

# Groton Daily Independent

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## 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.



## Monday, March 9

Senior Menu: Tater tot hot dish, corn, fruit, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast; Egg bake  
School Lunch: Corn dog, chips  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.  
Groton Senior Citizens, 1 p.m., Community Center  
1st Grade Boys Basketball Practice, 4:30 p.m., elementary gym  
HS Baseball Practice, 6 p.m., HS 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.**

## **Practicing Planetary Defense**

NASA reported yesterday that it deliberately changed an asteroid's orbit around the sun for the first time—a feat that could one day divert a space rock from slamming into Earth.

Scientists launched a spacecraft in 2021 toward two asteroids that orbit the sun together: Didymos and its smaller counterpart, Dimorphos. Observations from around the world now confirm that the spacecraft's impact—combined with aftershocks from roughly 35 million pounds of ejected rock and dust—cut the duo's time travel around the sun by 0.15 seconds. While the change seems small, experts say a tiny deflection adds up over decades, potentially making the difference between an interplanetary object hitting or missing Earth. (Neither Didymos nor Dimorphos has ever posed a risk to Earth.)

The largest asteroid impact recorded in modern history exploded over Siberia in 1908 with the power of roughly 185 Hiroshima bombs.

## **American forces were likely responsible for strike on Iranian school.**

Evidence shared by the US and Israeli militaries suggests an explosion that killed over 165 people at an Iranian girls' school last Saturday was likely caused by US airstrikes. The strikes also hit an Iranian Revolutionary Guard base. Neither the US nor Israel has claimed responsibility; the US says it's still investigating the incident, which marks the highest reported civilian death toll since the war began.

Separately, Russia is reportedly providing Iran with intelligence on the location of US forces, marking the first sign that another nuclear-armed adversary of the US is participating in the war. Meanwhile, yesterday, President Donald Trump appeared to rule out negotiations with Iran, calling for its "unconditional surrender."

## **US economy loses 92,000 jobs, unemployment rises to 4.4% in February.**

The federal report published yesterday sharply differed from economists' expectations that the economy would add roughly 60,000 new jobs. The losses come after January saw 126,000 new jobs and a 4.3% unemployment rate. Experts do not expect hiring to pick up until companies have more certainty about the Trump administration's upcoming 15% blanket tariffs and the war with Iran.

## **GOP congressman drops reelection bid amid House ethics probe into affair.**

Rep. Tony Gonzales (R-Texas) ended his campaign in response to outrage over an affair he admitted to having with an aide who died by suicide. His withdrawal positions YouTuber Brandon Herrera as the GOP nominee in Texas' 23rd district. The Ethics Committee investigates only sitting lawmakers, so a probe into Gonzales, announced Wednesday, may not be finished and published before his term ends next year.

## **Tariff refund system expected to be operational in 45 days.**

Customs and Border Protection said yesterday it is creating a streamlined electronic system for refunds in response to a Court of International Trade ruling earlier this week. The agency estimates that it collected roughly \$166B under President Donald Trump's global tariffs, which were ruled unconstitutional last month, and that issuing refunds using current systems would take over 4.4 million hours of staff labor.

## **Hungary arrests Ukrainians carrying roughly \$82M for alleged money laundering.**

The seven detained individuals, all employees of a Ukrainian-owned bank, were reportedly transporting cash and gold between bank locations as part of regular services. Kyiv has accused Hungary of taking the Ukrainians hostage and illegally seizing the assets. The incident further escalates tensions between the two countries, which have been locked in a dispute over Hungary's access to Russian oil.

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## Nations boycott Paralympics opening ceremony over Russia, Belarus participation.

Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and Germany were among several nations that declined to attend the opening ceremony yesterday in protest of Paralympic organizers' decision to allow Russian and Belarusian athletes to compete under their national flags. The Olympic committee required both nations' athletes to compete neutrally last month, a sanction for Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Belarus' support of it.

## Humankind(ness)

Today, we're sharing a story from reader Claire G. in Boulder, Colorado.

"Yesterday, my friends and I had an imaginary snowball fight. One of my friends grabbed my arm and pulled me into the middle of our small turf field. She said, 'We're having an imaginary snowball fight,' and into it we launched. I had not laughed so hard in weeks, heaving clumps of imaginary snow with imagined accuracy. It ended with all 20 of us collapsing onto the ground, soaked in imaginary snow, and surrounded by very real joyful laughs. I had not felt like a child in so long, and really did need that reminder of childhood's joys. Everyone should try being a child again, even if only for a few minutes."

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## Tigers use scoring runs to roll past Milbank, advance to SoDak 16



**Becker Bosma dribbles around Layten Osowski.** (Photo

by Paul Kosel)

staying aggressive coming out of the locker room.

"We talk about those first three minutes of the third quarter," he said. "You can either put the nail in the coffin or let them back in. I thought we got it to 20 real quick, and I was really pleased with that."

Groton delivered an eight-point run in the third quarter to stretch the margin to 51-25 entering the final frame, then added another nine-point surge spanning the third and fourth quarters to seal the victory.

Balanced scoring keyed the Tigers' effort. Keegen Tracy led the way with 15 points and two rebounds, while Karson Zak added 13 points, four rebounds and a block. Gage Sippel chipped in 12 points, six rebounds and one block.

Kjellsen also praised the play of others who stepped forward offensively.

"Becker got us going a little bit, and Karson — he's almost unstoppable when he gets into

GROTON, S.D. — Groton Area used a series of decisive scoring runs and a balanced offensive effort to defeat Milbank 61-35 in the second round of the Region 1A boys basketball tournament Friday night at the Groton Area Arena.

The Tigers put the game away with two nine-point bursts and an eight-point run while improving to 17-4 on the season and extending their winning streak to eight games. Groton Area now advances to the SoDak 16, where it will face Pine Ridge.

"It was a team effort," Groton Area head coach Greg Kjellsen said following the win. "I was proud of the boys. You don't want to lay an egg this time of year, and they played great and defended well."

Groton wasted little time taking control, using a nine-point run in the opening quarter to build a 19-6 lead after one. The Tigers continued to apply pressure in the second period and carried a comfortable 36-22 advantage into halftime.

Kjellsen said the Tigers emphasized



**Karson Zak gets ready to move around Jeter Scoular.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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that 10-foot range," Kjellsen said. "He did a great job."

Becker Bosma finished with eight points, five rebounds, three assists, a steal and a block, while Ryder Johnson contributed six points and five rebounds. Jayden Schwan scored three points, Easton Weber added two points, three rebounds, one assist and one steal, and both J.J. Muller had two points and Logan Warrington and Ryder Schelle each grabbed a rebound.

Groton shot efficiently throughout, hitting 20-of-34 two-pointers (59 percent), 3-of-11 from beyond the arc (27 percent) and 12-of-18 at the free-throw line (67 percent). The Tigers finished with 27 rebounds, five assists, two steals, three blocked shots and just five turnovers.

Kjellsen said there was still room for improvement, particularly on the glass.

"I'm going to nitpick a little bit — we didn't rebound very well," he said. "They're physical and strong, and we've got to get tougher with that as the year goes on."

Milbank, which closed its season at 12-10, was led by Ryan Keeton with 12 points. Jetter Scoular added seven, Lincoln Holscher scored five, and Sam Rick had four points while going a perfect 4-for-4 at the free-throw line. Cade Grabow also scored four, while Layten Osowski had two and Jaxson Wiese added one.

The Bulldogs struggled to find consistent offense, shooting just 10-of-50 from the floor (20 percent) while going 11-of-19 at the free-throw line. Milbank committed nine turnovers and finished with 17 team fouls.

With little turnaround time before the SoDak 16, Kjellsen said preparation will focus on staying sharp rather than overworking his team.

"We'll come in tomorrow and not go real hard," he said.

"Everybody in the state knows what you've got to do against Pine Ridge. We'll start focusing on them and just stay locked in."

The coach said his team's mindset remains simple heading into Tuesday.

"The 20 practice games are over," Kjellsen said. "We're 1-0 in the ones that count."



**Gage Sippel shoots the ball over Milbank's Layten Osowski.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)



**The boys were awarded the SoDak16 qualifying ball at the end of the game.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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**Coach Greg Kjellsen is being interviewed by Rich Bosma on GDILIVE.COM after the game.**

(Photo by Paul 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, The Meat-House, Weismantel Insurance Agency. Paul Kosel did the stats, the camera and technology and Rich Bosma provided the play-by-play commentary.*



**The High School Dance team performed at halftime of the game.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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**The GHS Pep Band played prior to the game and also performed the four corner style of the National Anthem, directed by Sharon Schwan.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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## Class A - SoDak 16

Game sites and times will be added once confirmed late  
Saturday evening (3/7) or Sunday morning (3/8)

Team	Game Site	Game Time
<b>#1 -</b> 1 West Central 16 Webster Area	STATE QUALIFIER	3/10 TBD
<b>#2 -</b> 2 Sioux Falls Christian 15 Wagner	STATE QUALIFIER	3/10 TBD
<b>#3 -</b> 3 Clark/Willow Lake 14 McCook Central/Montrose	STATE QUALIFIER	3/10 TBD
<b>#4 -</b> 4 Hamlin 13 Rapid City Christian	STATE QUALIFIER	3/10 TBD
<b>#5 -</b> 5 Groton Area 12 Pine Ridge	STATE QUALIFIER	3/10 TBD
<b>#6 -</b> 6 Stanley County 11 Flandreau	STATE QUALIFIER	3/10 TBD
<b>#7 -</b> 7 Lennox 10 St. Thomas More	STATE QUALIFIER	3/10 TBD
<b>#8 -</b> 8 Mahpiya Luta 9 Cheyenne-Eagle Butte	STATE QUALIFIER	3/10 TBD

### Seed Points Averages (calculated Feb. 27)

#1 West Central 46.700 - #2 Sioux Falls Christian 46.579 - #3 Clark/Willow Lake 45.750 - #4 Hamlin 45.350 - #5 Groton Area 44.800 - #6 Stanley County 44.400 - #7 Lennox 44.250 - #8 Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 43.850 - #8 Mahpiya Luta 43.850 - #10 St. Thomas More 43.500 - #11 Flandreau 43.450 - #12 Pine Ridge 42.900 - #13 Rapid City Christian 42.450 - #14 McCook Central/Montrose 41.900 - #14 Wagner 41.900 - #16 Webster Area 41.550



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## GFP Commission Holds March Meeting

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) Commission held their March meeting at the State Library in Pierre on March 5-6.

### FINALIZATIONS

#### Iron Creek Lake No Wake Zone

The Commission created a “No Wake Zone” on Iron Creek Lake in Lawrence County. Iron Creek Lake is a 24-acre impoundment, and the no wake zone will address safety, user conflict, and shoreline erosion concerns.

#### Lake Albert Waterfowl Refuge

The Commission removed refuge status from Lake Albert Waterfowl Refuge.

The Lake Albert Waterfowl Refuge was comprised of private property owned by eight landowners. The landowners formally requested that their property be removed from the Waterfowl Refuge status and provided signed consents to remove their property. By removing the refuge status, landowner control over hunting access on their property will be restored.

#### Hunt for Habitat

The Commission modified the license packages available within the Hunt for Habitat raffle. The Hunt for Habitat raffle allows for up to ten big game licenses, and the package for 2026 will offer:

- 1 Custer State Park Trophy Bison;
- 1 Custer State Park Trophy Bison and Any White-tail Deer Package;
- 1 Any Deer (Statewide - excludes Custer State Park); and
- 3 Any Deer (Statewide - excludes Custer State Park) and Elk Package.

### PROPOSALS

#### Application for License

The Commission proposed to allow a hunter to apply for a “Special Antelope” license as a choice in the first drawing for the antelope season. This proposed change would eliminate the separate drawing for “Special Antelope” and make it a unit in the antelope season drawing.

#### Deer Hunting Seasons

The Commission proposed several changes to deer seasons for 2026, including:

Removing the license tag type specifications for antelope, deer, and landowner-on-own-land elk. Those tag types will then be designated in administrative actions;

Making “Free antlerless whitetail” landowner-own-land licenses available in deer units where antlerless-only East River or West River Deer Season licenses are available;

Changing archery and muzzleloader “any deer” licenses to “any buck” licenses; and

Reducing licenses in some East River Deer Hunting units.

#### Elk Hunting Seasons

The Commission proposed several changes to elk hunting seasons for 2026, including:

Modifying season structure and unit description of the Special Custer State Park Antlerless Elk hunting season;

Creating a new prairie elk hunting unit (PRE-ERA) to include all counties east of the Missouri River, excluding the interior boundary of the Crow Creek Sioux Indian Reservation, with season dates from Sep. 1 - Dec. 31. This unit would have unlimited “any elk” licenses;

Opening all prairie elk season units to landowner-own-land, resident only, antlerless elk licenses;

Expanding season dates and license types for:

PRE-11B from Sep. 1 - Oct. 15 to Sep. 1 - Dec. 31.

PRE-35A and PRE-35B from Sep. 15 - Dec. 31 to Sep. 1 - Dec. 31.

PRE - 49A from Sep. 15 - Oct. 31 and Dec. 1 - Dec. 31 to Sep. 1 - Dec. 31.

Open the Special Custer State Park Antlerless Elk Hunting Season, with license numbers to be set at the April meeting; and

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There were no proposed changes to the Black Hill Firearm, Black Hills Archery, Custer State Park Firearm, or Custer State Park Early Archery Elk hunting seasons.

Tag allocations for all elk hunting seasons will be set during the April meeting.

## **Waterfowl Hunting Seasons**

The Commission proposed to reduce the daily limit of Canada geese during the August Management Take and the Early Fall Canada Goose hunting seasons from 15 to 8 geese.

They also proposed to remove Brown, Edmunds, Faulk, McPherson, and Spink counties from the August Management Take unit.

There were no changes proposed to the Duck, Goose, Spring Light Goose, Youth, Non-resident Waterfowl, Crane or Tundra Swan hunting seasons.

## **Bighorn Sheep Hunting Season**

GFP staff presented a recommendation to increase the number of bighorn sheep licenses from seven to eight. The commission is scheduled to take administrative action on the final license numbers for the Bighorn Sheep Seasons in April.

## **Public Comments Being Accepted**

To hear the discussion on these proposals, audio from the meeting is available through South Dakota Public Broadcasting and will soon be available on the GFP website as part of the meeting archive.

To see these proposals in their entirety, visit [gfp.sd.gov/commission/information](http://gfp.sd.gov/commission/information).

To be included in the public record and to be considered by the Commission, comments must include a full name and city of residence and be submitted by 11:59 p.m. CDT on April 5.

The next GFP Commission meeting will be held in Pierre on April 9-10.



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### **Noem could forgo her new federal role for a political race, but observers say it's unlikely**

**BY: JOSHUA HAIAR**

Several South Dakota political insiders think Kristi Noem will stick with her new role in the Trump administration following her dismissal as U.S. Department of Homeland Security secretary, rather than jump into a political race in her home state.

Joel Rosenthal is a former chairman of the South Dakota Republican Party. He said Noem returning to state politics is unlikely in the near term, given her new role as special envoy for The Shield of the Americas, which Rosenthal speculated "was created for her to have a place to go after she became a liability to the president."

President Donald Trump announced Noem's new job Thursday on social media and said he would nominate Sen. Markwayne Mullin, R-Oklahoma, to succeed her at the Department of Homeland Security. The moves followed Noem's appearance before a U.S. Senate panel, where she suffered bipartisan criticism of her handling of the administration's mass deportation campaign.

The South Dakota Democratic Party celebrated the change.

"Kristi Noem has consistently proven there is one thing that has motivated her rise through politics — herself," said South Dakota Democratic Party Vice Chair Jessica Meyers in a statement.

Democratic activist Cory Heidelberger writes the political blog Dakota Free Press. Like Rosenthal, he said Trump having another job ready for Noem signals "she isn't planning to come back to South Dakota." Her former lieutenant governor, Larry Rhoden, has been serving as governor since she resigned in January 2025 to join the Trump Cabinet.

"Every signal I've seen from Gov. Larry Rhoden, as well as the other Republicans in power, is that they've had enough of Kristi, and they aren't going to sacrifice anything to give her room to come back to power within the state," Heidelberger said.

The 2026 governor's race is closed to Noem. The state constitution says "no person shall be elected to more than two consecutive terms as governor." Noem was elected in 2018 and 2022. There are four Republicans, including Rhoden, running for the party's nomination for governor.

There are other political options open to Noem, who is affiliated with a federal political action committee — Keeping Republican Ideas Strong Timely & Inventive ("KRISTI") — that has a balance of \$1.1 million, while her Kristi for Governor state candidate committee has a balance of \$1.8 million.

Noem could run for U.S. Senate or U.S. House in South Dakota. She would need to collect 2,171 nominating petition signatures from registered South Dakota voters and file them by March 31 to appear on the ballot in the primary election, which is June 2. If she instead tried to run as an independent, she'd need 3,502 signatures by April 28.

The state's lone U.S. House seat — held by Noem before she was governor — is up for grabs because Republican U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson is running for governor. Heidelberger noted that Republican Attorney General Marty Jackley, now running for U.S. House, lost to Noem in the 2018 primary for governor; therefore, "there's no way he'll step aside and let her run for her congressional seat again."

And while a U.S. Senate seat is on the 2026 ballot, incumbent U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds has already announced he's running for reelection, so Noem would have to beat him in the June primary. Rounds was governor of South Dakota from 2003 to 2011, and has served in the Senate since 2015. He has already earned Trump's endorsement for reelection.

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Pat Powers, a Republican, writes the South Dakota political blog Dakota War College. He said that with only a few weeks left to collect signatures until petitions are due to get on the South Dakota ballot, "I think the window for getting into the race is closed."

Beating Rounds would come with its own challenges, given he "has had a campaign in motion for months, is popular in South Dakota, and already has President Trump's endorsement," Powers said.

A Republican co-host of Dakota Town Hall, a South Dakota politics podcast, Jake Schoenbeck, said he is "of two minds" about Noem's future.

"A logical person would look at Rounds and see their endorsement from Trump, war chest, and general appeal and think 'I don't have a chance,'" Schoenbeck said. "But then there's Noem, who seems to operate on a hubris so large she might be able to convince herself she still walks on water in South Dakota."

Schoenbeck added that he thinks Rounds "would trounce her if she got in the race." Noem, who was a legislator before her service in Congress and as governor, has never lost an election.

In a social media post Thursday, Noem wrote that she looks forward to her new role as a special envoy for a new "Security Initiative in the Western Hemisphere." Trump said the initiative will be announced Saturday at a conference in Doral, Florida.

*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.*

## **COMMENTARY**

### **South Dakota Freedom Caucus is long on theatrics, short on results**

**by Dana Hess**

According to its website, the members of the South Dakota Freedom Caucus keep busy by "fighting for the people's rights." If their legislative results this year are any indication, the people's rights are taking a beating.

The Freedom Caucus is a group of Republicans in the South Dakota Legislature. Their website touts adherence to the vision of President Ronald Reagan, but their beliefs put them a little to the right of Genghis Khan.

The group's chairman is the Legislature's resident bad boy, Rep. Phil Jensen of Rapid City. Last year he lost the vice chairmanship of the House Education Committee for filing a bill that would have stripped the Huron School District of state funding because he had heard bad things about the district's loose bathroom policy for transgender students.

This year he lost the committee entirely, shuttled to another panel when he threw a fit over a seating arrangement that didn't meet with his approval. He stayed in the news weeks later when he disparaged the religious beliefs of other representatives. For that infraction, he was denied access to the GOP caucus for two weeks, a punishment akin to being stoned with popcorn.

The Freedom Caucus vice chairman is Sen. John Carley of Piedmont and the secretary/treasurer is Rep. Tina Mulally of Rapid City. The group's website lists six other members, all representatives: Logan Manhart of Aberdeen, Dylan Jordan of Clear Lake, Tony Kayser of Sioux Falls, Aaron Aylward of Harrisburg, Tony Randolph of Rapid City and Josephine Garcia of Watertown.

The group's "meet the team" page includes this cryptic phrase: "Not all South Dakota Freedom Caucus members are public members." Why someone's membership in the group would need to remain hidden is a mystery, much like their secret identities.

Not to be outdone by the bad boy chairman of the caucus, Carley put himself at the center of a news story recently, disappearing before a crucial vote on economic development incentives for data centers.

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His absence was seen in many quarters for what it was, a ploy to ensure that the bill was killed. Carley got the result he wanted by using a tactic that's not usually found in "Robert's Rules of Order."

Perhaps Carley was called to a meeting of the double-secret members of the Freedom Caucus. Maybe he was desperately searching for someone — anyone — who would vote to advance some of his legislation.

Carley led all Freedom Caucus members this year as the prime sponsor of 21 bills. At this writing, his record is 1-20. Just one of his 21 bills made it out of the Senate to be considered by the House.

Despite that poor showing, Carley doesn't have the worst winning percentage of Freedom Caucus members. That belongs to Mulally who, obviously swamped with secretary/treasurer duties, was the prime sponsor of just two bills, both of which failed to garner enough support to move on to the Senate.

Despite operating in the House, which boasts a Republican super-majority, other Freedom Caucus members did not fare much better. In most cases they saw their mix of protections for the unborn, cannabis restrictions, property tax reforms, election integrity changes and Second Amendment enhancements go down in defeat.

Jensen was 1-3, Jordan was 1-8, Kayser 1-3, Aylward 2-4, Randolph 3-4 and Garcia was 3-8. The member of the Freedom Caucus with the most success was Manhart, who was the prime sponsor of nine bills with five of them making it to the Senate.

Of the 73 bills proposed by the Freedom Caucus members — at least the members that we know about — 17 of them made it into the Senate. That 17-56 record is just what fans fear the Minnesota Twins' record will be early in July. It's hardly the kind of legislative showing to be expected from a group that bills itself as fighting for the freedoms of South Dakotans.

There could be valid reasons for the poor legislative showing of the Freedom Caucus. Maybe they're just ahead of their time. Maybe other members are jealous of their insight and expertise. Or maybe they need to spend more time being lawmakers and less time garnering headlines.

