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Wednesday, March 11

Senior Menu: Chili with beans, winter blend, fruit, cornbread.
School Breakfast: Oatmeal.
School Lunch: Mac & Cheese, peas.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.; Soup Supper (Nigeria Circle hosts), 6 p.m.; Lenten Service, 7 p.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.; Lent Supper, 6 p.m.; Lent Service at St. John's, 7 p.m.
United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.
Pickleball, 5:30 p.m., elementary gym
6th Grade Boys Basketball, 6 p.m., HS Gym
Groton C&MA: Kid's Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study, 7 p.m.



Thursday, March 12

Senior Menu: Oven baked chicken, baked potato, green beans, fruit, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Maple French toast bake.
School Lunch: Beef sticks, cooked carrots.
State A GBB Tourney in Watertown
Groton Lions Club meeting, 6 p.m., 104 N Main
2nd Grade BB, 5 p.m., elementary gym
4th Grade BB, 6 p.m., HS Gym

Friday, March 13

Senior Menu: Spaghetti, lettuce salad, fruit, breadsticks.
School Breakfast: Breakfast boat.
School Lunch: Fish, baby bakers.
State A GBB Tourney in Watertown
Groton CDE
HS Baseball Practice, 6 p.m., GHS Gym

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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.

Lebanon in Crossfire

Roughly 700,000 people in Lebanon, including about 200,000 children, have been displaced as Israeli airstrikes on Beirut continued yesterday. Many are sheltering in schools and stadiums. Lebanese officials say the death toll is rising by roughly 100 people a day, with at least 570 people killed as of yesterday.

Israel began bombing Lebanon last week after Hezbollah, an Iran-backed militant group, attacked Israel in retaliation for the killing of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Lebanon's government has called for talks with Israel aimed at disarming Hezbollah and postponed parliamentary elections by two years. The country, which borders Israel to the south, was already struggling to recover from a nearly 14-month war between Israel and Hezbollah that officially ended in 2024, though UN experts reported continued strikes in Lebanon after the ceasefire.

In Iran, state officials say more than 1,300 civilians have been killed, as US officials report striking over 5,000 targets over 10 days, with roughly \$5.6B spent on munitions in the first two days. The Pentagon has also reported seven service member deaths and about 140 wounded.

The Eyes of a Mouse

Scientists have reconstructed videos of what mice are seeing by analyzing their brain activity, a new study revealed yesterday. The research could lay the groundwork for understanding how different animals experience visual input.

In recent years, researchers have used fMRI scans to monitor human subjects as they watch images or films. They then recreate those images, including with the help of generative AI tools like Stable Diffusion. In the latest study, researchers showed 10-second videos to 10 mice, reconstructing frame-by-frame visuals by analyzing the brain activity of five mouse subjects. Instead of using fMRI scans, which analyze blood flow, these scientists used single-cell recordings, aiming to capture the activity of individual neurons in the visual cortex (about 8,000 neurons per mouse). The goal was to capture more a precise measurement of brain activity.

The team then compared pixel-level data between the original and reconstructed videos.

Runway Safety Lapse

South Korean airport operators built a concrete mound at the end of Muan International Airport's runway to cut costs, according to a government audit released yesterday. The decision violated safety standards and contributed to the 2024 Jeju Air crash that killed 179 people.

A report released earlier this year used computer simulations to reconstruct the Boeing 737-800's belly landing and collision with a solid concrete mound after a bird strike left its landing gear inoperable. The audit found the airport had used solid concrete rather than collapsible materials to support a localizer antenna—a navigation aid that guides landing aircraft—because reshaping the surrounding terrain would have been more expensive. Investigators also determined that airport officials falsified inspection reports for 16 years to conceal the defect.

The audit identified 14 similar localizer installations at nine airports nationwide that did not meet government regulations. Officials said they are working to replace those with compliant structures.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Miami Heat star Bam Adebayo scores 83 points in 150-129 win over Washington Wizards, marking second-highest scoring effort in NBA history after the late Wilt Chamberlain's 100-point game from 1962.

Italy purchases portrait of a young Pope Urban VIII, painted by Baroque painter Caravaggio around 1598, for roughly \$35M, one of its largest payouts for a single artwork.

Arnold Schwarzenegger to revive 1980s "Conan the Barbarian" franchise, also in talks to return to "Predator" franchise and star in sequel to 1985 film "Commando".

Universal Pictures secures deal to produce Bon Jovi biopic.

Science & Technology

Blood test identifies women at higher risk for dementia up to 25 years before symptoms appear, enabling better preventive care and monitoring.

Ancient parrot DNA reveals Amazonian parrots were transported across the Andes centuries before the Inca Empire—evidence of a long-distance trade network that challenges assumptions about regional isolation in pre-Incan societies.

Transportation Department approves eight electric aircraft pilot programs across 26 states.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 -0.2%, Dow -0.1%, Nasdaq +0.0%).

Bill Ackman's Pershing Square hedge fund seeks up to \$10B in initial public offering on NYSE.

Legora, Swedish legal AI platform, valued at roughly \$5.6B after \$550M funding round as it seeks to expand in the US—home of rival Harvey.

Meta acquires Moltbook, a social network for AI agents that went viral earlier this year.

China posts record trade surplus in first two months of 2026 as exports rose around 22% year-over-year, driven by strong global demand for semiconductors, electronics, and autos.

Politics & World Affairs

Severe storms bring tornadoes, massive hail from Texas to Indiana; National Weather Service's Storm Prediction Center issues Level 4 of 5 risk—the highest severe weather outlook so far this year (More, w/videos)

Republican Clay Fuller and Democrat Shawn Harris head to April runoff in race to fill seat of former Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R, GA-14), who resigned in January.

Trump appoints Turning Point CEO Erika Kirk to 16-seat Air Force Academy Board of Visitors, replacing her late husband, Charlie Kirk.

Canadian police search for two suspects after shots are fired at the US consulate in Toronto; no one was wounded and no motive was publicly identified as of this writing.

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The advertisement features a colorful illustration of a teddy bear, a baby bottle, and a stack of colorful blocks on the left, and a yellow bucket with cleaning supplies on the right. At the bottom, there is a small house and a red car on a road.

Groton boys off to state, again

CHAMBERLAIN — The Groton Area Tigers built a big early cushion, survived a furious second-half rally, and leaned on poise and defense in crunch time to defeat Pine Ridge 62-54 Tuesday night in SoDak 16 boys basketball action and advance to the Class A State Tournament in Rapid City.

Groton Area (18-4) used a dominant first-half stretch and balanced scoring to offset a sensational performance from Pine Ridge standout Marvin Richard III, whose 27 points kept the Thorpes within striking distance all night.

Big Run Sparks Tigers

The Tigers seized control late in the first quarter with a decisive 16-point run, turning a tight 9-7 contest into a commanding 25-7 advantage. Groton's defense fueled the surge, forcing tough shots while the offense repeatedly attacked the rim and cleaned up misses on the glass.

"We told the kids all along defense was going to win the game," Groton head coach Greg Kjellsen said afterward. "We knew we could score on them — it was just a matter of getting enough stops."

Groton led 21-7 after one quarter and carried a 31-22 advantage into halftime. The Tigers shot efficiently



Gage Sippel controls the tip over Pine Ridge's Talton Hawk. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Karson Zak goes over Talton Hawk for this basket. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Becker Bosma moves inside for this basket. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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early, finishing 24-of-52 (46 percent) for the game, while holding Pine Ridge to 19-of-53 (36 percent).

Richard Keeps Pine Ridge Close

Despite Groton's strong start, Pine Ridge never went away thanks largely to Richard. The University of South Dakota commit showed his full offensive arsenal — step-back threes, drives to the basket, and timely passes — as he poured in 27 points.

"He didn't get 73 tonight, did he?" Kjellsen said with a smile. "He's so tough to guard and no lead is safe when he's on the floor."

Talton Hawk added 16 points for the Thorpes, while Christian Pulliam scored six and Donnie Ghost Dog finished with five. Pine Ridge shot 8-of-10 (80 percent) from the foul line, committed nine turnovers and was whistled for 15 team fouls.

Balanced Offense Leads the Way

Groton countered with a balanced attack led by Karson Zak, who finished with a team-high 19 points while adding seven rebounds, four steals and three assists. Ryder Johnson and Gage Sippel each scored 13 points, with Johnson grabbing six rebounds and Sippel pulling down seven boards and recording a block.

Keegen Tracy contributed 10 points and two steals, while Becker Bosma added seven points and seven re-



Ryder Johnson is being guarded by Marvin Richard III. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Keegen Tracy gets through the defense to make this basket. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Easton Weber looks for an open teammate. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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bounds. Easton Weber chipped in three rebounds off the bench as Groton outrebounded Pine Ridge and controlled much of the tempo.

The Tigers also overcame a shaky night at the line, finishing 10-of-18 (56 percent).

Hanging On Down the Stretch

After leading by double digits for much of the night, Groton watched Pine Ridge storm back in the fourth quarter. Missed free throws and turnovers allowed the Thorpes to trim the margin to one point at 50-49 midway through the period.

Kjellsen called timeout as momentum shifted and delivered a simple message.

"We just needed to get stops and settle down," he said. "We did some really stupid things at times, but the kids hung in there and made plays when it mattered."

Zak answered with a key putback and later a clutch drive, while Johnson knocked down late free throws. A steal and runout by Tracy in the final seconds sealed the outcome and sent Groton back to state for the third time in four years.

Proud Effort

Kjellsen credited his senior-led group for staying composed under pressure.

"I'm just so proud of those boys," he said. "They earned it. Pine Ridge made us earn it, and we just did what it took and hung in there."

Next Up: Hamlin

Groton Area will open Class A State Tournament play Thursday in Rapid City against Hamlin, a familiar opponent the Tigers defeated earlier this season. Kjellsen said his team knows the challenge awaiting them.

"We've seen them and we know how good they are," Kjellsen said. "At this point everybody's good. We'll enjoy this tonight, then get back to work."

With the win, Groton Area heads west with confidence — and the momentum gained from surviving one of its toughest battles of the season.

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 MeatHouse, Weismantel Insurance Agency. Paul Kosel did the stats, and technology, Jeslyn Kosel ran the camera and Rich Bosma provided the play-by-play commentary. There was a record of over 7,000 viewers to the GDILIVE.COM broadcast.



The Groton Area cheerleaders stand together to watch the Pine Ridge cheerleaders perform. With the boys going to the state tournament, the Groton Area cheerleaders will be heading back to defend their two-time Spirit of Six Award. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

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State regulators approve one electric rate increase, begin consideration of another

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

South Dakota regulators approved an electric rate increase for Otter Tail Power on Tuesday in Pierre while starting a review of Black Hills Energy's rate increase request.

Otter Tail Power had proposed hiking its average residential customer's bill by \$14.39 per month. The company has about 11,500 customers in northeastern South Dakota.

The Public Utilities Commission approved a settlement reducing the increase to \$8.97 per month. An annual revenue increase for Otter Tail that would have been \$5.7 million was thus reduced to \$3.3 million.

Otter Tail said it needs the higher rates to cover inflated day-to-day operating costs and necessary infrastructure investments.

Commissioners also approved Otter Tail's reimbursement plan. Customers will receive credits on their May bills to refund the difference between the higher interim rates that began Dec. 1 and the rates approved in the settlement. The settlement includes a rate moratorium through Dec. 1, 2029, which means Otter Tail cannot seek another rate increase before then.

Black Hills Energy says its requested rate increase of about \$25 per month for the average residential customer is justified by infrastructure investments, inflation and the lack of a rate increase since 2014.

The proposal would generate \$50.6 million in additional annual revenue for the company, which serves roughly 75,000 customers in its western South Dakota electric service territory.

Black Hills Energy filed an application with the commission on Feb. 19. On Tuesday, commissioners voted to pause the proposed rate increase for up to six months while they review it, and to require Black Hills Energy to pay up to \$500,000 to cover the cost of examining the proposal.

Separately, Xcel Energy is seeking an increase that would raise the average bill for its residential customers by about \$21 per month and bring in \$43.6 million in additional annual revenue. The company has about 107,000 customers in South Dakota, mostly in the Sioux Falls area. That rate case is pending.

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.

Two of five bills in property tax package defeated by South Dakota legislators

BY: JOHN HULT

The South Dakota House of Representatives said no to another of the five bills in a property tax reduction package announced last week by Gov. Larry Rhoden and legislative leaders.

House Bill 1323 would have made it easier for citizens to refer local government decisions that could increase property taxes to a public vote. Its 40-27 defeat in the House on Tuesday came one day after the state Senate defeated another bill in the package, House Bill 1253. That one sought to limit growth in the home valuations that drive property taxes to 5% a year with a reset to market values every five years. The Senate nixed it 24-9 Monday afternoon.

Lawmakers have two more days in the regular legislative session to decide on two of the three remain-

ing bills in the compromise property tax package, endorsed by both Rhoden and Republican Speaker of the House Jon Hansen. Hansen and Rhoden are running for the GOP nomination for governor in the June 2 primary, as are U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson and Aberdeen businessman Toby Doeden.

Senate Bill 245 passed the House 42-27 on Monday. That bill, which awaits a vote in the Senate, would put the extra money collected after next year's scheduled 4.2% to 4.5% sales tax increase into a property tax relief fund for homeowners and seed the fund with a one-time infusion of nearly \$56 million.

House Bill 1051, which would lower the maximum property tax levies for school districts, awaits a hearing in the Joint Appropriations Committee.

Senate Bill 96, which would let county governments impose a half-percent sales tax and use the money for homeowner property tax credits, has passed both chambers and awaits Rhoden's signature. That bill was proposed by the governor.

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

South Dakota stiffens penalty for disrupting worship, in response to ICE protests elsewhere

BY: MEGHAN O'BRIEN

PIERRE — The crime of preventing religious practices by threat or violence will change from a misdemeanor to a felony in South Dakota, in response to out-of-state protests against immigration enforcement actions.

State Senate Majority Leader Jim Mehlhaff, R-Pierre, and state House Majority Leader Scott Odenbach, R-Spearfish, sponsored the bill in coordination with Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden, who signed it into law Tuesday. It increases the punishment for any person who, by threat or violence, intentionally prevents another person from performing any lawful act associated with religion.

Doing so is currently a misdemeanor, punishable by up to a year of county jail time and a \$2,000 fine. The new law raises the penalty to a felony, making it punishable by two years in state prison and a \$4,000 fine.

"South Dakota is the freest state in the nation," Rhoden said during a bill-signing ceremony at the Capitol. "When our freedom to worship is under attack, we will step up."

Supporters of the bill said they were inspired by January protests in Minnesota, where demonstrators disrupted a church service while protesting the operations of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, resulting in arrests and federal charges. A pastor of the church works for ICE, which had thousands of agents in Minnesota conducting enforcement actions. While operating in the state, federal agents shot and killed two U.S. citizens.

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

Psychedelic mental health treatments will be legal in South Dakota, if approved by feds

Governor signs bills on synthetic psilocybin, fraudulent insemination, data rights, Future Fund and more

BY: JOHN HULT

A synthetic version of psychedelic mushrooms will be legal for use in mental health therapy in South Dakota if it's approved by the federal government.

Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden signed a bill into law on Tuesday that sets the state up to instantly legal-

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ize crystalline polymorph psilocybin if the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approves its use and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration reschedules it from a drug of abuse to a drug with medical value.

House Bill 1099 sailed through the House of Representatives 58-7 on the strength of testimony about the drug's promise in clinical trials as a more effective option for post-traumatic stress disorder and treatment-resistant depression. Lobbyists for combat veterans testified in support of the measure.

The bill met a bit more resistance in the Senate, where Rapid City Republican Sen. Greg Blanc pulled it from the chamber's consent calendar — a list of noncontroversial bills passed with a single vote unless a senator asks to remove one — to decry the idea of using a psychedelic drug in therapy.

Blanc pleaded with his fellow senators to resist the bill's conditional legalization, but supporters returned repeatedly to the theme of hope for veterans and treatment-resistant depression and stressed that nothing would happen until the federal government green-lit the drug as safe and effective.

The bill passed the Senate 21-12.

Rhoden also signed a bill on Tuesday to create the crime of fraudulent assisted reproduction. House Bill 1164 was spurred by the actions of a fertility doctor in Indiana who inseminated dozens of women with his own sperm without their knowledge. His story inspired the Netflix documentary "Our Father," which Piedmont Republican Rep. Terri Jorgenson saw before deciding to craft and sponsor the bill.

Starting July 1, it will be a felony crime to engage in fraudulent assisted reproduction in South Dakota. Parents or children affected by it will be empowered to seek civil damages.

The governor also announced on Tuesday morning that he'd signed a bill requiring social media companies with 100 million or more monthly users to give to South Dakotans, upon request, a copy of all personal data collected about them. Senate Bill 111 also sets up parameters for usability and access of the requested data.

Later in the day, Rhoden's office issued a press release to say he'd signed Senate Bill 164, requiring motorists with commercial driver's licenses to be proficient in English, and Senate Bill 180, which says non-U.S. citizens must have legal status to have CDLs.

He additionally signed House Bill 1286, which makes numerous reforms to the governor-controlled Future Fund for economic development, including the addition of definitions for acceptable uses of the fund, requiring more reporting to legislators about the fund's awards, stipulating information required of applicants, directing the Governor's Office of Economic Development to develop rules governing the fund's use, and requiring the office to make recommendations to the governor about potential awards.

As of Tuesday afternoon, the governor had signed 127 bills into law and vetoed one this legislative session.

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.

Democrats sue Trump administration for information on possible plans for troops at polls

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA

WASHINGTON — The Democratic National Committee Tuesday filed a lawsuit in federal court aiming to force the Trump administration to admit if it plans to send armed federal law enforcement or U.S. troops to polling locations in the upcoming midterm elections.

The suit in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia charges that 11 Freedom of Information Act, or FOIA, requests submitted to the Department of Justice, Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Defense by the DNC in October have gone unanswered, a violation of public records law.

"To ensure that the American people obtain timely knowledge of potential threats to free and fair elections and to enable the DNC to take appropriate action to ensure voting rights are protected, the DNC now seeks this Court's aid to enforce FOIA requirements," according to the suit.

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The suit was assigned to federal Judge Beryl A. Howell, who was appointed by former President Barack Obama.

Voting machines

The suit details how the FOIA requests were filed after comments from President Donald Trump to the New York Times that he regretted not using the U.S. military to seize voting machines after he lost the 2020 presidential election.

"These and many other actions have raised serious concerns among voters across the country that the President will order armed federal agents or troops to polling places, drop boxes, and election offices, ... and will send FBI agents or Justice Department officials to interfere with the orderly administration and certification of elections," according to the complaint.

The suit also cites comments from White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt that she "couldn't guarantee" that federal law enforcement officers would not be at polling locations this November.

"Donald Trump wants to bully and cheat his way through a midterm election that he knows Republicans will lose, but we won't let him," DNC Chair Ken Martin said in a statement. "The DNC will stand on the side of voters and use every tool in our arsenal to stop voter suppression and intimidation before it can even begin."

Are there records?

It's also possible that no records exist.

Congressional Democrats have pressed Trump officials during hearings on plans to send agents from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and U.S. Customs and Border Protection to polling locations.

Both heads of those agencies, ICE acting director Todd Lyons and CBP Commissioner Rodney Scott, said there were no plans to send any of their agents or officers to polling locations.

Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem, who is leaving her post at the end of month and being replaced by Oklahoma GOP Sen. Markwayne Mullin, was also pressed by Democrats.

She said there were no plans for ICE agents, but also asked Democrats if they plan for noncitizens to vote in federal elections, something that is already illegal and rarely occurs.

But during the hearing, Noem would not commit to issuing a directive barring immigration agents from polling locations.

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

No easy answers for senators grappling with college sports pay

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA

WASHINGTON — A U.S. Senate panel on Tuesday added to the fierce debate over compensation for student-athletes, with senators and experts agreeing the current system wasn't working but with different ideas for a path forward.

Sen. Bill Cassidy, a Louisiana Republican and chair of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, hosted a roundtable of experts, leaders and former college and professional athletes to discuss "fixing college sports."

Cassidy said the "current system is actually hurting the student-athlete."

"Our effort will be, what do we do to protect the student-athlete?" he continued, adding that approach would also protect universities.

Two of the five panelists Cassidy brought in hailed from Louisiana State University, including Collis Temple Jr., a member of the LSU Board of Supervisors and former basketball star at the university, along with Julie Cromer, executive deputy athletic director and chief operating officer for LSU Athletics.

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The event came on the heels of a White House roundtable last week, where President Donald Trump pledged to imminently deliver an executive order aimed at reshaping college sports.

Debate over athletes as employees

The college sports world continues to grapple with the fallout from the NCAA's 2021 guidelines, which allowed student-athletes to profit from their name, image and likeness.

A federal judge in June 2025 approved the terms of a nearly \$2.8 billion antitrust settlement that paved the way for schools to directly pay athletes.

The rules for name, image and likeness deals vary from state to state.

The college sports landscape is also wrestling with gender inequity in NIL deals and the NCAA's controversial transfer portal, among other issues.

A bipartisan bill on pause in the U.S. House aims to create a national framework for college athletes' compensation. It would also prohibit college athletes from being classified as employees while providing broad antitrust immunity to the NCAA and college sports conferences.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, a Louisiana Republican, expressed optimism over the bill's fate during the White House roundtable, saying "we're right on the verge of passage in the House and we now think we have the votes to do that."

But the bill would face a dismal path in the Senate, where Senate Democrats have pushed back against it.

Meanwhile, a bipartisan proposal from GOP Sen. Eric Schmitt of Missouri and Democratic Sen. Maria Cantwell of Washington state would provide "a new antitrust exemption allowing college football institutions to jointly sell media rights" and make it "optional for conferences and schools to pool their media rights together."

