

Groton Daily Independent

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Friday, March 6

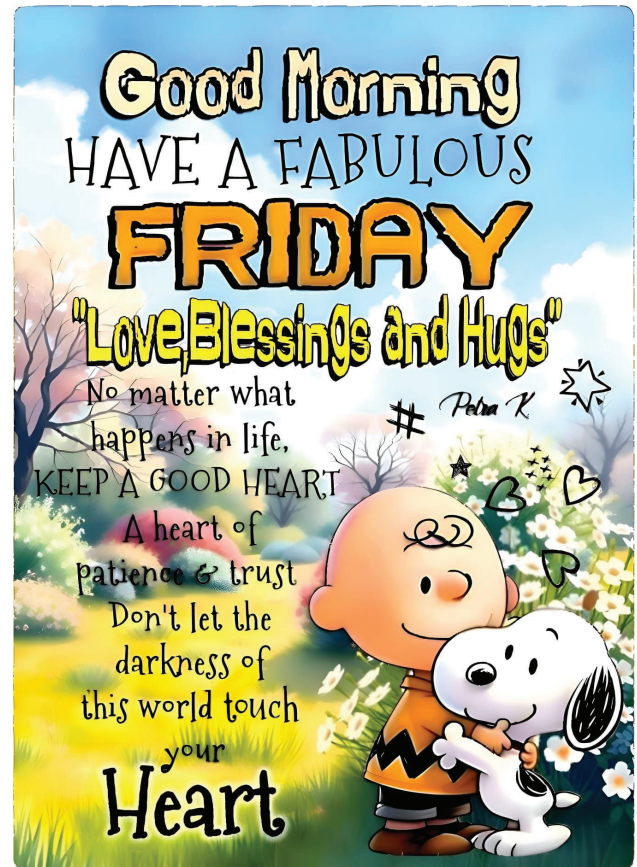
Senior Menu: Tuna noodles, peas, fruit, biscuit.
School Breakfast: Doughnuts.
School Lunch: Cheese pizza, green beans.
World Day of Prayer
FFA @ Redfield CDE
Region 1A Boys Basketball, 7 p.m., Arena. Groton vs. Milbank

Saturday, March 7

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

Sunday, March 8

SPRING FORWARD - Turn clocks ahead 1 hour
Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 9 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.; Choir, 6 p.m.



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

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

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

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

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

Groton Soccer Association Clinics, 11:30 a.m., Arena.

4th grade BB Practice, 2 p.m., Gym

6th grade BB Practice, 6 pm., Arena

FCS St. Baldricks SHAVE TO SAVE Event, 3:30 p.m., GHS 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.

Trump Boots Noem

President Donald Trump yesterday fired Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem, marking the first Cabinet secretary to depart during his second term. He nominated Sen. Markwayne Mullin (R-OK) to replace her.

The decision followed a congressional hearing in which senators from both parties urged Noem to resign. Lawmakers criticized her leadership during the Minneapolis immigration crackdown, her delay in distributing disaster funds, and her management of federal funds, including the allocation of roughly \$220M to an advertising campaign. Trump said Noem will shift to a newly created role—special envoy for the Shield of the Americas—focused on Western Hemisphere security.

Under federal vacancy rules, Mullin can serve as acting DHS secretary while his nomination is pending in the Senate, which remains deadlocked over DHS funding, pushing the department shutdown into a fourth week. If confirmed, Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt (R) would appoint an interim replacement for Mullin's Senate seat until a special election is held.

Moon Beans

Chickpeas may be able to grow on the moon, Texas scientists revealed in a Scientific Reports study yesterday. The study paves the way for further research on lunar agriculture and may have implications for astronauts' ability to spend longer stretches of time in space.

In 2022, researchers demonstrated plants could grow in lunar soil using samples from the Apollo 11, 12, and 17 missions (1969-72). However, the plants—a relative of mustard greens—showed signs of stress and absorbed high levels of heavy metals. This time, biologists conducted a similar experiment using materials from Earth simulated to mimic lunar soil. They dusted chickpeas with powdered arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi, helping the plant's roots spread out and reduce absorption of iron, aluminum, zinc, and copper. Some soil samples were also treated with fertilizer from red wiggler worms. In each case, chickpeas treated with fungi powder lived two weeks longer or more on average.

China Growth Slowdown

China set a 2026 economic growth target of 4.5% to 5% at its annual Two Sessions meeting, the lowest since the early 1990s and the first cut since 2023's shift to "around 5%," as Beijing faces persistent deflation and US trade tensions.

Officials say the target allows room for reforms amid weak consumer spending, a property slump, a shrinking population, and an energy shortage—exacerbated by US actions in Iran and Venezuela. China's economy grew 5% in 2025 but slowed to 4.5% in the final quarter. Exports, which produced a \$1.2T surplus last year, have become a growth driver for the country, even as President Donald Trump's tariffs weigh on the economy.

Draft outlines for the 15th Five-Year Plan, covering 2026 through 2030, emphasize innovation, high-tech industries, scientific research, and stronger household consumption. Chinese officials say boosting domestic demand will remain a top priority this year as they try to reduce the economy's reliance on external demand.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Netflix acquires Ben Affleck's AI filmmaking startup specializing in postproduction tools; financial terms were not disclosed.

Cannes Film Festival to honor "Lord of the Rings" director Peter Jackson with lifetime achievement award.

World Baseball Classic continues today, with the US facing Brazil at 8 pm ET; tournament runs through March 17, with games in Miami, Houston, Puerto Rico, and Tokyo (More, w/full schedule)

Britney Spears arrested in California on suspicion of driving under the influence; she was released hours later and has a court appearance May 4.

Science & Technology

Chinese automaker BYD releases new electric vehicle battery that can charge from 10% to 97% in nine minutes, a task that previously took 30 to 60 minutes; advance comes amid slowing demand for EVs.

GLP-1 drugs linked to reduced interest in all major addictive substances—from alcohol and nicotine to cannabis and opioids—potentially offering a pivotal approach to substance abuse treatments.

Scientists create 3D images of ant morphology with a particle accelerator that captured high-resolution images of internal anatomy in seconds; the library, spanning 792 species, may inform robot design.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close lower (S&P 500 -0.6%, Dow -1.6%, Nasdaq -0.3%) as crude oil tops \$80 per barrel amid Iran conflict and as traders await jobs data today.

Pentagon informs Anthropic leadership that the AI company and its products, including Claude chatbot, are deemed to be a risk to US supply chain.

Group of 24 states sues Trump administration over new 10% global tariffs, arguing President Donald Trump cannot sidestep Supreme Court ruling that invalidated most of his earlier tariffs.

Politics & World Affairs

Justice Department publishes Epstein-related files about woman who, in 2019, alleged to the FBI that President Donald Trump sexually abused her years before, when she was between 13 and 15 years old; DOJ says the allegations were baseless, Trump denies wrongdoing.

President Donald Trump reportedly calls on Kurdish fighters to enter the war with Iran; Tehran strikes Kurdish headquarters in Iraq.

Ecuadorian officials confirm they are receiving support from the US military to address narcoterrorism; do not elaborate on level of cooperation.

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Defending Champion Chargers End Groton Area Season in Lady Tigers' first SoDak 16 appearance

MADISON, S.D. — Sioux Falls Christian showed why it is the defending state champion Friday night in Madison, defeating Groton Area 55-25 in SoDak 16 girls basketball action.

The Chargers seized early control with an 8-0 run in the opening quarter and never trailed, building a 15-5 lead after one and stretching the margin to 24-10 by halftime. Sioux Falls Christian then put the game away with a decisive 14-0 surge spanning the late second and early third quarters to open a 38-10 advantage.

Still, Groton Area head coach Matt Locke said his team battled, especially early.

"You know, we knew that length was going to be a problem — you don't see that every day," Locke said. "I thought we came out and defended the hell out of them in the first half. We just couldn't get a shot to fall. We were rushing shots, and that length messes with you."

The Chargers continued their push in the third, leading 50-16 at the end of the period. The 30-point running clock went into effect with 40 seconds remaining in the third quarter as Sioux Falls Christian closed out the 55-25 win.

It was a cold shooting night for Groton Area throughout. The Tigers shot just 13 percent in the first quarter compared to 67 percent for Sioux Falls Christian. Groton Area went 1-for-10 (10 percent) in the second quarter while the Chargers finished 4-for-10 (40 percent). In the third, Groton was 2-for-11 while Sioux Falls Christian caught fire, hitting 11-of-15 attempts. The Tigers finished 4-for-9 in the fourth, while the Chargers went 2-for-5.

Locke said his team executed the defensive game plan early, especially against Sioux Falls Christian standout Lezlei Setzer.

"We knew that coming in — we just thought we could push her off her spot," Locke said. "We did a good job of that in the first half."

For the game, Groton Area shot 5-for-23 on two-pointers (22 percent), 4-for-21 from three-point range (19 percent) and 3-for-4 at the free-throw line (75 percent). The Tigers finished with 22 rebounds, 25 turnovers, 10 assists, four steals and nine team fouls.

Jerica Locke led Groton Area with 11 points, six rebounds, three assists and three steals. Rylee Dunker added five points, three rebounds, one assist and one steal. Jaedyn Penning scored four points with two rebounds and one assist. Kella Tracy finished with three points, two rebounds and five assists, while McKenna Tietz added two points and one rebound.

Sioux Falls Christian shot 23-for-40 (57.5 percent) from the floor and controlled the glass, outrebounding Groton Area 33-22. Aubrie VanBeek led the Chargers with 17 points. Setzer finished with 13 points and a team-high 13 rebounds, while Ruth Dvoracek added 11 points.

Despite the outcome, Locke said the loss won't define the Tigers' season.

"This loss isn't going to define what these girls did this year," he said. "They're the first team ever from Groton to go to the SoDak 16. That's what we'll look back on."

Locke said his message to the team afterward focused on pride and



Jaedyn Penning shoots over Lezlei Setzer. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Jerica Locke dribbles around Aubrie VanBeek. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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perspective.

"I told them they've earned my respect for their lives," he said. "When you make it through a basketball season, you're tough, you're committed, you're gritty — and that doesn't go away."

Looking ahead, Locke said the next step will come through offseason work.

"If we want to take the next step, we've got to get better individually — putting the ball in the basket and handling the basketball," he said. "A lot of that work gets done in the offseason."



Coach Matt Locke being interviewed by Rich Bosma after the game on GDILIVE.COM. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by BaseKamp Lodge, Bierman Farm Service, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Farmers Union Coop, Groton Ag Partners, Groton American Legion, Groton Chamber, Groton Dairy Queen, Groton Ford, Hanlon Brothers, John Sieh Agency, Jungle Lanes & Cafe, Krueger Brothers, Lori's Pharmacy, Poet, S & S Lumber, Spanier Harvesting & Trucking, Sun & Sea Travel, The MeatHouse, Weismantel Insurance Agency. The audio was also simulcast on the Madison Livestream. Jeslyn Kosel ran the camera, Paul Kosel did the stats and technology and Rich Bosma provided the play-by-play commentary.



Taryn Traphagen walks on air as she heads to the basket.

(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Rylee Dunker passes the ball off to Jaedyn Penning. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



There were tears and hugs after the game. Bottom left are Mia Crank and Jaedyn Penning and with Coach Matt Locke is Talli Wright. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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The cheerleaders and the student body section cheered on the Lady Tigers. (Photos by Jeslyn Kosel)

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Date: 3/5/2026
Time: 7:45 pm

Arena:
City, State:

VISITOR: Groton Area ()

NO	PLAYER	P	TOT-FG		3-PT		FT	FTA	REBOUNDS			PF	TP	A	TO	BK	S	MIN
			FG	FGA	FG	FGA			OFF	DEF	TOT							
11	Locke, Jerica	*	4	16	2	8	1	2	4	2	6	0	11	1	3	0	0	32:00
15	Penning, Jaedyn	*	1	11	0	5	2	2	1	1	2	4	4	1	1	0	1	32:00
21	Traphagen, Taryn	*	0	6	0	2	0	0	3	0	3	3	0	1	0	0	1	32:00
25	Dunker, Rylee	*	2	6	1	4	0	0	1	1	2	1	5	0	0	0	1	24:00
31	Tracy, Kella	*	1	4	1	4	0	0	0	2	2	1	3	0	5	0	1	32:00
4	Tietz, McKenna		1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0:00
5	Krause, McKenna.		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0:00
10	Warrington, Ashlynn		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0:00
13	Locke, Sydney		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0:00
23	Hanson, Tevan		0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8:00
33	Wright, Talli		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0:00
41	Hanten, Teagan		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0:00
45	Crank, Avery		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0:00
53	Crank, Mia		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0:00
TEAM REBOUNDS									0	5	5				1			
Team Totals			9	46	4	24	3	4	10	12	22	9	25	4	10	0	4	160

Total FG% - 1st: 3/26 0.115 2nd: 6/20 0.300 Game: 0.196 Deadball
 3-PT FG% - 1st: 1/14 0.071 2nd: 3/10 0.300 Game: 0.167 Rebounds
 Total FT% - 1st: 3/4 0.750 2nd: 0/0 0.000 Game: 0.750 (0,0)

HOME: Sioux Falls Christian ()

NO	PLAYER	P	TOT-FG		3-PT		FT	FTA	REBOUNDS			PF	TP	A	TO	BK	S	MIN
			FG	FGA	FG	FGA			OFF	DEF	TOT							
1	VanBeek, Aubrie	*	7	10	3	5	0	0	0	2	2	1	17	1	1	0	1	32:00
10	Lems, Emory	*	2	6	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	4	5	2	0	1	32:00
12	Schaap, Sydney	*	1	3	0	2	0	0	1	2	3	4	2	1	5	0	2	24:00
22	Dvoracek, Ruth	*	4	5	2	3	1	2	0	1	1	3	11	2	2	0	0	24:00
24	Setzer, Lezlei	*	6	7	0	0	1	3	4	3	7	2	13	0	1	0	0	24:00
0	Aukes, Autumn		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0:00
2	Hadler, Oaklee		0	3	0	3	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	8:00
3	Connell, Maci		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0:00
4	Mulder, Regan		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0:00
5	Nelson, Avery		0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0:00
11	Reitsma, Makinli		2	4	1	3	0	0	0	5	5	0	5	0	2	0	0	0:00
15	Stanford, Nealie		1	1	0	0	1	1	1	2	3	0	3	4	0	0	0	16:00
20	Poppema, Kinzie		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0:00
TEAM REBOUNDS									0	9	9				1			
Team Totals			23	40	6	17	3	6	6	27	33	14	55	13	14	0	4	160

Total FG% - 1st: 10/18 0.556 2nd: 13/22 0.591 Game: 0.575 Deadball
 3-PT FG% - 1st: 2/7 0.286 2nd: 4/10 0.400 Game: 0.353 Rebounds
 Total FT% - 1st: 2/3 0.667 2nd: 1/3 0.333 Game: 0.500 (2,0)

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South Dakota PUC reminds consumers to protect their money and information from scammers

PIERRE, S.D. – In recognition of National Consumer Protection Week, the South Dakota Public Utilities Commission highlights the importance of recognizing red flags from unknown callers. The commission's "Don't Know? Don't Answer." education campaign emphasizes a simple, protective message: If you don't recognize the number calling you, don't answer the call.

"The PUC aims to provide South Dakotans with the information and resources needed to protect their information, assets and identities. We always recommend that if you don't know the number calling, don't answer. If that isn't always possible, listen for warning signs in the call," said PUC Chairman Chris Nelson. "Threatening language or demands for immediate action should cause concern. If that happens, don't be afraid take a step back and contact the supposed caller directly through a publicly available phone number," he explained.

Most often, phone scams can be categorized as imposter scams, where the caller pretends to be or impersonates someone else to gain your trust, information and eventually money.

"Telephone scammers are criminals who defraud people. Knowledge is power in avoiding them. Know common scams and how they operate and be prepared to respond. If you receive a suspicious call claiming to be from your utility provider, hang up and call your utility using the number on your bill to verify. Always use trusted sources," recommended PUC Vice Chairperson Kristie Fiegen.

Common phone scams include callers impersonating utility companies, banks, credit card companies, law enforcement, IRS officials, charity organizations, Medicare or Medicaid representatives, investment and crypto-currency firms, and even family members in legal trouble. Other scams have surfaced in previous years, like those involving student and auto loans, car warranties, health insurance and lottery or sweepstakes winnings, and are still common occurrences.

"Scams come in many shapes and sizes, and are always evolving, which makes perpetrators difficult to catch. That is why it is so important to stay informed, use available consumer resources to help identify and avoid scams, report incidents to law enforcement, state attorney general's office or the Federal Trade Commission and access support that can help you recover if a scam occurs," stated Commissioner Gary Hanson.

PUC Commissioners and staff will be on hand at the Black Hills Home Show, March 27-29, at The Monument in Rapid City to answer questions and continue their efforts to educate consumers. Stop by to take our "Don't Know? Don't Answer!" pledge and learn more about scams or visit the PUC's website at puc.sd.gov/scamcalls.

SDHSAA board warned about legislative interference in other states

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. NewsMedia Association

PIERRE — A report on this year's legislative bills that may have affected the South Dakota High School Activities Association led to a warning about state associations that are suffering from legislative interference. The SDHSAA board of directors got the report at their meeting on Wednesday, March 4.

SDHSAA Executive Director Dan Swartos told the board that legislative interference with activities associations is occurring across the country. He said it has started in the southeast and is working its way across the nation.

According to Swartos, activities association boards are under the threat of being disbanded by legislative action in Missouri and Oklahoma. Other associations are facing legislative threats in Wisconsin, North Carolina and Florida.

The South Dakota association is fortunate, Swartos said, because "we have a pretty good relationship with our Legislature." Swartos added that he tries to be responsive to the needs of the Legislature, the governor's office and the state Department of Education.

The bills being tracked by SDHSAA included House Bill 1039, calling for cardiac evaluations of students. That bill was withdrawn by the sponsor, Swartos said.

HB 1073 called on schools to create cardiac emergency plans. That bill was endorsed by the House Education Committee on a 12-0 vote. Because of a \$150,000 appropriation for the purchase of automated external defibrillators or AEDs, it next went to the Joint Appropriations Committee where a do pass motion failed on a 6-10 vote. A 10-6 vote sent the bill to the 41st day, a method used for disposing of legislation.

Swartos said the cardiac emergency plan outlined in HB 1073 is similar to something that SDHSAA already requires of member schools. Most schools already have AEDs in their gyms. Swartos said the \$150,000 appropriation could have been used by schools that need AEDs away from school grounds, like practice facilities for tennis, soccer and cross-country.

HB 1187 calls for coaches to become mandatory reporters when they see students that are abused or neglected. The original bill gave that distinction to coaches in SDHSAA-sanctioned sports. It was amended, Swartos explained, to include all coaches. That means it would also apply to coaches in non-sanctioned sports like weight-lifting, hockey and baseball.

The bill was endorsed unanimously by the House Judiciary Committee 11-0 and the full House 66-0. It will next be heard in the Senate Judiciary Committee on March 5.

—30—

Unsportsmanlike conduct noted at state wrestling tournament

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. NewsMedia Association

PIERRE — While no one has tracked whether it was worse than last year, officials of the South Dakota High School Activities Association noted that there seemed to be a rise in unsportsmanlike activity at this year's state wrestling tournament.

"I felt like it was more," SDHSAA Assistant Executive Director Randy Soma told the association's board of directors at their meeting on Wednesday, March 4. "It stood out."

In wrestling, athletes can get point deductions for taunting, swearing, refusing to shake hands after a match or throwing headgear. If a wrestler is called twice for unsportsmanlike conduct he can be ejected.

Soma said he hasn't tracked whether this year's point deductions for unsportsmanlike conduct were similar to previous tournaments.

SDHSAA Executive Director Dan Swartos said one coach was cited for unsportsmanlike conduct. The rest of the citations were for wrestlers. In one of the more serious cases, a wrestler was bitten.

Sportsmanship in wrestling will be a "point of emphasis" prior to the start of next year's season, Soma said.

—30—

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Wrestling duals tournament may be on the way out

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. NewsMedia Association

PIERRE — Scheduling difficulties, as well as other factors, may lead to the demise of the state wrestling duals tournament. At its meeting on Wednesday, March 4, members of the South Dakota High School Activities Association board of directors learned about possibility of discontinuing the tournament.

SDHSAA Assistant Executive Director Randy Soma told the board that the wrestling advisory panel voted 6-0 in favor of discontinuing the tournament. The advisory panel is made up on coaches, administrators and an official. The advisory panel's decision will now be considered at the annual meeting of athletic directors. Decisions made at the athletic directors' meeting must be finalized by the SDHSAA board of directors.

Reasons offered for discontinuing the tournament included the difficulty in tracking out-of-state records, financial concerns and scheduling challenges. A dual consists of two wrestling squads competing against each other as opposed to a tournament format with multiple teams.

SDHSAA Executive Director Dan Swartos said it can be difficult to match teams in the tournament as some schools may wrestle 30 duals while other schools may wrestle only 10 duals.

Prior to the duals tournament, Swartos said he had one wrestling coach tell him, "I hope I'm not in it. I want my kids to have that weekend off."

The Wrestling Coaches Association may be interested in offering a duals tournament, according to Swartos. That event would be similar to a basketball classic.

GT

on

Boys Region 1A

Groton Area vs.

Milbank

at the Groton Area Arena

Fri., March 6, 7 p.m.



Groton
Area
Tigers
Groton, SD

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For more info: GDILIVE.COM



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Kristi Noem out as DHS secretary; Trump says she's moving to job as special envoy

President to nominate Oklahoma Sen. Mullin as Noem's successor

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump Thursday said Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem will be leaving the post for a job as a special envoy, following an appearance before a U.S. Senate panel this week that provoked bipartisan criticism of her handling of the department that is tasked with fulfilling the administration's mass deportation campaign.

Oklahoma GOP Sen. Markwayne Mullin, a Trump loyalist who has championed the president's war against Iran, will lead the Department of Homeland Security, the president wrote on his social media site, TruthSocial.

"I thank Kristi for her service at 'Homeland,'" Trump wrote, adding that her role ends March 31.

In a social media post, Noem wrote she looked forward to her new role as a special envoy for a new "Security Initiative in the Western Hemisphere."

In that role, she will work with Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, she said, adding that her new position will "build on the partnerships and national security expertise" that she made as DHS secretary, but did not go into detail.

"I look forward to working with them closely to dismantle cartels that have poured drugs into our nation and killed our children and grandchildren," she said, adding that the "Western Hemisphere is absolutely critical for U.S. security." Trump said her title would be special envoy for the Shield of Americas, "our new Security Initiative in the Western Hemisphere" that will be announced at a conference in Doral, Florida, on Saturday.

As members of Congress and other officials reacted to the sudden news of Noem's ouster Thursday, the outgoing secretary spoke at a previously scheduled event with local law enforcement leaders at a conference in Nashville.

Noem took questions from the officials in the room, but was not asked about the shakeup and did not address it.

In a social media post, Mullin said he was grateful for the nomination and, if confirmed, would support Trump's "mission to safeguard the American people and defend the homeland."

"I look forward to earning the support of my colleagues in the Senate and carrying out President Trump's mission alongside the department's many capable agencies and the thousands of patriots who keep us safe every day," he said.

Senate hearing

In the heated hourslong oversight Tuesday hearing before senators, Republicans grilled Noem over handing no-bid contracts to close allies and her agency's slow disaster relief response.

North Carolina Republican Sen. Thom Tillis berated Noem for a full 10 minutes, criticizing her for a policy she instituted to require disaster relief funds over \$100,000 to be approved by her, which he said created a bottleneck in approving funds to his state that is recovering from Hurricane Helene.

He slammed her leadership at DHS as a "disaster" and said it showed the same bad decisionmaking that led her to shoot and kill her 14-month-old dog named Cricket, which she detailed in her 2024 memoir.

After the president announced Thursday that he would nominate Mullin to lead DHS, Tillis gave his support in a social media post.

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"Senator Markwayne Mullin is a great guy and a great choice to lead DHS, restore competence, and refocus efforts on quickly distributing disaster aid, keeping the border secure, and targeting violent illegal immigrants for deportation," Tillis said. "Another big positive: he likes dogs."

Also cited were multiple video recordings that contradicted her statements that two U.S. citizens killed by her federal immigration officers in Minneapolis were "domestic terrorists."

Senate Democrats have refused to approve funding for the Department of Homeland Security, now at day 19 of a shutdown, unless certain policy changes are made to immigration enforcement tactics. A vote in the Senate to move forward on approving a funding bill for the agency failed again on Thursday, in a 51-45 vote. Sixty votes are required.

Ad campaign

The Wall Street Journal reported earlier Thursday that Trump was planning to fire Noem after she said during the Senate hearing that a special \$220 million ad campaign that prominently featured her was personally signed off on by the president.

Louisiana Sen. John Kennedy questioned Noem about her decision to award a no-bid contract for the ad campaign, in which she pressured immigrants in the country without legal authority to "self deport."

A ProPublica investigation found that Noem awarded the contract to the husband of former DHS spokesperson Tricia McLaughlin.

Kennedy asked Noem if the president was aware of the cost of the ad campaign. Noem said Trump knew about it and approved it.