*Dana Hess spent more than 25 years in South Dakota journalism, editing newspapers in Redfield, Milbank and Pierre. He's retired and lives in Brookings, working occasionally as a freelance writer.*

## License plate imaging helps solve theft cases, say police in two South Dakota cities

**Sioux Falls, Madison use technology that has sparked legal concerns elsewhere**

**BY: JOHN HULT**

Police in South Dakota logged fewer theft reports in 2025 than the previous year, but made more arrests for theft.

The figures suggest surveillance technology first adopted in Madison and expanded last year to Sioux Falls can make it easier to find suspects, its supporters say.

Madison Police Chief Justin Meyer said the city's automated license plate readers, which take static images of license plates and run them against databases of reported crimes, have been "an invaluable tool" since the city installed them in 2022.

"We have been able to clear a number of retail thefts where we wouldn't have been able to before," said Meyer, who shared his department's success stories with Sioux Falls officials as that city considered purchasing the readers.

In Sioux Falls, the license plate readers are part of an integrated Real Time Information Center where a team coordinates responses from detectives and patrol officers with the help of the license plate images and the crimes associated with them, as well as footage from the city's network of traffic cameras.

At a media briefing on crime trends in Sioux Falls recently, Sioux Falls Police Chief Jon Thum and other city officials trumpeted a five-year low in per capita crime rates.

Drops in burglary, stolen vehicle and other theft cases were a focal point, but Chief Thum also pointed out that the information center, launched last year, has helped police solve hundreds of crimes and es-

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establish the cause of 124 traffic crashes.

"One of our highlights is our proactive enforcement efforts, which contribute to some of the success that we've seen," Thum said.

## Fewer reports, more arrests

Crime in South Dakota 2025, a publication of Attorney General Marty Jackley's office, was released recently. The publication is built from data on calls for service and arrests reported by policing agencies across the state. It does not include crimes reported in tribal areas.

The 2025 report's marquee figure was a 6.2% drop in reported crimes, with decreases in most offense categories. It's the largest year-over-year drop in crime in at least five years and a continuation of a downward trend since 2023.

The report also shows an improved clearance rate for nonviolent crimes. The clearance rate is the percentage of reported crimes solved through an arrest. Nationwide and in South Dakota, clearance rates for property crime are generally lower than they are for violent crime overall, though clearance rates for rape tend to be the lowest of any specific offense.

In 2025, the violent crime clearance rate in South Dakota was just under 42%, slightly less than 2024. For property crimes, the 2025 figure was 14%, compared to 11% the year before.

South Dakota police agencies logged around 2,000 fewer property crime calls than 2024, but nonetheless made 200 more arrests for those offenses.

The improvement in clearance rates for property crimes was driven largely by two categories of offenses: general larceny and motor vehicle theft.

There were 1,277 fewer larcenies reported in 2025 than 2024, but 246 more arrests, which bumped the clearance rate in that category by three percentage points.

On the stolen vehicle side, South Dakotans reported 468 fewer incidents in 2025, a drop of 27%. Yet police made almost as many arrests as they had in 2024, moving the clearance rate for stolen vehicles from 12% to 16%.

Arson and burglary are also classified as property crimes. The state had nine more arson reports than 2024 and six more arrests, with a clearance rate of 37%. The rate in 2024 was 31%.

There were 20% fewer burglaries and 20% fewer burglary arrests. The clearance rate stood at just under 13% for both 2024 and 2025.

## License plate readers boost arrests in Sioux Falls

Around 70% of all reported crimes in South Dakota originate in two metro areas: Rapid City and Sioux Falls. Changes in reports or arrests on the local level in either area can have an outsized effect on state-wide statistics.

Sioux Falls Police Department spokesman Aaron Benson said the agency hasn't done the granular statistical work necessary to definitively link its new policing technologies to the state's figures for property crime, but he said the city's records broadly align with the 2025 report's findings.

"We are seeing numbers similar to what the state is seeing," Benson said.

The department placed 25 automated license plate readers, from a company called Flock, on traffic signals around the city last summer. The city council in Sioux Falls approved \$168,000 for a contract with Flock in January of 2025.

The devices capture images of license plates, automatically scanning the numbers for plates attached to stolen vehicles, vehicles associated with reported crimes, or with people who have active arrest warrants.

The devices can't be used for facial recognition, and the data cannot be shared for use in immigration enforcement, according to the Sioux Falls Police Department website and the city's Flock data portal website.

The systems detected more than 400,000 vehicles in the past month, the data portal says, with more than 2,100 "hot list" hits, meaning the plates or vehicles were tied to incidents listed in the National Crime Information Center, Amber Alerts and to reports to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

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The readers, Benson said, have been used in concert with the city's existing network of traffic light cameras, and have helped officers piece together clues and solve crimes — particularly vehicle thefts — in situations where they've struggled in the past.

"Being able to monitor a vehicle as it's traveling through town until officers can arrest somebody or can safely recover the vehicle after the fact, that's something we weren't really able to do until the last few years," Benson said.

The city's most recent crime statistics, released at this week's crime trends press conference, said the city's real time information center has attended to 559 calls for service, contributing to 64 arrests, 37 of the 40 stolen vehicles recovered since its launch, and to the resolution of 27 cases.

## **Madison chief says South Dakota has careful approach to surveillance**

The Madison Police Department's Flock website says the city has similar restrictions on data collection and use, but lists dozens of policing agencies in South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa and Minnesota with which it shares data. The 28 cameras in Madison detected more than 35,000 vehicles last month, with 323 "hot list" hits.

Meyer, the Madison police chief, said his city collaborates with Sioux Falls, sharing information back and forth to track suspects using their respective resources. He pointed to several cases solved through that collaboration in recent years, including an ATM theft and the recovery of a kidnapped child.

Meyer said he understands that people worry about surveillance.

"You start using the word surveillance, and I think the general public immediately jumps to Big Brother," Meyer said, a reference to the surveillance overseer in George Orwell's book "1984."

South Dakota famously passed a law barring the state of Iowa from accessing its motor vehicle records to send tickets to South Dakota residents caught speeding by traffic cameras in Sioux City. Sioux Falls was forced to dismantle a set of red light cameras following a lawsuit in which the state Supreme Court ruled their use violated due process rights.

More recently, concerns about the reliability and application of rapidly proliferating facial recognition technology have sparked lawsuits nationwide. The American Civil Liberties Union has filed or supported multiple lawsuits over alleged wrongful arrests based on facial recognition technology, and on allegations of overly broad data collection.

This year, a group of plaintiffs filed suit against the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, alleging that Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents are photographing them to build a database of agitators and threatening to label them as domestic terrorists.

In Colorado, lawmakers filed a bill to require law enforcement agencies to get a warrant to search Flock data after Denver Police Department logs revealed that Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents had requested data from that city's system hundreds of times.

Meyer sees South Dakota's approach to the license plate readers as one with a lighter touch. The systems aren't used to issue traffic citations, he said. The images become tools for tracking down more evidence in situations where a vague vehicle description isn't enough to track down a suspect.

"They're taking hundreds of thousands of photos a month, and we're doing a very minute number of searches, looking for a specific vehicle for a specific purpose," Meyers said. "We are not out there watching these cameras 24/7."

Meyer or another supervisor with the department reviews statistics on searches performed each month, he said, to "make sure we're not abusing this."

"Our officers are fully aware of that," he said. "We haven't had any instances of abuse. So yes, it's a great investigative tool, and nothing more."

Meyer also noted that surveillance from police agencies are only a small part of modern surveillance. The ATM theft case in Madison leaned on surveillance footage from a private citizen, he said, and data collected by smartphones — when those phones are seized and searched by officers — is far more robust than anything police can collect with cameras on traffic lights.

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"Your cellphone follows you around everywhere," Meyer said. "It listens to everything that you say."

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

## After positive January, latest job report shows losses again

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — The United States lost 92,000 jobs in February, edging unemployment up slightly according to the latest employment figures released Friday by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The report showed, for the third time in the last five months, losses among nonfarm jobs and highlighted a continued "trend down" in the information sector and federal government employment. The federal workforce is down by 11% from its peak in October 2024, according to the bureau. The report also noted a decrease in health care jobs, "reflecting strike activity."

Unemployment ticked up to 4.4% from 4.3% in January, and rates remained higher for women, teenagers and non-white workers.

Administration officials blamed the job losses on winter weather on the East Coast and labor strife among West Coast health care workers.

But Democrats faulted President Donald Trump's policies, including military action in Iran and reimposing tariffs after the U.S. Supreme Court said many of Trump's taxes on foreign goods were illegal.

U.S. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said Friday's report is a "blaring alarm that Donald Trump's economy is deteriorating rapidly," and speculated the nearly week-old war in Iran will only make things worse.

"Now we've seen job losses in two of the last three months and an economy teetering on the edge of recession," Schumer said in a Friday morning statement. "Tariffs are increasing costs, gas prices are spiking, and jobs are evaporating: The Trump Republican agenda is failing the American people and without immediately changing course the economy may go over the cliff."

The unexpected report, combined with uncertainty over the war with Iran, rattled U.S. markets Friday morning, sparking a drop across all indexes, according to a daily update from the New York Stock Exchange's Eric Criscuolo.

Economists had estimated a February jobs gain for the U.S. to land around 59,000, according to Criscuolo. Additionally, the report is in stark contrast to January's figures, which showed the economy gained 130,000 jobs, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

### Trump officials project optimism

But the administration is brushing off negative headlines, and attributing the weak report to ice and snow storms in February and a month-long strike by Kaiser Permanente health care workers.

"While record-breaking strikes and bad winter weather dragged down February nonfarm employment, the unemployment rate held steady, and there are several positive signs for our economy that continue to show American workers are recovering from the mess left behind by Biden," Labor Secretary Lorie Chavez DeReemer said in a statement.

She added that the administration's massive tax and spending cuts law enacted in July is positive for the economy.

Kevin Hassett, director of the White House National Economic Council, told CNBC Friday, "I think what we need to start doing with these jobs numbers, at least on the payroll side, is take the average over a few months."

"And if you take the average over a few months, we had a surprisingly positive one last month and a surprisingly negative one this one. But on average, it's about what we expect to be seeing," he said, adding that the sharp fall in immigration is leading to "break-even employment" in the U.S.

## No growth

Economists cautioned the jobs report builds on a negative economic outlook for the country.

“While it’s never sensible to read too much into one month of data, this morning’s report showing a decline in nonfarm payrolls and an increase in the unemployment rate comes at a difficult moment, with inflation still above target and an oil price shock threatening to raise inflation further,” said Daniel Hornung, a fellow at Stanford Institute of Economic Policy Research.

“The report complicates the Fed’s efforts to keep both unemployment and inflation low, and it makes it difficult for the Administration to argue heading into the midterms that their policies are leading to the kind of growth or improvement in living standards that they’ve long promised,” Hornung, the deputy director of the National Economic Council under President Joe Biden, said.

David Kelly, JPMorgan Asset Management’s chief global strategist, described the report as “weak.”

“We’re not seeing any job growth at all, really, in this economy,” Kelly told CNBC Friday morning. “But because immigration has done such a 180 here, and we’ve got a huge drop in the labor force — and that’s keeping the unemployment rate from spiking here — but it’s a very, very slow economy.”

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

## Jobs changes in South Dakota

FROM SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

Month-to-month changes in the number of nonfarm jobs in South Dakota.

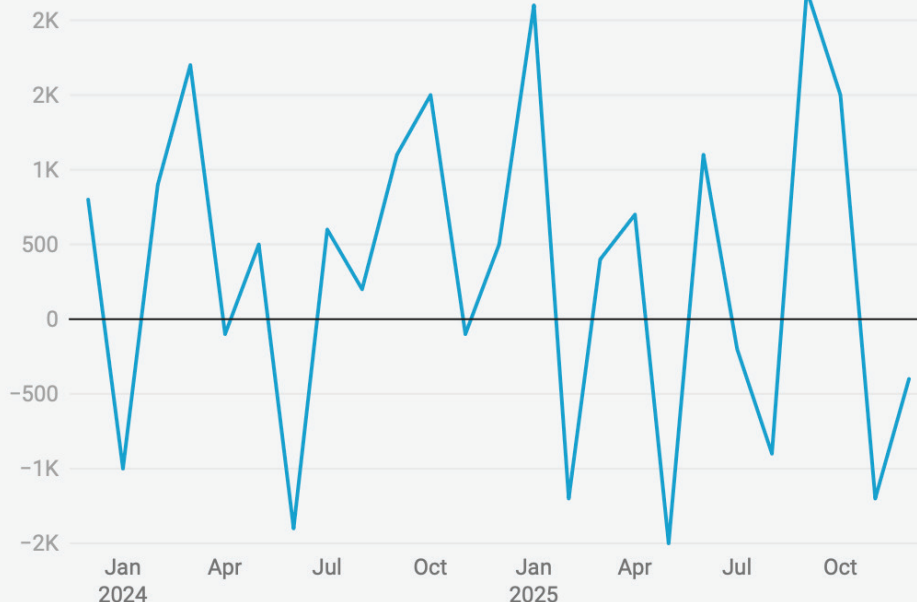


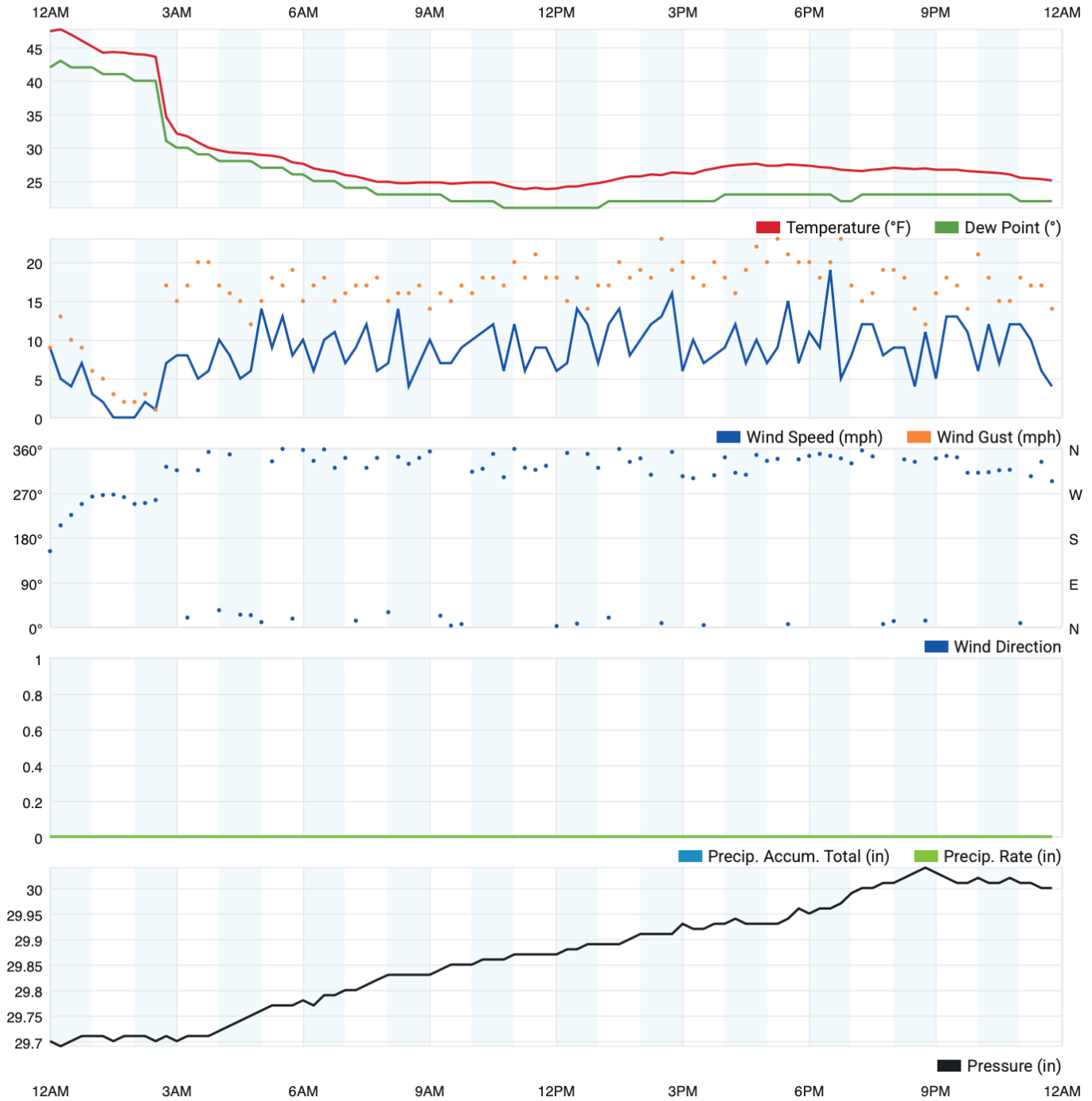
Chart: South Dakota Searchlight • Source: [Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis](#) • [Get the data](#) • [Embed](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

March 6, 2026



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Today

Tonight

Sunday

Sunday Night

Monday



**High: 53 °F**

Mostly Sunny  
then Sunny  
and Breezy



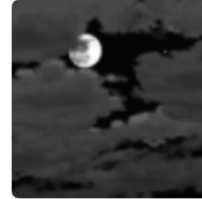
**Low: 37 °F**

Mostly Cloudy



**High: 66 °F**

Mostly Sunny  
then Mostly  
Sunny and  
Breezy



**Low: 33 °F**

Decreasing  
Clouds



**High: 46 °F**

Mostly Sunny

## Today



**Highs: 46 to 57°**  
**Lows: 34 to 40°**

**Mostly Sunny**

**Breezy**  
**Southwest winds with**  
**gusts of 25 to 35 mph**



NWS Aberdeen

## Upcoming Forecast

### Sunday



**Highs: 61 to 71°**  
**Lows: 30 to 38°**

**A blend of clouds**  
**and sun**

**Breezy**  
**Southwest winds**  
**with gusts of 30 to**  
**35 mph**

### Monday



**Highs: 44 to 60°**  
**Lows: 24 to 30°**

**15-25% chance**  
**of light rain/snow**  
**over north**  
**central SD**

**Dry weather expected for the weekend with temperatures warming back up to above average! Winds will be breezy both this afternoon and Sunday afternoon, out of the southwest, with gusts of 25 to 35 mph.**

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 48 °F at 12:09 AM

Low Temp: 24 °F at 11:18 AM

Wind: 24 mph at 5:13 PM

Precip: : 0.00

## Today's Info

Record High: 70 in 2016

Record Low: -24 in 1995

Average High: 37

Average Low: 15

Average Precip in Mar.: 0.17

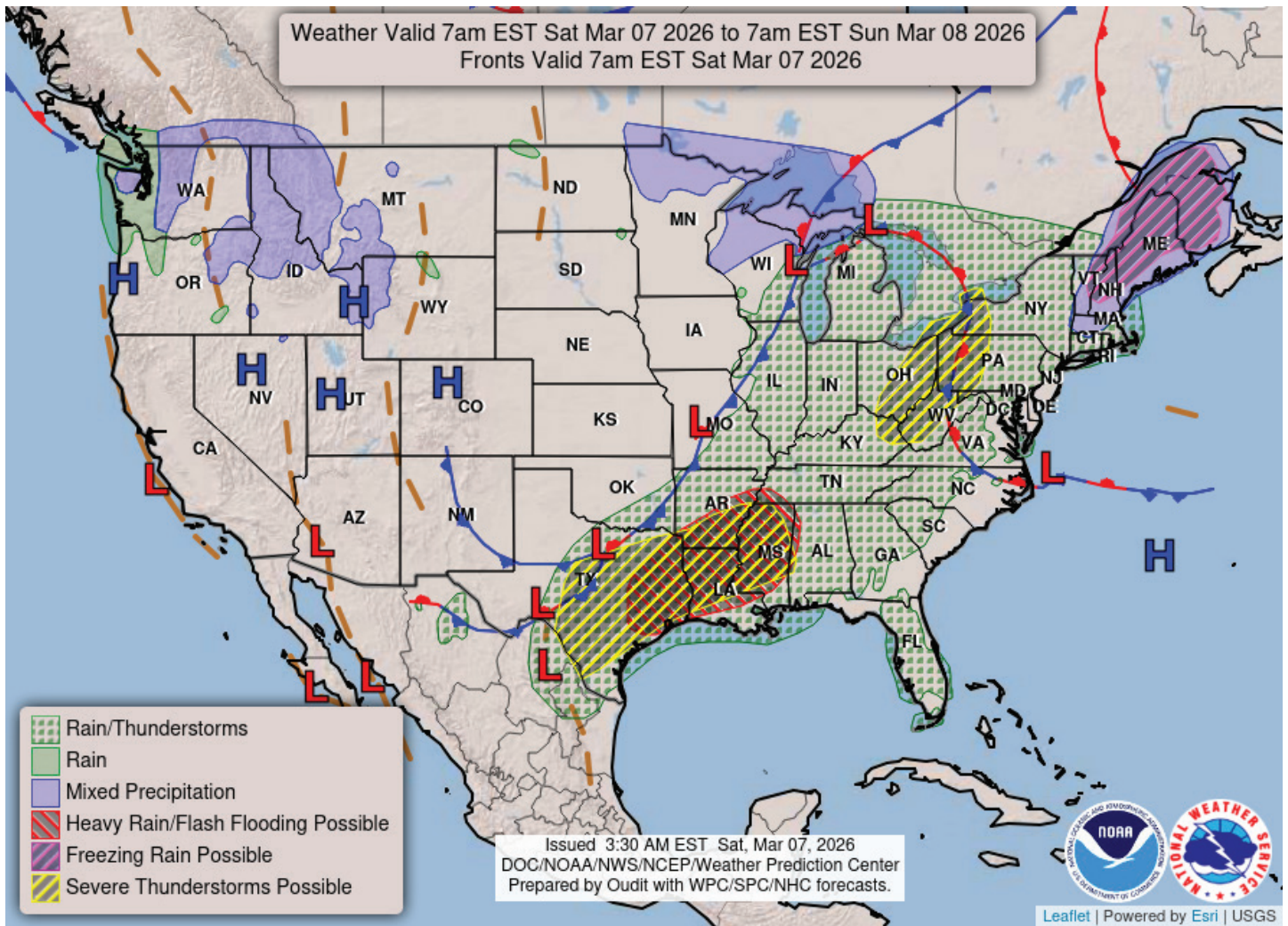
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 1.34

Precip Year to Date: 1.33

Sunset Tonight: 6.27 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:58 am



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## Today in Weather History

March 3rd, 1994: The melting of a very high snowpack resulted in flooding along the James River and other lowlands and farmland. Widespread problems included damaged roads, washed-out culverts, and flood damage to homes, especially basement flooding.