Conversation between schools and athletes needed

Jim Carr, president and CEO of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics, said "the implications of student-athletes becoming employees, or a lot of these court decisions that are making it difficult to enforce our rules around what we call education-based athletics, is really — I don't think it's an overstatement or being too dramatic to say — critical to not only the NAIA but each of our institutions being able to stay in business on a long-term basis."

Carr, whose association includes roughly 250 institutions, said at an average NAIA school, 36% of the students are also athletes.

Sen. Chris Murphy called for collective bargaining, where athletes can "speak for themselves," noting that Congress should not "micromanage" the relationship between colleges and college athletes.

"We should just empower the colleges or the conferences and the athletes to have a conversation between themselves," the Connecticut Democrat said.

Bernard Dennis III, principal at Jackson Lewis P.C. and an employment and sports law expert, said that if students are classified as employees, "they then become subject to several statutory schemes, not the least of which would be the (Fair Labor Standards Act), which would allow them to be compensated for their work time, for overtime and then it becomes a challenge in what constitutes that."

He added that "under the law, it would be anything that is required for their work, and so when you have eligibility rules about maintaining a certain GPA, things like that, it becomes not only your time on the field, but does going to class become compensable work time? How do you track that?"

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

Briefing on Trump's Iran war angers US Senate Dems as Pentagon reports 140 troops injured

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY AND JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — Senate Democrats tasked with overseeing defense left a classified briefing Tuesday incensed about President Donald Trump's war with Iran, as the United States and Israel continue their joint bombardment and families prepare to bury seven American service members killed in the conflict.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., who sits on the Senate Armed Services Committee, said he left the briefing "more doubtful than ever that there is clarity on objectives or exit strategy."

"I emerged from this briefing as dissatisfied and angry, frankly, as I have from any past briefing in my 15 years in the Senate. I am left with more questions than answers, especially about the cost of the war," Blumenthal said.

Chief Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell said in a statement that since the beginning of the war in Iran, "approximately 140 U.S. service members have been wounded over 10 days of sustained attacks."

"The vast majority of these injuries have been minor, and 108 service members have already returned to duty," he said. "Eight service members remain listed as severely injured and are receiving the highest level of medical care."

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt, asked at a press briefing about a Reuters news report that as many as 150 U.S. troops have been injured in the war, replied, "I know it's within that ballpark," but deferred to the Pentagon for the exact numbers.

Seven U.S. troops have died, the Pentagon has said.

'The most fighters, the most bombers'

Military and defense intelligence officials conducted the closed-door update for senators shortly after Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, alongside Joint Chiefs of Staff Chair Gen. Dan Caine, said from the Pentagon that Iran should expect "yet again the most intense day of strikes" Tuesday.

"The most fighters, the most bombers, the most strikes — intelligence more refined and better than ever," Hegseth said.

The secret briefing occurred a day after oil prices took a rollercoaster ride, peaking at \$119 a barrel before falling below \$90, due to Iranian officials' effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's petroleum passes.

Giving mixed signals Monday night, Trump said the war in Iran is "going to be a short-term excursion," but added later the U.S. military "will not relent until the enemy is totally and decisively defeated."

Dems unsure of end game

Many Senate Democrats have criticized the administration for not coming before Congress to debate the war publicly.

"We've been calling over and over again for them to come out of the classified rooms to allow us to have these conversations as much as we can in an open setting," Sen. Jacky Rosen, D-Nev., said after leaving the briefing, held in a secured compartmented information facility, or SCIF, underneath the U.S. Capitol.

"I have to think about what I can and can't say — it is concerning, it is disturbing, and I'm not sure what the end game is or what their plans are. They certainly have not made their case," Rosen said.

Sen. Mark Kelly, D-Ariz., said "a range of four individuals" briefed lawmakers, including a major general and personnel from the Joint Staff Intelligence and Defense Intelligence Agency, two organizations.

Telling reporters that "wild horses" could not get him to discuss the classified briefing, Armed Services Committee Chairman Roger Wicker, R-Miss., said he hasn't received a request from Democrats, including ranking member Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., for an open hearing.

Schumer demands hearings

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., issued a joint press release with Reed and Sen. Jeanne

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Shaheen, D-N.H., just after the classified briefing demanding public hearings "on Trump's war of choice."

"Public hearings featuring cabinet-level witnesses have been a standard part of congressional oversight throughout our history, including recent military conflicts, as well as during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. After all, our founders were clear about the role of Congress in matters of war as the representatives of the American people," the senators wrote.

South Dakota Republican Sen. Mike Rounds said he feels lawmakers are getting enough information from the administration, but he indicated that what happens after the bombing stops will largely be left up to civilians in Iran.

"That's not our focus," he said. "Our focus was on eliminating the threat to our people in the Middle East, to our allies, and to be able to address the threats before they became a lot worse in a very short period of time."

Rounds said he believes that once the war ends, it will "be up to the Iranian people to determine whether they want to join the free world."

"The Iranians are very smart people. They're well educated. They can run their country if given the opportunity," he said. "But if they just come to bring in another group of religious zealots, then they're going to continue to have problems. And I think they realize that."

Progress seen by Montana's Sheehy

Massachusetts Democratic Sen. Elizabeth Warren criticized the administration for not having clearer goals or an exit strategy.

"Here we are, well into the second week of attacks, and there are still contradictory descriptions of the goals and contradictory descriptions of how we intend to accomplish this work," she said.

Montana Republican Sen. Tim Sheehy said he believes the U.S. military has "made great progress" during the first week-and-a-half of bombing.

He said he expects the war will end once the United States and Israel have eliminated "the regime's ability to continue to spread terror around the world and continue to control regional waterways and continue to try to kill Americans and our allies, not just in the region, but around the world."

Shaheen, ranking member on the Foreign Relations Committee, said she hopes the administration will publicly release its investigation into whether a U.S. missile struck near a girls school in Iran.

"Hopefully they will release the investigation," she said. "Certainly I don't believe there is any deliberate intent to target civilians in Iran in that way, but the fact that there are so many different explanations for what's happening raises concerns."

Jacob Fischler contributed to this report.

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

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

Law enforcement resistance tanks bill barring jail for unpaid sobriety program fees

Attorney General's Office and sheriffs cite worries about funding for 24/7 program

BY: JOHN HULT

A late-session rally from law enforcement lobbyists quashed a South Dakota legislative effort to bar the jailing of 24/7 sobriety program participants for their inability to pay.

Codifying constitutional prohibitions against locking up people for debt without a plan to backfill sheriff's office budgets, the lobbyists said, could spell the death of a program that supporters and opponents of House Bill 1176 both described as a critical public safety tool.

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The Senate Appropriations Committee voted 5-4 to table the bill last week. A move to place the bill on the Senate calendar Monday failed 8-26.

Under the 24/7 program, judges release people accused of crimes linked to alcohol or drugs from jail as they await trial, on the condition they pay daily or weekly fees for alcohol or drug testing to prove they're sober as the case is pending.

Participants pay \$2 a day for twice-daily breath tests for alcohol, or between \$40 and \$60 a week for alternative testing methods like alcohol monitoring bracelets or drug patches.

Those who fail to remain sober are returned to jail, after which a judge decides whether to release them back onto the program. If a person fails to show up, a warrant can be issued for their arrest.

The bill from Rep. Peri Pourier, R-Rapid City, was filed in response to a class action lawsuit in Pennington County that alleged some participants were being jailed not for failure to remain sober, but because they couldn't afford to pay the program's upfront fees.

It is unconstitutional to incarcerate a person for failure to pay a debt alone, based on U.S. Supreme Court precedent.

The county settled the lawsuit in federal court. It agreed to cease the practice of threatening jail time for an inability to pay, and to pay damages to the plaintiffs who had been jailed for their inability to pay — \$10,000 to the main plaintiff, and \$1,000 apiece to another 37 people.

Pourier's bill, which would change state law to explicitly state that no one can be jailed for failure to pay 24/7 fees alone, passed through the House Judiciary Committee and the full House of Representatives without a no vote.

In committee and on the House floor, Pourier referenced South Dakota Searchlight reporting on the Pennington County lawsuit as a motivating factor for bringing the bill.

Attorney General's Office: Future uncertain after lawsuit

Grant Flynn, a representative of the South Dakota Attorney General's Office, told lawmakers on the Senate Judiciary Committee last Tuesday that he had no issue with the concept of codifying the constitutional prohibition on debtor's prisons into law as it relates to the 24/7 program.

His concern, however, was for the program's viability. Flynn said his office had explored ways to shore up 24/7 if the bill passes and a mass of participants claim indigency.

The program is locally operated. Flynn said county sheriffs have always been happy to administer the program not only because it helps keep people sober, but because it does so without burdening local budgets.

Those on the program who wouldn't be released from jail on bond without it, he said, appreciate their pretrial freedom.

"They can be with their families, they can go to work, they can continue to live their productive lives while they address this mistake that they made," said Flynn.

Staci Ackerman, executive director of the South Dakota Sheriffs' Association, told the Judiciary Committee that many sheriffs are worried about counties picking up a greater share of program costs.

Flynn and Ackerman asked the Judiciary Committee to refer the bill to the Senate Appropriations Committee to determine its potential financial impact.

When that committee considered the bill on Thursday, Pourier offered an amendment that would've pulled funding from the state's 24/7 sobriety program fund to support counties, and would have allowed the state and counties to solicit donations to bolster the fund.

Flynn told appropriators that wasn't enough to address his concerns.

"This program is too important to rely on some future source of funding someday," Flynn said.

If the state explicitly exempts the indigent from the responsibility to pay in the offender-funded program, Flynn said, people will use the law to duck fees they might otherwise pay.

"People are going to find more and more ways to fall into this category to avoid paying those fees," he said.

Had the bill become law, a person could request a hearing and ask a judge to deem them unable to pay.

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Those who are able to convince a judge they can't afford the fees could be ordered to pay them later, at the time of their sentencing.

Eric Erickson, a lobbyist for the South Dakota State's Attorney's Association, said people who can't afford to pay fees before sentencing rarely pay their fines afterward.

Dick Tieszen, who also lobbies for the Sheriffs' Association, told Senate appropriators he sees a bleak future for the program — which operates in nearly every county in South Dakota — if the law changes without a new funding source.

"I think we're going to see a program that's been successful disappear," said Tieszen.

Push to revive bill fails

Pourier said she'd been willing to work with law enforcement to identify a funding source, and told South Dakota Searchlight that discussions had taken place in good faith.

She told the Senate Appropriations Committee that counties currently have a collective total of between \$20,000 and \$25,000 in delinquencies from people who haven't paid their 24/7 fees.

The state's 24/7 sobriety fund, which would have been used to help counties pay down those delinquencies had Pourier's amended bill become law, collected around \$1.2 million in 2025. The state gets a portion of program fees to pay for a state-level 24/7 coordinator, and for other program expenses, including contracts for software. It can also bolster the fund with grants or gifts, but nearly all the money in the fund comes from offender fees.

The \$1.2 million collected in 2025 was enough to pay the state's 24/7 operations bills and then some. At the end of fiscal year 2025, the fund had \$72,686 left over. It had surpluses of \$10,500 in 2024, \$38,240 in 2023 and \$40,877 in 2022.

Concerns about a growth in delinquencies of an uncertain size may be legitimate, Bonesteel Republican Sen. Mykala Voita said, but that shouldn't excuse a failure to pass a law saying the state will adhere to the U.S. Constitution.

If the figures prove overwhelming, Voita said, lawmakers can address them and find a funding source in future sessions.

"We have this court case that's setting precedent that's saying how this was being run is unconstitutional," said Voita, who unsuccessfully moved to send the bill to the Senate floor.

Sen. Taffy Howard, R-Rapid City, supported two motions meant to shut down debate on the bill: One to table it, another to defeat it.

"Let's allow the program to continue to be run how it's been run," Howard said.

Both her motions failed by one vote, just like Voita's motion to pass it to the Senate floor.

Voita's final motion was to send the bill to the floor with no recommendation, which passed by one vote.

On Monday, Brandon Republican Sen. Steve Kolbeck asked his colleagues to put the bill on the chamber's calendar. He reminded them it had passed the House with overwhelming support. Red Dawn Foster, D-Pine Ridge, told the chamber that supporters had new numbers to present on the bill's viability, but the move failed.

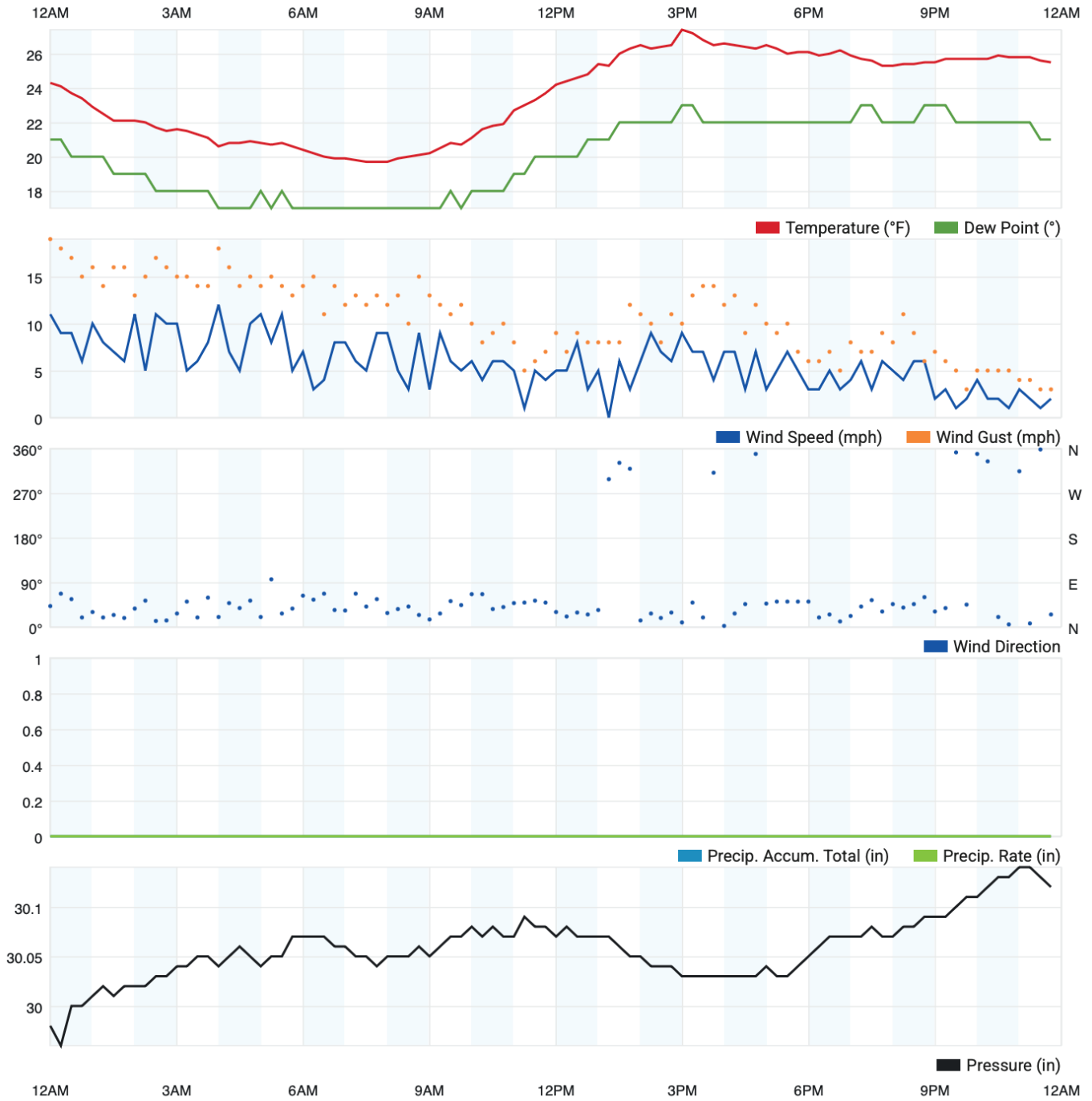
John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

March 10, 2026



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Today	Tonight	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday
				
High: 42 °F	Low: 23 °F	High: 50 °F	Low: 23 °F	High: 35 °F
Partly Sunny then Chance Snow	Partly Cloudy	Chance Rain/Snow then Rain Likely and Breezy	Slight Chance Rain/Snow and Windy	Mostly Cloudy



Strong Winds Thursday Afternoon & Evening March 11, 2026 2:40 AM CDT

Maximum Wind Gust (mph) Forecast

	3/12 Thu											3/13 Fri								
	11am	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm	9pm	10pm	11pm	12am	1am	2am	3am	4am	5am	6am
McIntosh	37	47	53	58	62	64	67	67	66	64	61	58	52	46	40	37	33	31	28	24
Eagle Butte	30	36	40	47	54	59	62	63	63	62	59	55	52	48	45	39	33	29	25	22
Murdo	32	35	37	39	41	44	46	46	46	46	47	46	44	40	37	32	28	24	22	20
Mobridge	24	28	31	35	40	44	47	49	54	56	58	55	51	45	38	32	28	23	20	18
Pierre	22	24	28	32	38	44	46	47	49	52	54	55	51	45	39	32	26	21	17	15
Gettysburg	25	26	29	32	39	45	48	51	54	58	59	58	54	48	43	37	32	28	24	21
Eureka	24	28	31	36	43	47	49	53	56	59	60	58	54	49	44	39	35	30	28	25
Chamberlain	22	25	28	35	38	41	43	43	44	41	45	48	44	41	40	37	33	26	26	24
Miller	26	28	30	35	38	44	46	49	51	54	56	58	55	51	46	41	37	32	28	25
Redfield	24	25	28	31	35	40	44	48	52	54	58	58	56	52	47	43	38	33	30	26
Aberdeen	22	23	25	28	31	33	39	45	52	56	58	58	55	51	45	40	36	31	28	24
Britton	24	26	29	30	31	32	37	40	45	49	54	55	54	51	47	45	41	39	35	30
Clark	25	26	28	31	33	35	38	40	46	51	54	55	54	52	48	46	43	39	36	31
Webster	24	25	29	30	31	32	36	40	44	48	52	54	53	51	47	45	43	39	35	30
Watertown	23	25	29	31	32	32	36	37	41	46	49	52	52	51	48	47	45	43	38	33
Sisseton	22	23	25	26	29	30	33	36	39	44	48	51	52	52	51	49	46	44	39	36
Milbank	21	22	25	26	29	30	32	33	36	39	43	45	47	47	47	46	45	43	39	36
Wheaton	22	23	25	26	28	28	28	29	30	32	37	41	44	46	47	47	46	44	41	38

Shifting winds from the southwest to northwest Thursday afternoon. Gusts 60+ mph.



High winds may move loose debris, damage property and cause power outages

Travel could be difficult, especially for high profile vehicles



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Wind gusts of 60 mph or more are possible Thursday afternoon into Thursday evening, shifting from out of the southwest to northwest Thursday afternoon. These high winds may move loose debris, damage property and cause power outages. Travel could be difficult, especially for high profile vehicles.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 28 °F at 3:03 PM

Low Temp: 20 °F at 7:13 AM

Wind: 19 mph at 12:05 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 72 in 2024

Record Low: --27 in 1948

Average High: 39

Average Low: 17

Average Precip in Mar.: 0.27

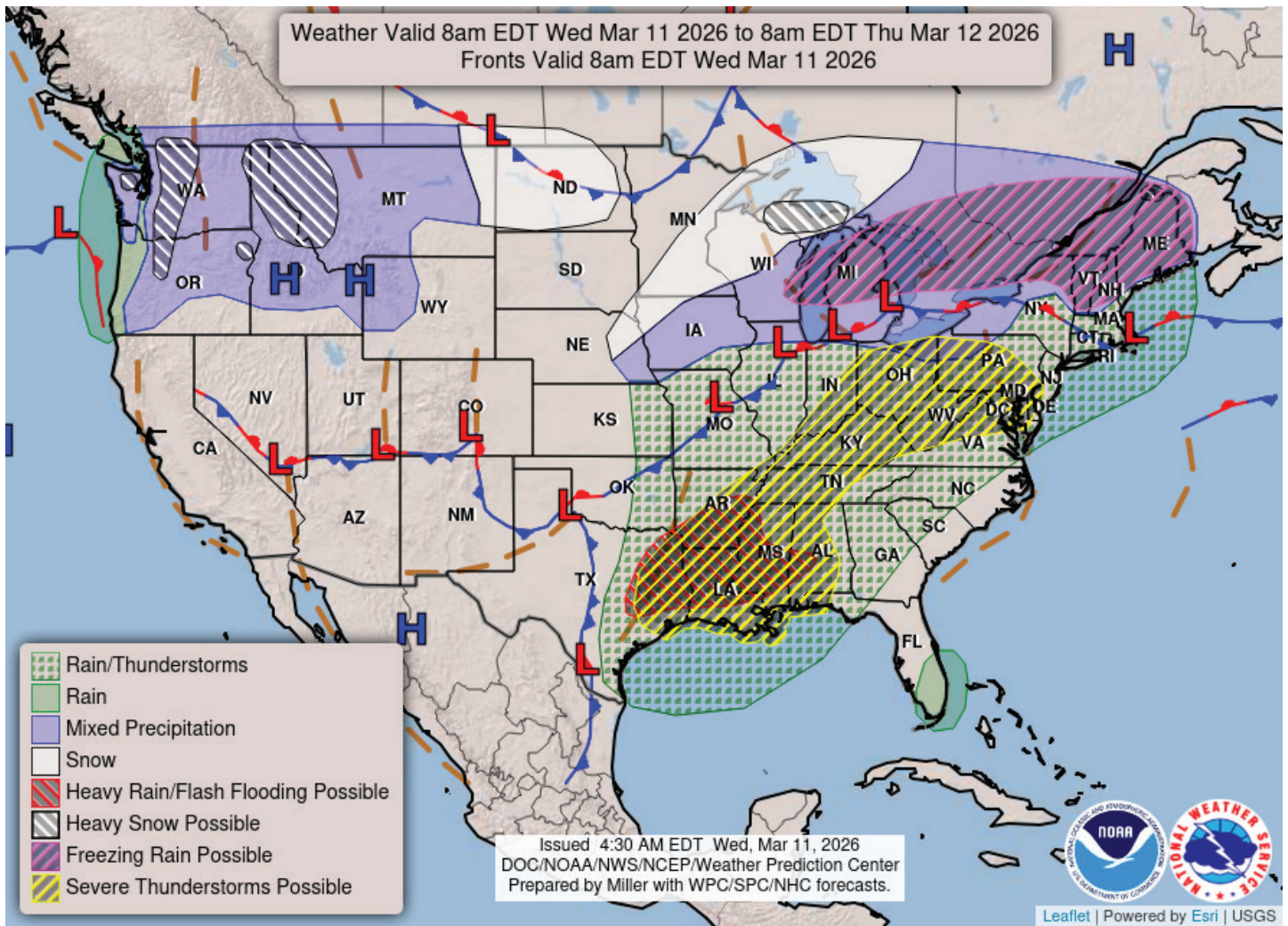
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 1.44

Precip Year to Date: 1.33

Sunset Tonight: 7.32 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:50 am



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Today in Weather History

March 11-12th, 1991: A developing winter storm centered to the south of the Black Hills caused heavy snow to fall on the northern Black Hills from the evening of March 11th until the morning of March 12th. Snowfall totals of 3-9 inches were reported, including 9 inches at Custer, 8 inches at Deerfield, and 8 inches at Lead.

