The storm produced record 24 hour snowfall totals of 27.2 inches at Blue Hill Observatory, 17.7 inches at Worcester, and 16.6 inches at Boston. Winds gusted to 70 mph. (3rd-5th) (The Weather Channel)

1962 — A tremendous storm raged along the Atlantic coast. The great Atlantic storm caused more than 200 million dollars property damage from Florida to New England. Winds along the Middle Atlantic Coast reached 70 mph raising forty foot waves, and as much as 33 inches of snow blanketed the mountains of Virginia. The Virginia shoreline was rearranged by historic tidal flooding caused by the combination of the long stretch of strong onshore winds and the Spring Tides. (David Ludlum)

1987 — A storm in the western U.S. produced heavy rain and high winds in California. Up to six inches of rain soaked the San Francisco Bay area in 24 hours, and winds gusted to 100 mph at the Wheeler Ridge Pumping Plant near the Tehachapi Mountains. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — While snow blanketed eastern Kansas and northern Oklahoma, eight cities in North Dakota reported new record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 61 degrees at Bismarck ND was 27 degrees warmer than that at Chanute KS. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 — Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the southeastern U.S. A strong (F-2) tornado killed one person and injured six others in Heard County GA. A strong (F-3) tornado injured 23 persons and caused more than five million dollars damage around Grantville GA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 — Thunderstorms over eastern Colorado, developing ahead of a major storm system, produced up to three inches of small hail around Colorado Springs in the late morning and early afternoon. Strong thunderstorms swept through southeastern sections of the Denver area during the evening hours. These strong thunderstorms also produced up to three inches of small hail, along with wind gusts to 50 mph, and as much as 2.4 inches of rain. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



Daily Devotion

God Is Sovereign Over Delays

Trust God while you wait—He hasn't forgotten you.

Proverbs 16:9: 9 The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.

No one likes to wait, but have you ever wondered why? Perhaps it's because delays show us that we are not in control. Someone or something else is calling the shots. Although we may be able to identify the immediate cause—like a traffic light or the long checkout line—ultimately the One who controls all our delays is the Lord. He is sovereign over everything in heaven and on earth; our time and schedules are in His hands.

This means that in every delay, we are actually waiting for God in some way. You might have thought that the expression "waiting upon the Lord" applies only to seeking His guidance or an answer to prayer. But it can mean so much more when you remember that He controls all your day-to-day inconveniences and frustrations.

In the Christian life, learning to wait is important because until you do, you'll struggle to walk in obedience to God, have an effective prayer life, or experience the peace of resting in His loving sovereignty. We must learn to trust His judgment—in all things (Psalm 27:14).

The next time you have to wait, remember that it comes as no surprise to God. He wants to use those moments to teach you patience and increase your faith.

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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.04.26

12 13 36 39 58 3

TOP PRIZE:
\$1,000,000/year

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 42 Mins 14 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.03.26

7 21 53 54 62 16

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$496,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 27 Mins 14 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.04.26

33 38 39 47 51 7

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$17,080,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 42 Mins 13 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.04.26

2 18 22 30 32

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 57 Mins 13 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.04.26

5 10 26 53 59 6

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 26 Mins 13 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.04.26

7 14 42 47 56 6

Power Play: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$35,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 26 Mins 13 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Harper's 22 lead Oral Roberts over UMKC in Summit League Tournament 84-62

By The Associated Press undefined

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Ty Harper had 22 points in Oral Roberts' 84-62 win over Kansas City on Wednesday night in the first round of the Summit League Tournament.

The eighth-seeded Golden Eagles will face top-seeded North Dakota State in a Thursday quarterfinal.

Harper also contributed three steals for the Golden Eagles (10-22). Martins Kilups added 17 points and six rebounds. Connor Dow finished with 16 points.

Jayson Petty finished with 14 points for the Roos (4-27). No. 9 seed UMKC also got 11 points, six rebounds, two steals and two blocks from Chris Dockery. Trey Booker-Lowery finished with nine points. The Roos extended their losing streak to 14 in a row.

Harper scored 18 points in the first half to help put them up 44-21 at the break. Oral Roberts pulled away with a 12-3 run in the second half to extend a 20-point lead to 29 points.

The Associated Press created this story using technology provided by Data Skrive and data from Sportradar.

Iran launches new attacks, saying US will 'bitterly regret' sinking warship, calls for Trump's blood

By JON GAMBRELL, DAVID RISING, ELENA BECATOROS and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran launched a new wave of attacks Thursday morning at Israel, American bases and countries around the region, threatening that the United States would "bitterly regret" torpedoing an Iranian warship in the Indian Ocean and calling for "Trump's blood," while Israel said it hit multiple targets in Iran.

Israel announced multiple incoming missile attacks and air sirens sounded in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Iranian state television said additional strikes also targeted U.S. bases.

The Israeli military said it had hit 80 targets in Lebanon linked to the Iranian-backed Hezbollah militant group over the past 24 hours and that a wave of strikes on Iran had hit long range ballistic missile launch sites and other targets.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi accused the U.S. Navy of committing an "an atrocity at sea" for sinking the Iranian frigate IRIS Dena in the Indian Ocean, which killed at least 87 Iranian sailors.

"Mark my words: The U.S. will come to bitterly regret (the) precedent it has set," he said on social media.

Ayatollah Abdollah Javadi Amoli, in one of the few clerical statements so far from Iran, later called on state television for the shedding of both Israeli and "Trump's blood."

"Fight the oppressive America, his blood is on my shoulders," he said in a rare call for violence from an ayatollah, one of the highest ranks within the clergy of Shiite Islam.

The U.S. and Israel launched the war Saturday, targeting Iran's leadership and killing Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, as well as hitting its missile arsenal and nuclear facilities. Leaders have suggested toppling the government is a goal, but the exact aims and timelines have repeatedly shifted, signaling an open-ended conflict.

The war has killed more than 1,000 people in Iran, more than 70 in Lebanon and around a dozen in Israel, according to officials in those countries. It has disrupted the supply of the world's oil and gas, snarled international shipping and stranded hundreds of thousands of travelers in the Middle East.

Threats expanding across the Middle East

A drone crashed Thursday near the airport in Nakhchivan, an Azerbaijan exclave bordering the north of

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Iran that is separated from the rest of the country by Armenia. Another drone fell near a school and two civilians were injured, Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry said.

Iran has not acknowledged targeting Azerbaijan, but its attacks since the start of the war have spread erratically and involved regional countries and beyond.

Qatar evacuated residents near the U.S. Embassy in Doha as a temporary precaution Thursday and later reported a missile attack on the city. Saudi Arabia said it destroyed a drone in its province bordering Jordan.

A tanker apparently came under attack off the coast of Kuwait early Thursday, expanding the area where commercial shipping was in danger, according to the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations Center run by the British military. It said there was an explosion but did not offer a cause. Iran in the past has attacked ships by attaching limpet mines to them.

Prior attacks since fighting began Saturday have happened in the Gulf of Oman and the Strait of Hormuz, which connects it to the Persian Gulf and through which about a fifth of the world's oil is shipped.

U.S. stocks rebounded Wednesday after oil prices stopped spiking and reports gave encouraging updates on the American economy. But oil prices resumed their ascent early Thursday and Brent crude, the international standard, is now up some 15% from the start of the conflict as Iranian attacks have disrupted traffic through the strait.

Iranian warship sunk on way home from multinational exercises

The Iranian ship sunk by the U.S. Navy was on its way back from participating in a February exercise hosted by the Indian navy. The U.S. Navy also participated in the same exercise with a P-8A Poseidon aircraft, which is employed for anti-submarine and anti-surface warfare as well as surveillance and reconnaissance.

Sri Lankan authorities said 32 crew members were rescued, while its navy recovered 87 bodies.

Araghchi said it had been carrying "almost 130" crew.

U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth confirmed Wednesday that an American submarine had sunk the ship with a torpedo.

Israel says it hits more Hezbollah targets in Lebanon

U.S. and Israeli military officials say launches from Iran have declined as their attacks have taken out ballistic missiles, launchers and drones. Israel's Homefront Command announced it was easing restrictions that closed workplaces nationwide, which could reopen Thursday if there is a shelter nearby. Schools would remain closed.

Still, explosions sounded early Thursday in Israel, which said its defensive systems were moving to intercept at least three waves of Iranian missiles.

At least 1,045 people have been killed in Iran, the country's Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs said Wednesday. Eleven people have died in Israel. Six U.S. troops have been killed, including a major whose identity was released Wednesday.

Among the 80 targets in Lebanon that the Israel military said it hit over the past 24 hours were "several command centers" used by Hezbollah in Beirut. It showed video footage of a building being hit, but provided no further details.

Another eight people were killed in Lebanon, including two in a building struck by the Israeli military in the Beddawi refugee camp in the coastal city of Tripoli on Thursday and three on a coastal highway, authorities said. The Israeli military did not immediately say who it targeted in the strikes.

In two near-simultaneous Israeli drone strikes in Beirut's southern suburbs late Wednesday, two vehicles were hit, killing three people and wounding six, the health ministry said. The Israeli military said it targeted a Hezbollah member, adding that further details would follow.

US and Mideast countries seek Kyiv's drone expertise as Russia-Ukraine talks put on ice

By ILLIA NOVIKOV and HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The United States and its allies in the Middle East are seeking Ukraine's expertise in countering Iran's Shahed drones, according to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Various countries, including the United States, have approached Ukraine for help in defending against the Iranian drones, Zelenskyy said late Wednesday. He said he has spoken in recent days with the leaders of the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Jordan and Kuwait about possible cooperation.

Russia has fired tens of thousands of Shaheds at Ukraine since it invaded its neighbor just over four years ago. Iran has responded with the same type of drones to joint U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iranian targets.

Ukrainian assistance in countering Iranian drones will be provided only if it does not weaken Ukraine's own defenses, and if it adds leverage to Kyiv's diplomatic efforts to stop the Russian invasion, according to the Ukrainian leader.

"We help to defend from war those who help us, Ukraine, bring a just end to the war" with Russia, Zelenskyy said.

The Iran war, now in its sixth day, has drawn international attention away from Europe's biggest conflict since World War II, and forced the postponement of a new round of U.S.-brokered talks between Russia and Ukraine planned for this week, Zelenskyy said.

Western governments and analysts say the Russia-Ukraine war has killed hundreds of thousands of people, while there is no sign that yearlong U.S.-led peace efforts will stop the fighting any time soon.

"Right now, because of the situation around Iran, there are not yet the necessary signals for a trilateral meeting," Zelenskyy said. "But as soon as the security situation and the overall political context allow us to resume that trilateral diplomatic work, it will be done."

Oleksandr Merezhko, the head of Ukraine's parliamentary foreign affairs committee, said Russian President Vladimir Putin is trying to drag out the negotiations so that he can press on with Russia's invasion while escaping further U.S. sanctions.

He urged the U.S. administration to look at the Russia-Ukraine war and the war in the Middle East as linked.

"In reality, Russia and Iran are close allies that act in concert — Iran supplies weapons and Russia helps Iran develop its defense industry. These are interconnected conflicts," Merezhko told The Associated Press.

Ukraine's army has recently pushed back Russian forces at some points along the roughly 1,250-kilometer (750-mile) front line, according to the Institute for the Study of War.

Localized Ukrainian counterattacks liberated more territory than Ukrainian forces lost in the last two weeks of February, the Washington-based think tank said this week, estimating the recovered land at about 257 square kilometers (100 square miles) since Jan. 1.

World shares are mixed as oil prices climb higher and Iran launches new attacks

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

BANGKOK (AP) — World shares advanced Thursday, while U.S. futures slipped as Iran launched more missiles at Israel on the sixth day of the war in the Middle East.

The future for the Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 0.2%. The S&P 500 future was down 0.1%.

Uncertainty about the war in the Middle East has been rattling financial markets, with most taking their cues from what the price of oil is doing.

"Yesterday's bounce in risk assets already looks less like a turning point and more like a classic relief rally in a market that briefly inhaled before realizing the room was still on fire," Stephen Innes of SPI Asset Management said in a commentary.

Crude prices climbed early Thursday, with Brent, the international standard, gaining 1.8% to \$82.87 per

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barrel. U.S. benchmark crude jumped 2.1% to \$76.31 per barrel.

The war brought a fresh wave of attacks by Iran on Israeli and American bases. Iran warned the United States would "bitterly regret" torpedoing an Iranian warship in the Indian Ocean and a religious leader called for "Trump's blood," while Israel said it had begun a "large-scale" attack on Tehran.

In Germany, the DAX regained lost ground, rising 0.2% to 24,253.24, while the CAC 40 in Paris was up 0.3% to 8,194.80. Britain's FTSE 100 added 0.4% to 10,609.63.

In Asian trading, South Korea's Kospi took back much of its historic losses from a day earlier, jumping 9.6% to 5,583.90. It had gained as much as 12% earlier in the day as investors hunted bargains, triggering temporary trading halts.

The government announced emergency measures for the economy after the benchmark fell by the most ever in a single day on Wednesday. President Lee Jae Myung urged officials to activate an emergency financial package worth 100 trillion won (\$68.5 billion) aimed at calming market volatility.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 index gave back some early gains, closing 1.9% higher at 55,278.06.

In Hong Kong, the Hang Seng climbed 0.3% to 25,321.34 after Chinese Premier Li Qiang opened the annual session of the National People's Congress with a report that set the annual target for economic growth this year at 4.5% to 5%. A draft budget put the increase in military spending at 7%, down from 7.2% in recent years.

The government pledged to support the sluggish domestic economy and spur more consumer spending, but did not announce any major new stimulus.

The Shanghai Composite index gained 0.6% to 4,108.57.

In Australia, the S&P/ASX 200 rose 0.4% to 8,940.30, while New Zealand's benchmark rose 0.6%.

Taiwan's main share index gained 2.6%.

On Wednesday, U.S. stocks got a boost as oil prices steadied, albeit temporarily. A report that said growth for U.S. businesses in the real estate, finance and other services industries accelerated last month at the fastest pace since the summer of 2022 also helped.

The S&P 500 rose 0.8%, erasing much of its losses since the war with Iran began. The Dow industrials added 0.5% and the Nasdaq composite climbed 1.3%.

Another report suggested U.S. private sector employers stepped up hiring last month, a potentially hopeful signal for a more comprehensive U.S. government Friday about the overall job market.

Investors are worried over how long the war with Iran could last, how high inflation may go because of more expensive oil and how much damage that might do to corporate profits.

Wall Street also got a lift from Big Tech stocks as Amazon rose 3.9% and Nvidia added 1.7%. Because they're among the biggest stocks in the U.S. market in terms of total value, their movements carry more weight on the S&P 500.

Wednesday's strong reports on the economy were welcome news for the Federal Reserve, whose job it is to keep the U.S. job market healthy and inflation low. The Fed's job has become more difficult because of the jump in oil prices, which is pushing upward on already high inflation.

In other dealings early Thursday, the U.S. dollar rose to 157.16 Japanese yen from 157.07 yen. The euro fell to \$1.1623 from \$1.1636.

The dollar has advanced against other currencies partly because the U.S. is viewed as facing less risk from the war than other countries, analysts said.

"When the world becomes less certain, capital gravitates toward the deepest pool of liquidity available," Innes said, adding that the dollar "remains the market's preferred storm shelter."

China sets a lower economic growth target of 4.5% to 5% for 2026 as challenges loom

By KEN MORITSUGU and CHAN HO-HIM Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China has signaled continuity rather than change for its economy, setting a slightly lower target for growth this year in the midst of a property slump and other headwinds at home and growing uncertainty abroad.

Premier Li Qiang announced a target of 4.5% to 5% annual growth in his report presented to the opening session of this year's meeting of the National People's Congress. That compares to actual 5% growth last year and a target of about 5% in the three years before. It's the lowest growth target since 1991.

"While recognizing our achievements, we are also clear-eyed about the difficulties and challenges we face," Li said, reading much of the 35-page report in a more than hourlong address.

Experts say the lower target is in line with longer-term goals that are less focused on high growth rates.

"GDP targets in recent years have become less important than before because the overarching, and most important political priority has shifted from promoting economic development to so-called 'high-quality development,'" said Xin Sun, a senior lecturer in Chinese and East Asian business at King's College London.

The government is striving to balance two goals: reviving the flagging economy by boosting domestic spending, while also furthering leader Xi Jinping's ambitions to build China into a global power in AI, robotics and other advanced technologies — and one that is not dependent on the U.S. or others for high-end semiconductors and other components.

China faces "a grave and complex landscape"

In its draft budget for 2026, the government also trimmed China's annual increase in defense spending to 7%, down from 7.2% in recent years. The nearly 3,000-member Congress, a largely ceremonial body that endorses policies set by Communist Party leaders, is due to approve the annual report and budget at its closing session next week, along with a five-year plan setting policy priorities until 2030.

China is grappling with tariff wars and actual wars. Like much of Asia, it depends heavily on oil and natural gas from the Middle East, and the war in that region has driven up prices and threatened supplies.

The report said that free trade is under severe threat, noting rising geopolitical risks. At home, it highlighted an "acute" imbalance between strong manufacturing supply and weak demand and the challenge of shifting to new drivers of growth.

"Rarely in many years have we encountered such a grave and complex landscape, where external shocks and challenges were intertwined with numerous domestic difficulties and tough choices," Li said in his report.

Boosting consumption will take time

With the domestic economy in the doldrums, China has maintained growth by exporting. Its trade surplus surged to a record of nearly \$1.2 trillion last year, though exports to the U.S. fell after President Donald Trump sharply raised tariffs. But the growth in exports to other countries has met pushback from governments worried about their own industries and workers.

Li pledged to improve living standards and boost consumer spending, which has lagged as Chinese have tightened their belts, feeling the pinch from a property slump weighing on home prices that has wiped out hundreds of thousands of jobs.

Nonetheless, in line with the government's approach in recent years, the annual report Thursday indicated it would continue to support domestic demand but not unleash any major new stimulus to boost growth. "Beijing continues to prioritize strengthening industrial self-reliance over boosting household consumption," said Neil Thomas, a China politics expert at the Asia Society Policy Institute.

The report said the government would issue 250 billion yuan (\$36 billion) in bonds for rebates to consumers who trade-in cars, appliances and other products for new ones. City-specific policies to control new housing supply and reduce unsold properties will be used to stabilize the property market, Li said.

He Meiru, a real estate agent in southern China, said he's lucky if he completes one deal every two months. His monthly income is hovering around 10,000 yuan (\$1,400) — less than a third of five years ago. "It's been a tough period for many — jobs are hard to find, people don't have money," he said.

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Apart from a property market recovery, social welfare spending and improved job security are needed to get families to spend more of their savings, said Ecaterina Bigos of AXA Investment Managers.

"Reviving domestic demand is key for sustained long-term growth," she said. "However, redirecting China toward higher levels of domestic consumption will take time."

China has purged its military leadership

The increase in defense spending to 1.9 trillion yuan (\$270 billion) comes against the backdrop of a widespread purge of military officials over corruption charges.

Analysts believe the dismissals are meant both to reform and modernize the military and to ensure Communist Party control over the People's Liberation Army. Nine military officers were among 19 delegates dismissed from the National People's Congress ahead of this year's meeting.

This year's report to the Congress repeated the government's commitment to "the Party's absolute leadership over the people's armed forces." Then it added a new line: "Guided by the principle of ensuring political loyalty in the military, we will continue to improve military political conduct."

Knitting for healing, one stitch at a time

By EVELYNE MUSAMBI Associated Press

THIKA, Kenya (AP) — When Mary Mwangi got her cancer diagnosis, she imagined death would follow shortly. She did not expect that her hobby of knitting, which she took up while recovering, would affect the lives of thousands of breast cancer survivors.

She now makes knitted prostheses for other breast cancer survivors in Kenya who who have had an entire breast removed, known as a mastectomy, without the reconstructive surgery common in higher-income countries.

Women say the affordable prostheses are a relief in Kenya where, as in most countries, breast cancer is the most diagnosed cancer among women. On average, 6,000 cases are diagnosed annually in Kenya, where 40% of the population lives below the poverty line.

'My dignity was restored'

Mwangi began in 2017 by knitting hats and scarves, then met a woman who was knitting a prosthesis.

Now, in her shared tailor shop in Thika, outside the capital of Nairobi, Mwangi shares her knowledge with other women, calling her group the New Dawn Cancer Warriors. Some make money from the art, while others use it as an outlet whenever they are overwhelmed by the grief of losing a breast.

"Knitting takes you through a process of healing. Once you are not thinking about your disease, you are positive and that positive mind helps you, because healing starts from your mind," she said.

For Nancy Waithera, a high school science teacher, meeting Mwangi before her surgery aided her recovery as she bought the prosthesis and started to picture life without one breast.

When she was diagnosed with breast cancer, "everything turned dark." Her husband had recently died, and the diagnosis crushed her further.

But her meeting with Mwangi restored hope, and after surgery she looked forward to her incision healing so she could try on the knitted prosthesis.

On the first day of wearing it, when she was going to church, "I felt like Nancy had come back," she said. "My ego was restored. My dignity was restored."

Filling a bra with clothing

Cancer remains a huge burden in developing countries like Kenya due to the high cost of treatment. Just over 50% of breast cancer patients in Kenya present with an advanced stage of the disease at diagnosis, according to the health ministry, which is working on standardizing early detection.

Mwangi's knitted prostheses cost \$10 per breast, or one-sixth of the price of silicone ones in Kenya. Her group of women knit and sell them to organizations that donate to cancer survivors who cannot afford to buy them. Together, they have sold more than 600 pieces in the last three years.

The yarn-knitted prostheses are filled with the kind of fiber used in pillows. Women said it feels gentle on their skin.

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Hannah Mugo, a housewife and mother, said she was lucky to upgrade from filling her bra with clothes, which left her looking rather unbalanced, to donning a knitted prosthesis filled with fiber that boosted her confidence.

"I used to stay indoors because I didn't want people to label me as the 'woman with one breast,'" Mugo said. She met Mwangi and learned how to knit, not just for herself but for sale as well.

'There is life after cancer'

Experts say hobbies and support groups play a critical role in healing and recovery for cancer patients. Breast cancer survivor Eglah Wambui, who also knits with Mwangi, recalled that a woman she met during her treatment killed herself due to what doctors said was depression.

"Knitting is therapeutic and helps take away my thoughts," said the mother of two.

Surgeon Daniel Ojuka, who has seen some of the donated prostheses at the Kenyatta National Hospital cancer treatment center, said having a plan for life after surgery and a supportive community makes recovery "significantly easier."

Ojuka said having a mastectomy is the cheapest option for Kenyan women diagnosed with breast cancer, and reconstructive surgery for the affected breast is out of reach for many. It is not covered by the national health insurance system.

Even though surgeons prepare patients to wake up after surgery with a flat chest, the loss is deeply affecting, he said. He has watched patients weep after waking.

For Mwangi, cancer no longer feels like a death sentence. She said she is determined to train more women to knit the prostheses while keeping their hope alive.