1717 — The Great Snow, a composite of four winter storms to hit the eastern U.S. in nine days, finally came to an end. Snow depths averaged 60 inches following the storm. Up to four feet of snow fell around Boston MA, and snow drifts 25 feet high were reported around Dorchester MA. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1932 — A severe coastal storm set barometric pressure records from Virginia to New England. Block Island RI reported a barometric pressure reading of 28.20 inches. (David Ludlum)

1987 — Forty-five cities in the north central and northeastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Huron SD hit 80 degrees, and Pickstown SD reached 81 degrees. Rochester MN and Rockford IL smashed their previous record for the date by sixteen degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 — High winds along a sharp cold front ushered snow and arctic cold into the Central Rocky Mountain Region and the Northern Plains. Snowfall totals in Utah ranged up to sixteen inches at Brighton. Winds gusted to 66 mph at Rapid City SD. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 — Blustery northwest winds ushered arctic cold into eastern U.S. Burlington VT reported a record low of 14 degrees below zero. Snow and ice over the Carolinas replaced the 80 degree weather of the previous day. High winds and heavy surf caused five million dollars damage along the North Carolina coast. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 — A major ice storm left much of Iowa under a thick coat of ice. It was the worst ice storm in at least twenty-five years for Iowa, perhaps the worst of the century. Up to two inches of ice coated much of western and central Iowa, with three inches reported in Crawford County and Carroll County. As much as five inches of ice was reported on some electrical lines. The ice downed 78 towers in a 17-mile stretch of a high voltage feeder near Boone costing three electric utilities fifteen million dollars. Damage to trees was incredible, and clean-up costs alone ran into the millions. Total damage from the storm was more than fifty million dollars. (Storm Data)



### **Tools for Overcoming Distractions** **God blesses those who persevere despite obstacles.**

Nehemiah 6:15-16: 15 So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of the month Elul, in fifty-two days.  
16 When all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations surrounding us saw it, they lost their confidence; for they recognized that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.

As we saw yesterday, distractions have the potential to get us off track. But Scripture gives us a role model to emulate. Nehemiah shows us the value of:

**Single-mindedness.** Nehemiah was a God-fearing man who conscientiously applied himself to the Lord's work. Likewise, when we set our attention on God's plan, our mind will stay fixed, regardless of the difficulties.

**Obedience.** The Lord wants to show us His favor; His blessing is always upon us when we are obedient to Him. This knowledge should bring us confidence in hard times, just as it did for Nehemiah.

**Accountability.** Apparently pleased with progress reports, the king let Nehemiah go back to Jerusalem (Nehemiah 13:6-7). One day when we stand before our King, we'll want Him to be pleased with the way we used our resources and gifts (1 Corinthians 3:12-15).

**Consistency.** The Israelites were helpless to stop their opponents' taunts. So Nehemiah prayed, and the people received strength to continue. Ongoing prayer is essential for us as well.

When we follow Nehemiah's example, God can accomplish great things in and through us. Which of the points from today's devotion can help you overcome what is distracting you?

*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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Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:  
03.06.26

4 10 29 48 50 3

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

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 46 Mins 48 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:  
03.06.26

8 19 26 38 42 24

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$533,000,000**

NEXT DRAW:

[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: 14 Hrs 46 Mins 49 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
03.04.26

2 18 22 30 32

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$20,000**

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 1 Min 48 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
03.04.26

5 10 26 53 59 6

TOP PRIZE:  
**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 30 Mins 48 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: 15 Hrs 30 Mins 48 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the **AP** Associated Press

## BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

SDHSAA Playoffs=

Region 1 Semifinal=

Class A=

Groton 61, Milbank 35

Webster 78, Britton-Hecla 57

Class B=

Leola-Frederick High School 66, Waubay/Summit 56

Region 2 Semifinal=

Class A=

Clark-Willow Lake 93, Elkton-Lake Benton 35

Hamlin 67, Sioux Valley 44

Region 3 Semifinal=

Class A=

Flandreau 45, Baltic 41

West Central 71, Dell Rapids 46

Region 4 Semifinal=

Class A=

Lennox 53, Vermillion 49

Sioux Falls Christian 83, Dakota Valley 54

Region 5 Semifinal=

Class A=

McCook Central-Montrose 35, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 29

Wagner 74, Parker/Marion 58

Region 6 Semifinal=

Class A=

Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 46, Mobridge-Pollock 30

Stanley County 69, Chamberlain 52

Class B=

Ipswich 61, Gettysburg 59

Sully Buttes 55, Faulkton 44

Region 7 Semifinal=

Class A=

Mahpiya Luta Red Cloud 62, Little Wound 61

Pine Ridge 72, Winner 67, OT

Class B=

Wall 81, New Underwood 55

White River 60, Kadoka 54

Region 8 Semifinal=

Class A=

Rapid City Christian 68, Hill City 40

St Thomas More 54, Lead-Deadwood 37

Class B=

Dupree 72, Harding County 53

Timber Lake 63, Faith 52

Region Semifinal=

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Class B=

Aberdeen Christian 61, Warner 56

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

## **Uelmen scores 41 as North Dakota thumps Denver 83-67 in Summit League Championship quarterfinal**

By The Associated Press undefined

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Freshman Greyson Uelmen finished with a season-high 41 points to lead North Dakota to an 83-67 victory over Denver on Friday night in the quarterfinals of the Summit League Tournament.

No. 3 seed North Dakota moves on to play No. 2 seed St. Thomas-Minnesota in a Saturday semifinal. No. 1 North Dakota State plays No. 5 seed Omaha in the other semifinal.

Uelmen made 13 of 19 shots with three 3-pointers and 12 of 18 free throws, adding three steals for the Fightin' Hawks (17-16). Eli King scored 20 points, going 7 of 17 (5 for 9 from 3-point range).

Carson Johnson led the way for the Pioneers (15-17) with 17 points. Jeremiah Burke added 13 points and Shaun Wysocki scored 11.

Uelmen had 19 points in the first half as North Dakota took a 42-29 lead into the break.

## **Glover scores 25 off the bench, Omaha knocks off South Dakota 76-62 in Summit League Tournament**

By The Associated Press undefined

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Ja'Sean Glover helped lead No. 5 seed Omaha past fourth-seeded South Dakota on Friday with 25 points off of the bench in a 76-62 win in the Summit League Tournament.

The Mavericks (16-16) play No. 1 seed North Dakota State in the semifinals Saturday.

Glover shot 7 for 13 (1 for 3 from 3-point range) and 10 of 11 from the free-throw line for the Mavericks. Lance Waddles scored 18 points while shooting 7 for 14, including 3 for 9 from beyond the arc, and added seven rebounds. Julian Margrave went 4 of 11 from the field (3 for 10 from 3-point range) to finish with 11 points.

Vince Buzelis led the Coyotes (16-15, 8-8) with 16 points and 12 rebounds. South Dakota also got 14 points from Jesse McIntosh. Jordan Crawford finished with 13 points and eight rebounds.

Omaha carried a slim three-point lead into halftime, as Waddles led the way with 13 points. Omaha took the lead for good with 10:26 remaining in the game. Glover helped the Mavericks pull away for the victory with 15 second-half points.

## **As citizen voting bill stalls in US Senate, some states forge ahead**

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (AP) — While the U.S. Senate remains deadlocked over President Donald Trump's call for strict citizenship voting requirements, Republicans in some states are pressing ahead with their own measures that could require documentary proof of citizenship to join or remain on the voter rolls.

Proof-of-citizenship legislation won final approval this week in South Dakota and Utah, already has passed one chamber in Florida and received a committee hearing in Missouri. In Michigan, supporters of voter citizenship documentation submitted 750,000 petition signatures this week in a bid to get a constitutional amendment on the November ballot.

Federal law already prohibits noncitizens from voting in U.S. elections, with violators subject to fines, imprisonment and potential deportation.

When people register to vote, they affirm under penalty of perjury that they are U.S. citizens. But Trump

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contends that's not enough. He wants prospective voters to show proof of their citizenship.

What would the federal legislation do?

The federal Safeguard American Voter Eligibility Act, or SAVE America Act, would require documentary proof of U.S. citizenship to register to vote. That could be satisfied with such things as a U.S. passport, citizen naturalization certificate or a combination of a birth certificate and government-issued photo identification.

The federal bill also would require a photo identification to cast a ballot, which some states already mandate. The Republican-led U.S. House approved the legislation last month on a mostly party-line vote, but it has stalled in the Senate under a filibuster threat from Democrats.

What would the new state measures do?

Legislation passed in South Dakota and Utah would create a two-tier voting system. People who provide documentation of their citizenship could vote in all elections. Those who don't could vote only in federal elections for president, U.S. Senate and U.S. House.

The bifurcated voting system is modeled after Arizona, where tens of thousands of voters who have not provided proof of citizenship can cast ballots only in federal elections. Arizona implemented its system after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 2013 that the state could not require citizenship documentation for federal elections.

The bills in South Dakota and Utah would take effect upon a governor's signature, meaning they could be in place for newly registered voters ahead of the November elections.

Utah's bill also directs election officials to use an online service from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement to check the citizenship status of existing voters. Those flagged would be sent notices asking for proof of citizenship to remain eligible to vote in all elections.

How are the Florida and Michigan measures different?

Neither the Michigan initiative nor legislation passed by the Florida House would require people to submit proof of citizenship when registering to vote. Instead, the measures would create a behind-the-scenes review that could result in some people being asked for citizenship documentation.

Under the Michigan measure, the secretary of state would review driver's license records, juror records and federal Homeland Security and Social Security data to determine if registered voters are citizens. Those flagged would be removed from the voter rolls if they cannot provide proof of citizenship.

The Florida legislation would require election officials to verify the citizenship of all registered voters using the state's driver's license database. Anyone whose citizenship could not be verified would be required to submit documentary proof.

Why are some pushing for proof of citizenship?

Trump and some fellow Republicans have raised alarms for several years about noncitizens voting in U.S. elections. Though evidence of people doing so is rare, there are some cases.

In 2024, a student from China was charged with perjury and attempted illegal voting after registering to vote by showing a University of Michigan student ID and signing a document asserting he was a U.S. citizen. He later contacted a local clerk's office requesting to get his ballot back, and ultimately fled the country.

The case provided part of the impetus for the Michigan ballot initiative, said Paul Jacob, chairman of Americans for Citizen Voting, which is backing the measure.

"We want a system we can have confidence in," Jacob said. "The way you avoid big problems in elections is to fix the small problems when they rise up and present themselves."

What are the concerns about documenting citizenship?

Constitutional amendments limiting voting to "only citizens" have won widespread support when placed on state ballots. But voting rights advocates say that requiring documentary proof can get complicated.

During a recent debate in the Florida House, Democratic state Rep. Ashley Gantt recounted how her aunt was born in a South Carolina home at a time when some hospitals didn't accept Black patients. As a result, she has no birth certificate and has had difficulty trying to demonstrate her citizenship, Gantt said.

A proof-of-citizenship law "would stop many thousands — if not more — U.S. citizens from voting in

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Florida," said Michelle Kanter Cohen, policy director and senior counsel at the nonprofit Fair Elections Center. "It requires documentation that a lot of eligible citizens don't have, or don't have access to."

Nationwide, about 21 million people — 9% of voting-age citizens — lack documentary proof of citizenship or cannot easily obtain it, according to a 2024 report by the Center for Democracy and Civic Engagement at the University of Maryland.

What's happened in other states that passed similar laws?

Legal challenges are common when states pass proof-of-citizenship requirements for voters.

After Kansas adopted a proof-of-citizenship law 15 years ago, more than 31,000 U.S. citizens ended up getting blocked from registering to vote. Federal courts declared the Kansas law an unconstitutional burden on voting rights, and it hasn't been enforced since 2018.

Two years ago, New Hampshire and Louisiana both passed proof-of-citizenship laws, prompting lawsuits. New Hampshire's law went to trial last month and is awaiting a ruling. Louisiana's election commissioner acknowledged in a December court filing that the requirement has not been enforced.

A nonprofit group also filed a legal challenge to a Wyoming proof-of-citizenship law passed last year. But a federal court dismissed that case while ruling the group lacked standing to sue.

## **A \$220 million ad blitz and a public split with Trump mark the end of Kristi Noem's DHS tenure**

By REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a one-minute video, Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem, decked out in Western riding gear and a cowboy hat, rides a horse through a pine forest near Mount Rushmore. She trumpets her department's hard-line message: "You cross the border illegally, we'll find you."

The ad was one of the many times the outgoing secretary made herself the public face of her department. In the end, that approach led to her undoing.

President Donald Trump on Thursday announced he was firing Noem, a decision that came on the heels of back-to-back hearings in Congress this week where she faced rare but blistering criticism from Republican lawmakers, especially over the \$220 million ad campaign that featured the secretary on horseback.

An administration official said the ad campaign, along with other "many unfortunate leadership failures" such as fallout from the immigration enforcement operation in Minnesota and mismanagement of her staff, led to her firing. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to discuss the private considerations for the firing.

Noem had faced criticism for months, primarily from Democrats, about the administration's tough immigration crackdown, especially in the aftermath of the shooting deaths of two Minneapolis protesters at the hands of federal officers. Despite outrage over how she characterized the protesters as agitators, publicly Trump stood by her throughout her 13-month tenure.

Noem's social media was awash in videos of her out on the streets seemingly joining arrest sweeps of illegal migrants, and photographs of her posing in front of inmates at a notorious El Salvadoran prison. Airports across the country also beamed videos of Noem blaming Democrats for a federal government shutdown.

In the end, keeping the spotlight on herself drew fierce scrutiny that may have pushed the president over the edge in deciding whether to keep her on board. Trump said he will nominate Oklahoma Republican Sen. Markwayne Mullin in her place and will make Noem a "Special Envoy for The Shield of the Americas," a new security initiative that will focus on the Western Hemisphere.

Noem was grilled in Congress this week over the ads

In the Mount Rushmore ad, a montage of video clips shows classic images of American history and culture — a rocket launching into air, a woman standing in a golden wheat field — interspersed with images of Trump being sworn into office, pumping his fist in the air after being shot at, and walking along a row of saluting cadets.

"Anyone who searches for freedom can always find a home here, but that freedom's a precious thing.

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And we defend it vigorously. You cross the border illegally, we'll find you," Noem says in the video.

"But if you come here the right way, your American dream can be as big as these open skies. From President Trump and me, Welcome home."

Over two days of questioning this week, senators and representatives pushed her to explain the ad campaign.

Republican Sen. John Kennedy of Louisiana asked whether spending \$220 million was appropriate when the administration was in a battle against waste. And he asked what the president knew.

"The president approved ahead of time you spending \$220 million running TV ads across the country in which you are featured prominently?"

"Yes, sir," Noem replied. "We went through the legal processes. Did it correctly."

She was repeatedly pressed about contracts awarded surrounding the campaign.

The Associated Press reported last year that the Department of Homeland Security, citing "an unusual and compelling urgency" over the situation at the U.S.-Mexico border, skipped a fully competitive bidding process when it launched an ad campaign early in 2025 and gave two Republican-linked firms the first part of the funding.

Noem insisted to Kennedy that the campaigns were effective.

"Well, they were effective in your name recognition," Kennedy replied.

Kennedy said Trump and Noem had different versions of the president's role

Kennedy went on to suggest that the campaign "puts the president in a terribly awkward spot."

"It's just hard for me to believe knowing the president as I do, that you said, 'Mr. President, here's some ads I've cut and I'm going to spend \$220 million running them' that he would have agreed to that," said Kennedy.

Trump later told NBC News that he didn't know about the campaign and that he wasn't "thrilled" with it.

"I spent less money than that to become president. I didn't know about it," he said.

Kennedy told CNN that he got a call from Trump Tuesday evening and the president was angry.

"Her version and the president's version of whether the president, A) was informed and B) consented are decidedly different," Kennedy said.

Kennedy, speaking after Noem's firing, said he spoke with the president after the secretary's testimony and he was "mad as a murder hornet."

When Trump nominated Noem for his Cabinet, he said he'd known her for years and she was "very strong" on border security. As recently as after the Minneapolis fallout in January, Trump said she was doing "great."

Noem made herself the public face of DHS

Beyond the Mount Rushmore ad, Noem appeared in other ads and a stream of social media videos and photos put out by the DHS communications team or in news reports. The constant appearances and content showed an image of a secretary out in the field, carrying out Trump's vision. She swooped into the heart of immigration enforcement operations, with visuals of the action following shortly after.

It was a tactic she employed right from the beginning of her tenure, when she went out with Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents making arrests in New York City. Wearing a flak jacket and baseball cap, Noem said in a video that they were "getting the dirtbags off the streets."

Later images showed her at the controls of a plane in Alaska or decked out in firefighting gear taking part in a training exercise. In Chicago she accompanied agents on a raid near a local Walmart store.

In one video, she stood in front of a cell packed with inmates in a Salvadoran prison and warned people not to come to the U.S. illegally or they could end up there.

She may have successfully raised her profile. But in the end, she became the latest senior administration official to rankle the president and be shuffled into obscurity.

## Trump will join grieving families for the return of soldiers killed in war in the Middle East

By SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump plans to join grieving families at Dover Air Force Base on Saturday at the dignified transfer for the six U.S. soldiers killed in the war in the Middle East.

The dignified transfer, a ritual that returns the remains of U.S. service members killed in action, is considered one of the most somber duties of any commander in chief. During his first term, Trump said bearing witness to the transfer was “the toughest thing I have to do” as president.

On his social media platform Friday night, Trump wrote: “I will be going to Dover Air Force Base tomorrow, with the First Lady and Members of my Cabinet, to pay our Highest Respect to our Great Warriors, who are returning home for the last time. GOD BLESS THEM ALL!”

Those killed in action were Sgt. 1st Class Nicole Amor, 39, of White Bear Lake, Minnesota; Capt. Cody Khork, 35, of Winter Haven, Florida; Chief Warrant Officer 3 Robert Marzan, 54, of Sacramento, California; Maj. Jeffrey O’Brien, 45, of Indianola, Iowa; Sgt. 1st Class Noah Tietjens, 42, of Bellevue, Nebraska; and Sgt. Declan Coady, 20, of West Des Moines, Iowa, who was posthumously promoted from specialist.

The six members of the Army Reserve, who were killed by a drone strike at a command center in Kuwait, were all from the 103rd Sustainment Command based in Des Moines, Iowa, which provides food, fuel, water and ammunition, transport equipment and supplies. They died just one day after the U.S. and Israel launched its military campaign against Iran.

“These soldiers engaged in the most noble mission: protecting their fellow Americans and keeping our homeland secure,” Republican Sen. Joni Ernst of Iowa, a combat veteran, said after the six were identified. “Our nation owes them an incredible debt of gratitude that can never be repaid.”

During the ritual, transfer cases draped with the American flag and holding the remains of the fallen soldiers are carried from the military aircraft that transported them to an awaiting vehicle to take them to the mortuary facility at the Delaware base. There, the service members are prepared for their final resting place.

Amor’s husband, Joey Amor, said earlier this week that she had been scheduled to return home to him and their two children within days.

“You don’t go to Kuwait thinking something’s going to happen, and for her to be one of the first – it hurts,” Joey Amor said.

O’Brien had served in the Army Reserve for nearly 15 years, according to his LinkedIn account, and his aunt said in a post on Facebook that O’Brien “was the sweetest blue-eyed, blonde farm kid you’d ever know. He is so missed already.”

Marzan’s sister described him in a Facebook post as a “strong leader” and loving husband, father and brother.

“My baby brother, you are loved and I will hold onto all our memories and cherish them always in my heart,” Elizabeth Marzan wrote.

Coady was among the youngest people in his class, trained to troubleshoot military computer systems, but he impressed his instructors, his father, Andrew Coady, told The Associated Press.

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

Khork’s family described him as “the life of the party” who was known for his “infectious spirit” and “generous heart” and who had wanted to serve in the military since childhood.

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

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

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

Trump most recently traveled to Dover in December to honor two Iowa National Guard members and a U.S. civilian interpreter who were killed in an ambush attack in the Syrian desert. He attended dignified transfers several times during his first term, including for a Navy SEAL killed during a raid in Yemen, for two Army officers whose helicopter crashed in Afghanistan and for two Army soldiers killed in Afghanistan when a person dressed in an Afghan army uniform opened fire.

## 4 dead in Michigan as powerful storms that produced at least 1 tornado rip through the state

By HALLIE GOLDEN, KATHY McCORMACK and JEFF MARTIN Associated Press

Four people were killed Friday in southern Michigan as powerful storms that produced at least one tornado, reduced homes to rubble, sent parts of roofs flying into the air and left a trail of debris hanging from power lines.

In the Union Lake area, near Union City, three people were killed and 12 injured after an apparent tornado hit, according to the Branch County Sheriff's Office. About 50 miles (80.5 kilometers) southwest, Cass County officials reported one death and several injuries, after a tornado touched down.

Lisa Piper stood on her back deck and videoed a terrifying scene that played out on the other side of frozen Union Lake as a funnel cloud formed and then dropped toward the ground. Trees were torn from their roots and debris flew into the air.

"It's lifting houses!" she said. As the devastation continued, she exclaimed: "Oh my heart is pounding. Oh, I hope they're OK."

Powerful storms formed Friday from Michigan all the way to Oklahoma, with reports of heavy rain and threats of severe thunderstorms. Tornado watches stretched from Iowa to Oklahoma, along with Michigan.

At least one tornado has been confirmed in southern Michigan, near Union City, on Friday, according to the National Weather Service, and there were reports of possible others.

Part of the First Congregational United Church of Christ in Union City was damaged, although its nearly 150-year-old grand piano was spared, it said in a post on Facebook.

The combination of a weather system that pulled moisture out of the Gulf of Mexico and a warm front that moved north created the right conditions for a tornado in a state where they're relatively rare, according to David Roth, a meteorologist at the weather service's Weather Prediction Center in College Park, Maryland. The system encountered much cooler air in the Great Lakes area.