March 11th, 2011: A very intense low-pressure area moving across North Dakota brought widespread blizzard conditions to central and northeast South Dakota. The low-pressure area brought 1 to 3 inches of snowfall to the region. The new snow combined with 30 to 50 mph winds with gusts to 60 to 70 mph brought widespread whiteout conditions. Traffic was brought to a standstill, with many motorists being rescued and taken to a shelter. Hundreds of cars were stranded on mainly Highway 12 and Interstate 29. Two people traveling on Highway 10 in McPherson County told how they became stuck and were picked up by another vehicle and that it took them over 2 1/2 hours to travel just a few miles to safety. Interstate-29 was closed from Watertown to Sisseton from 6 pm on the 11th until noon on the 12th. Many events were affected, including the Girl's State Basketball Tournament in Watertown. There were several overturned semis and several vehicle accidents across the area. Some of the highest wind gusts included 56 mph at Watertown, 58 mph at Mobridge, Sisseton, and Faulkton, 59 mph at Aberdeen, 61 mph at Bowdle, 66 mph near Hillhead, and 71 mph west of Long Lake.

1911 — Tamarack, CA, reported 451 inches of snow on the ground, a record for the U.S. (David Ludlum)

1948 — Record cold followed in the wake of a Kansas blizzard. Lows of -25 degrees at Oberlin, Healy and Quinter established a state record for the month of March. Lows of -15 at Dodge City, -11 at Concordia, and -3 at Wichita were also March records. (The Weather Channel)

1962 — One of the most paralyzing snowstorms in decades produced record March snowfalls in Iowa. Four feet of snow covered the ground at Inwood following the storm. (David Ludlum)

1987 — Unseasonably cold weather prevailed in the southeastern U.S., and a storm over the Gulf of Mexico spread rain and sleet and snow into the Appalachian Region. Sleet was reported in southern Mississippi. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 — A blizzard raged across the north central U.S. Chadron NE was buried under 33 inches of snow, up to 25 inches of snow was reported in eastern Wyoming, and totals in the Black Hills of South Dakota ranged up to 69 inches at Lead. Winds gusted to 63 mph at Mullen NE. Snow drifts thirty feet high were reported around Lusk WY. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 — Twenty-one cities in the central and southwestern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 95 degrees at Lubbock TX equalled their record for March. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 — Forty-four cities in the central and eastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Record highs included 71 degrees at Dickinson ND and Williston ND, and 84 degrees at Lynchburg VA, Charleston WV and Huntington WV. Augusta GA and Columbia SC tied for honors as the hot spot in the nation with record highs of 88 degrees. A vigorous cold front produced up to three feet of snow in the mountains of Utah. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2006 — Phoenix's record run for dry days finally ends at 143 days. The last measured rain fell on October 18, 2005. Not only did the rain break the dry spell, the 1.40 inches that fell was a record amount for the date.



Daily Devotion

God's Empowering Presence

Nothing else can satisfy the longing that God alone is meant to fill.

Psalms 42:1-5: 1 As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for You, O God.
2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; When shall I come and appear before God?
3 My tears have been my food day and night, While they say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"
4 These things I remember and I pour out my soul within me. For I used to go along with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God, With the voice of joy and thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival.
5 Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him For the help of His presence.

God desires an intimate relationship with each of us, so He created humanity with a yearning for His presence. Though He alone can fill that void, people attempt to satisfy their longing with all kinds of relationships and activities. But trying to fill that spot with anything other than the Lord is at best a short-term solution, one that ultimately will fall short.

The Bible urges us to stop our frenzied search for satisfaction in what the world offers and instead recognize that we should focus on Jesus Christ (Psalm 62:1). Yet so many people choose substitutes for His presence. It's important to realize friends, hobbies, and even busy schedules can be good pursuits—as long as we prioritize time spent in quietness before God. But all too often, when the amusement of one good thing wears off, we seek a new activity or person instead of asking ourselves what our heart truly needs.

Nothing besides the Lord can adequately fill the place in our life that God has reserved for Himself. Our Father's empowering presence is the only genuine solution. For believers, the Holy Spirit is already present within. What we must do is settle ourselves before God, and then He will make Himself known.

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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.10.26

3 27 43 45 49 4

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

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 32 Mins 17 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.10.26

16 21 30 35 65 7

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$50,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 17 Mins 17 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.09.26

3 4 11 20 24 10

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$17,860,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 32 Mins 17 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.07.26

1 2 6 22 26

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 47 Mins 17 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.09.26

24 28 32 55 62 5

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 16 Mins 17 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.09.26

22 23 28 36 54 13

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$58,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 16 Mins 17 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the **AP** Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

SDHSAA SoDak 16=

State Qualifier=

Class A=

Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 70, Mahpiya Luta Red Cloud 57

Clark-Willow Lake 77, McCook Central-Montrose 41

Groton 62, Pine Ridge 54

Hamlin 65, Rapid City Christian 33

Sioux Falls Christian 89, Wagner 68

St Thomas More 57, Lennox 55, OT

Stanley County 54, Flandreau 45

West Central 73, Webster 39

Class B=

Aberdeen Christian 67, Sioux Falls Lutheran 52

Castlewood 69, Timber Lake 43

DeSmet 56, Ipswich 45

Freeman 62, Lower Brule 40

Lyman 59, Leola-Frederick High School 46

Sully Buttes 42, Dupree 40

Viborg-Hurley 70, White River 57

Wall 72, Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 66

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

Trump visits Ohio and Kentucky to downplay war's effect on economy and target a top GOP antagonist

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump plans to visit Ohio and Kentucky on Wednesday to argue that his policies can steady an economy facing shock waves from the war on Iran and to try to defeat one of the few congressional Republicans who has dared to defy him.

In Cincinnati, the Republican president is touring Thermo Fisher Scientific, a pharmaceutical company. There, he'll tout efforts to lower prescription drug prices, a key part of his attempts to show his administration is focused on making the cost of living more affordable for many Americans ahead of November's midterm elections.

After that, Trump will visit a logistics packing facility in nearby Hebron, Kentucky, part of the district of Rep. Thomas Massie. Trump is backing a primary challenger to Massie.

The trip presents a test of Trump's ability to cleanse his party of those who oppose him but also to try to stay on an economic message increasingly strained by the military action launched by the U.S. and Israel against Iran. He'll be "talking about the economy, which is, of course, the utmost importance to him," White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said.

Polls showed that Americans were increasingly wary of Trump's handling of the economy even before the conflict with Iran began, and fighting there has derailed Trump's messaging, as the low gas prices he once bragged about are now surging and stocks that had set record highs have slipped.

Employers also cut an unexpectedly high 92,000 jobs in February, and revisions trimmed another 69,000 jobs from December and January payrolls — which the White House had previously hailed as "blockbuster."

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None of that has stopped Trump from continuing to insist the country is booming — and blaming the Democrats for everything else.

“They’re the one that caused the problem,” he told a House Republican meeting in Florida on Monday. “But we’re really bringing down prices big.”

Democrats offer a sharp contrast to Trump’s depiction of the nation, arguing that costs remain high for many Americans more than a year into his second term and that families are still struggling under his policies.

Trump’s affordability tour meets his opposition to Massie

After Democrats won the Virginia and New Jersey governors’ races in November, the White House announced that Trump would travel the country to show that he’s taking kitchen table issues seriously and reassure voters nervous about still-rising prices and economic growth.

Since then, the president has made stops in Pennsylvania, Georgia, Michigan, North Carolina and Texas — though his speeches sometimes have been more focused on his own political grievances than his plans to try to help lower everyday costs around the country.

This trip, however, marks the first time this primary cycle that Trump has sought to keep promises to punish members of his own party who oppose him on key issues. The president has endorsed Ed Gallrein, a farmer, businessman and retired Navy SEAL, who is running against Massie in Kentucky’s Republican primary on May 19. Trump and Gallrein will appear together on Wednesday.

Massie is an outspoken Trump critic who opposed the White House-backed tax and spending measure and bucked Trump by pushing to have files related to the sex trafficking investigations into Jeffrey Epstein released. He’s also opposed the U.S. strike on Venezuela that toppled then-President Nicolás Maduro and, most recently, the war in Iran.

“This isn’t America First,” Massie posted on X on Sunday, blaming the war for causing gas prices to jump.

Iran targets commercial ships, Dubai airport and oil facilities as concerns grow over global energy

By JON GAMBRELL and DAVID RISING Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran attacked commercial ships on Wednesday across the Persian Gulf and targeted Dubai International Airport, escalating a campaign of squeezing the oil-rich region as global energy concerns mounted and American and Israeli airstrikes pounded the Islamic Republic.

Two Iranian drones hit near Dubai International Airport, home to the long-haul carrier Emirates and the world’s busiest for international travel. Four people were wounded but flights continued, the Dubai Media Office said.

Iran’s joint military command announced it would start targeting banks and financial institutions in the Middle East. That would put at risk particularly Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates, which is home to many international financial institutions, as well as Saudi Arabia and the island kingdom of Bahrain.

Earlier, a projectile hit a Thai cargo ship off the coast of Oman in the Strait of Hormuz, setting it ablaze. Authorities are searching for three missing crew members from the Mayuree Naree after 20 were rescued by the Omani navy, according to Thailand’s Marine Department.

Kuwait said its defenses downed eight Iranian drones and Saudi Arabia said it intercepted five heading toward the kingdom’s Shaybah oil field.

Iran has effectively stopped cargo traffic in the narrow strait through which about a fifth of all oil is shipped. It has also targeted oil fields and refineries in Gulf Arab nations, aiming at generating enough global economic pain to pressure the United States and Israel to end their strikes.

The U.N. Security Council was to vote later Wednesday on a resolution sponsored by the Gulf Cooperation Council demanding Iran stop attacking its Arab neighbors.

Witnesses reported continuous airstrikes hitting Tehran after Israel said it had renewed its attacks. Explosions were also heard in Beirut and in southern Lebanon after Israel said it was hitting targets connected to Iran-backed Hezbollah militants.

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Israel pounds Lebanon with new attacks

The attacks set a building ablaze in central Beirut's densely populated Aicha Bakkar area, engulfing the top two floors. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

Other Israeli strikes on southern and eastern Lebanon killed 14 people, and a Red Cross worker also died Wednesday of wounds sustained Monday, when his team was hit by an Israeli strike while they were rescuing people from an earlier attack.

More than 500 people have been killed so far in Lebanon since Hezbollah triggered the latest round of fighting with Israel after the United States and Israel began the wider war with their surprise bombardment of Iran.

Iran launches multiple salvos at Israel and Gulf Arab nations

Israel warned of three Iranian attacks early Wednesday, with sirens heard in Tel Aviv and elsewhere but no immediate reports of casualties.

Saudi Arabia said it had destroyed six ballistic missiles launched toward Prince Sultan Air Base, a major U.S.- and Saudi-operated facility, and intercepted two drones over the eastern city of Hafar al-Batin.

The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center, run by the British military, reported an attack on a container ship off the United Arab Emirates, saying the "extent of the damage is currently unknown but under investigation by the crew." Another ship was hit by a projectile in the Persian Gulf, it said. The crew was reported safe.

The ship attacks follow intense American airstrikes targeting Iranian navy assets and the port city of Bandar Abbas on Tuesday.

Qatar, Oman, Bahrain and the UAE were working to shoot down Iranian missiles and drones.

The Iranian threat against financial institutions did not identify any specifically. It came after a Tehran location of Bank Sepah, the state-owned financial institution sanctioned by the U.S. over funding its armed forces, came under attack early Wednesday, killing staffers there, the state-run IRNA news agency reported.

At the United Nations, the Security Council was to vote Wednesday afternoon on the Gulf Cooperation Council resolution, according to three diplomats speaking on condition of anonymity ahead of an official announcement.

The draft resolution, obtained by The Associated Press, condemns Iran's attacks on Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Jordan. The measure calls for an immediate end to all strikes and threats against neighboring states, including through proxies.

It would be the first Security Council resolution considered since the start of the war on Feb. 28.

Oil prices stay high on fears of prolonged shipping disruption

Oil prices remained well below Monday's peaks but the price of Brent crude, the international standard, was still up some 20% Wednesday from when the war began, and consumers around the world are already feeling the pain at the pump.

The spike in oil prices has been rocking financial markets worldwide because of worries that a prolonged war could hinder exports from a critical region.

The U.S. military said Tuesday it had destroyed 16 Iranian minelayers near the Strait of Hormuz, though U.S. President Donald Trump said in social media posts that there were no reports yet of Iran mining the passage.

If the strait is mined, it could take at least weeks to clean it up once the conflict is over.

Some tankers, believed linked to Iran, are continuing to get through the strait making so-called "dark" transits -- meaning they aren't turning on their Automatic Identification System trackers, which show where vessels are. Vessels carrying sanctioned Iranian crude often turn off their AIS trackers.

The security firm Neptune P2P Group said Wednesday there had been seven ships pass through the strait since March 8. Of them, five were linked to Iranian-associated shipping, it said. In ordinary times the strait typically sees 100 ships or more transit daily from the Persian Gulf into the Gulf of Oman.

Meanwhile, the commodity-tracking firm Kpler said Iran has restarted crude exports through its Jask oil terminal on the Gulf of Oman. A tanker loaded roughly 2 million barrels at Jask on March 7, it said.

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Speculation over health of Iran's new supreme leader grows
Concerns are growing over the health of Iran's new Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei after comments about him "being injured."

The 56-year-old Khamenei — the son of the late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei — has not been seen since becoming supreme leader on Monday. His father and wife both were killed in an Israeli airstrike on the first day of the conflict.

Foreign nationals flee region as death tolls rise

In addition to the more than 500 killed in Lebanon, Iran has said that more than 1,300 people have been killed there and Israel has reported 12 people dead.

The U.S. has lost seven soldiers while another eight have suffered severe injuries.

Many foreign nationals have been getting out of the Persian Gulf region since the war began, including over 45,000 U.K. citizens, the British Foreign Office said. Some 40,000 people returned to the United States, according to the State Department.

Trump has one prescription for midterms. House Republicans have another

By STEVEN SLOAN Associated Press

DORAL, Fla. (AP) — President Donald Trump insisted he had the answer for Republicans anxious about losing their congressional majority this year: build on an already strict national voter identification law to ban mail ballots and restrict transgender rights.

"It'll guarantee the midterms," he told Republicans gathered in the ballroom of his golf course just outside Miami on Monday. "If you don't get it, big trouble."

Less than 24 hours later, House Republican leaders highlighted their priorities. And the voting bill, which Trump has rebranded from the SAVE Act to the SAVE America Act, wasn't high on the list.

Rep. Lisa McClain of Michigan, the House GOP conference chair, spoke of tax cuts for families, energy independence and the so-called Trump accounts for newborns as she described "real results for real people." House Majority Leader Steve Scalise of Louisiana said his colleagues were working with Trump to "make life more affordable for working families." Rep. Tom Emmer of Minnesota, the House majority whip, recounted "win after win" as he proclaimed "working families are keeping more of their hard-earned money in their pockets."

As House Republicans close out their annual ideas conference on Wednesday, an election year disconnect is emerging.

Just a few seats shy of losing their majority, senior Republicans are eager to emphasize the party's work to lower costs, none of which is easy to accomplish with only a few votes to spare. Trump, meanwhile, is often focused elsewhere.

The war he initiated in Iran has disrupted the party's message on affordability, with GOP leaders here facing frequent questions about the rising cost of gas, which House Speaker Mike Johnson described as a "temporary blip." The voting bill Trump is pushing is rooted in his insistence that he won the 2020 presidential election, claims rejected by dozens of courts and his own attorney general at the time.

At times, the president was even dismissive of the traditional pocketbook issues other Republicans preferred to highlight.

"Every time I go out, save America, sir. Save America Act," Trump said at the GOP event. "That's all they talk about. They don't talk about housing. They don't talk about anything. That's what they want to talk about."

Johnson, who is close to Trump and appeared onstage with him this week, is hardly distancing from Trump's push for the voting bill. On Tuesday, he denied there was any daylight between his colleagues and the White House.

"We're all on the same page," Johnson said. "The president and I are exactly in lockstep."

A challenging path ahead for Republicans

But the path ahead is rocky.

In an effort to gain leverage over lawmakers, including some Republicans, Trump said he won't sign other legislation into law until the voting bill is passed. That raises the prospect of Congress grinding to a halt just as lawmakers are asking voters to send them back to Washington.

Passing legislation that comports with Trump's demands will also be challenging. The House has already passed a version of the bill so the changes Trump is seeking would require fresh action by the chamber.

The dynamic isn't any easier in the Senate, where Republicans are struggling to pass the measure without Democratic support. And that was before Trump asked for additions, saying Republicans should "go for the gold."

In the meantime, other high-profile work lies ahead for Congress, including reopening the Department of Homeland Security and confirming its new leader.

Johnson suggested on Tuesday that there were ways for lawmakers to continue their work amid Trump's threat to not sign legislation. The speaker noted that the Constitution allows legislation to become law if it's sent to the president but isn't signed within 10 days.

Johnson aims to shift focus to Democrats

Faced with a tough political calculus, Johnson is trying to shift focus to Democrats, in particular over the DHS shutdown, which has prompted security lines to swell at some airports over the past few days.

"If you missed a wedding or funeral or are worried about missing your flight for spring break this weekend, you have Democrats to blame," he said.

Republicans spent much of this week trying to remind voters of what they didn't like about life before Trump returned to office. There were frequent mentions of inflation and border crossings under former President Joe Biden.

The question that may animate this year's election, however, is whether voters are more interested in the shift from Biden to Trump or are more focused on what's ahead.

If voters are more future-oriented, that could represent an additional hurdle for the GOP.

About one-third of Americans mentioned inflation or personal finances as topics they wanted the government to address this year, according to an AP-NORC poll from December. Hardly any mentioned concerns about voting laws or election security.

Under a blazing Florida sun on Tuesday afternoon, a handful of House Republicans gathered to make the case that they were listening and deserve another term in power.

"We're not sitting back on our laurels," said Rep. Beth Van Duyne, R-Texas. "We recognize there is still plenty for us to do and we're working on that."

As another shutdown impacts travelers, some see eliminating TSA agents as a solution

By RIO YAMAT AP Airlines and Travel Writer

Long security lines snaked into baggage claim areas and parking garages at some U.S. airports this weekend, a possible indicator of more widespread travel problems as the latest government shutdown drags on.

That kind of disruption, while not yet widespread, is not a concern that typically surfaces at San Francisco International Airport, the largest of nearly two dozen U.S. airports where screening checkpoints are staffed by private contractors under a little-used federal program that allows airports to outsource security screenings while maintaining TSA oversight.

Because contractors' pay comes from a federal contract, it often continues even when the government shuts down.

"The money's already been allocated, the payments have already been made, and that continues without interruption," SFO spokesperson Doug Yakel told The Associated Press. "That is a very nice place to be."

The contrast draws attention to a long-running debate in the aviation industry: Can private contractors operating under TSA oversight provide a stopgap — and shield airport security operations from the politi-

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cal impasses that can disrupt U.S. air travel?

Some aviation experts see the TSA screening program as a potential model for keeping security lines moving with fewer disruptions during shutdowns. At SFO, that system helped maintain screening operations during last year's record 43-day shutdown, Yakel said.

But critics caution that privatization is not a silver bullet — and could introduce new risks. The union representing federal screeners argues that moving operations to private companies could erode job protections and reduce pay and benefits for workers already facing high turnover amid demanding conditions.

How the program works

TSA's screening partnership program allows airports to use private security companies chosen by the federal government to run checkpoints while TSA retains authority over procedures and oversight. The agency says private security screeners receive the same security background check and must meet the same medical requirements as prospective federal security screeners.

In addition to SFO, other participating airports include Kansas City International Airport, Atlantic City International Airport and Orlando Sanford International Airport.

The vast majority of the nation's roughly 400 commercial airports, meanwhile, rely on federal screening officers employed directly by TSA. During shutdowns, those workers must continue reporting for duty even though they stop getting paid — a dynamic that has historically led to higher absenteeism and slower-moving checkpoints the longer a shutdown lasts.

The current partial shutdown affects only the Department of Homeland Security, which includes TSA. Democrats in Congress refused to fund the department over objections to its immigration enforcement tactics. The lapse marks the third shutdown in less than a year to leave TSA workers temporarily without pay — and once the government reopens, to have to wait for backpay.