"There is life after cancer, and cancer is not a death sentence, because I'm a living testimony," she said.

Voting peaceful in first Nepal election since September youth-led protests

By BINAJ GURUBACHARYA Associated Press

KATHMANDU, Nepal (AP) — Voting was peaceful Thursday in Nepal's first nationwide election since a violent, youth-led uprising forced the government from power in September.

Security forces patrolled streets and guarded polling stations across the Himalayan nation of about 30 million people as voters lined up to cast their ballots. Vote counting is set to begin later Thursday, with results expected over the weekend.

Campaigning and voting through Thursday had not been disrupted by any incidents of violence, officials said.

"There is huge excitement about this election among the people, and we anticipate the voter turnout to be at least 65%," Nepal's acting chief election commissioner Ram Prasad Bhandari said.

Authorities banned vehicles from the streets and prohibited political rallies and public gatherings. All forms of campaigning are barred on election day.

People crowded polling stations from the mountains in the north to the southern plains districts. At the main square in capital city Kathmandu, men and women stood in separate lines under the warm spring sun while police officers and soldiers maintained a tight security presence around the area.

"I came to vote mainly because of the protest and so many people gave their lives in the hope of a change, in hope of seeing better Nepal," said Luniva, a first-time voter. "Hopefully, I want to see my country become better by all the sacrifices that have been made."

Others shared similar hopes that the election could usher in positive change for the Himalayan nation after months of political unrest.

"I felt someone I am able to fulfill and responsibility as a person and a citizen because each of our votes matters," said Sanjiya Shrestha, who walked to the polling station despite being visually impaired.

Young voters joined older generations at polling stations across the country, with many lining up even before voting began at 7 a.m.

There are about 19 million registered voters among the country's nearly 30 million people, according to

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the Election Commission of Nepal.

Millions of Nepalis living overseas are unable to take part in the vote. An estimated 3 million citizens work abroad — largely in the Middle East, Southeast Asia and neighboring India — and cannot cast ballots because the country does not yet have a system allowing voting from abroad.

Voters are directly electing 165 members to the House of Representatives, the lower chamber of Parliament. The remaining 110 seats in the 275-member body will be allocated through a proportional representation system, under which political parties nominate lawmakers based on their share of the vote.

The election is widely seen as a three-way contest, shaped by voter frustration over widespread corruption and demands for greater government accountability.

The National Independent Party, founded in 2022, is considered the front-runner, posing a strong challenge to two long-dominant parties: the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist).

The new party's prime ministerial candidate is rapper-turned-politician Balendra Shah, who won the 2022 Kathmandu mayoral race and emerged as a leading figure in the 2025 uprising that ousted former Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Oli.

Shah, 35, has rode a wave of public anger toward traditional political parties. He highlighted health and education for poor Nepalis as a key focus during his campaign.

The protests against corruption and poor governance were triggered by a social media ban before snowballing into a popular revolt against the government. Dozens were killed and hundreds injured when protesters attacked government buildings and police opened fire on them.

While the Congress and the Communists retain loyal voter bases, Shah's party has drawn larger crowds on the campaign trail, highlighting its growing appeal among younger voters seeking an alternative.

Shah was among the first one to reach polling station at a local school in Kathmandu. He lives in the capital but is contesting from a district in southeast Nepal against Oli. He did not speak to reporters.

The next administration is expected to inherit daunting challenges. It must deliver on changes demanded by last year's protests, tackle entrenched corruption and carefully manage ties with its powerful neighbors, India and China.

Millions left without power after major blackout hits Cuba's western region

By MILEXSY DURÁN and DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

HAVANA (AP) — A blackout left millions of people without power in Havana and the rest of western Cuba on Wednesday in the latest outage on an island struggling with dwindling oil reserves and a crumbling electric grid.

Government radio station Radio Rebelde quoted an energy official as saying that it could take at least 72 hours to restore operations at one of Cuba's largest thermoelectric power plants, where a shutdown sparked the outage.

The government's electric utility said on social platform X that the outage affected people from the western town of Pinar del Rio to the central town of Camaguey.

Energy and Mines Minister Vicente de la O Levy wrote on X late Wednesday that the government was powering critical infrastructure in the affected region as two power plants came online. Such infrastructure includes hospitals and medical clinics.

"We are working to restore the National Electric System amid a complex energy situation," he wrote earlier on X.

The U.S. Embassy warned people to "prepare for significant disruptions" and conserve fuel, water, food and mobile phone batteries. "Cuba's national power grid is increasingly unreliable, and scheduled and unscheduled power outages are prolonged and a daily occurrence across the country, including Havana," it said on X.

'We'll have to eat bread again'

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By late afternoon, the government said crews had restored power to 2.5% of Havana, or some 21,100 customers, noting that efforts were gradual and tied to what the system's conditions would allow. It did not provide updated numbers by late Wednesday night.

"We trust in the experience and effort of the electrical workers to overcome this situation in the shortest possible time," Prime Minister Manuel Marrero Cruz wrote on X.

As night fell, people across Havana lingered on doorsteps and used wood or charcoal to prepare "caldosas," a popular soup shared among neighbors who contribute items including vegetables, chicken and meat. A group of musicians along the city's famed seawall played into the night.

Others played dominoes by a rechargeable lightbulb.

"With the power outages, this is the only thing we young people have to distract ourselves," Jefferson Silvera said.

Daily, prolonged outages have become so common in Cuba that 66-year-old Genoveva Torres was waiting for power to return at night as usual to cook dinner. She was perturbed when told about the massive blackout.

"My God, until when?" she exclaimed. "Then we won't eat. We'll have to eat bread again."

State media reported that the outage was caused by a shutdown of the Antonio Guiteras thermoelectric power plant east of Havana following a leak in its boiler.

Radio Rebelde quoted the plant's technical director Román Pérez Castañeda as saying that crews must first locate the fault before repairing it and restarting the unit.

Pérez Castañeda said that a pipe burst in the boiler, causing a water leak and subsequent fire that was extinguished without major damage, according to Radio Rebelde.

The outage caught 63-year-old Odalis Sánchez out on the street with her grandson. She was unable to walk because of a recent operation, so she called someone for a ride home.

Some 200 people waited at a bus stop near her, but buses were not running given a lack of fuel, so they tried to get a ride via any means available, including hitchhiking.

"I need to be able to get home to see what I can do," Sánchez said. "Without power, you can't do anything. My grandson also is studying and I have to make him food. Public transportation isn't helping."

'We have to move forward'

It is the second such outage to affect western Cuba in three months.

The outage in early December lasted nearly 12 hours. Officials said a fault in a transmission line linking two power plants caused an overload and led to the collapse of the energy system's western sector.

Authorities have noted that some thermoelectric plants have been operating for over 30 years and receive little maintenance given the high cost. U.S. sanctions also have prevented the government from buying new equipment and specialized parts, officials say.

Cuba also is struggling with dwindling oil reserves after the U.S. attacked Venezuela in early January, which halted critical petroleum shipments from the South America country. Later that month, U.S. President Donald Trump threatened to impose tariffs on any country that would sell or supply Cuba with oil.

Ernesto Couto Martínez, 76, was trying to find a ride home and said he would confront the latest outage "with the spirit that all Cubans have."

"We must keep fighting. There's no other way," he said. "We have to move forward, blockade or no blockade."

Last month, Cuba's government implemented austere fuel-saving measures and warned that jet fuel wouldn't be available at nine airports until mid-March.

Prior to the attack on Venezuela, the island already was struggling with a crumbling electric grid, generation deficits and interruptions in fuel supplies.

Canada and Australia leaders urge war de-escalation, but agree Iran can't get nuclear weapons

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — The Canadian and Australian prime ministers on Thursday called for a de-escalation of the Iran war but added the Iranians must never gain a nuclear weapon.

Canada's Mark Carney and his Australian counterpart Anthony Albanese discussed the war during their meeting in Australia's capital, Canberra.

The meeting came after news that a U.S. submarine sank an Iranian warship in the Indian Ocean and Turkey said NATO defenses intercepted a ballistic missile launched from Iran before it entered Turkey's airspace.

"We want to see a broader de-escalation of these hostilities with a broader group of countries than just the direct belligerents involved," Carney said at a press conference with Albanese.

"We stress that that cannot be achieved unless we're in a position that Iran's ability to acquire a nuclear weapon, develop a nuclear weapon, and to export terrorism, is ended. So that process must lead to those outcomes," Carney added.

He said the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council, which were "showing tremendous restraint," should become involved in the de-escalation process.

Albanese said: "The world wants to see a de-escalation and wants to see Iran cease to spread the destinations of its attacks."

"We're seeing Gulf states, that have not been involved, attacked across the board, including the attacks on civilian and tourist areas as well. But we also want to see the objectives achieved. I want to see the possibility of Iran getting a nuclear weapon removed once and for all," Albanese said.

Questioned by a reporter, Carney could not rule out the Canadian military ever becoming involved in the conflict.

"You've asked a fundamental hypothetical in a conflict that can spread very broadly," Carney said.

"So one can never categorically rule out participation. We will stand by our allies when it makes sense," he added.

Carney is in Australia on a trade-focused, three-nation visit that began in India last week. He addressed the Australian Parliament on Thursday and will fly to Japan on Friday.

Republicans take another crack at Homeland Security funding, citing Iran war

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans are invoking the war in Iran and the prospect of retaliatory terrorist attacks as they tee up votes Thursday on a funding bill for the Department of Homeland Security.

The House already approved a DHS spending bill in January, but it faltered in the Senate as Democrats insisted on changes to immigration enforcement operations following the shooting death of ICU nurse Alex Pretti in Minneapolis. As a result, funding for the department lapsed on Feb. 14.

Republicans are calling on Democrats to reconsider their vote in the wake of the conflict in Iran. Both the House and the Senate are expected to hold votes on the matter.

"The military action in Iran makes it all more urgent and crucial to have a fully funded, fully staffed DHS across all its departments," House Speaker Mike Johnson said.

It did not appear the GOP's strategy had changed the position of Democratic lawmakers, though. They said they are prepared to fund most of the agencies at the department, just not Immigration and Customs Enforcement or Customs and Border Protection.

"It's the same lousy, rotten bill that does not put any guardrails or constraints on ICE or CBP after federal agents shot American citizens in the street," said Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass.

Workers are beginning to miss part of their paychecks

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Following the longest federal shutdown in the country's history last year, Congress has completed work on 11 of this year's 12 appropriations bills. Only the bill for Homeland Security remains outstanding.

Republicans said the timing couldn't be worse for a Homeland Security shutdown. While a large majority of the department's employees are considered essential and continue to work, many will not receive a full paycheck this week.

Republicans said the prospect of an increase in unscheduled absences by the Transportation Security Administration's agents and screeners could lead to longer wait times at the nation's airports. Meanwhile, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency has canceled various assessments to determine vulnerabilities to critical infrastructure. And training for first responders conducted through the Federal Emergency Management Agency has been canceled.

"Can we not understand America is under siege, now likely to be attacked because radical Islam is under siege, and they're going to hit back and we're sitting here looking at each other and not funding DHS," Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., said during a hearing Tuesday featuring DHS Secretary Kristi Noem.

Democrats are seeking several changes at the department include prohibiting ICE enforcement operations at sensitive locations like schools and churches, allowing independent investigations into alleged wrongdoing, requiring warrants to be signed by judges before federal agents can forcibly enter private homes or other nonpublic spaces without consent, and requiring agents to wear identification and remove their masks.

Republicans note that the bill does include a bipartisan provision directing more resources for deescalation training and \$20 million to outfit immigration enforcement agents with body-worn cameras.

Little to show from negotiations

The White House and congressional Democrats don't appear to have made significant progress in recent weeks resolving their differences after trading several offers.

"Look, we're still far apart but we're negotiating and exchanging paper back and forth," Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said.

Alabama Sen. Katie Britt, the Republican chairwoman of a panel that oversees homeland security funding, said she's been talking to Democrats about a possible pathway forward, but prospects are unclear.

She and other Republicans are citing last weekend's mass shooting in Austin as an example of the dangerous threat environment that's facing Americans following the attack on Iran.

"I think that it is incredibly irresponsible to not fund the agency that is supposed to keep us safe here at home," Britt said.

Democrats said they are ready to fully fund all the agencies within the department except for ICE and CBP.

Rep. Rosa DeLauro, the ranking Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee, authored a proposal to do that, but it was blocked from consideration. She said Republican leadership was using Trump's "aimless, costly and illegal war with Iran to force through more funding for ICE and Customs and Border Protection without any of the substantial changes that the vast majority of Americans believe those agencies need."

"It is a cynical effort and it is one that will fail," DeLauro said.

House to vote on Iran war powers resolution in a test of Trump's strategy

By LISA MASCARO, STEPHEN GROVES and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House is preparing to vote Thursday on a war powers resolution to halt President Donald Trump's attack on Iran, a sign of unease in Congress over the rapidly widening conflict that is reordering U.S. priorities at home and abroad.

It's the second vote in as many days, after the Senate defeated a similar measure along party lines. Lawmakers are confronting the sudden reality of representing the American people in wartime and all that entails — with lives lost, dollars spent and alliances tested by a president's unilateral decision to go to war with Iran.

The tally in the House is expected to be tight, but the outcome will provide an early snapshot of the

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political support, or opposition, to the U.S.-Israel military operation and Trump's rationale for bypassing Congress, which alone has the power to declare war.

"Donald Trump is not a king, and if he believes the war with Iran is in our national interest, then he must come to Congress and make the case," said Rep. Gregory Meeks, the top Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Meeks said in his nearly three decades in Congress, the hardest votes he has taken have been deciding whether to send U.S. troops to war.

The roll calls are a clarifying moment for the president and the parties just days into the overseas conflict that has quickly carried echoes of the long U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Many veterans of those wars have since run for office and now serve in Congress.

Republicans largely back Trump, and most Democrats oppose the war

Trump's Republican Party, which narrowly controls the House and Senate, largely sees the conflict with Iran not as the start of a new war, but the end of a regime that for decades has long menaced the West. The operation has killed Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, which some view as an opportunity for regime change, though others warn of a chaotic power vacuum.

Rep. Brian Mast of Florida, the GOP chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, publicly thanked Trump for taking action against Iran, saying the president is using his own constitutional authority to defend the U.S. against the "imminent threat" the country posed.

Mast, an Army veteran who worked as a bomb disposal expert in Afghanistan, said the war powers resolution was effectively asking "that the president do nothing."

For Democrats, Trump's war with Iran, influenced by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, is a war of choice that is testing the balance of powers in the U.S. Constitution.

"The framers weren't fooling around," said Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Md., arguing that the Constitution is clear that only Congress can decide matters of war.

He said whether lawmakers support or oppose the Trump administration's military action, they should have the debate. "It's up to us, we've got to vote on it."

While views in Congress are largely falling along party lines, there are crossover coalitions. Both the House and Senate resolutions were bipartisan, and are drawing bipartisan support and opposition. The House is also voting on a separate resolution affirming that Iran is the largest state sponsor of terrorism.

The war powers resolution, if signed into law, would immediately halt Trump's ability to conduct the war unless Congress approved the military action. The president would likely veto the measure.

As an alternative, a small group of Democrats has proposed a separate war powers resolution that would allow the president to continue the war for 30 days before he must seek congressional approval. It is not expected to come yet for a vote.

Trump officials provide shifting rationale for war

After launching a surprise attack against Iran on Saturday, Trump has scrambled to win support for a conflict that Americans of all political persuasions were already wary of entering. Trump administration officials spent hours behind closed doors on Capitol Hill this week trying to reassure lawmakers that they have the situation under control.

Six U.S. military members were killed over the weekend in a drone strike in Kuwait, and Trump has said more Americans could die. Thousands of Americans abroad have scrambled for flights, many lighting up the phone lines at congressional offices as they sought help trying to flee the Middle East.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said that the war could extend eight weeks, twice as long as the president himself first estimated. Trump has left open the possibility of sending U.S. troops into what, so far, has largely been bombing campaign by air. Hundreds of people in the region have died.

The administration said the goal is to destroy Iran's ballistic missiles that it believes are shielding its nuclear program. It has also said Israel was ready to act against Iran, and American bases would face retaliation if the U.S. did not strike first. On Wednesday, the U.S. said it torpedoed an Iranian warship near Sri Lanka.

"This administration can't even give us a straight answer of as to why we launched this preemptive war," said Rep. Thomas Massie, the Republican from Kentucky who is often an outlier in his party.

Massie and Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Calif., who had teamed up to release the Jeffrey Epstein files, also forced the war powers resolution to the floor, pushing past objections from House Speaker Mike Johnson.

Johnson has warned that it would be "dangerous" to limit the president's authority while the U.S. military is already in conflict.

Senators sit in their desks for solemn vote

In the Senate, Republican leaders have successfully, though narrowly, defeated a series of war powers resolutions pertaining to several other conflicts during Trump's second term. This one, however, was different.

Underscoring the gravity of the moment Wednesday, Democratic senators filled the chamber and sat at their desks as the voting got underway.

"Today every senator — every single one — will pick a side," Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said before the vote. "Do you stand with the American people who are exhausted with forever wars in the Middle East or stand with Donald Trump and Pete Hegseth as they bumble us headfirst into another war?"

Sen. John Barrasso, second in Senate Republican leadership, said "Democrats would rather obstruct Donald Trump than obliterate Iran's national nuclear program."

The legislation failed on a 47-53 tally mostly along party lines, with Republican Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky in favor and Democratic Sen. John Fetterman of Pennsylvania against.

New Mexico jurors watch Zuckerberg deposition in Meta child safety bellwether trial

By MORGAN LEE Associated Press

SANTA FE, N.M. (AP) — Jurors in a bellwether trial about the impacts of social media on children watched a deposition of Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg on Wednesday that explored what the architects of Facebook and Instagram knew from internal research about the negative experiences of young users and how the company responded.

New Mexico's attorney general alleges that Meta violated state consumer protection laws in failing to disclose what it knew about the dangers of addiction to social media as well as child sexual exploitation on the company's platforms. Attorneys for Meta say the company discloses risks and makes efforts to weed out harmful content and experiences — acknowledging that some bad material still gets through its safety net.

In the pretrial deposition recorded last year, prosecutors confronted Zuckerberg with internal company communications and emails from platform users spanning back to the infancy of Facebook in 2008 that discuss "problematic" and addictive use of social media.

"Over the past 15 years, users of your products have repeatedly told your company and you personally that they find the products to be addictive, that's true isn't it?" Previn Warren, a member of the prosecution team, asked Zuckerberg.

Zuckerberg took issue with the word "addictive."

"I think people sometimes use that word colloquially," he said "That's not what we're trying to do with the products, and it's not how I think they work."

At the same time, Zuckerberg said he wants to "make sure that we can understand so we can improve the products and make them better for people in ways that they want."

Zuckerberg went on to concede that he initially set goals for employees to increase the amount of time teenagers spent on its platform amid efforts to expand business revenue and the number of platform users.

"Yes, I think we focused on time spent as one of the major engagement goals," Zuckerberg said. "Sometime during 2017 and beyond — for, at this point, most of the last 10 years — we've focused on other metrics."

The deposition also delved into Zuckerberg's decision to lift a temporary Instagram ban on the use of cosmetic filters that changed people's appearance in a way that seemed to promote plastic surgery.

"I care a lot about not cracking down on the ways that people can express themselves and there's, like, always been a lot of pressure to do that and censor our services," Zuckerberg said. "I didn't find any of the anecdotal examples that people used to be convincing that it was actually clear evidence that this was going to be harmful."

The deposition was shown during the fourth week of the civil trial. Meta, which also owns WhatsApp, prohibits children under 13 from using its platforms, but some manage to sign up anyway.

On Tuesday, the New Mexico jury watched a video in which prosecutors peppered Instagram head Adam Mosseri with questions about Meta's approach to safety, corporate profits and social media features. They also asked him about policies for young users that might contribute to unwanted communications with adults.

The New Mexico case and a separate trial against Meta in Los Angeles could set the course for thousands of similar lawsuits against social media companies.

Zuckerberg testified last month in Los Angeles about young people's use of Instagram and has answered questions from Congress about youth safety on Meta's platforms.

During his 2024 congressional testimony, he apologized to families whose lives had been upended by tragedies they believed were caused by social media. But while he told parents he was "sorry for everything you have all been through," he stopped short of taking direct responsibility for it.

Haitian man dies in US immigration custody with untreated toothache, brother says

By JACQUES BILLEAUD Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — A Haitian man confined at an Arizona immigration detention center for months died at a hospital Monday after a tooth infection was left untreated, the man's brother said Wednesday.

Emmanuel Damas, 56, told medical personnel at the Florence Correctional Center that he had a toothache in mid-February, but he was not sent to a dentist, said Damas' brother, Presly Nelson.

Nelson believes the staff at the facility did not take his brother's complaints seriously even though it was a treatable condition. Nelson said he would expect such a death in countries with less access to health care, but not the United States.

"As a country — I'm an American now — I think we can do better than that," Nelson said.

Damas is among at least nine people who have died in Immigration and Customs Enforcement custody this year.

The Department of Homeland Security did not immediately respond to emails seeking comment. ICE had said it hoped to issue a news release Wednesday.

Earlier Wednesday, ICE officials announced the death of Mexican national Alberto Gutierrez-Reyes, who had been in a California ICE detention center and died in the hospital Feb. 27 after reporting chest pain and shortness of breath.

Chandler City Council member Christine Ellis, a Haitian American who is a registered nurse, said she was contacted by Damas' family after his death.

"As a medical person, I am absolutely appalled that there were medical-licensed people that were working there and allowed those things to happen," Ellis said. "It does not make sense to me."

A report from the Maricopa County Medical Examiner's Office listed Damas' cause of death as "pending" as of Wednesday.

Damas was taken into ICE custody in September and was soon transferred to the medium-security Florence Correctional Center, where he was held for several months, including after his asylum application was denied, Ellis said.

CoreCivic, a for-profit corrections company that runs the Florence facility, deferred comment to ICE.

Last 2 names of 6 US soldiers who died in Kuwait attack identified by the Pentagon

By HANNAH FINGERHUT, KONSTANTIN TOROPIN and REBECCA BOONE Associated Press
WEST DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — The last two names of the six U.S. soldiers killed in a drone strike at a command center in Kuwait were released Wednesday by the Pentagon, and they are from California and Iowa.

The soldiers identified Wednesday were Chief Warrant Officer 3 Robert Marzan, 54, of Sacramento, and Maj. Jeffrey O'Brien, 45, of Indianola, Iowa.

The six members of the Army Reserve, who worked in logistics and kept troops supplied with food and equipment, died Sunday when a drone hit a command center in Port Shuaiba, Kuwait, one day after the U.S. and Israel launched its military campaign against Iran. Iran responded by launching missiles and drones against Israel and several Gulf Arab states that host U.S. armed forces.

The Pentagon said Marzan was at the scene when a drone strike hit the command center and is "believed to be the individual who perished at the scene," according to the statement. A medical examiner will confirm identification, the Pentagon said.