Michigan gets an average of 15 tornadoes a year, which is much less than the 155 for Texas and 96 for Kansas, he said.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer activated the state's Emergency Operations Center Friday "to coordinate an all-hands-on-deck response to severe weather," she said in a statement.

In St. Joseph County, Michigan, next to the Indiana border, the sheriff's office told residents to "seek shelter immediately" following reports of an unconfirmed tornado, a severe thunderstorm watch and possible winds more than 60 mph (96 kph). The sheriff's office said they should expect power outages, closed roads and disruptions to cell service and the internet.

Severe weather stretches far beyond Michigan

A tornado cut around a 4-mile (6.4-kilometer) path of damage in Okmulgee County, some 30 miles (48 kilometers) south of Tulsa, although more details wouldn't be clear until daybreak, said Jeff Moore, the county's emergency manager.

Some people were injured, although Moore couldn't provide an exact number or their conditions, and large trees were toppled. Power was out for more than 1,600 people, according to poweroutage.us.

"We're just getting everywhere as fast as we can, clearing roads as fast we can," Moore said.

In an eerie scene captured on video Thursday, a first responder drove straight at a storm near the western Oklahoma town of Fairview, where flashes of lightning illuminated a giant funnel that appeared

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to reach the ground. That storm, among the first outbreaks of severe weather on the verge of the spring storm season, was filmed by a camera mounted on the deputy's car.

Nearby, a 47-year-old woman and her 13-year-old daughter from Fairview were found dead in a vehicle near an intersection of a highway and a county road at about 10 p.m. Thursday, authorities said.

"I am praying for the family as they grieve this tragic loss, as well as all those impacted by the storms," Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt said in a statement Friday.

Multiple large municipalities could see severe storms

More than 5 million Americans were at an enhanced risk of severe weather in an area that includes Kansas City, Missouri, and Topeka, Kansas, the national Storm Prediction Center said Friday.

Severe, scattered thunderstorms are expected to continue Friday evening from areas of the Plains states to the Ozarks and Midwest, the National Weather Service said.

The spring storms come near the start of what many call tornado season, which generally begins at various times in different parts of the U.S. Experts recommend a few simple safety steps to take before tornadoes hit, including having a weather radio and a plan for where to take shelter.

The weather began to ease Friday in some areas of the Northeast, but Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut remained under weather advisories.

In parts of the southern U.S., the 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 Valley and Mid-Atlantic," federal forecasters wrote in their long-range forecast discussion. "Daily records could become widespread."

## Trump looks to turn attention to Western Hemisphere, at least for a moment, at a regional summit

By AAMER MADHANI and JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

DORAL, Fla. (AP) — President Donald Trump is set to gather with Latin American leaders on Saturday at his Miami-area golf club as his administration looks to demonstrate it's still committed to sharpening U.S. foreign policy focus on the Western Hemisphere even as it deals with five-alarm crises around the globe.

The gathering, which the White House is calling the "Shield of the Americas" summit, comes just two months after Trump ordered an audacious U.S. military operation to capture Venezuela's then-president, Nicolás Maduro, and whisk him and his wife to the United States to face drug conspiracy charges.

Looming even larger is Trump's decision to join with Israel to launch a war on Iran one week ago, a conflict that has left hundreds dead, convulsed global markets and unsettled the broader Middle East.

He started Saturday with a social media post warning that more Iranian officials would become targets in the war and that strikes on the country will intensify.

"Today Iran will be hit very hard!" Trump said.

Trump's time with the Latin American leaders will be limited: He is set to fly to Dover Air Force Base, Delaware, to be on hand for the dignified transfer of the six U.S. troops killed in a drone strike on a command center in Kuwait, one day after the U.S. and Israel launched their military campaign against Iran.

But with the summit, Trump will look to turn attention to the Western Hemisphere, at least for a moment. He has pledged to reassert U.S. dominance in the region and push back on what he sees as years of Chinese economic encroachment in America's backyard.

"Under previous leaders, we grew obsessed with every other theater and every other border in the world except our own," Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth told regional leaders and defense ministers who gathered in Florida this week for talks on countering drug cartels. "These elites reduced our power and presence in this hemisphere, opting for a benign neglect that was anything but benign."

Who will be attending

The leaders of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guyana, Honduras, Panama, Paraguay, and Trinidad and Tobago have confirmed they will take part in the gathering

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at the Republican president's Trump National Doral Miami, a golf resort where he is also set to host the Group of 20 summit later this year.

The idea for a summit of like-minded conservatives from across the hemisphere emerged from the ashes of what was to be the 10th edition of the Summit of the Americas, which was scrapped during the U.S. military buildup off the coast of Venezuela last year.

Host Dominican Republic, pressured by the White House, had barred Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela from attending the regional gathering. But after leftist leaders in Colombia and Mexico threatened to pull out in protest — and with no commitment from Trump to attend — the Dominican Republic's president, Luis Abinader, decided at the last minute to postpone the event, citing "deep differences" in the region.

The Shield of the Americas moniker is meant to speak to Trump's vision for a "America First" foreign policy toward the region that leverages U.S. military and intelligence assets unseen across the area since the end of the Cold War.

But notably missing will be the region's two dominant powers — Brazil and Mexico — as well as Colombia, long the linchpin of U.S. anti-narcotics strategy in the region.

Richard Feinberg, who helped plan the first Summit of Americas in 1994 while working at the National Security Council in the Clinton White House, said the contrast could not be starker.

"The first Summit of the Americas, with 34 nations and a carefully negotiated comprehensive agenda for regional competitiveness, projected inclusion, consensus and optimism," said Feinberg, now professor emeritus at the University of California, San Diego. "The hastily convened Shield of the Americas mini-summit conjures a crouched defensiveness, with only a dozen or so attendees huddled around a single dominant figure."

The challenge from China

Since returning to the White House, Trump has made countering Chinese influence in the hemisphere a top priority. His national security strategy promotes the "Trump Corollary" to the 19th century Monroe Doctrine, which had sought to ban European incursions in the Americas, by targeting Chinese infrastructure projects, military cooperation and investment in the region's resource industries.

The first demonstration of the more muscular approach was Trump's strong-arming of Panama to withdraw from China's Belt and Road Initiative and review long-term port contracts held by a Hong Kong-based company amid U.S. threats to retake the Panama Canal.

More recently, the U.S. capture of Maduro and Trump's pledge to "run" Venezuela threatens to disrupt oil shipments to China — the biggest buyer of Venezuelan crude before the raid — and bring into Washington's orbit one of Beijing's closest allies in the region. Trump is scheduled to travel to Beijing later this month to meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

But even leaders closely aligned with Trump have been reluctant to sever ties with China, said Evan Ellis, an expert on Chinese engagement in the region at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

For many countries, China's trade-focused diplomacy fills a critical financial void in a region with major development challenges ranging from poverty reduction to infrastructure bottlenecks. In contrast, Trump has been slashing foreign assistance to the region while rewarding countries lined up behind his crackdown on immigration — a policy widely unpopular across the hemisphere.

"The U.S. is offering the region tariffs, deportations and militarization whereas China is offering trade and investment," said Kevin Gallagher, director of Boston University's Global Development Policy Center, who has written extensively about China's economic diplomacy in the Americas. "Leaders in the region would do well to remain neutral and hedge, such that they can leverage increased U.S.-China rivalry to their own benefit."

Before the summit, Trump announced that he was naming Kristi Noem, whom he just removed as his homeland secretary, as his special envoy for the Shield of the Americas.

Noem said Trump will announce "a big agreement" at the summit centered on "how we're going to go after cartels and drug trafficking in the entire Western Hemisphere."

## **23 dead, flights disrupted and military deployed after heavy rains pound Kenya's capital overnight**

By EVELYNE MUSAMBI Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Twenty-three people died, flights were disrupted and the military was deployed as motorists in the Kenyan capital were stranded for hours on Saturday after roads were flooded following heavy rains overnight.

George Seda, the police boss in Nairobi, said Saturday that some of the people drowned and others were electrocuted, warning that the death toll may rise as search and rescue operations continue. Seda also said that more than 100 vehicles were damaged, with some overturning on the roadside and in parking bays.

Kenya Airways Saturday said flights were disrupted, with some diverted to the coastal city of Mombasa, and that disruptions would continue for hours.

The military was deployed to assist emergency rescue services, and the local toll road operator waived fees for an elevated road.

Heavy rain began on Friday and continued overnight, submerging vehicles and forcing motorists in some areas to wade through hip-high water to reach higher ground.

Videos of flooded homes and overturned vehicles were shared on social media.

A military rescue unit was deployed overnight to support emergency services as Kenya Red Cross response units struggled to reach people in need.

Kenya Red Cross Secretary-General Ahmed Idris said search and rescue teams were working tirelessly to assist those stranded.

"We are severely limited by the traffic and the situation on what used to be roads. We are doing our best to reach those in need," he wrote on X.

Kenya's Public Service Minister Geoffrey Ruku said Saturday that he was coordinating national disaster preparedness, response, and recovery efforts. He urged Kenyans to be cautious and prioritize their safety.

Some residents blamed the flooding on clogged drainage systems, stating that city authorities ought to have prepared by ensuring there was functional drainage infrastructure ahead of the rainy season.

One resident, Aisha Bajaber, wrote on X, "The whole city is flooded yet again. How long will officials keep ignoring the lack of drainage?"

Rains have been pounding the country since late February, which marks the start of the long-rains season.

Previous rain seasons have seen flooding, landslides and mudslides that have left hundreds of people dead and seen thousands of others displaced.

## **At least 8 killed in Ukraine's Kharkiv as Russian missile hits apartment building**

By SUSIE BLANN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — At least eight people, including two children, were killed and 10 others were wounded on Saturday by a Russian missile that hit a five-story residential building in Ukraine's second-largest city, Kharkiv, officials said.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy condemned the attack and called for an international response. He said that Russia struck Ukraine overnight with 29 missiles and 480 drones, targeting energy facilities in Kyiv and other central regions and with damage reported in at least seven other locations across the country.

According to preliminary data, air defense systems downed 19 missiles and 453 drones with hits from 9 missiles and 26 strike drones recorded at 22 locations.

In Kharkiv, in Ukraine's northeast, emergency workers were combing the rubble, looking for survivors. Among the dead are a primary school teacher and her son, a second-grade student, who were killed in their home and an eighth-grader who also died with her mother, according to the city's mayor, Ihor Terekhov.

The regional Prosecutors's Office said the building was hit by a new Russian cruise missile known as Izdeliye-30. Ukrainian reports said that the new subsonic air-launched weapon that Russia has recently

started to use against Ukraine has a range of 1,500 kilometers (930 miles) and is equipped with a new satellite navigation system more resistant to jamming.

In the Kyiv region, damage from debris was reported in three districts, according to local authorities. In the southern Odesa region, 80 firefighters were called in to help battle massive fires at infrastructure facilities following an attack with multiple drones. Ukraine's state rail operator Ukrzaliznytsia said damage to the rail infrastructure forced changes to a number of routes in the center-west of the country.

In Moscow, the Russian Defense Ministry said the overnight strike targeted Ukrainian military factories, energy facilities and air bases.

"There must be a response from partners to these savage strikes against life," Zelenskyy said in a post on X. "Russia has not abandoned its attempts to destroy Ukraine's residential and critical infrastructure, and therefore support must continue. We count on active work with the European Union to guarantee greater protection for our people. I am grateful to everyone who helps strengthen our protection."

Russia has fired tens of thousands of Iranian-designed drones at Ukraine since it invaded its neighbor just over four years. It has launched a large-scale domestic production of them and battered Ukraine with hundreds of drones in a single night — more than were used during some entire months in 2024.

Iran has responded to joint U.S.-Israeli strikes by launching the same type of Shahed drones at countries in the Middle East.

Zelenskyy said he had received a U.S. request for support to defend against the Iranian drones in the Middle East and had given the order for equipment to be provided along with Ukrainian experts.

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

## **NFL teams are becoming more willing to trade two first-round picks for elite defensive players**

By ROB MAADDI AP Pro Football Writer

Defense wins championships.

That's why NFL teams are becoming more willing to part with valuable draft picks for elite defenders.

Trading two first-rounders for a player has been rare with fewer than 20 such deals over the past 40 years. However, three of those have occurred in the past 6 1/2 months and each was for a superstar defensive player.

Five-time Pro Bowl edge rusher Maxx Crosby became the latest premier talent traded for two No. 1s when the Baltimore Ravens acquired the 28-year-old star from the Las Vegas Raiders on Friday night, two people with knowledge of the deal told The Associated Press on Friday night.

Both people spoke on condition of anonymity because the trade can't be announced until the league's new year starts next week.

The last two Super Bowls were decided by superior defenses. Seattle's "Dark Side" defense sacked Drake Maye six times in a 29-13 victory over New England last month.

Last year, the Eagles sacked Patrick Mahomes six times in Philadelphia's 40-22 victory over the Chiefs.

Adding Crosby is a significant boost for the Ravens, who've fallen short in the playoffs several times despite successful regular seasons led by two-time NFL MVP Lamar Jackson.

Crosby upgrades a defense that had just 30 sacks in 2025, tied for 28th in the NFL. He could thrive under new coach Jesse Minter, a former defensive coordinator.

Here's a look at some other trades involving two first-round picks over the past five years:

Sauce Gardner

The Colts sent two first-rounders and wide receiver Adonai Mitchell to the Jets for the two-time All-Pro cornerback last November. Indianapolis was 7-2 at the time but injuries to quarterback Daniel Jones and Gardner helped derail their season.

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Micah Parsons

The Packers traded two first-rounders and three-time Pro Bowl defensive tackle Kenny Clark to Dallas for the three-time All-Pro edge rusher a week before the start of last season.

Parsons had 12 1/2 sacks in 14 games, helping Green Bay start 9-3-1. They didn't win a game without him after he tore an ACL.

Russell Wilson

The Denver Broncos made a blockbuster deal to acquire the 10-time Pro Bowl quarterback in March 2022, sending two first-round picks, two second-round picks, a fifth-round pick, QB Drew Lock, tight end Noah Fant, and defensive lineman Shelby Harris to Seattle. Wilson went 11-19 in only two seasons in Denver before he was released.

Deshaun Watson

In March 2022, the Cleveland Browns made what turned out to be one of the worst trades in NFL history when they acquired Watson and a 2024 sixth-round pick from the Houston Texans in exchange for three first-round picks, a third-round pick and two fourths.

The Browns then signed Watson to a \$230 million contract fully guaranteed. He's played just 19 games in four years, going 9-10.

Matthew Stafford

The Los Angeles Rams traded quarterback Jared Goff, two first-rounder and a third to the Detroit Lions for Stafford in January 2021. The three-time Pro Bowl QB led the Rams to a Super Bowl title that season and was AP NFL MVP in 2025.

## **Hong Kong firm seeks \$2 billion over Panama's takeover of 2 key canal ports**

HONG KONG (AP) — A subsidiary of a Hong Kong-based company that has lost control of two critical ports on the Panama Canal said it is seeking \$2 billion of compensation in damages from Panama over its "illegal" takeover of the ports.

Panama Ports Company, a unit of Hong Kong's CK Hutchison Holdings, said in a Friday statement that it is demanding the sum under international arbitration proceedings that it had already started.

Panama's government last week seized control of the Balboa and Cristobal ports on each end of the Panama Canal, a crucial waterway for maritime trade, after the country's Supreme Court declared earlier that a concession allowing the Panama Ports Company to run the pair of ports was unconstitutional.

Panama Ports Company operated the two ports since 1997 and had only renewed its concession in 2021 for another 25 years. Beijing and Hong Kong's governments had also hit back at Panama over the seizure of the two ports.

The two ports came into the spotlight after U.S. President Donald Trump, early last year, accused China of "running" the Panama Canal.

After CK Hutchison announced a deal in March last year that it would sell the bulk of their dozens of global ports, including the two Panama ports, to a consortium that involved U.S. investment firm BlackRock in a \$23 billion deal, Beijing was quick to protest and the deal has been largely stalled over the past months.

CK Hutchison and the Panama Ports Company "will not relent and they are not coming for some token relief — they will assert all of their rights and damages they are due because of the radical breaches and anti-investor conduct of the Panamanian State," Friday's statement said.

In the statement, Panama Ports Company also said the Panamanian state had previously misstated the compensation figure sought in press comments. Panama Economy Minister Felipe Chapman had earlier said the company was seeking \$1.5 billion in compensation.

In a separate statement on Friday, CK Hutchison accused Panama of occupying the two ports and taking the property and personnel of the Panama Ports Company "without transparency." The company also said it would continue to "pursue recourse to available national and international legal proceedings" on the matter.

## Videos show US citizen's shooting death in Texas last year by federal immigration agent

By MICHAEL BIESECKER, REBECCA BOONE and JACK BROOK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Newly released videos showing the fatal shooting of a U.S. citizen by a federal immigration agent in Texas last year call into question assertions by the Department of Homeland Security that a driver intentionally rammed an agent with his car immediately before he was killed.

The videos, including from officer body cameras, offer the first visual account of the shooting of Ruben Ray Martinez, 23, during a beach trip last year. Hours of footage and other law enforcement records were released Friday following a public records request from The Associated Press and other news outlets.

Martinez's death was the earliest of at least six fatal shootings by federal agents since President Donald Trump launched a nationwide immigration crackdown in his second term, and is among several cases in which video has called into question the administration's initial narratives.

The Texas Rangers closed their investigation into the March 15, 2025, shooting after a grand jury declined last week to file any criminal charges against Homeland Security Investigations Supervisory Special Agent Jack Stevens, who fired the fatal shots, according to records released by the Texas Department of Public Safety.

In a written statement included in the files, Stevens said he fired to protect his fellow agents, police officers and the public from what he feared was a potential terrorist attack intended to cause mass casualties. A DHS spokesperson said last month the HSI agent fired defensive shots after the driver "intentionally ran over" his fellow agent, "resulting in him being on the hood of the vehicle."

The newly released body camera videos, taken from behind Martinez's car, do not clearly show the vehicle striking an agent.

Another video shows Joshua Orta, who was riding in the car with Martinez, telling investigators that his friend had not intended to harm federal officers but had "panicked" because he feared getting arrested for driving while intoxicated.

"He didn't know what to do. Like he definitely didn't want to go to jail," Orta said. "But as far as like running over an officer ... he wouldn't do that."

Spokespersons for DHS did not respond to requests for comment about the videos.

'Shots fired, shots fired'

While local media reported at the time the shooting involved a police officer, DHS did not publicly disclose its agents were involved until after the AP and other media outlets reported it last month.

Martinez was just days past his 23rd birthday when he and Orta drove from their hometown of San Antonio down to South Padre Island, a popular spring break party destination. They drank with friends and smoked marijuana before heading back out on the town, Orta told investigators.

Martinez was driving his blue Ford sedan when, shortly after midnight, they came upon the scene where South Padre police officers were directing traffic around a two-car collision at a busy intersection. Also at the scene were three HSI agents from a maritime border security task force redirected to conduct immigration enforcement, according to documents.

In body camera footage captured by two of the island's police officers, Martinez's car can be seen slowly approaching the intersection, appearing to go straight as vehicles were being instructed to turn left. Martinez's car slows to a crawl — nearly a full stop — for pedestrians in the crosswalk. Once the pedestrians are out of the way, the car slowly pulls into the intersection before stopping again as the HSI agents approach, shouting instructions for the driver to stop.

One of the HSI agents, identified in documents as Special Agent Hector Sosa, moves in front of the car. Stevens is on the driver's side and reaches toward the door.

"Get him out, get him out," one of the officers can be heard shouting.

Martinez's car begins slowly moving forward and turning to the left, where other vehicles were traveling. Stevens, on the driver's side of the car, is keeping pace and appears to be leaning in toward the open driver's side window. As officers yell for Martinez to stop, Stevens pulls his weapon and rapidly fires three

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shots through the window before quickly backing away.

"Shots fired, shots fired," one of the police officers wearing a camera yells into his radio.

The entire incident transpires in about 15 seconds.

Agents pull the driver from the car

The blue Ford quickly comes to a full stop and Martinez is pulled from the vehicle and handcuffed by multiple officers. Orta is also pulled from the passenger seat and handcuffed.

Martinez remains in cuffs and on the ground, unmoving, for about a minute before paramedics already on the scene of the earlier traffic accident begin to provide medical aid.

An autopsy report shows all three shots fired by Stevens hit Martinez, with bullets traveling through his left arm before entering his torso and piercing his heart, lungs, liver and other organs. The autopsy report also showed that Martinez's blood alcohol level was 0.12%, well above the legal limit to drive in Texas of 0.08%.

In a three-page written statement provided to the Texas Rangers almost two months after the shooting, Stevens said he fired his weapon as Martinez "accelerated forward, striking Special Agent Sosa who wound up on the hood of the vehicle." He also said he narrowly avoided being run over, being struck by the driver's side and "causing the mirror to break off of the vehicle." A photo from the scene showed the mirror damaged, but still on the car.

As he fired, the agent said that "still fresh on his mind" were recent domestic and international events, including a man who had driven a pickup truck into a crowd of New Year's revelers in New Orleans weeks earlier.

"The driver's eyes were open widely, fist clenched to the steering wheel, and he was looking past the officers on scene as he failed to comply with the loud and repeated verbal commands of multiple law enforcement officers," Stevens wrote. "This is a behavior I have observed in my training and experience as a pre attack indicator and sign of noncompliance as the suspect is looking in the path of their intended movement and is not indicative of compliance. This path of movement, if left unmitigated, would, using the vehicle as a weapon, have resulted in numerous casualties."

As reported by AP last month, an internal U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement investigation said the agent struck by the car was treated for an unspecified knee injury at a nearby hospital and released. The newly released videos show the agent after the shooting arresting Orta and walking without any visible injury or limp.

'That's when he panicked and turned the wheel'

Orta said Martinez had been drinking earlier that night — several shots and a beer — and smoked marijuana when he approached the traffic checkpoint where a vehicle accident had occurred earlier.

One officer spotted an open alcoholic beverage near Martinez but directed the car to keep moving and turn to the left. Instead, Martinez continued straight, toward the accident and more officers.

"That's when he panicked and turned the wheel, and he didn't floor the gas but we kind of went a little bit and I guess they thought he was like trying to run the cop over or something," Orta said.