Those disruptions can ripple through the travel system, cascading problems across already crowded flight schedules. The strain is especially acute this time of year as airlines and airports brace for what they expect will be one of the busiest spring break travel seasons on record.

San Francisco's airport is a 'litmus test'

Aviation security expert Sheldon Jacobson, whose research contributed to the design of TSA PreCheck, said the program's success at SFO, a large international airport, shows that privatization "is something that needs to be explored."

SFO is among the top 15 busiest airports in the U.S. when measured by passenger traffic. A major hub for international travel, it is the second-busiest airport in California behind Los Angeles International Airport.

"It's operated just as well as any other airport," Jacobson said, adding that SFO's multiple concourses and status as a hub for United Airlines demonstrate that even large-scale operations can be managed effectively under this model. "If SFO is the litmus test for delivering this privatized product, then many other airports can do it, too."

Jacobson noted that most airports currently using the program are smaller, but "the scale issue should not be a limiting factor," and he called for a broader conversation on how such options could deliver government services efficiently and benefit travelers.

"Of course TSA would have oversight. It's not like they're freewheeling on their own," he said of privately contracted screeners. "We might as well use a government shutdown that affects air travel as an opportunity to begin that discussion."

Why TSA's union opposes the private model

The American Federation of Government Employees, which represents TSA officers, has long opposed privatization.

"We will never advocate for any privatization of any federal employees. We don't believe that'll work," Johnny Jones, secretary-treasurer of the TSA union's bargaining unit, said in a brief phone call this week.

In a blog post on its website, the union argues it could weaken accountability for aviation security — one of the reasons Congress chose to federalize airport screening after the Sept. 11 attacks.

The union also warned that private companies could face pressure to cut costs in ways that affect training, staffing levels and employee benefits. Relying on contractors, the union says, could create inconsistencies

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between airports if different companies operate checkpoints across the country, potentially complicating oversight of a system designed to maintain uniform national security standards.

"We have to remember the TSA was created in the wake of 9/11 when there were no security standards or very minimal security standards," said airline industry analyst Henry Harteveldt, president of Atmosphere Research Group. "The TSA came around, they established very stringent airport screening security requirements, which exist to this day."

Others say there are simpler ways to address the shutdown problem.

Industry groups — including the U.S. Travel Association, Airlines for America and the American Association of Airport Executives — are urging Congress to pass legislation that would ensure aviation workers are paid regardless of the government's funding status.

"Every time Washington fails to fund the government, these essential workers pay the price. So do travelers. So does the economy," Geoff Freeman, U.S. Travel Association's president, said in a statement. "That is why America's travel industry has come together, because this workforce is too important, and the stakes are too high, for this to keep happening."

An unintended benefit of outsourcing screeners

Republican lawmakers have pushed in recent years to dismantle the agency entirely and replace its screening functions with private contractors overseen by the federal government.

Last year, two GOP senators introduced the "Abolish TSA Act," which would phase out the agency and transfer oversight to a new office charged with aviation security. Supporters of the long-shot legislation say privatized screening could be more efficient and less vulnerable to shutdowns.

TSA leadership has signaled an openness to discussion. Speaking at a House Appropriations subcommittee hearing last year, Ha Nguyen McNeill, a senior official performing the duties of TSA administrator, said "nothing is off the table" regarding potential privatization.

"If a new privatization scheme makes sense, then we're happy to have that discussion to see what we can come up with," McNeill said. "It's not an all-or-nothing game."

At SFO, officials say its screening model was adopted more than 20 years ago for reasons unrelated to government shutdowns. But with shutdowns in recent years growing longer and more disruptive, the airport says its arrangement has revealed an unintended benefit: fewer staffing disruptions at checkpoints.

"The benefits, I think, are compelling," Harteveldt said. "The real issue is making sure that any vendor, any partner to the TSA, upholds the strict standards that TSA has established and works with TSA to ensure that screening remains efficient and finds ways to make it even better."

World shares are mixed as investors watch for release of oil reserves and crude again heads higher

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

BANGKOK (AP) — World shares were mixed on Wednesday as the rally of the past two days faded and oil prices resumed climbing with no end to the war with Iran in sight.

Oil prices have remained sharply below their peaks near \$120 a barrel hit on Monday. Such spikes have been rocking financial markets worldwide because of worries that the war could block the global flow of oil and natural gas for a long time.

Early Wednesday, the price for a barrel of Brent crude, the international standard, had jumped 4.7% to about \$92. U.S. benchmark crude oil was up 5.6% at about \$88 per barrel.

The future for the S&P 500 was 0.2% lower and that for the Dow Jones Industrial Average lost 0.3%.

In early European trading, Germany's DAX slipped 1.5% to 23,613.47, while the CAC 40 in Paris fell 0.9% to 7,986.41. Britain's FTSE 100 also shed 0.9%, to 10,285.50.

Markets were mixed in Asia, where Tokyo's Nikkei 225 gained 1.4% to 55,025.37.

South Korea's Kospi picked up 1.4% to 5,609.95 after gaining more than 3% earlier in the day.

In Hong Kong, the Hang Seng fell back, slipping 0.2% to 25,898.76, while the Shanghai Composite index climbed 0.3% to 4,133.43.

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Australia's S&P/ASX 200 rose 0.6% to \$8,743.50.

Taiwan's benchmark climbed 4.1% and the Sensex in India fell 1.8%. In Thailand, where worries over oil and gas supplies have prompted the government to order energy-saving measures, Bangkok's SET gained 0.1%.

Oil prices plunged Monday after hitting their most expensive level since 2022 as President Donald Trump raised hopes that the war may end soon when he told CBS News that he thought "the war is very complete, pretty much."

Both sides have since sharpened their rhetoric.

The U.S. said it took out more than a dozen minelaying Iranian vessels Tuesday, and the Islamic Republic vowed to block the region's oil exports, saying it would not allow "even a single liter" to be shipped to its enemies.

"With Iran continuing to threaten vessels passing through the Strait of Hormuz, the focus will be on how the U.S. and other major economies will ensure the flowing of crude oil via this narrow passage and alternative routes to help stabilize prices," Fawad Razaqzada of Forex.com wrote in a market report.

The International Energy Agency is considering a major release of emergency oil reserves but that will only buy time, he said. "The real issue is the disruption to supply flows, and the longer that continues unresolved, the higher oil prices are likely to go if the Iran war continues."

Trump has remained clear about his desire to keep the Strait of Hormuz open. The war has effectively blocked the waterway off Iran's coast, where a fifth of the world's oil sails on a typical day.

On Tuesday, the S&P 500 dipped 0.2%, a day after its latest wild swings caused by extreme moves in the oil market. The Dow fell 0.1% and the Nasdaq composite edged less than 0.1% higher.

Oracle's shares on the Nasdaq surged 11% in premarket trading early Wednesday after the company reported its earnings and revenue jumped 20% in the last quarter, much better than analysts had forecast.

Stock markets have a history of bouncing back relatively quickly from military conflicts, as long as oil prices don't stay too high for too long. Uncertainty about whether that may happen this time around has led to stunning swings up and down for markets worldwide, often hour-to-hour.

If oil prices do stay high for long, household budgets already stretched by high inflation could snap under the pressure. Companies would see their own bills jump for fuel and to stock items on their store shelves or in their data warehouses. It all raises the possibility of a worst-case scenario for the global economy, "stagflation," where growth stagnates and inflation remains high.

In other dealings early Wednesday, the dollar rose to 158.41 Japanese yen from 158.05 yen. The euro fell to \$1.1605 from \$1.1610.

Analysis: Iran war becomes a contest of who can take the most pain

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The war with Iran, for all its complexity and global effects, boils down to a single question: Who can take the pain the longest?

A surge in oil prices points to what may be Iran's most effective weapon and the United States' biggest vulnerability in continuing the campaign: Damaging the world economy. A sharp rise in gas prices has rattled consumers and financial markets, and international travel and shipping have been severely disrupted.

U.S. President Donald Trump appears aware of the danger. As oil jumped to nearly \$120 a barrel on Monday, the highest since 2022, he suggested the war would be "short-term." That helped reassure markets and the price eased to around \$90 — even as Trump, nearly in the same breath, vowed to keep up the war and the punishment on Iran.

On the other side, Iran has to endure a near-constant stream of American and Israeli airstrikes it can't defend against. So far, the Islamic Republic has been able to keep its leadership and military cohesive and in control. The Iranian public, which already rose up against its theocracy in nationwide protests in January, still boils in anger but have stayed home as they try to survive the heavy bombardment. Security

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forces have been on the street every day to ensure no anti-government demonstrations form.

The pressure is on U.S. allies as well. Gulf Arab states, while still not combatants in the war, face seemingly unending and occasionally fatal Iranian fire targeting oil fields, cities and critical water works. And Israel, while boasting of inflicting heavy damage on Iran's missile program and other military targets, continues to be targeted by increasingly sophisticated Iranian missiles that send a buckshot-like bouquet of high explosives raining down on its cities. Frequent air-raid sirens have disrupted daily life, closed schools and workplaces and created a tense atmosphere across the region.

No off-ramps seen in fighting

There's no immediate end to the war in sight — nor in the rhetoric coming from both America and Iran, whose bad blood extends back decades to the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the U.S. Embassy hostage crisis.

"We've already won in many ways, but we haven't won enough," Trump said in a speech Monday in Doral, Florida. "We go forward, more determined than ever to achieve ultimate victory that will end this long running danger once and for all."

Iranian Foreign Ministry official Kazem Gharibabadi offered a mirror image comment from Tehran, boasting that the Islamic Republic had rejected contacts about a ceasefire that he said had come from China, France, Russia and others.

"At the moment, we hold the upper hand," Gharibabadi told Iranian state television late Monday night. "Just look at the state of the global economy and energy markets — it has been very painful for them."

He asserted that it was Iran that "will determine the end of the war."

Iranian strategy remains havoc

For years before Israel and the U.S. launched the war on Feb. 28, Iran warned that, if attacked, it would retaliate on the entire Middle East, targeting the oil infrastructure that made its Gulf Arab neighbors fantastically wealthy. By contrast, Tehran's economy has been crippled by international sanctions.

Iran has now backed up its threat with barrages of missiles and drones. Qatar was forced to halt its production of natural gas, and Bahrain declared its oil operations couldn't meet their contractual obligations. Other producers like Saudi Aramco are affected, disrupting a key source of energy for Asia — particularly China, which has sent a top envoy to the region.

Shipping broadly has stopped in the strategic Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which 20% of all oil and natural gas traded passes, and up to 30% of world fertilizer exports. Iran didn't need to mine the waterway — its attacks on several ships prompted companies stop sending their vessels through the strait.

Trump has suggested U.S. warships providing escorts to tankers, but that has yet to materialize in a way to restart the traffic.

Early Tuesday morning, he threatened that if Iran stops the oil through the strait, "they will be hit by the United States of America TWENTY TIMES HARDER than they have been hit thus far."

"Additionally, we will take out easily destroyable targets that will make it virtually impossible for Iran to ever be built back, as a Nation, again — Death, Fire, and Fury will reign upon them — But I hope, and pray, that it does not happen!" he wrote on his Truth Social platform.

Iran, however, only doubled down. The Revolutionary Guard warned on Tuesday that it won't allow "a single liter of oil" to leave the Persian Gulf.

What is victory?

For Iran's theocratic rulers, victory means surviving the campaign still in power, no matter the costs to the country and the region.

Trump has been vague and contradictory about his aims in the war. At times, he seems to push for overthrowing Iran's theocracy; other times, he seems to be willing to stop short of that, saying broadly that he wants to ensure Iran is no longer a threat to Israel, the region and the U.S.

That could give him flexibility in declaring that victory has been achieved, especially if real damage starts to show to the U.S. economy.

But if the war stopped right now, both the U.S and Israel would be left with major challenges.

One is Iran's leadership. After an Israeli airstrike killed 86-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei at the start of the war, Iranian clerics named his 56-year-old son Mojtaba to the position, elevating him to the rank of an ayatollah.

Now Iran's ultimate ruler, the younger Khamenei has long been viewed by analysts as being even more hard-line than his father, with close ties to the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard. Israel already described him as a target in its campaign, while Trump has said he wanted someone else in the role.

Also, Iran still has its stockpile of highly enriched uranium – one reason for the war that Israel and the U.S. have both pointed to. Iran had been enriching up to 60% purity, a short, technical step away from weapons-grade levels of 90%.

The U.S. bombed three Iranian nuclear sites in June during the 12-day war between Israel and Iran, likely burying much of the stockpile in the debris. Those sites to this day remain out of the reach of international inspectors.

Mojtaba Khamenei could issue a religious ruling, or fatwa, reversing his father's earlier statements and ordering it to be used to make a weapon. That's something both America and Israel, long believed to be the Mideast's only nuclear-armed state, don't want to see.

Prosecutor says Rihanna, A\$AP Rocky, 3 kids were home when woman charged with attempted murder fired

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Rihanna, her partner A\$AP Rocky, their three children and her mother were all at home when a woman now charged with attempted murder and many other felony counts is alleged to have fired at the property, a prosecutor said Tuesday.

Ivanna Lisette Ortiz, 35, of Orlando, Florida, was charged with attempting to kill Rihanna, along with 10 counts of assault on a person with a semiautomatic firearm and three counts of shooting at an inhabited vehicle or dwelling, authorities said. No one was injured.

The singing superstar and her rap star partner were together in a trailer on the property at the time of the Sunday afternoon shooting, while other family members and staffers were in the Beverly Hills-area home, Los Angeles County District Attorney Nathan Hochman said outside a court hearing.

Inside court, Deputy Public Defender Jamarcus Bradford, Ortiz's attorney, at first entered a plea of not guilty on her behalf, but then withdrew it in favor of postponing arraignment until March 25. She was ordered held on \$1.8 million bail. Ortiz wore blue jail clothes with her blond hair in braids and spoke to the lawyer through a glass divider.

Bradford didn't talk to reporters outside court.

The LA County Public Defender's Office said in a statement that it could not comment on the pending case against Ortiz.

"As in every case, we will work to ensure that our client receives the full protections guaranteed under the Constitution," the statement said.

Ortiz could get life in prison if convicted on all charges. All 14 counts against her are felonies. The three counts of firing at a dwelling were for Rihanna's house, her trailer, and a neighbor's house, prosecutors said. The 10 assault counts were for Rihanna and family, two staffers and two people in the neighboring house.

"LA based celebrities should not be additionally worried because of this," Hochman said, "in large part because of the response of the police." He praised officers for arresting Ortiz soon after the shooting, several miles (kilometers) to the north in the suburb of Sherman Oaks.

Judge Theresa McGonigle issued a protective order for Ortiz to stay away from Robin Fenty and Rakim Mayers — the legal names of Rihanna and A\$AP Rocky — and their home. McGonigle also said Ortiz is not allowed to possess any firearms or ammunition along with several other conditions.

The hearing was held in a courtroom a few floors from where Rocky went through a trial where he was acquitted just over a year ago. Rihanna was often in attendance, sometimes with their sons.

And the lead prosecutor in the new case is Alexander Bott, the deputy district attorney who successfully

prosecuted rapper Tory Lanez in a trial where he was convicted of shooting hip-hop star Megan Thee Stallion in the feet.

Hochman would not say where any of the bullets landed, would not say how long Ortiz had been in California, or discuss her motivation or any connection to Rihanna, saying all were under investigation.

Public records show her most recent address was in Orlando and that she has been a licensed speech pathologist for more than a decade.

The Associated Press also sent emails seeking comment from Rihanna's publicist and manager.

In 2018, a man was accused of breaking into another home belonging to Rihanna in the Hollywood Hills and spending 12 hours there. The man pleaded no contest to felony counts of stalking and vandalism and a misdemeanor count of resisting arrest in 2019. He was sentenced to probation.

A nine-time Grammy Award winner, Rihanna has 14 No. 1 hits on the Billboard Hot 100, including "We Found Love," "Work," "Umbrella" and "Disturbia." She founded the makeup brand Fenty Beauty in 2017.

She and A\$AP Rocky announced the birth of their third child, a girl named Rocki Irish Mayers, in September.

UK will publish files about the appointment of Epstein friend Mandelson to ambassador post

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The British government said it would publish files related to the appointment of Peter Mandelson as ambassador to the U.S. on Wednesday, as police investigate potential misconduct stemming from the ex-diplomat's ties to the late Jeffrey Epstein.

Lawmakers have forced Prime Minister Keir Starmer's government to disclose thousands of files about the decision to name Mandelson to the key diplomatic post at the start of U.S. President Donald Trump's second term, despite a past friendship with the convicted sex offender.

The government has said the files will show that Mandelson misled officials about the extent of the relationship.

Mandelson, 72, a former Cabinet minister, ambassador and elder statesman of the governing Labour Party, was arrested Feb. 23 at his London home on suspicion of misconduct in public office. He has been released without bail conditions as the police investigation continues.

He has previously denied wrongdoing and hasn't been charged. He does not face allegations of sexual misconduct.

Cabinet minister Darren Jones said the "first tranche of documents" will be published Wednesday afternoon.

The documents are being published in batches after review by Parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee. Police have asked the government not to release files that could compromise their criminal investigation into Mandelson.

"The documents that will be published today later to Parliament will provide full transparency about the appointments process, bar one document that has been held back by the Metropolitan Police because of an ongoing criminal investigation," Jones told broadcaster ITV.

Starmer fired Mandelson in September after earlier revelations about his Epstein ties, but is facing a political storm over his decision to give him the Washington job in the first place.

Documents in a huge trove of Epstein files published by the U.S. Department of Justice in late January suggested that Mandelson sent market-sensitive information to the convicted sex offender when he was the U.K. government's business secretary after the 2008 financial crisis.

That includes an internal government report discussing ways the U.K. could raise money, including by selling off government assets. Mandelson also appears to have told Epstein he would lobby other members of the government to reduce a tax on bankers' bonuses.

Mandelson is also facing a separate probe by the European Union's anti-fraud office for the time he spent as the bloc's trade representative.

A bus fire that killed 6 people could have been set deliberately, Swiss police say

GENEVA (AP) — Police are investigating whether a bus fire in a town west of the Swiss capital that killed at least six people was started deliberately.

Police spokesperson Frédéric Papaux of Fribourg canton, or region, said an unspecified “voluntary act” could have caused the fire Tuesday evening in the town of Kerzers, about 25 kilometers (15 miles) west of Bern.

Five people were also injured in the fire, which for locals echoed a New Year’s Eve fire in the Swiss ski resort of Crans-Montana that killed 41 young people.

Christa Biemann, representing the Fribourg police, told Swiss broadcaster SRF: “There is information circulating that a person poured flammable liquid over themselves on the bus and that this caused the fire. But this is part of the ongoing investigation and is being clarified.”

“It shocks and saddens me that once again people have lost their lives in a serious fire in Switzerland,” Swiss President Guy Parmelin wrote on X on Tuesday night. “The circumstances are being investigated. I offer my condolences to the families of those who died in Kerzers. And my thoughts are with the injured and the rescue workers.”

There were no indications that this was a terror attack, Martial Pugin, head of communications for the Fribourg cantonal police, told broadcaster RTS on Wednesday morning.

The regional transport bus is operated by PostBus, which is affiliated with the national postal service. Images from the scene on Swiss media showed flames tearing through the bus.

“We are deeply moved by this tragic news. Our thoughts are with the victims, the injured, and all their families,” PostBus said in a statement on its website.

“After rushing to the scene, rescue teams noted that the vehicle was totally engulfed in flames,” the regional government said in a statement.

Ambulance and helicopter teams ferried three people with severe injuries to hospitals, while two others were treated on site, police said.

Papaux said at least six people were killed. Police said the identification of the victims could take several days.

The burned-out vehicle was removed during the night and traffic returned to normal as of Wednesday morning.

North Korean leader Kim watches cruise missile tests with his daughter

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and his teenage daughter observed tests of strategic cruise missiles fired from a warship, state media reported Wednesday, as North Korea threatened responses to U.S.-South Korean military drills.

Images sent by the Korean Central News Agency showed the two in a conference room looking at a screen showing weapons being fired from the Choe Hyon, a year-old naval destroyer.

Kim Jong Un watched the missiles launches via video on Tuesday and underscored the need to maintain “a powerful and reliable nuclear war deterrent,” KCNA reported in a dispatch that did not mention his daughter.

The girl, reportedly named Kim Ju Ae and about 13, has accompanied her father at numerous prominent events including military parades and weapons launches since late 2022. South Korea’s spy agency assessed last month Kim Jong Un was close to designating her as his heir.

KCNA said the missiles hit target islands off North Korea’s west coast. It quoted Kim Jong Un as saying the launches were meant to demonstrate the navy’s strategic offensive posture and get troops familiar-

ized with weapons firings.

Kim Jong Un observed similar cruise missile launches from the Choe Hyon in person last week, but his daughter was not seen at that appearance.

Tuesday's missile firings came after the start of the springtime U.S.-South Korean military drills that North Korea views as an invasion rehearsal.

On Tuesday, Kim Jong Un's sister and senior official, Kim Yo Jong, warned the drills reveal again the U.S. and South Korea's "inveterate repugnancy toward" North Korea. She said North Korea will "convince the enemies of our war deterrence."

The 11-day Freedom Shield drill that began Monday is largely a computer-simulated command post exercise and will be accompanied by a field training program. North Korea often reacts to the two sets of training with its own weapons tests.

Severe storms whip up tornadoes in Illinois and Indiana, leveling homes

By HALLIE GOLDEN Associated Press

Major storms that whipped up tornadoes in parts of Illinois and Indiana on Tuesday leveled homes, downed trees and power lines, and overwhelmed a 911 center south of Chicago with emergency calls, according to officials.