According to the Wall Street Journal's Thursday story, the president had not agreed to the campaign, and he was frustrated with its self-promoting style.

Kennedy had mused to Noem that the ad campaign was "effective in (boosting) your name recognition."

Minneapolis killings

Democrats have called for Noem to step down following the deaths of U.S. citizens in Minnesota, Renee Good and Alex Pretti, both 37.

Noem had approved an aggressive immigration operation, sending more than 2,000 federal immigration agents to the city. The months-long operation in a city with a high Somali refugee population sparked massive protests and community pushback.

Following Pretti's death, the second, Trump directed White House border czar Tom Homan to take over the operations.

Cabinet departure

Noem is the first high-profile Cabinet official to leave her role, which she's held for a little over a year.

A similar inflection point with the Trump administration's immigration policy occurred in the president's first term in 2018, when huge controversy was generated when parents were separated from their children at the southern border.

Then-DHS Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen was charged with implementing the policy, which was crafted by Stephen Miller, who is still a top architect of the Trump administration's immigration policy. Nielsen eventually resigned from her role months later.

Back to South Dakota?

While the president said Noem will move into another role, the former governor of South Dakota could still have a future in her home state with a potential primary race against Republican Sen. Mike Rounds.

To earn a spot on the June 2 primary ballot, Noem would have to gather nominating petition signatures from 2,171 registered South Dakota voters by March 31.

If that race were to materialize, it would pit two former governors against each other. Rounds was governor of South Dakota from 2003 to 2011, and Noem served from 2019 until last year, when she resigned.

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to join Trump's Cabinet.

However, such a race would be an uphill battle for her as Rounds already earned a reelection endorsement from Trump in July.

Before she was governor, Noem served in the U.S. House as South Dakota's lone representative. She could seek a return to that position, because Republican Rep. Dusty Johnson is running for governor.

The leading candidate for the state's Republican nomination for U.S. House is Attorney General Marty Jackley, who lost to Noem in the 2018 Republican gubernatorial primary.

Markwayne Mullin

Mullin, if confirmed by the Senate, would be the first Native American to lead DHS. He is an enrolled member of the Cherokee Nation.

Mullin appears to have little experience in homeland security. In the Senate, he does not sit on any committee that oversees or appropriates funds to the agency.

He'll be tasked with carrying out the president's campaign promise of mass deportations, along with leading crucial agencies such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency, transportation security and cyber security, among other departments.

He would also be taking over an agency that received a separate funding stream from Congress that provides more than \$170 billion for immigration enforcement and detention, which he voted for last year.

Mullin will have to leave the Senate in order to run the agency, if confirmed. Another former senator who serves in Trump's cabinet, Rubio, resigned as Florida's senator after the Senate confirmed him in a 99-0 vote. Rubio voted for himself before submitting his resignation.

In his time in the House from 2013 to 2023, Mullin sat on the Energy and Commerce, Transportation and Infrastructure and Natural Resources committees.

In the Senate, he sits on the Appropriations, Armed Services, Indian Affairs and Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions committees.

During a 2023 HELP Committee hearing, Mullin challenged International Brotherhood of Teamsters President Sean O'Brien to a physical fight.

On Appropriations, he chairs the panel that handles funding for the legislative branch, and on the HELP Committee, he chairs the panel on Employment and Workplace Safety.

He would undergo a confirmation hearing before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, where he called the committee chair, Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky, a "freaking snake," and said he understood why Paul's neighbor assaulted him, according to an Oklahoma journalist.

Paul's ribs were broken by his neighbor in the assault in 2017.

Seth Tupper contributed to this report.

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.

New sales tax options for counties and cities headed to governor's desk

Revenue from county plan would be used to reduce homeowner property taxes; city plan is for special projects

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER AND MEGHAN O'BRIEN

Two bills that would allow local governments to impose new sales taxes for specific purposes cleared their last legislative hurdles on Thursday at the South Dakota Capitol in Pierre and are headed to the governor for his consideration.

One bill is the governor's own proposal to allow counties to levy up to a half-percent sales tax to offset county property taxes on owner-occupied homes, which is one of several pending proposals to reduce or slow the growth of homeowner property taxes. The other bill would allow cities to implement a temporary sales tax up to 1% — in addition to existing city sales taxes — to pay for major projects.

Counties are not currently allowed to have sales taxes. South Dakota's state sales tax rate is 4.2%, but is scheduled to increase to 4.5% in 2027. Cities can charge up to another 2%, plus an additional 1% on lodging, prepared food, alcohol and event ticket sales.

If the governor signs both bills, some South Dakotans could pay sales taxes up to 9% if they live in a city and county where all the optional, local sales taxes are enacted.

County sales tax designed for property tax relief

The House of Representatives voted 48-19 to approve Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden's plan, Senate Bill 96, allowing counties to charge up to a half-percent of sales tax for homeowner property tax credits.

Supporters said the bill allows for more local control and targeted relief for counties that may be feeling more of a strain from increased property taxes.

"The counties with the biggest crisis are also the ones with the most growth, and the most visitors, and the most tourist traffic, all of which can be better captured by a sales tax," said Rep. John Hughes, R-Sioux Falls, "versus continuing to pressure owner-occupied property owners or to pursue a statewide tax increase."

But the bill could also shift burdens, according to Rep. Will Mortenson, R-Fort Pierre. He said it imposes a higher burden on people from smaller communities, who might not see that return on property tax relief.

"When we hear about these visitors, they don't just come from out of state, they come from rural communities," he said. "Because this bill is structured so that the property tax cut goes where the economic activity goes, you know who's getting the biggest tax cut? The people in the biggest houses, in the biggest towns."

The governor recently published a website that estimates how much homeowners would save on property taxes, if counties decide to enact a half-percent sales tax.

Bureau of Finance and Management Commissioner Jim Terwilliger estimated last week that he would spend an additional \$160 in sales taxes each year for his four-person family. He said the average property tax savings statewide would be about \$660, netting approximately \$500 in savings.

Temporary sales tax allows cities to 'invest in their future,' avoid bonds

A proposal that lays out provisions for an optional, temporary city sales tax passed the Senate 19-15. The bill, if signed by the governor, will allow a municipality to impose a temporary sales tax of up to 1% to pay for specific projects — if cleared with at least a 60% vote of the public.

The tax would automatically sunset once the identified amount for the project is raised or after five years, whichever is earlier, and municipalities would have to wait two years before they propose implementing the tax again.

The bill's sponsor in the Senate is Tim Reed, R-Brookings. He framed it as a cost saving tool for communities, because the tax would allow them to fund projects without debt.

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"If that community believes in the project and its citizens are willing to approve and collect the temporary tax to make it happen, they should have the ability to invest in their future," Reed said.

A mayor-appointed committee would have to unanimously approve projects proposed by the city council before they go to a public vote. All revenue raised from the tax would be placed into a dedicated fund for the project.

The state Department of Revenue opposed the proposal throughout the legislative session. In a hand-out given to lawmakers on Thursday, the department highlighted the increase in municipal sales taxes in the last few decades and raised concerns about the "undue burden for retailers" in the state to track and implement the tax.

Senate opponents on Thursday criticized the proposal as another sales tax layered onto the existing framework. Opponents also suggested communities fundraise to meet their needs.

Reed referenced a proposed community center project in Murdo, a town of about 600 people, as an example. Fundraising for such a major project — which would house child care, emergency medical services and general community space — would be difficult in small communities that lack a major business or philanthropist to fund the project, he said.

"We're not talking about pie sales to do a community center," Reed said. "We're talking about some large funds."

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.

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.

Data center regulation bill passes South Dakota House **Legislation now goes back to state Senate for consideration of amendment**

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

One of the last remaining data center bills pending in the South Dakota Legislature — a measure that would impose new regulations — passed the state House on Thursday and now heads back to the Senate for consideration of a House committee's amendment.

Senate Bill 135 is labeled the "Data Center Bill of Rights for Citizens" by its prime sponsors, Senate President Pro Tempore Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls, and House Speaker Jon Hansen, R-Dell Rapids.

The bill would require data centers with peak electrical use of 10 megawatts or greater to cover any costs associated with meeting their power demands, including costs if the data center unexpectedly leaves. It would also bar the state from preempting local laws limiting, banning or regulating data centers.

Data centers would additionally have to notify local water providers of their proposed projects and the amount of water they would require for uses such as cooling. Data centers would need determinations from local providers that the project's water consumption would be compatible with the local water supply.

"We're putting some basic protections in place for consumers, for South Dakota ratepayers," Hansen said. "They've seen the headlines. They've seen the concerns."

The bill passed on a 60-7 vote. It passed the Senate 34-0 last month, and it will have to go back to the Senate for consideration of an amendment made by a House committee. That amendment inserted the 10-megawatt or greater applicability standard.

The bill originally banned data center tax exemptions at the state and local levels, but the Senate voted to strike that language, even as Karr said the language was under review and could return later.

Data centers — rooms or buildings full of computer servers — have been storing cellphone pictures, emails and social media accounts for years. What's new are 100- to 1,000-acre warehouses full of serv-

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ers for cryptocurrency and artificial intelligence. Those massive data centers, often needing 30 to 1,000 megawatts of energy, have electricity consumption equivalent to 29,000 to 800,000 residential customers. There is a 30-megawatt data center in South Dakota, but the state has none of the larger data centers that have proliferated elsewhere.

During the House debate, the bill's supporters said the legislation protects ratepayers from subsidizing massive electric loads, without banning data centers from coming to the state.

Opponents said utilities and local officials already have tools to manage large electric loads and warned the bill tells businesses that South Dakota has an anti-growth mindset that undermines economic development.

"This comes from a good place, but focusing on what government can block is the wrong path," said Rep. Will Mortenson, R-Fort Pierre. "We need to start focusing on what people can build."

Most other data center-related measures have failed this legislative session. Those include bills to give data centers sales tax refunds or rebates, and another to remove the need for Public Utilities Commission permitting of large backup generators.

One data center bill that's still pending would allow the Public Utilities Commission to make companies pay for regulatory studies related to data centers with peak electrical demands of 10 megawatts or more.

With one week left in the annual legislative session, there's still time for failed proposals to come back as amendments to other bills.

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.

Medical Marijuana Oversight Committee survives, for now, as attempt to shut it down fails

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

The committee that oversees South Dakota's medical marijuana program should continue its work for at least another year, a panel of state senators decided. But the full Senate could have the final say.

A bill that would repeal the sections of state law that established the Medical Marijuana Oversight Committee was rejected 4-3 in the Senate Health and Human Services Committee earlier this week, but a procedural effort is already underway to force it to the Senate floor next week. The bill passed the House of Representatives earlier, 41-26.

Current law requires the Legislature's Executive Board to appoint an 11-member committee made up of two senators, two representatives, and seven non-legislative stakeholders from an array of backgrounds, including medicine, law enforcement, counseling and at least one patient.

The committee must meet at least twice a year and make recommendations to the Legislature and the Department of Health.

The medical marijuana program itself would continue if the bill had passes, under the regulation of the state Department of Health.

Rep. Tim Goodwin, R-Rapid City, introduced the bill. He said the committee made sense when the state was setting up the program after voters approved it in 2020, but that it has since become an unnecessary layer of bureaucracy. He said the Department of Health and the Legislature are equipped to manage the program going forward.

The legislation comes amid friction between the oversight committee and the medical marijuana industry. In November, the committee approved 11 motions, primarily calling for tighter regulations, without publishing them in advance or taking public comment on each motion.

The South Dakota Catholic Conference, South Dakota Sheriffs' Association, and the oversight committee's current chair, Rep. Josephine Garcia, R-Watertown, all testified against the bill. Opponents said the

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oversight committee is a watchdog the public wants in place, and that the committee's concerns have not yet been addressed.

"We also have not determined, actually, the mental psychosis we're now seeing, with cannabis use," Garcia said. "Things that are being discussed are stress, anxiety, PTSD, which is not an indication for this type of cannabis use, and it has actually potentiated the mental psychosis."

The state has 18,306 medical marijuana patient cardholders.

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.

US House also rejects restraint on Trump's war power in Iran

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — House Republicans and a handful of Democrats followed the Senate in blocking a measure Thursday to stop President Donald Trump from furthering the war in Iran without authorization from Congress.

The joint war with Israel that began six days ago has already claimed the lives of six U.S. troops and injured and killed dozens of civilians across Israel and the Persian Gulf nations. Iranian officials say more than 1,000 have been killed since Saturday, according to multiple reports.

The War Powers Resolution sponsored by Reps. Ro Khanna, D-Calif., and Thomas Massie, R-Ky., failed in a 212-219 vote. Massie was the lone Republican to sign on to the measure.

Massie and Rep. Warren Davidson, R-Ohio, broke ranks with Republicans to vote in favor of limiting Trump's hand in Iran. But Democrats Greg Landsman, D-Ohio, Jared Golden, D-Maine, Henry Cuellar, D-Texas, and Juan Vargas, D-Calif., joined the majority of Republicans in opposing the War Powers Resolution.

Golden issued a statement following the vote saying he is reluctant to support a halt to the current fighting, despite Trump's lack of clarity.

Servicemembers are "actively engaged in hostilities, our allies are under attack and the Iranian regime is more desperate than ever to reassert its power. While I do not believe that an abrupt about-face is a good course of action given the reality on the ground, that should not be construed as my approval," Golden said.

Davidson wrote on social media Monday that he wants to "review the intelligence behind the Iran strikes. I'm open to being persuaded these strikes were necessary. But I do not support a regime-change war, and any boots on the ground or prolonged conflict requires authorization from Congress."

House lawmakers otherwise split along party lines, with Republicans offering resounding support for the intervention.

Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., described the War Powers Resolution as a "a terrible, dangerous idea."

During debate on the House floor Wednesday, Rep. Brian Mast, R-Fla., said Trump "is utilizing his constitutional Article II authority to defend the United States of America against that imminent threat that we agree upon."

Mast sponsored a separate, symbolic resolution reaffirming Iran as the largest state-sponsor of terrorism. The measure passed Thursday in a 372-53 vote. Two members voted present. All who voted "no" or present were Democrats.

Rep. Gregory Meeks, D-N.Y., who argued for the War Powers Resolution on the floor Wednesday, said the U.S. is now involved in a conflict with Iran "at President Trump's own behest."

"What is the strategy for preventing regional escalation, and what is the plan for the day after? What will this cost the American people? Because the American people deserve those answers, and Congress deserves a vote," Meeks said.

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House vote echoes Senate

A similar War Powers Resolution failed in the U.S. Senate Wednesday when all but one Republican, Kentucky's Rand Paul, voted against it. Sen. John Fetterman, D-Pa., was the only Democrat to join Republicans in opposing the measure.

Republicans, joined by Fetterman, have blocked other attempts to rein in Trump's military interventions during his second term. A War Powers Resolution to stop Trump from further operations in Venezuela failed in the House and Senate in January.

The U.S. apprehended Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro and his wife on Jan. 3 on drug trafficking and weapons charges. Maduro remains in U.S. custody while awaiting trial. His arrest followed months of a U.S. bombing campaign on alleged small drug boats in the Caribbean Sea that have killed more than 130 people, according to the human rights-focused Washington Office on Latin America, which has joined a chorus of critics who argue the strikes are illegal.

Congress overrode a veto by President Richard Nixon in 1973 during the ongoing Vietnam War to pass the War Powers Resolution as a check on presidential power

Strikes continue

U.S. and Israel continued strikes on Iran Thursday.

Trump urged all Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps members and police to lay down their arms and "accept immunity." Otherwise, they'll face "absolute guaranteed death," he said at an unrelated White House event Thursday afternoon.

"We also urge Iranian diplomats around the world to request asylum and to help us shape a new and better Iran with great potential," Trump said.

The war widened its reach as Azerbaijani officials said two drones from Iran struck an airport and other civilian targets inside the NATO ally's borders.

"These acts of aggression will not remain unanswered," according to a statement Thursday from Azerbaijan's Ministry of Defense.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi told NBC News Wednesday night that if the U.S. launches a ground invasion, "we are confident that we can confront them, and that would be a big disaster for them."

White House press secretary told reporters Wednesday American ground troops are "not part of the current plan" but did not rule out that it's an option "on the table."

All six U.S. troops killed by an Iranian drone in Kuwait Sunday have been identified by the Pentagon.

Jennifer Shutt contributed to this report.

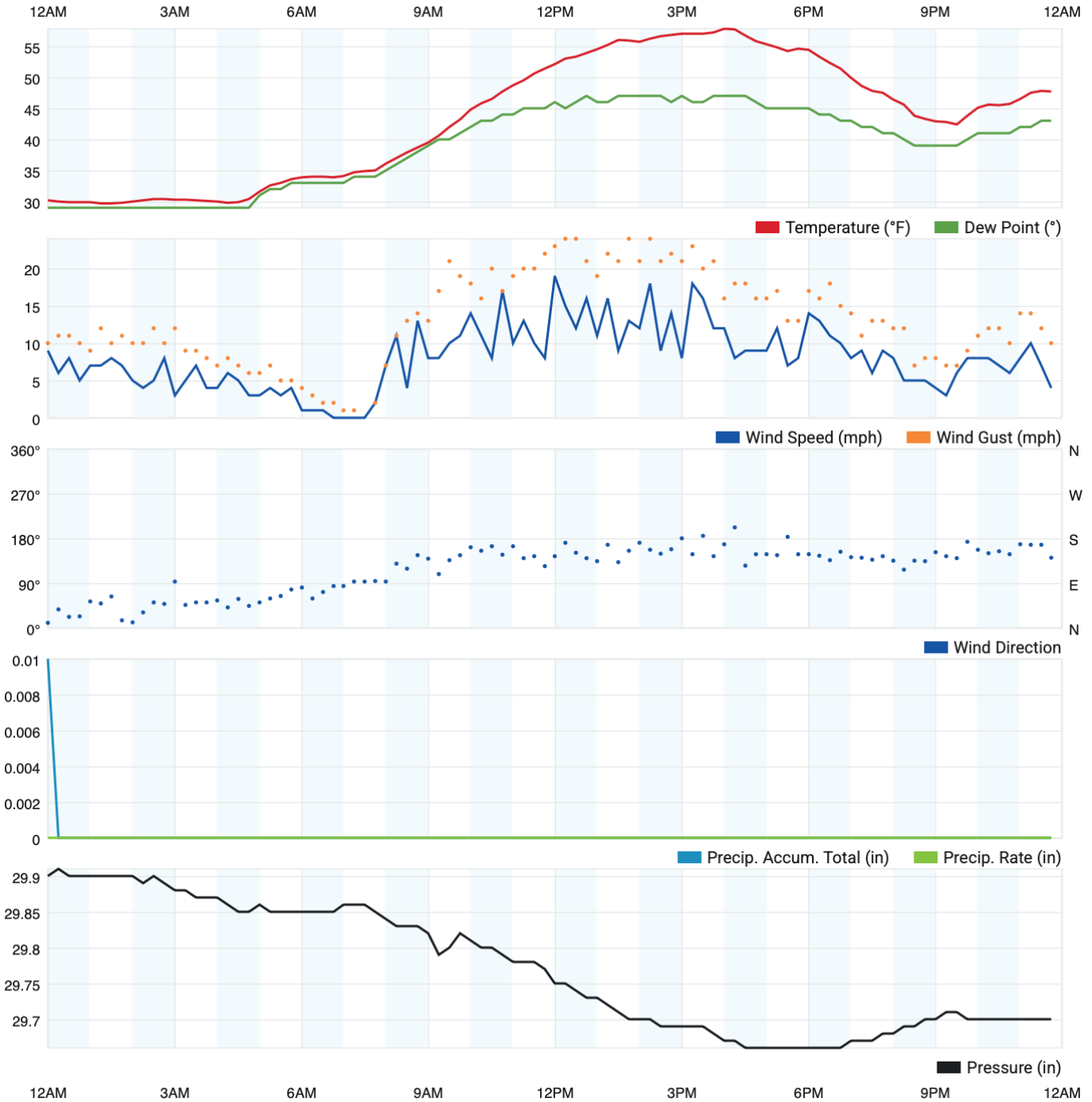
Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

March 5, 2026



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Winter Weather Advisory		Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
Today	Tonight			
				
High: 33 °F	Low: 21 °F	High: 48 °F	Low: 35 °F	High: 63 °F
Breezy. Patchy Fog then Chance Wintry Mix	Chance Snow then Mostly Cloudy	Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny then Mostly Sunny and Breezy



Winter Weather Friday

Rain, Snow, and Freezing Rain All Possible

March 5, 2026
3:09 PM

Key Messages

- Rain transitioning to a wintry mix before transitioning to snow Friday.
- Surface temperature Friday morning into the afternoon will drive precipitation type (either rain or freezing rain) and uncertainty remains.
- ◆ **Freezing drizzle may impact the morning commute, a freezing rain mix may impact the evening commutes.**
- Increasing winds out of the north, with gusts of 30-40 mph.
- Strong winds combining with the falling snow may lead to drifting and patchy blowing snow, reducing visibility at times.

NEW

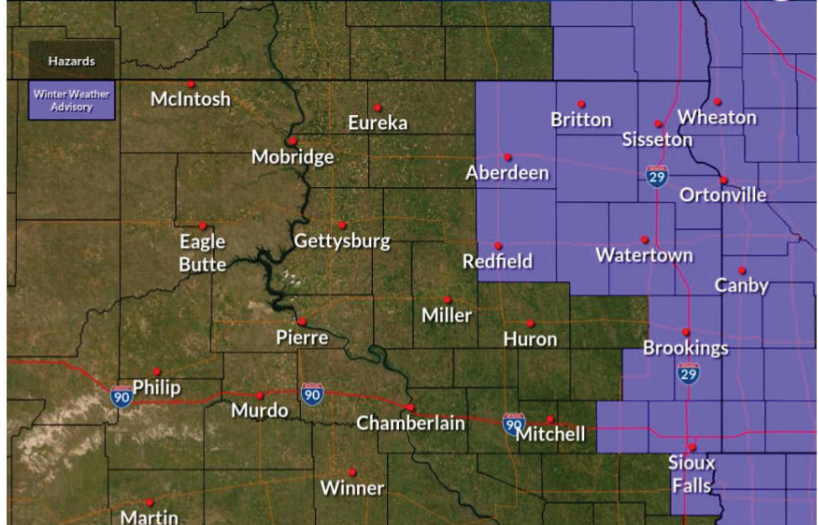
Important Updates

- Winter Weather Advisory has been issued for northeastern SD and west central MN valid Friday morning through Saturday morning.

Winter Weather Advisory

In effect early Friday morning through Saturday morning.

Weather Forecast Office
Aberdeen, SD
Issued Mar 05, 2026 3:00 PM CST



National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

A Winter Weather Advisory has been issued for Friday morning through Saturday morning. Freezing drizzle and Rain may be present during the morning commute, before a transition to a wintry mix of freezing rain and snow will occur in the late morning to afternoon time frame. Strong winds gusting to 30-40 mph combined with falling snow may lead to patchy drifting or blowing snow, reducing visibility at times.