Orta said that their car came to a "full stop" at first. Then Martinez turned to the left with the car "barely moving."

"I saw the officer kind of get on the hood. Like he didn't hit him, but like he kind of like, you know what I mean, caught his feet," Orta said. "It was just slowly moving and they started shooting."

Orta died Feb. 21 in a car accident in San Antonio.

Lawyers representing Martinez's mother, Rachel Reyes, said in a statement the newly released videos and other evidence showed his car was barely moving when Stevens fired at point-blank range.

"This batch of evidence shows no justification for Ruben's killing," lawyers Charles M. Stam and Alex Stamm said. "Still, our pursuit of full transparency will continue until we have all the facts. We, and the public, have yet to see all of the evidence held by the government."

## Ex-rapper's political party leads early results in Nepal's first election since 2025 youth revolt

By BINAJ GURUBACHARYA Associated Press

KATHMANDU, Nepal (AP) — Preliminary and partial results released Saturday showed a new political party led by an ex-rapper leading Nepal's parliamentary election, the country's first since last year's youth-led revolt.

The Rastriya Swatantra, or National Independent, Party, had already won 27 of 165 directly elected seats and was leading in 90 other constituencies in the results published by Nepal's Election Commission.

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

The 35-year-old highlighted health and education for poor Nepalis as a key focus of his campaign, which rode a wave of public anger toward traditional political parties.

He's running directly against Oli in a southeastern district, where he has a substantial lead on the former prime minister as counting continues.

The six other seats that have been called went to the Nepal Congress party and two communist parties.

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

Vote counting was continuing in most of country's constituencies Saturday and final results are expected within the next two days. Ballot boxes were being collected from remote mountain villages in the northern parts of the country using helicopters.

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

The Rastriya Swatantra Party was founded only in 2022, but gained huge support this election, emerging as the front- and posing a strong challenge to two long-dominant parties: the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist)

The 2025 protests against corruption and poor governance were triggered by a social media ban before snowballing into a popular revolt against the government. Dozens were killed and hundreds injured when protesters attacked government buildings and police opened fire on them.

## Iran war deaths could resurface Trump's complicated history with military sacrifice

By JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

It's delicate for any president to watch flag-draped transfer cases return home from overseas, a solemn tradition that honors the dead and shines a spotlight on the human costs of conflict.

Donald Trump's visit Saturday to Dover Air Force Base, honoring the six American service members killed in the war in the Middle East, could be an especially fraught moment for a president whose White House has done little to build public support for the conflict. He also has a record of controversy when it comes to talking about military service and sacrifice

Trump can be reverential, such as when he recently awarded the Medal of Honor to troops for bravery during previous conflicts.

But he can also be terse or even dismissive. After launching attacks on Iran in coordination with Israel a week ago, Trump warned that there could be American casualties. When it comes to war, he said in a video message, "that's the way it is."

Trump often highlights military bravery

The president frequently emphasizes the strength of U.S. armed services and stories of individual heroism.

"Today you entered the ranks of the bravest warriors ever to stride the face of the earth," Trump told

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retired Command Sgt. Maj. Terry P. Richardson last week before presenting the Medal of Honor for actions during the Vietnam War that were credited with saving the lives of 85 other service members.

During his State of the Union address last month, Trump presented the same medal to Army Chief Warrant Officer 5 Eric Slover, a helicopter pilot who in Venezuela was shot four times but maintained control of the aircraft, saving the men on board.

"The success of the entire mission and the lives of his fellow warriors hinged on Eric's ability to take searing pain," Trump said.

But when honoring injured service members, he sometimes interjects partisanship or other asides.

"Their valor gave us the freest, greatest and most noble republic ever to exist on the face of the earth," Trump said during a Memorial Day ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery last year.

Then he added a dig at his predecessor, Democrat Joe Biden, describing the country as "a republic that I am fixing after a long and hard four years."

He sometimes questions military sacrifice

One of Trump's first controversies after entering politics involved criticism of Sen. John McCain's military service.

"He is a war hero because he was captured. I like people who weren't captured," he said in 2015.

McCain was tortured during more than five years as a prisoner of war in Vietnam, refusing an offer to be released ahead of other Americans because his father was a high-ranking Navy admiral.

Some former officials who served during Trump's first term have claimed the president disparaged fallen service members as "suckers" and "losers" when, they said, he did not want to travel in 2018 to a cemetery for American war dead in France. Trump denied the allegation, saying, "What animal would say such a thing?"

Former Trump aides also alleged that he did not want to be seen in the presence of military amputees, saying, "it doesn't look good for me."

In 2017, he told the widow of a slain soldier that he "knew what he signed up for," according to a Florida congresswoman who heard the call. The father of another slain soldier accused the president of going back on a promise to send a check for \$25,000. The White House said the money was sent after controversy erupted.

And in 2020, Trump downplayed the severity of traumatic brain injuries service members suffered when Iran fired missiles at a U.S. base in Iraq in retaliation for a U.S. strike that killed Iran's most powerful general, Qassem Soleimani.

"I heard that they had headaches and a couple of other things, but I would say and I can report it is not very serious," Trump said.

Trump jokes about unearned military honors

Trump, who received deferments to avoid the draft during the Vietnam War, has remarked several times about wanting to receive military medals.

"I always wanted to get the Purple Heart. This was much easier," Trump told a veteran who presented his medal to Trump during his 2016 campaign. The Purple Heart is awarded to service members wounded or killed from enemy action.

And at his Medal of Honor ceremony Monday, Trump again joked getting a medal for himself, calling it "a great honor."

"I've tried numerous times to get one by myself," Trump said. "I keep getting shut down. They say: 'You can't do it, sir. Bad protocol.'"

"Very bad, I would say the worst," he added. "But I'm only kidding."

## State actors are behind much of the visual misinformation about the Iran war

By MELISSA GOLDIN Associated Press

As attacks spread after the bombing of Iran by U.S. and Israeli forces, a video circulated widely of crowds peering up at fire, smoke and debris coming from the top of a high-rise building said to be in Bahrain.

Social media users claimed an Iranian attack had hit the skyscraper. But while buildings in Bahrain have been struck by Iranian missiles during the Iran war, this video wasn't real. It was generated with artificial intelligence and shared by accounts associated with the Iranian government as part of an effort to amplify its successes.

There are multiple clues that the video was not authentic, including two cars on the left side of the clip that appear stuck together and a man in the bottom-right corner whose elbow seems to move straight through a backpack.

A deluge of misrepresented or fabricated videos has spread widely online since the Iran war began last weekend, fueled in part by state-linked propaganda and influence campaigns — particularly around who is winning the war and how many casualties there have been.

"The content that's coming from state actors tends to be a little better targeted," said Melanie Smith, senior director of policy and research on information operations at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue. "They have a very clear kind of narrative structure and the videos are just used to support some kind of statement they want to make about the conflict and about the kind of geopolitical situation writ large."

Pro-Iran social media accounts have adopted a narrative that exaggerates the destruction and death tolls wrought by the country's military — a position supported by what is being reported in Iranian state media. This has led to a large number of AI-generated videos of supposed air strikes, such as the one of the Bahraini high-rise on fire.

An ongoing Russia-aligned influence operation called Operation Overload, also referred to as Matryoshka or Storm-1679, has been posting videos designed to impersonate intelligence agencies and news outlets, undermining people's sense of safety in an effort to sway their behavior — a tactic the network has previously used during election cycles. For example, it shared a warning falsely attributed to Israeli intelligence telling Israelis in Germany and the U.S. to be cautious when in public or to not go outside at all.

Iranian censorship confuses matters further

Misrepresented and fabricated videos have been a key feature of other recent conflicts, such as the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Hamas wars, but experts say a major difference now is the lack of information from the Iranian public due to internet shutdowns and general censorship — a loss of perspectives that could have worked both for and against the Iranian government.

"In Ukraine, that message was so full-throated it really changed the entire dynamic of the conflict because the world really aligned with the perspective of Ukrainians facing the attacks and showing resilience in light of the attacks, but we're sort of missing that story from Iran," said Todd Helmus, a senior behavioral scientist at RAND who studies irregular warfare, terrorism and information operations.

In search of clicks, opportunistic social media users not affiliated with state actors have also contributed heavily to the misinformation that has spread during the first days of the Iran war, presenting old footage from other conflicts as recent, sharing video game clips as real and posting their own AI-generated content.

AI, in particular, has helped fuel misinformation in ways that weren't possible during past conflicts, even just a few years ago. Coupled with state-linked disinformation and censorship, this creates an even wider vacuum in which the truth can get lost.

"The volume of AI content is starting to just pollute the information environment in these kinds of crisis settings to a really terrifying degree," Smith said. "The inability to get access to verified and credible information in times like this — it's getting harder and harder to do that."

Nikita Bier, X's head of product, wrote in a Tuesday post that the platform will suspend users from its revenue-sharing program if they post AI-generated content from an armed conflict without a proper disclosure. The suspensions are 90 days for a first offense and permanent after that. Emerson Brooking,

director of strategy and resident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab, warns that social media platforms are now frontlines in war, and that users should be aware of their potential to be used by state actors, even if they are located thousands of miles away from on-the-ground action.

"If you're in these spaces, just understand that this is an extension of the physical battle space," he said. "That there are actors on all sides of the conflict that are actively trying to spread propaganda and disinformation to convince you that certain things are true that aren't. That your eyeballs and your attention are an asset."

## **Russia has provided Iran with information that can help Tehran strike US military, AP sources say**

By SEUNG MIN KIM and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Russia has provided Iran with information that could help Tehran strike American warships, aircraft and other assets in the region, according to two officials familiar with U.S. intelligence on the matter.

The officials, who were not authorized to comment publicly on the sensitive matter and spoke on the condition of anonymity, cautioned that the U.S. intelligence has not uncovered that Russia is directing Iran on what to do with the information as the U.S. and Israel continue their bombardment and Iran fires retaliatory salvos at American assets and allies in the Persian Gulf.

Still, it's the first indication that Moscow has sought to get involved in the war that the U.S. and Israel launched on Iran a week ago. Russia is in the rare club of countries that maintains friendly relations with Tehran, which has faced years of isolation over its nuclear program and its support of proxy groups that have wreaked havoc in the Middle East, including Hezbollah, Hamas and the Houthis.

Trump on Friday evening berated a reporter for raising the matter when he opened the floor to questions from the media at the end of a White House meeting about how paying student-athletes has recalibrated college sports.

"I have a lot of respect for you, you've always been very nice to me," Trump said to Peter Doocy, the Fox News reporter. "What a stupid question that is to be asking at this time. We're talking about something else."

White House officials downplayed the reports, but did not deny that Russia was sharing intelligence with Iran about U.S. targets in the region. White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt on Friday told reporters that "it clearly is not making any difference with respect to the military operations in Iran because we are completely decimating them."

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth in a CBS' "60 Minutes" interview on Friday said the U.S. is "tracking everything" and factoring it into battle plans, when asked about the reports Russia was aiding Iran.

"The American people can rest assured their commander in chief is well aware of who's talking to who," he said. "And anything that shouldn't be happening, whether it's in public or back-channeled, is being confronted and confronted strongly."

Leavitt declined to say if Trump had spoken to Russian President Vladimir Putin about the reported intelligence sharing or whether he believed Russia should face repercussions, saying she would let the president speak to that himself.

Asked whether Russia would go beyond political support and offer military assistance to Iran, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said there has been no such request from Tehran.

"We are in dialogue with the Iranian side, with representatives of the Iranian leadership, and will certainly continue this dialogue," he said Friday.

Pushed on whether Moscow has provided any military or intelligence assistance to Tehran since the Iran war's start, he refrained from comment.

Russia has tightened its relationship with Iran as it looked for badly needed missiles and drones to utilize in its four-year war against Ukraine.

The Biden administration declassified intelligence findings that showed Iran supplies Moscow with attack drones and has assisted the Kremlin with building a drone-manufacturing factory.

The former U.S. administration also accused Iran of transferring short-range ballistic missiles to Russia for its war in Ukraine.

Details about the U.S. intelligence were first reported by The Washington Post.

Asked whether the revelation had shaken Trump's faith in Putin's ability to cut any peace deal in the Russia-Ukraine war, Leavitt said, "I think the president would say that peace is still an achievable objective with respect to the Russia-Ukraine war."

Meanwhile, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says the United States and its allies in the Middle East are seeking Ukraine's expertise in countering Iran's Shahed drones. Tehran has been supplying Russia with Shaheds for its war on Ukraine and are now utilizing them in retaliatory attacks throughout the Gulf.

Zelenskyy says that he's spoken to the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Jordan and Kuwait about possible cooperation.

"Ukraine knows how to defend against Shahed drone attacks because our cities have faced them almost every night," said Ukraine's ambassador to the United States, Olga Stefanishyna. "When our partners are in need, we are always ready to help."

Trump, who has struggled to fulfill a campaign pledge to end the Russia-Ukraine war, has had an up-and-down relationship with Zelenskyy. He's frequently pressured the Ukrainian leader to heed Russian demands, including that Kyiv concede Ukrainian territory still in its control.

With the Pentagon facing questions about whether the Iran war is depleting U.S. stockpiles, Trump this week grumbled that former President Joe Biden provided billions in high-end weaponry to Ukraine and failed to replenish U.S. reserves.

## **After a president-filled celebration, Rev. Jesse Jackson's family gathers for a private homegoing**

MATT BROWN undefined

CHICAGO (AP) — A day after former presidents, sitting governors and local Chicago residents alike attended a vibrant, televised celebration for the late Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr., the family and friends who knew him best will privately grieve the civil rights leader at his organization's headquarters.

The private memorial service at the Rainbow PUSH Coalition's headquarters on the South Side of Chicago will include only a few hundred attendees, who are expected to be mostly family members, allies and confidants. The homegoing will serve as a capstone to a week of services held across the country.

"I foresee tomorrow will represent everything that Rev. Jackson stood for," said the Rev. Chauncey D. Brown, a pastor to a Chicago-area church and mentee of Jackson's. "It will include dignitaries and icons, as well as many from where the true power lies, with the people in the streets."

Seats will be first come, first served at the morning service, according to staff.

Since his death last month, Jackson's family and allies have honored the late reverend with commemorations, community service and demonstrations they say continue his work.

Mourners were first allowed public visitations at the Rainbow PUSH headquarters in February, giving Jackson's longtime neighbors a chance to say goodbye to the civil rights leader.

The late reverend then lay in state at the South Carolina Capitol. Jackson grew up in segregated Greenville, South Carolina. As a high schooler, he led fellow students into a protest that desegregated a local library, starting a lifetime of civil rights activism.

Services honoring Jackson in Washington, D.C., were postponed after a request for him to lie in honor at the U.S. Capitol was denied. House Republican leadership cited the precedent that only former presidents and senior generals regularly receive the privilege.

Jackson's mentees also honored his legacy by organizing on issues such as voting rights, economic inequality and political organizing in the weeks after his passing. Rainbow PUSH hosted a forum for community organizers and clergy whom Jackson mentored to discuss his impact on their careers.

On Thursday, the headquarters also hosted a series of events that celebrated Jackson's life ahead of the public celebration. Hundreds of members of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity gathered at the headquarters

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to honor Jackson.

Jackson's life "is a dream fulfilled," said Michael Barksdale Jr., one of the fraternity brothers who honored Jackson. A Chicago public school counselor who first met Jackson as a high school freshman, Barksdale said the PUSH Coalition awarded him a college scholarship after he worked as one of the group's local youth organizers.

"It is up to my generation now to continue that legacy of Jackson and all the civil rights dignitaries who came before," said Barksdale, 37. "They did all of the heavy lifting, and we are going to continue to build."

That same night, the chamber hosted a reunion for Rainbow PUSH alumni to commemorate the late reverend and his years of activism. The group included state and local lawmakers, academics, longtime organizers and former diplomats.

Carol Moseley Braun, the first Black woman ever elected to the U.S. Senate, paid her respects alongside longtime veterans of the organization who supported Jackson throughout his life. Braun, who served as a volunteer on Jackson's 1988 presidential campaign, was supported by Jackson in her successful 1992 election.

They celebrated Jackson's life and reminisced about his dual presidential bids; his globe-trotting activism as an anti-apartheid activist and hostage negotiator; and his evangelism for a Christianity that emphasized justice for all and support for the downtrodden.

The headquarters also greeted nearly 100 progressive activists from Minnesota. The assembled groups represented civil, labor and immigrants' rights groups who were recently thrust into the national spotlight after President Donald Trump's administration's enhanced immigration enforcement operation in the state sparked protests.

"It's really empowering, at least for me, to see the coalition coming together and to understand the history of civil rights and human rights and immigrants' rights," said Yeng Her, the organizing director at the Immigrant Defense Network, one of the organizations that has protested the Trump administration in Minnesota.

The Jackson family invited the activists to Chicago to learn more about Jackson's strategies and find resources for their own organizations. Organizers met Rainbow PUSH alumni and some of Jackson's children.

The gathering was a prelude to both the private service for Jackson's family and another commemoration.

On Sunday, members of the Jackson family and many of Jackson's mentees will travel to Selma, Alabama, to commemorate the "Bloody Sunday" protest marches when civil rights activists were beaten by police on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in 1965.

Jackson himself often attended the same anniversary march.

## US immigration authorities arrest Spanish-language news reporter in Tennessee

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — A reporter for a Spanish-language news outlet in Tennessee who has been detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was not shown any warrant when she was arrested this week, according to court documents filed by her attorney.

Estefany Rodriguez Florez, a reporter for Nashville Noticias who has done stories critical of ICE, was arrested Wednesday during a traffic stop, according to documents filed in federal court in Nashville. Her lawyer called for her immediate release, but ICE has asked a judge to deny the request.

Rodriguez, a Colombian citizen, entered the U.S. lawfully and has been living in the country for the past five years, court records filed by her lawyer show. She has a valid work permit, and she has applied for political asylum and legal status through her husband, who is a U.S. citizen.

Rodriguez has said she left Colombia after receiving death threats for her coverage of crime in the region, according to a statement from the National Association of Hispanic Journalists. The association said it "denounces immigration tactics that detain journalists and any efforts to interfere with news coverage of immigration enforcement."

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Rodriguez was with her husband in a marked Nashville Noticias vehicle when it was surrounded by several other vehicles and she was taken to a detention center, the news outlet said in a statement.

A court filing Friday by a lawyer for ICE said an arrest warrant had been issued for Rodriguez on Monday and her visa authorizing her to stay in the U.S. had expired. The filing said her arrest and detention "are not in violation of any laws or regulations." ICE spokesperson Melissa Egan said Rodriguez was arrested during a "targeted enforcement operation" and she will remain in custody as her case proceeds through court.

Court documents filed by Rodriguez's lawyer said that her attorney, Joel Coxander, spoke to an ICE agent who indicated that there was no arrest warrant for her at the time of her arrest. When she was arrested, Rodriguez was only shown an immigration document telling her to appear before ICE, according to the documents.

Rodriguez's lawyer said in court documents that ICE had twice rescheduled a meeting with Rodriguez on her case, first because the office was closed during a winter storm and the second time because an agent couldn't find her appointment in the system.

A new meeting was then set for March 17.

Rodriguez joined Nashville Noticias in 2022, covering social, family, health, police and immigration issues, the news outlet's statement said.

"She needs to reunite with her young daughter and husband to continue her legal process within the framework permitted by law," the statement said.

## **Explosions rock Iran's capital, and more attacks target Israel as US warns bombing will intensify**

By JON GAMBRELL, DAVID RISING, SAM METZ and SALLY ABOU ALJOUND Associated Press  
DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Explosions sent up clouds of dark smoke in the Iranian capital city early Saturday, and Tehran retaliated by firing missiles at Israel as the United States warned of a forthcoming bombing campaign that officials said would be the most intense yet in the weeklong conflict.

There was no foreseeable end to the fighting. U.S. President Donald Trump's administration approved a new \$151 million arms sale to Israel after Trump said he would not negotiate with Iran without its "unconditional surrender." Iran's U.N. ambassador said the country would "take all necessary measures" to defend itself.

Associated Press video showed explosions flashing and smoke rising over western Tehran as Israel said it had begun a broad wave of strikes. Also early Saturday, loud booms sounded in Jerusalem and incoming missiles from Iran had people heading to bomb shelters across Israel.

There were no immediate reports of casualties by Israel's emergency services.

In a sign of the widening nature of the conflict, sirens sounded early Saturday in Bahrain as Iranian attacks targeted the island kingdom. And Saudi Arabia said it destroyed drones headed toward its vast Shaybah oil field and shot down a ballistic missile launched toward Prince Sultan Air Base, which hosts U.S. forces.

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

Meanwhile, Russia has provided Iran with information that could help Tehran strike the U.S. military, according to two officials familiar with U.S. intelligence on the matter. Russian President Vladimir Putin had a call Friday with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, expressing his condolences over the killing of Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Kremlin said.

In other developments, evidence emerged suggesting that an explosion that killed scores of Iranian students at a school was likely caused by U.S. airstrikes that also hit an adjacent compound associated with the regime's Revolutionary Guard.

Qatar's energy minister, Saad al-Kaabi, warned in an interview with the Financial Times that the war could "bring down the economies of the world," predicting a widespread shutdown of Gulf energy exports that could send oil to \$150 a barrel.

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The price for a barrel of benchmark U.S. crude rose above \$90 on Friday for the first time in more than two years.

Russia is providing information to Iran, officials say

Russia has provided Iran with information that could help Tehran strike American warships, aircraft and other assets in the region, according to two officials familiar with U.S. intelligence on the matter.

The people, who were not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity, cautioned that the U.S. intelligence has not uncovered that Russia is directing Iran on what to do with the information.

Still, it's the first indication that Moscow has sought to get involved in the war.

Trump says US will help rebuild Iran once it has 'ACCEPTABLE' leaders

In a social media post Friday, Trump said "There will be no deal with Iran except UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER!" After a surrender, "and the selection of a GREAT & ACCEPTABLE Leader(s)," he wrote, the U.S. and its allies will help rebuild Iran, making it "economically bigger, better, and stronger than ever before."

Those comments were likely to raise further questions about the endgame of the war. The fighting has killed at least 1,230 people in Iran, more than 200 in Lebanon and around a dozen in Israel, according to officials in those countries. Six U.S. troops have been killed.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian wrote on social media that "some countries" had begun mediation efforts, without elaborating.