Public records appeared to show Marzan living in Virginia but with family in the Sacramento area. Family members couldn't immediately be reached or declined to comment.

The Pentagon listed O'Brien's hometown as Indianola, a suburb of Des Moines. A person answering the door at a home address in Waukee, another suburb of Des Moines, did not comment, saying the family would release a statement.

The four soldiers previously identified by the Pentagon were: Sgt. Declan Coady, 20, of West Des Moines, Iowa;; Sgt. 1st Class Nicole Amor, 39, of White Bear Lake, Minnesota; Capt. Cody Khork, 35, of Winter Haven, Florida; and Sgt. 1st Class Noah Tietjens, 42, of Bellevue, Nebraska.

All were assigned to the 103rd Sustainment Command, which provides food, fuel, water and ammunition, transport equipment and supplies.

"Sadly, there will likely be more, before it ends. That's the way it is," President Donald Trump said of the deaths. Trump will attend the dignified transfers of the soldiers when they arrive in the U.S., the White House said Wednesday. The ritual honors service members killed in action.

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds released a statement Wednesday offering prayers and condolences for the families of the Iowa residents killed.

"Our hearts are broken by the deaths of Major Jeffrey O'Brien and Sergeant Declan Coady, two brave Iowa soldiers who gave the ultimate sacrifice to secure freedom and peace," Reynolds said.

Nearly 15 years of service

O'Brien was promoted to major in August 2024, according to a Facebook post, which shows him alongside two young children. He served in the Army Reserve for nearly 15 years, according to his LinkedIn.

The signal officer and information systems engineer in the Army Reserve was a manager of defensive cyber operations at an Iowa-based cybersecurity company, according to his LinkedIn. He had a career spanning two decades in information and cybersecurity.

O'Brien is survived by a wife and children, according to his aunt, Mary Melchert, who posted on Facebook. Melchert said O'Brien "was the sweetest blue-eyed, blonde farm kid you'd ever know. He is so missed already."

Loving husband and father

Marzan's sister described him on Facebook as a "strong leader" and loving husband, father and brother. "My baby brother, you are loved and I will hold onto all our memories and cherish them always in my heart," Elizabeth Marzan wrote.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom and acting Gov. Eleni Kounalakis offered condolences to Robert Marzan's wife and family in a statement Wednesday, saying flags at the state Capitol will remain at half-staff in his honor.

They described him as "a courageous Californian whose service to our nation was marked by honor and

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distinction.”

A mother of 2 who loved gardening

Amor was just days away from returning to her husband and children.

“She was almost home,” her husband, Joey Amor, said Tuesday. “You don’t go to Kuwait thinking something’s going to happen, and for her to be one of the first — it hurts.”

Amor was an avid gardener who enjoyed making salsa from the peppers and tomatoes she grew with her son, a high school senior. She enjoyed rollerblading and bicycling with her fourth-grade daughter.

A week before the drone attack, Amor was moved off-base to a shipping container-style building that had no defenses, her husband said.

“They were in fear that the base they were on was going to get attacked and they felt it was safer in smaller groups in separate places,” he said.

‘He loved being a soldier’

Coady had been checking in with his family from Kuwait every hour or two after the U.S. and Israel launched their military campaign against Iran, even as Iran launched retaliatory strikes.

When he didn’t respond to messages Sunday, “most of us started to wonder,” Coady’s father, Andrew, told The Associated Press. “Your gut starts to get a feeling.”

Coady recently told his father he had been recommended for a promotion from specialist to sergeant, a rank he received posthumously.

He was among the youngest people in his class, trained to troubleshoot military computer systems, but he impressed his instructors, Andrew Coady said Tuesday.

“He trained hard, he worked hard, his physical fitness was important to him. He loved being a soldier,” Coady said. “He was also one of the most kindest people you would ever meet, and he would do anything and everything for anyone.”

Declan Coady, an Eagle Scout, was studying cybersecurity at Drake University in Des Moines, and he wanted to become an officer.

“I still don’t fully think it’s real,” his sister Keira Coady said. “I just remember all of our conversations about what he was going to do when he came back.”

A calling to serve his country

Khork was very patriotic and wanted to serve in the military from childhood, his family said in a statement Tuesday.

He enlisted in the Army Reserve and joined Florida Southern College’s ROTC program.

“That commitment helped shape the course of his life and reflected the deep sense of duty that was always at the core of who he was,” his mother, Donna Burhans; father, James Khork; and stepmother, Stacey Khork; said in a statement.

Khork, who loved history, had a degree in political science.

His family described him as “the life of the party, known for his infectious spirit, generous heart, and deep care for those who served alongside him and for everyone blessed to know him.”

Abbas Jaffer posted Monday on Facebook about his friend of 16 years.

“My best friend, best man, and brother gave his life defending our country overseas,” Jaffer said.

A dedicated instructor and mentor

Tietjens, who came from a military family, previously served alongside his father in Kuwait. When he returned home in February 2010, he reunited with his overjoyed wife in a local church’s gym.

Tietjens’ cousin Kaylyn Golike asked for prayers, especially for Tietjens’ 12-year-old son, wife and parents, as they navigate “unimaginable loss.”

“We lost a brave soldier this weekend and many hearts are broken,” Golike wrote on Facebook Tuesday.

Tietjens earned a black belt in Philippine Combatives and Taekwondo and was “an instructor who gave his time, discipline, and leadership to others,” the Philippine Martial Arts Alliance said on Facebook.

Army Staff Sgt. Jeff Coleman said Tietjens was his mentor.

“You could call him day or night,” Coleman told KETV. “He always took the time, you know, he made you feel important.”

Iran launches missiles at Israel and US bases as Israeli military begins new strikes in Lebanon

By JON GAMBRELL, ELENA BECATOROS and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran launched new strikes against Israel and U.S. military bases in the Middle East as aerial attacks resumed early Thursday after an American submarine sank an Iranian warship and Iran threatened the destruction of military and economic infrastructure across the region.

Israel announced multiple incoming missile attacks, and air sirens sounded in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Iranian state television said additional strikes also targeted U.S. bases. The Israeli military said it had begun new strikes in Lebanon targeting the Iranian-backed Hezbollah militant group in Beirut's southern suburbs.

The fighting continued after the U.S. and Israel intensified their bombardment of Iran on Wednesday.

The tempo of the strikes on Iran was so intense that state television announced the mourning ceremony for Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who was killed at the start of the conflict, would be postponed. Millions attended the funeral of his predecessor, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, in 1989.

The U.S. and Israel launched the war Saturday, targeting Iran's leadership, missile arsenal and nuclear program while suggesting that toppling the government is a goal. But the exact aims and timelines have repeatedly shifted, signaling an open-ended conflict.

President Donald Trump praised the U.S. military Wednesday for "doing very well on the war front, to put it mildly." Fellow Republicans in the U.S. Senate stood with Trump on Iran as they voted down a resolution seeking to halt the war.

Iran fired on Bahrain, Kuwait and Israel as the conflict spiraled. Turkey said NATO defenses intercepted a ballistic missile launched from Iran before it entered Turkey's airspace.

The war has killed more than 1,000 people in Iran, more than 70 in Lebanon and around a dozen in Israel, according to officials in those countries. It has disrupted the supply of the world's oil and gas, snarled international shipping and stranded hundreds of thousands of travelers in the Middle East.

Threats expanding across the Middle East

Neighboring countries braced for potential dangers Thursday, a day after Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard threatened "the complete destruction of the region's military and economic infrastructure."

Qatar's Interior Ministry said authorities were evacuating residents near the U.S. Embassy in Doha as a temporary precaution, without providing further details.

Fighter jets could be heard overhead in the United Arab Emirates city of Dubai.

And a new attack off the coast of Kuwait appeared to expand the area where commercial shipping was in danger.

An explosion rocked the area early Thursday, according to the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations Center run by the British military. It said a tanker apparently came under attack, but the agency did not offer a cause. Iran in the past has attacked ships by attaching limpet mines to them.

Prior attacks since fighting began Saturday have happened in the Gulf of Oman and the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which about a fifth of the world's oil is shipped.

Oil prices have soared as Iranian attacks have disrupted traffic through the strait, and global stock markets have been hammered over worries that the spike in oil prices may grind down the world economy.

Buildings of Iranian military and security forces targeted

U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said a torpedo from an American submarine sank an Iranian warship Tuesday night in the Indian Ocean.

Sri Lankan authorities said 32 crew members were rescued, while its navy recovered 87 bodies.

Israel said it hit buildings associated with Iran's internal security command as well as the Basij, an all-volunteer force of the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard whose bloody crackdown on protesters in January left thousands dead.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has said his country's forces have decentralized leadership, with units acting largely on their own, which could blunt the effect of attacks on top command and control hubs.

Shifting timelines for U.S. operations

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During his Pentagon briefing, Hegseth did not give a definitive timeline for U.S. operations.

"You can say four weeks, but it could be six. It could be eight. It could be three," he said. "Ultimately, we set the pace and the tempo. The enemy is off balance, and we're going to keep them off balance."

U.S. and Israeli military officials say launches from Iran have declined as their attacks have taken out ballistic missiles, launchers and drones. Israel's Homefront Command announced it was easing restrictions that closed workplaces nationwide. It said workplaces could reopen Thursday if there's a shelter nearby. Schools would remain closed.

Still, explosions sounded early Thursday in Israel, which said its defensive systems were moving to intercept Iranian missiles.

At least 1,045 people have been killed in Iran, the country's Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs said Wednesday. Eleven people have died in Israel. Six U.S. troops have been killed.

The death toll has exceeded 70 in Lebanon, where the health ministry and state news agency said at least eight people had been killed in strikes since Wednesday.

Israel says its offensive had been planned for midyear

Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz said the offensive against Iran was originally planned for mid-2026, but "the need arose to bring everything forward to February."

He listed events inside Iran, Trump's positions and the possibility of "creating a combined operation" as reasons.

The protests in Iran put unprecedented pressure on its leadership. Trump threatened military action in response to the crackdown before shifting his attention to Iran's disputed nuclear program.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said Wednesday that the U.S. launched its operation partly out of concern Iran might strike American personnel and assets in the region first. A phone call between Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu before the airstrikes began was also "important with respect to the timeline," she said.

Iran's clerics are choosing a new supreme leader

Iran's leaders are scrambling to replace Khamenei, who ruled the country for 37 years. It's only the second time since the 1979 Islamic Revolution that a new supreme leader is being chosen.

Potential candidates range from hard-liners committed to confrontation with the West to reformists who seek diplomatic engagement. Mojtaba Khamenei, Khamenei's son, has long been considered among them — though he has never held a government position.

In a sign that Iran's leadership will only seek to consolidate its power, the head of the judiciary warned that "those who cooperate with the enemy in any way will be considered an enemy."

Israel's defense minister, Katz, said on X that Iran's next supreme leader — if he continues to threaten Israel, the U.S. and others — "will be a target for elimination."

Texas judge declines to close Camp Mystic despite family's request after last year's floods

By JIM VERTUNO and SEAN MURPHY Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — A Texas judge on Wednesday ordered Camp Mystic to preserve damaged cabins but stopped short of blocking reopening plans after a family of one of the 25 girls and two counselors who died last summer sued to keep the camp closed.

The family of 8-year-old Cile Steward, who was swept away in the flood last Fourth of July and whose body still has not been recovered, had asked District Judge Maya Guerra Gamble to prevent the owners from reopening the facility and to halt any construction while the lawsuit is pending. Their request for a temporary injunction maintains that any changes at the camp could destroy evidence needed for their lawsuit.

Gamble ruled that Camp Mystic's owners must not alter or demolish the cabins where campers were housed during the floods, and said they must not use the portion of the camp closest to the Guadalupe River where those cabins were located.

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"What we're trying to do is preserve the evidence that's there so that we can understand, so that future campers will never be put in a situation like this again," Will Steward, Cile's father, told reporters after the hearing.

The campers and counselors were killed when the fast-rising floodwaters roared through a low-lying area of the summer camp before dawn on the Fourth of July. All told, the destructive flooding killed at least 136 people, raising questions about how things went so terribly wrong.

The camp, established in 1926, did not evacuate and was hit hard when the river rose from 14 feet (4.2 meters) to 29.5 feet (9 meters) within 60 minutes.

"The worst thing you can do is put a bunch of 8-year-olds on a bus and try to drive them out of there. They all would have drowned," said Mikal Watts, an attorney for Camp Mystic and its family of owners.

In a packed courtroom Wednesday, family members of the deceased girls wore buttons depicting their images as lawyers for Camp Mystic displayed pictures of trees planted in their memory and architectural renderings of plans to rebuild parts of the camp outside a 1,000-year flood zone.

Attorneys for Camp Mystic have expressed sympathy for the girls' families but maintained there was little they could have done during the catastrophic flooding that quickly overcame the camp. Pictures of the rising floodwaters were shown in court Wednesday.

"Nobody had ever seen a prior flood anything like we saw in 2025," Watts said.

More than 850 campers have already signed up to attend camp this summer, he said. The camp still needs to be approved for a license by state regulators to operate this summer.

Edward Eastland, the son of camp owner Richard Eastland, who died in the flooding, testified Wednesday that his mother, his wife and their children as well as another staff member were at a camp house when "the double doors of the house broke open" from floodwaters. They had to break out a separate window to climb out and evacuate to higher ground. All survived.

The camp had security cameras around the campus, Eastland said, but no one was watching the live feed in the middle of the night as the waters rose. When he tried to pull it up about 3 a.m., he wasn't able to.

And when pressed about the camp's flood plans, Eastland said he didn't know if there was anything more detailed than a one-paragraph slide shown in the hearing. Will and Cici Steward said they don't believe the camp has adequate safety measures in place to welcome new campers while they still search for their daughter.

"They didn't have a plan, and they don't have a plan moving forward," Cici Steward said.

The camp's decision last year to partially open and to construct a memorial on the grounds drew outrage from many of the girls' families who are mourning their loved ones and who said they weren't consulted on the plans.

Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick has asked Texas regulators not to renew the license for Camp Mystic while the deaths are being investigated and cited legislative probes that are expected to begin in the spring.

Families of several of the girls who died have sued the camp's operators, arguing that camp officials failed to take necessary steps to protect the campers as life-threatening floodwaters approached.

War with Iran chokes flows of oil and natural gas, highlighting energy security risks for Asia

By ANTON L. DELGADO and ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Global energy trade is in turmoil as war around the Persian Gulf chokes off oil and natural gas shipments, causing prices to soar.

Asia is the most exposed since it relies heavily on imported fuel, much of it shipped through the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow passageway that carries a fifth of global trade in crude oil and liquified natural gas, or LNG.

About 13 million barrels of oil per day moved through the corridor in 2025, according to energy consultancy Kpler. That's about a third of all seaborne crude, the unrefined petroleum that is processed into fuels such as gasoline and diesel.

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Roughly a fifth of the world's LNG, natural gas cooled into liquid form for easier storage and transport, also flows through the straits. More than 80% of the LNG shipped through the strait in 2024 went to Asia, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Since the Iran war began, the price of Brent crude, the international standard, has jumped 15% to about \$84 per barrel, the highest level since July 2024.

U.S. President Donald Trump said Tuesday the U.S. will offer risk insurance to shippers and may deploy its navy to protect vessels if needed. But the disruptions are cascading beyond the region. When supply tightens, richer nations outbid poorer ones for scarce cargoes, leaving more vulnerable economies short of fuel. This was seen during past energy shocks caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

"The crisis, with the closure of the Hormuz Strait as the latest development, would not only raise oil and gas prices but also grind global economic activity to a halt," said Zulfikar Yurnaidi, with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' Centre for Energy.

China and India potentially face big risks

For Asia's two most populous countries, their huge scale magnifies the risks.

China is the world's largest crude oil importer and India comes in third. Sustained spikes in oil prices would ripple through their broader economies, straining transport, industry and households.

China is the biggest buyer of Iranian oil, but Beijing has prioritized energy security and has alternatives, including major use of renewables. It imported about 1.4 million barrels per day from Iran last year, roughly 13% of its total seaborne crude imports, according to Kpler.

Most of those shipments are already at sea and will cover another four to five months of demand, Kpler estimates. China also has substantial strategic petroleum reserves, though the exact amount is a state secret.

It can buy more from Russia: China's independent refiners – also known in the industry as 'teapots' – have been the key buyers for Iranian, Russian and Venezuelan oil, often at big discounts due to risks associated with Western sanctions. Despite war-related disruptions, global supplies are sufficient overall.

"It is therefore unlikely that China would struggle to source enough crude to power its economy or meet domestic demand," said Muyu Xu, a senior crude oil analyst at Kpler. "The real question is at what price."

India might resume purchases of Russian crude oil, despite pressure from Trump not to.

It has enough crude reserves to last less than a month. The next two weeks will be critical and the situation could deteriorate quickly, driving up fuel costs and broader inflation if the conflict drags on, according to energy analyst Vibhuti Garg with the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis, or IEEFA, in Delhi.

"It is a very, very volatile situation," Garg said.

The main risk is higher prices for perishable foods vulnerable to supply shocks. At the same time, a weaker rupee and higher borrowing costs could slow the economy, she said.

Japan, South Korea and Taiwan are most exposed

Few regions are as exposed to Middle East energy flow disruptions as East Asia.

Japan imported 2.34 million barrels of crude per day in January, about 95% of its total imports that month, according to its Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry. Japan is often ranked as the world's second-largest LNG importer.

South Korea relies nearly entirely on energy imports. The Korea International Trade Association says it gets around 70% of its crude oil and 20% of its LNG from the Middle East.

Taiwan also imports nearly all of its LNG. It has been trying to reduce its reliance on the Middle East but still sources about one-third from Qatar, which halted LNG production after attacks on its facilities.

Japan and South Korea have large energy supply stockpiles. While Taiwan announced that it has enough supplies for March and contingency plans for the future.

But analysts say reserves are temporary buffers and energy-intensive industries, like Taiwan's semiconductor industry, remain vulnerable.

Governments are in "hope for the best, prepare for the worst" mode, said Grant Hauber, with IEEFA,

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warning some may regret not diversifying sooner into renewables, a “natural hedge” against disruption. Fossil fuels dominate the energy mix in all three East Asian economies. Renewables provide under 10% of power in South Korea and Taiwan and about 22% in Japan, according to the International Energy Agency.

Southeast Asia braces for energy issues

Developing, energy-hungry countries in Southeast Asia face the risk of being outbid by richer nations as supplies tighten.

In Singapore, officials have warned businesses and households to brace for higher energy bills.

In Manila, authorities banned non-essential travel and personal use of government cars to cut fuel use.

In Thailand, officials have urged the public to save energy, as motorists lined up at filling stations as prices climbed.

Full-time delivery riders and drivers — essential to keeping goods and people moving through Thailand’s congested urban centers — depend on fuel to earn a living. In the northern city of Chiang Rai, 64-year-old taxi driver Sommit Sutar said he can’t see how to conserve fuel and still work.

“Gasoline was already expensive. This war will make the problem even worse,” Sutar said.

The government has suspended petroleum exports to shore up domestic reserves, which it says can last up to 61 days while ramping up natural gas production from the Gulf of Thailand and Myanmar.

Thailand relies heavily on spot-market LNG, leaving it “highly exposed to price and geopolitical volatility,” said Amy Kong, with the Brussels-registered research group Zero Carbon Analytics. That makes it vulnerable to bidding wars with wealthier nations.

Lou Holtz, college football staple who coached Notre Dame to 1988 national title, dies at 89

By ERIC OLSON and TOM COYNE Associated Press

Lou Holtz never met an opponent that couldn’t beat him. Somehow, he squeaked out nearly 250 wins and a national title while cementing himself both as one of the most lovable and unlikable characters in college football — a one-of-a-kind iconoclast in a profession brimming with originals.

The pint-sized motivator who restored greatness at Notre Dame and demanded it everywhere else he went died in Orlando, Florida, Notre Dame announced Wednesday. He was 89.

Spokeswoman Katy Lonergan said the family did not provide a cause of death.

“Notre Dame mourns the loss of Lou Holtz, a legendary football coach, a beloved member of the Notre Dame family and devoted husband, father and grandfather,” Notre Dame president the Rev. Robert A. Dowd said in a statement.

His son, Skip, who followed Holtz into coaching, said in a post on X that his father had passed away and was “resting peacefully at home.”

“He was successful, but more important he was Significant,” Skip Holtz wrote.

Holtz went 249-132-7 over a career that spanned 33 seasons and included stops at Minnesota, Arkansas, South Carolina and, most notably, Notre Dame.

It was there that he won his lone national championship, in 1988, capped with a win over West Virginia in the Fiesta Bowl but highlighted by a 31-30 victory earlier in the season over Miami — one of the notable meetings in the so-called “Catholics vs. Convicts” rivalry of the ‘80s.

For all the big personalities coarsing through college football during the day, none stood bigger than Holtz. He was only 5-foot-10, but commanded the sideline like someone much bigger. The lead-up to the big games were sometimes his best theatre.

Armed with a homespun brand of folksiness that could trickle into corny but always contained a kernel of truth, Holtz lit up bulletin boards and motivational posters with dozens of memorable quotes and pithy observations, virtually all of them constructed to inspire:

—“Life is ten percent what happens to you and ninety percent how you respond to it.”

—“When all is said and done, more is said than done.”

—“You’re never as good as everyone tells you when you win, and you’re never as bad as they say when

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you lose.”

He could make any team — from Akron to Army to Alabama — sound like a world beater on any given week. More often than not, his Fighting Irish figured out a way to scratch out the wins.

Restoring Notre Dame to greatness

Before Holtz arrived in South Bend, Notre Dame was wallowing in mediocrity — a mere shell of the program built on a foundation of Knute Rockne, Ara Parseghian, the Golden Dome and Touchdown Jesus. Holtz turned things around quickly and had the Irish in the Cotton Bowl in Year 2 and winning the national title the season after that.

His 1988 and 1989 teams won a school-record 23 consecutive games and he beat three teams ranked No. 1 — Miami in 1988, Colorado in 1989 and Florida State in 1993.

The Irish finished No. 2 in the AP poll in 1993. Holtz left South Bend after the 1996 season with a record of 100-30-2.

“Lou and I shared a very special relationship,” said current Notre Dame coach Marcus Freeman, who led the Irish back to the national title game in 2025 — a contest Holtz attended and spiced up with some trolling of the Ohio State program that beat the Irish that day. “Our relationship meant a lot to me as I admired the values he used to build the foundation of his coaching career: love, trust and commitment.”

A fast start, then a detour to the NFL

Notre Dame was the highlight of a head-coaching career that began at William & Mary and North Carolina State and also included a one-year stop in the NFL.

Like so many who mastered the college game in his profession, he failed up there, resigning with one game left in a 3-10 campaign with the New York Jets in 1976 and proclaiming “God did not put Lou Holtz on this earth to coach in the pros.”

That opened the door at Arkansas, which was one of the four schools he led into the AP Top 25. His teams made 18 appearances there; eight of those were in the top 10.