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Snapshot of Precipitation Type & Timing

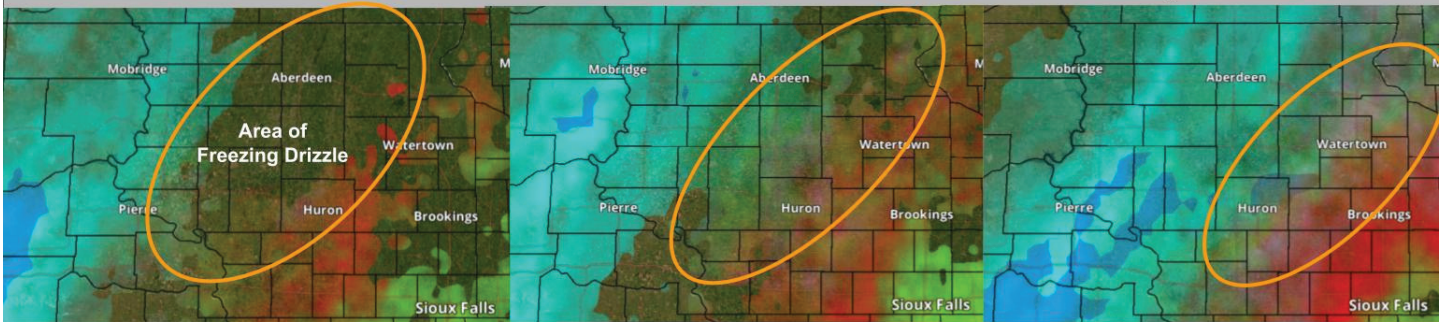
March 5, 2026
3:09 PM

Transition from rain to a wintry mix

Friday 6 AM CST

Friday 12 PM CST

Friday 3 PM CST



Area of Freezing Drizzle

Snow

Fz Rain

Mixed

Rain

- Rain will transition to a wintry mix (including freezing rain and snow) Friday morning and afternoon.
- This transition will be very dependent on near-surface temperatures.
- Northeastern South Dakota and western Minnesota will see mainly rain Friday morning, while central South Dakota will already be seeing snow and/or freezing rain.
 - **Snow will expand east through the day, reaching northeastern South Dakota and western Minnesota by late Friday afternoon to Friday evening.**



Precipitation Amounts Through Saturday

March 5, 2026
3:09 PM

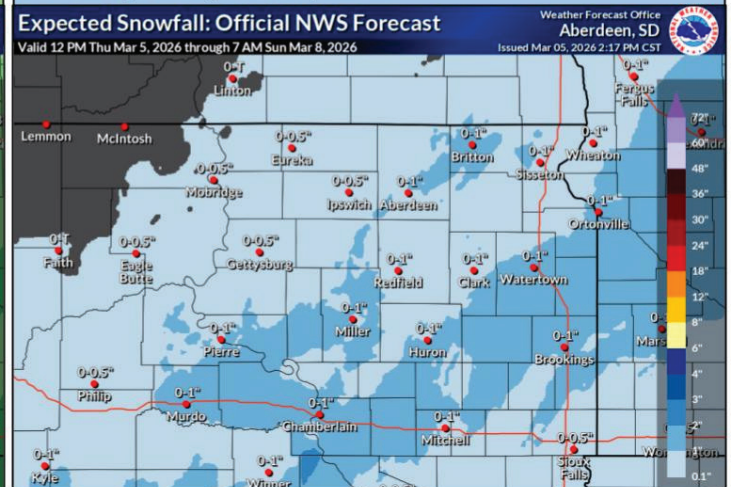
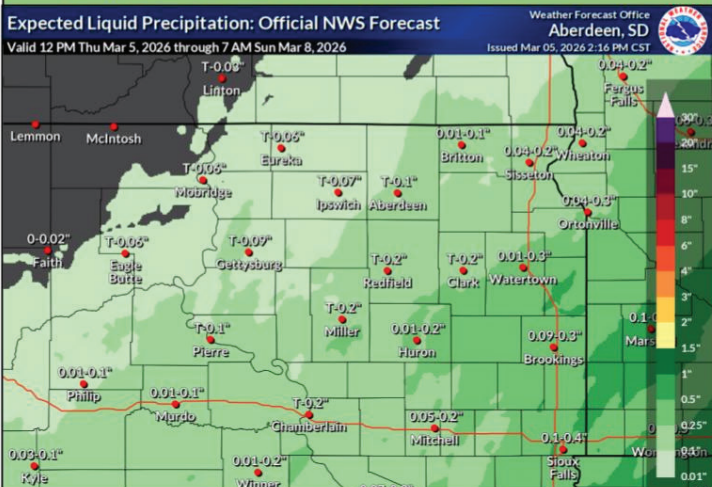
Up to a half inch of liquid (including up to two inches of snow) are possible through Saturday morning.

Total Liquid Precipitation Amounts

- Northeastern South Dakota to western Minnesota is the area expected to see the highest total precipitation through Saturday, up to 0.5" inches at the most.
- Expected amounts decrease moving west into central and north central South Dakota.

Total Snowfall Amounts

- Parts of northeastern as well as central South Dakota are expected to see the highest snowfall totals through Saturday.
- Up to 2" of accumulation is expected, with locally higher amounts possible.
- Patchy blowing snow is possible.



National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 58 °F at 4:01 PM

Low Temp: 30 °F at 1:08 AM

Wind: 26 mph at 11:47 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 69 in 2000

Record Low: -16 in 1899

Average High: 36

Average Low: 15

Average Precip in Mar.: 0.14

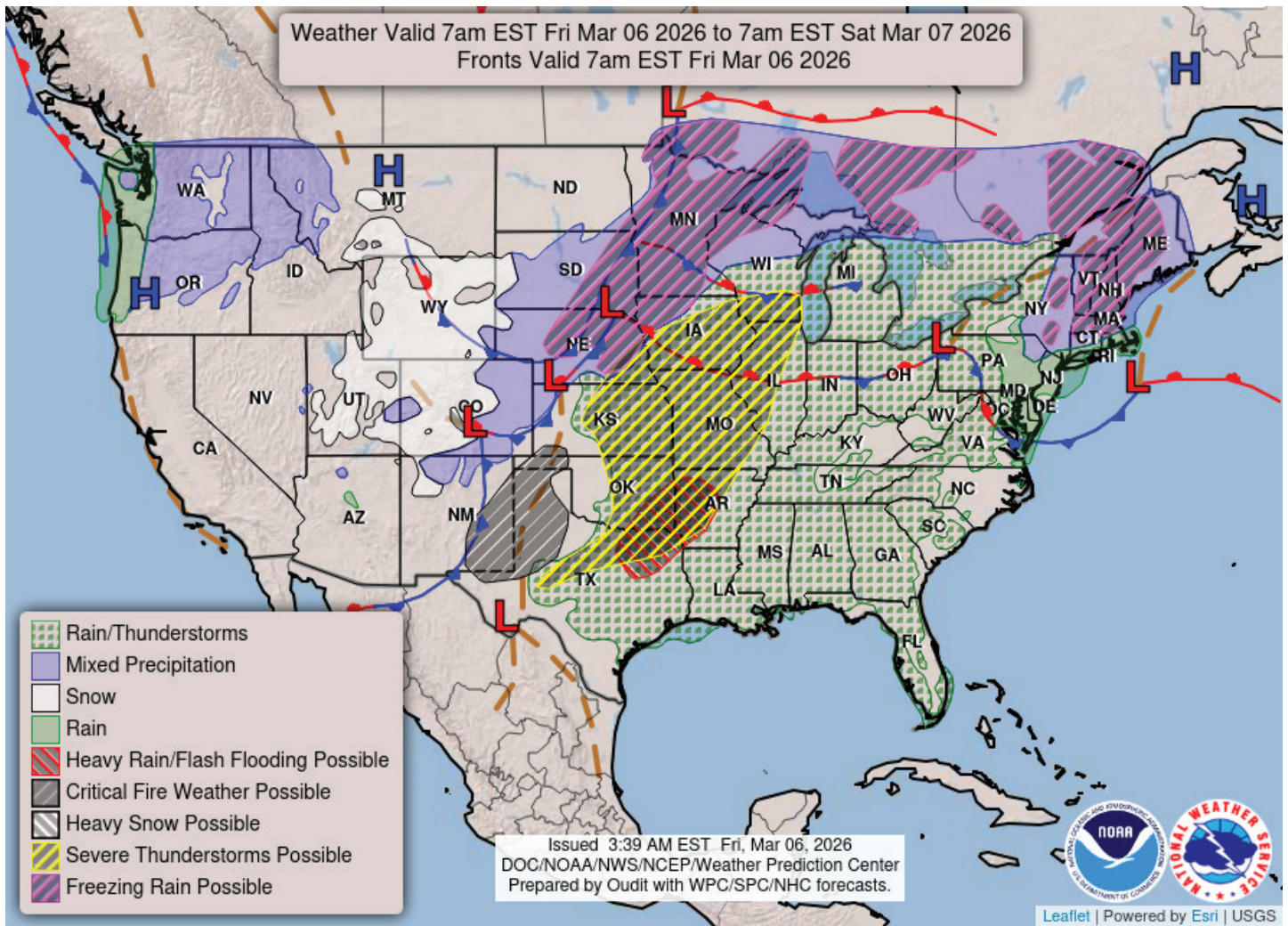
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 1.31

Precip Year to Date: 1.33

Sunset Tonight: 6.25 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:59 am



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Today in Weather History

March 6th, 1987: Twenty-eight cities in the north-central U.S. reported record-high temperatures for the date. Pickstown, South Dakota, was the hot spot in the nation with a reading of 83 degrees. The high of 71 at Saint Cloud, Minnesota, smashed their previous record by 21 degrees.

March 6th, 2000: A grass fire of unknown origin was exacerbated by dry conditions and strong winds, burning 1500 acres of grassland northwest and north of Brandon in Minnehaha County. The fire threatened several homes, but no homes were damaged, although farmland and equipment burned. In a separate event the same day, a controlled burn went out of control, exacerbated by the conditions and strong winds. The fire caused one fatality and one injury. The damage was confined to grassland.

1872 — A cold wave hit the East coast sending the mercury plunging to 8 degrees below zero at Boston. It was the most severe March cold wave in modern history. (David Ludlum)

1900 — A chinook wind blowing down the slopes of the Rockies through Havre MT raised the temperature 31 degrees in just three minutes. (The Weather Channel)

1954 — Florida received its greatest modern-day snowfall of record, with 4.0 inches at the Milton Experimental Station. Pensacola FL equalled their 24-hour record with 2.1 inches of snow. (The Weather Channel)

1987 — Twenty-eight cities in the north central U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Pickstown SD was the hot spot in the nation with a reading of 83 degrees. The high of 71 at Saint Cloud MN smashed their previous record by 21 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 — Wintry weather developed in the Rockies and the Plateau Region as arctic air swept in from the northwest. Blizzard conditions in southeast Idaho claimed the lives of two teenagers. Thunderstorms developed in Utah and Idaho. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 — A winter storm in the south central U.S. left parts of Missouri and Arkansas buried under more than a foot of snow. Heavier snowfall totals in Missouri included 14 inches at Springfield and 16 inches at Lebanon. Totals in Benton County AR ranged up to 14 inches. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 — Colorado's strongest winter storm of the season moved northeastward across the state producing 50 inches of snow at Echo Lake, 46.5 inches on Buckhorn Mountain, and 46 inches near the top of Coal Canyon. Snow fell at the rate of several inches per hour during the height of the storm, while winds gusted above 50 mph. Several hundred rush hour commuters, including the state governor, were stranded in blizzard conditions along Highway 36 between Denver and Boulder. Drifts up to twelve feet high had to be cleared southeast of Boulder. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

Dealing With Distractions

To fulfill your calling and remain aligned with His will, focus on God's purpose.

Nehemiah 1:4-11: 4 When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

5 I said, "I beseech You, O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments,

6 let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You; I and my father's house have sinned.

7 "We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses.

8 "Remember the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful I will scatter you among the peoples;

9 but if you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though those of you who have been scattered were in the most remote part of the heavens, I will gather them from there and will bring them to the place where I have chosen to cause My name to dwell.'

10 "They are Your servants and Your people whom You redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand.

11 "O Lord, I beseech You, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name, and make Your servant successful today and grant him compassion before this man." Now I was the cupbearer to the king.

When Nehemiah was cupbearer to the king, he was troubled by the plight of the Israelites and their city. So, with the king's permission, he set out to rebuild Jerusalem's wall. There were numerous obstacles, but Nehemiah refused to be distracted from the task.

From his story, we learn the importance of:

Being in the center of God's will. When Nehemiah cried out in prayer about his people and homeland, the Lord showed him what to do.

Remembering what the goal is. Nehemiah knew the Lord's priority for him was to rebuild the city's defenses. God has also planned things for us to do, and His work is always of great value.

Accomplishing each task. By keeping the Lord's goal in mind, we are better able to stay in our God-appointed place, carry out each step, and remain on course.

Accurately identifying distractions. Those who seek to interrupt our work, divert our attention, or attack us personally are not from God. Think about situations that are likely to distract you. Being aware of their potential to cause delays can help you stay focused.

Every believer has God-given tasks (Ephesians 2:10). Nehemiah's example is a good blueprint to follow in carrying them out.

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:
03.05.26

17 20 23 30 33 5

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

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 53 Mins 29 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.03.26

7 21 53 54 62 16

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$496,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 38 Mins 29 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: 1 Days 13 Hrs 53 Mins 29 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.04.26

2 18 22 30 32

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 14 Hrs 8 Mins 29 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.04.26

5 10 26 53 59 6

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 14 Hrs 37 Mins 29 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: 1 Days 14 Hrs 37 Mins 29 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the **AP** Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

SDHSAA Class A SoDak 16=
State Qualifier=
Hamlin 60, Sisseton 40
Lakota Tech 72, Rapid City Christian 59
Lennox 62, Miller 33
Mahpiya Luta Red Cloud 79, McCook Central-Montrose 21
Sioux Falls Christian 55, Groton 25
Sioux Valley 49, St Thomas More 29
Wagner 46, Dell Rapids 31
West Central 54, Mobridge-Pollock 42
SDHSAA Class B SoDak 16=
State Qualifier=
Bennett County 72, Ipswich 21
Centerville 57, Highmore-Harrold 41
Colman-Egan 49, Warner 44
Corsica/Stickney 38, Waubay/Summit 32
Ethan 53, Deubrook 34
Harding County 74, Jones County 30
Lyman 53, McIntosh High School 22
Parkston 40, DeSmet 36

Some high school basketball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

Trump fires Homeland Security Secretary Noem after mounting criticism over her leadership

By MICHELLE L. PRICE, REBECCA SANTANA and SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Thursday fired his embattled Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem, after mounting criticism over her leadership of the department, including the handling of the administration's immigration crackdown and disaster response.

Trump, who said he would nominate Oklahoma Republican Sen. Markwayne Mullin in her place, made the announcement on social media after Noem faced a two-day grilling on Capitol Hill this week from GOP members as well as Democrats.

Noem's departure marks a stunning turnaround for a close ally to the president who was tasked with steering his centerpiece policy of mass deportations. But she appeared to increasingly become a liability for Trump, with questions arising over her spending at her department and over her conduct in the aftermath of the shooting deaths of two protesters in Minneapolis earlier this year.

Trump said Noem "has served us well, and has had numerous and spectacular results (especially on the Border!)." He said he was making her a "Special Envoy for The Shield of the Americas," a new security initiative that he said would focus on the Western Hemisphere.

Noem, who appeared at a law enforcement event in Nashville, Tennessee, moments after Trump's announcement, did not address her ouster there. She read from prepared remarks and was not asked by attendees about the development.

Later, in a social media post, she thanked Trump for the new appointment and touted her accomplishments as secretary.

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"We have made historic accomplishments at the Department of Homeland Security to make America safe again," she wrote.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said the administration will work with the GOP-led Senate to get Mullin, whom she called "extraordinarily qualified," confirmed to lead DHS "as soon as possible."

The administration's immigration crackdown faced criticism, especially in Minnesota

Noem is the first Cabinet secretary to leave during Trump's second term. Her tenure looked increasingly short-lived after hearings in Congress this week where she faced rare but blistering criticism from Republican lawmakers. One particular point of scrutiny was a \$220 million ad campaign featuring Noem that encouraged people in the country illegally to leave voluntarily.

Noem told lawmakers that Trump was aware of the campaign in advance, but Trump disputed that in an interview Thursday with Reuters, saying he did not sign off on the ad campaign.

Noem has faced waves of criticism as she's overseen Trump's immigration crackdown, especially since the shooting deaths of the two protesters in Minneapolis at the hands of immigration enforcement officers. In the immediate aftermath of the deaths of Renee Good and Alex Pretti, Noem portrayed both of them as aggressors, contradicting widely viewed videos and descriptions of their deaths from bystanders. She declined to apologize for her description over two days of Congressional testimony.

The former South Dakota governor was also criticized over the way her department has spent billions of dollars allocated to it by Congress.

Her department, DHS, has been at the center of a funding battle in Congress over immigration enforcement tactics and has been shut down for 20 days, although many of the employees are continuing to work, often without pay.

Even before Noem's appearance before key congressional committees this week, Republican lawmakers had been anticipating the secretary's eventual ouster, particularly after her handling of the immigration enforcement crackdown in Minneapolis.

As they tried to end the ongoing Homeland Security shutdown, Senate Republicans had noted privately to Democratic senators that Noem was likely on her way out and that that should prompt Democrats to move forward with agreeing to fund the department again, according to two people familiar with the discussions.

Democrats did not see that as an actual concession by Republicans, considering Noem was becoming a political liability for the GOP, said the people, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private negotiations.

Aside from immigration, Noem also faced criticism — including from Republicans — over the pace of emergency funding approved through the Federal Emergency Management Agency and for the Trump administration's response to disasters.

Critics welcomed Noem's departure. Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey wrote "good riddance" on social media, a sentiment echoed by Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer.

Some immigration activists questioned whether her departure would change the execution of an immigration agenda that they fundamentally disagree with.

"This is not accountability, just a reshuffling of the enablers of the agenda of President Trump," said Vanessa Cárdenas, Executive Director of America's Voice, an advocacy group. She said Noem's tenure was "marked by cruelty."

Gregory Bovino, a Border Patrol official who was elevated under Noem's watch to lead immigration crackdowns in cities including Los Angeles, Chicago and Minneapolis, was one of the few who applauded Noem's tenure.

"She is the best Secretary I ever worked for, period. The others weren't even close. Noem is the ultimate patriot," Bovino told The Associated Press.

DHS leadership changes come at a pivotal time

Mullin would need to be confirmed by the Senate, but under a federal law governing executive branch vacancies, he would be allowed to serve as an acting Homeland Security secretary as long as his nomination is formally pending.

Voting in the Senate just after Trump's announcement, Mullin said he has "no idea" how quickly his

nomination will move.

"The president and I are good friends. So we look forward to working closer with the White House, and obviously I'm gonna be over there a lot more," he said.

Mullin would take over the third-largest department in government that has responsibility for carrying out Trump's hardline immigration agenda. And he would assume the role at a pivotal time for that agenda.

Immigration enforcement during the first year of Trump's administration was largely defined by high-profile, made-for-social-media operations with flashy names, often led by Bovino, who reported directly to Noem. Noem herself often went out on those operations, riding along with officers when they went out to make arrests.

But those high-profile operations in places like Los Angeles, Chicago and Minneapolis often led to clashes with activists and protesters that were captured on video and drove opposition to the president's immigration agenda.

That culminated with the shooting deaths in Minneapolis after which Trump shuffled leadership of the operation. The number of officers there was drawn down shortly after.

Wheeler-Thomas leads North Dakota State's 76-65 win over Oral Roberts in Summit League Tournament

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Damari Wheeler-Thomas had 18 points in North Dakota State's 76-65 victory over Oral Roberts on Thursday in the Summit League Tournament.

Wheeler-Thomas shot 6 of 11 from the field, including 4 for 6 from 3-point range for the Bison (25-7). Trevian Carson scored 17 points while going 5 of 15 from the floor, and added five rebounds and three steals. Noah Feddersen had 12 points and 11 rebounds off the bench.

Connor Dow led the Golden Eagles (10-23) in scoring, finishing with 24 points, seven rebounds, four assists and two steals. Oral Roberts also got 15 points, five rebounds and two blocks from Luke Gray. Ty Harper also had 10 points.

North Dakota State took the lead with 11:48 remaining in the first half and did not trail again. Wheeler-Thomas led with 11 points in the first half to help put them ahead 36-26 at the break. North Dakota State outscored Oral Roberts by one point in the final half, while Carson led the way with a team-high nine second-half points.

Oosterbaan, Minessale lead St. Thomas 80-67 past South Dakota State in Summit League Tournament

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Ben Oosterbaan and Nolan Minessale combined for 45 points in St. Thomas' 80-67 win against South Dakota State on Thursday in the quarterfinals of the Summit League Tournament.

Oosterbaan went 8 of 13 from the field (5 for 8 from 3-point range) for the No. 2 seed Tommies (24-8) to finish with 23 points. Minessale added 22 points while shooting 7 for 12 (4 for 6 from 3-point range) and 4 of 5 from the free-throw line along with eight rebounds and six assists. Nick Janowski shot 4 for 11, including 1 for 6 from beyond the arc to finish with 10 points and three steals.

Jaden Jackson finished with 16 points and five steals for the No. 7 seed Jackrabbits (14-18). Damon Wilkinson added 13 points for South Dakota State, as did Joe Saylor.

St. Thomas took the lead for what would be the final time on Oosterbaan's layup with 18:18 remaining in the second half. They would outscore South Dakota State by 11 points in the second half.

Wall Street heads for losses again as Iran war enters 7th day, sending oil prices up another 6%

By CHAN HO-HIM and MATT OTT AP Business Writers

Wall Street was on track to open lower again Friday as oil prices continued to climb, hitting the high-

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est level in nearly two years less than a week since the U.S. and Israel began bombing Iran, one of the world's top oil producers.

Futures for the S&P 500 and Dow Jones Industrial Average slid 0.7% before the opening bell, while Nasdaq futures fell 1%.

Benchmark U.S. crude surged 6.8% to \$86.57 per barrel as the war with Iran entered its seventh day. Brent crude, the international standard, gained 4.7% to \$89.44 per barrel. Both were trading near their highest levels since April 2024.

If oil prices spike further and remain high, some analysts and investors expect it would weigh on global economic growth. Uncertainty over what will happen with the war has caused frenetic swings across financial markets this week.

Oil prices will hinge on a steady resumption of oil flows through the Strait of Hormuz following disruptions of tanker activities there, ING analysts wrote. Roughly one fifth of the world's seaborne oil is estimated to flow through the waterway located between Iran and Oman.

The conflict in Iran has also halted exports of Iranian gas to much of Asia. If that stoppage is drawn out, it will likely lead to a bidding war between Europe and Asia that would send energy prices even higher, said Fatih Birol, chief of the International Energy Agency.

The prospect of higher fuel prices for an extended period caused shares of major airlines to fall further in early trading Friday. Delta, United and American were all down around 2.5% in premarket after losing between 4% and 5% on Thursday.

Gas prices in the U.S. also rose another seven cents, to an average of \$3.32 per gallon, AAA said Friday. That amounts to an 11.4% rise in prices at the pump in the past week.

Elsewhere, in European trading at midday, Britain's FTSE 100 fell 0.8%, while Germany's DAX and the CAC 40 in Paris each lost 0.9%.

In Asia, South Korea's Kospi edged up less than 0.1% to 5,584.87, after a roller coaster week with a record 12% loss on Wednesday followed by a nearly 10% rebound on Thursday. The index had shot above 6,000 in recent weeks before the war began to rattle financial markets.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 index gained 0.6% to 55,620.84.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng jumped 1.7% to 25,757.29, while the Shanghai Composite index rose 0.4% to 4,124.19.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 declined 1% to 8,851.00.

Taiwan's Taiex shed 0.2% and India's Sensex lost 0.8%.

In currency trading early Friday, the U.S. dollar rose to 157.93 Japanese yen from 157.56 yen. The euro fell to \$1.1563 from \$1.1611.

Prices for gold and silver were both up less than 1%.

Israeli warplanes pound Tehran and Beirut as the US vows a surge in its strikes on Iran

By JON GAMBRELL, DAVID RISING, SAM METZ and SALLY ABOU ALJOUD Associated Press
DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Israeli warplanes pounded Beirut and Tehran on Friday as Iran launched another wave of retaliatory strikes against Israel and Gulf countries. There was no sign of the war letting up on its seventh day, as Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth warned the U.S. air campaign against Iran would "surge dramatically."

The strikes in Lebanon were the heaviest since a 2024 ceasefire ended the last war between Israel and the Iran-backed Hezbollah, who fired rockets at Israel in the opening days of the latest conflict. Tens of thousands have fled Beirut's suburbs and southern Lebanon after sweeping Israeli evacuation warnings.

The war has escalated to affect more than a dozen countries across the Middle East and beyond. The United States said it had struck an Iranian drone carrier at sea as it waged an unrelenting campaign against the country's navy that earlier included torpedoing of a warship in the Indian Ocean.

The U.S. and Israel have battered Iran with strikes, targeting their military capabilities, leadership and

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nuclear program. The stated goals and timelines for the war have repeatedly shifted, as the U.S. has at times suggested it seeks to topple Iran's government or elevate new leadership from within.

The war has already caused a spike in oil prices, and Qatar's energy minister warned that it could "bring down the economies of the world," predicting a widespread shutdown of Gulf energy exports that could send oil to \$150 a barrel. Saad al-Kaabi told the Financial Times newspaper that even if the war ended immediately it could take "weeks to months" to resume normal exports after an Iranian drone strike on Qatar's largest liquefied natural gas plant.

Heavy strikes on Iran

Israel's military said Friday morning it had begun "a broad-scale wave of strikes" on Tehran, Iran's capital. Witnesses described Israeli airstrikes as particularly intense, shaking homes in the area. Others reported explosions around the Iranian city of Kermanshah in an area that is home to multiple missile bases.

Iran meanwhile launched missile and drone attacks at Israel, as well as Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, all countries that host U.S. forces. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

The war has killed at least 1,230 people in Iran, more than 120 in Lebanon and around a dozen in Israel, according to officials in those countries. Six U.S. troops have been killed.

Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian said Friday that "some countries" had begun mediation efforts in the conflict, without elaborating.

The United Nations high commissioner for human rights, Volker Türk, urged all countries involved to de-escalate, saying "the world urgently needs to see steps to contain and extinguish this blaze."

US says it struck an Iranian drone carrier

The U.S. military said early Friday that it struck an Iranian drone carrier, setting it ablaze.

The U.S. military's Central Command released black-and-white footage of the burning carrier. The Iranian military did not immediately acknowledge the attack.

The drone carrier, the IRIS Shahid Bagheri, is a converted container ship with a 180-meter-long (yard) runway for drones. The vessel can travel up to 22,000 nautical miles without needing to refuel in ports, reports said at the time of its 2025 inauguration.

Adm. Brad Cooper, head of U.S. Central Command, described the carrier as "roughly the size of a World War II aircraft carrier."

"As we speak, it's on fire," Cooper told reporters.