Trump has also told media outlets that he should be involved in choosing a replacement for Khamenei, who was killed in the opening strikes of the war. Trump spoke dismissively of Khamenei's son, Mojtaba Khamenei — a front-runner to replace his father — calling him "a lightweight."

Iran's U.N. ambassador, Amir Saeid Iravani, condemned Trump's statement and said Iran "does not accept and will never allow any foreign power to interfere in its internal affairs."

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.

U.S. official warns that 'biggest bombing' is coming

U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said in a television interview that the "biggest bombing campaign" of the war was still to come.

Israel has said that over the past week it has heavily bombed an extensive underground bunker that Iranian leaders had planned to use during the hostilities.

New information surfaced suggesting that a deadly Feb. 28 explosion at a school in the Iranian city of Minab, some 1,100 kilometers (680 miles) southeast of Tehran, was likely caused by U.S. airstrikes. The information included satellite images, expert analysis, a U.S. official and public information released by U.S. and Israeli military forces.

Iranian state media has said more than 165 people were killed in the blast, most of them of children.

Iran has blamed Israel and the U.S. for the explosion. Neither country has accepted responsibility, though Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has said the U.S. is investigating.

Fighting with Israeli troops reported in eastern Lebanon

The Iranian-backed militant group Hezbollah said its fighters clashed with an Israeli force that landed late Friday in the mountains of eastern Lebanon. The Lebanese Health Ministry said at least three people were killed.

Israel did not acknowledge the fighting, and its military did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Israel has carried out waves of airstrikes on the southern suburbs of Beirut, where Hezbollah has a large presence but which is also home to hundreds of thousands of civilians.

Lebanon's Health Ministry said at least 217 people have been killed by Israeli strikes since Monday and 798 wounded.

Roads in the Lebanese capital were choked with evacuating traffic as smoke rose over the city's southern districts. Two hospitals evacuated patients and staff.

"What can we do? We prayed here under the tree. During the night, we slept in the car because there is no place to stay," Jihan Shehadeh, one of the tens of thousands of displaced, said.

## Fired Michigan football coach Sherrone Moore reaches plea deal to resolve home invasion case

By LARRY LAGE AP Sports Writer

ANN ARBOR, Mich. (AP) — Former Michigan football coach Sherrone Moore pleaded no contest to two misdemeanors Friday in a deal to resolve a felony criminal case that arose immediately after he was fired for having an inappropriate relationship with his executive assistant.

The deal was struck on the same day a judge planned to hear a challenge to Moore's arrest in December on three charges, including felony home invasion. Those charges were dropped in exchange for Moore pleading no contest to trespassing and malicious use of a telecom device in a relationship.

"Things have changed," Judge J. Cedric Simpson said.

Moore had confronted the woman with whom he had been having an affair and blamed her for his dismissal, even threatening to kill himself with butter knives in her apartment, authorities said.

**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](https://www.988lifeline.org)

Assistant prosecutor Kati Rezmierski told the judge that the case changed "based on additional evidence and investigation as well as consultation" with the woman through her lawyer.

"What we do believe the evidence supports is criminal misbehavior in the context of an intimate partner relationship," Rezmierski said.

Outside the courtroom, Moore's attorney said the three initial charges, which included stalking, were not supported by facts or law.

"The dismissal of those charges validates the concerns we raised about the investigation from the very beginning. Mr. Moore is pleased to put this behind him and move forward," Ellen Michaels said as Moore and wife Kelli stood nearby.

Moore declined to comment on the outcome as they left together.

"Appreciate it," he said.

Rezmierski also declined to comment. Sentencing is scheduled for April 14. One of the charges carries a maximum penalty of six months in jail, though Michaels predicted there would be no additional time in custody beyond Moore's two nights in jail following his arrest.

"This is not the kind of case that somebody is punished by jail," she said.

Michaels said she advised Moore to plead no contest to help him move on with his family and avoid a trial.

"He has had the opportunity to be with his daughters, to be with his wife, to be home for the holidays, to take his kids to swim lessons," she said. "As somebody who's come up the coaching tree and became a head coach at a young age, that is something that he has missed out on.

"I can tell you that losing his job and being at home, he has embraced it as an opportunity to reconnect to his family, to spend time with his kids and to become the man he wants to be," Michaels said.

Moore, 40, was fired on Dec. 10 after two seasons as the successor to Jim Harbaugh, who won a national championship before leaving to lead the NFL's Los Angeles Chargers.

In dismissing Moore, the university cited an inappropriate relationship with a staff member. Rezmierski has said the woman ended the affair a few days before Moore's firing and spoke to the school.

University of Michigan spokesman Paul Corliss said the school had no comment on Moore's no-contest plea.

At a hearing in February, Moore's attorney said investigators left out key details when they obtained an arrest warrant for him. Michaels noted, for example, that a magistrate wasn't told that Moore and the

woman had a professional relationship.

Michaels said repeated text messages and phone calls had a legitimate purpose as the football team prepared for a bowl game and were not evidence of harassment. Police said Moore's assistant did not answer a dozen calls or respond to some messages from him before his dismissal.

In a statement Friday night, attorneys for Moore's assistant called on the university to conduct a wide-ranging investigation into Moore's actions and any related "institutional failures."

"Today's plea by Sheronne Moore confirms the seriousness of that criminal misconduct. But this case is about far more than one terrifying incident," attorneys Andrew M. Stroth and Steven A. Hart said. "It raises urgent and troubling questions about how a powerful figure within a major university athletic program was able to engage in years of inappropriate conduct toward a subordinate without meaningful intervention or oversight."

Moore signed a five-year contract with a base annual salary of \$5.5 million last year. According to the terms of his deal, the university did not have to buy out the remaining years of his contract because he was fired for cause.

## **Suspect in Utah killings of 3 women was free on Iowa burglary and other charges**

By MARGERY A. BECK, COLLEEN SLEVIN and MEAD GRUVER Associated Press

A man accused of killing three women in Utah and stealing their cars and credit cards was already known to police in Iowa: He was arrested there on suspicion of breaking into a cabin about two months prior, court documents show.

Officials released Ivan Miller, 22, without bail back in January on the charges in Iowa, and he vowed to appear for the next court appearance.

But Miller missed the arraignment Friday because he was in jail in southern Colorado after authorities tracked him there in one of the stolen vehicles.

A public defender representing Miller in the Colorado case, Scott Van Zandt, said Friday during a court hearing that his client does not want to speak to police or media.

Meanwhile, out in southern Utah's starkly beautiful desert country, friends and relatives of the women killed struggled to comprehend what authorities called a crime of "convenience."

Miller told investigators he stole the cars and credit cards because he needed to get back to Iowa, according to interviews outlined in court documents.

Two bodies at a trailhead, then a third at a home

The husbands of two victims found their wives dead Wednesday near a trailhead after they didn't return from a desert hike. The body of the third victim — a church-going woman who loved yardwork and kept a tidy yard — was found near her home.

There was no sign that Miller had any connection to the three, said Lt. Cameron Roden of the Utah Highway Patrol.

Miller had been on the move often in recent days if not months. A few days before the killings, Miller hit an elk in the town of Loa.

He sold his pickup truck to the tow company, leaving him without a vehicle. After staying in hotels for a few days, Miller slept in a shed on 86-year-old Margaret Oldroyd's property in Lyman, Utah, without her knowledge, according to investigators who interviewed Miller.

Oldroyd's Buick was found Wednesday at a trailhead outside Capitol Reef National Park, about 10 miles (16 kilometers) from her house in the rural area of farms and ranches. There, authorities said Miller told them he saw two women get out of a Subaru and killed them before taking their car.

Linda Dewey, 65, and her niece Natalie Graves, 34, were killed and found in a dry creek bed. Their husbands called 911 and waved down a ranger.

"Our family is dealing with the shock of the devastating loss of two members of our family who were bonding over the beauty of a hike in one of their favorite places on earth -- cherished by them and the

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community, considered to be a safe sanctuary," the family of Dewey and Graves said in a statement. "They were murdered. We cannot comprehend why this happened."

The family said Dewey was a wife, mother, grandmother, daughter and sister who had extended family and friends worldwide.

"She was loved deeply and loved her family deeply. She was the heart of our family," their statement said.

The family described Graves, a wife, daughter and sister, as "joy, sunshine and beauty embodied."

Elderly victim remembered as sweet, with a tidy yard

Police linked the Buick to its owner, Oldroyd, whose body they found in a cellar under the shed on her property.

Next-door neighbor Randy Jones said he was shocked by the death of "the sweetest woman you'd ever meet." She kept her flowers and lawn watered and neatly manicured, he said.

Oldroyd used to work at a local grocery store stocking shelves, Jones said. And when Jones helped rid her yard of skunks, she would bring him a cake as a thank you.

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

Jones said Oldroyd didn't leave home much in recent years except to attend religious services and get groceries. Now and then, she would visit him and his horses.

Miller stole Oldroyd's car after shooting her while she watched TV in her home, Wayne County prosecutors allege.

A search across the greater Four Corners region

After finding the bodies, police searched the greater Four Corners region for Miller.

He drove hundreds of miles through Arizona and New Mexico before they caught up with him using license plate readers and vehicle trackers in Pagosa Springs, a Colorado tourist town known for hot spring resorts lining the San Juan River.

Miller told investigators he killed the two hikers because he didn't like the Buick and wanted a different vehicle, according to court documents.

Miller appeared briefly in court in Colorado for the first time Friday but didn't speak except to say and spell his name. His lawyer, Van Zandt, said he would fight his client being sent to Utah, where he could face the death penalty.

Wayne County, Utah, Attorney Michael Winn declined to comment Friday on Miller's plan to fight extradition.

Miller had an arraignment scheduled Friday in Iowa on charges including felony second-degree burglary and misdemeanor theft, marijuana possession and gun possession. Court documents in that case say Miller also faced a related case charging him with illegally hunting on a game refuge, but that case was not found in a statewide search of Iowa online court records. According to a court order dated Jan. 13, he was released without bail on a promise to appear on the charges.

Suspect was free after prior arrest at Iowa state park

Miller had been arrested after rangers entered a cabin at Lake Wapello State Park in Iowa on Dec. 31 to prepare for an upcoming reservation.

They found the front door unlocked, food on the counter, a pan with bacon grease in it on the stove, a container with several marijuana joints and loaded guns, including a bolt-action rifle with a bayonet and an AR-10 with a scope and bipod, according to the arrest affidavit.

The person staying there also brought in a television, Xbox game console and Starlink internet device, suggesting "intent to stay for a long period of time" the affidavit states.

Miller showed up while the rangers were there, knocked softly and soon admitted to breaking into the cabin three days earlier seeking a warm place to stay, according to the affidavit.

The county attorney's office prosecuting Miller on his Iowa charges declined Friday to answer any questions on the case, including whether Iowa prosecutors would allow Utah officials to first pursue the more serious charges against Miller. The Associated Press left a voicemail Friday for his public defender in the Iowa case.

## **A wedding proposal and a promotion honored a Coast Guardsman before he died of injuries from mission**

By CLAIRE RUSH and GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — A U.S. Coast Guard rescue swimmer has died after being injured while on a medical evacuation mission off the Washington coast.

But before he passed away Thursday evening, two poignant ceremonies were held on his behalf: His partner posted on social media that she had accepted a hospital-room wedding proposal carried out by his family. And the Coast Guard awarded him the Distinguished Flying Cross, one of the highest military awards for heroism during flight, as his family and crewmates watched.

The rescue swimmer, Tyler Jagers, was also promoted to petty officer 2nd class.

"He demonstrated extraordinary heroism in the face of danger, upholding the highest standards of courage and excellence for Coast Guard operations," Admiral Kevin Lunday, Commandant of the Coast Guard, said in a statement Friday. "We honor his selfless actions and unwavering devotion to our highest calling: to save others."

Jagers was part of an Astoria, Oregon-based crew that responded Feb. 27 to transport a stroke victim from a commercial vessel 120 nautical miles (222 nautical km) off the Washington coast, the Coast Guard said.

The agency did not specify what happened, citing an ongoing investigation. But according to Rick McElrath, board president and founder of the Coast Guard Helicopter Rescue Swimmer Association, Jagers fell as he was being lowered to the deck from a helicopter. The association is a nonprofit dedicated to helping Coast Guard aviation veterans.

Jagers had been on life support, the association said. He was treated at hospitals in Victoria, British Columbia, and at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, south of Seattle. He died Thursday evening, the Coast Guard reported.

Jagers joined the Coast Guard in January 2022 and had served in Astoria since 2024. The Department of Homeland Security had previously recognized him for superior performance as a crew member aboard U.S. Coast Guard cutter Legare during operations in the Caribbean, the Coast Guard said.

The Coast Guard said it is conducting an investigation into the cause of his injuries.

The Canadian Coast Guard subsequently responded to evacuate the stroke victim, McElrath said.

In a post on social media Thursday, Jagers' partner described how she became his fiancée: While at his hospital bedside, his dad placed the ring on her hand.

"What I didn't realize was that he had recently told some of his closest buddies that he was getting ready to propose," Cassandra Weaver wrote. "So yesterday, surrounded by the people who love him most, his family carried out the proposal on Tyler's behalf."

Her post included photos of her hand — with the new engagement ring — holding his, and touching his Coast Guard uniform.

"I always told him I didn't care if he proposed with a Ring Pop," she wrote. "I said yes."

## **Americans stuck in the Middle East recount finding their way home with little government help**

By HALLIE GOLDEN, RIO YAMAT and MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

Alyssa Ramos' evacuation from Kuwait took 48 hours and carried her across four continents. The U.S. government did not help with any part of it, the travel blogger said.

"They keep going on the news and saying they're doing everything they can to get Americans out," Ramos said after landing in Miami on Thursday. "I know for a fact they're not."

She said she repeatedly messaged the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait before being directed to the consular section, which told her it couldn't help her leave the country and advised her to enroll in the U.S. smart

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traveler program and shelter in place.

Ramos is among the many travelers who found themselves stranded in the Middle East and beyond after Israeli-U.S. attacks on Iran almost a week ago rapidly entangled more than a dozen nearby countries. Since then, U.S. citizens have described frustrations and growing fear as they encountered closed airports, canceled flights and confusing U.S. government guidance while Poland, Australia, France and other countries moved quickly to dispatch military or chartered planes for their citizens.

As of Friday, about 27,000 Americans have returned to the U.S. since the war began Feb. 28, the State Department said. The vast majority of them made their own way out without U.S. government assistance.

Chicago resident Susan Daley, who became stranded while on a work trip in the United Arab Emirates, arrived in the U.S. on Thursday aboard the first commercial flight from Dubai to San Francisco since the conflict started.

"Having the State Department or whoever tell us, 'You need to get out immediately,'" Daley said, "but there's no help, so you're on your own to get your own travel plans. That was the most stressful thing."

President Donald Trump's administration has pushed back against criticism that the U.S. response was too slow.

The first U.S.-chartered repatriation flight arrived Thursday and more were expected daily, the State Department said, though officials did not say how many people were on board or where the planes departed.

Two State Department officials said 30% to 40% of Americans offered seats on charter flights had either declined them or did not show up. The officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal operations, could not say how many people that percentage range would cover, but noted that about 13,000 Americans had contacted the department seeking information or assistance about leaving the Middle East. Not all of them were asking for or were offered seats on charter flights, the officials stressed.

Chat groups help people evacuating

With little practical guidance from Washington or U.S. consular offices, some travelers say they turned to WhatsApp group chats and social media for leads on commercial flights and alternative routes out of the region. Some started fundraising campaigns to help cover hotel bills and other expenses after days stranded in Gulf cities.

Ramos created several group chats Monday after followers of her travel account, "My Life's a Travel Movie," began messaging her for help leaving the region, too.

Within three days, more than 2,200 people had joined the chats. Members shared rides to airports where flights were still operating, names of trusted drivers and their prices and types of currency accepted.

In one message Thursday, a woman wrote that her family, including two children, had two flights canceled in Dubai and that her diabetic 2-year-old was running low on medication. Other members quickly jumped in to offer advice.

American Cory McKane also relied on a WhatsApp group while escaping Dubai. He eventually flew out Wednesday, but only after a long, sleepless trip across the Oman border. Rather than risk the crowds at Dubai's airports, McKane and friends rented a car and drove to the border, where he said taxi drivers were charging up to \$650 to take stranded travelers to Muscat's airport where flights are still operating.

"Everyone's been sending each other resources because, quite frankly, the U.S. has not done a single thing in any capacity. That's been really disappointing," he said.

Democratic lawmakers call US response 'unacceptable'

Jason Altmire, a former three-term Democratic congressman from Pennsylvania, made it out of Dubai after the UAE partially reopened its airspace. He flew to Bangkok, where he and his wife had originally planned to start a vacation in Southeast Asia before becoming stranded.

"We never heard anything from the State Department other than the general email advising us to find our own way out," Altmire said in an email interview. "I found this, along with the 'you're on your own' State Department voicemail, to be infuriating."

The State Department email, which Altmire shared with The Associated Press, advised Americans in the United Arab Emirates to leave "if they believe they can do so safely."

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"For those who cannot or choose not to depart," the email said, "we continue to recommend that they shelter in place at their residence, hotel, or other structure, staying away from windows, and leaving only as necessary to obtain food, water, medications, and other essential items."

Democrats in Congress also criticized the U.S. response. In a letter Tuesday to Secretary of State Marco Rubio, they wrote that "the lack of clear preparation, planning, and communication to Americans abroad is unacceptable."

Rubio said Tuesday the U.S. had organized recovery flights but officials faced logistical challenges.

"We know that we're going to be able to help them," he said, while cautioning that "it's going to take a little time because we don't control the airspace closures."

Air traffic is starting to pick up

Airspace over Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, Kuwait and Syria remained closed, according to flight-tracking service Flightradar24. Azerbaijan also shut the southern sector of its airspace Thursday after accusing Iran of a drone attack that injured four civilians and damaged an airport building.

As of Friday, more than 29,000 of roughly 51,000 flights scheduled in or out of Middle East airports were canceled, according to aviation analytics firm Cirium.

While commercial flight options have been limited since the war began, air traffic was starting to pick up.

Qatar announced Friday it would partially resume flights for passenger evacuations and cargo through designated contingency routes. Dubai Airports, which runs the UAE city's main airports, said it has facilitated more than 1,140 flights over the past three and a half days and was adding more daily.

Dubai-based Emirates said Friday it expected to restore its full flight network in the coming days, depending on airspace access and operational conditions, adding more options for passengers who have been relying on Oman, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan as key exit points because flights have remained operational in those countries.

Some travelers continued to find their own escape routes.

Trenten Higgins reached New York on Thursday after taking a taxi from Israel into Jordan and flying out of Amman. He said the State Department wasn't much help.

"Every alert that they gave and all the advice they gave was a day at least too late," he said. "Even when it wasn't too late, it was impossible to act upon and then they would just hang up."

## Former Democratic presidents remember the late Rev. Jesse Jackson during final public tribute

By SOPHIA TAREEN and MATT BROWN Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — From former presidents to an NBA Hall of Famer to prominent pastors, stories of the Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr.'s influence on politics, corporate boardrooms and picket lines loomed large Friday at a celebration honoring the late civil rights leader.

The public tribute — with appearances by Grammy-winning gospel singers and Jennifer Hudson — felt at times like a church service and others like a political rally. Many, from former President Bill Clinton to the Rev. Al Sharpton, a civil rights leader and founder of the National Action Network, likened Jackson's death to a call to action, from speaking out against justice to voting in the midterms.

Former President Barack Obama said Jackson's presidential runs in the 1980s set the stage for other Black leaders, including his own successful 2009 presidency and reelection.

"The message he sent to a 22-year-old child of a single mother with a funny name, an outsider, was that maybe there wasn't any place or any room where we didn't belong," Obama said to the boisterous crowd of thousands. "He paved the road for so many others to follow."

The event drew a slew of elected U.S. leaders. Other notable attendees included actor and producer Tyler Perry, California Gov. Gavin Newsom, Colombian President Gustavo Petro, and political activist and theologian Cornel West. Detroit Pistons great and Chicago native Isiah Thomas also spoke at the event that lasted five hours.

The crowd gave an especially warm welcome to Obama, who launched his political career in Chicago,

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and credited Jackson with keeping him on his toes. He said he was grateful to Jackson for providing a "legacy of hope" in contrast with the current Republican leadership in Washington.

"We are living in a time when it can be hard to hope," Obama said. "Each day we wake up to some new assault to our democratic institutions. Another setback to the idea of the rule of law, an offense to common decency. Every day you wake up to things you just didn't think were possible."

Clinton said Jackson made him a better president, while former Democratic Vice President Kamala Harris talked about Jackson's inspiring 1980s presidential runs and showed off campaign memorabilia she had kept from them. Former President Joe Biden also spoke during the service.

President Donald Trump, who praised Jackson on social media after he died and also shared photos of the two of them, did not attend.

### Thousands attend Jackson memorial service

The event honoring the protege of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and two-time presidential candidate followed memorial services that drew large crowds in Chicago and South Carolina, where Jackson was born. Friday's celebration — at an influential Black church with a 10,000-seat arena — was the largest.

Attendees waited in long lines outside the church as television screens played excerpts of some of Jackson's most famous speeches. Inside, vendors sold pins with his 1984 presidential slogan and hoodies with his "I Am Somebody" mantra.

Marketing professional Chelsia Bryan said Friday that she decided to attend for the "chance to be part of something historic."

"As a Black woman, knowing that someone pretty much gave their life, dedicated their life to make sure I can do the things that I can do now, he's worth honoring," Bryan said.

### Jackson Jr.: Everyone has a Jackson story

Jackson died last month at age 84 after battling a rare neurological disorder that affected his mobility and ability to speak. His final public appearances included the 2024 Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

"Every single person in here has a Jesse Jackson story," his eldest son, Jesse Jackson Jr., said to the crowd. "The time he shook your hand, the time he prayed for you, the time he held you up, the time he prayed the funeral for somebody you know ... and he prayed you to a new course of existence."

Sitting in the crowd was 90-year-old Mary Lovett. She said Jackson's advocacy inspired her many times, from when she moved from Mississippi to Chicago in the 1960s, taught elementary school and became a mom. She voted for Jackson during his presidential runs and appreciated how he always spoke up for underrepresented people.