After Notre Dame, Holtz transitioned into the TV booth with CBS, promising he would never coach again.

“I said, ‘You could put it in granite.’ I’ve got the granite stone,” Holtz said. “It wasn’t very good granite.”

He took an open job at South Carolina, where he had once served as an assistant coach. Despite posting a career-worst 0-11 mark in his first season with the Gamecocks, Holtz went 17-7 over the next two seasons, beat then No. 9 Georgia in the second game of 2000 and also beat Ohio State twice in the Outback Bowl.

He left the sideline for good following the 2004 season and returned to the airwaves, working 11 more seasons with ESPN.

Core values of trust and getting the best out of players

On the field, each program he led reached new heights in part because he never wavered from his core values of trust, a commitment to excellence and caring for others.

“I think you have to go in there with a vision of where you want to go and a plan of how you’re going to get there,” Holtz once said. “You have to hold people accountable, and you have to believe it can be done.”

The results were impressive, even if he sometimes used unconventional methods.

He once tackled quarterback Tony Rice following a failed play in practice and was widely critiqued in 1991 when he grabbed a player by the facemask, pulling him to the sideline and yelling at him the entire way after the player committed a personal foul. Holtz later apologized.

Holtz suspended his leading rusher, Tony Brooks, and leading receiver, Ricky Watters, in 1988 because they were 40 minutes late to a team meal the night before Notre Dame faced then No. 2 Southern California. The Irish still won 27-10.

At Arkansas, he once suspended three starting offensive players for disciplinary reasons before facing then No. 2 Oklahoma in the Orange Bowl. Arkansas, an 18-point underdog, still won 31-6.

As demanding as Holtz could be, though, he used his charm and eye for good players to recruit top talent. Notre Dame’s 1990 recruiting class included five future first-round NFL draft picks, and he found unique ways to motivate his team.

“The first thing I said at every practice was, ‘Boy, what a great day to work,’” Holtz recounted. “It could

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be raining. It could be whatever. I'd be, 'Boy, am I glad to be here. No place I'd rather be than here.' I used to say to them, 'I travel all over the world speaking to every major corporation and they'd pay me money. I speak to you for free and you don't have to take notes.'"

Born in West Virginia, dreamed of coaching high school

Louis Leo Holtz was born Jan. 6, 1937, in Follansbee, West Virginia, and aspired to be a high school football coach. His future wife broke off their engagement in 1960. That's when Holtz, once a 150-pound linebacker at Kent State, took a graduate-assistant job at Iowa. A year later, he married Beth Barcus, and they were together more than 50 years.

She inspired him again in 1966 when, eight months pregnant with their third child, Holtz was jobless. Beth bought him a book about setting goals, and Holtz created a wish list of what he wanted to do: attend a White House dinner, appear on "The Tonight Show" and see the Pope.

Holtz said there were 107 entries on the list: "She said, 'Gee, that's nice. Why don't you add 'get a job.' So we made it 108," he said.

In 2008, Holtz was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame and Notre Dame placed a statue of him outside its home stadium.

He said numerous times that his plan was to be buried on that campus, as well. He figured it was only fitting because, as he said in 2015: "The alumni buried me here every Saturday,"

Senate Republicans vote down legislation to halt Iran war in Congress' first vote on the conflict

By STEPHEN GROVES, LISA MASCARO and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Republicans voted down an effort Wednesday to halt President Donald Trump's war against Iran, demonstrating early support for a conflict that has rapidly spread across the Middle East with no clear U.S. exit strategy.

The legislation, known as a war powers resolution, failed on a 47-53 vote tally. The vote fell mostly along party lines, though Republican Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky voted in favor and Democratic Sen. John Fetterman of Pennsylvania voted against.

The war powers resolution gave lawmakers an opportunity to demand congressional approval before any further attacks are carried out. The vote forced them to take a stand on a war shaping the fate of U.S. military members, countless other lives and the future of the region.

Underscoring the gravity of the moment, Democratic senators filled the Senate chamber and sat at their desks as the voting got underway. Typically, senators step into the chamber to cast their vote, then leave.

"Today every senator — every single one — will pick a side," Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer said before the vote. "Do you stand with the American people who are exhausted with forever wars in the Middle East or stand with Donald Trump and Pete Hegseth as they bumble us headfirst into another war?"

Sen. John Barrasso, second in Senate Republican leadership, said during the debate that GOP senators were sending a message that Democrats are wrong for forcing a vote on the war powers resolution.

"Democrats would rather obstruct Donald Trump than obliterate Iran's national nuclear program," he added.

Trump administration scrambles for congressional support

After launching a surprise attack against Iran on Saturday, Trump has scrambled to win support for a conflict that Americans of all political persuasions were already wary of entering. Trump administration officials have been a frequent presence on Capitol Hill this week as they try to reassure lawmakers that they have the situation under control.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said Wednesday that the war could extend eight weeks, a longer time frame than has previously been floated by the Trump administration. He also acknowledged that Iran is still able to carry out missile attacks even as the U.S. tries to control the country's airspace.

U.S. service members "remain in harm's way, and we must be clear-eyed that the risk is still high," Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said at the same press conference.

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Six U.S. military members were killed over the weekend in a drone strike in Kuwait.

Republican Sen. Joni Ernst of Iowa acknowledged the human costs of the war in her floor speech. Two of the soldiers killed Sunday were from Iowa and a National Guard unit from her state was also attacked in Syria in December, resulting in the deaths of two other soldiers.

"But now is our opportunity to bring an end to the decades of chaos," said Ernst, who herself served as an officer in the Iowa National Guard for two decades.

"The sooner the better," she added.

Trump has also not ruled out deploying U.S. ground troops. He has said he is hoping to end the bombing campaign within a few weeks, but his goals for the war have shifted from regime change to stopping Iran from developing nuclear capabilities to crippling its navy and missile programs.

"We should be careful about opening a door into chaos in the Middle East when we cannot see the other side of it," Democratic Sen. Chris Coons of Delaware said in a solemn floor speech after the vote concluded.

He said he was praying for "grace to find a path forward together where more do not needlessly join those who have already fallen in this new war in the Middle East."

Lawmakers go on record

The votes in Congress this week represented potentially consequential markers of just where lawmakers stand on the war as they look ahead to midterm elections and the consequences of the conflict.

"Nobody gets to hide and give the president an easy pass or an end-run around the Constitution," said Sen. Tim Kaine, the Virginia Democrat leading the war powers resolution.

Republican leaders have successfully, though narrowly, defeated a series of war powers resolutions pertaining to several other conflicts that Trump has entered or threatened to enter. This one, however, was different.

Unlike Trump's military campaigns against alleged drug boats or even Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro, the attack on Iran represents an open-ended conflict that is already ricocheting across the region. Several senators who have voted for previous war powers resolutions noted that they opposed this one because it applied to a conflict that is already raging.

"Passing this resolution now would send the wrong message to Iran and to our troops," said GOP Sen. Susan Collins of Maine. "At this juncture, providing unequivocal support to our service members is critically important, as is ongoing consultation by the administration with Congress."

House vote looms

On the other side of the Capitol, an intense debate over the war unfolded before a vote Thursday. The House first debated a resolution presented by GOP leadership affirming that Iran is the world's largest state sponsor of terrorism.

Rep. Brian Mast, the GOP chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, publicly thanked Trump for taking action against Iran, saying the president is using his own constitutional authority to defend the U.S. against the "imminent threat" of Iran.

Mast, an Army veteran who worked as a bomb disposal expert in Afghanistan, said the Democratic resolution was effectively asking "that the president do nothing."

Rep. Gregory Meeks, the top Democrat on the Foreign Affairs panel, said before the debate that the hardest votes he has taken in Congress have been to decide whether to send U.S. troops to war. "Our young men and women's lives are on the line," he said, his voice showing emotion as he emerged from a closed-door briefing late Tuesday with Trump officials.

At a news conference Wednesday, several Democratic members who are also veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars spoke about the heavy costs of those conflicts.

One of them was Rep. Jason Crow, D-Colo. "I learned when I was fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, that when elites in Washington bang the war drums, pound their chest, talk about the costs of war and act tough, they're not talking about them doing it, they're not talking about their kids," Crow said. "They're talking about working class kids like us."

Fight over Trump's Iran war powers comes after a long stretch of Congress yielding to presidents

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

Multiple times during Donald Trump's second presidency, Congress has debated his military authority, first in Latin America and now the Middle East.

The latest test will come in the GOP-controlled House on Thursday after the Senate voted down a Democratic measure to limit Trump, at least theoretically, in the U.S.-Israeli war against Iran.

Like many predecessors, Trump claims broad, even unlimited power over U.S. forces. He approved boat strikes near Venezuela, established a naval blockade and authorized a military operation to arrest and depose its leader, Nicolás Maduro — all arguable acts of war under international law. He made noise about additional action in Greenland and Latin America, before launching a sweeping bombing campaign in Iran.

Under the Constitution, the military reports to the president. But the document grants oversight roles to Congress. Trump says he won't sign anything limiting his options — proof for some experts that control over a civilian-led military has skewed from its original design.

"The Constitution gives war powers to two different branches of government," said military historian Peter Mansoor, an Ohio State University professor and retired U.S. Army colonel. "The pendulum has swung towards the executive," he lamented, arguing that "the framers meant for Congress to be the most powerful branch."

Here is a look at what the Constitution says and how U.S. war powers have played out.

What the constitution says about war powers

Article I, which established Congress, states that lawmakers "shall have power ... to declare war." Article II, which established the presidency, makes the chief executive the "commander in chief of the Army and Navy." The Constitution also gives Congress authority over military budgets.

Congress has not declared an official state of war since World War II. Yet since 1945, U.S. service members have fought and died in full-scale conflicts in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan, among other places.

In the Maduro mission, an Army pilot was injured, leading Trump to award him the Medal of Honor — recognition legally restricted to actions taken when fighting a foreign enemy. As of Wednesday, six U.S. service members had died in the Iran war.

During Senate debate last month on Venezuela, Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., mocked an "elaborate song and dance" and said it's "an absurdity" to argue that Trump's actions were anything other than waging war.

Sen. Tim Kaine, the Virginia Democrat who sponsored Venezuela and Iran war powers resolutions, said the latest version — which failed 47-53 — would prevent a presidential "end-run around the Constitution."

Declarations of war: 11 — but none since World War II

Congress has declared war against 11 nations across across five wars. Three declarations came in the 19th century, two during World War I and six during World War II. Each time, the president formally asked Congress to act, citing some specific attack on the U.S. or another national interest.

President James K. Polk asked even for the Mexican War, which was principally about expanding U.S. territory.

Over the same span, Congress voted many times to authorize force without declaring war. Early measures were usually for specific naval actions defending U.S. commercial interests. Congress first took this route in 1798; it became a roadmap for the post-World War II era.

The Korean War marked a turn toward presidential power

President Harry Truman won World War II under declarations issued while Franklin Roosevelt was president. Then, in 1950, the fledgling United Nations voted to act in Korea and asked member nations to assist.

Citing the U.N., Truman engaged U.S. troops in a so-called "police action" without seeking lawmakers' approval. Congress later that year approved the Defense Production Act to mobilize U.S. war capacity. It was an after-the-fact endorsement of Truman's decision, and the law remains a potential Pentagon tool.

Vietnam showed the span of congressional and presidential power

Presidents from Dwight Eisenhower to Gerald Ford presided over what history remembers as the "Viet-

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nam War," though it was often called "the Vietnam conflict" as U.S. administrations expanded southeast Asia operations.

Lyndon Johnson persuaded Congress to pass the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in 1964 and used that to accelerate U.S. involvement.

As U.S. deaths rose, the war grew unpopular, but Johnson — and then Richard Nixon — had broad authority from lawmakers. "Congress approves and supports the determination of the President, as Commander-in-Chief, to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression," the 1964 resolution stated.

Congress repealed that measure in 1971, but Nixon did not withdraw.

Mansoor said war declarations don't just define the start of a war. They also effectively require an official end — which triggers the Senate's role in ratifying peace treaties. Sidestepping those legal bookends, Mansoor said, is "how you get in these forever wars."

Congress answers with the War Powers Act

In 1973, as the U.S. limped toward its Vietnam exit, Congress passed the War Powers Resolution, intending to impose guardrails on presidents by requiring certain communication with lawmakers and allowing Congress to hold votes setting parameters for military action. That was the legislative trigger this year for failed Venezuela resolutions and the Iran resolutions.

In 2020, a Democratic-controlled House narrowly adopted a measure intended to curtail Trump's powers against Iran at that point. But in practice the War Powers Resolution has not served as a functional check on executive power.

After Vietnam, presidents assert role as commander in chief

Ronald Reagan sent troops to Lebanon in 1982 as part of a multinational peacekeeping force. He did not cite the War Powers Resolution when notifying Congress and did not agree to congressional authorization until 1983 — after service members already had died.

In 1990, George H.W. Bush notified Congress under the War Powers Resolution that he'd dispatched troops to the Middle East after Iraq invaded Kuwait. Bush asked Congress for "support" — as opposed to "authorization" — only after securing U.N. backing for action by an international coalition led by U.S. forces. Congress authorized force in January 1991.

Bill Clinton deployed U.S. troops multiple times — to Somalia, Haiti, Rwanda, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Iraq. He asked Congress for appropriations but not explicit authorizations. When some lawmakers pressed Clinton to seek approval for strikes in Iraq in 1998, Clinton asserted his interpretation of presidential authority — not unlike Trump's arguments.

Bush calls 9/11 an act of war — but never seeks a declaration

George W. Bush quickly mobilized the military after terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001. He consulted quickly with Congress, resulting in a joint resolution authorizing sweeping action. It was unique because no specific country was targeted and it initially focused on al-Qaida. Congress nearly unanimously supported the measure but asked for reports every 60 days.

Mansoor, the military historian, noted that Bush used the vote to conduct antiterrorism efforts anywhere in the world. Bush returned to Congress in 2002, telling leaders he wanted authorization for action against Iraq.

What Congress passed for Bush had no effective end date. His successor, Barack Obama, inherited troops in Iraq and did not initially withdraw them. Afghanistan carried on through Obama's two terms and Trump's first presidency and into Joe Biden's term.

Biden withdrew U.S. troops from Afghanistan after it had become the longest U.S. war — never declared — in the nation's history.

Stranded travelers in the Middle East share their accounts of being stuck during the war

By The Associated Press undefined

Hundreds of thousands of people have been stranded across the Middle East amid the U.S. and Israel's joint war against Iran. And between swaths of flight cancellations and airspace closures, many are still scrambling for next steps.

In a matter of days, the conflict has continued to escalate — particularly with strikes in the Gulf states where, beyond the Middle East, airports serve as critical hubs connecting travelers going to Europe, Africa and Asia. Despite ongoing evacuation efforts, flights remain deeply disrupted. Many tourists, business travelers, migrant workers and others are navigating it all.

Some travelers shared their stories with The Associated Press. Here's a glimpse of what they've experienced.

A European couple stranded with their children

Viktoriiia Lokhmatova, who lives in Serbia, and Michael Crepin, who lives in Belgium, had traveled to Dubai with their children for a special milestone.

Although the couple have been together for more than a year, the trip was the first time their children — her 8-year-old daughter, Anny, and his 13-year-old son, Gabriel, — would meet in person. And all four were celebrating their birthdays in February.

But their plans changed when their return flight was canceled amid regional airspace disruptions with the outbreak of the war. A rebooking was also canceled, leaving the group scrambling to find a way home while facing the cost of extending their stay.

"We stayed on calls with the airline for almost two days trying to figure out another flight," Lokhmatova said.

While searching for options, she discovered an initiative by local vacation-home operators offering temporary accommodation to stranded travelers. The couple and their children were offered a free stay for one night in an apartment managed by AraBnB Homes, a Dubai-based luxury rental company that had opened vacant units to passengers unable to leave the city.

The temporary stay gave them time to regroup and make arrangements for the rest of their extended trip. During the first few days, they occasionally heard explosions from air defense systems intercepting missiles or drones — but "we tried to stay calm because the kids were there," Crepin said.

But, he said, they've felt safe and have been grateful to be together throughout the experience. They now hope to leave Dubai on Saturday, if their latest flight goes ahead. They will then travel together to Istanbul before separating — Lokhmatova and Anny returning to Serbia and Crepin and Gabriel to Belgium.

Midflight turnaround impacts tech entrepreneur

Two hours into his flight over the weekend from the Qatari capital of Doha to Barcelona, Varun Krishnan says it became clear the aircraft was no longer heading toward Spain.

Krishnan, who runs the Indian technology business Fone Arena, was on the final leg of his flight from India to a telecommunications conference, Mobile World Congress, in Barcelona.

"It seemed something was off," Krishnan said, noting that he had been tracking the flight and realized it didn't seem to be proceeding on course.

Breakfast had just been served when the captain announced that Baghdad airspace was closed due to security issues. Instead of continuing across Iraq towards Europe, the aircraft began circling around the United Arab Emirates.

Krishnan said the captain provided updates about what was happening, "but still people were panicking."

As the aircraft prepared to land back in Doha, emergency notifications sounded across the cabin. Once on the ground, long lines formed as departure boards filled with cancellations.

Krishnan said he's been staying at a hotel since. And on Wednesday, he was still waiting for airlines to confirm when flights might resume.

US tourists stuck in Dubai

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Louise Herrle, a retiree from Pittsburgh, and her husband got stranded in Dubai, where the couple had been vacationing when the war broke out.

She told the AP that they've had several flights canceled and are now scheduled to leave early Thursday morning, but don't know if that flight will be canceled as well.

They've heard fighter jets flying overhead "from time to time," as well as some explosions, she said. But despite the "extremely stressful" situation, she's found support from fellow travelers.

"It's not a great experience, but it's, you know, a shared experience and it brings people together," she said.

Hong Kong expat recounts search for safety

Agnes Chen Pun, a Hong Kong expatriate who moved to Dubai with her husband and their 1 1/2-year-old last year, said she has tried to keep her family safe amid escalating tensions in the United Arab Emirates. They have moved twice — first to a resort about an hour and a half away in Fujairah, then to one near the port city of Sharjah — after worrying about potential attacks.

"We were so nervous, so anxious," said Chen, a partner at Asia Bankers Club, a Hong Kong- and Dubai-based investment company.

She finally secured commercial tickets for \$2,200 per person to Singapore, although her departure is still uncertain. Despite the disruption, Chen said she plans to return to the UAE once the situation stabilizes, viewing the country as an attractive place to live and work.

"I think the scare, the fears, will be short-term. Definitely now, safety is the most important," she said. "I will go to Hong Kong ... wait (until) the war is over, and then I probably, definitely would come back again."

Trump says he'll make endorsement soon in the Texas Senate runoff between Paxton and Cornyn

By STEVE PEOPLES, THOMAS BEAUMONT and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — President Donald Trump said Wednesday he soon will endorse a Republican candidate in the Texas Senate race, warning that the divisive contest "cannot, for the good of the Party, and our Country, itself, be allowed to go on any longer."

But Trump, a former reality television host, continued to stoke suspense over his decision by not immediately naming his choice, even as Republicans on Capitol Hill pushed him to support four-term Sen. John Cornyn over conservative firebrand Ken Paxton, the state's attorney general.

"IT MUST STOP NOW!" Trump wrote on social media after Cornyn and Paxton advanced on Tuesday to a May 26 runoff for the nomination. "I will be making my Endorsement soon, and will be asking the candidate that I don't Endorse to immediately DROP OUT OF THE RACE! Is that fair? We must win in November!!!"

Paxton said he wouldn't drop out no matter whom Trump backed.

"I'm staying in this race," he told Real America's Voice. "I owe it to the people of Texas."

Republicans are deeply concerned that the 83-day sprint to the runoff will be expensive and divisive as the party fights to maintain control of Congress in competitive states across the nation.

Texas, a state Trump carried by 14 percentage points, was not supposed to be among this year's political battlegrounds. But operatives in both parties believe Democrats have a real chance to claim a Senate seat here for the first time in nearly four decades.

Democrats nominated state Rep. James Talarico, a 36-year-old Christian progressive who Republicans privately believed to be a stronger general election candidate than his primary opponent, Rep. Jasmine Crockett.

Cornyn gets support from fellows senators

There was already pressure on Trump to endorse Cornyn before the president's social media post Wednesday afternoon.

Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina said that Cornyn was "the best bet to win the general election." Sens. John Barrasso of Wyoming and Mike Rounds of South Dakota said they have been sending similar messages to Trump.

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The drumbeat has grown loud enough that Rep. Ronny Jackson, a Trump ally from Texas, said the expectation is the president will endorse Cornyn.

"It's going to be probably more difficult for Paxton to beat Talarico than Cornyn," said Jackson, who has not made an endorsement. Because Cornyn has been "dumping tons of money in the race," Jackson said it makes sense to avoid spending even more "picking each other apart for weeks and then going into the general election as the nominee wounded."

Cornyn and his allies spent nearly \$70 million to survive the first round of the primary. He was slightly ahead of Paxton with more votes still being counted Wednesday.

Some right-wing allies of the president warned him against backing Cornyn, whom they view as insufficiently loyal to Trump and his "Make America Great Again" movement.

"Endorsing Cornyn will be more gutting to the base than the Iran air strikes," wrote conservative influencer Mike Cernovich on social media.

Paxton isn't backing down

It is unclear whether any level of attack can deter Paxton, who has long been shadowed by allegations of corruption and infidelity. He has fashioned himself as the kind of diehard supporter that Trump needs in Washington.

Paxton was defiant when speaking to a few hundred supporters at a Dallas hotel ballroom on Tuesday night, a far different scene from Cornyn's small news conference.

"We just sent a message, loud and clear, to Washington," he said. "We are not going to go quietly, and we are not going to let you buy the seat."

Cornyn's campaign argued that a runoff would not have been necessary without the "vanity campaign" by Rep. Wesley Hunt, who finished a distant third. It is not known how Hunt's voters would line up in the runoff.

The pro-Paxton Lone Star political action committee, in a memo, described Cornyn as a "Washington relic."

"The D.C. establishment has done its job: it rallied around its wounded incumbent, opened the fundraising spigot, and flooded the airwaves. But the results, the data, and the reality on the ground all point to the same conclusion: John Cornyn has no viable path to the Republican nomination," the memo said. "Cornyn should suspend his campaign, concede the nomination to Ken Paxton, and refuse to allow another \$100+ million in Republican resources to be burned in a race that is already decided."

Cornyn is building his case

While Trump's endorsement looms, Cornyn made it clear that he would make the case himself. He told reporters that Paxton would be "a dead weight at the top of the ticket for Republicans" in November.

"I've worked for decades to build the Republican Party, both here in Texas and nationally," Cornyn said. "I refuse to allow a flawed, self-centered and shameless candidate like Ken Paxton to risk everything we've worked so hard to build over these many years."

Cornyn will face intense fundraising pressure, having already spent so much money in the first round of the primary. Aides said he had some small fundraisers planned but nothing in the days immediately after the election as he returns to Washington.