Earlier in the week, an American submarine sank an Iranian frigate off the coast of Sri Lanka as it was returning from an exercise hosted by the Indian navy that the U.S. also joined. Sri Lanka's navy rescued 32 crew members and recovered 87 bodies.

Under cover of darkness Friday morning, B-2 stealth bombers dropped dozens of 2,000-pound "penetrator" bombs on deeply buried ballistic missile launchers inside Iran, Cooper said.

Iran targets countries hosting US forces

Qatar said early Friday it intercepted a drone attack targeting Al Udeid Air Base, which hosts the forward headquarters of the U.S. Central Command.

Saudi Arabia intercepted and destroyed three ballistic missiles fired early Friday toward Prince Sultan Air Base south of Riyadh, which also hosts U.S. forces, said a spokesperson for Saudi Arabia's Defense Ministry.

Air raid sirens sounded in Bahrain, where the Interior Ministry said Iranian strikes targeted two hotels and a residential building. It said there were no casualties. In Kuwait, where the six U.S. soldiers were killed Sunday, the army said air defenses were activated when missile and drone attacks breached its airspace.

The United Arab Emirates said three drones had struck its territory, without elaborating.

The British ambassador to Bahrain said Friday that the United Kingdom would help defend the country with its fighter jets. Ambassador Alastair Long's announcement came the day after British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said he was sending four more Royal Air Force Typhoon fighters to Qatar following requests from allies for further help.

In Israel, the sound of explosions could be heard in Tel Aviv early Friday morning after a warning about missiles incoming from Iran, as air defense systems worked to intercept the barrage.

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Trump again urges Iranians to 'take back' their country

In brief remarks at the White House, U.S. President Donald Trump again urged the Iranian people to "help take back your country." This time he promised the U.S. would grant them "immunity" amid the war and ongoing dangers under the current Iranian regime.

"So you'll be perfectly safe with total immunity," Trump said, without giving any details about what that meant. "Or you'll face absolutely guaranteed death."

Cooper and Hegseth cautioned Iranians not to take to the streets while the conflict is still raging, however.

In an interview with the news website Axios, Trump said he should be involved in choosing Iran's new supreme leader to replace Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who was killed in the opening strikes of the war. Trump spoke dismissively of Khamenei's son, Mojtaba Khamenei, being a front-runner to replace his father, calling him "a lightweight."

"We want someone that will bring harmony and peace to Iran," Trump said.

Iranian state television reported Friday that a leadership council had started discussing how to convene the country's Assembly of Experts, which will select the new supreme leader.

Buildings associated with the Assembly of Experts, a 88-member clerical panel, have been attacked during the Israeli-U.S. airstrike campaign, and Israel has said it would target the next supreme leader if he poses a threat.

Israel hits Lebanon with multiple airstrikes around Beirut

Israel carried out at least 11 airstrikes late Thursday and early Friday, targeting the southern suburbs of Beirut. Fires broke out near a gas station.

Two hospitals evacuated patients and staff. No casualties were immediately reported.

Türk, the U.N. human rights chief, said he was "extremely concerned" about the situation, particularly what he described as "blanket, massive displacement orders" by Israel to civilians in Lebanon.

The Lebanese health ministry said the death toll has risen to 123 since the resurgence of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah, which struck Israel in the opening days of the war.

Lebanon's Prime Minister Nawaf Salam slammed both Israel and Hezbollah, saying the Lebanese state and people "did not choose this war."

Gulf allies complain US didn't notify them of Iran attacks and ignored their warnings, sources say

By SAMY MAGDY, MICHELLE L. PRICE and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — The Trump administration is confronting mounting discontent from allies in the Persian Gulf who have complained they were not given adequate time to prepare for the torrent of Iranian drones and missiles bombarding their countries in retaliation for strikes launched by the U.S. and Israel.

Officials from two Gulf countries said their governments were disappointed in the way the U.S. has handled the war, particularly the initial attack on Iran on Feb. 28. They said their countries were not given advance notice of the U.S.-Israeli attack and complained the U.S. had ignored their warnings that the war would have devastating consequences for the entire region.

One of the officials said that Gulf countries were frustrated and even angry that the U.S. military has not defended them enough. He said there is belief in the region that the operation has focused on defending Israel and American troops, while leaving Gulf countries to protect themselves, and said that his country's stock of interceptors was "rapidly depleting."

Like others in this story, the Gulf officials spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were discussing a confidential diplomatic matter.

The governments of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates did not respond to requests for comment.

White House spokeswoman Anna Kelly said in response: "Iran's retaliatory ballistic missile attacks have decreased by 90% because Operation Epic Fury is crushing their ability to shoot these weapons or produce more. President Trump is in close contact with all of our regional partners, and the terrorist Iranian

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regime's attacks on its neighbors prove how imperative it was that President Trump eliminate this threat to our country and our allies."

The Pentagon did not respond.

Official reactions by the Gulf Arab countries have been muted, but public figures with close ties to their governments have been openly critical of the U.S., suggesting that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu dragged President Donald Trump into a needless war.

"This is Netanyahu's war," Prince Turki al-Faisal, the former Saudi intelligence chief, told CNN on Wednesday. "He somehow convinced the president (Trump) to support his views."

Pentagon officials conceded this week in closed-door briefings with lawmakers they are struggling to stop waves of drones launched by Iran, leaving some U.S. targets in the Gulf region, including troops, vulnerable.

The Gulf countries have emerged as valuable targets for Iran, well within the range of Iran's short-range missiles and filled with targets, including American troops, high-profile business and tourist locations and energy facilities, disrupting the world's flow of oil.

Since the start of the war, Iran has fired at least 380 missiles and over 1,480 drones targeting the five Arab Gulf countries, according to an AP tally based on official statements. At least 13 people have been killed in those countries, according to local officials.

In addition, six U.S. soldiers were killed in Kuwait on Sunday when an Iranian drone strike hit an operations center in a civilian port, 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, said the operations center was a shipping container-style building and had no defenses.

In briefings for members of Congress on Tuesday, U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told lawmakers that the U.S. will not be able to intercept many of the incoming UAVs, especially the Shaheds, according to three people familiar with the briefings.

In one of the briefings, Caine and Hegseth did not offer any details when pressed by lawmakers why the U.S. did not seem prepared for Iran to launch waves of drones at U.S. targets in the region, according to one of the people.

That person, a U.S. official who is familiar with the U.S. security posture in Gulf region, said that the U.S. did not have widespread capabilities throughout the Gulf region to effectively counter waves of the one-way drones coming to places outside conventional targets or bases outside of Iraq and Syria.

Drone attacks this week at the embassy in Saudi Arabia caused a limited fire at the embassy in Riyadh, and another drone attack the United Arab Emirates sparked a small fire outside the U.S. consulate in Dubai.

The U.S. and its allies in the Middle East on Thursday even sought help from Ukraine, which has expertise in countering Iran's Shahed drones, according to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. When asked about Zelenskyy's comments, Trump told Reuters on Thursday, "Certainly, I'll take, you know, any assistance from any country."

Bader Mousa Al-Saif, a Kuwait-based analyst with Chatham House, said the U.S. appeared to have underestimated the risk to its Gulf Arab allies, believing American troops and Israel would be the primary targets of Iranian retaliation.

"I don't think they saw that there would be as much exposure to the Gulf," he said, saying the lack of a plan to protect the Gulf countries "speaks to U.S. short-sightedness."

The frustration in some of the Gulf nations is driven in part by the relative success that Israel has had knocking down drones and missiles compared to some of their neighbors, according to a person familiar with the sensitive diplomatic matter who was not authorized to comment publicly.

Their air defense systems are hardly as robust as Israel's, but according to the person, U.S. officials have been somewhat perplexed that the Gulf countries are still not showing an appetite for delivering a counteroffensive by launching missiles at Iranian targets.

Elliott Abrams, who served as a special representative for Iran and Venezuela at the end of Trump's first term, said that U.S. national security officials and their Gulf allies were aware that Iran had the capability to carry out significant strikes.

"And the neighbors knew it and were afraid of it. But it was never clear that Iran would actually do it, because they have a lot to lose," Abrams said. "These attacks will leave long-term enmity, and if they keep up, the Gulf Arabs may start attacking Iran."

Michael Ratney, a former U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia, said that while the Gulf countries have an interest in seeing Iran weakened, they also have key concerns about the ongoing war — including the economic damage and instability it is causing and its open-ended nature.

Ratney, who is now a senior adviser in the Middle East program of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said: "What comes next? The countries of the Gulf will have to bear the brunt of whatever that is."

'Worse than a prison': 911 calls, interviews reveal problems at ICE's largest detention camp

By MORGAN LEE, RYAN J. FOLEY AND MICHAEL BIESECKER Associated Press

EL PASO, Texas (AP) — Serious medical and mental health emergencies have been routine at the nation's largest U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention facility since its opening, according to records obtained by The Associated Press.

Data and recordings from more than a hundred 911 calls at Camp East Montana in El Paso, Texas, along with interviews and court filings, offer a disturbing portrait of overcrowding, medical neglect, malnutrition and emotional distress.

Current and former detainees describe a camp where about 3,000 people have lived per day in loud and unsanitary quarters. They say detainees struggle to obtain health care as disease spreads, lose weight because of a lack of food, and fear security guards known to use force to put down disturbances.

"Every day felt like a week. Every week felt like a month. Every month felt like a year," said Owen Ramsingh, a former property manager in Columbia, Missouri, who spent several weeks in the camp before his deportation in February to the Netherlands. "Camp East Montana was 1,000% worse than a prison."

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story includes discussion of suicide. If you or someone you know needs help, the national suicide and crisis lifeline in the U.S. is available by calling or texting 988. There is also an online chat at 988lifeline.org

A Department of Homeland Security spokesperson who did not provide their name rejected claims of subprime conditions, saying Camp East Montana detainees receive food, water and medical treatment in a facility that is regularly cleaned.

Here are some takeaways from AP's reporting:

Camp averaged nearly one 911 call per day for months

After its opening in mid-August, staff at the camp made nearly one 911 call per day in its first five months of operation, according to data covering 130 calls from the City of El Paso obtained by the AP.

In one call, a man is heard sobbing after being assaulted by another detainee. In another, a doctor says a man is banging his head against the wall while expressing suicidal thoughts. In a third, a nurse says a pregnant woman is in severe pain and has coronavirus.

The injured detainees ranged from a 19-year-old man who fell out of a bunk bed to a 79-year-old man struggling to breathe. At least 20 emergencies were reported as seizures, including some that resulted in serious head trauma.

Calls reveal repeated attempted suicides

The calls show detainees have repeatedly tried to harm themselves and expressed suicidal thoughts.

Two incidents have resulted in death. On Jan. 3, ICE said security guards responded after a 55-year-old Cuban man tried to harm himself and then used handcuffs and force to restrain him. A medical examiner ruled that Geraldo Lunas Campos's death was a homicide caused by asphyxia.

On Jan. 14, staff reported that a 36-year-old Nicaraguan man died by suicide days after he was detained

while working in Minnesota.

In addition to those cases, at least six other suicide attempts were reported, according to records from the City of El Paso.

The DHS spokesperson said the facility's staff "closely monitors at-risk detainees" and provides mental health treatment.

ICE has not released inspection results

The Washington Post reported in September that a required ICE inspection found conditions at the facility violated at least 60 federal standards for immigration detention. But that report has never been released, unlike dozens of other inspections at facilities posted on ICE's website.

DHS has called claims of violations described in the Post story false without explaining why the inspection report was wrong. ICE's current database on detention facilities indicates Camp East Montana has never been inspected but is scheduled for one this fiscal year.

A DHS spokesperson said ICE's Office of Detention Oversight recently completed an inspection at Camp East Montana but provided no other information and the results have not been made public.

Congresswoman calls for camp's closure and contract investigation

U.S. Rep. Veronica Escobar, an El Paso Democrat who has toured the camp several times, is calling for its closure.

"This facility should not be operational. It feels like this contractor is reinventing the wheel, and people are losing their lives in their experiment," she said.

She said the facility had temporarily cut its population below 1,900 when she visited last month and will be closed to visitors temporarily because of a measles outbreak.

On one visit, a female detainee showed Escobar a meager serving of scrambled eggs that was served still frozen in the middle. She learned detainees protested after they had stopped receiving juice, fruit and milk with their meals.

Escobar met with a detainee from Ecuador who said his arm had been broken during a violent arrest by immigration agents in Minnesota. Weeks later, the congresswoman could still the fractured bones in his forearm poking up under the skin.

Escobar called for an investigation into contractor Acquisition Logistics LLC, which was awarded a contract worth up to \$1.3 billion to build and operate the camp. She said the company, which didn't return messages, and its subcontractors were not delivering services paid for by taxpayers.

"People should be moved by the abject cruelty, but if they're not, I hope they're moved by the fraud and corruption," Escobar said.

Attempted suicides, fights, pain: 911 calls reveal misery at ICE's largest detention facility

By MORGAN LEE, RYAN J. FOLEY and MICHAEL BIESECKER Associated Press

EL PASO, Texas (AP) — The calls to 911 poured in from staff at Camp East Montana in Texas, the nation's largest U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention facility, at a rate of nearly one a day for five months, each its own tale of pain and despair.

A man sobs after being assaulted by another detainee. Another bangs his head against the wall after expressing suicidal thoughts. A pregnant woman complained of severe back pain and also had coronavirus.

"Every day felt like a week. Every week felt like a month. Every month felt like a year," said Owen Ramsingh, a former property manager in Columbia, Missouri, who spent several weeks in the camp before his deportation in February to the Netherlands. "Camp East Montana was 1,000% worse than a prison."

Fueled by billions of dollars in new funding, ICE operations across the nation have roiled communities, separated families and created a culture of fear in pursuit of President Donald Trump's vow to rid the country of unauthorized migrants.

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EDITOR'S NOTE — This story includes discussion of suicide. If you or someone you know needs help, the national suicide and crisis lifeline in the U.S. is available by calling or texting 988. There is also an online chat at 988lifeline.org

The mass arrests have swelled detention centers, and set ICE off on a national chase for space to warehouse those who have been apprehended. Far from the "worst of the worst" that Trump vowed to deport, the data from ICE show that 80% at the camp had no criminal record and were instead caught up in a far-reaching dragnet.

Camp East Montana looks like a pop up village, with six long tents along a stretch of the Chihuahuan Desert outside El Paso at the U.S. Army base Fort Bliss, once the site of an internment camp for Japanese Americans during World War II. Inside the hastily constructed camp, a series of communal living pods shelter thousands of immigrants in color-coded uniforms and Croc-style shoes.

But the stories of the conditions at the facility, revealed in data and recordings from more than a hundred 911 calls obtained by the The Associated Press — in addition to follow-up interviews and court filings — offer a disturbing portrait of overcrowding, medical neglect, malnutrition and emotional distress.

The detainees describe a camp where an average of about 3,000 people have lived per day in loud and unsanitary quarters, diseases spread easily and sleep is a luxury. The center will be closed to visitors until at least March 19 because of a measles outbreak, according to U.S. Rep. Veronica Escobar.

Detainees struggle to obtain medication and health care, lose concerning amounts of weight because of a lack of food, and live in fear of private security guards known to use force to put down disturbances. The ceilings in the windowless tents leak when it rains and they only see sunlight during brief outings once or twice a week to a cramped recreation yard.

In an email, a Department of Homeland Security spokesperson who did not provide their name rejected claims of subprime conditions, saying Camp East Montana detainees receive food, water and medical treatment in a facility that is regularly cleaned.

The agency said Tuesday that normal operations continue at the camp. The Washington Post reported Wednesday that ICE is considering a plan to close it.

Detainee says guards bet on suicide

Like other detainees, Ramsingh said that between cleanings the rooms, restrooms and showers were often filthy and infested with insects. He said detainees stole others' food because everyone was hungry due to the small and sometimes inedible meals, which led to fights, and the conditions took a toll on his mental health.

At one point he said he overheard a security guard talking about bets made among the staff over which detainee would be next to die by suicide. The guard said he had paid \$500 into a pool, with the total pot riding on the outcome. The talk was particularly jarring, he said, because he had contemplated suicide himself.

The DHS spokesperson said Ramsingh's account was false, though provided no indication of how the agency had sought to verify that.

Ramsingh said he heard of the betting pool after Jan. 3, when ICE said security guards responded after a 55-year-old Cuban man tried to harm himself and then used handcuffs and force to restrain him. A medical examiner ruled that Geraldo Lunas Campos's death was a homicide caused by asphyxia.

On Jan. 14, staff reported that a 36-year-old Nicaraguan man died by suicide days after he was detained while working in Minnesota.

In addition to those cases, detainees attempted to harm themselves while expressing suicidal ideations on at least six other occasions that resulted in 911 calls, according to records from the City of El Paso obtained under the Texas public information law.

DHS said the facility's medical staff "closely monitors at-risk detainees," provides mental health treatment and tries to prevent suicide attempts.

Ramsingh was a legal permanent resident brought to the U.S. at age 5, when his Dutch mom married a U.S. service member. He married a U.S. citizen in 2015.

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But at the age of 45, immigration authorities detained him at Chicago O'Hare airport in September after he flew home from a trip to visit family in the Netherlands. They cited a drug conviction from when he was 16 years old, for which he served prison time decades ago. He was among the first detainees sent to Camp East Montana.

'It's really mentally draining'

Other medical emergencies included seizures, chest and heart problems, according to AP's review of 130 calls made after the camp's opening in mid-August through Jan. 20.

"It's not easy in here, psychologically," said detainee Roland Kusi, 31, who said he fled Cameroon in 2022 to escape political violence. "You just keep thinking, like all the time, you're thinking and thinking for a solution. ... It's really mentally draining."

Immigration authorities arrested him in Chicago in September at an appointment with his wife, a member of the Army National Guard, to register their marriage in pursuit of legal residency for him. He was shipped quickly to El Paso.

A Cuban immigrant in his 50s told the AP he requested to receive his medication for diabetes, high blood pressure and an enlarged prostate during a six-week detention at Camp East Montana but it never arrived. He spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals.

Desperate, the man said he once refused to leave living quarters when a cleaning crew came. An immigration official offered him Ibuprofen, and urged him to consider leaving for another country.

"He says to me, 'Look, there are a lot of detainees, we don't have enough for everyone,'" he said. "The man from ICE says to me, 'OK, why don't you decide it's better to leave? Leave for Mexico, go to Cuba. There you can have your medicine, have your things.'"

Fearing death, the man agreed to self-deport to Mexico to Ciudad Juárez — across the international border from his wife and their 11-year-old son in El Paso.

Injured detainees range from teenagers to retirees

The detainees, mostly male, come from all over the world. Some have lived in the U.S. for decades.

The camp is intended for short-term stays before detainees are transferred or deported. The average stay there is only nine days, according to ICE data, but some detainees have been kept for months amid court cases or logistical issues related to deportation. Ramsingh said he got stuck there for weeks after his deportation was ordered because ICE lost his Dutch passport. His personal belongings, including gold jewelry, also went missing.

Advocates for detainees and some members of Congress have called for the camp's closure, citing inhumane conditions.

"This facility should not be operational. It feels like this contractor is reinventing the wheel, and people are losing their lives in their experiment," said Escobar, a Democrat from El Paso who has toured the camp several times.

She said the facility had temporarily cut its population below 1,900 when she visited last month after cases of the measles and tuberculosis were reported.

On one visit, a female detainee showed Escobar a meager serving of scrambled eggs that was served still frozen in the middle. She learned that detainees protested after they had stopped receiving juice, fruit and milk with their meals.

Escobar also met with a detainee from Ecuador who said his arm had been broken during a violent arrest by immigration agents in Minnesota. Weeks later, he was still pleading for proper medical treatment and the congresswoman could still the fractured bones in his forearm poking up under the skin.

"I asked him, have you asked for help? And he said, 'I ask every day, all day. And the only thing they give me is aspirin,'" she recalled.

A missing inspection report

The Washington Post reported in September that a required ICE inspection found conditions at the facility violated at least 60 federal standards for immigration detention, but that report never been released publicly.

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The DHS spokesperson did not explain why but called claims in the Post story false. The spokesperson said ICE's Office of Detention Oversight recently completed an inspection at Camp East Montana but that report also has not been released.

The camp was hastily constructed last summer after the administration awarded a contract now worth up to \$1.3 billion to Acquisition Logistics LLC, a Virginia contractor that had previously not operated an ICE facility.

The company uses subcontractors at Camp East Montana, including security firm Akima Global Services and medical contractor Loyal Source.

Escobar called for an investigation into the contractors, saying they were not delivering the services paid for by taxpayers.

"People should be moved by the abject cruelty, but if they're not, I hope they're moved by the fraud and corruption," she said.

Akima didn't respond to messages seeking comment. Loyal Source declined comment.

Seizures, fights also reported on calls

Most of the 911 calls were made by the camp's contract medical staff. At least 20 incidents were reported as seizures, including some that resulted in head trauma.

Some injuries stemmed from fights between detainees, including a man who said he had been kicked in the ear and battered in his ribs. Another man reported he could not move his left eye after he had been assaulted the day before.

A woman who was 12 weeks pregnant had not received any prenatal care prior to her arrival at Camp East Montana and was in intense pain, 911 calls revealed. She was among a small number of emergencies involving women, who make up less than 10% of the camp's population.

The calls also revealed some staff discord. A doctor is heard berating another employee for seeking to take a suicidal detainee back into the detention facility rather than to the emergency room, only to then figure out they had confused two different patients.

After one detainee attempted suicide while in an isolation room, a doctor could be heard speaking with a shaken colleague. A security supervisor assured him, the doctor said, that incidents "like this shouldn't happen."

Indonesia will ban social media for children under 16, communication minister says

By EDNA TARIGAN Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Indonesia will ban social media for children under 16, Communication and Digital Affairs Minister Meutya Hafid said Friday.

Hafid in a statement to media said that she just signed a government regulation that will mean children under the age of 16 can no longer have accounts on high-risk digital platforms, including YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, Threads, X, Bigo Live and Roblox.

The implementation will start gradually from March 28, until all platforms fulfill their compliance obligations.

"The basis is clear. Our children face increasingly real threats. From exposure to pornography, cyberbullying, online fraud, and most importantly addiction. The government is here so that parents no longer have to fight alone against the giant of algorithms." Hafid said.

She added that the government is taking this step as the best effort in the midst of a digital emergency to reclaim sovereignty over children's futures.

"We realize that the implementation of this regulation may cause some discomfort at first. Children may complain and parents may be confused about how to respond to their children's complaints," Hafid said.

Residents and parents in Jakarta welcomed the government's restrictions on access to social media, especially because children have access to social media through mobile phones.

"I think that it has been very worrying for minors, especially children. Because they have too much freedom with photos, videos and everything. Some education is educational, but some is misleading. So

we really need to sort through social media again," said Marianah, 43, who like many Indonesians uses a single name.

Others suggested that the government should also block other harmful websites, such as pornography and online gambling sites.

"As parents, we hope that online gambling and pornography websites can also be removed. So, in a sense, the government must also be fair. This is for the sake of the people themselves, for the children, and for the children's growth and development," said Harianto, 49, a resident in Jakarta.

Earlier this week, Indonesia's Ministry of Communication and Digital Affairs conducted a surprise inspection of Meta Platforms' Jakarta office over concerns about the handling of harmful content on its platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp.

The ministry in a statement said that through this inspection, the Minister of Communication and Information Technology issued a stern warning regarding Meta's low level of compliance with national regulations.

The Associated Press has sent email requests for comment to TikTok and Meta, but has not yet received a response.

Indonesia will be the first country in Southeast Asia to restrict the access of children to social media.

The restriction of social media access for teens began in Australia in December 2025. Social media companies have revoked access to about 4.7 million accounts identified as belonging to children in Australia.

Other countries, including Spain, France, and the UK are also taking or are considering measures to restrict minors' access to social media amid growing concern that children are being harmed by exposure to unregulated social media content.

Sri Lanka takes custody of an Iranian vessel off its coast after US sank an Iranian warship

By BHARATHA MALLAWARACHI, SHEIKH SAALIQ, KRISHAN FRANCIS and ROD McGUIRK Associated Press COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — Sri Lanka began transferring more than 200 sailors from an Iranian vessel to shore Friday after the ship sought assistance while anchored outside the country's waters, as tensions mounted in the Indian Ocean following the sinking of an Iranian warship by a U.S. submarine.

Sri Lankan navy spokesperson Cmdr. Buddhika Sampath said 204 sailors of the IRIS Bushehr were brought to the Welisara Naval Base near the capital, Colombo. They underwent border control procedures and medical tests, but none were found to have health issues.

About 15 others have been left aboard the ship with Sri Lankan naval personnel for assistance because they had reported a fault with the ship.

The Iranian sailors are interpreting operational instructions, manuals and logs for their Sri Lankan counterparts because the ship will be in Sri Lankan custody until further notice, Sampath said.

The ship will be taken to the port of Trincomalee in eastern Sri Lanka, Sampath said.

Iranian ship was taking part in naval exercises

The Sri Lankan government took custody of the Bushehr after the U.S. sank an Iranian warship, the IRIS Dena, off Sri Lanka's coast Wednesday. The strike marked one of the rare instances since World War II in which a submarine sank a surface warship, and highlighted the expanding scope of the U.S.-Israeli military campaign against Iran.