"He's gone, but I hope his legacy lives," she said. "I hope we can remember what he tried to teach us."

### Jackson's service was to the poor, underrepresented

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.

Sharpton, who considered the late reverend a lifelong mentor, said he hoped attendees would take home some of the "Jackson fire."

"Don't sit here so holy and sanctified and act like you have no assignment yourself," he said to the increasingly boisterous crowd. "We didn't come this far to turn around now."

Another son, Yusef Jackson, who runs the Rainbow PUSH Coalition, recalled how his father carried a well-worn Bible but also showed his faith by showing up to picket lines.

"He lived a revolutionary Christian faith rooted in justice, nonviolence and the moral righteousness," he said. "He was deeply involved in the political struggles of his time, but his gift was that he could rise above them. It's not about the left wing or the right wing. It takes two wings to fly. For him, the goal was always the moral center."

A final homegoing service was scheduled for Saturday at Rainbow PUSH Coalition.

Services in Washington, D.C., were tabled after a request to allow Jackson to lie in honor in the United States Capitol rotunda was denied by House Speaker Mike Johnson, who said the space is typically reserved for select officials, including former presidents.

## Man convicted in political assassination plot he tied to Iranian paramilitary

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A Pakistani business owner who tried to hire hit men to kill a U.S. politician was convicted Friday in a trial that showcased allegations of Iran-backed plotting on American soil.

As the Iran war unfolded in the Mideast, Asif Merchant acknowledged in a U.S. court that he sought to put an assassination in motion during the 2024 presidential campaign — a plot that was quickly disrupted by American investigators before it had a chance to proceed.

A jury in Brooklyn convicted Merchant on terrorism and murder for hire charges. He faces up to life in prison.

The verdict after only a couple hours of deliberations followed a weeklong trial that included remarkable testimony from Merchant himself.

Merchant told the jury he was carrying out instructions from a contact in the Islamic Republic's powerful paramilitary Revolutionary Guard. According to Merchant, the handler never specified a target but broached names including then-candidate Donald Trump, then-President Joe Biden and Nikki Haley, the former U.N. ambassador who was also in the race for a time.

The Iranian government has denied trying to kill U.S. officials.

The nascent plot fell apart after Merchant showed an acquaintance what he had in mind by using objects on a napkin to depict a shooting at a rally. He asked the man to help him hire assassins. Instead, he was introduced to undercover FBI agents who were secretly recording him, as had the acquaintance.

Merchant told the supposed hit men he needed services that could include killing "some political person" and paid them \$5,000 in cash in a parked car in Manhattan.

"This man landed on American soil hoping to kill President Trump — instead, he was met with the might of American law enforcement," U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi said in a statement released after the conviction.

Merchant's attorney, Avraham Moskowitz, didn't immediately reply to a message seeking comment.

Merchant, 47, worked for Pakistani banks for decades before going into clothing and other businesses. He has two families, in Pakistan and Iran, and he sometimes visited the U.S. for his garment business.

Merchant testified that he met a Revolutionary Guard intelligence operative about three years ago. The contact gave him countersurveillance training and assignments including the assassination scheme, Merchant said.

He maintained that he had to do his handler's bidding to protect loved ones in Iran. The defendant said he reluctantly went through the motions but thought he'd be arrested and explain his situation to authorities before anyone was killed.

"I was going along with it," he said, speaking in Urdu through a court interpreter.

Prosecutors emphasized that Merchant admitted taking steps to enact the plan on behalf of the Revolutionary Guard, which the U.S. considers a foreign terrorist organization, and he didn't proactively go to authorities.

Instead, he was packing for a flight to Pakistan when he was arrested on July 12, 2024, a day before an unrelated attempt on Trump's life in Butler, Pennsylvania. Officials said it appeared the Butler gunman acted alone but that they had been tracking a threat on Trump's life from Iran, a claim that the Islamic Republic called "unsubstantiated and malicious."

When Merchant subsequently spoke to FBI agents to explore the possibility of a cooperation agreement, he didn't say he had acted out of fear for his family.

Prosecutors argued that he didn't back up a defense of acting under duress. Merchant sought to persuade

jurors he simply didn't think the agents would believe him because they seemed to "think that I am some type of super-spy," which he said he was "absolutely not."

## Trump administration's embattled FDA vaccine chief is leaving for the second time

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Food and Drug Administration's embattled vaccine chief, Dr. Vinay Prasad, is once again leaving the agency — the second time in less than a year that he's departed after controversial decisions involving the review of vaccinations and specialty drugs for rare diseases.

FDA Commissioner Marty Makary announced the news to FDA staff in an email late Friday, saying Prasad would depart at the end of April. Makary said Prasad would return to his academic job at the University of California, San Francisco.

In July, Prasad was briefly forced from his job after running afoul of biotech executives, patient groups and conservative allies of President Donald Trump. He was reinstated less than two weeks later with the backing of Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and Makary.

Prasad's latest ouster follows a string of high-profile controversies involving the FDA's review of vaccines, gene therapies and biotech drugs in which companies have criticized the agency for reversing itself, in some cases calling for new trials of products previously greenlighted by regulators.

In the last month, Prasad has come under fire from pharmaceutical executives, investors, members of Congress and other critics for multiple decisions at the agency.

First, Prasad initially refused to allow the FDA to review a highly anticipated flu vaccine from drugmaker Moderna made with mRNA technology. The rejection of the application, highly unusual for the FDA, prompted Moderna to go public with Prasad's decision and vow to formally challenge it.

A week after the rejection became public, the FDA reversed course and said it would accept the shot for review after all, pending an additional study from Moderna.

Then, in the past week, the FDA engaged in a highly unusual public fight with a small drug company developing an experimental treatment for Huntington's Disease, a fatal condition that affects about 40,000 people in the U.S.

The company, UniQure, said Monday that the FDA was demanding a new trial of its gene therapy that would involve performing a sham surgery on some of the patients in the trial. The company's gene therapy is injected directly into the brain during a surgical procedure.

Company executives said the request for a sham-controlled trial contradicted previous FDA guidance and raised ethical concerns for patients.

On Thursday, the FDA held a highly unusual press conference with reporters to criticize the company's therapy and defend the agency's request for an additional study.

A senior FDA official, who requested anonymity to speak with reporters, called the company's original study "stone cold negative."

"We have a failed product here," he added.

The FDA typically communicates in carefully-vetted written statements when speaking about scientific disagreements, especially those involving experimental drugs that are still under the agency's review.

Prasad's time as the FDA's top vaccine and biotech regulator has been marked by a series of similar disputes with the companies the agency regulates.

More than a half-dozen drugmakers studying therapies for rare or hard-to-treat diseases have received rejection letters or requests to run additional studies, adding years and potentially many millions of dollars to their development plans.

A longtime academic and critic of the FDA's standards for drug reviews, Prasad's approach to regulation since arriving at the FDA last May has confounded many FDA observers and critics.

On repeated occasions, Prasad joined Makary in announcing steps to make FDA drug reviews faster and easier for companies. But he also has imposed new warnings and study requirements for some biotech

drugs and vaccines, particularly COVID shots that have long been a target for Kennedy, a longtime anti-vaccine activist before joining the Trump administration.

## **NHL trade deadline upended as old contenders sell and new buyers add with an eye on the playoffs**

By STEPHEN WHYNO and JOHN WAWROW AP Hockey Writers

Two-time Stanley Cup champion Florida, Toronto, St. Louis and so many perennial contenders not being in the mix for the playoffs turned the NHL trade deadline upside down.

Those teams and others were sellers this time or simply stood pat, opening the gates for a new set of buyers eager to take a run at the Cup. Many of the top teams did make a bunch of moves, with league-leading Colorado reacquiring gritty center Nazem Kadri on Friday as the Avalanche look to make another title run four years after their last one with him.

The newcomers include the New York Islanders, who made a big splash by getting Brayden Schenn from the Blues for fellow forward Jonathan Drouin, a goaltending prospect and first- and third-round picks in the draft this year.

"He fits exactly what we need right now," first-year general manager Mathieu Darche said.

Schenn, who hoisted the Cup in 2019 and has captained St. Louis the past three seasons, joins a mix on Long Island led by standout rookie defenseman Matthew Schaefer, the No. 1 pick whose presence has revitalized the franchise.

"He was excited for a new opportunity to go to an upstart Islander team with the most exciting young player in a long time," said Blues GM Doug Armstrong, whose team also got first- and third-rounders as part of the return from Detroit for defenseman Justin Faulk. The Red Wings are looking to make the playoffs for the first time in a decade.

No one has a longer drought than Buffalo at a league-record 14 years, and the Sabres are on track to ending it. They added center Sam Carrick from the New York Rangers and defenseman Luke Schenn — Brayden's brother — from Winnipeg, then made another trade with the Jets for forward Tanner Pearson.

"It's new for me," captain Rasmus Dahlin said of the Sabres adding rather than unloading players at the deadline. "This is why you play hockey. This is what it should feel like."

Toronto joined the sellers by trading fourth-year forward Bobby McMann to the Seattle Kraken for a fourth-round pick in the draft this year and a 2027 second-rounder.

Some of the usual suspects also made moves

Colorado getting Kadri back from Calgary put the rest of the league on notice: The Avalanche are not content to ride the speed of their top two lines.

They got Kadri and a '27 fourth-rounder from the Flames for Victor Olofsson, the rights to unsigned pick Max Curran, a conditional 2028 first-round pick and conditional 2027 second-rounder. The Flames even retained 20% (\$1.4 million) of Kadri's salary as part of the trade.

The Avalanche had already bolstered their depth down the middle by acquiring Nicolas Roy from Toronto.

The Kadri stunner came hours after Minnesota got 38-year-old forward Nick Foligno from Chicago for future considerations. He now gets to play with brother Marcus and chase the Stanley Cup for a beefed-up Wild team that has made five prominent trades since December to put itself in the mix for the championship after failing to advance beyond the first round since 2015.

In the East, Tampa Bay brought back winger Corey Perry in a trade from Los Angeles for a 2028 second-round pick, with the Kings retaining half his salary. Perry, who turns 41 in May, has reached the final and lost in five of the past six years, including 2022 with the Lightning. The pesky winger has a Cup ring from 2007 with Anaheim and gives coach Jon Cooper's team veteran experience and an edge.

Eastern Conference-leading Carolina has plenty of skill, and the Hurricanes got tougher in the final hour before the deadline by acquiring forward Nicolas Deslauriers from Philadelphia for a conditional 2027 seventh-round pick.

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"We have a group of guys that has that internal toughness, that fight," general manager Eric Tulskey said. "We do have that fire. But of course, it's easier to have that toughness when you've got a guy like Deslauriers out there with you."

Some big-name players stay put

The Rangers held on to center Vincent Trocheck, the U.S. Olympic champion who was considered the top player available on a lot of lists, and Philadelphia did not trade big defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen. Each player is under contract beyond this season.

St. Louis was active, getting goalie prospect Marcus Gidlof from the Islanders and forward Dmitiri Buchelnikov from the Wings, but goaltender Jordan Binnington, forwards Robert Thomas and Jordan Kyrou did not get moved.

"I don't spend a lot of time on trades that didn't happen," Armstrong said.

The Panthers also held on to two-time Vezina Trophy-winning netminder Sergei Bobrovsky, who backstopped them to consecutive championships and could now re-sign.

Some teams mixed buying and selling

John Carlson going to the Anaheim Ducks just after midnight made it seem like the Washington Capitals were selling in what could be Alex Ovechkin's final NHL season, especially after also trading veteran center Nic Dowd to Vegas. Then they turned around and added Carlson's replacement on defense from San Jose by sending a fourth-rounder this year to the Sharks for Timothy Liljegren.

After trading Perry and sending Warren Foegele to Ottawa, the Kings got Scott Laughton from Toronto. The Ducks also sold after buying, sending center Ryan Strome to Calgary for a seventh-round pick.

## **Oil surges to its highest price since 2023, and stocks drop after a weak update on the US job market**

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Oil shot to its highest price since 2023 after surging again Friday because of the Iran war, and a weak update on the U.S. job market knocked stocks lower to cap Wall Street's worst week since October.

The S&P 500 dropped 1.3% after a report showed U.S. employers cut more jobs last month than they created and after oil prices spiked above \$90 per barrel. The combination of a weak economy and high inflation is a worst-case scenario for investors because the Federal Reserve has no good tool to fix both problems at the same time.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average plunged as many as 945 points before finishing with a loss of 453, or 0.9%, and the Nasdaq composite sank 1.6%.

"You can't sugarcoat this report," according to Brian Jacobsen, chief economic strategist at Annex Wealth Management. "A negative payrolls number combined with a big jump in oil prices will have traders worrying about stagflation risks."

Stagflation is what economists call the miserable mix of a stagnating economy with high inflation, and a separate report released Friday added to the sourness after showing that U.S. retailers made less money in January than economists expected. It raised the disconcerting possibility that spending by U.S. households, the main engine of the economy, may be stretched near its maximum.

Usually when the economy is unsteady and the job market is weakening, the Federal Reserve cuts interest rates to give things a boost. Lower rates can make it easier for households to get mortgages and for companies to raise money to expand, while also lifting prices for stocks and other investments. The Fed cut its main interest rate several times last year and had indicated more were to come this year.

But lower interest rates can also make inflation worse. And the Fed's hands may be increasingly tied because spiking oil prices are pushing inflation higher due to disruptions for the energy industry.

The price for a barrel of Brent crude, the international standard, leaped another 8.5% to settle at \$92.69. It briefly rose above \$94 to touch its highest level since September 2023.

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A barrel of benchmark U.S. crude breached the \$90 level for the first time since 2023 and jumped 12.2% to \$90.90.

Oil prices have surged, with Brent up from near \$70 late last week, as the war has expanded and included areas critical to the production and movement of oil and gas in the Middle East. Much will depend on what happens with the Strait of Hormuz off Iran's coast, where roughly a fifth of the world's oil typically sails.

The U.S. government gave details Friday about a plan President Donald Trump announced earlier to offer insurance to ships crossing the strait, but it had little effect on the market.

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.

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. Uncertainty about just how high oil prices will go this time around and for how long caused frenetic swings across financial markets this past week, sometimes hour by hour.

On Monday, the S&P 500 tumbled to an immediate 1.2% loss at the start of trading but made it all back and ended the day with a tiny gain.

Trump's most recent signal on the war was that he wants an "unconditional surrender" of Iran, apparently ruling out negotiations.

In the bond market, Treasury yields wavered, with higher oil prices pushing upward on them and the discouraging updates on the U.S. economy pulling downward.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury initially rose toward 4.19% before pulling back to 4.14%. That's up from 4.13% late Thursday and just 3.97% a week earlier.

Smaller companies often feel the bite of high borrowing costs more because many need to borrow to grow. Smaller companies can also be more dependent on the strength of the U.S. economy for their profits than big multinational rivals, and the smallest stocks on Wall Street took Friday's sharpest dives.

The Russell 2000 index of small stocks fell a market-leading 2.3%.

Among the big companies in the S&P 500, companies with high fuel bills helped lead the way lower. Old Dominion Freight Line sank 7.9%, cruise line Carnival fell 5% and Southwest Airlines lost 5.3%.

All told, the S&P 500 fell 90.69 points to 6,740.02. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 453.19 to 47,501.55, and the Nasdaq composite sank 361.31 to 22,387.68.

In stock markets abroad, indexes slumped in Europe following a better finish in Asia. London's FTSE 100 fell 1.2%, while Hong Kong's Hang Seng jumped 1.7%.

South Korea's Kospi was nearly unchanged after plunging 12.1% Wednesday for its worst loss in history and then rebounding 9.6% Thursday.

## Islamic militants abduct more than 300 people in northeastern Nigeria, officials say

By DYEPKAZAH SHIBAYAN and WILSON MCKIN Associated Press

ABUJA, Nigeria (AP) — Islamic militants attacked a town in northeastern Nigeria on Friday, abducting more than 300 people, including women and children, local officials said.

The attack happened in the town of Ngoshe in Borno state, according to Bulama Sawa, an official from the Gwoza area. He told The Associated Press the attack was likely in retaliation for an operation by the military that killed three commanders of the militant Boko Haram group.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for Friday's attack. Nigeria is battling a complex security crisis from different armed groups. The United States has sent troops to the West African nation to help advise its military on the fight against insecurity.

Separate attacks this week also took place in the communities of Konduga, Marte, Jakana, and Mainok between Wednesday and early Friday, according to a military spokesperson.

The spokesperson, Uba Sani, said the troops were able to repel the attacks on the communities of Konduga, Marte, Jakana and Mainok, but "a number of brave soldiers paid the supreme price in the line

of duty," along with a senior officer. He did not elaborate on military casualties.

Sani described the assaults as "failed attacks" and said they showed "increasing desperation of terrorist elements under sustained operational pressure" from the military.

Ulf Laessing, with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, said Friday's attack on Ngoshe took advantage of the Nigerian army's difficulties in controlling large swaths of the country where jihadi groups operate. Militants are also benefiting from increased cross-border cooperation between their groups and the use of drones to scout out their targets before attacking.

"The army is fighting a ghost — fighters descending with motorbikes on villages and disappearing into the bush before the army can respond in time," said Laessing.

Among the most prominent Islamic militant groups are Boko Haram and its breakaway faction, which is affiliated with the Islamic State group and known as Islamic State West Africa Province. There is also the IS-linked Lakurawa, as well as other "bandit" groups that specialize in kidnapping for ransom and illegal mining.

Recently, the crisis has worsened to include other militants from the neighboring Sahel region, including the Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin, which claimed its first attack on Nigerian soil last year.

Several thousand people in Nigeria have been killed, according to data from the United Nations. Analysts say not enough is being done by the government to protect its citizens.

## **For survivors, Rhode Island clergy abuse report brings vindication and renewed demands**

By LEAH WILLINGHAM and KIMBERLEE KRUESI Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — The sound of the school nurse's office door opening. Light reflecting off a stained-glass window. Tearful outbursts and fear of getting on the school bus.

For many survivors of clergy abuse, memories like these linger for decades.

A report released this week by the Rhode Island attorney general detailed decades of abuse inside the state's Catholic Diocese of Providence, identifying 75 clergy members who sexually abused more than 300 children since 1950. The investigation drew on thousands of church records and years of interviews with victims and witnesses. Officials said the true number of victims is likely much higher.

But survivors say the numbers capture only part of the story. Behind each case, they say, are childhood fragments that resurface years later — along with the long struggle to understand what happened.

Many survivors spent decades searching for answers and pressing authorities to investigate. Now some are speaking publicly about what they endured and what they hope will come next: broader support for survivors, help from the church to pay for therapy and counseling, and accountability from Catholic leaders.

From survivor to advocate

"I can still hear the click of the hardware in that metal door opening to this very day," said Dr. Herbert "Hub" Brennan, an internal medicine doctor who lives and works in his hometown of East Greenwich, Rhode Island, where he grew up in a devoutly Catholic family.

Brennan was sexually abused in elementary school by the Rev. Brendan Smyth, an Irish priest who arrived in the community in the 1960s. Brennan was an altar server at Our Lady of Mercy Parish when the abuse began in the church sacristy.

Brennan says a nun would pull him from class and send him to wait in the principal's office until Smyth arrived and led him into the nurse's room.

"They say that rape is one of the few crimes where the victim feels the shame," Brennan said. "But the shame is enormous. And then the secrecy that follows to hide that shame gets in the way of healing."

Brennan confronted it years later when a newspaper arrived on his doorstep in 1995. The headline about Smyth's arrest in Ireland read: "Diocese has no complaints against jailed priest."

Smyth was later convicted of assaulting children at least 100 times over four decades.

When Brennan later tried to discuss the abuse with a parish priest, he said he was assured there had

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been no complaints, only to learn later the priest had been Smyth's roommate.

The revelation pushed Brennan to seek accountability. He later worked with attorney Mitchell Garabedian and settled in Massachusetts Superior Court.

"I needed to make sure that others knew exactly what was going on in this diocese — if it happened to others, who was responsible and how they were hiding it," Brennan said.

The report released this week felt like a culmination of that effort, he said: "That allowed me to switch from survivor-victim to advocate."

### Breaking the 'wall of secrecy'

For Claude Leboeuf, amber light streaming through stained-glass windows still triggers painful memories. Leboeuf, who was abused by a priest as a child in neighboring Massachusetts and now advocates for victims in Rhode Island, called the report an important step toward dismantling what he calls the church's "wall of secrecy."

The retired U.S. postal worker said his memories resurfaced only a few years ago, prompting him to pursue legal action and speak publicly about what happened to him.

"There's a need to do something for these people — something real: money, tuition, therapy," Leboeuf said. "The effects are real; they last a long, long time."

In a video statement, Bishop of Providence Bruce Lewandowski said the report describes a "tragic history" of abuse that caused lasting harm to victims and their families. He said he felt "extreme sadness" and "intense shame" while reading it and apologized to survivors for church leaders' past failures to protect children. Lewandowski said the diocese has since implemented safeguards aimed at responding quickly to allegations and preventing abuse.

Leboeuf rejects any framing that abuse by clergy is "old history."

"It's justice denied for more than 60 years for some people," he said. "These are people who brought their complaints to the diocese as kids in the 1960s, and they were ignored, ridiculed, even punished."

### Fighting to be believed

Ann Hagan Webb remembers the dread she felt before the school bus arrived each morning. Webb was only a kindergartner when her parish priest began sexually abusing her at school in Rhode Island.

The abuse took place between 1957 and 1965, during which Webb — who was abused from the age of 5 to 12 — remembers tearful outbursts before school, sometimes needing to be pulled onto the bus.

It wasn't until decades later, at 40, that Webb — a trained psychologist — turned to therapy herself to help process the memories. But when she was ready to report the abuse, Webb was met with hostility.

Initially, she asked only for compensation to cover her therapy bills. Still, she was met with skepticism, with leaders at the Diocese of Providence demanding her medical records and questioning the veracity of her claims.

Webb turned to advocacy, becoming known as a force for survivors of clergy abuse. In 2019, she helped convince the Rhode Island Legislature to enact legislation dubbed "Annie's Law," which allows child sexual abusers to be held civilly accountable to victims.