"Please do not come here. Do not try to help right now," Newton County Sheriff Shannon Cothran said in a video update in front of what looked to be a destroyed home in the small northwestern Indiana community of Lake Village.

Multiple homes in the community were destroyed in an apparent tornado, and Indiana State Police Cpl. Eric Rot said people had been injured. He wasn't able to provide an exact number or their conditions.

Severe storms dumping rain and hail in parts of the Midwest were threatening to bring intense tornadoes, damaging winds and very large hail from the southern Plains to the southern Great Lakes, according to the National Weather Service. States from Oklahoma to Michigan were under tornado watches.

Several tornadoes formed across northeastern Illinois and northwestern Indiana, but the exact number won't be available until officials conduct damage surveys, said Andrew Lyons, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service Storm Prediction Center.

He described this as a fairly typical early Spring strong storm system. It is expected to continue to move east across parts of the mid-Atlantic and East Coast Wednesday, likely bringing more severe weather, he said.

Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker said in a post on the social platform X that he'd been briefed on the storm and tornado damage.

"Keeping in our thoughts all Illinoisans impacted by the severe weather — we'll be here to help them recover," he said.

A tornado struck down near the Kankakee fairgrounds, about 57 miles (91.7 kilometers) south of Chicago, before traveling northeast into Aroma Park, where it caused extensive damage, according to the Kankakee County Sheriff's Office. No injuries have been reported.

"I want to remind area residents to check on their neighbors and loved ones but to avoid unnecessary travel, if at all possible," Kankakee County Sheriff Mike Downey said in a statement.

In video shared on social media, the twister is seen ripping across a field of farmland near an airport while vehicles lined the road.

More than 2 million Americans were at a moderate risk of severe weather in Illinois and Indiana. Nearly 22 million were at a slightly lesser risk in a zone that includes Chicago, Fort Worth, Texas, and Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Lebanon's latest conflict brings rare public backlash against Hezbollah as war flares again

By BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — The Lebanese mother of two had just awakened to prepare the pre-dawn meal before another day of fasting during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan when Israeli warplanes began attacking southern Lebanon in retaliation for rockets and drones launched by Hezbollah.

The family quickly packed up and headed toward Beirut, seeking safety from another deadly war between Israel and Hezbollah. With tens of thousands of others fleeing on that March 2 day, the usually one-hour trip from the southern city of Nabatiyeh took 15 hours.

"I am against giving pretexts to Israel," said the 45-year-old woman, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals from the Hezbollah supporters she lives among.

"I am totally against Hezbollah's decision to start with the first strike," said the woman, who is now living with her husband, their 17- and 12-year-old children, and her mother-in-law inside a school turned into a shelter in the Lebanese capital.

As Hezbollah enters a new round of fighting with Israel just 15 months after the last Israel-Hezbollah war ended with a November 2024 U.S.-brokered ceasefire, the Iran-backed militant group and political party is facing increasing grassroots discontent within its base and problems with the Lebanese authorities.

Population still reeling from the previous war

On March 2, two days after Israel and the U.S. launched attacks on Iran, igniting a war in the Middle East, Hezbollah fired missiles and drones into Israel for the first time in more than a year.

Hundreds of thousands of residents of southern Lebanon, the eastern Bekaa valley and Beirut's southern suburbs have fled their homes after Israeli warnings that their neighborhoods, towns and villages would be targeted.

The new round of fighting comes as Shiite communities that suffered the brunt of the last conflict are still reeling from it. The last Israel-Hezbollah war killed more than 4,000 people in Lebanon and caused \$11 billion in damage, according to the World Bank.

Unlike in the past, when many people were afraid to publicly criticize Hezbollah, some Lebanese Shiites are openly blaming the militant group for their current misery as they find themselves living in the street, on public squares, or with relatives or friends amid cold weather and fasting during Ramadan.

For Hussein Ali, it was the second time in less than two years that he was forced to leave his house in Beirut's southern suburb of Haret Hreik. During the last Israel-Hezbollah war, the apartment where he lived was destroyed and now the vegetable vendor is worried the same thing will happen again.

"No one wanted this war," said the man, who is also staying in the school and relying on aid to survive. "People haven't recovered from the previous war."

Government takes a harsher stance

After the end of Lebanon's civil war in 1990, militias were required to disarm, but Hezbollah was exempted because it was fighting Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon at the time.

Now the Lebanese government has sought to crack down on the group's armed wing and end its status as a parallel armed force outside of state control.

The shift was clear when, on March 2, the Lebanese government moved to declare Hezbollah's military activities illegal, with all but two of the 24 Cabinet ministers voting in favor; only the two Hezbollah ministers voted no. Even ministers from Hezbollah's strongest ally, the Amal group of Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, voted to approve the measure.

"The government confirms that the decision of war and peace is only in the hand of the state," Prime Minister Nawaf Salam said, adding that the government "orders the immediate ban on all of Hezbollah's military activities as they are illegal and it should be forced to hand over its weapons to the Lebanese state."

The Lebanese army has since begun to crack down and last week arrested three Hezbollah members who were found transporting weapons at a checkpoint. But the men were released on bail Monday.

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Government officials have accused Hezbollah of repeatedly taking unilateral military actions that should be under state authority. On Oct. 8, 2023, the group began attacking Israel a day after the assault led by the Iranian-backed Hamas on southern Israel triggered the war in Gaza.

Now, the group has entered the fray on behalf of Iran to avenge the killing of its supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, as well as in retaliation, it says, for Israeli violations of the November 2024 ceasefire. Some Hezbollah supporters see the war as justified.

Ali al-Amin, a Lebanese journalist who is a harsh critic of Hezbollah, said that while some people are now criticizing the militant group more than in the past, many still remain quiet out of fear for their safety.

"Criticism could have a high cost and not all people express their opinions," said al-Amin, a Shiite Muslim from south Lebanon, who added that many poor Shiites rely on assistance that could be cut off anytime by Hezbollah or the allied Amal group.

In the past, people who criticized Hezbollah on social media were sometimes roughed up by its supporters and forced to make new videos saying they were wrong.

But the group still has many supporters. They say that Hezbollah's decision to strike was justified because Israel had not abided by the November 2024 ceasefire.

Since the ceasefire, Israel has continued to carry out almost daily airstrikes against Hezbollah, which have killed about 400 people, including dozens of civilians, and that have also prevented the reconstruction of destroyed areas.

"We cannot tolerate that anymore," said Ali Saleh who was displaced from a southern village near Nabatiyeh. "I pray for God to protect our young men and make them victorious against Israel."

Even the Shiite woman who criticized Hezbollah's move to strike first said that if the militants hadn't, the result might have been the same.

"If we attack they will attack us and if we don't attack they would have attacked us," she said.

Sadek Nabulsi, a political science professor at the Lebanese University whose thinking aligns with Hezbollah, said the latest complaints are nothing new and don't represent a fissure in grassroots support for the Iranian-allied militants. There was a similar outcry during the 14-month Israel-Hezbollah war that ended in 2024 and the monthlong war in 2006, he said.

"Hezbollah's base of support is known for ... tolerating pain," Nabulsi said. "If you look at this base of support, despite all the harsh conditions, it is still coherent, patient and waiting for salvation."

Trump-backed Fuller and Democrat Harris move to Georgia runoff to succeed Marjorie Taylor Greene

By JEFF AMY Associated Press

ROME, Ga. (AP) — Democrat Shawn Harris and Republican Clay Fuller advanced to a runoff for Marjorie Taylor Greene's former U.S. House seat in Georgia after no candidate won a majority in Tuesday's special election.

President Donald Trump in February endorsed Fuller, a district attorney who prosecutes crimes in four counties, to succeed Greene in Georgia's 14th Congressional District. Greene, once among Trump's most ardent supporters, resigned in January after a falling out with the president.

Trump's endorsement didn't boost Fuller to a majority of the vote in a 14-candidate field that included nine Republicans, three Democrats, a Libertarian and an independent. But Fuller said he was confident he could bring Republicans together to beat Harris on April 7.

"I think the Republican Party is going to unite around us because they know that the Democrat is too dangerous," he said Tuesday night. "We can't have a Democrat representing Georgia 14. That would be a tragedy for our community, a tragedy for Georgia 14 and a tragedy for the MAGA movement."

Trump congratulated Fuller for "getting such a high percentage of the vote" with so many other Republicans in the race.

"Clay will be a GREAT Congressman — HE WILL NEVER LET YOU DOWN!" the president wrote on social media.

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Harris, a cattle farmer and retired brigadier general, will face an uphill battle to win a majority in the heavily Republican district. Nevertheless, he was leading in the hours after the polls closed and Democrats are likely to boast of his success as they have focused on strong performances in special elections.

Harris has contrasted himself with Greene's bomb-throwing style, saying practical-minded Republicans should vote for him because he will work for constituents "not for somebody else who's already in D.C."

"The way I'm going to go to Congress is that it's going to be a coalition of Democrats, independents and Republicans," Harris said Tuesday night.

The winner will serve out the remaining months of Greene's term. A Republican win in the northwest Georgia district would bolster the party's slim majority in the House, where Republicans currently control 218 seats to Democrats' 214.

Fuller was a White House fellow in the first Trump administration and is a lieutenant colonel in the Georgia Air National Guard. He finished fourth in the 2020 Republican primary that Greene won. He credited Trump's nod for propelling him to the runoff.

"They want to know who President Trump was endorsing in this race," Fuller said. "And that's why they came out in droves to support him, because they want an America First fighter on Capitol Hill fighting for his policies that are going to make a difference for our community."

Harris said he's not worried about further Trump intervention.

"If Donald Trump wants to come and do what he wants to do, that's his business," he said.

This round of voting is only the first step in an elections marathon in the Georgia district. Republicans and Democrats seeking a full two-year term are set for a May 19 party primary, and possibly a June 16 party runoff, before advancing to the general election in November.

Last week, 10 Republicans and Harris qualified to run in November for a full two-year term. That includes Fuller, as well as Colton Moore, a former state senator and favorite of far-right activists who was poised to finish third on Tuesday, short of the runoff.

Those who backed Democrats said they were repelled by Trump and eager to reduce his power.

"There just needs to be checks and balances and I don't think we have many of those right now," said Matthew Wisniewski, a Dallas resident who voted for Harris.

Greene was one of the most well-known members of Congress until she left in January. She remained loyal to Trump after he lost to Democrat Joe Biden, promoting Trump's falsehoods about a stolen election. When Trump ran again in 2024, she toured the country with him and spoke at his rallies while wearing a red "Make America Great Again" hat.

But Greene began clashing with Trump last year after he and other Republicans pushed back against her running for U.S. Senate or governor. Greene criticized Trump's foreign policy and his reluctance to release documents involving the Jeffrey Epstein case. The president eventually had enough, saying he would support a primary challenge against her. Greene announced a week later that she would resign.

Fire engulfs a bus in Switzerland, killing 6 people and severely injuring 3 others

GENEVA (AP) — A bus caught fire in a town west of the Swiss capital killing at least six people and severely injuring three others, police said Tuesday.

Police spokesperson Frederic Papaux of Fribourg canton, or region, said an unspecified "voluntary act" could have caused the fire Tuesday evening in the town of Kerzers, about 25 kilometers (15 miles) west of Bern, the capital.

The regional transport bus is operated by PostBus, which is affiliated with the national postal service. Images from the scene on Swiss media showed flames tearing through the bus.

"After rushing to the scene, rescue teams noted that the vehicle was totally engulfed in flames," the regional government said in a statement.

Ambulance and helicopter teams ferried three injured people with severe injuries to hospitals, while two others were treated on site, police said.

Papaux said at least six people were killed. An investigation was underway.

Cher's son heads to court over allegations he broke into a New Hampshire home

By MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

The son of Cher is scheduled to be in court Wednesday for a hearing over allegations he broke into a New Hampshire home earlier this month.

It was the second arrest in a matter of days for Elijah Allman, 49, of Malibu, California, who was detained Feb. 27 after allegedly acting belligerently at a prestigious prep school in New Hampshire. It was unclear if Allman had any connection to either St. Paul's School or the home in Windham, New Hampshire.

Allman remains in the Rockingham County Department of Corrections in what is called preventive detention, Superintendent Jonathan Banville said.

Allman, whose father was the late singer Gregg Allman, faces two counts of criminal mischief, one count of burglary and a count of breach of bail for breaking into the home on March 1. Police said in a report that Allman did not have permission to be at the home and forcibly entered it.

In the incident at the prep school, Allman was charged with four misdemeanors: two counts of simple assault, criminal trespass and criminal threatening. Allman was also charged with a violation of disorderly conduct, which is illegal in the state but not considered a crime.

At about 7 p.m. that day, Concord police responded to reports that Allman was disturbing people in the dining hall of St. Paul's School. After charging Allman, police said he was released on bail as his case works through the court system.

Allman did not respond to an email requesting comment, and a phone number for him was not working. It was unclear from the court records if Allman has an attorney.

In December 2023, Cher filed a petition to become a temporary conservator overseeing her son's money, saying Allman struggles with mental health issues and addiction have left him unable to manage his assets and potentially put his life in danger.

The petition from the singer and actress said Elijah Allman is entitled to regular payments from a trust fund. But "given his ongoing mental health and substance abuse issues," she is "concerned that any funds distributed to Elijah will be immediately spent on drugs, leaving Elijah with no assets to provide for himself and putting Elijah's life at risk," the petition says.

A few weeks later, Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Jessica Uzcategui denied the request, saying she was not convinced that a conservatorship was urgently needed. Allman was in the courtroom with his attorneys, who acknowledged his previous struggles but argued that he is in a good place now, attending meetings, getting treatment and reconciling with his previously estranged wife.

Inflation likely to spike in coming months after tame February reading

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Inflation likely was elevated last month even before the spike in oil and gas prices of the past two weeks that is expected to send consumer costs soaring in the months ahead.

Consumer prices are forecast to have risen 2.5% in February from a year earlier when the Labor Department reports last month's figures Wednesday, according to a survey of economists by data provider FactSet. That would be up slightly from 2.4% in the previous month. Core prices, which exclude the volatile food and energy categories, are expected to have also risen 2.5% in February, matching January's figure for the lowest in five years.

But the data will represent an already-faded snapshot of inflation before the Iran war was launched Feb. 28, which has caused violent gyrations in oil prices as shipping lanes through the Persian Gulf have suffered a rare shutdown. Gas prices have already jumped and are expected to push inflation much higher

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when March figures are released next month.

The price spike will unnerve the inflation fighters at the Federal Reserve and could slow consumer spending and weigh on the broader economy. The increase could be a one-time event and potentially reverse if the war ends soon, as President Donald Trump has hinted. But the spike in gas prices threatens to worsen inflation for at least a few months even as Americans are already weary from nearly five years of stubbornly high prices that have made "affordability" a thorny political issue for congressional Republicans who will soon face voters in midterm elections later this year.

Oil prices soared as high as nearly \$120 a barrel late Sunday before rapidly falling back Monday after Trump suggested that the conflict would be a "short-term excursion." Still, he has also threatened ongoing attacks and it isn't clear when the conflict might end.

Some analysts warn prices will move much higher if the Strait of Hormuz remains closed, which has removed roughly three-quarters of the Persian Gulf region's oil production from world markets, according to Wood Mackenzie, an energy analytics firm. Oil prices could soar to \$150 a barrel in the coming weeks, the firm forecasts, if shipments don't resume.

That would push gas prices still higher in the United States, where they jumped to \$3.54 a gallon on average nationwide Tuesday, according to AAA, an increase of about 20% just in one month.

Over time, higher gas prices will lift some other costs as well, including air fares and shipping costs, which could make groceries and restaurant meals more expensive.

At the same time, given the ups-and-downs of oil prices — U.S. crude prices fell nearly 9% to \$86.55 Tuesday afternoon — it is difficult to forecast how big the impact will be over time. If shipments resume in a week or so, gas prices will likely decline fairly soon, though they typically fall much more slowly than they rise.

Laura Rosner-Warburton, senior economist at MacroPolicy Perspectives, a consulting firm, expects inflation could jump by as much 0.8% or 0.9% just in March from the previous month, when that data is reported next month. It would be the largest monthly gain in nearly four years. Yearly inflation could easily surpass 3% in that case and potentially near 4% in the following months.

By comparison, overall prices are projected to climb just 0.3% in February from the previous month.

The jump in gas prices so far this month has been the largest since March 2022, and before that since June 2009, Rosner-Warburton said.

"That is enormous," she said. "Increases of that magnitude are highly unusual."

Core prices will be much less affected this month, but could tick higher over time as more expensive gas pushes up airline fares and other transportation costs. Core inflation is expected to have increased 0.3% in February from the previous month.

Even if the sharp rise is short-lived, it will almost certainly delay any interest-rate cut by the Federal Reserve, which meets next week. It cut its key rate three times last year before leaving it unchanged at its last meeting in January.

The Fed is already deeply divided over whether it needs to keep its rate at its current level of about 3.6% to push inflation down closer to its 2% goal, or whether it should reduce the rate to support borrowing, spending, and hiring.

Last Friday, the government reported an unexpectedly sharp job loss in February, as employers slashed 92,000 jobs and the unemployment rate ticked up to a still-low 4.4% from 4.3%.

The weak jobs report puts the Fed in an especially difficult position: It would normally reduce rates to boost growth and hiring, but it typically raises rates — or at least keeps them where they are — if they are worried about inflation.

"That's always the worst-case scenario for the central bank," said Austan Goolsbee, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, on Bloomberg Friday. "As we get more uncertainties, I kind of think that the time at which it makes sense to act keeps getting pushed back."

Gregory Daco, chief economist at EY-Parthenon, a consulting firm, said that normally the Fed would expect an oil price shock to have at most a temporary impact on inflation and might still cut rates if the economy needed lower borrowing costs.

But Fed policymakers were burnt just a few years ago when they initially said the post-COVID inflation spike in 2022-23 — the worst in four decades — would be temporary, Daco said. As a result, they will be reluctant to take the risk of prematurely lowering rates. A few officials even mentioned during the January meeting that they might have to hike rates soon, rather than cut them, according to the meeting's minutes — and that was before the Iran war.

"They do not want to be burned again," Daco said.

What to know about the Strait of Hormuz, a key passageway essential for global energy supply

By JON GAMBRELL and MAE ANDERSON Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The United States says it has destroyed more than a dozen mine-laying Iranian vessels to prevent any attempt to close the Strait of Hormuz, highlighting the important role the narrow passageway plays in global energy supply.

The war in Iran has ground tanker traffic through the Strait of Hormuz to a halt and oil prices have been swinging sharply, highlighting the important role the narrow passageway plays in global energy supply as the Islamic Republic vowed to block the region's oil exports, saying it would not allow "even a single liter" to be shipped to its enemies.

President Donald Trump also said in social media posts that there were no reports of Iran planting mines in the Strait of Hormuz, the mouth of the Persian Gulf through which 20% of the world's oil and natural gas is shipped.

Any disruption to traffic through the Strait of Hormuz affects the oil trade — and several ships in and around it have come under attack from Iran during the war. Fears about the strait caused oil to spike Monday, only for it to swiftly fall back after Trump suggested the war could be near an end.

"The scale of what is at stake cannot be overstated," said Hakan Kaya, senior portfolio manager at investment management firm Neuberger Berman. He said a partial slowdown lasting a week or two could be absorbed by oil companies. But a full or near full closure lasting a month or more would push crude oil prices "well into triple digits" and European natural gas prices "toward or above the crisis levels seen in 2022."

Here's what to know about the strait and the widening Iran war.

A key waterway for global shipping

The Strait of Hormuz is a bending waterway, about 33 kilometers (21 miles) wide at its narrowest point. It connects the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman. From there, ships can then travel to the rest of the world. While Iran and Oman have their territorial waters in the strait, it's viewed as an international waterway all ships can ply. The UAE, home to the skyscraper-studded city of Dubai, also sits near the waterway.

The strait long has been important for trade

The Strait of Hormuz through history has been important for trade, with ceramics, ivory, silk and textiles moving from China through the region. In the modern era, it is the route for supertankers carrying oil and gas from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, Qatar, Bahrain, the UAE and Iran. The vast majority of it goes to markets in Asia, including Iran's only remaining oil customer, China.

While there are pipelines in Saudi Arabia and the UAE that can avoid the passage, the U.S. Energy Information Administration says "most volumes that transit the strait have no alternative means of exiting the region."

Threats to the route have spiked global energy prices in the past, including during the Israel-Iran war in June.

Is the strait closed?

Iran has attacked several ships in the Strait of Hormuz and threatened any ships that try to pass through, effectively but not officially closing it.

Trump said on social media that the U.S. would dramatically increase attacks if Iran tried to close the Strait of Hormuz. Iran has been targeting energy infrastructure and traffic through the strait.

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Previously, Iran temporarily shut down parts of the strait in mid-February for what it said was a military drill. In past times of tension and conflict, Iran has at times harassed shipping through the narrows, and during the 1980s Iran-Iraq war, both sides attacked tankers and other vessels, using naval mines to completely shut down traffic at points. But Iran up until now not carried out repeated threats to close the waterway altogether since then, even during last year's 12-day war when Israel and the U.S. bombarded Iran's key nuclear and military sites.

The U.S. is rolling out ship reinsurance in the region through the U.S. International Development Finance Corp., a government agency that partners with the private sector to back global investment projects, in an effort to get ships moving through the strait again.

Political risk insurance is a type of coverage intended to protect firms against financial losses caused by unstable political conditions, government actions, or violence. Marine insurers had been canceling or raising rates for insurance in the region.

The U.S. reinsurance facility will insure losses up to approximately \$20 billion on a rolling basis, according to the International Development Finance Corp., focusing on insuring cargo and physical damage to a ship's structure and operating machinery to start.

Trump said that, if necessary, the U.S. Navy would escort oil tankers through the strait, though that has yet to happen.

There is a French-led initiative in the works that could involve European and non-European nations helping to escort tankers with the aim of gradually reopening the strait "as soon as possible after the most intense phase of the conflict is over."