The Dena had participated in naval exercises hosted by India before heading into international waters on its way home. At least 74 countries had joined the events, according to India's Defense Ministry, including the U.S. Navy, which conducted reconnaissance aircraft and maritime patrol drills.

The Indian navy received a distress signal from the Dena but by the time it launched a search and rescue operation, the Sri Lankan navy had already begun its own rescue efforts, the ministry said.

The Sri Lankan navy rescued 32 sailors and recovered 87 bodies.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said the Dena had been carrying "almost 130" crew. The normal crew size for a warship of that class is 140.

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Araghchi called the sinking an "atrocious act at sea" and said the US would "bitterly regret" the attack.

Sri Lanka says it acted under international law

Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake said late Thursday that authorities decided to take control of the IRIS Bushehr after discussions with Iranian officials and the ship's captain, after one of its engines failed.

"We have to understand that this is not an ordinary situation. It's a request by a ship belonging to one party to enter into our port. We have to consider that according to the international treaties and conventions," he told journalists Thursday night.

Separately on Friday, he wrote on X: "No civilian should die in wars. Our approach is that every single life is as precious as our own."

The IRIS Bushehr had been described in previous Iranian media reports as a navy logistics ship equipped with a helicopter pad.

Dissanayake said Sri Lanka was guided by neutrality while seeking to uphold humanitarian principles.

"We have followed a very clear stance. We will not be biased to any state nor we will be submissive to any state," he said.

Sri Lanka's neutrality is tested

The broadening Middle East conflict is putting strategically located Sri Lanka in a delicate position as it tries to balance humanitarian obligations, international maritime law and its longstanding policy of non-alignment.

H.M.G.S. Palihakkara, Sri Lanka's retired former foreign secretary who also served as its permanent representative to the United Nations, said the country had acted responsibly and impartially.

"There has been a distress call from the ship. So naturally Sri Lanka, as a party to the Law of Sea and The Hague Convention, had no option but to do what it did by mounting a humanitarian operation to provide assistance to save lives and provide medical care to the affected," he said.

Palihakkara said parties to the conflict would understand that Sri Lanka was not taking sides.

"You could not have ignored the distress call. Even the attacking powers cannot leave shipwrecked sailors dying. That is the law," Palihakkara said.

Katsuya Yamamoto, director of the Strategy and Deterrence Program at the Sasakawa Peace Foundation in Tokyo, said Sri Lanka, which is not at war with either the U.S. or Iran, is considered a neutral state. As such, the Bushehr can enter a Sri Lankan port if granted permission by the government, he said.

Yamamoto said that once the vessel is docked, it falls under Iranian jurisdiction, leaving Sri Lankan authorities without legal grounds to inspect it unless Colombo decides to side with the U.S.

Australians aboard submarine

Australia's government confirmed on Friday that three Australians were aboard the submarine that sank the IRIS Dena. The Australians were there as part of the trilateral U.S., Australian and British training program under the AUKUS security pact.

The Australian government has maintained it was not warned that the U.S and Israel planned to attack Iran. Australia has not commented on the legality of the attack, but supports the objective of preventing Iran from gaining nuclear weapons.

Neil James, executive director of the Australian Defense Association policy think tank, said it is "reasonably rare" for Australians embedded with another nation's military to go to war against a country such as Iran that Australia wasn't at war with.

He said an Australian would not have fired the torpedo that sank the Iranian ship

"The Australians wouldn't have a job where they had to push the button on the torpedo because the captain of the boat gives the order and someone else, perhaps the weapons officer, presses the button but they're not going to be Australian," James said.

4 men arrested in UK on suspicion of aiding Iran by spying on Jewish community

LONDON (AP) — London police said Friday that four men have been arrested on suspicion of aiding Iran by spying on the Jewish community.

In a statement, the Metropolitan Police said the suspects — one Iranian and three dual British-Iranian nationals — were taken into custody on suspicion of assisting a foreign intelligence service. The men, who were arrested at addresses in and around north London shortly after 1 a.m., are suspected on spying on locations and individuals.

Police said the men arrested are aged 22, 40, 52 and 55 and that searches are ongoing at the addresses as well as other properties nearby.

Six other men were also arrested on suspicion of assisting an offender and have been taken into custody, the force said.

"We understand the public may be concerned, in particular the Jewish community, and as always, I would ask them to remain vigilant and if they see or hear anything that concerns them, then to contact us," said Commander Helen Flanagan, who is in charge of counterterrorism policing in London.

The arrests come as the U.S. and Israel continue to strike Iran, which has kept up retaliatory strikes on Israel, U.S. bases and across the region. Britain is not involved in offensive operations but is assisting in regional defense.

The Campaign Against Antisemitism said it is grateful to police "for foiling this alleged plot" but accused the British government of not taking the threat from Iran seriously.

"The U.K. may not be acting against Iran but Iran is acting against us," it said in a statement.

"The government's failure to keep its promise to proscribe the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps — the main instrument that the Islamic Republic uses to foment antisemitic violence worldwide — has sent the message that support for the brutal Iranian regime and its Jew-hating and West-hating ideology is perfectly acceptable in Britain," it added.

Iran-related spying in the U.K. is an increasing concern for British authorities.

The head of Britain's MI5 domestic intelligence service, Ken McCallum, said in October that more than 20 "potentially lethal Iran-backed plots" had been disrupted in the previous 12 months.

He alleged that Iran, along with Russia, is increasingly using "ugly methods," including "surveillance, sabotage, arson or physical violence." The U.K. has accused Iran of using criminal proxies to conduct attacks on European soil.

Most of the disrupted Iran-backed plots have targeted opposition Farsi-language media outlets or the Jewish community.

Ukraine says Hungary seized \$80 million from armored cars and detained 7 bank employees

By JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

BUDAPEST, Hungary (AP) — Hungarian authorities have detained seven Ukrainian citizens, including a former Ukrainian intelligence officer, and seized two armored cars carrying large amounts of cash across Hungary on suspicion of money laundering, officials said Friday.

Ukraine accused Hungary of taking the Ukrainians hostage and illegally seizing millions of dollars in cash. "This is state terrorism and racketeering," Ukraine's Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha wrote on X late Thursday.

The seven were employees of the Ukrainian state-owned Oschadbank, and they were traveling in two armored cars that were carrying the money between Austria and Ukraine when they were detained, Sybiha said.

The armored cars were carrying cash as part of regular services between state banks, he said, adding that the status of the employees was unknown.

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In a separate statement, Oschadbank wrote that 40 million U.S. dollars as well as 35 million euros and 9 kilograms (19.8 pounds) of gold — worth around \$1.5 million at current prices — had been apprehended by Hungary.

Hungary's National Tax and Customs Administration confirmed Friday that it had detained seven Ukrainian citizens and seized the two armored cash-transport vehicles. It added it was conducting criminal proceedings on suspicion of money laundering.

Hungary's Interior Ministry, Foreign Ministry and Counter-Terrorism Centre did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

GPS data showed the vehicles were in the center of Budapest near one of Hungary's law enforcement agencies, but that the location of the bank employees remained unknown, the Ukrainian bank said.

The incident further inflamed tensions between Hungary and Ukraine, which are embroiled in a bitter feud over Hungary's access to Russian oil through a pipeline that crosses Ukrainian territory.

Oil shipments through the Druzhba pipeline have been interrupted since Jan. 27. Ukraine says a Russian drone strike damaged the pipeline's infrastructure, and that repairing it carried risks to technicians. It said that even if restored, it would remain vulnerable to further Russian attacks.

Hungary's government, however, has accused Ukraine of deliberately holding up supplies of Russian crude, and has vowed to take countermeasures against Kyiv until oil flows resume.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who has maintained close relations with the Kremlin while escalating an aggressive anti-Ukraine campaign ahead of crucial elections next month, has called Ukraine Hungary's "enemy," and accused Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of seeking to provoke an energy crisis in order to sway the April 12 vote.

Orbán did not directly mention the detention of the bank vehicles but alluded to the incident in statements to state radio Friday, saying: "We will stop things that are important to Ukraine passing through Hungary until we get the approval of the Ukrainians for oil shipments."

"The Ukrainians will run out of money sooner than we will run out of oil," he added.

Trailing in most polls behind a popular center-right challenger, the populist Orbán has staked the election on convincing voters that Ukraine poses an existential threat to Hungary's security.

In office since 2010, the EU's longest-serving leader has claimed that if he loses the election, the European Union will force Hungary into bankruptcy by cutting Russian energy imports, and that Hungarian youth will be sent to their deaths on the front lines in Ukraine.

Hungary, along with neighboring Slovakia, have defied EU efforts to wean off Russian fossil fuels, and continued to purchase them despite Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

Orbán previously ceased diesel shipments to Ukraine, vetoed a new round of EU sanctions against Russia and blocked a major, 90-billion-euro (\$106-billion) loan for Kyiv in retaliation for the interruption in oil shipments. He's also deployed military forces to key energy infrastructure sites across Hungary, accusing Ukraine of plotting disruptions.

On Thursday, Orbán told an economic forum that Hungary would use "force," including "political and financial tools," to compel Ukraine to resume oil shipments.

On his post on X, the Ukrainian foreign minister took issue with Orbán's comments, writing: "If this is the 'force' announced earlier today by Mr. Orban, then this is a force of a criminal gang," Sybiha wrote.

Ukraine's Foreign Ministry on Friday urged Ukrainian citizens to abstain from visiting Hungary, saying their security could not be guaranteed amid "arbitrary actions by the Hungarian authorities."

The Ministry also called for Ukrainian and European businesses to take into account "the risk of arbitrary seizure of property" in Hungary.

What to know as a son of Iran's late supreme leader is a possible candidate to replace his father

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 never having 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, which 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 the United States 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 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, which was "a combination of aide-de-camp, confidant, gatekeeper and power broker," according to United Against Nuclear Iran, a U.S.-based pressure group.

And U.S. President Donald Trump may have indirectly boosted his candidacy by criticizing Khamenei in an interview with news website Axios on Thursday and insisting he be involved in selecting Iran's next leader.

"They are wasting their time. Khamenei's son is a lightweight. I have to be involved in the appointment," Trump said, referring to his operation that saw the U.S. military seize former Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro.

"Khamenei's son is unacceptable to me," Trump added. "We want someone that will bring harmony and peace to Iran."

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,

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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 Trump's first term 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 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.

Hong Kong ex-media mogul Jimmy Lai will not appeal national security conviction, legal team says

By KANIS LEUNG Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — Hong Kong pro-democracy ex-publisher Jimmy Lai will not appeal the national security conviction for which he was sentenced to 20 years in prison last month, his legal team said Friday.

Lai, an outspoken critic of China's ruling Communist Party who founded the now-defunct Apple Daily, was found guilty in December of conspiracy to collude with foreign forces and conspiring with others to publish seditious articles.

His Hong Kong legal team told The Associated Press via a text message about the decision, which ends a yearslong legal battle. The lawyers would not comment on the reason for not appealing.

"We can confirm we have clear and definitive instructions not to lodge an appeal against conviction or sentence," they said.

Observers say his conviction reflected the decline of press and other freedoms that has changed Hong Kong, a former British colony that returned to China's control in 1997. The government insists the case has nothing to do with a free press, saying the defendants used news reporting as a pretext for years to commit acts that harmed China and Hong Kong.

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Lai was one of the first prominent figures to be arrested under the security law in 2020. Within a year, some of Apple Daily's senior journalists also were arrested, and the newspaper, known for its critical coverage of both the Beijing and Hong Kong governments, shut down in June 2021.

Lai is 78, and his lengthy sentence raised concerns that he could spend the rest of his life in prison.

After the sentencing, the children of Lai said a possible visit by U.S. President Donald Trump to Beijing could be crucial in securing the release of their father, a British citizen. After Lai's verdict, Trump, who had raised Lai's case with China, said he felt "so badly."

The White House has confirmed that Trump will travel to China on March 31 through April 2 to meet Chinese leader Xi Jinping, although there is no official confirmation from Beijing so far.

U.K. Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper has said Lai was sentenced for exercising his right to freedom of expression and called on the Hong Kong authorities to release him on humanitarian grounds.

Chinese and Hong Kong authorities have defended Lai's sentencing, saying it reflected the spirit of the rule of law.

Wilson Chan, co-founder of the Pagoda Institute, a think tank focusing on public policy and the global political economy, said Beijing has previously granted medical parole to mainland prisoners but Hong Kong has no such provision, so one potential path for Lai's release could be a pardon from the city leader under a diplomatic solution.

Chan suggested not appealing may be a basic requirement to satisfy Beijing for any such solution, but it doesn't guarantee anything. He predicted the chance of a diplomatic solution from a Trump-Xi meeting would be slim, even though the two leaders are likely to discuss Lai.

Chan said Beijing would not need to use Lai's case as leverage with the U.S. and it would have other considerations, including how to maintain the city's judicial independence under its "one country, two systems" governing principle. Resolving Lai's case also would not be Trump's priority, he said.

Before the Iran war erupted, Washington and Beijing already had tensions on multiple issues, from trade and the economy to Taiwan.

"Speaking from Washington's perspective, what can it get through a trade when Mr. Lai is released?" Chan said.

Last week, Lai won an appeal to quash his convictions and sentence in a separate fraud case, a rare victory in his legal battles.

That ruling could reduce his total prison time. But the government earlier said the Department of Justice would study the judgment thoroughly and consider whether to appeal.

Man charged in Utah killings wanted victims' cars and money to get home, prosecutors allege

By COLLEEN SLEVIN, HANNAH SCHOENBAUM, SARAH BRUMFIELD and GEORGE FREY Associated Press TORREY, Utah (AP) — Two men whose wives did not return from a hike in Utah's south-central desert arrived at the trailhead Wednesday to find both women dead and a car missing, spurring a multi-state search that led investigators to a third body before they arrested a suspect Thursday in Colorado.

An Iowa man has been charged with aggravated murder in the deaths of the two hikers and a third woman authorities say he killed inside her home after he spent a night in a shed on her property. There was no indication that the man had any connection to the victims, said Lt. Cameron Roden of the Utah Department of Public Safety.

Ivan Miller, 22, told investigators after his arrest that he killed the three women to steal their cars and credit cards because he needed money to get back to Iowa, charging documents show. He had hit an elk a few days earlier in a tiny Utah farming town near Capitol Reef National Park and was without a vehicle after selling his truck to the tow company.

After staying in hotels for a few days, Miller slept in the woman's shed. He stole her Buick after shooting her from behind while she was watching TV, Wayne County prosecutors allege.

Miller, of Blakesburg, Iowa, told authorities that he quickly realized he did not like the Buick and wanted

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a different vehicle, according to court documents. He parked it at a trailhead about 10 miles (16 kilometers) from the first victim's home, saw two women get out of a Subaru and killed them before taking the car, the documents state. He attempted to conceal their bodies in a dry creek bed, prosecutors allege.

The husbands called 911 and waved down a ranger after finding their wives shot and stabbed at the trail, which is used mostly by locals and partially shielded from the road by piñon and juniper trees, according to officials and court documents.

Officials identified the hikers as aunt and niece Linda Dewey, 65, and Natalie Graves, 34, and the woman killed in her home as Margaret Oldroyd, 86. The hikers had no known connection to Oldroyd.

Victim remembered as 'the sweetest woman'

Authorities found Oldroyd's body in a cellar under a shed on her property after identifying the owner of the stolen Buick left at the trailhead, according to court documents.

Police used yellow tape to cordon off the brick home in Lyman and an outbuilding while investigators gathered evidence Thursday.

Oldroyd's next-door neighbor of 20 years, Randy Jones, described her as "the sweetest woman you'd ever meet" and said he was shocked by her death.

Oldroyd had a love of yard work, always keeping her flowers and lawn watered and neatly manicured. She used to work at a local grocery store stocking shelves, Jones said. And when Jones helped rid her yard of skunks, she'd bring him a cake as a thank you.

"Out here in rural counties, we all take care of each other," Jones said.

In recent years, he didn't see his neighbor leave home much except to attend religious services and pick up groceries. But every now and then, she would come over to Jones' house, sit with him and visit his horses.

Suspect tracked across state lines

Investigators have not found a motive for the killings and do not believe the suspect targeted the women for any reason other than "convenience," Roden said. Investigators were still looking into when Miller arrived in Utah and what he was doing prior to the killings.

Authorities used license plate readers and vehicle tracking services to follow Miller's path, from Utah through northern Arizona and into the mountain town of Pagosa Springs in southwestern Colorado, where he abandoned the stolen vehicle, Roden said. He was found after a short search.

According to online jail records, Miller was being held on suspicion of carrying a concealed weapon, a misdemeanor. He was arrested in Colorado with a large knife and a .45 caliber pistol, according to court documents, and was scheduled to make his first court appearance in the state Friday afternoon.

Miller is being represented at the hearing by the Colorado Public Defender's office, said Justin Bogan, who heads the office in the judicial district that covers Pagosa Springs. Bogan declined to comment further. Voicemail messages left at listings for possible relatives of Miller were not immediately returned on Thursday.

Authorities were working to bring Miller to Utah to face the murder charges.

The Associated Press left a message for the public defender's office in Utah late Thursday afternoon.

Before a suspect was in custody, Wayne County residents were asked to remain vigilant and schools were closed Thursday. Officials asked for help finding a white Subaru Outback but warned people not to approach it.

GOP Rep. Tony Gonzales of Texas ends reelection bid after admitting to affair with aide

By LISA MASCARO and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republican Rep. Tony Gonzales of Texas said late Thursday he was withdrawing from his reelection race, after having admitted an affair with a former staff member who later died by suicide, but he vowed to finish out his term in Congress.

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He had faced calls from GOP leadership to end his reelection bid, and from others in Congress to resign. "After deep reflection and with the support of my loving family, I have decided not to seek re-election," Gonzales said in a statement posted late Thursday to X.

The move is the latest in a quickly changing situation that stunned Capitol Hill and resulted in a House Ethics Committee investigation into his conduct. Gonzales' decision to bow out of the race appears to clear the field. On Tuesday, he had been forced into a May runoff against Brandon Herrera, a gun manufacturer and YouTube gun-rights influencer who narrowly lost to him in the 2024 primary.

House Speaker Mike Johnson and the GOP leadership earlier Thursday had called on Gonzales to withdraw from reelection after Gonzales, a day earlier, acknowledged a relationship that has upturned the political world in his home state and in Washington.

"We have encouraged him to address these very serious allegations directly with his constituents and his colleagues," said Johnson, Majority Leader Steve Scalise, Whip Tom Emmer, and GOP Conference Chairwoman Lisa McClain in a statement.

"In the meantime, Leadership has asked Congressman Gonzales to withdraw from his race for reelection."

Johnson, R-La., has been under enormous pressure from his own GOP lawmakers to take action, and several Republicans have already called for Gonzales to step aside. Rep. Anna Paulina Luna, R-Fla., has introduced two resolutions to punish Gonzales. The first seeks to remove him from his assignments on the House Appropriations and Homeland Security committees, while the second seeks to censure him.

House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York, meanwhile, said he would support expelling Gonzales from the House, a rare step that requires a two-thirds vote from the chamber.

GOP leaders notably did not call for Gonzales to resign from office as they struggle to maintain their slim majority in the House, which they hold by only a handful of seats.

Their move came after Gonzales, appearing on the "Joe Pags Show," was asked whether he had a relationship with the aide, Regina Ann Santos-Aviles.

Santos-Aviles, 35, died after setting herself on fire in the backyard of her home in Uvalde, Texas. The Bexar County Medical Examiner's Office later ruled her death a suicide.

"I made a mistake and I had a lapse in judgment, and there was a lack of faith, and I take full responsibility for those actions," Gonzales said.

The congressman, now in his third term, had said he would not step down in response to the allegations, telling reporters recently that there will be opportunities for all the details and facts to come out.

Gonzales, a father of six, first won his seat in 2020 after retiring from a 20-year career in the Navy that included time in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In the interview broadcast Wednesday, Gonzales said he had not spoken to Santos-Aviles since June 2024. She died in September 2025.

"I had absolutely nothing to do with her tragic passing, and in fact, I was shocked just as much as everyone else," Gonzales said.

Gonzales went on to say he had reconciled with his wife, Angel, and has asked God to forgive him. He also said he looked forward to the Ethics Committee investigation.

Johnson and GOP leadership urged that committee to "act expeditiously."

Under House ethics rules, lawmakers may not engage in a sexual relationship with any employee of the House under their supervision.

Talarico became famous with viral videos. Can Republicans turn that against him?

By JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

James Talarico rode viral video fame to the Democratic nomination for U.S. Senate in Texas. Now Republicans want to turn years of candid on-camera musings against him.

Conservatives are digging through Talarico's social media history and finding a trove of progressive commentary on hot-button cultural issues like race, gender, religion and immigration. They hope it will torpedo

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his candidacy in a red state like Texas that Democrats have spent decades struggling to turn blue.

Talarico was a state legislator barely known outside his district before he started building a national profile by making himself ubiquitous. He sat for lengthy podcast interviews and posted heavily on social media. The grandson of a Baptist preacher and a seminary student himself, Talarico often makes a Biblical case for progressive policies, using a gift of gab that many Democrats believe will help him connect with voters across Texas.

It's also given his critics hours and hours of material to mine. And after he defeated Rep. Jasmine Crockett in the Democratic primary on Tuesday, conservatives started uploading an arsenal of video clips.

"God is nonbinary," Talarico once said during a legislative floor speech. He later explained that he was being "a little provocative" to make the theological point that "God is beyond gender."

"Our southern border should be like our front porch. There should be a giant welcome mat out front," Talarico said in a clip that cuts off the rest of his sentence — "and a lock on the door."

"Radicalized white men are the greatest domestic terrorist threat in our country," Talarico wrote five years ago in a post lamenting mass shootings targeting Black, Hispanic and Asian Americans.

Republican consultant Chris LaCivita shared that post on social media and suggested it was "great ad copy" for his party. LaCivita is working for a super PAC supporting incumbent Sen. John Cornyn, who faces state Attorney General Ken Paxton in a runoff for the Republican nomination.

President Donald Trump even joined in, telling Politico in an interview that Talarico is "a terribly weak candidate" who is "more woke than even the very highly untalented Jasmine Crockett." He predicted Talarico would be "much easier than her" to defeat in a general election.

"He is radically out of touch with Texans and they will not vote for this in November," said Samantha Cantrell, a spokesperson for the National Republican Senatorial Committee.

During a victory speech Wednesday, Talarico primed his supporters for the onslaught of criticism, which he blamed on billionaires and political elites desperate to hold onto power.

"They're going to throw everything they have at us," he said. "They're going to call me a radical leftist. They're going to call me a fake Christian. They'll call our movement un-Texan, un-American. They'll call us a threat."

The criticism is coming, Talarico said, "because we're a threat to their corrupt system."

"Our campaign is building a movement poised to change the politics of this state and take power back for working people," said Talarico spokesperson JT Ennis. "While they lob stale attacks to mislead Texans, we are uniting the people of Texas to win in November."

Democrats are hoping that Republican runoff voters will favor Paxton, who has weathered allegations of corruption and infidelity and has his own history of controversial remarks.

Trump has promised to make an endorsement in the race, but he hasn't said when he'll announce a decision or who it will be. Republican leaders want him to line up behind Cornyn, who is seeking a fifth term.

New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani's successful campaign provides a recent model of a Democrat who overcame intense scrutiny for progressive statements that became a political liability. Mandani went on Fox News and apologized to New York Police Department officers for past criticism, such as a calling to "defund this rogue agency" in 2020.

Still, New York and Texas are worlds apart politically. Trump won Texas by nearly 14 points and lost the state of New York by nearly as much.

Celebration of life for Jesse Jackson to draw former presidents and Grammy-winning artists

By SOPHIA TAREEN Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Three former U.S. presidents, Grammy-winning artists, clergy and elected officials are expected to attend a Chicago celebration of life on Friday for the late Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr.

The event honoring the protege of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and two-time presidential candidate follows memorial services that drew large crowds in Chicago and South Carolina, where the civil rights

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leader was born.

The Chicago celebration — at an influential Black church with a 10,000-seat arena — is anticipated to be the largest. Former Democratic U.S. presidents Barack Obama, Joe Biden and Bill Clinton, along with former Vice President Kamala Harris, plan to attend, according to the Rainbow PUSH Coalition, the organization that Jackson founded. The musical lineup includes gospel singer BeBe Winans.

"These homegoing services are welcome to all. Democrat, Republican, liberal, conservative, right wing, left wing because his life is broad enough to cover the full spectrum of what it means to be an American," the civil rights leader's son Jesse Jackson Jr. said last month. "Dad would have wanted us to have a great meeting to discuss our differences, to find ways of moving forward and moving together."

The elder Jackson died last month at age 84 after battling a rare neurological disorder that affected his mobility and ability to speak. Family members say he continued coming into the office until last year and communicated through hand signals. His final public appearances included the 2024 Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

Jackson's pursuits were countless, taking him to all corners of the globe: Advocating for the poor and underrepresented on issues including voting rights, health care, job opportunities and education. He scored diplomatic victories with world leaders, and through Rainbow PUSH Coalition, he channeled cries for Black pride and self-determination into corporate boardrooms, pressuring executives to make America a more open and equitable society.