Hegseth says US 'can't stop everything' that Iran fires even as he asserts air dominance

By KONSTANTIN TOROPIN and DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth acknowledged Wednesday that some Iranian air attacks may still hit their targets even as he asserted that U.S. military superiority is quickly giving it control of the Islamic Republic's airspace.

The United States has spared "no expense or capability" to enhance air defense systems to protect American forces and allies in the Middle East, Hegseth told reporters at the Pentagon, days after the U.S. and Israel attacked Iran in a war that has widened throughout the region.

"This does not mean we can stop everything, but we ensured that the maximum possible defense and

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maximum possible force protection was set up before we went on offense," he said.

The acknowledgment that additional drone or missile strikes could cause damage and harm to troops comes as President Donald Trump and top defense leaders have warned that more American casualties were expected in a conflict that began Saturday and could last months. The U.S. and Israeli bombardment intensified and Iran hit back Wednesday, when the Trump administration revealed that a U.S. submarine fired a torpedo that sank an Iranian warship in the Indian Ocean.

'The risk is still high' to American troops

U.S. service members "remain in harm's way, and we must be clear-eyed that the risk is still high," Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said at the news conference with Hegseth.

Six soldiers were killed when an Iranian drone strike hit an operations center Sunday in the heart of a civilian port in Kuwait, more than 10 miles from the main Army base. The husband of one of the slain soldiers, who was part of a supply and logistics unit based in Iowa, says the center was a shipping container-style building and had no defenses.

Caine declined to answer a question about the possibility of deploying ground troops in Iran, which Trump has not ruled out.

"I'm not going to comment on U.S. boots on the ground," Caine said. "I think that's a question for policymakers. And I don't make policy, I execute policy."

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters that it was "not part of the plan for this operation at this time" but noted that "I'm not going to remove an option for the president that is on the table."

Hegseth suggests the conflict could last 3 weeks or up to 2 months

Hegseth also signaled a possible longer time frame for the conflict than has previously been floated by the administration, saying it could last eight weeks but that the U.S. has the munitions and the equipment to beat Iran in a war of attrition. He declined to set a specific time range, saying the specific duration of the war would depend on how it unfolds.

"You can say four weeks, but it could be six, it could be eight, it could be three," Hegseth said. "Ultimately, we set the pace and the tempo. The enemy is off balance, and we're going to keep them off balance."

More forces are arriving in the region, including jet fighters and bombers, Hegseth said, and the U.S. "will take all the time we need to make sure that we succeed."

Hegseth and Caine say US forces have enough munitions

Supplies of weaponry are not an issue, Hegseth and Caine said, with the defense secretary noting that the military used more advanced weapons at the start of the campaign but was switching to gravity bombs now that the U.S. has gained control of the Iranian sky. Stockpiles of the advanced weapons remain "extremely strong," Hegseth said.

Caine said U.S. attacks on Iranian missile sites and other offensive targets have been successful enough that forces can strike deeper inland, allowing for the shift from sophisticated weapons that can be launched from far away to more traditional, precision bombs dropped by aircraft.

Caine said the U.S. has "sufficient precision munitions for the task at hand, both on the offense and defense." He noted that the military would not be releasing quantities, citing operational security.

"Our air defenses and that of our allies have plenty of runway," Hegseth said. "We can sustain this fight easily for as long as we need to."

Trump said this week the campaign is likely to last four weeks to five weeks but he was prepared "to go far longer than that."

Tehran has pledged to completely destroy Iran's military and economic infrastructure, signaling the war was nowhere near over and could expand further. But Iran's use of missiles and drones is putting a dent in its arsenal.

The number of ballistic missiles fired by Iran is down 86% from the first day of the U.S. military's campaign, with a 23% drop in the past 24 hours, Caine said Wednesday, and Iran's use of one-way attack drone shots is down 73% from the opening days. The decrease could indicate that Iran is holding some weapons in reserve to prolong the conflict.

Americans scramble to depart the Mideast

The administration promoted its efforts to help Americans depart the region. It had abruptly advised those in 14 countries to leave immediately even as the threat of missiles and drones closed airspace in the region and caused widespread flight cancellations.

The State Department said it has assisted nearly 6,500 Americans since the start of the war and has begun charter flights and other transportation. Caine said the military has opened up available seats as military transport planes arrive "to try to help folks get out."

The State Department said one charter flight departed the Middle East for the U.S. on Wednesday. It did not say where the flight originated, though it has said it is arranging charter aircraft from the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Israel.

More than 17,500 Americans have returned to the U.S. from the region since Saturday, including more than 8,500 on Tuesday alone, the department said. It acknowledged that the vast majority of those used commercial transportation without any government assistance.

Elon Musk defends himself against accusations of misconduct leading up to Twitter takeover

By BARBARA ORTUTAY and MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writers

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — A defiant Elon Musk on Wednesday took the stand in a jury trial to defend himself against accusations that he engaged in a pattern of deceptive behavior that misled investors as he attempted to back out of his \$44 billion deal to buy Twitter before he finally completed the takeover.

The civil trial in San Francisco centers on a class-action lawsuit filed just before Musk took control of Twitter, a social media service he renamed X, in October 2022, six months after agreeing to buy the embattled company for \$44 billion, or \$54.20 per share. The price paid by the world's richest man represents a sliver of a fortune now estimated at \$841 billion.

The case, which represents Twitter shareholders who sold the stock between May 13 and Oct. 4, 2022, revolves around allegations that Musk violated federal securities laws while taking a series of calculated steps to drive down the company's stock price in an attempt to either blow up the deal or wrangle a lower sales price.

Musk maintained the deal merited re-negotiation or termination while insisting Twitter's board duped him about the percentage of fake, or "bot," account on its platform — a stance he took again during his Wednesday testimony in a black suit and a tie.

When asked if he had threatened to "hunt down" Twitter's board unless they returned to the negotiating table to discuss a revised sales price, Musk didn't rule out that possibility in an answer that reflected the acrimony surrounding the deal.

"There were a lot of threats going back and forth from both sides," Musk said. "I was pretty upset with the Twitter board because I felt they had engaged in fraud."

The problem of bots and fake accounts on Twitter wasn't new at the time Musk negotiated the deal. The company had paid \$809.5 million in 2021 to settle claims it was overstating its growth rate and monthly user figures. Twitter also disclosed its bot estimates to the Securities and Exchange Commission for years, while also cautioning that its estimate might be too low.

In Wednesday testimony, Musk repeatedly described the information that Twitter's board provided with an abbreviation for a bull's scatology. "I did make it clear that I thought it was BS," Musk said of Twitter's calculations asserting that only about 5% of its accounts were bots.

But the allegations in the case accuse of Musk making a series of misleading statements about the Twitter deal before he served notice in July 2022 that he was pulling the plug on the deal.

After Musk backed out, Twitter went to court in Delaware to force him to honor his original deal. Just before that case was scheduled to go to trial, Musk reversed course again and agreed to pay what he had originally promised.

Musk testified Wednesday that he ended up completing the deal because his lawyers advised him that Delaware Chancery Court Chancellor Kathleen St. Jude McCormick, the judge in charge of the case, was

“extremely biased” against him and he had no chance of prevailing.

He pointed out that McCormick voided a \$55 billion pay package awarded to him as CEO of electric automaker Tesla, but that decision wasn’t made until January 2024 — 15 months after he completed the Twitter takeover. The Delaware Supreme Court overturned McCormick’s ruling late last year.

By tying his belief that McCormick was biased against him to his lawyers, Musk insulated himself from extensive questioning about the decision through legal protections shielding discussions between attorneys and their clients.

But U.S. District Judge Charles Breyer on Wednesday cited other evidence that Musk may have personally concluded McCormick was biased, which could lift attorney-client privilege. Breyer indicated he may rule on the matter later in the trial currently scheduled to continue through March 19.

In his testimony, Musk asserted that his decision to follow through on the deal at the original sales price provided a huge windfall for most Twitter shareholders.

But Twitter’s shares fell below \$33, or about 40% below Musk’s original purchase price, while the deal was hanging in limbo. That downturn costs shareholders who sold their stock during the uncertainty caused by what the lawsuit alleges was Musk’s deceitful behavior.

“I can’t control whether people sell their stock, but everyone who held the stock fared extremely well,” Musk said.

This isn’t the first time that Musk has been dragged into court to defend himself against allegations of duping investors with his social media posts. Three years ago, Musk spent about eight hours testifying in a San Francisco federal trial about his plans to buy Tesla — the electric automaker that he still runs as publicly traded company — for \$420 per share in a proposed 2018 deal that never materialized. A nine-member jury absolved Musk of wrongdoing in that case.

Before his Wednesday testimony concluded, Musk acknowledged that his frequent posts on social media probably reveal too much about what his going on his mind.

“What I think privately is what I say publicly,” Musk said.

Musk is expected to return to court Thursday to continue his testimony.

US issues first commercial construction permit for a nuclear reactor in years to a Wyoming project

By MEAD GRUVER Associated Press

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission on Wednesday approved its first construction permit for a commercial nuclear reactor in eight years, one that will allow a Bill Gates-backed company to build a sodium-cooled reactor in western Wyoming.

TerraPower filed for the permit in 2024 and construction is now set to begin within weeks. Completion of the up to \$4 billion plant is targeted for 2030, according to TerraPower. Microsoft co-founder Gates, who is eyeing nuclear generation as a power source for the electricity-hungry data centers behind artificial intelligence, is a founder of TerraPower and its primary investor.

“We have spent thousands of manpower hours working to achieve this momentous accomplishment,” TerraPower President and CEO Chris Levesque said in a statement.

The TerraPower plant is set to be built near a coal-fired power plant that is being converted to burn natural gas outside Kemmerer, a town of about 2,500 people some 130 miles (210 kilometers) northeast of Salt Lake City.

Gates and his energy company are seeking to develop a next-generation nuclear plant that would “revolutionize” how power is generated. The 345-megawatt reactor is expected to produce up to 500 megawatts at its peak, enough energy for up to 400,000 homes.

Construction at the TerraPower plant site — though not on the reactor itself — began in 2024.

The reactor construction permit for a TerraPower subsidiary is the NRC’s first approval for a non-light-water commercial reactor in more than 40 years, the NRC said in a statement.

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Virtually all of the world's commercial nuclear reactors use water to control reactions and transfer heat to drive turbines and produce electricity.

The NRC last issued a construction permit for a conventional light-water reactor to Florida Power & Light Company for a power plant south of Miami in 2018. That project has yet to be built.

The TerraPower reactor would use molten sodium, not water, as a coolant.

The last commercial non-light-water reactor in operation in the U.S. was the Fort St. Vrain nuclear plant in northern Colorado. The problem-plagued, helium-cooled plant produced electricity from the mid-1970s until it was shut down in 1989.

In October, Gates told reporters he thinks nuclear power will be a "gigantic contributor" to powering data centers. He had recently met with Energy Secretary Chris Wright, Interior Secretary Doug Burgum and various members of Congress and said the government was "very involved" in the TerraPower reactor.

"I wish I could deliver nuclear fission like three years earlier than I can, because then we'd have a perfect match to the current demand pattern of these data center guys," he said.

The plant would use a highly enriched form of uranium that in recent years has been obtainable only from Russia. TerraPower has been lining up other sources to produce the fuel domestically and in South Africa, according to the company.

While the Trump administration pushes toward nuclear power, the federal government has yet to address the thousands of tons of spent fuel that have been piling up for decades at nuclear plants nationwide. New Mexico and Texas have dug in their heels to keep from becoming dumping grounds in the absence of a permanent solution.

In January, the U.S. Department of Energy announced it was taking what it called a first step toward possible partnerships with states to modernize the fuel cycle, including reprocessing spent fuel and disposing of waste. The agency gave states until April 1 to step forward if they're interested in participating.

The TerraPower reactor would produce relatively less nuclear waste than conventional reactors, according to the company.

House committee votes to subpoena Attorney General Bondi to answer questions over the Epstein files

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House Oversight Committee voted Wednesday to subpoena Attorney General Pam Bondi to answer questions over the Justice Department's handling of files regarding the Jeffrey Epstein sex trafficking investigation.

Five Republicans joined Democrats to support the subpoena proposed by GOP Rep. Nancy Mace in a sign of continued frustration among conservatives with the department's review and release of a tranche of documents related to the disgraced financier. The move amounted to a sharp rebuke of Bondi by Republicans who have been clamoring for information about Epstein's abuse of young girls and his interactions with rich and powerful people.

"The American people want answers on the Epstein files, and so do we," Mace, of South Carolina, said in a post on X.

The Justice Department had no immediate comment on the subpoena.

The Epstein files remain a political headache for the Trump administration more than a year after Bondi sparked backlash by handing out binders of documents with no new revelations to conservative influencers at the White House. Then, after a months-long review, the Justice Department in July said it had concluded that no Epstein "client list" existed and there was no reason to make additional files public.

That set off a furor that prompted Congress to pass legislation demanding that the Justice Department release the files. Since the first release in December, critics have accused the administration of fumbling the rollout and withholding too many documents. Administration officials have said lawyers worked as quickly as possible to properly review, redact and release millions of documents required under the law.

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"For months, Attorney General Bondi has been instrumental in orchestrating the White House's cover-up of the Epstein files, and has failed to comply with our bipartisan subpoena for the release of the complete, unredacted files," Rep. Robert Garcia of California, the top Democrat on the committee, said in a statement.

"The American people deserve transparency, survivors deserve justice, and we are demanding answers."

Bondi has defended the department's handling of the files and has accused Democrats of using the furor over the documents to distract from Trump's successes, even though some of the most vocal criticism has come from members of the president's own party.

During a fiery congressional hearing last month, Democrats excoriated Bondi over haphazard redactions in the Epstein files that exposed intimate details about victims and included nude photographs. Bondi told lawmakers that the Justice Department had taken down files when it was made aware that they included victims' information and said staff had tried to do their "very best" in the time frame allotted by the legislation mandating the release of the files.

The move to demand Bondi's testimony comes a week after the Justice Department said it was looking into whether it had improperly withheld documents from the files after several news organizations reported that some records involving uncorroborated accusations made by a woman against Trump were not among those released to the public.

That announcement followed news reports saying that a massive tranche of records released by the Justice Department did not include several summaries of interviews that the FBI conducted with an unidentified woman who came forward after Epstein's 2019 arrest and claimed to have been sexually assaulted by both Trump and Epstein when she was a minor in the 1980s.

Former President Bill Clinton and his wife, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, recently sat with lawmakers on the committee for their own depositions over the former Democratic president's connections to Epstein from more than two decades ago.

Bill Clinton told members of Congress on Friday that he "did nothing wrong" in his relationship with Epstein and saw no signs of Epstein's sexual abuse. Hillary Clinton told lawmakers she had no knowledge of Epstein's crimes and did not recall "ever encountering Mr. Epstein."

What to know about how GLP-1 medications might fight addiction

By JONEL ALECCIA AP Health Writer

The blockbuster GLP-1 drugs that have reshaped the treatment of diabetes and obesity may help prevent multiple substance use disorders — and reduce the tragic outcomes they cause, a large new study finds.

An analysis published Wednesday in a medical journal looked at electronic health records from more than 600,000 U.S. Veterans Affairs patients with diabetes. It found that those treated with medications such as Ozempic and Mounjaro were less likely to develop addictions to alcohol, nicotine, cocaine, opioids and other substances than those treated with a different class of drugs.

In those already addicted, the GLP-1 drugs were linked to lower risks of hospitalization, overdose and death, according to the study.

The new results suggest — but don't prove — that the weight-loss medications may be able to target the underlying source of cravings that affect the more than 48 million Americans with substance use disorders.

"They're actually working against the root cause of all these different addictions," said Dr. Ziyad Al-Aly, the study's lead author and a chief researcher at the VA St. Louis Health Care System.

Here's what you need to know about the new research published by The BMJ:

How the study was designed

Previous studies have suggested that the drugs known as GLP-1s, or glucagon-like peptide-1 receptor agonists, could reduce addictions by targeting the brain's reward pathways. But those studies have been small and often limited to one substance.

For this study, one of the largest to date, Al-Aly and his colleagues analyzed data from the electronic records of more than 600,000 Veterans Affairs patients with diabetes over three years. They compared people who received GLP-1 drugs with those treated with medications that lower blood sugar.

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The patients were divided into seven parallel trials that analyzed the risk of developing addictions to multiple substances including alcohol, cannabis, cocaine, nicotine and opioids. Another trial looked at the risk of specific harms among people with existing addictions when they took the different types of medication.

What the researchers found

Al-Aly and his colleagues found that people starting the GLP-1 drugs had lower risks of developing addiction to multiple substances. Compared with the other medications, people taking the GLP-1 drugs had a reduced risk for addiction: 18% for alcohol, 14% for cannabis, 20% for both cocaine and nicotine, and 25% for opioids.

In patients who already had substance use disorders, starting the GLP-1s was linked with a 31% lower risk of emergency department visits, 26% lower risk of hospitalizations, 25% lower risk of suicidal thoughts or attempts, 39% lower risk of overdose — and 50% lower risk of death.

Overall, the study found that using GLP-1 drugs likely prevented about seven cases of substance use disorder and 12 incidents involving serious harm for every 1,000 users over three years, Al-Aly said.

The limits of the study

Among the study's limitations: It was conducted within the VA health system, which serves a population that is mostly older, white and male, although Al-Aly said the results were consistent in more than 35,000 women. It also includes data only from people with diabetes, not the general population.

The researchers also couldn't account for some factors, such as socioeconomic status or lifestyle choices, that could affect the results. And the analysis focuses on the effects of using GLP-1s compared with another drug, not compared with no treatment.

As an observational study, the new analysis showed that the GLP-1s are associated with reduced risk of substance use disorders and harms, not that the drugs themselves caused the reduction.

Addiction researchers see a need for new medications

The new findings are striking, said Dr. Lorenzo Leggio, a National Institute on Drug Abuse clinical director who wasn't involved in the study.

"Even though we don't fully understand the mechanism, somehow the GLP-1 system is tackling addiction biology and the foundational system that underlies all these disorders," he said.

Diabetes and weight-loss trials have shown that the GLP-1 drugs target hormones in the gut and the brain that control appetite and feelings of fullness, cutting down on what's described as "food noise," or intrusive thoughts of food. In the same way, this study indicates the drugs may tamp down "alcohol or drug noise," Leggio said.

Growing evidence that GLP-1s might prevent substance use disorders is exciting, said Dr. Anna Lembke, a Stanford University addiction medicine specialist.

"We haven't really had a new tool in our toolbox from a pharmacotherapy perspective to treat addiction in a long time," said Lembke, noting that some addiction specialists are already prescribing GLP-1s off-label, especially when other treatments have failed.

She cautioned that the GLP-1 drugs don't work the same way for all users and that they have risks that must be weighed against potential benefits.

What comes next

The new findings do not, by themselves, justify prescribing GLP-1 drugs to prevent or treat substance use disorders, Al-Aly said. That evidence would need to come from randomized controlled clinical trials that directly compare the use of the drugs against a placebo, or dummy medication. Several such trials are pending, Leggio noted.

The goal is finding a new way to treat addictions, which are a leading cause of sickness and death around the world.

"The consequence in terms of chronic disease of these addictive drugs is actually gigantic in our society," Leggio said.

Noem defends Homeland Security Department in post-shooting appearances before Congress

By REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem wrapped up two days of scrutiny in Congress on Wednesday, appearing for the first time in front of lawmakers since the shooting deaths of two protesters in Minneapolis at the hands of immigration enforcement officers.

Noem came under blistering criticism from Democrats — and a few Republicans — over allegations that under her authority, immigration officers have abused the rights of immigrants and American citizens and used excessive force. She was also slammed over how her department is spending the billions of dollars allocated to it by Congress and accused of dodging accountability.

Noem, the secretary leading President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown, argues she has strengthened the nation's security by stemming migration from the southern border. She said immigration enforcement officers are following the law in the face of violent protesters. Most Republicans backed her stance, portraying Noem as a leader out to rectify immigration left unchecked by President Joe Biden's administration.

Here's a look at some highlights from her testimony.

Repeated Democratic attacks about immigration enforcement

During both days of testimony, Noem was repeatedly made to answer for her characterization of the two killed protesters, Renee Good and Alex Pretti, as armed agitators. Bystanders' video and accounts have contradicted Noem's depiction of events.

The top Democrat on the House committee, Rep. Jamie Raskin of Maryland, pushed Noem about her comments.

"You told a lie about them. You said they were domestic terrorists," Raskin said.

Other Democrats questioned why DHS officers used force to yank people out of vehicles or why they'd pulled an American citizen from his Minneapolis home in his pajamas.

Noem also faced criticism from some Republicans, including most notably retiring Republican Sen. Thom Tillis of North Carolina, who on Tuesday called her leadership a "disaster."

Over the two days, Noem pushed back on the allegations, saying that Democrats didn't have their facts correct and defended how her officers operate.

"We do targeted enforcement based on intelligence and go after the worst of the worst," Noem said.

Speaking Tuesday of her comments after the shootings, Noem said she was relying on information from people on the scene and blamed "violent protesters" for contributing to the chaos officers encountered.

Lawmakers question whether Noem is obstructing watchdog investigations

In the letter obtained by The Associated Press, Homeland Security Inspector General Joseph Cuffari said DHS leadership has "systematically obstructed" the office's work in 11 instances, including one criminal investigation with a "nexus" to the department.

Cuffari said that his department was not allowed to access databases or take other steps that were necessary for their investigations.

Democratic Rep. Hank Johnson of Georgia asked Noem about the letter, saying that her department had a "pattern of obstructing investigations."

Noem denied the accusation and said Cuffari hadn't outlined what information he wanted and the timeline for his request.

"He wants unfettered access to every single thing in the department. And that's not the process," Noem said.

DHS under scrutiny over spending

Noem's department was infused with \$170 billion, money granted by Congress that has since sparked questions over where and how it is being spent.

The secretary on Wednesday was asked about her department's decision to carry out a \$220 million ad campaign featuring Noem that encouraged people in the country illegally to leave voluntarily.

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Democrats questioned whether the contracts went through a competitive bidding process and whether Noem's associates unfairly benefited from the process.

"You're using millions of dollars of taxpayer money in this way," said Democratic Rep. Joe Neguse, who called it fraud. "Ultimately I think there's going to be accountability."

Noem said the spending was carried out lawfully.

The top Democrat on the committee also hammered Noem over her department's purchase of luxury jets.

Noem defends use of administrative warrants

The Associated Press reported earlier this year that federal officers were asserting sweeping power to forcibly enter a suspect's home without a judge's warrant — something legal experts say infringes on constitutional rights.

Noem on both days said the warrants were appropriate and legal. She said their use in forcible entry was limited, saying that they were only used 28 times under her authority, without saying where they were used.

"We do use it, but it's very rare when we do," Noem said.

But the warrants' use received pushback even from Republicans. Rep. Thomas Massie of Kentucky said he's a "strong proponent of the Fourth Amendment, and I think it would be helpful if we stuck to that."