Mine fears

On Tuesday, Trump said the U.S. military "completely destroyed" 16 inactive Iranian mine-laying ships.

Trump in his social media post added that there would be "more to follow," suggesting the U.S. would target additional mine-laying vessels.

The announcement of the targeting of the ships came soon after two other social media posts by the U.S. president in which he said he has no reports of Iran putting explosive mines in the strategic waterway, but also warned Tehran if mines were laid he wanted them immediately removed.

Global shippers suspend operations

Global shippers have issued service alerts saying they have suspended operations in the area. Danish shipping company Maersk, the world's biggest shipping company, said Sunday it is suspending all vessel crossings in the Strait of Hormuz until further notice. Other ocean carriers including Hapag-Lloyd, CMA-CGM and MSC made similar announcements.

"Those ships that got stuck in the Gulf are not going anywhere," said Tom Goldsby, logistics chairman in the Supply Chain Management Department at the University of Tennessee. "There's also a whole host of ships that were heading into the Gulf to replace them, and of course they're anchored or going elsewhere now."

There are currently about 400 oil and product tankers idle in the Gulf, and one oil tanker passed through the Strait of Hormuz without incident on Monday, according to data from the website MarineTraffic.

US says it destroyed 16 mine-laying vessels as Iran threatens to block Gulf oil exports

By JON GAMBRELL, JULIE WATSON and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The U.S. said it took out more than a dozen mine-laying Iranian vessels Tuesday, and the Islamic Republic vowed to block the region's oil exports, saying it would not allow "even a single liter" to be shipped to its enemies.

As concerns grew about the war's effect on a strategic waterway, the American military said it destroyed 16 minelayers, though President Donald Trump said in social media posts that there were no reports of Iran planting explosives in the Strait of Hormuz, through which 20% of the world's oil is shipped.

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The American military released the figure, along with unclassified footage of some of the vessels, after Trump threatened to hit Iran at "a level never seen before" if the country failed to immediately remove any mines it might have deployed in the channel.

Both sides sharpened their rhetoric as the war entered its 11th day. U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth promised the most intense strikes yet while the Pentagon detailed the broader toll of injuries sustained by U.S. troops.

The conflict's effects rippled across the Middle East and beyond. Iranian leaders ruled out talks, threatened Trump and launched new attacks against Israel and Gulf Arab countries.

In Iran, residents of Tehran said they experienced some of the war's heaviest strikes. A woman said she saw a residential building get hit. She and others reached by The Associated Press spoke on condition of anonymity to prevent reprisals. Tens of thousands of Iranians have sought shelter in the countryside.

Lebanon reports more deaths

Multiple Israeli strikes across southern Lebanon killed seven people, the Lebanese Health Ministry said early Wednesday.

Other deaths included a Red Cross member who died early Wednesday after an Israeli strike targeted his team Monday while they were rescuing people following an earlier attack, the health ministry said. On Tuesday, Israeli airstrikes killed four people, including a paramedic who worked for the Hezbollah-affiliated Islamic Health Authority who was treating the wounded.

Also Tuesday, an Israeli strike killed a Lebanese soldier, the Lebanese army said, bringing the number of troops killed there to five since the conflict began.

Israel said it was working to intercept missiles from Iran and Hezbollah, which began firing on Israel after the start of the war.

Saudi Arabia's Defense Ministry said early Wednesday that it intercepted multiple missiles launched toward several sites, including Prince Sultan Air Base, a major U.S.- and Saudi-operated air facility. The ministry said it also destroyed drones near two major cities and more headed toward the kingdom's vast Shaybah oil field in the Empty Quarter desert.

In Iraq, drones targeted military bases inside Baghdad International Airport late Tuesday, two security officials told AP on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the press. Some drones fell near Iraqi security positions, while others landed near logistical support sites used by U.S.-led coalition forces, one official said.

The United Arab Emirates said early Wednesday that its air defenses were firing at incoming Iranian fire. The wealthy Gulf nation — home to the business and travel hub of Dubai — said Iranian attacks have killed six people and wounded 122 others.

Bahrain sounded sirens early Wednesday, warning of an incoming Iranian attack. The warnings came a day after an Iranian attack hit a residential building in the capital, Manama, and killed a 29-year-old woman and wounding eight people.

Pentagon says 140 US troops wounded since war began

Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said U.S. forces hit more than 5,000 targets.

The Pentagon separately said Tuesday that about 140 U.S. service members have been wounded in the war, and the "vast majority" of the injuries were minor, with 108 service members already back on duty. Eight U.S. service members suffered severe injuries, and seven have been killed.

In Iran, at least 1,230 people have been killed, while the death toll is more than 480 in Lebanon and 12 in Israel, according to officials.

Iran's leaders have remained defiant after days of heavy strikes targeting the country's leadership, military, ballistic missiles and its disputed nuclear program. Iran's parliament speaker, Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, said on X that Iran was "definitely not looking for a ceasefire."

"We believe that the aggressor should be punched in the mouth so that he learns a lesson so that he will never think of attacking our beloved Iran again," he said.

A top Iranian security official, Ali Larijani, posted a warning to Trump, writing on X that "Even those big-

ger than you couldn't eliminate Iran. Be careful not to get eliminated yourself." Iran has been accused of plotting attempts to kill Trump in the past.

The Trump administration, meanwhile, faced growing scrutiny at home about the war.

"I'm not sure what the end game is, or what their plans are," Democratic Sen. Jacky Rosen of Nevada said after a classified briefing that the Trump administration held Tuesday for some lawmakers.

Saudi Arabia's oil giant says tankers being rerouted to avoid Strait of Hormuz

Iran has repeatedly targeted energy infrastructure with attacks that appear aimed at generating enough global economic pain to pressure the U.S. and Israel to end their strikes. It has also fired on Israel and U.S. military bases in the region.

The U.S. stock market held steadier Tuesday as Wall Street waited for the next clue on when the war with Iran may end.

Oil prices, meanwhile, remained well below their peaks hit on Monday. Such spikes have been rocking financial markets worldwide because of worries that the war could block the global flow of oil and natural gas for a long time.

Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard said it "will not allow the export of even a single liter of oil from the region to the hostile side and its partners until further notice."

Amin Nasser, the president and CEO of Saudi Arabia's oil giant Aramco, said tankers were being rerouted to avoid the strait, and that the company's east-west pipeline would reach its full capacity this week of 7 million barrels a day being brought to the Red Sea port of the Yanbu.

"The situation at the Strait of Hormuz is blocking sizable volumes of oil from the whole region," he said. "If this takes a long time, that will have serious impact on the global economy."

Foreign nationals get out of region

The U.N. refugee agency said Tuesday that more than 667,000 people in Lebanon had registered as displaced — an increase of over 100,000 since a day earlier — and more than 85,000 people from Lebanon, mostly Syrians, had entered neighboring Syria.

The British government said the number of commercial flights from the UAE to the U.K. is returning to normal levels, with 32 flights operated Monday from Dubai to Britain and another 36 scheduled Tuesday. British Airways, however, said it suspended flights to and from Jordan, Bahrain, Qatar, Dubai and Tel Aviv until later this month.

Many foreign nationals have been getting out of the Persian Gulf region since the war began, including over 45,000 U.K. citizens, the British Foreign Office said. Some 40,000 people returned to the United States, according to the State Department.

Smartmatic says Trump's 'campaign of retribution' is driving criminal prosecution

By JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Voting technology firm Smartmatic is seeking to dismiss a criminal indictment for money laundering, blaming President Donald Trump and his allies for seeking its prosecution as part of a "campaign of retribution" against those they blame for his 2020 election loss.

Smartmatic's parent company, UK-based SGO Corporation, was added to a criminal indictment last fall previously charging several executives with paying \$1 million in bribes to election officials in the Philippines.

In a motion to dismiss the indictment filed Tuesday, attorneys for Smartmatic said the company had been cooperating with the Justice Department since it first learned of its investigation in 2021, including by producing millions of pages of documents and making presentations to federal agents. A trial date for the executives, including co-founder Roger Pinate, had been set and the company believed that it was in the clear.

But when Trump returned to the White House, the Justice Department reversed course and decided to press charges against Smartmatic. Attorneys for the company said the decision was prompted by Trump's demands to prosecute his perceived enemies and his "mantra" that Smartmatic helped rig the 2020 U.S.

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presidential election won by Joe Biden — allegations that are at the heart of a \$2.7 billion lawsuit filed by Smartmatic against the president's allies in the media.

"The prosecution of SGO furthers their collective false narrative that President Trump did not actually lose the 2020 election," Smartmatic said in the filing in Miami federal court.

The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Attorneys likened the prosecution to the Justice Department's targeting of Kilmar Armando Ábrego García, a Salvadoran migrant who was criminally charged for conduct years earlier after he successfully sued the Trump administration over its decision to deport him.

In the years since the election, the filing states, "Smartmatic USA has exercised its right to hold those individuals and entities legally accountable for their deluge of defamatory statements and the attendant damage inflicts on its business, putting it squarely in the crosshairs for retribution."

The criminal case against Smartmatic and its employees stem from payments, between 2015 and 2018, that were allegedly made to obtain a contract with the Philippines government to help run that country's 2016 presidential election. Pinate, who no longer works for Smartmatic but remains a shareholder, has pleaded not guilty.

As part of the criminal case, prosecutors in August sought the court's permission to introduce evidence they argue shows that revenue from a \$300 million contract with Los Angeles County to help modernize its voting systems was diverted to a "slush fund" controlled by Pinate through the use of overseas shell companies, fake invoices and other means.

They also accused Pinate of secretly bribing Venezuela's longtime election chief by giving her a luxury home with a pool in Caracas. Prosecutors say the home was transferred to the election chief in an attempt to repair relations following Smartmatic's abrupt exit from Venezuela in 2017 when it accused then-President Nicolas Maduro's government of manipulating tallied results in elections for a rubber-stamping constituent assembly.

Smartmatic was founded more than two decades ago by a group of Venezuelans who found early success running elections while the late Hugo Chavez, a devotee of electronic voting, was in power. The company later expanded globally, providing voting machines and other technology to help carry out elections in 25 countries, from Argentina to Zambia.

But Smartmatic has said its business tanked after Fox News gave Trump's lawyers a platform to paint the company as part of a conspiracy to steal the 2020 election.

Fox said it was legitimately reporting on newsworthy events but eventually aired a piece refuting the allegations after Smartmatic's lawyers complained. Nonetheless, it has aggressively defended itself against the defamation lawsuit in New York — arguing that the company was facing imminent collapse over its own internal misconduct, not due to any negative coverage.

Pope announces resignation of US bishop accused of embezzling \$270K from California parish

By GREGORY BULL, CHRISTOPHER WEBER and DEEPA BHARATH Associated Press

EL CAJON, Calif. (AP) — The bishop of a small Chaldean Catholic community in the San Diego area has resigned amid charges that he embezzled \$270,000 from his parish, Pope Leo XIV announced Tuesday.

Bishop Emanuel Shaleta pleaded not guilty on Monday to 16 felony charges, including money laundering, during a hearing attended by many of his supporters. The hearing followed his arrest Thursday at San Diego International Airport as he was trying to leave the country, according to the San Diego County Sheriff's Office.

Shaleta, 69, is accused of embezzling from the St. Peter Chaldean Catholic Cathedral in El Cajon, east of San Diego.

Last August, someone from Shaleta's church provided a statement and documentation "showing potential embezzlement from the church," the sheriff's office said in a news release.

The Vatican said in its daily bulletin Tuesday that Leo had accepted Shaleta's resignation under the

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code of canon law for Eastern Rite churches, which allows for the pope to agree if a bishop asks to step down. It also said Iraqi Cardinal Louis Sako retired as patriarch of the global Chaldean Catholic Church, saying he wishes to pursue "prayer, writing and simple service." It's unclear if his retirement is connected to Shaleta's case.

Leo actually accepted Shaleta's resignation in February, but it wasn't announced until this week, according to the Vatican embassy in Washington. The Holy See appears to have waited to announce the decision to avoid interfering with the police investigation.

Prosecutor Joel Madero said the allegations against Shaleta are connected to monthly rental payments of more than \$30,000 from a tenant of the church's social hall that allegedly were missing. He said there were discrepancies in church accounts and that Shaleta "provided completely unreasonable tales of where that money was going."

The judge set bail at \$125,000 and seized Shaleta's passport. Madero said Shaleta was a flight risk, but the bishop's attorney said Thursday's flight had been planned for a while. Authorities didn't say where he was headed.

During a Feb. 22 Mass, Shaleta addressed allegations against him, saying he has never "abused any penny of the church money."

"On the contrary, I have done my best to preserve and manage the donations of the church properly," he said at the time.

Shaleta's attorney, Sharon Appelbaum, said she planned to show that the allegations were false. The priests of the Chaldean Catholic Eparchy of St. Peter the Apostle released a statement expressing solidarity with Shaleta.

Shaleta could face 15 years in prison if convicted on all charges, the district attorney's office said. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for April 27.

On Tuesday, the El Cajon parish church's doors were closed and its parking lot was empty. Leo named Bishop Saad Hanna Sirop as a temporary administrator.

Shaleta was ordained a priest of the Chaldean Catholic Church in Detroit in 1984. He was named to the San Diego branch of the Eastern Rite Catholic Church in the U.S. in 2017.

The Chaldean Catholic Church represents more than a million Aramaic-speaking Christians who are primarily from Iraq. While its beliefs align with Roman Catholic doctrine, including the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus, the church maintains its own distinct, ancient Eastern traditions and identity.

Sako, 76, said in a statement that he freely offered his resignation to Pope Leo XIV, who granted it, and that he was leaving "of my own will." As the head of the global Chaldean Catholic Church, he occasionally clashed with Iraq's political leaders.

The Chaldean Community Foundation estimates there are about 500,000 members in the U.S. with the largest concentration — about 187,000 — in the Detroit area, and the rest concentrated in California and Arizona.

Sako's retirement "will give a chance for new leadership to emerge, hopefully, a younger leader who brings new life into the community," said the Rev. Mark Morozowich, who heads the Center for Ukrainian Church Studies at the Catholic University of America in Washington.

The bishop, meanwhile, is the "spiritual father" of the diocese, and Shaleta's resignation is likely to cause turmoil beyond his Southern California parish.

"A bishop facing such serious allegations is a sad moment in the history of these wonderful Christians who are a small community that has historically suffered a lot under Iraqi occupation," he said.

The countdown is on for the 98th Oscars, with Conan O'Brien back and a 'moving' in memoriam

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

Lynette Howell Taylor has seen the Oscars from a few different vantage points: As a nominee, in 2019 for "A Star is Born," as a producer of the broadcast in 2020, as a member of the film academy's board of

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governors and, for the last three years, as awards chair. It's made her first year as the president of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences feel like a natural transition. And one thing she is certain of is that every Oscars is unique.

"Every year is different," Taylor said in a recent interview alongside film Academy CEO Bill Kramer. "Every season is different. Every set of movies is different. And so, the show is always different every year."

It's a tricky thing to both honor the people in the room while also making an entertaining show for a home audience. But behind the scenes, from returning host Conan O'Brien to the producers and Emmy-winning production design team, is a group of people who know how to dazzle a global audience.

"I think we, in the past couple of years, have really hit that balance right," Kramer said. "We're looking at that puzzle constantly and this year is going to be spectacular."

Final preparations are underway for the 98th Academy Awards on Sunday and everyone is feeling good about what they have planned, including performances, tributes and a special spotlight for their newest award for casting. It helps that the top nominees, "Sinners" and "One Battle After Another," happen to be great.

"It's always about the movies and the movies this year? They're all the things," Taylor said. "There are escapist movies, big commercial movies, there are movies that are really brave and really bold in their storytelling ... I get really emotional when I talk about the quality of this year's films."

Growing the audience

The ratings for the Oscars have been ticking up since plummeting to an all-time low in 2021 during the pandemic. The winning movie last year, "Anora," might have been smaller than "Oppenheimer" the previous year, but ratings still went up slightly from 19.5 million in 2024 to 19.7 million in 2025.

The show had an especially big lift among people ages 18 to 49, driven by mobile and laptop watches from younger viewers. Last year was the first time the ceremony was available to stream live on Hulu. They've also been partnering with popular internet personalities like Amelia Dimoldenberg in an effort to reach new audiences in a way that still feels "Academy appropriate."

"Our audiences are growing," Kramer said. "And young people are watching the show in ways that we've not seen before and that's really great."

Early planning and last-minute pivots

Boosted ratings might not be a coincidence with the fact that planning for the show has been starting earlier and earlier in recent years.

"It gives us time to talk through so many things pre-nominations. So once the nominations happen, we can start focusing on what that means for the show," Kramer said. "There's not a lot of last-minute panicking over anything."

One of the ways that will manifest in this year's show is the production design, from the set to the red carpet, details are pored over for many months.

"They've done such beautiful work ... and this year, they've just gone a whole step further with a different feel that's very intimate and warm," Taylor said. "It's a bit of a departure."

Though a lot is pre-planned, they're also always thinking of ways to meet the moment, which has led to some major showstoppers. Last year's big opener with Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande was a relatively late addition and ended up being one of the more memorable parts.

"We're open to pivoting, depending on what's going on in the world," Kramer said.

A very special in memoriam

The deaths of many beloved figures in the film world over the past year have hit hard, including Robert Redford, Diane Keaton, Rob Reiner, Catherine O'Hara, Robert Duvall, Val Kilmer, Malcolm-Jamal Warner, James Van Der Beek and Claudia Cardinale, just to name a few.

Last year Morgan Freeman took the stage to honor Gene Hackman, who had been found dead just days earlier, and others. This year there have been rumors about Meg Ryan and Billy Crystal joining forces for Reiner, but the organizers are neither confirming nor denying that reunion.

"Obviously we're paying special attention to the in memoriam this year. It's going to be robust and

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beautiful and very, very moving," Kramer said. "We won't give away any secrets. You'll have to tune in."
As always, there will be a longer version of the in memoriam available online to recognize people who might not make the broadcast cut.

It'll be three-and-a-half hours. Really.

The longest broadcast in Oscars history, the 74th show in 2002 hosted by Whoopi Goldberg, clocked in at four hours and 23 minutes. But even with a new category, the people behind the show are striving to do it in three-and-a-half hours, or less.

"It's a lot of moving pieces, but it's totally doable," Kramer said. "And casting's going to get a gorgeous moment on the show."

Taylor added that awards shows are like movies. Sometimes a long film can feel like "watching paint dry." Other times, it flies by.

"We really focus on making the show as dynamic and emotionally connecting as possible and really celebrating movies in a way that audiences want to stay tuned for," Taylor said.

Looking toward 100 and a future on YouTube

Planning is already underway for the 100th Oscars in 2028. They're also charting a course beyond too: In 2029, the Oscars will move from traditional broadcast television to YouTube.

"YouTube signals our desire to be a more global organization that reaches more audiences around the world," Kramer said. "The Oscars are just one part of a year-round deal where we're building a hub for cinema on YouTube that will have our SciTech Awards, our museum programming. Google Arts and Culture will be digitizing components of our collection and making it available to the public. This is all about reach and growing audiences."

FBI finds explosive residue in storage unit after 2 men are charged with lighting bombs in NYC

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ and MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The FBI said Tuesday that it found explosive residue in a Pennsylvania storage unit as part of an investigation into two men charged with bringing homemade bombs to a protest outside the home of New York City's mayor.

Emir Balat, 18, and Ibrahim Kayumi, 19, told police after their arrests that they were inspired by the Islamic State group, according to law enforcement officials and a criminal complaint.

The men live in the Philadelphia suburbs and drove together to New York City on Saturday to carry out the attack near Gracie Mansion in Manhattan, officials said.

In response to police questioning, Balat said he hoped to accomplish something "even bigger" than the Boston Marathon bombing, which killed three people, the complaint said.

Overnight Monday, FBI bomb technicians conducted controlled detonations of the explosive residue found at a public storage facility in Langhorne, Pennsylvania, near where Balat's family lives, the agency said.

The explosion resulted in "several loud bangs," the Middletown Township Police Department said Tuesday, adding that there was no threat to residents. The FBI said it has conducted multiple searches in connection with the investigation.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt on Tuesday called the attack "absolutely despicable" and said government investigators and prosecutors won't rest until the perpetrators are brought to justice.

Much remains unknown about the motives, planning and relationship between Balat and Kayumi.

Court documents show Emir Balat's father, Selahattin Balat, is a native of Turkey who was granted asylum in the United States in 1998 and later became a U.S. citizen. In a 2009 bankruptcy filing, he listed his occupation as painter and said he had three children.

Emir Balat is a senior at Neshaminy High School in Langhorne. A school spokesperson said he enrolled in a virtual program in September and had not attended in-person classes since.

His lawyer, Mehdi Essmidi, said his client had "complicated stuff going on" in his personal life, without elaborating. Essmidi said he did not believe the two young men had known each other for long.

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Kayumi is from Newtown, about 4 miles (6.5 kilometers) north of Langhorne. He graduated in 2024 from Council Rock High School North, according to a school spokesperson.

His attorney did not speak to reporters following a court hearing Monday and declined to comment when reached by The Associated Press.

Online records show that Kayumi's parents have owned and worked at multiple Popeyes fast food locations, including in Philadelphia, Brooklyn and Atlantic City.

His mother filed a missing person report with police Saturday, the day of the protest, saying her son had not been seen since that morning, according to the complaint.

Prosecutors, police and FBI officials say Balat and Kayumi joined a throng of counterprotesters at a small, anti-Muslim rally organized by far-right activist Jake Lang. A Christian nationalist, Lang is a critic of New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani, a Democrat and the first Muslim to hold the office.

Journalists photographed Balat hurling a device, smoking with a lit fuse, that was later found to contain the explosive TATP. The object, which also contained nuts and bolts, extinguished itself without harming anyone.