Jackson's services in Chicago and South Carolina drew civic leaders, school groups and everyday people who said they were touched by Jackson's work, from scholarship programs to advocating for inmates. Several states flew flags at half-staff in his honor.

Services in Washington, D.C., were tabled after a request to let Jackson lie in honor at the United States Capitol rotunda was denied by House Speaker Mike Johnson, who said precedent typically reserves the space for select officials, including former presidents. Details on a future event have not been made public.

In his final months, Jackson received numerous visitors in Chicago, including the Clintons and the Rev. Al Sharpton, who also attended his memorial services in Chicago last week.

"He has been the central mentor of my life," Sharpton said. "The challenge for us that we've got to make sure that all he lived for was not in vain."

Pentagon says it is labeling AI company Anthropic a supply chain risk 'effective immediately'

By MATT O'BRIEN and KONSTANTIN TOROPIN Associated Press

The Trump administration is following through with its threat to designate artificial intelligence company Anthropic as a supply chain risk in an unprecedented move that could force other government contractors to stop using the AI chatbot Claude.

The Pentagon said in a statement Thursday that it has "officially informed Anthropic leadership the company and its products are deemed a supply chain risk, effective immediately."

The decision appeared to shut down the opportunity for further negotiation with Anthropic, nearly a week after President Donald Trump and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth accused the company of endangering national security.

Trump and Hegseth announced a series of threatened punishments last Friday, on the eve of the Iran war, after Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei refused to back down over concerns the company's products could be used for mass surveillance of Americans or autonomous weapons.

Amodei said in a statement Thursday that "we do not believe this action is legally sound, and we see no choice but to challenge it in court."

The Pentagon statement said, "this has been about one fundamental principle: the military being able to use technology for all lawful purposes. The military will not allow a vendor to insert itself into the chain of command by restricting the lawful use of a critical capability and put our warfighters at risk."

Amodei countered that the narrow exceptions Anthropic sought to limit surveillance and autonomous

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weapons “relate to high-level usage areas, and not operational decision-making.”

He said there were “productive conversations” with the Pentagon in recent days over whether it could keep using Claude or establish a “smooth transition” if no agreement was reached. Trump gave the military six months to phase out Claude, which is already widely embedded in military and national security platforms. Amodei said it’s a priority to make sure warfighters won’t be “deprived of important tools in the middle of major combat operations.”

Some military contractors were already cutting ties with Anthropic, a rising star in the tech industry that sells Claude to a variety of businesses and government agencies. Lockheed Martin said it will “follow the President’s and the Department of War’s direction” and look to other providers of large language models.

“We expect minimal impacts as Lockheed Martin is not dependent on any single LLM vendor for any portion of our work,” the company said.

How the Defense Department will interpret the scope of the risk designation is unclear. Amodei said a notification Anthropic received from the Pentagon on Wednesday shows it only applies to Claude’s use by customers as a “direct part of” their military contracts.

Microsoft said its lawyers studied the rule and the company “can continue to work with Anthropic on non-defense related projects.”

Pentagon draws criticism for its decision

The Pentagon’s decision to apply a rule designed to address supply threats posed by foreign adversaries was met with broad criticism. Federal codes have defined supply chain risk as a “risk that an adversary may sabotage, maliciously introduce unwanted function, or otherwise subvert” a system in order to disrupt, degrade or spy on it.

U.S. Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, a New York Democrat and member of the Senate Armed Services Committee and Senate Intelligence Committee, called it “a dangerous misuse of a tool meant to address adversary-controlled technology.”

“This reckless action is shortsighted, self-destructive, and a gift to our adversaries,” she said in a written statement Thursday.

Neil Chilson, a Republican former chief technologist for the Federal Trade Commission who now leads AI policy at the Abundance Institute, said the decision looks like “massive overreach that would hurt both the U.S. AI sector and the military’s ability to acquire the best technology for the U.S. warfighter.”

Earlier in the day, a group of former defense and national security officials sent a letter to U.S. lawmakers expressing “serious concern” about the designation.

“The use of this authority against a domestic American company is a profound departure from its intended purpose and sets a dangerous precedent,” said the letter from former officials and policy experts, including former CIA director Michael Hayden and retired Air Force, Army and Navy leaders.

They added that such a designation is meant to “protect the United States from infiltration by foreign adversaries — from companies beholden to Beijing or Moscow, not from American innovators operating transparently under the rule of law. Applying this tool to penalize a U.S. firm for declining to remove safeguards against mass domestic surveillance and fully autonomous weapons is a category error with consequences that extend far beyond this dispute.”

Anthropic sees boost in consumer downloads

While losing big partnerships with defense contractors, Anthropic experienced a surge of consumer downloads over the past week due to people siding with its moral stance. More than a million people signed up for Claude each day this week, the company said, lifting it past OpenAI’s ChatGPT and Google’s Gemini as the top AI app in more than 20 countries in Apple’s app store.

The dispute with the Pentagon has also further deepened Anthropic’s bitter rivalry with OpenAI that started when ex-OpenAI leaders, including Amodei, started Anthropic in 2021.

Hours after the Pentagon punished Anthropic last Friday, OpenAI announced a deal to effectively replace Anthropic with ChatGPT in classified military environments.

OpenAI said it sought similar protections against domestic surveillance and fully autonomous weapons

but later had to amend its agreements, leading CEO Sam Altman to say he shouldn't have rushed a deal that "looked opportunistic and sloppy."

Amodei also expressed regret about his own part in that "difficult day for the company," saying Thursday he wanted to "directly apologize" for an internal note he sent to Anthropic staff that attacked OpenAI's behavior and suggested Anthropic was being punished for not giving "dictator-like praise" to Trump.

House narrowly rejects Iran war powers resolution in test of Trump's strategy

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

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House narrowly rejected a resolution Thursday to curb President Donald Trump's powers in the Iran war, an early 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. Lawmakers are confronting the sudden reality of representing wary Americans 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.

While the tally in the House, 212-219, was expected to be tight, the outcome provided a clarifying snapshot of political support for, and opposition to, the U.S.-Israel military operation and Trump's rationale for bypassing Congress, which alone has the power to declare war. At the Capitol, the conflict has quickly carried echoes of the long wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and many Sept. 11-era veterans now serve in Congress.

"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.

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

"We are not at war," said Johnson, R-La., a close ally of Trump, contradicting others. He said the operation is limited in scope and duration, and the "mission is nearly accomplished."

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 government that 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.

Republican Rep. Brian Mast of Florida, 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 attack on Iran, influenced by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, is a war of choice that is testing the balance of powers in the 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. "It's up to us."

Crossover coalitions emerged among those in Congress. Two Republicans joined most Democrats in voting for the war powers resolution, while four Democrats joined Republicans to reject it.

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

Trump officials provide shifting rationale for war

Trump has scrambled to win support for the nearly week-old conflict as Americans of all political persuasions take stock. Administration officials spent hours behind closed doors on Capitol Hill this week trying to reassure lawmakers that they have the situation under control.

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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 phone lines at congressional offices as they sought help trying to flee the Middle East.

Trump said Thursday he must be involved in choosing Iran's new leader. Yet Johnson, R-La., said this week that America has enough problems at home and is not about to be in the "nation-building business."

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said that the war could extend eight weeks, twice as long as the president first estimated. Trump has left open the possibility of sending U.S. troops into what has largely been a bombing campaign. More than 1,230 people in Iran 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, and American bases would face retaliation if the U.S. did not strike Iran first. The U.S. said Wednesday 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, an outlier in his party.

Massie and Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Calif., who had teamed up to force the release the Jeffrey Epstein files, also pushed the war powers resolution to the floor, past objections from Johnson's GOP leadership. Republican Rep. Warren Davidson of Ohio, a former Army Ranger, also voted for it. Democratic Reps. Henry Cuellar of Texas, Jared Golden of Maine, Greg Landsman of Ohio and Juan Vargas of California voted against.

"Congress must stand with the president to finally close, once and for all, this dark chapter of history," said Rep. Michael McCaul, R-Texas.

Rep. Yassamin Ansari, D-Ariz., said that as the daughter of Iranian immigrants who fled their homeland, she opposes the regime but is concerned that a democratic transition for the people of Iran never seems to a priority for Trump or the officials who briefed Congress.

"War carries profound and deadly consequences for our troops, for the American people and for the entire world," she said. "It's the most serious decision that a nation can make."

Other Democrats have proposed an alternative resolution that would allow the president to continue the war for 30 days before he must seek congressional approval. The House also approved a separate measure affirming that Iran is the largest state sponsor of terrorism.

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 Wednesday, Democratic senators sat at their desks as the voting got underway.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York said that every senator will pick a side. "Do you stand with the American people who are exhausted with forever wars in the Middle East?" he asked. Or with Trump and 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 Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., in favor and Sen. John Fetterman, D-Pa., against.

Trump says he wants to be involved in picking Iran's next leader as war ripples across the region

By JON GAMBRELL, DAVID RISING, ELENA BECATOROS and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press
DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — U.S. President Donald Trump said Thursday he should be involved in choosing Iran's next supreme leader as the U.S. and Israel hammered the country for a sixth day. Iran kept up retaliatory attacks on Israel, American bases and countries around the region.

U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth warned that American firepower over Tehran was "about to surge dramatically." The Israeli military said strikes have already destroyed most of Iran's air defenses and missile launchers.

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Trump ruled out Mojtaba Khamenei, a front-runner to replace his father, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who was killed in the opening strikes of the war. Trump's comments to the American news website Axios were likely to renew questions about whether the U.S. and Israel seek the overthrow of the Islamic Republic or just a change in its policies, as the conflict has appeared increasingly open-ended.

The war has escalated each day, affecting an additional 14 countries across the Middle East and beyond. On Thursday, Azerbaijan accused Iran of drone attacks, which Tehran denied. Iran said the U.S. would "bitterly regret" torpedoing an Iranian warship near Sri Lanka a day earlier.

Israel issued a mass evacuation warning for Beirut's southern suburbs as the fighting escalated with Iran-allied Hezbollah militants. U.N. peacekeepers reported ground combat in southern Lebanon as more Israeli troops crossed the border.

All the while, the U.S. and Israel battered Iran with nationwide strikes, targeting their military capabilities, leadership and nuclear program.

Iran's attacks have targeted their Arab neighbors, disrupted oil supplies and snarled global air travel. The war has killed at least 1,230 people in Iran, more than 120 in Lebanon and around a dozen in Israel, according to officials in those countries. Six U.S. troops have been killed.

Trump's decision to strike Iran won enough support from Republican lawmakers in the U.S. House on Thursday to defeat a resolution to halt the bombardment. The Senate voted down a similar measure a day earlier.

Trump again urges Iranians to "take back" their country

In brief remarks at the White House, Trump again urged the Iranian people to "help take back your country." This time he promised the U.S. would grant them "immunity" amid the war and ongoing dangers under the current Iranian regime.

"So you'll be perfectly safe with total immunity," Trump said, without giving any details about what that meant. "Or you'll face absolutely guaranteed death."

In the Axios interview, Trump derided 56-year-old Mojtaba Khamenei, who has never been elected or appointed to a government position, as "a lightweight."

"We want someone that will bring harmony and peace to Iran," Trump said.

"I have to be involved in the appointment, like with Delcy in Venezuela," Trump said, referring to the acting president in the South American country. Delcy Rodríguez took power in January after a U.S. military operation captured Nicolás Maduro and whisked him to the U.S. to face federal drug conspiracy charges.

Iran remains defiant

Iran has not requested talks with the U.S. to bring an end to the widening war, Iran's ambassador to Egypt told the Associated Press on Thursday. Ambassador Mojtaba Ferdousi Pour denied comments by Trump that Iran wants to negotiate.

He said a lack of trust makes such engagement impossible after talks for a possible nuclear deal twice failed and ended with war.

"There will be no trust in Trump," Ferdousi Pour said.

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

The Iranian ship was returning from an exercise hosted by the Indian navy that the U.S. also joined. Sri Lankan authorities said 32 crew members were rescued. Araghchi said it had been carrying "almost 130" crew.

An Iranian cleric later called on state television for the shedding of both Israeli and "Trump's blood."

The statement from Ayatollah Abdollah Javadi Amoli represented a rare call for violence by an ayatollah, one of Shiite Islam's highest clerical ranks. There are dozens in Iran.

Sri Lanka said more than 200 sailors aboard another Iranian warship near its coast were being escorted to a naval base outside the capital, Colombo. The ship will be taken to a Sri Lankan port, said Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake.

The war keeps expanding

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The U.S. military said early Friday that an Iranian drone carrier was attacked and set ablaze.

The message from the U.S. military's Central Command showed black-and-white footage of the carrier ablaze after multiple strikes hit it. The Iranian military did not immediately acknowledge the attack.

Speaking at U.S. Central Command, which oversees U.S. forces in the Middle East, Hegseth gave few details Thursday when he promised an upcoming surge.

"It's more fighter squadrons, it's more capabilities, it's more defensive capabilities," Hegseth said. "And it's more bomber pulses more frequently."

Adm. Brad Cooper, head of U.S. Central Command, said U.S. forces have sunk more than 30 of Iran's ships, including a drone carrier ship "roughly the size of a World War II aircraft carrier."

Meanwhile, Israel's top general said waves of strikes had destroyed 80% of Iran's air defenses and 60% of its missile launchers. Still, Lt. Gen. Eyal Zamir said: "The threat has not yet been removed."

Gulf countries also reported coming under fire. The U.S. State Department announced it was closing the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait, which activated air defense systems in response to incoming missiles.

Iran has fired waves of missiles and drones at American-allied Kuwait, where a drone strike Sunday killed six American soldiers.

In the United Arab Emirates, a drone was shot down near the Al Dhafra Air Base, which hosts U.S. forces. Authorities said falling shrapnel wounded several people.

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

Bahrain said an Iranian missile hit a state-run oil refinery Thursday, sparking a fire that was extinguished. It said no casualties were reported.

Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev accused Iran of "a groundless act of terror and aggression" after a drone crashed Thursday near an airport, injuring four civilian workers. Another drone fell near a school.

Iran denied it launched drones toward Azerbaijan. Iran has also repeatedly denied targeting oil infrastructure and other civilian targets, even as its missiles and drones have hit such sites.

Ships have been attacked in the Gulf of Oman and the Strait of Hormuz, through which about a fifth of the world's oil is shipped. That has caused oil prices to soar and U.S. stock prices to sink.

Israel issues evacuation warning for Beirut suburbs

Israel struck Beirut's southern suburbs Thursday evening after urging residents to "save your lives and evacuate your homes immediately." Two hospitals evacuated patients and staff.

The Lebanese health ministry said the death toll has risen to 123 since the resurgence of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah, which struck Israel in the opening days of the war.

A spokesperson for the U.N. peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon, Tilak Pokharel, said Thursday that peacekeepers had seen and heard clashes, including ground combat, in southern Lebanon as more Israeli forces have moved across the border.

What to know about the Kurds and their potential involvement in the Iran war

By SAM McNEIL Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — Thousands of battle-hardened Kurds in northern Iraq are preparing for a potential cross-border military operation in Iran with U.S. backing, Kurdish officials told The Associated Press.

The three officials said U.S. President Donald Trump and the heads of the two main Kurdish parties in Iraq discussed the situation Sunday. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to comment publicly.

The addition of armed Kurds now, as Israel and the U.S. continue to strike Iran, would significantly challenge Iranian defenses but also risk pulling Iraq — where some of the Iranian Kurdish groups have bases — deeper into the conflict.

Here's a look at the Kurds and their relationships in the Middle East:

Who are the Kurds?

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The Kurds are among the largest stateless ethnic groups in the world, with roughly 30 million living as minorities in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. They speak their own language, with several dialects, and most are Sunni Muslims.

Although Kurds have never had their own state, they govern a semiautonomous area in northern Iraq and for years de facto ruled much of northeastern Syria. Many have waged insurgency campaigns seeking to establish their own nation called Kurdistan.

The 9 million Kurds in Iran live mainly in a stretch of land along the country's western borders with Iraq and Turkey. They have a long history of grievances and rebellions against both the current Islamic Republic and the monarchy that preceded it.

Before the war, Amnesty International said Kurds face "systemic discrimination" in Iran and that in the past "security forces killed or injured many unarmed Kurdish cross-border couriers (kulbars) with impunity."

What is the Kurdish opposition in Iran?

A number of Kurdish opposition groups have taken up arms against Iranian authorities over the years.

Some have established bases in neighboring Iraq, which was a point of friction between Tehran and the central Iraqi government in Baghdad until 2023, when they reached an agreement to disarm the Iranian Kurdish groups.

In the run up to the current war, five Iranian Kurdish groups formed a coalition dedicated to overthrowing the Islamic Republic and establishing the Kurdish people's right to self-determination. On Thursday, a sixth group joined.

"For the first time, all major Kurdish parties have come together as one in a new coalition — a historic step toward shaping a new future for Kurds and a democratic Iran," said Abdullah Mohtadi, secretary general of the Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan.

But joining with the other Iranian opposition groups to oust the authorities in Tehran might prove difficult.

What is the Kurds' history with the US?

Kurds have rarely come out on the winning side in their interactions with U.S. presidents.

In 1975, President Gerald Ford failed to protect the Kurds from a routing by Iraqi forces.

In 1988, President Ronald Reagan did not stop Iraqi forces from using chemical weapons against the Kurds.

In 1990, President George Bush encouraged the Kurds to rise up against Saddam Hussein after he invaded Kuwait but then stood aside as Iraqi forces brutally crushed the rebellion.

And in January, Trump allowed Syrian forces to seize Kurdish territory won during the Syrian civil war and in bloody battles against the Islamic State group.

Where does Turkey stand?

It is unlikely that Turkey, a key member of NATO and potential host to war refugees, would accept Western weapons transfers to Kurdish guerrillas even if their targets were in Iran.

Turkey has fought a brutal military campaign since 1984 against an armed Kurdish insurgency that has claimed tens of thousands of lives and spilled into neighboring Iraq and Syria.

On Thursday, Turkey voiced opposition to Iranian Kurdish dissident groups' possible involvement in the conflict in Iran, warning of greater instability in the region.

Turkey considers the main Kurdish dissident group, PJAK, a terrorist group with links to separatists fighting Turkey. Turkey's defense ministry said Thursday that PJAK's activities "negatively affect not only Iran's security but also the overall peace and stability of the region."

What's the situation in Iraq?

Violence has already erupted across the Kurdish lands sprawling across the border between Iran and Iraq.

As Israel and the U.S. have struck targets across Iran, Iranian forces and its allies in Iraq launched missiles and drones targeting U.S. military bases and the U.S. Consulate in Irbil as well as the Iranian Kurdish groups' bases.

Khalil Nadiri, an official with the Kurdistan Freedom Party based in northern Iraq's semiautonomous Kurdish region, said Wednesday that some of their forces had moved to areas near the Iranian border in

Sulaymaniyah province and were on standby.

In January, the group said it carried out raids inside Iran during a massive crackdown on protests. State media then labeled them "terrorists," without offering any evidence to support the claim, a crime Iran punishes with death.

Officials with Iraq's Kurdish regional government and Iraqi Kurdish political parties, meanwhile, have said they do not want attacks to be launched against Iran from their territory, fearing a harsh response.

Peshawa Hawramani, spokesperson for the Kurdistan Regional Government, said in a statement that "allegations claiming that we are part of a plan to arm and send Kurdish opposition parties into Iranian territory are completely unfounded" and that the Iraqi Kurdish parties do not want to "expand the war and tensions in the region."

US and Venezuela agree to reestablish diplomatic relations in major shift after Maduro's ouster

By REGINA GARCIA CANO and MEGAN JANETSKY Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — The United States and Venezuela agreed to reestablish diplomatic relations in a major shift in a historically adversarial relationship, the State Department said on Thursday.

The move comes after rounds of Trump administration officials have visited the South American nation following a U.S. military operation that deposed former President Nicolás Maduro in January. Since then, the Trump administration has been stepping up pressure on Maduro loyalists now in power to accept its vision for the oil-rich nation.

Relations between the two countries were cut off in 2019, during the first Trump administration, in a decision by Maduro. They closed their embassies mutually after U.S. President Donald Trump gave public support to Venezuelan opposition lawmaker Juan Guaidó, who claimed to be the nation's interim president in January that year. That prompted U.S. diplomatic staff to move to neighboring Colombia.

The State Department in a statement on Thursday said that talks between the countries were "focused on helping the Venezuelan people move forward through a phased process that creates the conditions for a peaceful transition to a democratically elected government."

The announcement was made at the end of a two-day visit by U.S. Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum to Venezuela. The visit largely focused on the country's mining sector. It followed a February visit by Energy Secretary Chris Wright that centered on Venezuela's oil potential. Both secretaries are aiming to shore up foreign investment to advance the administration's phased plan to turn around the crisis-wracked nation.

Acting President Delcy Rodríguez, formerly Maduro's vice president, said on state televisions that such steps "will strengthen relations between our two countries."

Rodríguez's government in a statement later expressed confidence that reestablishing diplomatic relations "will contribute to strengthening understanding and opening opportunities for a positive and mutually beneficial relationship."

"These relations ought to result in the social and economic happiness of the Venezuelan people," she said.

Since the unprecedented U.S. offensive in Venezuela, the Trump administration has pushed the government to make sweeping changes, including opening its oil sector to foreign companies. Rodríguez's government also approved an amnesty law that has enabled the release of politicians, activists, lawyers and many others, effectively acknowledging that the government has held hundreds of people in prison for political motivations.

Trump stunned Venezuelans in and outside their home country with his decision to work with Rodríguez, instead of the political opposition, following Maduro's ouster. On Sunday, Venezuela's top opposition leader and winner of the 2025 Nobel Peace Prize María Corina Machado said that she will return to Venezuela in the coming weeks and that elections will be held in Venezuela.

Such seismic shifts would have been unthinkable just months before in the South American nation. Venezuela's main political current, known as Chavismo, has been able to dodge curve balls thrown at it for years, from U.S. sanctions to spiraling economic crisis.

Videos from officers show terrifying moments during Texas mass shooting that left 3 dead

By LEKAN OYEKANAMI Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Newly released police body camera footage shows bargoers and pedestrians fleeing and ducking for cover in the moments after a gunman began firing outside a Texas bar, leaving three dead in what is being investigated as potential terrorism.

"Everybody down!" one officer yells. "Where is he?"

The terrifying moments captured on video by officers and surveillance cameras that were released Thursday show how the shooting that wounded more than a dozen others unfolded quickly early Sunday in downtown Austin's entertainment district.

Austin Police Chief Lisa Davis said officers arrived within 56 seconds of the first 911 call, shooting and killing the suspect after he fired at police.

Davis said the investigation is ongoing and would not discuss a possible motive for the shooting that erupted a day after the U.S. and Israel launched an attack on Iran.

The FBI has said it's investigating the shooting as a potential act of terrorism and a law enforcement official told The Associated Press that the gunman was wearing clothes with an Iranian flag design and bearing the words "Property of Allah."

Police have identified the gunman as 53-year-old Ndiaga Diagne and say he legally bought the pistol and rifle that he used in the attack outside Buford's Backyard Beer Garden. The venue is on Sixth Street, a nightlife destination filled with bars and music clubs close to the University of Texas at Austin..

Authorities now know 19 people were hit by gunfire, including the three who died, Davis said Thursday. One person remains in critical condition.

Most of those who were shot were outside the bar, including one victim who was waiting for a ride, she said.

Screaming and shouts of "get down" can be heard on a 911 call released Thursday. "There has been a shooting at Buford's," one caller said. "There are people dead over here. We need help right now."

Diagne was not on the radar of authorities before he opened fire early Sunday. Davis said investigators have found he was the subject of a mental health-related welfare check, possibly in 2022, by an agency elsewhere.

He fired the first shots from his SUV then parked his vehicle and emerged with a rifle, police said. He shot another person before officers rushed to the intersection and shot and killed him, Davis said.

Jorge Pederson, 30, an aspiring mixed martial arts fighter, died from his gunshot wounds Monday. He had just moved to Texas from Minnesota. His former gym, the Academy Martial Arts Gym, said in a Facebook post that he brought "light and joy into the grueling work of training."

Also killed were 21-year-old Savitha Shan and 19-year-old Ryder Harrington.

Shan, a business student at the University of Texas at Austin, had a job waiting for her at a consulting firm, her family said in a statement released through the university. It said she was an only child and described her death as "profoundly unfair."

Harrington had attended Texas Tech University through last fall, and his former fraternity brothers at Beta Theta Pi recalled in an Instagram post his ability to "make ordinary days unforgettable."

Mother of 2 girls found in shallow graves in Cleveland charged with murder

By MARK SCOLFORO and SUE OGROCKI Associated Press

CLEVELAND (AP) — The mother of two young girls found buried inside suitcases in Cleveland was charged Thursday with two counts of aggravated murder, police said.

Aliyah Henderson, 28, is accused of killing Mila Chatman and Amor Wilson, whose remains were recovered after a dog walker led authorities to the suitcases four days earlier.