Questions about top Noem adviser's role

Rep. Sydney Kamlager-Dove, a Democrat from California, asked Noem about her relationship with Corey Lewandowski, a special government employee who is one of the secretary's top advisers.

Lewandowski was Trump's first campaign manager in 2016 and was long one of his most vocal supporters. He later became a key Noem supporter, helping her gain access to the former president's political orbit.

When Noem took the position at DHS, Lewandowski became a special government employee — a position that is supposed to limit the number of days that he's allowed to work at the department. But he's been a constant presence at Noem's side, raising questions about how many days he's actually working and about the nature of the pair's relationship.

Kamlager-Dove said Lewandowski wields "unchecked" and "unconfirmed" power and asked whether Noem and Lewandowski were having an affair.

"At any time during your tenure as director of the Department of Homeland Security have you had sexual relations with Corey Lewandowski?" said Kamlager-Dove.

"Mr. Chairman, I am shocked that we are going down and peddling tabloid garbage in this committee today," Noem said. She denied the allegations, calling the questioning offensive and said Lewandowski does not have decision-making authority.

What to know about the investigation into Catholic priests in Rhode Island and sexual abuse charges

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — A new investigation into the Catholic Diocese of Providence, Rhode Island, shows that an estimated 75 priests abused more than 300 children since 1950, with the state's top law enforcement chief warning Wednesday that the scope of the abuse is likely much bigger.

The report was released by Rhode Island Attorney General Peter Neronha, whose office has been investigating the diocese since 2019.

According to Neronha, the church could be doing more to address child sexual abuse. Yet diocese leaders have pushed back at the conclusions from the report, maintaining there are no "credibly accused clergy in active ministry."

Here's what to know about the investigation.

How the diocese handled reports of child abuse

The report described church records as "damning," declaring that the diocese often failed to take the proper steps to protect children from sexual abuse. While clergy abuse has been widely exposed, up until Wednesday's report, the scope of what took place in Rhode Island had largely been unknown.

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The report flagged that the diocese often transferred accused priests to new assignments without thoroughly investigating complaints or contacting law enforcement. This practice was common, as other investigations in Boston, Philadelphia and elsewhere have exposed.

This includes the Diocese of Providence opening a "spiritual retreat-style facility" in the early 1950s, where several accused priests were sent elsewhere for a period of time with the goal of returning to work. This practice evolved into sending accused priests to more formal treatment centers after determining clergy abuse may stem from mental health problems.

The report said the diocese's "overreliance and misplaced faith" in the treatment centers was at best "absurdly Pollyannaish."

By the 1990s, accused priests were sometimes placed on sabbatical leave.

Were any of the priests charged

In total, only 20 people — about a quarter of the clergy identified in the report — faced criminal charges, and just 14 were convicted. A dozen others were laicized, or dismissed from the clerical state.

Neronha's office has charged four current and former priests with sexual abuse for allegations stemming from 2020 to 2022.

Three of them are still awaiting trial. The fourth priest died after being deemed incompetent to stand trial in 2022.

How the diocese responded to the recent report

In a lengthy response, the Diocese of Providence acknowledged that were "serious missteps" made by church leaders in the past, but stressed that the diocese willingly shared internal records under a 2019 agreement with the state.

"The report presents this 75-year history in ways that might lead the reader to conclude these issues are an ongoing diocesan problem or that these are new revelations. They are not," the statement said.

What the Rhode Island investigation recommends

The state's report urged clergy leaders to address ongoing concerns about abuse, outlining multiple changes for the diocese, which include providing clear investigative timelines and guidelines.

The report then stressed the need for the diocese to abandon the practice of requiring victims to take polygraph tests and to stop refusing to investigate third-party complaints about priests.

Separately, Neronha called on Rhode Island lawmakers to change various state laws that would remove obstacles for victims in coming forward. He particularly noted that state law currently prevents grand jury reports from becoming public. This meant his office couldn't use that option to investigate the diocese because he didn't want the findings to remain secret.

Neronha also recommended that the criminal statute of limitations on second-degree assault should be extended and that the civil statute of limitations on certain child sexual abuse claims should be expanded. Those bills are currently being introduced inside the Democratic-controlled statehouse.

Judge rules companies are entitled to refunds for Trump tariffs overturned by the Supreme Court

By PAUL WISEMAN and MAE ANDERSON AP Business Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a defeat for the Trump administration, a federal judge in New York ruled Wednesday that companies that paid tariffs struck down last month by Supreme Court are due refunds.

Judge Richard Eaton of the U.S. Court of International Trade wrote that "all importers of record" were "entitled to benefit" from the Supreme Court ruling that struck down sweeping double-digit import taxes President Donald Trump imposed last year under the 1977 International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA).

The Supreme Court found those tariffs to be unconstitutional under the emergency powers law, including the sweeping "reciprocal" tariffs he levied on nearly every other country. The majority ruled that the president could not unilaterally set and change tariffs because taxation power clearly belongs to Congress.

In his ruling, Eaton wrote that he alone "will hear cases pertaining to the refund of IEEPA duties." The

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ruling offers some clarity about the tariff refund process, something the Supreme Court did not even mention in its Feb. 20 decision. Trade lawyer Ryan Majerus, a partner at King & Spalding and a former U.S. trade official, said he expects the government to appeal or “seek a stay to buy more time for U.S. Customs to comply.”

The federal government collected more than \$130 billion in the now-defunct tariffs through mid-December and could ultimately be on the hook for refunds worth \$175 billion, according to calculations by the Penn Wharton Budget Model.

Eaton was ruling specifically on a case brought by Atmus Filtration, a Nashville, Tennessee, company that makes filters and other filtration products, claiming a right to a tariff refund.

All goods that go through U.S. Customs and Border Protections enter a process called “liquidation,” when the agency issues its final accounting of what is owed. Once liquidated, importers have 180 days to formally contest the duties. After that window closes, the liquidation is legally final.

The judge ordered customs to stop collecting the IEEPA tariffs the Supreme Court struck down last month on goods going through the liquidation process. And if the goods were past that part of the process, the agency would have to recalculate them without the tariffs.

“This is a great decision for importers and consumers who paid,” said Barry Appleton, a law professor and co-director New York Law School’s Center for International Law. “It will make customs brokers busy. It should make things easier for the courts — and get a process underway for those importers who paid within the last 180 days.”

On Monday, another federal court rejected the Trump administration’s attempt to slow the refund process. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit started the next phase in the refund process by sending it to New York trade court to sort out.

Now the U.S. Customs and Border Protection agency must come up with a way to process the refunds. Customs routinely refunds tariffs when there’s been some kind of error, but its system was “not designed for a mass refund,” said trade lawyer Alexis Early, a partner at Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner. “The devil will be in the details of the administrative process.”

Sprawling investigation finds decades of sexual abuse among Catholic priests in Rhode Island

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI, MARYCLAIRE DALE and LEAH WILLINGHAM Associated Press
PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — Catholic priests in Rhode Island preyed on hundreds of children for decades, and were protected by bishops more concerned with the church’s reputation than the victims, according to a new report on clergy sexual abuse that echoes findings elsewhere.

The report, released Wednesday by Attorney General Peter Neronha, follows a multiyear investigation into the Catholic Diocese of Providence, Rhode Island.

Neronha said the full scope of the priest abuse problem in Rhode Island — the smallest U.S. state but the one with the highest Catholic population per capita, at nearly 40% — had long remained elusive. He agreed with victims who say not enough has been done to address the problem long after it was exposed in the nearby Boston diocese in 2002.

“If you’re the Diocese of Providence and you’re listening, this is a scandal you need to own and you need to fix,” Neronha told reporters Wednesday. “We can’t slow walk solutions and we can’t slow walk justice.”

Neronha, who was raised Catholic, hopes the report will spur legal reforms to boost investigative powers and help victims seek justice.

The investigation found that 75 Catholic clergy molested more than 300 victims since 1950, but officials stressed that the number of victimized children and abusive priests is likely much higher.

The diocese, in response, acknowledged the scourge of child sexual abuse — especially by clergy — but said the report reflects the church’s willingness to share internal records under a 2019 agreement with the state.

“The report presents this 75-year history in ways that might lead the reader to conclude these issues

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are an ongoing diocesan problem or that these are new revelations. They are not," the statement said.

3 priests charged in RI awaiting trial

Church records show the diocese transferred accused priests to new assignments without fully investigating complaints or contacting law enforcement, a practice exposed in investigations in Boston, Philadelphia and elsewhere.

And, as in other cities, the Diocese of Providence opened a "spiritual retreat-style facility" in the early 1950s for accused priests to seek treatment. Later, when the abuse was deemed a mental health problem, priests were sent to more formal treatment centers.

By the 1990s, accused priests were sometimes placed on sabbatical leave.

For example, a priest named Robert Carpentier resigned after a victim came forward in 1992 to say that he had been sexually abused as a 13-year-old victim in the 1970s. Carpentier acknowledged the abuse, was sent to a treatment center and later went on sabbatical at Boston College. He retired in 2006 and received support from the diocese until he died in 2012.

Most accused priests, the report found, avoided accountability from both law enforcement and the diocese.

Neronha's office has charged four current and former priests with sexual abuse for allegations stemming from 2020 to 2022. Three of them are still awaiting trial. The fourth priest died after being deemed incompetent to stand trial in 2022.

Only 20 people — about a quarter of the clergy identified in the report — faced criminal charges, and just 14 were convicted. A dozen others were laicized or otherwise dismissed.

Diocesan review board member among the accused

One survivor described being groomed more than a year before he was abused by the pastor of Immaculate Conception Church in Cranston in 1981. The survivor, who is not named in the report, said the late Monsignor John Allard showered him with attention. By ninth grade, he said, the sexual abuse began in the priest's bedroom.

"His comment to me was always, 'You need a hug,' and that's something that I can hear him saying very clearly to this very day," the survivor told officials in 2013.

While a review board deemed the abuse credible, the Vatican — at the urging of then-Providence Bishop Thomas Tobin — let Allard retire rather than be defrocked.

The report lists Tobin advocating for several accused priests, a trend that Neronha repeatedly criticized.

"I just don't know how you square it. If he's got an answer, then he's free to send it in," Neronha said.

The diocese, in a statement released Wednesday, praised Tobin's willingness to work with Neronha while he was bishop before retiring in 2023.

Separately, in at least one case, a member of the diocesan review board hearing abuse complaints was himself accused, the report says. The Rev. Francis Santilli stepped down after the complaint, but remained in active ministry even after other complaints surfaced in 2014 and 2021. He was not removed until 2022. A message left at a possible number for him on Wednesday was not immediately returned.

Church disagrees with AG on findings

Neronha launched the investigation in 2019, a year after a Pennsylvania grand jury issued a landmark report that found more than 1,000 children had been abused by some 300 priests since the 1940s.

However, Rhode Island law does not allow grand jury reports to become public — a hurdle that Neronha has long tried to change. Instead, he forged an agreement with the diocese to access its trove of records on clergy sexual abuse.

The church turned over 70 years' worth of material, including complaints from its secret archives, civil settlement records, treatment costs and other documents. Yet Neronha called the diocese's help limited at times, saying it refused to provide diocesan personnel for interviews.

Neronha criticized the diocese on Wednesday for treating the report as "ancient history," arguing that more needed to be done by clergy leaders to address ongoing concerns about abuse. His office outlined multiple changes for the diocese, which include providing clear investigative timelines and guidelines. He also stressed the need for the diocese to abandon the practice of requiring victims take polygraph tests and to stop refusing to investigate third-party complaints about priests.

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The diocese, in its response Wednesday, pushed back on that view, saying the report would not have been possible without the church's cooperation.

"There are no credibly accused clergy in active ministry," said Bishop Bruce Lewandowski in a video statement. "Today's Catholic clergy here in Rhode Island are good and holy men serving Christ and his people with devotion and out of genuine pastoral concern."

For Herbert Brennan, who was repeatedly abused by a Rhode Island priest in the 1960s, the diocese's response is disappointing but not surprising.

"If one wants to learn the teachings of Jesus Christ, they should read the Bible. If one wishes to understand the Catholic church, read this report," Brennan said.

Talarico wins Texas Senate Democratic nomination while Cornyn and Paxton head to Republican runoff

By THOMAS BEAUMONT and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — State Rep. James Talarico topped Congresswoman Jasmine Crockett in an expensive and fiercely contested Texas Senate Democratic primary that once again has the party dreaming of a big upset in November.

Who Talarico will face depends on a May runoff between longtime Republican Sen. John Cornyn and MAGA favorite Ken Paxton — a race expected to get increasingly nasty over coming months and could hinge on whether or not President Donald Trump offers an endorsement.

Texas, along with North Carolina and Arkansas, on Tuesday kicked off midterm elections with control of Congress at stake and against the backdrop of the U.S.-Israeli war with Iran.

No Democrat has won a statewide race in the reliably Republican state in over 30 years, but in a statement after his victory, Talarico proclaimed "We're about to take back Texas."

Crockett's campaign said she planned to sue over voting issues in Dallas and she spoke only briefly on Tuesday night to warn that "people have been disenfranchised."

Republicans head to round 2

Cornyn, meanwhile, is seeking a fifth term but is facing a tough challenge from Paxton, the state attorney general. Cornyn hopes to avoid becoming the first Republican senator in Texas history to seek reelection and not be renominated.

The GOP contest also featured U.S. Rep. Wesley Hunt, who finished a distant third and conceded. But him making it a three-way race made it tougher for any candidate to reach the 50% vote threshold needed to win the nomination outright and avoid the May 26 runoff.

All three campaigned on their ties to Trump, who did not make an endorsement in the race. Now both Cornyn and Paxton will again fiercely compete to curry the president's favor.

Cornyn was facing a tough enough battle that he didn't hold an election night party. Instead, in comments to reporters in Austin, he sought to make the case that a runoff win by Paxton would leave "a dead weight at the top of the ticket for Republicans."

"I've worked for decades to build the Republican Party, both here in Texas and nationally," Cornyn said. "I refuse to allow a flawed, self-centered and shameless candidate like Ken Paxton to risk everything we've worked so hard to build over these many years."

Addressing supporters in Dallas, Paxton made a point of saying he felt like he had during a recent trip to Mar-a-Lago, Trump's Florida estate. He also proclaimed: "We proved something they'll never understand in Washington."

"Texas is not for sale," he said.

Cornyn's cool relationship with Trump is part of what made him vulnerable. He and allied groups spent at least \$64 million in television advertising alone since July to try stabilize his support.

Paxton, who began campaigning in earnest only last month, has made national headlines for filing lawsuits against Democratic initiatives. He remained popular in Texas despite a 2023 impeachment trial on corruption charges, of which he was acquitted, and accusations of marital infidelity by his wife.

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Senate GOP leaders, who are backing Cornyn, worry that Paxton's liabilities would make it harder to defend the seat if he is the nominee — and require significant spending that could be better used elsewhere.

Confusion at some polling places

In the Democratic campaign, Crockett and Talarico each argued that they would be the stronger general election candidate in a state that backed Trump by almost 14 percentage points in 2024.

Voting was extended in Dallas County and Williamson County, outside Austin, after voters reported being turned away and directed to different voting precincts because of new primary rules. Paxton's office later challenged a decision keeping the polls open longer, and the state Supreme Court ruled that ballots cast by people not in line by 7 p.m. should be separated from others.

It was not immediately clear how the court's action would be carried out or how many eligible ballots remained to be counted in Dallas County, Crockett's home base. Crockett said she would seek legal action after voting was concluded.

And in Harris County, which includes Houston, a spokesperson said that as of 10 p.m. there were still voters at 20 centers.

Democratic race featured clash of styles

Crockett and Talarico waged a spirited race as Democrats look for their first Senate win in Texas since 1988.

Crockett has built a national profile for zinger attacks on Republicans and focused on turning out Black voters in the Dallas and Houston areas. Talarico, a seminarian who often references the Bible, held rallies across the state, including in heavily Republican areas.

"We are not just trying to win an election," a jubilant Talarico told supporters in Austin before the race was called. "We are trying to fundamentally change our politics. And it's working."

Dallas voter Tanu Saini said she cast her ballot for Talarico because he "really spoke to me in the way he tries to unify."

Tomas Sanchez, a voter in Dallas County, said he supported Crockett because "she cares about immigrants, she cares about the American people in a way that a lot of the Republicans have proven they haven't."

Talarico outspent Crockett on television advertising by more than four to one as of late February. He got a burst of attention — and campaign contributions — last month from CBS' decision not to air his interview with late-night host Stephen Colbert, who said the network pulled the interview for fear of angering Trump's FCC.

Other key primaries

Texas' races also featured new congressional district boundaries that GOP lawmakers — urged on by Trump — redrew to help elect more Republicans. The result matched several Democratic incumbents in primary fights and set up new general election battlegrounds.

Republican former Rep. Mayra Flores was attempting a comeback but was defeated by Eric Flores, a lawyer endorsed by Trump, for the nomination to run against Democratic Rep. Vicente Gonzalez. Mayra Flores made history in a 2022 special election as the first Republican to win in the Rio Grande Valley in 150 years but lost her bid for a full term later that year.

Incumbent Republican Rep. Dan Crenshaw lost his primary to state Rep. Steve Toth, who was endorsed by Sen. Ted Cruz.

Another incumbent GOP incumbent, Rep. Tony Gonzales, was considered vulnerable after an alleged affair with a staffer who killed herself. He was challenged by gun manufacturer and YouTube influencer Brandon Herrera, who calls himself "the AK guy." The two will head to a runoff in a district that includes Uvalde, site of a deadly 2022 shooting at Robb Elementary School.

Former Major League Baseball star Mark Teixeira clinched the Republican primary to succeed GOP Chip Roy in southwest Texas.

Democrat Bobby Pulido, a Latin Grammy winner, won his party's primary in South Texas against physician Ada Cuellar. Pulido will face two-term Republican Rep. Monica De La Cruz.

In suburban Dallas, Democratic Rep. Julie Johnson was facing former Rep. Colin Allred, a former NFL

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linebacker and 2024 Senate nominee.

Democratic Rep. Al Green was fighting to stay in office after his Houston-based district was drawn to lean Republican. Green, 78, ran in a newly drawn district against Democratic Rep. Christian Menefee, 37, who won a January special election for the current 18th District.

Republican Gov. Greg Abbott easily won his primary and will face Democratic state Rep. Gina Hinojosa. Roy advanced to a primary runoff with Mayes Middleton for attorney general.

US stocks rebound after strong economic updates and as oil prices stop spiking

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The U.S. stock market rebounded Wednesday from two days of punishing swings after oil prices stopped spiking and reports gave encouraging updates on the economy.

The S&P 500 rose 0.8% and made back most of its losses since the war with Iran began. The Dow Jones Industrial Average climbed 238 points, or 0.5%, and the Nasdaq composite climbed 1.3%.

The strength followed a scary start to Wednesday, when South Korea's Kospi stock index plunged 12.1% for its worst loss in history. Uncertainty about the war has sent prices in financial markets careening up and down this week, with most taking their cues from what the price of oil is doing.

Oil prices moderated as trading moved westward from Asia to Europe and across the Atlantic. After briefly topping \$84, the price for a barrel of Brent crude, the international standard, settled at \$81.40, back to where it was a day earlier. A barrel of benchmark U.S. crude rose 0.1% to \$74.66.

Stocks also got a boost from signs of strength for the U.S. economy.

One report said growth for U.S. businesses in the real estate, finance and other services industries accelerated last month at the fastest pace since the summer of 2022. Encouragingly for inflation, it also said prices for such businesses are increasing at a slower rate, at least before the war with Iran began.

A second report suggested U.S. employers outside of the government picked up their hiring last month. That could be a hopeful signal for the more comprehensive report coming Friday from the U.S. government about the overall job market.

In financial markets, worries are centered on how long the war with Iran could last, how high inflation will go because of more expensive oil and how much corporate profits will sink because of it.

The U.S. stock market has a history of shaking off military conflicts in the Middle East relatively quickly, though that comes with the caveat that oil prices don't jump too high. That has some professional investors suggesting patience through the volatility, at least when it comes to financial markets.

Not everyone is optimistic.

"I think the Iran situation is getting out of hand, and I think that U.S. President Donald Trump miscalculated enormously," said Francis Lun, CEO of Venturesmart Asia. "The situation is very grim."

On Wall Street, a mix of companies helped drive Wednesday's rise.

Stocks enmeshed in the crypto industry climbed as bitcoin's price rebounded back above \$73,000. Coinbase Global jumped 14.6%, and Robinhood Markets rallied 8.1%.

Retailers and travel companies strengthened with hopes that a solid economy and an easing for jumps in gasoline prices will mean their customers may have more to spend.

Ross Stores climbed 8% after reporting better profit and revenue for the latest quarter than analysts expected and saying it's entering 2026 with "solid momentum." Expedia Group rose 3.1%.

Big Tech stocks, meanwhile, were the strongest forces lifting the market. Amazon rose 3.9%, and Nvidia added 1.7%. Because they're among the biggest stocks in the U.S. market in terms of total value, their movements carry more weight on the S&P 500.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 52.87 points to 6,869.50. The Dow Jones Industrial Average climbed 238.14 to 48,739.41, and the Nasdaq composite rallied 290.79 to 22,807.48.

In stock markets abroad, indexes rose in Europe following sharp drops in Asia. France's CAC 40 climbed 0.8%, and Germany's DAX returned 1.7%. That came after losses of 2% for Hong Kong's Hang Seng and

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3.6% for Japan's Nikkei 225, along with Seoul's historic plunge.

In the bond market, Treasury yields ticked higher after jumping early in the week with worries about worsening inflation. The yield on the 10-year Treasury rose to 4.09% from 4.06% late Tuesday.

Wednesday's strong reports on the economy were welcome news for the Federal Reserve, whose job it is to keep the U.S. job market healthy and inflation low. The Fed's job has become more difficult because of the jump in oil prices, which is pushing upward on already high inflation.

The Fed could keep interest rates high to keep a lid on inflation. But high interest rates would also keep it more expensive for U.S. households and companies to borrow money, grinding down on the economy.

The central bank had indicated it planned to resume its cuts to interest rates later this year, in hopes of giving a boost to the job market and economy. Because of the war and higher oil prices, traders have pushed their forecasts further into the summer for when the Fed could begin cutting rates again.

Aaron Judge and a loaded US roster hope to dethrone Ohtani's Japan at the World Baseball Classic

By RONALD BLUM AP Baseball Writer

Aaron Judge is trading pinstripes for a plain jersey with red, white and blue letters.

"Getting the chance to wear that across my chest is going to be pretty powerful," the U.S. and New York Yankees captain said of the World Baseball Classic. "I think a lot of people have a lot of pride for their country."

After losing 3-2 in the 2023 final when Japan's Shohei Ohtani ended the game by striking out Mike Trout, the U.S. will be trying for its first championship since 2017 when 20 nations compete for the sixth championship starting Thursday.