Balat then dropped a second object near some police officers and tried to run, but was tackled and arrested, according to a court complaint.

Balat and Kayumi were being held without bail after their court appearance on charges that include attempting to provide material support to a foreign terrorist organization and using a weapon of mass destruction. They were not required to enter a plea.

New York Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch said Monday there were no indications that the attack was connected to the ongoing war in Iran, but said the city remained on a heightened state of alert.

On Tuesday afternoon, a park near the mayor's residence was evacuated and several surrounding streets were closed as police investigated reports of a "suspicious device."

The object was later determined to be nonthreatening.

Mamdani was not home at the time and Gracie Mansion was not evacuated, a City Hall spokesperson said.

Alabama governor commutes death sentence of man whose accomplice fired fatal shot

By KIM CHANDLER Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey on Tuesday commuted the death sentence of a 75-year-old inmate who was set to be executed this week even though he was not in the building when the victim was killed during a 1991 robbery.

Ivey reduced Charles "Sonny" Burton's sentence to life in prison without the possibility of parole, marking just the second time the Republican governor has granted clemency to a death row inmate since taking office in 2017.

Burton was sentenced to death for the shooting death of a customer, Doug Battle, during the robbery of an AutoZone auto parts store in Talladega. Though he had left the store before another man, Derrick DeBruce, killed Battle, Burton was convicted as an accomplice, with prosecutors portraying Burton as a leader of the robbery.

Both DeBruce and Burton were convicted of capital murder, but DeBruce's sentence was overturned on appeal. DeBruce was resentenced to life in prison and died in prison.

Ivey, who has presided over 25 executions, said she firmly believes in the death penalty as "just punishment for society's most heinous offenders," but said it also must be administered fairly and proportionately. The Republican governor said she "cannot proceed in good conscience with the execution of Mr. Burton under such disparate circumstances."

"I believe it would be unjust for one participant in this crime to be executed while the participant who pulled the trigger was not," Ivey said in a statement. "To be clear, Mr. Burton will not be eligible for parole and will rightfully spend the remainder of his life behind bars for his role in the robbery that led to the murder of Doug Battle. He will now receive the same punishment as the triggerman."

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Burton was scheduled to be executed Thursday night by nitrogen gas, a new execution method the state began using in 2024.

Burton's supporters and family members had urged Ivey to consider clemency for Burton, who uses a wheelchair. Multiple jurors from Burton's 1992 trial were among those urging his life be spared. Battle's daughter sent a letter to Ivey urging clemency, asking "how does it legally make sense" to execute Burton.

"I'm just so happy, so happy. It's just tears of joy," Burton's daughter, Lois Harris, said through sobs during a telephone interview.

Alice Marie Johnson, whom President Donald Trump had tapped last year as his "pardon czar" after commuting her sentence for federal drug and money laundering charges, praised Ivey. She said the governor "showed what courageous and common sense leadership looks like."

"By commuting the death sentence of Charles "Sonny" Burton, she ensured that justice — not technicalities — guides the most serious decision a state can make," Johnson wrote on social media.

But Attorney General Steve Marshall slammed the move, saying, "There has never been any doubt that Sonny Burton has Douglas Battle's blood on his hands."

Burton organized the armed robbery and "held a gun to the store manager's head" before dividing up the proceeds, Marshall said in a statement.

Burton received the news at Holman Correctional Facility in Atmore as the state was making preparations for his execution on Thursday. Burton had made his request for a final meal and was working on a will to give away his belongings after he was put to death.

Matt Schulz, an assistant federal defender who represented Burton, said he was able to deliver the news in person.

"This was absolutely the right decision for the governor to make for any number of reasons," Schulz said. "The biggest one is the fact that this dichotomy of executing a non-shooter who did not even see the shooting take place after the state itself had resentenced the shooter to life without parole."

In a statement issued through his attorneys, Burton thanked the governor: "Just saying thank you doesn't seem like much. But it's what I can give her."

Burton told The Associated Press last month that no one was supposed to be injured in the robbery and that he didn't know until later that DeBruce had shot anyone.

"I didn't know anything about nobody getting hurt until we were on the way back. No, nobody supposed to get hurt," Burton said in a telephone interview from Alabama's Holman Correctional Facility

Burton said he wants to apologize to Battle's family. "I'm so sorry. If I had the power to bring him back, I would," Burton said.

Thune says Senate to consider voting bill but pushes back on demands for 'talking filibuster'

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Majority Leader John Thune said Tuesday that the Senate will consider a bill to impose strict new proof-of-citizenship requirements in elections, but says "the votes aren't there" to pass it through a marathon talking filibuster sought by President Donald Trump.

Trump has said he won't sign any other legislation until the bill — known as the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility or SAVE America Act — is passed. But it faces unified opposition from Democrats, meaning that the Senate can't pass it unless Republicans change the rules and eliminate the filibuster.

Thune has said there aren't enough votes to do that, or to launch a talking filibuster that would force Democrats to hold the floor indefinitely to block the bill.

"That is just a function of math," Thune told reporters on Tuesday, making his strongest statements yet after weeks of discussions among GOP senators. "For better or worse, I'm the one who has to be a clear-eyed realist about what we can achieve here."

Republican senators are discussing, instead, voting on the legislation as soon as next week under regular procedure — meaning it will likely fail. Thune said that Republicans are "going to have a fight on the floor"

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and will force Democrats to vote on “whether they think noncitizens should vote in American elections.”

Trump’s aggressive effort to dictate Senate procedure has put Thune in an awkward position as he has tried to appease the president and increasingly angry base voters who have called for Republicans to do whatever they can to pass it ahead of the midterm elections. But most Republican senators appear to be backing Thune’s approach.

“There’s been enough dithering,” said Sen. John Kennedy, R-La.. “It’s time to go and let the chips fall where they may.”

Trump’s talking filibuster

Trump has made the SAVE America Act a priority ahead of the midterm elections, arguing that Republicans need it to win — even as his party won the presidency and congressional majorities in 2024 without it. Federal law already requires that voters in national elections be U.S. citizens.

“It’ll guarantee the midterms,” he told House Republicans Monday at their annual retreat at his Florida golf club. “If you don’t get it, big trouble.”

But Trump’s push is running into the realities of the Senate, where minority Democrats can filibuster any piece of legislation and force Republicans to find 60 votes when they only hold 53 seats. Democrats uniformly oppose the legislation, arguing that it would disenfranchise some 20 million American voters who don’t have birth certificates or other documents readily available.

Republicans could change the rules and eliminate the filibuster to pass it, or they could attempt the talking filibuster. But Thune says they don’t have enough support within the GOP conference to do either.

Even if they did, a talking filibuster would not guarantee passage. Supporters of that approach say that Democrats would eventually tire of speaking or allow the legislation to pass. But Democrats would also be allowed to bring up an indefinite number of amendments on any subject, forcing Republicans to take hard votes in an election year and delaying the process even more.

“We can’t find a piece of legislation in history that’s been passed that way,” Thune said this week.

Republicans ready to move

Utah Sen. Mike Lee, who has led the talking filibuster push with Trump, posted on X Tuesday that the “Senate should do everything it can in an effort to pass” the bill.

“While passage isn’t guaranteed, we can be certain that failure will be the outcome if we don’t try,” Lee wrote.

But leaving a GOP conference meeting on Tuesday, several senators said it was time to move on the legislation, even if they couldn’t accommodate the president’s procedural demands.

“I think we just go ahead and try to get on the bill,” said Sen. Roger Marshall, R-Kansas.

Wisconsin Sen. Ron Johnson suggested that they should debate the bill on the floor for an extended time. There should not be a “one and done vote,” he said.

“Our base would scream about that and that wouldn’t be smart,” Johnson said.

There was little anger at Thune, as many of his GOP colleagues agree that eliminating the filibuster would be unwise and the talking filibuster would be risky. Republicans have long pushed back on efforts to “nuke” the filibuster, arguing that minority rights need to be preserved for legislation.

“There’s a right way to do it, there’s a wrong way to do it,” said Republican Sen. Thom Tillis of North Carolina. “Nuking the filibuster doesn’t work. The talking filibuster would be a goat rodeo.”

Tillis said Thune “has the toughest job in Washington, D.C. He’s doing just fine. And he, quite honestly, has taken on a lot for the members.”

New priorities

Trump said over the weekend that he also wants to add new priorities to the legislation, including a ban on mail-in ballots that he has pushed since losing the 2020 presidential election. He said he also wants to add on two unrelated provisions around transgender rights issues — one that would ban those born as men from playing in women’s sports and another to block sex reassignment surgeries on some minors.

“Let’s go for the gold,” Trump told the House Republicans.

House Speaker Mike Johnson said Tuesday at the Florida retreat that they are “looking at mechanisms”

to do that, even though the House has already passed the bill and sent it to the Senate. But it's unclear if a ban on mail-in ballots would pass the House, as they are popular in many states.

Thune said that the House would probably have to pass a new bill to add those issues.

"It would probably make sense for them to send over another version," he said.

US stocks hold steadier as Wall Street waits for the next signal on how long war with Iran may last

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The U.S. stock market held steadier Tuesday as Wall Street waited for the next signal on when the war with Iran may end.

The S&P 500 dipped 0.2%, a day after its latest wild swings caused by extreme moves in the oil market. The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 34 points, or 0.1%, and the Nasdaq composite edged higher by less than 0.1%.

Oil prices, meanwhile, remained sharply below their peaks hit on Monday. Such spikes have been rocking financial markets worldwide because of worries that the war could block the global flow of oil and natural gas for a long time.

The price for a barrel of Brent crude, the international standard, settled at \$87.80. That's down 11.3% from its settlement price the day before, but much of that drop happened on Monday before the U.S. stock market finished trading. That's why it did not give much of a boost to U.S. stocks Tuesday.

Oil prices plunged Monday afternoon from a high of nearly \$120 per barrel, its most expensive level since 2022, after President Donald Trump told CBS News he thinks "the war is very complete, pretty much." That raised hopes that the war may end relatively soon, which could allow oil to flow freely again from the Middle East to customers around the world.

But Trump's comments later Monday, after the U.S. stock market finished trading, were not as clear. And a spokesperson for Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard said that "Iran will determine when the war ends." Iran launched new attacks Tuesday at Israel and Gulf Arab countries, keeping pressure on the Middle East in a war started by Israel and the United States.

That has Wall Street waiting for the next clue about how long the war may last.

One point where Trump remained clear was his desire to keep the Strait of Hormuz open. The war has effectively blocked the waterway off Iran's coast, where a fifth of the world's oil sails on a typical day. That's been a central reason for extreme swings in oil prices recently, which have dominated other financial markets and raised worries about the global economy.

"If Iran does anything that stops the flow of Oil within the Strait of Hormuz, they will be hit by the United States of America TWENTY TIMES HARDER than they have been hit thus far," Trump said in a posting on his social media network late Monday.

"The outlook for oil right now is about as binary as it gets," according to Hakan Kaya, senior portfolio manager at Neuberger Berman.

"Either the Strait of Hormuz reopens and you see a massive unwind of the risk premium, or it stays shut and we are looking at the largest supply disruption in modern history. There is no middle ground, and that is why putting a number on it is almost irresponsible."

The U.S. stock market has a history of bouncing back relatively quickly from military conflicts, as long as oil prices don't stay too high for too long. Uncertainty about whether that may happen this time around has led to stunning swings up and down for markets worldwide, often hour-to-hour.

If oil prices do stay high for long, household budgets already stretched by high inflation could break under the pressure. Companies would see their own bills jump for fuel and to stock items on their store shelves or in their data warehouses. It all raises the possibility of a worst-case scenario for the global economy, "stagflation," where growth stagnates and inflation remains high.

On Wall Street, Vertex Pharmaceuticals leaped 8.3% for the biggest gain in the S&P 500 after reporting encouraging trends from a trial for its treatment for a life-threatening kind of kidney disease.

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West Pharmaceutical Services sank 5.7% after Eric Green said he'll retire as CEO and chair once the board finds and hires his successor.

All told, the S&P 500 fell 14.51 points to 6,781.48. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dipped 34.29 to 47,706.51, and the Nasdaq composite added 1.16 to 22,697.10.

Stock markets in Asia and Europe jumped after getting their first chances to react to Trump's comments from late Monday and the subsequent easing of oil prices. Indexes leaped 5.3% in South Korea, 2.2% in Hong Kong and 1.8% in France.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 rose 2.9% after the government also released revised economic data showing Japan's economy grew faster in the final quarter of last year than initially estimated.

In the bond market, the yield on the 10-year Treasury rose to 4.15% from 4.12% late Monday.

Israel says Iran is using cluster munitions. What to know about the weapons

By SAM METZ and MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Israel says Iran has been firing cluster munitions throughout their 10-day war — adding a complicated and deadly challenge to Israel's already-stretched air defenses.

The warheads burst open at high altitudes, scattering dozens of smaller bomblets across a wide area. The smaller bombs, which at night can resemble orange fireballs, are difficult to intercept and have proven lethal.

Normally restrictive about releasing information on Iranian hits and damage, Israeli authorities in recent days have sought to educate the public about their dangers, which can persist as unexploded bombs on the ground even after civilians leave shelters. At least three people have been killed, including two at a construction site in central Israel on Tuesday.

Over 120 countries have signed an international convention banning the use of cluster munitions, although Israel, the United States and Iran are among the nations that have not joined the treaty. The weapon has been used for decades in conflicts around the world, including by Israel when it fought the Iran-allied Lebanese militant group Hezbollah in 2006.

Here's what to know about cluster munitions:

The bomblets scatter and kill indiscriminately

After what's called a parent munition is launched, it releases smaller submunitions at an altitude of 7-10 kilometers (4-6 miles). These bomblets scatter across a large area, from several hundred meters (yards) to several kilometers (miles), trading precision for coverage.

Critics worldwide argue that cluster munitions kill or maim indiscriminately, with unexploded bomblets remaining dangerous long after their use. In Israel, they can be especially dangerous because most of the missiles have been aimed at its densely populated center.

"Cluster bombs don't create real damage to buildings, only people," said Yehoshua Kalisky, a senior researcher at Israel's Institute for National Security Studies.

Tough to shoot down

An Israeli military official, speaking anonymously under army briefing rules, said Tuesday that roughly half of the projectiles Iran was launching toward Israel had been cluster munitions.

Israel's Arrow missile-defense system has done a good job intercepting incoming ballistic missiles, Kalisky said. But if cluster munitions are released before the missile is destroyed, there is little that can be done.

Israel's Iron Dome system is geared toward intercepting smaller rockets fired from short ranges and lower altitudes. But it isn't designed to destroy the clusters once they've dispersed into dozens of bomblets, Kalisky added.

Unlike heavier explosives, the bomblets — often weighing less than 3 kilograms (7 pounds) — are most dangerous to targets like cars, storefronts or people caught outside shelters.

"They pose a particular threat to the civilian population both during and after use, with victims often including a high proportion of children," according to the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

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The submunitions fail to explode more often than other kinds of warheads. Unexploded ordnance can act like a land mine, detonating later and killing indiscriminately.

The Open Source Munitions Portal, which authenticates publicly sourced images of munitions worldwide, has published several images of unexploded submunitions found in Israel this week. It also verified images of Israeli submunitions being used in Lebanon last year. Lt. Col. Nadav Shoshani, an Israeli military spokesperson, declined to comment directly on the allegation, but pointed to a post on the military's Substack, which noted that cluster bombs can be used against military targets but not civilian areas.

Iran has used them frequently

Most of the damage in Israel has been caused by larger Iranian missiles, but Iran has been using cluster munitions on a "nearly daily basis," Shoshani said. He says Iran fired similar projectiles during the 12-day war in June.

The military said the Iranian warheads contain between 20 and 24 bomblets with explosives weighing up to 5 kilograms (11 pounds).

The Israeli military's Home Front Command has distributed flyers warning residents not to touch unexploded submunitions. A public service announcement from police also warned people not to touch anything they see and to call authorities instead.

What Iran is using

According to the Missile Defense Project at the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies, Iran said in 2017 that its Khorramshahr medium-range ballistic missile could carry multiple warheads. The missiles are the largest of Iran's submunition-dispersing arsenal. Iran also has submunition-equipped shorter range Zolfaghar missiles.

Cluster munitions, including those seen in Associated Press video flying westward toward Israel, can look like falling fireballs — an effect caused by the friction of reentering the atmosphere.

N.R. Jenzen-Jones, director of Armament Research Services, said little open-source information exists about Iran's cluster munitions beyond state television reports of leaders touring missile factories and videos from military exercises. But videos showing them used last week indicate that some Iranian missiles carrying cluster munition warheads are designed to open at high altitude, scattering them across an area far larger than most military targets.

Design components that disperse them at such heights — including a protective coating on the submunitions that can withstand the heat of atmospheric reentry — appear to show they were built for far less precise use than cluster munitions seen in other conflicts.

"The design seems to scatter submunitions so widely as to suggest it was designed purely as a weapon of terror, scattering its explosive cargo indiscriminately over a wide area," Jenzen-Jones said.

In July 2025, after the 12-day war between Iran and Israel, Amnesty International said Iran's "deliberate use of such inherently indiscriminate weapons is a blatant violation of international humanitarian law."

Broadly banned but still used

Cluster munitions — including those more targeted than Iran's — are not illegal but are barred by the Geneva Conventions for use in civilian areas. They're also banned under recent international agreements signed by more than 120 nations.

Cluster munitions were first used by Nazi Germany, when it dropped "butterfly bombs" on the United Kingdom in World War II. The U.S. has used various kinds in Vietnam, Laos, Iraq and Afghanistan, and provided cluster munitions to Ukraine. Russia was accused of using cluster bombs in its 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, a charge Moscow denied.

During a 2006 war in Lebanon with the militant group Hezbollah, the U.N. estimated some 30% to 40% of Israeli cluster bombs failed to explode, leaving southern Lebanon littered with hundreds of thousands of bomblets.

The U.S. State Department said Israel likely used American-made cluster bombs in civilian areas during the 2006 war, after U.N. demining teams found unexploded bomblets in hundreds of locations.

Israel is not using cluster bombs currently, according to a military official who spoke on condition of

anonymity under the military's briefing rules.

What to know about the embezzlement charges facing a former Chaldean Catholic bishop in California

By REBECCA BOONE Associated Press

The bishop of a small Chaldean Catholic community in California has resigned and pleaded not guilty to embezzlement and money laundering after prosecutors said he took more than \$270,000 from his parish.

Pope Leo XIV announced Bishop Emanuel Shaleta's resignation on Tuesday. Shaleta was arrested last week at San Diego International Airport while trying to leave the country, according to the San Diego County Sheriff's Office.

Prosecutor Joel Madero said Shaleta is accused of embezzling from St. Peter Chaldean Catholic Cathedral in El Cajon, east of San Diego. But Shaleta's defense attorney says those allegations are false.

Here's what to know:

Bishop for more than a decade

Shaleta, 69, was born in Faysh Kahbur, a small town in Iraq near the Tigris River and the Syrian border, according to a biography on the St. Paul Assyrian Chaldean Catholic Church website. He entered seminary at age 15, training for the priesthood at St. John Minor Seminary near Mosul and Pontifical Urbaniana University in Rome. He was ordained by Pope John Paul II in 1984.

After receiving his doctorate in biblical theology, he was transferred to the United States, serving in Illinois, Michigan and California until 2015 when Pope Francis appointed him the bishop of the Eparchy of Mar Addai of Toronto of the Chaldeans in Canada.

Francis appointed him the Bishop of Saint Peter Apostle of San Diego of the Chaldeans in 2017.

Allegations involve rental payments

Madero, the prosecutor, said the embezzlement allegations are connected to monthly rental payments of more than \$30,000 from a tenant of the church's social hall, and that there were discrepancies in the church's financial accounts.

A court document with details of the allegations has been sealed. But the San Diego District Attorney's office says Shaleta has been charged with 16 felonies, including eight counts of embezzlement and eight counts of money laundering.

Shaleta has pleaded not guilty.

During a recent Mass, Shaleta said he has never "abused any penny of the church money."

Shaleta faces up to 15 years in prison if convicted on all charges, the district attorney's office said. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for April 27.

The Chaldean Church released a formal statement, saying that the Vatican was investigating the matter and that "all perspectives are being taken seriously and require careful review, proper documentation, and time so that the truth may be fully and fairly discerned."

The priests of the Chaldean Catholic Eparchy of St. Peter the Apostle released a statement in solidarity with Shaleta and asked for prayers for the church.

Chaldeans are important Christian church in the Middle East

There are several branches of the Catholic Church that recognize the pope. That means they may have their own customs and rules, but they agree on the same church teachings. It also means the pope may appoint branch leaders and approve resignations.

The largest branch is commonly known as the Roman Catholic Church, and it is sometimes also called the Latin or Western Catholic church. There are also 23 Eastern branches of the church, including the Chaldean branch, that are in communion with the pope.

The Chaldean Catholic Church represents more than a million Aramaic-speaking Christians. The church traces its founding to the Apostle Thomas in the region that is now Iraq. Today, the headquarters — or Patriarchate — of the Chaldean church remains in Baghdad, Iraq.

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The Chaldean Community Foundation estimates that the Chaldean and Assyrian branches together have roughly half a million members in the U.S., primarily in Arizona, California and Illinois.

Case comes during time of turmoil for the branch

The Vatican said in its daily bulletin Tuesday that Pope Leo XIV had accepted Shaleta's resignation under the code of canon law for Eastern Rite churches, which allows for the pope to agree if a bishop asks to step down.

Leo actually accepted Shaleta's resignation in February, but appears to have waited to announce the decision to avoid interfering with the police investigation. Leo named Bishop Saad Hanna Sirop as a temporary administrator.

The head of the Chaldean church, Cardinal Louis Raphael Sako, retired on March 9, and Leo announced the retirement at the same time as Shaleta's resignation.