Mila's father, DeShaun Chatman, said Thursday that he had been looking for his daughter and pursuing custody for five years before investigators told him late Wednesday she was dead.

Chatman said he repeatedly sought emergency custody and had tried to locate Mila through a child welfare agency, but those efforts were unsuccessful because he did not know where they were living.

"It's very much horrible," Chatman said, adding that it turned out Mila had been living within view of where their bodies were found. He said he felt "useless — I couldn't save my baby."

Phone numbers linked to Henderson were no longer hers, and it was unclear if she was represented by a lawyer.

A police case report said the two suitcases were found about 25 feet (8 meters) apart in the field near Ginn Academy in Cleveland's South Collinwood neighborhood.

The Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner's Office confirmed the names late Thursday and said DNA relationship testing helped identify them. The office said Mila would have been 8 years old and her half-sister Amor 10.

Sgt. Wilfredo Diaz said earlier Thursday that police detained Henderson on Wednesday evening after detectives completed initial interviews and examined evidence. A child, seemingly in good health, was located inside a house that investigators searched and placed in the custody of the Department of Children and Family Services, police said.

Chatman, a restaurant cook, said he and Henderson were not married but lived together for about a year after their daughter was born. He last saw Mila in 2020, when she was 3 years old.

"Mila was happy-go-lucky, always smiling," Chatman said. "Favorite color was pink — she swore that she was a princess. She was always happy. She was a kid's kid."

He said authorities have not told him how the girls died.

"We are hoping to find answers," Cleveland Police Chief Dorothy Todd told reporters earlier this week. "This is a terrible, tragic situation."

Justice Department publishes missing Epstein files involving uncorroborated claim about Trump

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department on Thursday released additional Jeffrey Epstein files involving uncorroborated accusations made by a woman against President Donald Trump that the department said had been mistakenly withheld during an earlier review.

The department said last week that it was working to determine if any records were improperly withheld after several news organizations reported that the massive tranche of records that had been made public didn't include some files documenting a series of interviews conducted in 2019 with a woman who made an allegation against Trump.

The accuser was interviewed by the FBI four times as it sought to assess her account but a summary of only one of those interviews had been included in the publicly released files.

On Thursday, the department said those files had been "incorrectly coded as duplicative," and therefore were inadvertently not published along with other investigative documents related to the disgraced financier, who killed himself while awaiting trial on sex trafficking charges in 2019.

"As we have consistently done, if any member of the public reported concerns with information in the library, the Department would review, make any corrections, and republish online," the department said in a post on X.

Trump has consistently denied any wrongdoing in connection with Epstein. The department noted in January that some of the documents contain "untrue and sensationalist claims against President Trump that were submitted to the FBI right before the 2020 election."

The new disclosures come as Attorney General Pam Bondi faces continued turmoil over the department's handling of the files released under a law passed by Congress after months of public and political

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pressure. Five Republicans on the House Oversight Committee joined Democrats in voting Wednesday to subpoena Bondi, demanding that she answer questions under oath in a sign of mounting frustration among members of the president's own party.

The Trump administration has faced constant political headaches since the rollout of the files began in December, with critics accusing the department of hiding certain documents or over-redacting files, or in some cases, not redacting enough. In some cases, the department inadvertently released nude photos showing the faces of potential victims as well as names, email addresses and other identifying information that was either unredacted or not fully obscured.

Department officials have defended their handling of the files, saying they took pains to release the files as quickly as possible under the law while also protecting victims. Department officials have said errors were inevitable given the volume of the materials, the number of lawyers viewing the files and the speed at which the department had to release them. The department has said it's entitled to withhold records that exposed potential abuse victims, were duplicates or protected by legal privileges, or related to an ongoing criminal investigation.

Some of the new records published Thursday pertained to a woman who contacted the FBI shortly after Epstein's 2019 arrest and claimed that a man named "Jeff" living in Hilton Head, South Carolina, had raped her there in the 1980s when she was around 13 years old. The woman told the agents she didn't know the man's identity at the time, but decades later concluded he was Jeffrey Epstein when a friend texted her his photo from a news story.

In a follow-up interview a month later, the woman added a host of other claims, including that Epstein had schemed to have her mother sent to prison, beaten her, arranged sexual encounters with other men and once flew her to either New Jersey or New York, where she claimed to have bitten Donald Trump after he tried to sexually assault her.

Agents spoke with the woman two more times, at one point asking her to provide more detail on her supposed interactions with Trump, but reported that she declined to answer additional questions and broke off contact. There's no indication that Epstein ever lived in South Carolina and it was unclear whether Trump and Epstein knew each other during the time period involved.

The woman's report was one of a number of uncorroborated, sometimes fantastical, reports that federal agents received from members of the public alleging misconduct by Trump and other famous people in the months and years after Epstein's arrest.

Study suggests Trump's unproven autism claims influenced care

By LAURA UNGAR AP Medical Writer

Last year, President Donald Trump told pregnant women not to take Tylenol as he promoted unproven ties between the fever reducer and autism and touted an old generic drug as a treatment for the developmental condition.

For nearly three months after that, new research found, Tylenol orders for pregnant women showing up in emergency rooms dropped and prescriptions of the generic drug for children rose. This happened despite sharp criticism of the president's message from doctor groups saying that the drug, leucovorin, shouldn't be broadly used for autism and Tylenol is safe during pregnancy.

"It just shows that in our country right now, health care has been politicized in a way that political messages are driving and impacting care — and not always for good," said Dr. Susan Sirota, a pediatrician in Highland Park, Illinois, who wasn't involved with the research.

Doctors, who published their work Thursday in *The Lancet*, looked at changes in drug ordering or prescribing compared with projected trends, or what might have happened if things had continued on the same path as before the White House briefing.

They found that orders for Tylenol — also known by the generic names acetaminophen and paracetamol — were 10% lower than predicted for pregnant emergency department patients aged 15 to 44. And outpatient prescriptions of leucovorin for children aged 5 to 17 were 71% higher than expected during the

same study period, late September to early December.

Researchers observed no similar shifts in comparable medications, suggesting the changes were directly tied to the briefing.

The research had limitations. For example, it didn't capture all Tylenol use by pregnant women because most people buy the painkiller over the counter outside of a hospital setting.

Still, it reflected how an unconventional news conference by a political leader could change not just patient behavior but prescribing as well, said co-author Dr. Michael Barnett.

In past administrations, "there are lots of layers of approval and expert consensus" before officials make big announcements about medical topics, said Barnett, who is with Brown University School of Public Health.

Pregnant women generally take Tylenol for pain or fever. Untreated fevers in pregnancy, particularly in the first trimester, increase the risk for miscarriages, preterm birth and other problems, according to the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine. Some studies have raised the possibility that taking Tylenol in pregnancy might be associated with a risk of autism, but many others haven't found a connection.

Leucovorin is a derivative of folic acid used for, among other things, reducing the toxic side effects of certain chemotherapy drugs and treating a rare blood disorder. It has also been studied for a neurological condition known as cerebral folate deficiency and for a subset of autistic children, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics.

The pediatrics group doesn't recommend routine use of the drug for autistic children. Early, small-scale studies have explored its use, "and some findings suggest potential benefit in carefully selected cases," the group said.

But evidence remains limited, the pediatrician group said. And in late January, the European Journal of Pediatrics retracted a study evaluating leucovorin as an autism treatment.

Still, after the federal announcement about the drug, Sirota said some families in her practice asked about getting it for their autistic children. She educated them about the evidence, told them about the potential for side effects and didn't prescribe it. Potential side effects include irritability, nausea and vomiting and skin issues like dermatitis.

Sirota said it has been hard to deal with the repercussions of government pronouncements like the ones on autism.

"It feels like a pattern with our government, right? They keep building on these houses of cards that just fall down," she said. "This politicizing of medicine just in general, and moving away from science, has been so challenging."

Britney Spears arrested on suspicion of driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs

By ANDREW DALTON and MIKE CATALINI undefined

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Britney Spears was arrested on suspicion of driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs near her Southern California home and released, authorities said. A statement from Spears' representative calls the arrest "inexcusable."

The California Highway Patrol said officers received a report shortly before 9 p.m. Wednesday that someone in a black BMW 430i was driving fast and erratically on U.S. 101 in Newbury Park, California in Ventura County near the Los Angeles County line.

The 44-year-old pop star, the only person in the car, exited the freeway and pulled over, a CHP statement said. She appeared to be impaired, took a series of field sobriety tests, was arrested on suspicion of driving under the influence of a combination of alcohol and drugs and was taken to a Ventura County jail, the CHP said. Chemical test results are pending and the case remains under investigation.

Spears was booked early Thursday morning and released at about 6 a.m., according to jail records.

"This was an unfortunate incident that is completely inexcusable," a statement from a Spears representative said. "Britney is going to take the right steps and comply with the law and hopefully this can be the first step in long overdue change that needs to occur in Britney's life. Hopefully, she can get the help and

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support she needs during this difficult time.”

The Ventura County District Attorney’s Office will determine whether charges will be filed. Spears has a May 4 court date scheduled.

The arrest was a few miles from Thousand Oaks, California where Spears has a home. The CHP listed her as living in nearby Westlake Village.

Born in Mississippi and raised in Louisiana, Spears was a teen pop phenomenon who became a defining superstar of the '90s and 2000s. She rose to fame from Disney Channel’s “The Mickey Mouse Club” to MTV and beyond, with such era-defining hits like “... Baby One More Time,” “Oops! ... I Did It Again” and “Toxic.”

Most of her albums have been certified platinum, according to the Recording Industry Association of America, with two diamond titles: 1999’s “... Baby One More Time” and 2000s “Oops! ... I Did It Again.” Her last full-length album, “Glory,” was released in 2016.

Spears became a focus of tabloids in the early 2000s, and a source of public scrutiny, as she battled mental illness and paparazzi documented the details of her private life.

Later, as cultural opinion evolved to recognize the misogynistic media coverage of the time, Spears’ fight to control her life became the focus of the #FreeBritney movement.

In 2008, Spears was placed under a court-ordered conservatorship, run primarily by her father and his lawyers, that would control her personal and financial decisions for well over a decade. It was dissolved in 2021. Two years later, she released a bestselling, tell-all memoir, “The Woman in Me.”

Millions of Americans under threat of tornadoes as spring storm season kicks in early in the US

By JEFF MARTIN Associated Press

Concern is rising that the first major storm outbreak on the verge of spring could strike the nation’s heartland, putting millions of Americans from Texas to Iowa at risk of potentially strong tornadoes.

Some scattered severe thunderstorms were expected to begin late Thursday in the Texas Panhandle and across western Oklahoma and parts of Kansas, the National Weather Service said. Large hail, damaging winds and possibly a few tornadoes were also expected, according to the forecasters.

Strongest storms and possible tornadoes are expected Friday

The strongest storms are forecast to develop Friday in a zone that includes much of Oklahoma, Kansas and Missouri and areas of some nearby states.

“This is probably our first real event this season where people are really starting to pay attention getting into the spring storm season,” said Melissa Mayes, deputy director of the Washington County Emergency Management Agency in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, north of Tulsa.

More than 6 million Americans are at the highest risk of severe weather Friday in an area that includes the metropolitan areas of Kansas City and Tulsa, Oklahoma, according to the national Storm Prediction Center. Another 22 million people are at a slightly lesser risk in a zone that includes Oklahoma City; St. Louis; Omaha, Nebraska; and Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

“We’re right in the middle of it,” said John Stipetich, deputy emergency management director in Douglas County, Kansas, home to the University of Kansas.

Stipetich has been working this week with forecasters to glean details of what’s expected and then turn that into a situation report he can share with schools, government agencies and others in the community.

Warm air from Gulf is clashing with cold air from Canada

The general setup for the strong storms is a clash between warm air streaming north from the Gulf Coast and cooler Canadian air behind cold fronts, according to meteorologists with the private forecasting service AccuWeather.

In parts of the eastern U.S., this weather pattern is also expected to usher in extremely warm temperatures for this time of year by the weekend.

“Temperatures will be 20-30 degrees above average, with 80s reaching as far north as parts of the Ohio

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Valley and Mid-Atlantic," federal forecasters wrote in their long-range forecast discussion. "Daily records could become widespread."

The high temperature in Louisville, Kentucky, for instance, is expected to reach 81 degrees (27.2 Celsius) by Friday, the weather service predicts. Atlanta's high temperature is expected to hit 82 degrees (27.8 Celsius) by Saturday. The forecast for Washington, D.C., calls for a high temperature of 74 degrees (23.3 Celsius) on Saturday.

Storms come near the start of tornado season

The spring storms in the forecast come near the start of what many call tornado season, which generally begins at different times in different parts of the United States.

In what has historically been known as Tornado Alley — a designation that typically includes Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas — the peak of tornado season is May into early June. But the season starts earlier in what is often called Dixie Alley made up of southern states such as Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia.

Safety experts urge people to be ready before storms strike

Experts recommend a few simple safety steps to take before tornadoes hit.

For Mayes and other emergency managers at this time of year, social media is a key tool for raising awareness of the risks that storm season brings.

"We will probably start pushing out some safety tips this afternoon," she said.

In Lawrence, Kansas, emergency managers must deliver information and warnings to a mix of university students, staff and visitors who might not be familiar with Kansas weather.

"Even people who have lived in Kansas their whole life sometimes get confused about what the siren means," Stipetich said. "If you hear the siren, there's a tornado coming and you need to take cover."

Stocks drop after oil spikes to its highest price since the summer of 2024

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Stocks sank on Wall Street Thursday after the price of oil spiked to its highest level since the summer of 2024 because of the war with Iran.

The S&P 500 fell 0.6% and erased what had been a small gain for the year so far. The Dow Jones Industrial Average briefly dropped more than 1,100 points before finishing with a loss of 784, or 1.6%. The Nasdaq composite slipped 0.3%.

The losses came as financial markets around the world keep following the cue of oil prices. Sharp increases there are raising worries that a long-term surge could grind down the global economy, exhaust households' ability to spend and push interest rates higher.

The price for a barrel of benchmark U.S. crude shot up 8.5% Thursday to settle at \$81.01 per barrel. Brent crude, the international standard, climbed 4.9% to \$85.41 per barrel and is likewise near its highest price since 2024.

Oil prices gave back some of those gains later in the day, which helped stocks in the U.S. moderate their losses at the end of trading. But worries nevertheless remain high about how long disruptions will last for oil production because of the escalating war with Iran.

Prices at U.S. gasoline pumps have already leaped because of them. The average price for a gallon is \$3.25, up 9% from \$2.98 a week ago, according to auto club AAA.

If oil prices spike further, like to \$100 per barrel, and stay there, some analysts and investors say it could be too much for the global economy to withstand. Uncertainty about what will happen has caused frenetic swings across financial markets this week, sometimes hour by hour.

Much will depend on what happens with the Strait of Hormuz. Roughly a fifth of the world's oil typically sails through the narrow waterway off Iran's coast.

To be sure, the U.S. stock market has a history of bouncing back relatively quickly following conflicts in the Middle East and elsewhere, as long as oil prices don't jump too high for too long. That has many

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professional investors suggesting patience and riding through the market's swings.

"While further escalation remains a risk, we think the more likely outcome is an increase in market risk aversion that likely lasts only a short time until investors can see a winding down of hostilities," according to Scott Wren, senior global market strategist at Wells Fargo Investment Institute.

The S&P 500 is down only 0.7% for the week so far, despite its sharp swings, as gains for Big Tech stocks and oil producers have helped to blunt losses across the rest of the market.

Stocks of airlines fell to some of the U.S. market's worst losses again on Thursday. Higher oil prices are increasing their already big fuel bills, while the war has left hundreds of thousands of passengers stranded across the Middle East.

American Airlines lost 5.4%, United Airlines fell 5% and Delta Air Lines sank 3.9%.

Stocks of smaller companies, meanwhile, took heavy hits. That's typical when worries are growing about the strength of the economy and about interest rates rising. The Russell 2000 index of the smallest stocks fell a market-leading 1.9%.

Wall Street's drop would have been worse if not for Broadcom. The chip company's stock rose 4.8% after it reported stronger profit and revenue for the latest quarter than analysts expected. It's one of Wall Street's most influential stocks because it's one of the biggest by total value, and CEO Hock Tan said it benefited from a 74% jump in revenue for AI chips.

All told, the S&P 500 fell 38.79 points to 6,830.71. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 784.67 to 47,954.74, and the Nasdaq composite slipped 58.50 to 22,748.99.

In the bond market, Treasury yields climbed as rising oil prices put more upward pressure on inflation, which could keep the Federal Reserve from cutting interest rates.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury rose to 4.13% from 4.09% late Wednesday and from just 3.97% before the war with Iran started.

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, which would grind 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.

In stock markets abroad, indexes rebounded in Asia following historic losses the day before. South Korea's Kospi soared 9.6% to recover much of its 12.1% plunge from Wednesday, which was its worst drop ever.

But indexes fell in Europe as oil prices began to accelerate. France's CAC 40 fell 1.5%, and Germany's DAX lost 1.6%.

Every facet of Iran's military and theocracy is under assault. These images show the damage

By LEE KEATH, SARAH EL DEEB and MICHAEL BIESECKER Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — The U.S. and Israel are striking a much wider array of targets in Iran than they did during 12 days of war last summer, when their focus was on the country's nuclear enrichment sites. Now, the aim appears to be destroying Iran's military and weakening the grip of its theocratic rulers, experts say.

U.S. Central Command alone says it has hit more than 2,000 targets in less than a week, a far heavier barrage than any American bombing campaign in the Middle East in more than a decade, according to Airwars, an independent group that tracks global conflicts. Israel says it has hit hundreds of sites.

From the capital of Tehran to cities across the country, the U.S. and Israeli airstrikes have bombarded the Islamic Republic -- its leaders, military bases, weapons factories, soldiers and police, and state TV.

The totality of the damage is not clear. But it is "a more significant blow than anyone expected might happen in such a short time," Armed Conflict Location and Event Data, an independent monitoring group, said in a statement. Still, even after the killing of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the emergency leadership team still appears to have "the ability for domestic coercion," said the group, which goes by

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the acronym ACLED.

The mounting death toll is also difficult to independently assess because of poor communications. An Iranian government agency says at least 1,230 people have been killed. More than 165 people were killed when a school in southeastern Iran was hit, most of them of children, according to Iranian state media.

Here is a deeper look at what has been targeted so far:

Many top officials have been killed

U.S. and Israeli strikes hit Khamenei's residential compound in central Tehran, killing him in the opening barrages on Feb. 28. Airstrikes also killed the defense minister, the head of the Republican Guard, Khamenei's top security adviser and other senior figures.

A religious site connected to Khamenei's predecessor was partially destroyed, and an airstrike smashed a hole through the dome of a building belonging to the Assembly of Experts, a council of senior Shiite clerics tasked with appointing the next supreme leader.

The Revolutionary Guard and Basij come under heavy fire

Many airstrikes have been directed at the Revolutionary Guard, Iran's most powerful military force, and the Basij, a paramilitary force that brutally enforces Islamic law and crushes any public dissent.

In more than 280 strikes that ACLED documented as of Wednesday, over 20% targeted Revolutionary Guard or Basij positions, mostly in Tehran and in western and southern Iran. Garrisons, air bases, underground complexes, ammunition depots, weapons factories and command buildings have all been attacked.

At the Revolutionary Guard's headquarters in northern Tehran, several buildings have been demolished, according to satellite photos from Vantor, a U.S. imaging company. Small, local branches of the Basij have also been targeted, according to ACLED.

On Thursday, two sports facilities in Tehran were struck, including the sprawling Azadi Sports Complex, where Iran once hoped to host the Olympics. There is now a giant hole in the roof of a 12,000-person arena, according to video verified by AP. The Guard and Basij have been known to use sports facilities as mobilizing points.

Not every bomb delivers meaningful impact. "A lot of empty buildings" are also being struck, ACLED said.

Destroying missile factories and storage sites is a priority

Eliminating Iran's missile arsenal and launchers is a top priority, Israeli and U.S. officials say.

A suspected missile site deep in the barren mountains overlooking the central city of Isfahan was struck, as was another outside the western city of Kermanshah. There, roads leading into tunnels beneath a mountain are now pockmarked with craters, according to satellite photos provided by Planet Labs PBC.

On the outskirts of Tehran, several buildings at the Garmdarah missile site were also heavily damaged.

Before the war, Iran was believed to have several thousand short- and medium-range missiles. It is still firing missiles and drones at Israel, American bases in the Persian Gulf, and at energy facilities across the region. A senior Western official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence matters, said Iran has several days' worth of ballistic missiles if it continues firing at current rates, but it may hold some back to wage a longer campaign.

The military and national police are key targets

Many buildings and assets belonging to Iran's armed forces have been hit. Satellite photos from Vantor show a capsized ship in the waters of the Konarak Naval Base on Iran's southern coast after strikes there. A U.S. submarine sank an Iranian warship off the coast of Sri Lanka, which on Wednesday recovered 87 bodies and rescued 32 Iranian sailors.

Manufacturers with ties to the military have also been attacked. In the central city of Isfahan, ACLED documented a strike on Isfahan Optics Industries, which is under international sanctions for its suspected connections to Iran's nuclear program.

At the main police headquarters in Tehran, strikes flattened multiple buildings, according to satellite photos from Planet Labs. The national police, commanded by a Revolutionary Guard general, is key to Iran's internal security apparatus and has been involved in violently halting anti-government protests.

Local police stations have also been in the line of fire, including one across the street from Tehran's Grand Bazaar, where protests began in late December that swelled into massive nationwide demonstra-

tions across the country, before being crushed in early January.

Iranian state TV still on air after multiple barrages

The state TV and radio broadcaster IRIB has faced multiple barrages, though it has continued to stay on air. Its main headquarters, located in a large park in northern Tehran, shows signs of damage.

A strike on Sunday hit an IRIB station elsewhere in the capital, bringing down an antenna. The strike caused heavy damage to the Gandhi Hospital across the street, shattering its façade and sending debris across its wards inside.

So far, nuclear facilities have not been a focus of the attacks

Nuclear facilities have not appeared to be a priority yet, though Israel has indicated it will attack them. Satellite images on Monday show newly damaged buildings at the Natanz nuclear facility in central Iran, the country's main enrichment site. The International Atomic Energy Agency said there was "no radiological consequence expected."

The Israeli military said it also struck mountains north of Tehran where it said Iran had secretly moved some nuclear activities to underground bunkers after June's 12-day war.

Iran maintains its program is peaceful, though its officials had threatened to pursue a bomb while enriching uranium to near-weapons-grade levels.

More than 20 states sue over new global tariffs Trump imposed after his stinging Supreme Court loss

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST and PAUL WISEMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Some two dozen states challenged President Donald Trump's new global tariffs on Thursday, filing a lawsuit over import taxes he imposed after a stinging loss at the Supreme Court.

The Democratic attorneys general and governors in the lawsuit argue that Trump is overstepping his power with planned 15% tariffs on much of the world.

Trump has said the tariffs are essential to reduce America's longstanding trade deficits. He imposed duties under Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974 after the Supreme Court struck down tariffs he imposed last year under an emergency powers law.

Section 122, which has never been invoked, allows the president to impose tariffs of up to 15%. They are limited to five months unless extended by Congress.

The lawsuit is led by attorneys general from Oregon, Arizona, California and New York.

"The focus right now should be on paying people back, not doubling down on illegal tariffs," said Oregon Attorney General Dan Rayfield. The suit comes a day after a judge ruled that companies who paid tariffs under Trump's old framework should get refunds.

White House vows vigorous defense

The White House said Trump is acting within his power. "The President is using his authority granted by Congress to address fundamental international payments problems and to deal with our country's large and serious balance-of-payments deficits," said spokesman Kush Desai. "The Administration will vigorously defend the President's action in court."

The new suit argues that Trump can't pivot to Section 122 because it was intended to be used only in specific, limited circumstances — not for sweeping import taxes. It also contends the tariffs will drive up costs for states, businesses and consumers.

Arizona Attorney General Kris Mayes pointed to a New York Federal Reserve Bank study that found Americans largely bear the cost of the tariffs, which has been estimated at \$1,200 a year per household. "That is money out of the pockets of American families trying to buy groceries, pay rent and keep their small businesses afloat," Mayes said.

Many of the plaintiff states also successfully sued over Trump's tariffs imposed under a different law: the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA).

Four days after the Supreme Court struck down his sweeping IEEPA tariffs Feb. 20, Trump invoked Section 122 to slap 10% tariffs on foreign goods. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent told CNBC on Wednesday

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that the administration would raise the levies to the 15% limit this week.

The Democratic states and other critics say the president can't use Section 122 as a replacement for the defunct tariffs to combat the trade deficit.

The Section 122 provision is aimed at what it calls "fundamental international payments problems." At issue is whether that wording covers trade deficits, the gap between what the U.S. sells other countries and what it buys from them.

Section 122 arose from the financial crises that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s when the U.S. dollar was tied to gold. Other countries were dumping dollars in exchange for gold at a set rate, risking a collapse of the U.S. currency and chaos in financial markets. But the dollar is no longer linked to gold, so critics say Section 122 is obsolete.