Australia plays Taiwan at the Tokyo Dome in the opener, and action starts the next day in Houston, Miami and San Juan, Puerto Rico. The final again will be at Miami, on March 17.

A much-improved pitching staff includes Paul Skenes, Tarik Skubal and Mason Miller, and the batting order likely will include Judge, Cal Raleigh, Kyle Schwarber and Bobby Witt Jr.

Having watched the last two tournaments, Skenes has hoped to receive an invite from U.S. manager Mark DeRosa.

"When DeRo called, it was like, just, 'Yeah, I'm in. You don't need to talk me into this or anything,'" said Skenes, who played two seasons at Air Force Academy before transferring to LSU. "It was a quick yes."

Players have been in contact with each other long before reporting this week.

"The group chat's been firing away for the last couple of months," Philadelphia's Bryce Harper said.

Rotation boost

Logan Webb is slated to start the Americans' Friday opener against Brazil in Houston, followed by Skubal on Saturday against Britain, Skenes vs. Mexico on Monday and top Mets prospect Nolan McLean against Italy on March 10.

The foursome has a combined 19.8 Baseball Reference WAR last season. The Americans' four starters in 2023, Adam Wainwright, Nick Martinez, Lance Lynn and Merrill Kelly, combined for a 7.8 the previous season.

Skubal intends to make one start, then return to the Tigers.

A pitcher is limited to 65 pitches in first-round games, 80 in a quarterfinal and 95 in a semifinal or final. If a player throws more than 50 pitches in an outing, he can't pitch for the next four days. If he throws more than 30, he can't pitch the next day. No one may pitch three days in a row.

"There are obviously guardrails for the tournament to begin with, pitch-count wise, but there's also guardrails for guys having to throw on certain days to get ready for their team's opening day," U.S. manager Mark DeRosa said.

Trying to do it again

Japan is trying to win its fourth title and become only the second repeat champion after the 2006 and 2009 Samurai Warriors.

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Shohei Ohtani and Yoshinobu Yamamoto have some experience at consecutive titles after helping last year's Los Angeles Dodgers become the first repeat World Series champion since the 1998-2000 Yankees won three in a row.

"Going back to back, that is our only goal," Yamamoto said through a translator.

Yamamoto, the World Series MVP, is scheduled to start Japan's opener against Taiwan on Friday. Los Angeles is allowing him to pitch for Japan after he threw 211 innings last year, including the postseason.

"The Dodgers understand how big the WBC tournament is, big in Japan," he said. "The Dodgers and the WBC, they both are very important to me equally."

Japan's pitching staff is missing Ohtani, who won't take the mound, along with Roki Sasaki, who remained at Dodgers camp following an injury-interrupted rookie season, and Yu Darvish, sidelined following elbow surgery.

Star-filled Dominican roster

Seeking its first title since its only previous win in 2013, the Dominican Republic has a roster that includes six players who finished among the top 10 in MVP voting last year: Junior Caminero, Jeremy Peña. Geraldo Perdomo, Julio Rodríguez, Juan Soto and Fernando Tatis Jr.

Vladimir Guerrero Jr., Manny Machado and Ketel Marte also are on a roster that includes pitchers Sandy Alcantara and Cristopher Sánchez.

"It can be a headache also because you have so much talent. You wish that you can make everybody happy," Dominican manager Albert Pujols said. "The Dominican Republic has been blessed with so many talent."

Venezuela, with the Dominicans in Group D, is led by Ronald Acuña Jr., Jackson Chourio, Eugenio Suárez and William and Willson Contreras.

Playing through politics, war

Judge says there's significance representing the U.S. in a tournament starting days after the U.S. and Israel launched a Middle East war with joint strikes on Iran. Skenes and reliever Griffin Jax played college ball at Air Force.

"There are individuals out there that have sacrificed everything for this country to allow me to have my wife safe at home, my daughter safe at home and I get a chance to come out here and play a kids' game," Judge said.

Israel is also in this year's tournament. Outfielder Assaf Lowengart is the only player on the roster born in the country.

Venezuela, with what appears to be among the strongest rosters, plays in Miami two months after the U.S. military captured former Venezuela President Nicolás Maduro. Following his ouster, Venezuela elevated the autocrat's vice president, Delcy Rodríguez, to serve as acting president.

Eight members of Cuba's delegation were denied U.S. visas, including a pitching coach and federation executives, the Cuban Baseball and Softball Federation said.

Hot prospect

Travis Bazzana makes his Australia national team debut in the tournament opener after being selected first overall by Cleveland in 2024 amateur draft.

While playing for Australia's under-18 team in 2024, Bazzana wrote a note on his phone dreaming of being Australia's second baseman and leadoff hitter at this year's WBC.

"Growing up, I always looked ahead and kind of had a vision of things I wanted to do in this game, and this was a big part of it," he said Wednesday. "I was always writing about it and thinking about it."

Bazzana has an .801 OPS in 111 minor league games and is expected to start the season at Triple-A.

Back after injury

Edwin Díaz is on Puerto Rico's roster after tearing the patellar tendon in his right knee during the 2023 WBC.

Díaz missed the 2023 season with the New York Mets because of the injury, sustained during an on-field celebration with teammates following a 5-2 group-stage win over the Dominican Republic that clinched a

quarterfinal berth.

Several star players will be missing from this year's tournament due to insurance issues, including Puerto Rico's Francisco Lindor and Carlos Correa and Venezuela's Jose Altuve.

The sea is higher than we thought and millions more are at risk, study finds

By SETH BORENSTEIN and ANNIKA HAMMERSCHLAG Associated Press

Climate change's rising seas may threaten tens of millions more people than scientists and government planners originally thought because of mistaken research assumptions on how high coastal waters already are, a new study said.

Researchers studied hundreds of scientific studies and hazard assessments, calculating that about 90% of them underestimated baseline coastal water heights by an average of 1 foot (30 centimeters), according to Wednesday's study in the journal *Nature*. It's a far more frequent problem in the Global South, the Pacific and Southeast Asia, and less so in Europe and along Atlantic coasts.

The cause is a mismatch between the way sea and land altitudes are measured, said study co-author Philip Minderhoud, a hydrogeology professor at Wageningen University & Research in the Netherlands. And he attributed that to a "methodological blind spot" between the different ways those two things are measured.

Each way measures their own areas properly, he said. But where sea meets land, there's a lot of factors that often don't get accounted for when satellites and land-based models are used. Studies that calculate sea level rise impact usually "do not look at the actual measured sea level so they used this zero-meter" figure as a starting point, said lead author Katharina Seeger of the University of Padua in Italy. In some places in the Indo-Pacific, it's close to 3 feet (1 meter), Minderhoud said.

One simple way to understand that is that many studies assume sea levels without waves or currents, when the reality at the water's edge is of oceans constantly roiled by wind, tides, currents, changing temperatures and things like El Niño, said Minderhoud and Seeger.

Adjusting to a more accurate coastal height baseline means that if seas rise by a little more than 3 feet (1 meter) — as some studies suggest will happen by the end of the century — waters could inundate up to 37% more land and threaten 77 million to 132 million more people, the study said.

That would trigger problems in planning and paying for the impacts of a warming world.

People at risk

"You have a lot of people here for whom the risk of extreme flooding is much higher than people thought," said Anders Levermann, a climate scientist at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impacts Research in Germany, who wasn't part of the study. And Southeast Asia, where the study finds the biggest discrepancy, has the most people already threatened by sea level rise, he said.

Minderhoud pointed to island nations in that region as an area where the reality of discrepancy hits home.

For 17-year-old climate activist Vepaiamele Trief, the projections aren't abstract. On her island home in the South Pacific archipelago of Vanuatu, the shoreline has visibly retreated within her short lifetime, with beaches eroded, coastal trees uprooted and some homes now barely 3 feet (about 1 meter) from the sea at high tide. On her grandmother's island of Ambae, a coastal road from the airport to her village has been rerouted inland because of encroaching water. Graves have been submerged and entire ways of life feel under threat.

"These studies, they aren't just words on a paper. They aren't just numbers. They're people's actual livelihoods," she said. "Put yourself in the shoes of our coastal communities — their lives are going to be completely overturned because of sea level rise and climate change."

Paying attention to the starting point

This new study is pretty much about what is the truth on the ground.

Calculations that may be correct for the seas overall or for the land aren't quite right at that key intersec-

tion point of water and land, Seeger and Minderhoud said. It's especially true in the Pacific.

"To understand how much higher a piece of land is than the water, you need to know the land elevation and the water elevation. And what this paper says the vast majority of studies have done is to just assume that zero in your land elevation dataset is the level of the water. When in fact, it's not," said sea level rise expert Ben Strauss, CEO of Climate Central. His 2019 study was one of the few the new paper said got it right.

"It's just the baseline that you start from that people are getting wrong," said Strauss, who wasn't part of the research.

Maybe not so bad, some scientists say

Other outside scientists said that Minderhoud and Seeger may be making too much of the problem.

"I think they're exaggerating the implications for impact studies a bit — the problem is actually well understood, albeit addressed in a way that could probably be improved," said Gonéri Le Cozannet, a scientist at the French geological survey. Most local planners know their coastal issues and plan accordingly, Rutgers University sea level expert Robert Kopp said.

That's true in Vietnam in the high-impact area, Minderhoud said. They have an accurate sense of elevation, he said.

The findings come as a new UNESCO report warns of major gaps in understanding how much carbon the ocean absorbs. That report said that models differ by 10% to 20% in estimating the size of that carbon sink, raising questions about the accuracy of global climate projections that rely on them.

Together, the studies suggest governments may be planning for coastal and climate risks with an incomplete picture of how the ocean is changing.

"When the ocean comes closer, it takes away more than just the land we used to enjoy," said Thompson Natuoivi, a climate advocate for Save the Children Vanuatu.

"Sea level rise is not just changing our coastline, it's changing our lives. We are not talking about the future — we're talking about the right now."

Spain's government denies cooperating with US operations in Mideast, contradicting White House

By JOSEPH WILSON, AAMER MADHANI and SUMAN NAISHADHAM Associated Press

MADRID (AP) — A diplomatic tussle between the United States and Spain over the war in Iran intensified on Wednesday when the governments exchanged contradictory statements over the possible use of Spanish military bases by American armed forces for operations in the Middle East.

Moments after a White House spokesperson said the Spanish government in Madrid had agreed to help the U.S., Spanish Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares came out and flatly denied that the European government had changed its position.

"I can refute (the White House spokesperson)," Albares told Spanish radio station Cadena Ser. "The position of the Spanish government regarding the war in the Middle East, the bombing of Iran and the use of our bases has not changed one iota."

The disagreement broke out on Tuesday when Trump said that he was going to "cut off all trade with Spain," a day after Albares said that his government wouldn't allow the U.S. to use jointly operated bases in southern Spain in any strikes not covered by the U.N. charter. Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez said that his government wouldn't "be complicit in something that is bad for the world."

Albares denied that his government had reconsidered its posture on the use of the bases on Wednesday evening in Madrid shortly after White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt had said "with respect to Spain, I think they heard the president's message yesterday loud and clear.

"And it's my understanding over the past several hours, they've agreed to cooperate with the U.S. military," Leavitt had said. "And so I know that the U.S. military is coordinating with their counterparts in Spain."

Spanish criticism of military action in Iran

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Sánchez, widely regarded as Europe's last major progressive leader, has called the U.S. and Israeli attacks on Iran an "unjustifiable" and "dangerous" military intervention.

Sánchez again criticized the U.S. and Israel's military actions in Iran early on Wednesday when he made a nationally televised address. While not mentioning Trump by name, Sánchez stood firm against trade threats from Washington and warning that the war in the Middle East risked "playing Russian roulette" with millions of lives.

"We are not going to be complicit in something that is bad for the world and is also contrary to our values and interests, just out of fear of reprisals from someone," Sánchez said.

Sánchez expressed concern that the attacks on Iran could lead to another costly military quagmire in the Middle East, similar to the past American interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"In short, the position of the government of Spain can be summarized in four words," Sánchez said. "No to the war."

After Spain denied U.S. use of its bases, Trump on Tuesday said "we could use their base if we want," referencing the Rota and Morón installations in southern Spain that the U.S. and Spain share, but which remain under Spanish command.

"We could just fly in and use it," Trump said. "Nobody's going to tell us not to use it, but we don't have to."

U.S. chastises Spain

It wasn't clear how Trump would have cut off trade with Spain, which is a member of the European Union. The EU negotiates trade on behalf of all its 27 member states.

When asked in an interview with CNBC whether a trade embargo with Spain would be possible, U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said that Wednesday "it would be a combination effort." He didn't explain further, but said Spain's refusal to allow the U.S. to use its bases in the weekend attack on Iran endangered American lives.

"Anything that slows down our ability to engage and prosecute this war in the fastest, most effective manner puts American lives at risk," Bessent said. "The Spanish put American lives at risk."

The EU said that it would protect its interests and work to stabilize its trade relationship with the U.S., with which it struck a trade deal last year after months of economic uncertainty over Trump's tariff blitz.

Trade threats

Tuesday's threats from Washington were just the latest instance of the U.S. president wielding the threat of tariffs or trade embargoes as punishment. Last month, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down Trump's far-reaching global tariffs, saying emergency powers don't allow the president to unilaterally impose sweeping tariffs.

However, Trump maintains that the court allows him to instead impose full-scale embargoes on other nations of his choosing.

Spain's main business groups expressed concerns over the trade threat, calling the U.S. a "key partner from an economic and political standpoint."

"We trust that our trade relations will ultimately not be affected in any way," the Spanish business chambers CEOE, CEPYME and ATA said Tuesday.

Last year, Spain's central bank issued a report that concluded Europe's fourth-largest economy was relatively cushioned compared with the EU average when it came to exposure to tariffs by Trump.

Spain's exports and imports with the U.S. accounted for 4.4% of gross domestic product, the Bank of Spain said, while trade with the U.S. for the EU as a whole was 10.1%.

Exports of Spanish goods to the U.S. accounted for 1% of Spain's GDP, or 16 billion euros (\$18.6 billion), the bank said, making it Spain's sixth largest export market for goods. Pharmaceutical products, olive oil, refined gas and electrical transformers are among Spain's main exports to the U.S., according to the Observatory of Economic Complexity.

Spain's position on the Iran conflict is the latest flare-up in its relationship with the Trump administration.

Sánchez was an outspoken critic of the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza and attracted Trump's ire last year when Spain backed out of NATO's pledge to increase defense spending by members to 5% of GDP.

Top FDA drug official is trying to hire a friend who's seeking a bold new warning on antidepressants

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Food and Drug Administration's top drug regulator, Dr. Tracy Beth Hoeg, is working to hire a researcher and friend who wants the agency to add new warnings to antidepressants about unproven pregnancy risks, The Associated Press has learned.

Dr. Adam Urato, a maternal-fetal medicine specialist and critic of antidepressant safety, is pressing the FDA to add a boxed warning to SSRIs, the drugs most commonly prescribed for depression. Urato's petition says the medications can cause pregnancy complications, including miscarriages and fetal brain abnormalities that may lead to autism and other disorders in children.

That proposed labeling change has become a top priority for Hoeg, who regularly consults with Urato and is working to bring him on as a full-time FDA employee, according to people familiar with the situation. They spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity to discuss confidential FDA matters.

Within the agency, Hoeg's close relationship with Urato is viewed as a clear conflict of interest that, under normal FDA standards, would result in her recusing herself from any work on the petition. But Hoeg is actively working to speed up the agency's review of her friend's proposal, according to the people familiar with the situation.

Outside experts say the petition relies on flimsy data, including animal studies and small trials in people. They fear a new FDA warning could cause pregnant women to stop medication unnecessarily, leading to serious health risks from untreated depression.

"A black box warning is a big red flag with both practitioners and patients," said Dr. Jennifer Payne, a University of Virginia reproductive psychiatrist. "What's missing in this petition is an understanding of the risks of maternal mental illness during pregnancy, not just to the woman, but to the pregnancy and ultimately the infant."

The FDA is legally required to respond in writing to each citizen petition and explain its reasons for granting or denying the request.

SSRIs include most of the bestselling depression medications, including Prozac, Paxil, Zoloft and their generic equivalents.

More than 15% of U.S. women, or about 26 million people, take medication for depression, according to the latest federal figures. Professional guidelines state that antidepressants are generally safe during pregnancy and should be discontinued only after careful consultation with a doctor.

Last fall, Hoeg gave a talk on the SSRI petition to top FDA drug officials, presenting the work as her own. Staffers who reviewed her slides found they were created by Urato, according to the people who spoke to the AP. The incident was first reported by Stat News.

Urato said in an email Wednesday that Hoeg is "an excellent scientist," and that they have known each other for several years.

"I am friendly with her, as I am with many colleagues, but we do not have a longstanding personal friendship that would in any way prevent her from reviewing the citizen petition," Urato said.

A spokesman for the Department of Health and Human Services, which oversees the FDA, said that the agency would respond directly to Urato about his petition.

In January, Urato was named to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's panel on vaccine recommendations, which has been completely reshaped by Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to include a number of anti-vaccine voices.

The latest COVID-19 contrarian elevated into FDA's leadership

The antidepressant review is the latest in a series of controversial topics taken up by Hoeg, a sports medicine physician with no previous government or management experience.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Hoeg attracted attention as a critic of masking, vaccine mandates and

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other public health measures. She co-wrote papers with medical contrarians who would go on to join the Trump administration, including FDA Commissioner Marty Makary and FDA's vaccine chief, Dr. Vinay Prasad. All three have become top surrogates for Kennedy.

Before the pandemic, Hoeg had published only a handful of medical papers, including one on health issues affecting ultramarathon runners.

A Danish American citizen and marathon runner, Hoeg was instrumental in the Republican administration's recent decision to drop a number of vaccine recommendations for children. That is a change she has long proposed, to bring the United States more in line with Denmark.

Like many critics of vaccines, including Kennedy, Hoeg has also been skeptical of antidepressants, questioning their safety and benefits. Last July, she hosted a panel of outside experts at the FDA on SSRIs that included Urato and nine other critics of the drugs.

"Never before in human history have we chemically altered developing babies like this, especially the developing fetal brain, and this is happening without any real public warning," Urato said at the meeting.

On a podcast shortly afterward, Hoeg echoed many of Urato's points.

"I think women should be informed about the potential risks so that they have time to come off SSRIs if they want to when they're trying to get pregnant," Hoeg told the hosts of the Mom Wars podcast.

FDA officials typically avoid making public comments about matters under review because it could suggest the agency is basing its decision on individual opinions, rather than science.

But Hoeg has taken a hands-on approach to the SSRI petition, telling FDA staffers that their proposed review timeline of nine months needed to be shortened, according to the people familiar with the situation.

Reviewing a citizen petition involves detailed analysis of scientific references, legal issues and a number of other steps to ensure that the agency's final decision can be defended in court.

"Apart from it serving FDA's public health mission, there's always going to be some concern about legal risk if the agency doesn't take sufficient time to consider all the relevant data and arguments," said Patti Zettler, a former FDA attorney now at Ohio State University's law school.

Hoeg was tapped to the lead FDA's drug center in December, inheriting the job during a period of unprecedented upheaval, including layoffs, buyouts and leadership changes. She is the sixth person to lead the 5,000-person center in the past year.

Staffers did not hear from Hoeg directly until a town hall last month, where she voiced her concerns about the safety of SSRIs and injectable RSV shots for children, a class of drugs that FDA is reviewing at her request. RSV is a respiratory virus that sends thousands of children in the United States to the hospital each year.

Antidepressant questions clouded by other health factors

The safety of antidepressants has been scrutinized for decades, leading to several updates to their FDA label, including the addition of a black box warning about the risk of suicidal behavior in children.

For pregnant women, the current label lists a number of documented safety issues, including risks of excess bleeding after giving birth.

Doctors who treat women with depression say they discuss those risks with their patients, balancing the possible safety issues against the potential harms of relapsing into depression: self-harm, substance abuse and other behaviors that negatively impact women and fetuses.

Researchers who have reviewed Urato's SSRI petition say many of the studies claiming to show connections to disorders such as autism don't take into account other important health factors. For example, women with depression have higher rates of smoking, diabetes and family histories of mental illness that can all increase the likelihood of developmental disorders.

"So how do we say that these outcomes are a result of the SSRI when all of these other factors are at play?" said Dr. Amritha Bhat, a University of Washington perinatal psychiatrist.

Bhat and other researchers say they support more research into the effects of SSRIs, and they acknowledge possible downsides to their use.

"But in the meantime we need to provide options to people that are struggling with these symptoms

during pregnancy," she said. "We cannot just ask them to white knuckle their way through it."

Rising energy prices from the Iran war could help Russia pay for fighting in Ukraine

By DAVID McHUGH AP Business Writer

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP) — The Iran war's disruption of Middle East oil and gas supplies and soaring prices are strengthening Russia's ability to profit from its energy exports, a pillar of the Kremlin's budget and a key to paying for its own war in Ukraine.

Prices for Russia's oil exports have risen from under \$40 per barrel as recently as December to about \$62 per barrel — first on fears of war and then due to interruption of almost all tanker traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, the conduit for some 20% of the world's oil consumption.

Russian oil still trades at a considerable discount to international benchmark Brent crude, which has risen above \$82 from the closing price of \$72.87 on Friday, the eve of the attack on Iran by the U.S. and Israel. However, Russian crude is now above the benchmark of \$59 per barrel that was assumed in the Russian Finance Ministry's budget plan for 2026. Oil and gas tax revenues account for up to 30% of the Russian federal budget.

Additionally, the halt in production of ship-borne liquefied natural gas, or LNG, by major supplier Qatar will sharply increase global competition for available cargoes -- including those from Russia.

A change in fortunes

Russia had seen state oil and gas revenue fall to a four-year low of 393 billion rubles (\$5 billion) in January and the budget shortfall of 1.7 trillion rubles (\$21.8 billion) for that month was the biggest on record, according to Finance Ministry figures.

The lower revenue was due to weaker global prices and to deep discounts fueled by U.S. and European Union hindrance of Russia's "shadow fleet" of tankers with obscure ownership used sell oil to its biggest customers, China and India, in defiance of a Western-imposed price cap and sanctions on Russia's two biggest oil companies, Lukoil and Rosneft.

Economic growth has stagnated as massive military spending has leveled off. President Vladimir Putin has resorted to tax increases and increased borrowing from compliant domestic banks to keep state finances on an even keel in the fifth year of the war.

"Russia is a big winner from the war-related energy turmoil," said Simone Tagliapietra, energy expert at the Bruegel think tank in Brussels. "Higher oil prices mean higher revenues for the government and therefore stronger capability to finance the war in Ukraine."

Amena Bakr, head of Middle East and OPEC+ insights at data and analytics firm Kpler, writes: "With Middle East barrels facing logistical disruption, both India and China face strong incentives to deepen reliance on Russian supply."

Additionally, the price of future delivery of natural gas has skyrocketed in Europe, raising questions about EU plans to put an end to imports of Russian LNG by 2027 -- reviving bad memories of a 2022 energy crunch after Moscow cut off most supplies of pipeline gas due to the war.