The advocacy has been exhausting, Webb said, and she still faces stigma when speaking publicly. Her abuse is often overlooked, she says, because many assume clergy abuse affected only boys.

"For 32 years, the diocese has called me not credible. I can't tell you what that feels like," Webb said.

The release of the attorney general's investigation has renewed her hope that change and justice are still on the horizon.

"It feels like vindication," she said.

"I hope the public demands their church be different," she added.

### A long-coming reckoning

The Rhode Island investigation comes at a time when examining possible clergy abuse is no longer unusual. The shift is a far cry from 2002, when The Boston Globe exposed the Boston Archdiocese's practice of moving abusive priests between parishes without warning parents or police, prompting investigations around the world.

That reckoning took decades longer in Rhode Island. With one of the highest Catholic populations per

capita in the country — nearly 40% — the Diocese of Providence maintained secrecy around clergy abuse even as accusations and lawsuits surfaced over the years.

Attorney Tim Conlon, who has long represented sex abuse victims in Rhode Island, said that when he first filed suits against the Diocese of Providence, many people were unwilling to believe such allegations could be true in their own parishes. At one point in the late 1990s, he said, even his mother questioned whether he was doing the right thing.

State law has also made it difficult for victims to seek justice, Conlon said, citing strict limits on civil suits against institutions like the Catholic Church and narrow statutes of limitations for second-degree sexual assault.

“Clearly there’s a call for reform,” Conlon said. “The magnitude of the need is well documented.”

## Evidence suggests the deadly blast at an Iranian school was likely a US airstrike

By JULIA FRANKEL and MICHAEL BIESECKER Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Satellite images, expert analysis, a U.S. official and public information released by the U.S. and Israeli militaries suggest an explosion that killed scores of Iranian students at a school was likely caused by U.S. airstrikes that also hit an adjacent compound associated with the regime’s Revolutionary Guard.

The Feb. 28 strike, which had the highest reported civilian death toll since the war began, has come under staunch criticism from the United Nations and human rights monitors. More than 165 people were killed, most of them of children, in the blast during school hours at Shajareh Tayyebbeh Elementary School, according to Iranian state media.

Satellite images taken Wednesday and reviewed by the The Associated Press show most of the school in the city of Minab, some 1,100 kilometers (680 miles) southeast of Tehran, reduced to rubble, a crescent shape punched into its roof. Experts say the tight pattern of damage visible on the satellite photos is consistent with a targeted airstrike.

Iran has blamed Israel and the United States for the blast. Neither country has accepted responsibility. Asked about the strike at the school at a Pentagon media briefing Wednesday, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said, “All I can say is that we’re investigating that. We, of course, never target civilian targets. But we’re taking a look and investigating that.”

Several factors point to a U.S. strike.

One is the launching of an assessment of the incident by the U.S. military. According to the Pentagon’s instructions on processes for mitigating civilian harm, an assessment is launched after a group of investigators make an initial determination that the U.S. military may bear culpability. A U.S. official told the AP that the strike was likely U.S. The official spoke anonymously because they were not authorized to comment publicly on the sensitive matter.

Another is the location of the school — next to a Revolutionary Guard base in Hormozgan Province and close to barracks for its naval brigade. The U.S. military has focused on naval targets and acknowledged strikes in the province, including one in the vicinity of the school.

Israel, which has denied conducting the strike, has focused on areas of Iran closer to Israel and hasn’t reported any strikes south of Isfahan, 800 kilometers (500 miles) away. The U.S. is operating warships in the Arabian Sea, including the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier, within range of the school.

When asked by the AP about its findings, U.S. military Central Command spokesperson Capt. Tim Hawkins said, “It would be inappropriate to comment given the incident is under investigation.”

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters Friday that she had no updates on the investigation and did not directly answer a question about whether President Donald Trump was satisfied with the pace of the probe.

“My assumption is that probably there were some activities recently there and they detected and tracked them, but ... they weren’t aware or didn’t have an up-to-date database that a girls’ school was there and

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they bombed it," said Farzin Nadimi, a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy who studies Iran's military.

Satellite images show damage

The school is adjacent to a walled compound labeled on maps as the Seyyed Al-Shohada Cultural Complex of the Guard. In addition to the school, satellite photos show that blasts struck at least five buildings in the Guard compound, leaving the area pocked with craters, charred holes in roofs and piles of rubble.

Iranian online map applications show a living quarters for the Assef Brigades about 150 meters (165 yards) from the school, inside the Revolutionary Guard compound. The 16th Assef Coastal Missile Group is part of the Guard's navy, Nadimi said. The 1st Naval District, which the Assef Brigades belong to, is responsible for the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which a fifth of all oil and natural gas traded passes. The strait has been a particular point of conflict in the war.

In the aftermath of the strike, video from Iran's state broadcaster verified by the AP using satellite imagery showed dozens of fresh graves dug at a nearby cemetery. Nadimi said it is likely the school taught daughters of Guard personnel.

The strike has drawn wide condemnation from the secretary-general of the United Nations and international human rights groups. The criticism comes amid reports that airstrikes have also hit other schools in Iran.

Targeting schools would be a clear violation of international laws governing armed conflict, said Elise Baker, a senior staff lawyer at the Atlantic Council, a Washington-based nonprofit think tank.

"Strikes can only legally target military objectives and combatants, but the school was a civilian object and the students and teachers were civilians," Baker said. "The school's proximity to (Guard) facilities and the attendance of children of (Guard) members at the school does not change that conclusion: It was a civilian object."

Pattern of damage suggests targeted strike

Three experts told the AP the satellite imagery and videos from the scene strongly suggested multiple munitions hit the compound. Complicating any assessment is the lack of images of bomb fragments from the blast. No independent agency has reached the site during the war to investigate.

There are no craters or evidence of bombs hitting in the surrounding neighborhood, suggesting a great degree of accuracy, said Corey Scher, a researcher who uses satellite imagery and radar data to study landscape changes in armed conflict zones.

"All the strikes are clustered within the walled-off compound," Scher said. "That's one level of precision at the block level. And then most of the strikes are basically leading to direct hits on buildings. That's another level of precision."

Scher said the school and the other buildings struck in the compound showed damage consistent with the use of air-to-surface munitions.

"They didn't explode in the air above the building," he said. "It looks like the explosion happened at the time they hit the surface, whether it was the building or the ground."

Sean Moorhouse, a former British Army officer and explosive ordnance disposal expert, said the available satellite imagery was insufficient to determine exactly what type of munitions were used in the strike, but he said the visible damage was consistent with what would be expected with impacts from multiple 2,000-pound (900-kilogram) high-explosive warheads. He said the multiple precise impacts would undercut any suggestion that a malfunctioning Iranian missile hit the school.

N.R. Jenzen-Jones, the director of Armament Research Services, said the school and Guard compound were targeted with "multiple simultaneous or near-simultaneous strikes."

"If indeed it is confirmed that an American or Israeli strike hit the school, there are several potential points of failure in the targeting cycle," Jenzen-Jones said. "We might be seeing an intelligence failure, likely rather early in the process, which misidentified the target or failed to update a targeting list following the building's change in use."

He said in videos of the school taken immediately after the strike, smoke can be seen rising from the Guard compound. There were also impacts on multiple buildings visible in satellite images and media

reports citing witnesses who said they heard multiple explosions.

U.N. Human Rights Office spokesperson Ravina Shamdasani said the investigation results needed to be made public.

"The families of the little girls who were killed are entitled to the truth of how this happened," she said.

## The US lost a surprising 92,000 jobs last month as the unemployment rate ticked up to 4.4%

By PAUL WISEMAN and ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Business Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — American employers unexpectedly cut 92,000 jobs last month, a sign that the labor market remains under strain. The unemployment rate blipped up to 4.4%.

Hiring deteriorated from January, when companies, nonprofits and government agencies added a healthy 126,000 jobs, the Labor Department reported Friday. Economists had expected 60,000 new jobs in February.

Revisions also cut 69,000 jobs from December and January payrolls.

The surprisingly weak employment picture in February adds to the economic uncertainty over the war with Iran, which has caused oil prices to surge and saddled business and consumers with unforeseen costs.

"The job market is struggling in the face of so many headwinds," said Heather Long, chief economist at Navy Federal Credit Union. "Companies are going to be even more reluctant to hire this spring until the war ends and they can see consumers still spending. It's a tense time for the U.S. economy."

The job market had been expected to rebound this year from a lackluster 2025 when it was buffeted by President Donald Trump's erratic tariff policies, his purge of the federal workforce and the lingering effects of high interest rates. In 2025, employers added just 15,000 jobs a month. Hopes for a 2026 rebound rose after January hiring came in above expectations.

"Just when it looked like the labor market was stabilizing, this report delivers a knock-down blow to that view," said Olu Sonola, head of U.S. economics at Fitch Ratings. "It's bad news whichever way you look at it."

The job losses were widespread.

Construction companies cut 11,000 jobs last month, which likely reflects frigid weather. And healthcare firms shed 28,000 jobs after a four-week strike by more than 30,000 nurses and other front-line workers at Kaiser Permanente in California and Hawaii. Health care has been one of the job market's strong points.

Factories cut 12,000 jobs and have now lost jobs for 14 of the last 15 months. Restaurants and bars lost nearly 30,000 jobs. Administrative and support services firms cut nearly 19,000 jobs and courier and messenger services almost 17,000.

Financial firms added 10,000 jobs, though job cuts continue to hit that sector as well this year.

Average hourly wages rose 0.4% from January and 3.8% from a year earlier.

The outlook for the job market – and the entire economy – is clouded by the war with Iran.

The combination of weak hiring and increasing inflationary pressures arising from the war creates a nightmare for the Federal Reserve, which must decide whether to cut interest rates to help the job market or hold off to help keep a lid on prices. "This is probably the worst scenario for monetary policy," said Eugenio Aleman, chief economist at Raymond James.

Employers were reluctant to hire last year because of uncertainty over Trump's tariffs – and the unpredictable way he rolled them out.

The impact of Trump's aggressive trade policies may recede in 2026. His import taxes became smaller and less erratic after he reached a trade truce last year with China and deals with leading U.S. trade partners such as Japan and the European Union. A lot of businesses have also learned how to offset the costs of the tariffs, often by passing them along to customers via higher prices.

Brian Bethune, an economist at Boston College, said that Trump's 2025 tariffs were a shock to companies' business plans. Now, just as they've adjusted to them, "Guess what! All of a sudden their 2026 business plans are upended by an increase in fuel costs" caused by the war with Iran.

Jay Foreman, CEO of the toy company Basic Fun, expects to get some relief from Trump's tariffs after

the Supreme Court last month struck down the biggest ones and potentially created a path for importers to get refunds for the levies they paid. The refunds would allow Foreman to invest more in his Boca Raton, Florida, company, which makes Lincoln Logs and Care Bears. He can also hand out more generous raises to employees and hire new people.

"We are expecting a record year," he said.

Yet under new tariffs sought by Trump, Foreman estimates that Basic Fun's tariff bill will more than double this year to \$15 million. That is partly because the firm will be paying for a full year of Trump tariffs in 2026. Tariffs last year were not rolled out until spring or later.

## Spacecraft's impact changed asteroid's orbit around the sun in a save-the-Earth test, study finds

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — An asteroid that NASA used for target practice a few years ago was nudged into a slightly different route around the sun, findings that could help divert a future incoming killer space rock, scientists reported Friday.

It's the first time that a celestial body's orbit around the sun was deliberately changed. The asteroid that NASA's Dart spacecraft slammed into was never a threat to Earth.

"This study marks a notable step forward in our ability to prevent future asteroid impacts on Earth," the international research team wrote in Science Advances.

The changes were slight — reductions of just one-tenth of a second and one-half of a mile (720 meters) to a solar lap spanning two years and hundreds of millions of miles (kilometers), according to the scientists.

"Even though this seems small, a tiny deflection ... can add up over decades and make the difference between a potentially hazardous asteroid hitting or missing the Earth in the future," lead author Rahil Makadia, of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, said in an email.

For any save-the-planet tests, "the key isn't delivering a huge shove at the last minute. The key is delivering a tiny shove many years in advance," he added.

Launched in 2021 on the world's first planetary defense exercise, the Dart spacecraft deliberately plowed into Dimorphos, which orbits a bigger asteroid, Didymos, as they circle the sun together. The space agency quickly determined that the 2022 strike trimmed the smaller asteroid's orbit around its bigger companion.

But it took until now for scientists to confirm, based on observations from around the world, that the impact cut the duo's travel time around the sun by 0.15 seconds. With each solar orbit lasting 769 days, that's a real-time slowdown of just over 10 micrometers per second, shrinking the asteroids' 300-million-mile (480-million-kilometer) orbit by 2,360 feet (720 meters).

The researchers said all the boulders and other debris flung off Dimorphos in the crash provided as much push to Dimorphos as the spacecraft itself — a doubling of momentum. Last summer, a U.S.-Italian team estimated that 35 million pounds (16 million kilograms) of rock and dust were ejected.

The good news is that even with the change in the asteroids' course, Earth remains safely out of their way for the foreseeable future. That's why this rubble-packed system was picked for the mission, said Steven Chesley of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, who took part in the study.

"While it is just a single experiment, it is nonetheless an important data point that will be relevant to any future asteroid deflection missions," Chesley said in an email.

Scientists expect to learn even more about the impact's aftermath when the European Space Agency's Hera spacecraft reaches the asteroids in November. Dimorphos is 525 feet (160 meters) in diameter. Fast-spinning Didymos is 2,560 feet (780 meters) across with, according to the latest study, 200 times more mass than its sidekick.

Unlike Dart, Hera will not strike but will tag along for months of surveying. A pair of small experimental probes will peel away and attempt to land.

## 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.

**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](https://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 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 detainees 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

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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.

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.

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She said the facility had temporarily cut its population below 1,900 when she visited last month after cases of 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 see 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 has never been released publicly.

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 before 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."

## **Kurdish Iranian dissidents in Iraq deny attack plans but say they would join a US invasion of Iran**

By STELLA MARTANY Associated Press

IRBIL, Iraq (AP) — Officials with one of the armed Kurdish Iranian dissident groups based in northern Iraq told The Associated Press that they are not planning an imminent cross-border attack on Iran but would join a ground invasion if the U.S. were to launch one.

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The comments appeared to be aimed at reassuring Iraqi Kurdish officials, who have said they do not want attacks to be launched against Iran from their territory, fearing that they will be further dragged into the war in the Middle East sparked by the U.S. and Israel's strikes on Iran.

In the event of a U.S. ground operation, "then we would enter alongside the coalition forces," said Khalil Nadiri, an official with the Kurdistan Freedom Party PAK, in an interview with the AP Thursday. But he said, "The Kurds must not place themselves as the spearhead of the attack."

He added that his group also has armed members already present inside of Iran and that they would not necessarily require cross-border support if they were to stage an uprising.

Nadiri said the Kurdish groups have been in contact with the U.S. and Israel but denied having received any material aid from them.

The comments came after Kurdish officials said earlier this week that the Kurdish Iranian dissident groups based in northern Iraq are preparing for a potential cross-border military operation in Iran, and the U.S. had asked Iraqi Kurds to support them.

Rebaz Sharifi, a military commander with the PAK, said it would be "a very positive development" if the U.S. and its allies were to arm the Kurdish groups, but also denied that they have received any such support so far.

Sharifi said he expects that at some point, U.S. President Donald Trump "might want the peshmerga forces of Eastern Kurdistan to participate in the conflict during a ground invasion" and "if it reaches that point, we, for our part, would be pleased with it."

However, the two officials sought to dispel the fears of Iraqi Kurdish officials that Iraq's semiautonomous Kurdish region would be used as a launching pad.

Peshawa Hawramani, spokesperson for the Kurdistan Regional Government, said in a statement earlier this week 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."

Already Iran and allied Iraqi militias have launched dozens of missiles and drone attacks into northern Iraq, targeting the U.S. bases and consulate in Irbil as well as bases of the Iranian Kurdish dissident groups.

Sharifi said PAK's bases have been attacked twice with ballistic missiles and four times with drones since the start of the war, killing one of their fighters and wounding three others.

Nadiri said that "since the (Iraqi) Kurdistan region has adopted a policy of not becoming a part of this conflict and because we do not want to disrupt the stability and security here and we respect the laws of this region, consequently, the environment has not yet been established for us to move our forces back into Eastern Kurdistan."

He was using the term used by Kurdish groups to refer to the Kurdish region of Iran.

The potential military involvement of the Kurds has raised tensions with other Iranian opposition groups - notably the faction led by the former shah's son, Reza Pahlavi, who has accused the Kurds of being separatists aiming to carve up Iran.

Sharifi said that his group's "ultimate goal is the statehood of the Kurds in all four regions and the reunification of Kurdistan," referring to the Kurdish areas that are currently split among Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria.

Nadiri said that a confederal system could be a "viable solution" that would allow the Kurdish area to remain part of Iran while maintaining its "own sovereignty, identity, and unique characteristics."

## **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."

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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 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."

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

By BHARATHA MALLAWARACHI and SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — Sri Lanka transferred more than 200 sailors from an Iranian naval vessel to shore Friday after it 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 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. He said the ship will be taken to the port of Trincomalee in eastern Sri Lanka, and remain in Sri Lankan custody until further notice.

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.

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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. 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.

The U.N. resident coordinator in Sri Lanka, Marc-André Franche, welcomed Sri Lanka's intervention, saying on X that it reflected its commitment to "multilateralism, maintaining neutrality, and underscoring its dedication to peace."

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

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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.

## Shohei Ohtani hits a grand slam at the World Baseball Classic after putting on a show in BP

By STEPHEN WADE AP Sports Writer

TOKYO (AP) — This is the Shohei Ohtani effect.

Ohtani put on a giant show in batting practice hours before he hit a grand slam in the second inning — in the first he doubled on the first pitch of the game but didn't score — as Japan hammered Taiwan 13-0 in Pool C at the World Baseball Classic.

It was Japan's first game of four in pool play.

Ohtani drew major Western star power to Japan for the game, with actor Timothée Chalamet and pop singer Bad Bunny in the stands.

Ohtani spoke to the crowd after the game.

"I knew it was going to leave the park right away after I hit it," Ohtani said of his grand slam. "It's important to score first."

Bowing and tipping his cap, Ohtani thanked the fans.

"It was a good game and we got off to a good start, so I think it was all because of your support," he said to rising applause as he spoke in Japanese. "I think the battles will continue, but if the fans and the team can come together and cheer it will encourage us. So please support us."

Starting and winning pitcher Yoshinobu Yamamoto also, of course, credited Ohtani in a post-game press conference away from the field.

"This was our first game of the tournament and to score the first run is always difficult," he said. "But Shohei hit a huge home run to give us the momentum. So I tip my cap to him."

An early show in BP

Ohtani's batting practice thrilled many who had traveled from afar to see him.

Lia Chan and her husband How and other family members flew in from Singapore — about a seven-hour flight to Tokyo — just to watch Ohtani play in the World Baseball Classic.

"And baseball is not even popular in Singapore," said Lia, who was seated a few rows behind home plate. "We know about baseball, we watch it, but when Ohtani came along it's just gone out of proportions."

Lia, her husband and other Singaporeans in their group were among some 40,000 in the stadium oohing-and-aahing on Friday, and this was only for batting practice hours before the second Pool C game.

Ohtani knows about drama.

He kept the crowd waiting for perhaps 30 minutes as other Japanese players practiced and hundreds of reporters with cameras, phones and tripods milled around in a penned-off area on the field.

Finally, Ohtani emerged from the dugout and waited his turn around the batting cage, hugged a few players, made small talk, and greeted some fans in an area for sponsors.

Fans in the stands stood to get a better look. But they were asked to sit down by attendants holding signs in Japanese and English that read: "Please watch from your seats."

Ohtani took about 25 swings, hit about 10 balls out of the park and another few against the outfield wall.

When batting practice ended, he jogged out to thank the batting practice pitcher, bowed slightly, and gathered a few loose balls and tossed them into the hopper. Then with a bat in each hand, he trotted off

the field to prepare for the game against Taiwan.

"Who does things like that?" Lia said. "He's in another league."

## 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.

Lai was one of the first prominent figures to be arrested under a Beijing-imposed national 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.

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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.

## Today in History: March 7 'Bloody Sunday' in Selma for civil rights movement

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Saturday, March 7, the 66th day of 2026. There are 299 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On March 7, 1965, a march by over 500 civil rights demonstrators was violently broken up at the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama; state troopers and a sheriff's posse fired tear gas and beat marchers with batons in what became known as "Bloody Sunday."

Also on this date:

In 1876, Alexander Graham Bell received a U.S. patent for his telephone.

In 1936, Adolf Hitler ordered his troops to march into the demilitarized Rhineland, thereby breaking the Treaty of Versailles and the Locarno Treaties.

In 1975, the U.S. Senate revised its filibuster rule, allowing 60 senators to limit debate in most cases, instead of the previously required two-thirds of senators present.

In 1994, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled that a parody that pokes fun at an original work can be considered "fair use." (The ruling concerned a parody of the Roy Orbison song "Oh, Pretty Woman" by the rap group 2 Live Crew.)

In 2010, filmmaker Kathryn Bigelow became the first woman to win the Academy Award for Best Director, taking the prize for "The Hurt Locker."

In 2024, movie armorer Hannah Gutierrez-Reed was found guilty of involuntary manslaughter in connection with the 2021 fatal shooting of a cinematographer by Alec Baldwin during a rehearsal on the set of the Western film "Rust." (Gutierrez-Reed served an 18-month prison sentence and was released in 2025.)

Today's birthdays: Hall of Fame auto racer Janet Guthrie is 88. Actor Daniel J. Travanti is 86. Entertainment executive Michael Eisner is 84. Football Hall of Famer Lynn Swann is 74. R&B musician Ernie Isley (The Isley Brothers) is 74. Actor Bryan Cranston is 70. Tennis Hall of Famer Ivan Lendl is 66. Singer Taylor Dayne is 64. Author Bret Easton Ellis is 62. Comedian Wanda Sykes is 62. Actor Rachel Weisz is 56. Actor Peter Sarsgaard is 55. Actor Jenna Fischer is 52. Actor Tobias Menzies is 52. Actor Laura Prepon is 46. Poet Amanda Gorman is 28.