Awkwardly for Trump, his own Justice Department argued in a court filing last year that the president needed to invoke the emergency powers act because Section 122 did "not have any obvious application" in fighting trade deficits, which it called "conceptually distinct" from balance-of-payment issues.

Still, some legal analysts say the Trump administration has a stronger case this time.

"The legal reality is that courts will likely provide President Trump substantially more deference regarding Section 122 than they did to his previous tariffs under IEEPA," Peter Harrell, visiting scholar at Georgetown University's Institute of International Economic Law, wrote in a commentary Wednesday.

The specialized Court of International Trade in New York, which will hear the states' lawsuit, wrote last year in its own decision striking down the emergency-powers tariffs that Trump didn't need them because Section 122 was available to combat trade deficits.

Trump does have other legal authorities he can use to impose tariffs, and some have already survived court tests. Duties that Trump imposed on Chinese imports during his first term under Section 301 of the same 1974 trade act are still in place.

Also joining the lawsuit are the attorneys general of Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin, and the governors of Kentucky and Pennsylvania.

Cornyn goes on offense against Paxton as Republicans await Trump's endorsement

By THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

As Texas waits on President Donald Trump's promised endorsement, Sen. John Cornyn isn't holding back on his runoff opponent in the Republican primary.

His campaign is releasing a new video Thursday with a litany of ethical and personal accusations against state Attorney General Ken Paxton. It's an initial salvo in a second round of campaigning that could be even more bitter and expensive than the first.

The video revisits issues like Paxton's impeachment trial on corruption charges, which ended in an acquittal but exposed an extramarital affair, and a state fraud indictment for securities fraud, which Paxton resolved with a plea deal without admitting guilt.

Cornyn's team said it's spending tens of thousands of dollars to keep the video in front of voters' eyes. It's pocket change in a race where spending surpassed \$110 million before Tuesday, but a possible foreshadowing of a future deluge if the six-minute clip is edited into television spots.

Trump did not endorse a candidate in the primary, frustrating Republicans who fear that they're wasting time and resources in Texas that could be devoted to more competitive battleground states. The president said Wednesday that he would weigh in on the May 26 runoff and expect the candidate without his endorsement to drop out, but he hasn't announced a decision.

Cornyn narrowly finished first in the primary that ended on Tuesday, but he did not cross the 50%-plus threshold necessary to avoid a runoff. U.S. Rep. Wesley Hunt finished third and was disqualified.

Party leaders are pushing for Cornyn, a stalwart incumbent seeking his fifth term, and warn that Paxton has too much baggage to be successful in a November general election against James Talarico, the

Democratic nominee.

But Paxton has proven resilient to attacks over the years, and he's fashioned himself as a political warrior for Trump's "Make America Great Again" movement. He told conservative influencer Benny Johnson that he wouldn't drop out, no matter what happens with the endorsement.

"I'm going to give people in Texas a choice," Paxton said. "The people in Washington can have their own opinion. The president can have his own opinion."

Paxton made a different offer on social media. There, he said he would consider dropping out if Senate Republican leaders lifted the filibuster to pass legislation supported by Trump to create strict new proof-of-citizenship requirements for voting. The proposal has stalled in the Senate.

Trump appeared frustrated by Paxton's intransigence.

"That is bad for him," he told Politico. "So maybe, maybe that leads me to go the other direction."

The president previously wrote on social media that he would endorse a Texas candidate because the divisive contest cannot "be allowed to go on any longer."

Hegseth urges Latin American allies to go on offense against drug cartels

By JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth on Thursday urged Latin American countries to take a more aggressive approach against drug cartels, warning that the Trump administration would be forced to act by itself if governments fail to effectively combat criminal organizations that directly threaten the United States and border security.

"America is prepared to take on these threats and go on the offense alone if necessary," Hegseth said in a speech at U.S. Southern Command in Miami with defense officials from allied governments around the region.

Hegseth spoke at what the Pentagon billed as the first "Americas Counter Cartel Conference," with representatives from Argentina, Honduras and the Dominican Republic among more than a dozen conservative governments closely aligned with President Donald Trump. Most of the military leaders came to Florida with their presidents, who on Saturday are scheduled to attend a summit with Trump at his nearby golf club.

The defense secretary said the U.S. and Latin America had a shared Christian heritage and that it was at stake as a result of decades of inaction and a purely law enforcement approach to fighting organized crime and terrorist networks in the Western Hemisphere.

"Business as usual will not stand," he said, pledging U.S. support to combat cartels, restore deterrence and "make the Americas great again."

His comments were echoed by Stephen Miller, the deputy White House chief of staff who is a key architect of Trump's aggressive stance in the region.

"Cartels that operate in this hemisphere are the ISIS (Islamic State group) and al-Qaida of this hemisphere and must be treated just as ruthlessly," Miller said, adding that "hard power" and lethal force — not criminal justice — must be used to repel the groups.

"The human rights that we are going to protect are not those of the savages that rape, torture and murder but those of the average citizens," he said.

The meetings come as the Republican administration seeks to leverage military assets to restore dominance in the hemisphere while now also fighting a war in Iran.

When Trump took office in January 2025, he pledged a renewed focus on Latin American, a strategic pivot that his national security strategy describes as the "Trump Corollary" to the 19th-century Monroe Doctrine, which sought to ban European incursions in the Americas. Key to that objective is a greater reliance on the U.S. military to neutralize drug cartels long blamed for soaring crime and murder rates that hold back Latin America's economic potential and fuel migration to the United States.

"For too long, leaders in Washington abandoned the simple wisdom of the Monroe Doctrine," Hegseth said, referring to Trump's focus on the region's security as the "Donroe Doctrine."

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Trump early on designated cartels from Mexico and Venezuela as foreign terrorist organizations. Later, he declared that Washington was in "armed conflict" with those groups.

The extraordinary assertion of presidential power to combat drug trafficking is at the heart of the White House's legal rationale for dozens of strikes on suspected drug smugglers in the Caribbean Sea and Eastern Pacific Ocean — so far, 44 boat strikes that have resulted in at least 150 deaths.

A massive naval deployment, unseen in Latin America since the end of the Cold War, also paved the way for the U.S. military operation in early January that captured Venezuela's then-president, Nicolas Maduro. He is now facing drug charges in New York.

Trump's approach has won support among conservatives in the region such as El Salvador's Nayib Bukele, who rode to power on promises to use a "mano dura" — iron fist — against criminal groups. Just this week, Ecuador for the first time carried out joint operations with U.S. military forces against organized crime groups.

But relying on the military to supplant the role traditionally performed by civilian law enforcement entails risks in a region where military institutions and oversight are weaker, armed forces have a legacy of human rights abuses and corruption is a perennial challenge.

"Without strong rule-of-law institutions and civilian oversight, militarizing the fight against cartels can weaken the very institutions needed to defeat them," said Rebecca Bill Chavez, president of the Inter-American Dialogue and a former deputy assistant defense secretary for Western Hemisphere affairs.

'Christ is king' becomes a loaded phrase in US political debates, especially on the right

By PETER SMITH Associated Press

On its own, the phrase "Christ is king" sums up a core tenet of the Christian faith, that Jesus is the divine ruler of the universe. Catholics and many Protestants celebrate a Christ the King Sunday each year.

But the ancient proclamation can morph into something political, controversial or even sinister, depending on who says it and how it's said.

In recent years, "Christ is king" and similar phrases have been chanted at political rallies, posted on social media and proclaimed in speeches by voices on the right.

At times the phrase is used to support the notion of America as a Christian nation or as one that owes its allegiance specifically to the Christian God. Some current Cabinet officials and recent members of Congress have used the phrase in speeches and on social media.

But other times, political activists have paired "Christ is king" with anti-Zionist statements or negative Jewish stereotypes.

The phrase has gained popularity among far-right figures and their followers. Conservative influencer Candace Owens, who shares antisemitic conspiracies, sells branded "Christ is King" coffee mugs and T-shirts.

The controversy connects to a larger schism on the right, with some conservatives pushing back against an increasingly vocal faction whose denunciations of Israel, critics say, often combine with blatant anti-semitism. Some of the latter group insist they're not antisemitic, just anti-Zionist. That itself is a sharp break from what was once a near-consensus of pro-Israel sentiment among Republicans.

But there are times when the use of the phrase "Christ is king" is unquestionably hostile toward Jews, said a 2025 report by the Rutgers University-affiliated Network Contagion Research Institute.

Analyzing social media postings between 2021 and 2024, the institute reported a dramatic increase of the phrase "Christ is king," often used as a hate meme targeting Jews. The report lamented this deviation from its historical use as a hopeful, sacred affirmation with biblical roots.

"The weaponization or hijacking of 'Christ is King' represents a disturbing inversion of its original intent. Rather than sacralizing shared values, extremists have exploited this religious expression to justify hatred," the report said.

Controversy spotlighted at religious liberty hearing

A recent meeting of the Religious Liberty Commission, a group President Donald Trump created and

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appointed, put the phrase and related controversies in the spotlight.

At a Feb. 9 hearing focused on antisemitism, a witness, Seth Dillon, spoke of often hearing people use the phrase "Christ is king" followed immediately by a highly contemptuous slur toward Jews.

"This should offend every Christian," said Dillon, the CEO of the conservative satirical site The Babylon Bee.

Commission member Carrie Prejean Boller repeatedly grilled witnesses about whether opposing Zionism could be construed as anti-Jewish. She said that as a Catholic she opposes Zionism but that this is not antisemitic. She asked Dillon if he thought "saying 'Christ is king' is antisemitic."

Dillon said no and that, as a Christian, he regularly declares that "Christ is my king" — but context matters.

He testified that the phrase has been co-opted by Groypers, alluding to the followers of far-right influencer Nick Fuentes, who has spread antisemitic views.

It's "using the Lord's name in an abusive manner," Dillon said.

Fuentes' supporters chanted "Christ is king" at the Million MAGA March, a November 2020 rally denying the Republican Trump's defeat to Democrat Joe Biden in that year's presidential election.

Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, a Republican who chairs the Religious Liberty Commission, announced Prejean Boller's removal from the panel after the meeting. He asserted that she tried to "hijack" the hearing for her own agenda.

Following the commission meeting, Prejean Boller has posted prolifically on X, denouncing "Zionist supremacists" and repeatedly using the phrase "Christ is King." She also has denounced the war launched by the U.S. and Israel against Iran.

A recent Catholic convert, she said she opposes a popular evangelical view that modern-day Israel exists in fulfillment of biblical prophecy.

A religious phrase 'co-opted by extremist figures'

The commission hearing was hardly the first forum to air controversy over "Christ is king."

The Network Contagion Research Institute's 2025 report noted that while many "Christ is king" references on social media are strictly religious, the phrase has been "systematically co-opted by extremist figures."

The report said Fuentes and other extremists use the phrase as a "white supremacist mantra publicizing their antisemitic beliefs."

Fuentes has said the Holocaust was exaggerated, and he has denounced "organized Jewry in America." He has claimed to be in battle with "satanic, globalist elites," an antisemitic trope.

The religious phrase "Christ is king" is not inherently political, said Brian Kaylor, president and editor-in-chief of Word&Way, a progressive site covering faith and politics.

But that fact provides a "deniability" to those politicizing it, he said.

"We're at a dangerous point with the phrase 'Christ is king' because of the heavy activity and use of it on the far right in very fascist, antisemitic ways," said Kaylor, a Baptist minister and author of several books on religion and politics. "We're at the danger of that phrase losing its meaning to where this new antisemitic use is the dominant definition."

The phrase has also gained popularity in political settings with some on the Catholic and evangelical right who are strongly pro-Israel and have repeatedly denounced antisemitism, such as Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

Kaylor said the phrase is often used as "a declaration of Christian nationalism" asserting that "the nation should be brought under the dictates of Christ."

A dispute over politics and religion

The controversy has highlighted both religious and political fissures.

The Vatican has diplomatic relations with Israel and has also recognized a state of Palestine. Pope Leo XIV has called for a two-state solution while denouncing antisemitism. During the Israel-Hamas war, popes Francis and Leo denounced the Oct. 7, 2023, attacks by Hamas and Israel's massive military response, with Leo demanding a halt to Israel's "collective punishment" of Gaza's population.

Other Catholics on the Religious Liberty Commission noted that Jesus and his followers were Jews and that a seminal 1965 Vatican document rejects antisemitism and the blaming of all Jews, including those alive today, for Jesus' crucifixion.

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Patrick, the commission chairman, said the dispute with Prejean Boller reflects "a real problem with a very small group in our Republican Party." Antisemitism needs to be repudiated or "this is going to destroy our party," he said on "The Mark Levin Show," a podcast.

But Prejean Boller has galvanized supporters from a staunchly conservative group called Catholics for Catholics, a lay-led, self-described "militant organization dedicated to the evangelization of this great country."

It plans to honor Prejean Boller at a March 19 event with a Catholic Champion Award in Washington featuring speakers such as Owens.

Prejean Boller has reposted announcements of the event on X, including one post that shared a Spanish-language statement that translates to "We will not rest until we convert the USA into a Catholic nation." The post concluded in English with "Christ is King!"

Doubles and triples are dwindling in MLB. Blame better outfielders and sluggers

By JAY COHEN AP Baseball Writer

GLENDALE, Ariz. (AP) — All those missing doubles and triples, well, Los Angeles Dodgers manager Dave Roberts thinks he knows where at least some of them went.

Over the fence.

"I think that guys chase exit velocity and launch angle so that doesn't lend itself to balls in the gap or down the lines," Roberts said. "So I think that's the whole crux for me."

While singles and home runs were up in the majors last year, the number of doubles and triples continued to decline. There were 7,745 doubles, down from 7,771 in 2024 and 8,254 a decade ago in 2016, according to Sportradar. Triples dropped to 628, compared to 697 in 2024 and 873 in 2016.

In an effort to create more action on the basepaths, Major League Baseball made the bases bigger when it changed some of its rules before the 2023 season. There was an increase in doubles, triples and steals that same year before doubles and triples resumed their downward trend.

It likely means less of a particularly exciting moment in a baseball game, when a crowd collectively leans forward and cheers in anticipation as a player runs toward second or third with a throw on the way.

"I guess you could say yeah, it loses something, but I think there's also a gain in some other things," Chicago White Sox outfielder Andrew Benintendi said. "People like home runs and more stolen-base opportunities."

The decline in doubles and triples can be traced to a variety of factors, beginning with defensive positioning.

While the 2023 rules package included limitations on infield shifts, there are no such restrictions on outfielders. And they are often playing deeper to guard against extra-base hits, helped by cards they keep in their back pockets that detail a hitter's tendencies.

"When I was playing, it was kind of, you want to play shallow to take away the singles," said Roberts, a former major league outfielder, "but nowadays you're playing for damage, and so outfields play considerably deeper than they used to."

Nolan Arenado remembers it like it was yesterday. The eight-time All-Star was playing for St. Louis on May 23, 2022, when he recorded the highest exit velocity of his career, a 111.4 mph liner on a 1-1 pitch from Toronto right-hander José Berríos in the bottom of the second inning. The ball went over the head of shortstop Bo Bichette before it was cut off by center fielder Bradley Zimmer.

"Yeah. Single," said Arenado, who was traded to Arizona in January. "And you know a few years back that probably would have been just an automatic double. ... So that was the first time I really noticed it. The defense alignment, it changes everything. You know you really got to hit a ball in the gap or you got to hit it down the line to get doubles."

Texas Rangers president of baseball operations Chris Young also pointed to the evolution of defensive alignment.

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"Every team has their own model and I think does a really good job of positioning," said Young, a former major league pitcher.

Ballpark dimensions also have played a role. The New York Mets have made multiple changes to Citi Field since it opened in 2009, bringing in the fences to make the ballpark more hitter friendly. The Detroit Tigers altered the outfield at Comerica Park before the 2023 season, lowering the walls and moving in some areas. The Kansas City Royals made some adjustments to Kauffman Stadium this year.

Citi Field and Yankee Stadium, which also hosted its first game in 2009, are two of the majors' least friendly ballparks when it comes to doubles and triples, according to Statcast's park factors leaderboard. Globe Life Field, which opened in 2020, also ranks in the bottom 10 in each category over the previous three years combined.

"Pitching is pretty good. I think maybe some of the outfielders, they're bringing fences in," Cincinnati Reds manager Terry Francona said. "You don't hear anybody moving the fences back. So there's a few ballparks, like Detroit, right-center. Kansas City was a big one. Now they moved them in. You're not going to see a ton in our ballpark, just the way we're configured. Right field's not very big."

It's 325 feet down the line in right in Cincinnati's Great American Ball Park. The short porch in right field at Yankee Stadium is 314 feet from home plate. Tampa Bay's Tropicana Field, which reopens this season, is 315 feet on the left-field line and 322 to right.

Major league outfielders also are more athletic than before, cutting down on the balls that used to roll all the way to the wall — leading to extra bases.

"Now, if you are a negative defensively, you have to hit at such a ridiculously high level in order to be even a starting player," Chicago Cubs second baseman Nico Hoerner said. "So there just aren't many players out there that are negatives defensively at this point."

Chaos sown by Iran's attacks across the Persian Gulf is key to its strategy

By JON GAMBRELL and JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — For years, Iran's theocratic government warned it would blanket the Middle East with missile and drone fire if it felt its existence was threatened.

Now, the Islamic Republic is doing just that.

Since the U.S. and Israel launched the war Saturday and killed Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran has unleashed thousands of drones and ballistic missiles targeting Israel, American military bases and embassies in the region, and energy facilities across the Persian Gulf. Iranian fire has even been directed over its borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan.

Iran's basic strategy is to instill fear about the dangers of a widening war in hopes that allies of the U.S. will apply enough pressure to halt their campaign. A protracted conflict, along with American and Israeli casualties, could also work in Iran's favor.

But the barrage-thy-neighbors strategy also could backfire.

A bid to wear down regional defenses and instill fear

Iran's first priority is to emerge from the war with its state institutions intact, said Ellie Geranmayeh, deputy director of the Middle East and North Africa program at the European Council on Foreign Relations.

"Iran is upping the costs for this U.S. military campaign and regionalizing it from the get-go, as they promised they would if America restarts the war again with Iran," she said. The U.S. joined Israel last June in a 12-day war, targeting nuclear enrichment sites. Iran maintains its program is peaceful, though its officials had threatened to pursue a bomb while enriching uranium to near-weapons-grade levels.

Iran's leaders believe that by inflicting casualties and disrupting energy production to drive up oil and gas prices, America's allies or an unsettled public back home will pressure U.S. President Donald Trump to ease back.

"The Iranians are banking on basically out-stomaching him, and exhausting him and his allies to the

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point where they would basically have a diplomatic off-ramp," Geranmayeh said. Trump is unpredictable, Geranmayeh said, but for now he appears to be pressing for "unconditional surrender to his demands, rather than a negotiated settlement."

The U.S. and Israel have carried out hundreds of airstrikes and inflicted heavy damage on Iranian government, military and nuclear targets. Despite being greatly outgunned, Iran has continued to fire ballistic missiles into Israel, killing 11 people and disrupting life for millions of Israelis. More have been killed in the Gulf Arab states, and the U.S.-Israeli campaign has killed 1,045 people in Iran.

After more than two years of war in the Gaza Strip, the Israeli public appears to have little appetite for another lengthy round of fighting. Polls suggest the U.S. public is leery of a protracted conflict.

Friends and onetime foes hit alike by Iran

The American and Israeli onslaught came after failed U.S.-Iranian talks over Iran's nuclear program and the West's sanctions.

Trump said Monday his four objectives were to destroy Iran's missile capabilities, wipe out its navy, prevent it from obtaining a nuclear weapon and ensure that it cannot continue to support allied armed groups.

The Iranian response has spared no one in the region — not even Oman, which mediated the latest round of nuclear talks and for decades has maintained a close relationship to Iran. In the 1970s, Iran's shah helped the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said put down a rebellion.

But now Oman has been dragged into the conflict. An Omani port and ships off its coast have been targeted by Iranian missiles. Oman's port at Duqm helped the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier with pre-deployment logistics.

Saudi Arabia, which has maintained a detente with Tehran since 2023, also came in the crosshairs this week. Its Ras Tanura oil refinery has been repeatedly attacked and the U.S. Embassy in Riyadh got hit by drones — an embarrassing moment for Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who has worked to cultivate a close relationship with Trump.

Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, which also have close ties to Trump, have been repeatedly targeted, too.

Missile math grows more important

There's a grim math equation at play as the war goes on. Iran has a finite number of missiles and drones, just as the Gulf Arab states, the U.S. and Israel all have a limited number of interceptor missiles capable of downing the incoming fire.

U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said Wednesday that thousands of Iranian missiles and drones have been "intercepted and vaporized" during the war. The Israeli military says it has destroyed dozens of missile launchers.

From the American and Israeli side, targeting missiles and their launchers remains key. Both countries had to shoot down Iranian missiles during the war in June and multiple times in the Israel-Hamas war.

"In simple terms, we are focused on shooting all the things that can shoot at us," said U.S. Navy Adm. Brad Cooper, the head of the American military's Central Command.

A senior Western official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence matters, said Iran has several days' worth of ballistic missiles if it continues firing at current rates, but it may hold some back to wage a longer campaign.

The Israeli military says there have been far fewer Iranian missiles launched in recent days as a result of the airstrikes — though warning sirens often wailed across Israel on Wednesday into Thursday.

Iran's strategy may be backfiring

Iran's strategy of trying to threaten energy security, drive a wedge between Gulf and Western states and raise costs is "backfiring," said Hasan Alhasan, a Middle East expert with the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies.

"It's driving and pushing the Gulf states into closer alignment with the United States," he said.

"The Gulf states can't simply sit idle and continue absorbing indefinite attacks to their critical infrastructure and to civilians in Gulf cities," Alhasan said. They are probably trying to both acquire more weapons

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to intercept incoming fire and find ways to broker an end to the war, he said.

Iran's foreign minister has suggested his country's military units are now isolated and acting independently from any central government control, a possible excuse for Iran's increasingly erratic fire.

"They are acting based on instructions — you know, general instructions — given to them in advance," Abbas Araghchi told Al Jazeera on Sunday.

But after a Wednesday phone call with Araghchi, Qatar's prime minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, "categorically rejected" his assertion that Iranian missiles were only directed at American interests and not intended to target Qatar.

Today in History: March 6, Supreme Court issues Dred Scott decision

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, March 6, the 65th day of 2026. There are 300 days left in the year.

On March 6, 1857, the U.S. Supreme Court, in the Dred Scott v. Sandford decision, ruled 7-2 that Scott, an enslaved person, was not a U.S. citizen and therefore could not sue for his freedom in federal court; it also ruled that slavery could not be banned from any federal territory. The decision deepened the national divide over slavery in the years leading up to the Civil War.

In 1820, President James Monroe signed the Missouri Compromise, which allowed Missouri to join the Union as a slave state and Maine to join as a free state, while banning slavery in the northern portion of the Louisiana Territory.

In 1836, the Alamo in San Antonio, Texas, fell as Mexican forces led by General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna stormed the fortress after a 13-day siege; the battle claimed the lives of all the Texian defenders, including William Travis, James Bowie and Davy Crockett.

In 1869, chemist Dmitri Mendeleev introduced his concept of a periodic table of elements at a meeting of the Russian Chemical Society in St. Petersburg.

In 1912, Oreo cookies were first introduced by the National Biscuit Company (later known as Nabisco).

In 1951, the trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg on federal espionage charges began in New York. (Both were subsequently found guilty, sentenced to death and then executed in 1953).

In 1964, heavyweight boxing champion Cassius Clay took a new name given to him by Nation of Islam leader Elijah Muhammed: Muhammad Ali.

In 1970, a bomb being built inside a townhouse in New York's Greenwich Village by members of the Weather Underground militant leftist group accidentally exploded, destroying the house and killing three group members.

In 1981, Walter Cronkite signed off for the last time after nearly two decades as the anchor of "The CBS Evening News."

In 1990, Ed Yeilding and Joseph T. Vida flew a Lockheed SR-71 "Blackbird" spy plane east across the U.S. from coast to coast in a record 67 minutes, 54 seconds. (The since-retired U.S. Air Force reconnaissance plane played an outsized role in American military and intelligence gathering since 1968.)

In 2009, NASA's Kepler Space Telescope was rocketed into space from Cape Canaveral, Florida, to hunt for Earth-sized planets orbiting distant stars. The spacecraft discovered 2,681 exoplanets outside the solar system before it ran low on fuel and was retired in 2018 after 9 1/2 years of scouring space for alien worlds.

In 2021, Pope Francis met with Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, one of Shiite Islam's most senior clerics, in Iraq's holy city of Najaf to deliver a message of peaceful coexistence, urging Muslims to embrace Iraq's long-beleaguered Christian minority. The historic encounter followed months of negotiations between the ayatollah's office and the Vatican.

Today's birthdays: Former Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan is 100. Former Soviet cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova is 89. Opera singer Kiri Te Kanawa is 82. Rock musician David Gilmour (Pink Floyd) is 80. Actor-comedian Tom Arnold is 67. Actor-comedian D.L. Hughley is 63. Actor Connie Britton is 59. Basketball Hall of Famer Shaquille O'Neal is 54. Rapper-producer Tyler, the Creator is 35. Actor Millicent Simmonds is 23.