Length of strait's closure is the key factor

Much depends on how long the Strait of Hormuz remains closed to most ship traffic, said Alexandra Prokopenko, an expert on the Russian economy at the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center in Berlin.

A quick exit from the conflict would return Brent prices to roughly \$65 per barrel and "a short-lived spike would not fundamentally change" Russia's budget picture, she said. A middle scenario in which some shipping resumes and oil stabilizes at around \$80 per barrel would give Russia "some fiscal relief," depending on how long the higher prices last.

A long-term closure with Iranian strikes damaging refineries and pipelines could send oil to \$108 per barrel, accelerate inflation and push Europe to the edge of recession. "This scenario would bring the largest windfall to Russia," she said.

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Even several weeks of interruption in Gulf LNG could lead to calls in Europe to suspend plans to ban new Russian supply contracts after April 25, said Chris Weafer, CEO of Macro-Advisory Ltd consultancy.

"The EU is under even more pressure to work with the U.S. to find a solution to the Ukraine conflict and, very likely, to consider easing the plan for a total block for Russian oil and gas imports," he said. "Countries such as Hungary and Slovakia and those who have been big buyers of Russian LNG, will press for that review."

In any case "the Russian federal budget will have a much better result in March," Weafer said, due to lower discounts on Russian oil and "because there are eager buyers of Russian oil and oil products."

Putin says European leaders have only themselves to blame

Putin said European governments were to blame for their energy predicament.

"What is happening today on the European markets, is, of course, above all the result of the mistaken policies of European governments in the energy sphere," Putin said Wednesday on state TV.

He said that "maybe it would be more beneficial for us to halt (gas) supplies now to the European market, and leave for the markets that are opening and get established there," adding that "it's not a decision, but in this case what's called 'thinking out loud.'"

Putin said he would have the government to look into the issue.

Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said Wednesday that Russian oil was "in demand" and that Russia was ready to increase supplies to China and India, the Tass news agency reported.

The head of Russia's sovereign wealth fund, Kirill Dmitriev, took a dig at European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas, writing on X that "surely the wise Ursula and Kaja have a backup LNG plan. Or maybe not."

Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Spain have continued to import around 2 billion cubic meters of Russian LNG per month, and on top of that Hungary imports 2 billion cubic meters a month through the Turkstream pipeline across the Black Sea, Tagliapietra said. That would amount to 45 billion cubic meters in 2026, 15% of total gas demand for this year.

It's "not easy to replace this in case the LNG market gets tighter with continued shutdowns in Qatar," he said.

A son of Iran's late supreme leader is a possible candidate to replace his father as war rages

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Mojtaba Khamenei, a son of Iran's late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has long been considered a contender to the post of the country's next paramount ruler — even before an Israeli strike killed his father at the start of the war last week and despite the fact he's has never been elected or appointed to a government position.

A secretive figure within the Islamic Republic, Mojtaba Khamenei has not been seen publicly since Saturday, when the Israeli airstrike targeting the supreme leader's offices killed his 86-year-old father. Also killed were the younger Khamenei's wife, Zahra Haddad Adel, who came from a family long associated with the country's theocracy.

Khamenei is believed to still be alive and likely has gone into hiding as American and Israeli airstrikes continue to pound Iran, though state-run Iranian media have not reported on his whereabouts.

Profile of Khamenei's son rises after airstrike

Mojtaba Khamenei's name continues to circulate as a possible candidate to replace his father, something that had been criticized in the past as potentially creating a theocratic version of Iran's former hereditary monarchy.

But now with his father and wife considered by hard-liners as martyrs in the war against America and Israel, Khamenei's stock likely has risen with the aging clerics of the 88-seat Assembly of Experts who will select the country's next supreme leader.

Whoever becomes the leader will gain control of an Iranian military now at war and a stockpile of highly

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enriched uranium that could be used to build a nuclear weapon — should he choose to decree it.

Khamenei had occupied a similar role to that of Ahmad Khomeini, a son of Iran's first Supreme Leader Ruhollah Khomeini — "a combination of aide-de-camp, confidant, gatekeeper and power broker," according to United Against Nuclear Iran, a U.S.-based pressure group.

Born into dissent

Born in 1969 in the city of Mashhad, some 10 years before the 1979 Islamic Revolution that would sweep Iran, Khamenei grew up as his father agitated against Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

An official biography on Ali Khamenei's life recounts one moment when the shah's secret police, the SAVAK, broke into their home and beat the cleric. Woken up after, Mojtaba and the rest of Khamenei's children were told their father was going on vacation.

"But I told them, 'There is no need to lie.' I told them the truth," the elder Khamenei was quoted as saying.

After the fall of the shah, Khamenei's family moved to Tehran, Iran's capital. Khamenei would go on to fight in the Iran-Iraq war with the Habib ibn Mazahir Battalion, a division of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard that would see several of its members ascend to powerful intelligence positions within the force — likely with the backing of the Khamenei family.

His father became supreme leader in 1989 — and soon Mojtaba Khamenei and his family had access to the billions of dollars and business assets spread across Iran's many bonyads, or foundations, funded from state industries and other wealth once held by the shah.

Power rises with his father's

His own power rose alongside his father's, working within his offices in downtown Tehran. U.S. diplomatic cables published by WikiLeaks in the late 2000s began referring to the younger Khamenei as "the power behind the robes." One recounted an allegation that Khamenei actually tapped his own father's phone, served as his "principal gatekeeper" and had been forming his own power base within the country.

Khamenei "is widely viewed within the regime as a capable and forceful leader and manager who may someday succeed to at least a share of national leadership; his father may also see him in that light," a 2008 cable read, also noting his lack of theological qualifications and age.

"Mojtaba is, however, due to his skills, wealth, and unmatched alliances, reportedly seen by a number of regime insiders as a plausible candidate for shared leadership of Iran upon his father's demise, whether that demise is soon or years in the future," it said.

Khamenei has worked closely with Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, both with commanders of its expeditionary Quds Force and its all-volunteer Basij that violently suppressed nationwide protests in January, the U.S. Treasury has said.

The United States sanctioned him in 2019 during the first term of U.S. President Donald Trump over working to "advance his father's destabilizing regional ambitions and oppressive domestic objectives."

That includes allegations that Khamenei from behind the scenes supported the election of hard-line President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005 and his disputed re-election in 2009 that sparked the Green Movement protests.

Mahdi Karroubi, who was a presidential candidate in 2005 and 2009, denounced Khamenei as "a master's son" and alleged he interfered in both votes. His father reportedly at the time said Khamenei was "a master himself, not a master's son."

Powers of supreme leader at stake

There has been only one other transfer of power in the office of supreme leader of Iran, the paramount decision-maker since the country's 1979 Islamic Revolution. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini died at age 86 after being the figurehead of the revolution and leading Iran through its eight-year war with Iraq.

Now the new leader will come on board after the 12-day war with Israel and as a U.S.-Israeli war with Iran is seeking to eliminate Iran's nuclear threat and military power, hoping also the Iranian people will rise up against the Iranian theocracy.

The supreme leader is at the heart of Iran's complex power-sharing Shiite theocracy and has final say over all matters of state. He also serves as the commander-in-chief of the country's military and the Guard, a paramilitary force that the United States designated a terrorist organization in 2019, and which his father

empowered during his rule.

The Guard, which has led the self-described "Axis of Resistance," a series of militant groups and allies across the Middle East meant to counter the U.S. and Israel, also has extensive wealth and holdings in Iran. It also controls the country's ballistic missile arsenal.

Cracks appear in Trump's MAGA base as leading figures criticize the Iran war

By DAVID BAUDER, MEG KINNARD and ALI SWENSON Associated Press Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — For President Donald Trump, some of the sharpest criticism he's faced in the early days of the Iran war has come from once-loyal media figures far more accustomed to singing his praises.

Tucker Carlson, Megyn Kelly and Matt Walsh are among those to express discontent. It's been noticed in the White House, which has been playing defense on social media and in interviews.

To be sure, these critics are the minority of the media MAGAsphere, where Fox News' biggest stars remain cheerleaders. But their words illustrate conservative media's influence and how valuable it is to Trump when all runs as a well-oiled machine — and, by contrast, how much of a problem it can be if it fractures.

Much of the criticism has centered on Israel's influence on Trump's decision to go to war. Carlson, the former Fox News star who has built his own independent operation, told ABC News over the weekend that the attack was "absolutely disgusting and evil."

"It's hard to say this, but the United States didn't make the decision here. Benjamin Netanyahu did," Carlson said on his podcast, referring to the Israeli prime minister.

'No one should have to die for a foreign country'

Kelly, another former Fox anchor gone indie, said about American casualties on her show that "no one should have to die for a foreign country."

"I don't think those service members died for the United States," Kelly said. "I think they died for Iran or Israel."

Secretary of State Marco Rubio's remarks prior to a Capitol Hill briefing were a flashpoint. Rubio said that Trump had given the go-ahead for the operation knowing that Israel was prepared to strike and he feared retaliation from Iran against U.S. bases in the region.

"We knew that if we didn't preemptively go after them, before they launched those attacks, we would suffer higher casualties," Rubio said. House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., said that if the Trump administration had not acted, lawmakers would have wondered why.

Walsh, a Daily Wire host, wrote on X that Rubio was "flat out telling us that we're in a war with Iran because Israel forced our hand. This is basically the worst possible thing he could have said."

The Republican president told journalist Rachael Bade in an interview that he did not believe that the opinions of Carlson and Kelly are shared by his base of supporters. "I think that MAGA is Trump," he said. "MAGA's not the other two."

Republican former U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia, who has fashioned herself as an influencer and media figure since bitterly breaking with Trump, said on Kelly's podcast that she was furious over the U.S. military action. "Make America Great Again," Greene says, "was supposed to be America first, not Israel first."

Will Trump supporters return to the fold?

Trump is probably right to think that most of his supporters will return to the fold if they're unhappy with the Iran attack, said Jason Zengerle, author of "Hated By All the Right People: Tucker Carlson and the Unraveling of the Conservative Mind." Given the consistency of his views on the topic, Carlson is probably the most important of Trump's conservative critics, Zengerle said.

"If the war does go badly, I think it strengthens the hand of someone like Tucker," he said. "All of this is a debate about what happens after Trump is gone anyway."

Carlson was at the center of a controversy last fall over antisemitism in conservative media for giving

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attention to polarizing influencer Nick Fuentes with an interview on Carlson's podcast. Fuentes has called Adolf Hitler "cool," suggested there is a genocide against white people and said his young followers are "tired of hearing about slavery and the Holocaust."

There have been cracks in Trump's conservative media support prior to Iran, notably with the vast and sprawling narratives around the Jeffrey Epstein report. But this week's criticism unleashed some startling internal vitriol. Ben Shapiro, of "The Daily Wire," called Kelly "wildly inconsistent" and a coward. Elisabeth Hasselbeck denounced Kelly for her suggestion that American servicemen died for Israel. "How dare you?" Hasselbeck said Tuesday on "The View."

Fox News' Sean Hannity said that Carlson was "not the person I knew when he was at Fox." Kelly denounced Hannity as a supplicant who "would never say anything other than to puff Donald Trump up."

It's worth remembering that most of what readers and viewers are seeing in conservative media supports Trump. Howard Polskin, publisher of The Righting newsletter, estimated Tuesday that about 95% of what he's monitored on websites is behind the president. "Trump Stands Tall on Iran," headlined The American Spectator.

The most popular personalities on Fox News — still the top dog among conservatives — continue to be supportive. Hannity, Brian Kilmeade and Mark Levin were among the most vociferous leading up to the attack and after. "The president has shown more courage, and this Pentagon, Pete Hegseth's Pentagon, has executed brilliantly once again," said Kilmeade, the "Fox & Friends" co-host.

"I think that MAGA gives him the benefit of the doubt, no question about it," Sean Spicer, the White House press secretary during the early part of Trump's first term, said on his podcast Tuesday. "I think he's built up a ton of credibility with the base. ... Look, you've got PTSD from a lot of our former leaders between Iraq and Afghanistan in particular, who only know forever wars, and so I get it. But this president has proven now twice that he knows what he's doing."

Criticism of war rollout draws specific White House rebuke

The podcast influencers who helped to drive many young men into Trump's camp during the 2024 campaign have been largely quiet.

Some of Walsh's criticism this week appeared to sting so much that it drew a specific rebuke from White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt.

"So far we've heard that although we killed the whole Iranian regime, this was not a regime change war," Walsh wrote on Monday. "And although we obliterated their nuclear program, we had to do this because of their nuclear program. And although Iran was not planning any attacks on the U.S., they also might have been, depending on who you ask. And although we are not fighting this war to free the Iranian people, they are now free, or might be, depending on who seizes power, and we have no idea who that will be. The messaging on this thing is, to put it mildly, confused."

Leavitt posted a lengthy response on X explaining Trump's rationale. "Simply put," she wrote, "the terrorist Iranian regime would not say yes to peace."

US soldiers who died in Iran war remembered as devoted parents and reservists

By HANNAH FINGERHUT, KONSTANTIN TOROPIN and REBECCA BOONE Associated Press

WEST DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Sgt. 1st Class Nicole Amor was just days away from returning home to her husband and two children when a drone strike at a command center in Kuwait killed her and five other U.S. service members.

"She was almost home," her husband, Joey Amor, said from their home in White Bear Lake, Minnesota, on Tuesday. "You don't go to Kuwait thinking something's going to happen, and for her to be one of the first — it hurts."

Amor was one of four U.S. soldiers killed in the Iran war on Sunday and identified Tuesday by the Pentagon; two soldiers haven't yet been publicly identified. The members of the Army Reserve worked in

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logistics and kept troops supplied with food and equipment.

They died just one day after the U.S. and Israel launched its military campaign against Iran. Iran responded by launching missiles and drones against Israel and several Gulf Arab states that host U.S. armed forces.

Those killed also included Capt. Cody Khork, 35, of Winter Haven, Florida; Sgt. 1st Class Noah Tietjens, 42, of Bellevue, Nebraska; and Sgt. Declan Coady, 20, of West Des Moines, Iowa, who was posthumously promoted from specialist. No other names were released.

"These men and women all bravely volunteered to defend our country, and their sacrifice will never be forgotten," Army Secretary Daniel Driscoll said.

All were assigned to the 103rd Sustainment Command, which provides food, fuel, water and ammunition, transport equipment and supplies.

"Sadly, there will likely be more, before it ends. That's the way it is," President Donald Trump said of deaths.

One of the youngest in his class

Coady had just told his father last week that he had been recommended for a promotion from specialist to sergeant, a rank he received posthumously.

He was one of the youngest people in his class but seemed to impress his instructors, his father Andrew Coady said Tuesday.

"He was very good at what he did," he said.

Coady trained as an information technology specialist with the Army Reserves and was studying cyber-security at Drake University in Des Moines. He was taking online classes while in Kuwait and wanted to become an officer.

"I still don't fully think it's real," his sister Keira Coady said. "I just remember all of our conversations about what he was going to do when he came back."

A mother of two who loved gardening

Amor, 39, was an avid gardener who enjoyed making salsa from the peppers and tomatoes in her garden with her son, a senior in high school. She also enjoyed rollerblading and bicycling with her fourth-grade daughter.

A week before the drone attack, Amor was moved off-base to a shipping container-style building that had no defenses, Joey Amor said.

"They were dispersing because they were in fear that the base they were on was going to get attacked and they felt it was safer in smaller groups in separate places," he said.

He last spoke to her about two hours before she was killed. He said she was working long shifts and they had been messaging about her tripping and falling the night before.

"She just never responded in the morning," he said.

A calling to serve his country

Khork was very patriotic and drawn from a young age to serving the U.S., his family said in a statement Tuesday.

He enlisted in the Army Reserve and joined Florida Southern College's ROTC program.

"That commitment helped shape the course of his life and reflected the deep sense of duty that was always at the core of who he was," said his mother, Donna Burhans, father, James Khork, and stepmother, Stacey Khork, in a statement.

Khork also loved history and had a degree in political science.

His family described him as "the life of the party, known for his infectious spirit, generous heart, and deep care for those who served alongside him and for everyone blessed to know him."

One of Khork's friends, Abbas Jaffer, posted on Facebook on Monday that he had lost the best person he had ever known.

"My best friend, best man, and brother gave his life defending our country overseas," Jaffer said. Khork and Jaffer had been friends for more than 16 years.

A loving father and husband

Tietjens lived with his family in the Washington Terrace mobile home park in the Omaha suburb of Bellevue, Nebraska. He was married with a son, according to a Facebook page.

Tietjens earned a black belt in Philippine Combatives and Taekwondo and was "an instructor who gave his time, discipline, and leadership to others," the Philippine Martial Arts Alliance said in a Facebook post.

On the mat and as a soldier, "he carried the same values: honor, discipline, service, and commitment to others," the organization said.

Nebraska Gov. Pillen paid tribute to the family Tuesday.

"Noah stepped up to serve and defend the American people from foreign enemies around the world — a sacrifice we must never forget," he wrote.

"We are holding the Tietjens family close in our hearts during this unbelievably difficult time and will keep them in our prayers," he said.

China to unveil priorities for coming 5 years at major annual political meeting

By HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China's ceremonial legislature is set to meet Thursday, where it will unveil the country's policy direction and economic goals for the coming years.

The meeting is held in Beijing, where the National People's Congress and its advisory body gather. The National People's Congress will ratify new laws decided by China's Communist Party leadership. While the near-3,000-member body technically votes, the vote is always almost unanimous.

Also meeting is the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, an advisory body composed of elite members of Chinese society, from business people to athletes. They also include representatives from China's minority groups, but the body has little power on issues of public policy.

The gathering is called the Two Sessions. The political meetings have changed under President Xi Jinping, with tighter scripts and less scope for debate.

"A long, long time ago, it was a venue for policy deliberation," and even controversial things, said Alfred Wu, a professor of public policy at the National University of Singapore. "Now it's very much become a showcase, propaganda."

Economy is front and center

The National People's Congress is when the Chinese premier announces the country's GDP target and other economic targets for the year.

This year, observers are also waiting for details for the 15th five-year plan, of which the government had revealed a draft in October. It is expected to be focused on building tech prowess and self-sufficiency.

China issues five-year plans to direct its economy, a legacy of its historical approach when it had a planned economy.

The Chinese economy remains sluggish, with high youth unemployment, weak housing prices and sagging domestic consumption. It also faces a trade war with the U.S., which has leveraged tariffs on all Chinese goods.

Lou Qinjian, the spokesperson for this year's National People's Congress, said Wednesday that the government would maintain its efforts to improve living standards and boost consumption. Those would include raising incomes and improving the education, child care, elderly care and health care systems so "consumers will feel freer to spend," he said at press conference.

Experts have said China will have to strike a tough balance between its goals of boosting its tech manufacturing, such as in robotics, renewable energy and AI, and boosting domestic consumption as many ordinary people are feeling the pinch. Tech supply chains are narrow and the trickle-down effect is less pronounced.

China is likely to drop its headline growth target to a record low, predicted Neil Thomas and Lobsang Tsering, policy experts at the Asia Society. It will be significant as a step in a "shift from high-speed to

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high-quality growth," they wrote.

A push for ethnic assimilation

The National People's Congress is also expected to ratify a new law governing China's ethnic minorities. While a final draft has not been released, experts say the latest public draft focused on assimilation, reducing autonomy for the country's minority groups.

Lou said the legislation fosters "a stronger sense of community among all ethnic groups in the Chinese nation" and outlines steps to promote interaction, exchange and integration.

"Once enacted, we will work to implement it thoroughly and advance Chinese-style modernization through the great unity of the Chinese nation," he said.

Lou highlighted the Communist Party's push for unity several times during the press conference and credited past five-year plans with delivering not only rapid economic growth but also long-term stability, a major concern of party leaders.

Personnel movements are not expected

China's legislature dismissed 19 members last week, after a highly publicized removal of two of the country's most senior generals in January.

Now, only one member remains of the powerful Central Military Commission, which controls the military, but policy experts say they do not expect any personnel announcements in the upcoming Two Sessions. Observers like to closely watch attendance for any signs of possible purges, however.

Xi Jinping has removed possibly up to 100 senior officials in the People's Liberation Army in the past four years, according to the Center for Strategic Studies, with the most prominent being General Zhang Youxia in January.

Yet, there is likely no great rush from the leadership to find a replacement.

"I don't think they're particularly worried about this," said Wu of National University Singapore. For example, he said, Wang Yi became foreign minister again after stepping down from the job initially because of the high-profile removal of Qin Gang, previously his replacement.

Today in History: March 5, the Boston Massacre

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, March 5, the 64th day of 2026. There are 301 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On March 5, 1770, the Boston Massacre took place as British soldiers who had been taunted by a crowd of colonists opened fire, killing five people. The killing fueled colonists' outrage in the run-up to the American Revolution.

Also on this date:

In 1856, a major fire destroyed Covent Garden's royal theater and opera house in London, marking the second time fire destroyed a theater on the site since 1808. (The theater was rebuilt and has since undergone major reconstruction and modernization.)

In 1933, in German parliamentary elections six days after the Reichstag fire, the Nazi Party won 44% of the vote; the Nazis joined with a conservative nationalist party to gain a slender parliamentary majority.

In 1946, Winston Churchill delivered a speech at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, in which he marked the onset of the Cold War, saying: "From Stettin in the Baltic, to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the continent."

In 1953, Soviet dictator Josef Stalin died from a stroke at age 74 after nearly three decades in power.

In 1963, country music performers Patsy Cline, Cowboy Copas and Hawkshaw Hawkins died in the crash of their plane, a Piper Comanche, near Camden, Tennessee, along with pilot Randy Hughes (Cline's manager).

In 1979, NASA's Voyager 1 space probe made its closest approach to Jupiter, sending back photographs of the planet and its moons.

In 1982, comedian John Belushi was found dead of a drug overdose in a rented bungalow at Hollywood's Chateau Marmont hotel; he was 33.

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In 2004, Martha Stewart was convicted in New York of conspiracy, obstructing justice and lying to the government about why she'd sold her Imclone Systems stock just before the stock's price plummeted; her ex-stockbroker, Peter Bacanovic, also was found guilty in the scandal. (Each later received a five-month prison sentence.)

In 2022, a promised ceasefire in the Ukrainian port city of Mariupol collapsed amid scenes of terror in the besieged town. The number of people fleeing the country reached 1.4 million just 10 days after Russian forces invaded.

Today's birthdays: Actor Fred Williamson is 88. Magician Penn Jillette is 71. Actor Adriana Barraza is 70. Football Hall of Famer Michael Irvin is 60. Actor-comedian Aasif Mandvi is 60. Rock musician John Frusciante (Red Hot Chili Peppers) is 56. Actor Eva Mendes is 52. Model Niki Taylor is 51. Singer-songwriter Amanda Shires is 44. Model Taylor Hill is 30. Baseball shortstop Bo Bichette is 28. Singer Madison Beer is 27. Country singer Gabby Barrett is 26.