It's not clear if the two departures are connected.

Sako, 76, said that he first discussed retiring with Pope Francis in 2024, but Francis encouraged him to remain. Sako said he asked Leo to retire again on Tuesday and Leo agreed.

Sako said he freely offered his resignation and was leaving "of my own will" to pursue prayer, writing and simple service. He had occasionally clashed with Iraq's political leaders, and his retirement comes as the U.S.-Israeli war in Iran has spilled into Iraq and other neighboring countries.

Before retiring, Sako wrote a letter to parishioners in the San Diego region, urging them to seek unity and "a compassionate, faithful heart, far from the spirit of revenge" during an "exceptionally painful situation."

"Let the legal procedures take their course in revealing the truth and upholding justice," Sako wrote.

What to know about the Alabama man granted clemency two days before his execution

By KIM CHANDLER Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey on Tuesday granted clemency to a man on death row who was scheduled to be executed Thursday even though he did not personally kill anyone.

Ivey commuted Charles "Sonny" Burton's death sentence to life in prison without the possibility of parole. Burton, 75, was convicted of capital murder for the shooting death of Doug Battle during a 1991 robbery. Another man, Derrick DeBruce, shot Battle after Burton had left the building.

The 1991 murder and legal proceedings

The shooting occurred Aug. 16, 1991, during a robbery at an AutoZone auto parts store in Talladega. Doug Battle, a 34-year-old Army veteran and father of four, was shot and killed after entering the store during the robbery.

Before they went inside, Burton said if anyone caused trouble in the store that he would "take care of it," according to testimony.

As the robbery was ending, Battle entered the store. He threw his wallet down, got onto the floor and exchanged words with DeBruce. LaJuan McCants, who was 16 at the time, testified that Burton and others had left the store before DeBruce shot Battle in the back.

A jury convicted DeBruce and Burton of capital murder and both were sentenced to death. During closing arguments, a prosecutor argued Burton was "just as guilty as Derrick DeBruce, because he's there to aid and assist him." Prosecutors pointed to the statement about handling trouble as evidence that Burton was the robbery leader. Burton's attorneys have disputed that he was the leader.

DeBruce had his death sentence overturned on appeal after a court agreed that he had ineffective counsel. DeBruce was resentenced to life imprisonment and later died in prison.

Ivey's reasons for granting clemency

Ivey said she "cannot proceed in good conscience with the execution of Mr. Burton" when the triggerman had his sentence reduced to life imprisonment.

"I believe it would be unjust for one participant in this crime to be executed while the participant who pulled the trigger was not," Ivey said in a statement. "To be clear, Mr. Burton will not be eligible for parole

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and will rightfully spend the remainder of his life behind bars for his role in the robbery that led to the murder of Doug Battle. He will now receive the same punishment as the triggerman."

It is only the second time the Republican governor, who has presided over 25 executions, has granted clemency to a person on death row.

"The murder of Doug Battle was a senseless and tragic crime, and this decision does not diminish the profound loss felt by the Battle family. I pray that they may find peace and closure," Ivey said.

A mix of praise and criticism

The governor's decision drew a mix of praise and criticism.

Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall said he was "deeply disappointed" in the action and said he believes Burton's execution should have gone forward. Marshall said Burton organized the armed robbery that led to Battle's death. He said "longstanding Alabama law recognizes accomplice liability, as has every judge that has touched this case over three decades."

"There has never been any doubt that Sonny Burton has Douglas Battle's blood on his hands," Marshall said.

Alice Marie Johnson, whom President Donald Trump had tapped last year as his "pardon czar," praised Ivey. She said the governor "showed what courageous and common sense leadership looks like."

"By commuting the death sentence of Charles "Sonny" Burton, she ensured that justice — not technicalities — guides the most serious decision a state can make," Johnson wrote on social media.

Other Republican governors have granted clemency where there were concerns the person scheduled to be executed was the less culpable defendant. Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt last year commuted the sentence of Tremane Wood to life, matching the sentence of his brother who confessed to the murder.

What happens next

Burton will be moved off of Alabama's death row, where he has been imprisoned since 1992. However, it is unclear when that will happen. A spokesperson for the Alabama Department of Corrections did not immediately return an email seeking comment.

Burton will spend the rest of his life in prison since he doesn't have the possibility of parole.

Russia and Ukraine both claim front-line progress with US-brokered talks on hold

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian and Ukrainian officials made rival claims of battlefield successes in their 4-year-old war, with Ukraine saying it pushed Moscow's forces back across places on the front line and the Kremlin insisting Russia's invasion of its neighbor is making progress.

At the same time, Russia's almost daily attacks on Ukrainian civilian areas continued, killing several people, as Washington postponed its sponsored talks between the two sides due to the war in the Middle East.

Russia and Ukraine tout contradictory success claims

Despite being short of soldiers, Ukrainian forces have recently retaken nearly all the territory of the southeastern Dnipropetrovsk industrial region during a counteroffensive, driving Russian troops out of more than 400 square kilometers (150 square miles), Maj. Gen. Oleksandr Komarenko said in an interview published Tuesday by local media outlet RBC-Ukraine.

Russian troops are poorly supplied and lack support, Andrii Kyianenko, the deputy battalion commander of the 425th Separate Assault Regiment "Skelia" deployed in the area, told The Associated Press. Ukrainian soldiers have broken through Russian defenses and advanced more than 10 kilometers (6 miles), he said.

The evolving military situation couldn't be independently verified, but the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank, observed that recent Ukrainian counterattacks "are generating tactical, operational and strategic effects that may disrupt Russia's spring-summer 2026 offensive campaign plan."

Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed Tuesday that Russian forces have extended their gains in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region, whose capture Moscow has made one of the goals of its invasion.

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Ukraine controlled about 25% of the Donbas six months ago, but it now holds just 15% to 17%, Putin said. He made the claim during a meeting with Denis Pushilin, the Kremlin-appointed head of the parts of the Donbas controlled by Russian forces. It was not possible to verify the claim.

The Kremlin foreign affairs adviser, Yuri Ushakov, said that Putin told U.S. President Donald Trump late Monday that Russian forces are "advancing rather successfully" in Ukraine.

That progress should "encourage" Kyiv to "move toward a negotiated settlement of the conflict," Ushakov told reporters — even though Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has repeatedly demanded a lasting peace deal and European governments accuse Putin of feigning interest in talks while the Russian military keeps hammering Ukraine.

Russia and Ukraine exchange strikes

Three powerful glide bombs struck the center of the eastern Ukrainian city of Sloviansk, killing four people, the head of the Donetsk regional military administration, Vadym Filashkin, said Tuesday. At least 16 other people, including a 14-year-old girl, were wounded.

Overnight drone strikes on three other Ukrainian cities wounded at least 17 people, including two children, emergency services said Tuesday. Ukraine's air force said that it shot down 122 out of 137 drones that Russia launched during the night.

Ukrainian missiles meanwhile struck the city of Bryansk in western Russia on Tuesday, killing at least six civilians and injuring 37, regional Gov. Alexander Bogomaz said.

Zelenskyy told reporters that the Ukrainian military chief, Col. Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyy, reported to him that the strike on Bryansk hit a plant involved in manufacturing control systems for all types of Russian missiles.

The Ukrainian military said it used British-made Storm Shadow cruise missiles to hit the Kremniy El microchip factory in Bryansk, one of Russia's largest makers of microelectronics.

US-brokered talks on hold due to war in the Middle East

The next round of talks was set for Tuesday and Wednesday in Turkey, according to Zelenskyy, but American negotiators postponed it, possibly until next week, he told reporters via WhatsApp messages.

The Iran war, which erupted on Feb. 28 following U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iran and spread across the region, has drawn the international spotlight from Ukraine's plight as it strives to hold back Russia's bigger army.

In the meantime, Zelenskyy urged Washington not to lift sanctions on Russia. The U.S. is reportedly considering easing sanctions on Moscow's oil sales in a bid to ease supply chain disruption and pressure on gas prices as the Middle East conflict continues.

Such a move would help Moscow finance its invasion and would be "a serious blow" for Ukraine, Zelenskyy said.

The Kremlin is hoping that the Iran war will bring it a financial windfall from rising oil prices, distract global attention from the war in Ukraine, run down Western arsenals and force the U.S. and its NATO allies to reduce military support for Kyiv.

Zelenskyy, meanwhile, is hoping that by supplying its cutting-edge and battle-tested drone technology to the United States and its Gulf partners for the war in the Middle East, Ukraine will win more international diplomatic leverage against Moscow.

He is also seeking a reciprocal supply of advanced American-made air defense missiles Ukraine needs to counter Russia's attacks.

Baltimore police officer wounded, gunman killed during midday burglary call

By BRIAN WITTE and ED WHITE Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — A police officer responding to a burglary call in Baltimore was shot in the leg Tuesday by a gunman who was killed by another officer, authorities said.

A woman jumped out of a window during the tense confrontation and another woman was held at gunpoint by the man before he was shot, Police Commissioner Richard Worley said.

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"It was relatively quick because he was firing on our officers," Worley said.

The officer with a leg wound was in stable condition at University of Maryland Shock Trauma Center. Dr. Thomas Scalea praised a "buddy" who applied a tourniquet at the scene.

"We're just so thankful that the officer or any other folks in that neighborhood were not severely harmed," Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott told reporters. "Our thoughts are with him and his family, and even the family of the deceased."

The man who died was related to people at the home, Worley said.

No names were released. The Baltimore Fraternal Order of Police, a union that represents officers, said "all involved members are in good spirits."

In a time of war with Iran, Americans unite in aggravation over sticker shock at the gas pump

By HANNAH FINGERHUT, MIKE HOUSEHOLDER, MICHAEL SCHNEIDER, MICHAEL CATALINI and BILL BARROW Associated Press

DE SOTO, Iowa (AP) — Standing alongside his son's Ford pickup truck at a central Iowa gas station off Interstate 80, Francisco Castillo was not happy.

He had voted for President Donald Trump in the last election. He believed Trump had strengthened the economy in his first term, and he wanted more of that.

"I thought that he was going to bring some of those things back," said Castillo, a 43-year-old factory worker. And now? "He said he was going to bring gas down, but the war in Iran is now making everything worse."

It seems a country divided on so many fronts is finding common ground in pain at the pump, where the cost of the Iran war is hitting Americans squarely in the wallet and aggravating people across the political spectrum.

For Castillo and many others filling their tanks on Monday at gas stations in Michigan, Pennsylvania, Florida, North Carolina and Iowa, it was a reminder that politicians' promises aren't going to pay the bills.

"They do what benefits them," Castillo said. "I have to go to work every day no matter what."

Some are optimistic that the sticker shock will be short-lived. Others blame corporate interests rather than the president. Electric vehicle owners are especially grateful about their decision as they cruise past gas stations with escalating prices.

The national average gas price was \$3.48 a gallon on Monday, up from \$2.90 a month ago, before the war, according to tracking by AAA.

The higher prices are a reminder of how Trump has veered from his campaign promises. Not only were Americans embroiled in a new war overseas, they were paying for it every time they filled up their tanks.

The Republican president insisted the conflict was worth it.

"We're putting an end to all of this threat once and for all, and the result will be lower oil prices, oil and gas prices for American families," he said at a news conference Monday. The war, he said, is "just an excursion into something that had to be done."

Robert Coon from Omaha, Nebraska, filled up on his way to Ames, Iowa. Though not a Trump voter, he believed the strikes in Iran needed to happen.

Even so, he fears U.S. involvement is not going to go the way he wants, which is "in, out, over."

A Quinnipiac poll conducted over the weekend found about half of registered voters oppose the U.S. military action against Iran while about 4 in 10 support it. The vast majority of Democrats were against it (89%), the vast majority of Republicans for it (85%) and independents against it (60%).

Overall, three-quarters were concerned about the war raising gas and oil prices. Recent polling also suggests that the vast majority of voters expect the U.S. action against Iran to last months or longer, and many worry it is making the U.S. less safe.

In Florida, a gas guzzler keeps rolling

For now, surging prices aren't keeping Ray Albrecht from hauling his 32-foot (11 meter) camper on his

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Silverado pickup truck around the country as he attended motorcycle festivals like Bike Week in Florida's Daytona Beach.

However, he said he would stop traveling if the price reached \$5 a gallon since he only gets 8 miles per gallon with his truck and camper. He stopped at a Speedway gas station off Interstate 4 in Winter Park, Florida, paying \$3.59 per gallon for half a tank to keep him rolling toward his home in Wisconsin.

"I've been pretty grateful that the gas prices have been really reasonable" at least until the last week, said Albrecht, 67, who identified as an independent voter.

At the same gas station, Republican-leaning Tyler Nepple, 23, said the price of gas for his Toyota Tacoma may shape his vote in the midterm elections this fall but won't change his driving habits.

"You've just got to fill it up and bite the bullet and hope that the prices go back down — that's all I can really do," said Nepple, who runs a startup in the Orlando, Florida, area. "I still have to get from point A to point B, and I need gas to do that."

A retiree cuts back in Pennsylvania

Kathryn Price Engelhard, 70, gassed up her Subaru Forester at a Wawa in Morrisville, Pennsylvania, in the Philadelphia suburbs. A retired nonprofit executive director and "strong Democrat," she said she had to stop at over a half a tank because she's on a fixed income. Last week, she paid only \$30 to top herself off.

Similarly, she cut her order for home heating oil by half because that cost is up, too. "I look at the prices of oil in the past and the stupid war, how did we — how did anybody — think that that was not going to impact oil?" she asked. "Of course it's impacting oil."

In Fairless Hills, Pennsylvania, Vivian Knight, 53, is hoping her fill-up last week will last her a month. She is a former exterminator out on disability. "If I had to go to work or something like that, gas prices would be ridiculous," she said.

Speaking of Trump, she said "he kind of starts some problems that really don't need to be started," and she puts the Iran war in that category.

The saga will have no effect on how Joey Perillo, 74, will vote in November.

"The gas price could have gone down to two cents a gallon and I'd vote against him," said the volunteer firefighter, retired actor and political independent from Yardley, Pennsylvania.

In Michigan, gratitude for electric cars

In the Detroit suburb of Livonia, Anthony Gooden, 57, sized up the plight of gas-powered vehicle owners while waiting for his Chevy Equinox EV to charge at a station.

"Whoa, they're going through it right now," said Gooden, 57, from nearby Redford Township. "And it's only getting worse."

Gooden ditched his internal combustion engine vehicle over a year ago and said days like these reinforce that decision. "You're happier now," he said. "No comparison."

In Ann Arbor, Michigan, Elvana Hammoud, 55, a diversity strategist, drives a Mach-E electric SUV as well as a Ford Raptor truck that costs \$100 to fill up when gas is over \$3. It's an easy choice which to use more now.

"I mostly drive the EV, especially to work because I have a long commute," she said. The Raptor is for snowy days, short errands or when moving something big. "I used it more frequently just for fun when gas prices were lower."

Trump has put up a number of roadblocks to rapid expansion of electric vehicles in favor of policies promoting gasoline-powered ones. Among them, his tax and spending bill passed by Congress last year eliminated federal tax credits that saved buyers up to \$7,500 off new and used EV purchases.

In North Carolina, worries about gouging

Kevin Kertesz, 65, filled his pickup at a Shell station in Graham, North Carolina, where unleaded started at \$3.34 per gallon, up from \$2.59 in the area last week.

The Republican retiree asserted that "everyone who is selling fuel for these elevated prices is price gouging, and there's nothing we can do about it because we all have to have gasoline to keep driving."

Ken Shuttlesworth, a 70-year-old IT manager from Graham who described himself as an independent Democrat, said he can absorb higher gas costs but worries about his children and grandchildren and oth-

ers who live closer to the financial margins.

Trump, he said, should have consulted Congress and had a more public discussion before taking the country to war.

"We have somebody who doesn't follow the policy," he said. "He follows his instincts."

White House says it fired NTSB member over misconduct but Todd Inman denies the allegations

By JOSH FUNK AP Transportation Writer

The White House said it fired a National Transportation Safety Board member after reports of drinking on the job and harassing staff, but Todd Inman flatly denied the allegations Monday and said he plans to fight back.

Inman revealed Sunday that he had been fired on Friday without explanation, though his term on the board was supposed to continue through the end of 2027. President Donald Trump's administration said Monday that it believes the firing is justified.

"The White House lawfully removed Todd Inman from the NTSB after receiving highly concerning reports of inappropriate alcohol use on the job, harassment of staff, misuse of government resources, and failure to attend at least half of NTSB meetings," White House spokesman Kush Desai said. "The Trump administration remains committed to maintaining safety and security for Americans in the air and on the ground."

Inman said Monday that he hadn't initially planned to sue over his firing, but now says, "I look forward to defending my reputation through all legal means possible."

"I categorically deny the allegations made in the White House statement. It has become increasingly obvious this action was a political hit job," said Inman, a Republican who was appointed in March 2024 during former President Joe Biden's administration.

After Inman's firing and the unexpected dismissal in May of Vice Chair Alvin Brown, a Democrat appointed by Biden, the NTSB currently lists only three members on its website. But the U.S. Senate recently confirmed American Airlines executive John DeLeeuw, and he will become the fourth member of the board that investigates major crashes of planes, trains and automobiles as well as pipeline incidents. The NTSB is currently investigating more than 1,000 cases and will make recommendations on how to prevent similar tragedies when it releases its final reports.

"President Trump has made clear that restoring an accountable government workforce is a top priority of his Administration. The NTSB has upheld this standard since we were established in 1967," a spokesman for the agency said in a statement. "The NTSB's workforce upholds the highest professional standards, is a responsible guardian of public resources, and safeguards the integrity of its investigations."

Inman was the lead board member on scene after last year's midair collision near Washington, D.C., that killed 67 people after an airliner collided with a U.S. Army Black Hawk helicopter. He also oversaw the initial investigation of the crash of a UPS cargo plane in Kentucky that killed 15 people in November.

Before last year, it was extremely unusual for board members at independent agencies to be dismissed. However, Trump has fired members of the Surface Transportation Board, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to clear the way for his own appointees. He also tried to remove Federal Reserve governor Lisa Cook, but she has been fighting that and the courts have allowed her to remain on the job.

The five-member NTSB is supposed to be split between three members of the president's party and two members of the other party. After Inman's firing and the addition of DeLeeuw, the board will be split evenly, 2-2, between the parties, and Trump will be able to appoint a third Republican.

Brown and Robert Primus, who served on the U.S. Surface Transportation Board, were the only Black board members overseeing their respective independent agencies when they were fired last year. Both have challenged their firings in court, and the legal services group Democracy Forward has filed discrimination claims on the men's behalf.

FDA finds little evidence that a drug touted by Trump can help people with autism

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Food and Drug Administration on Tuesday approved a generic medication for a rare brain disorder, while walking back statements by President Donald Trump and other administration officials that the drug showed great promise for people with autism.

The agency said it approved leucovorin for children and adults with a genetic condition that limits delivery of folate, a form of vitamin B, to the brain. FDA officials estimate the ultrarare condition impacts fewer than 1 in a million people in the U.S.

It's a major step back from comments made at a White House news conference in September, when Trump and FDA commissioner Marty Makary announced the drug was under review to benefit patients with autism, some of whom have a form of the vitamin brain deficiency.

"It might be 20, 40, 50% of kids with autism," Makary said at the news conference.

But senior FDA officials told reporters Monday that their review was narrowed to focus on the strongest evidence, which only supported the drug's use by patients with the rare mutation that impacts folate levels in the brain.

The FDA officials also pointed out that one study supporting the drug's use for autism was retracted earlier this year.

Autism researchers on Tuesday reiterated that the drug has not been shown safe or effective for the vast majority of people with the brain disorder.

"There is no evidence to say that leucovorin will help most people with autism, and there's certainly no evidence to say it's safe," said Dr. Alycia Halladay of the Autism Science Foundation, in an interview.

Halladay noted there is also no established figure for how many people with autism have a form of the folate brain disorder. Some doctors diagnose the folate condition using a specialty laboratory test that isn't FDA-approved.

The administration's White House event touting the drug last year followed promises from Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to determine the cause of autism by September.

Leucovorin is a synthetic metabolite of folate, which is essential for healthy pregnancies and is recommended for women before conception and during pregnancy. The drug's current FDA label covers leucovorin's use in reducing side effects of certain chemotherapy drugs and treating a rare blood disorder.

Patients affected by the condition targeted by Tuesday's approval experience movement disorders, seizures and other neurological problems that can resemble symptoms of autism.

But professional medical societies say it's far from clear whether the drug helps people with autism.

The American Academy of Pediatrics doesn't recommend routine use of leucovorin for autistic children, including those with the brain condition known as cerebral folate deficiency.

Unresolved questions about the drug haven't stopped U.S. doctors from prescribing it.

A paper published in *The Lancet* last week found that leucovorin prescriptions for children aged 5 to 17 were 71% higher than normal in the three months immediately following Trump's late September news conference.

"We've seen huge increases in leucovorin prescriptions for autism because of the initial premature and ill-informed announcement that it can treat autism symptoms," said David Mandell, an autism expert at the University of Pennsylvania. "Now families are experiencing whiplash about what constitutes best practice for their children."

Some families of children with autism have reported trouble getting prescriptions filled in recent weeks.

FDA officials told reporters the agency is allowing imports of the drug by foreign drugmakers to help boost supply. The drug's original manufacturer, GSK, does not plan to relaunch its version of the drug.

Halladay, of the Autism Science Foundation, cautioned parents against seeking out the drug, noting reports of side effects including irritability, aggression and hyperactivity when used in people with autism.

"If parents are insistent on trying this they should know that it may cause harm and it may do no good,"

she said.

Trump officials originally decided to review the drug after speaking with an Arizona-based neurologist who prescribes the drug for autism patients and runs an online education business focused on the experimental treatment.

The theory behind the drug's use is that some people with autism have specific antibodies that block folate from entering the brain. But the Autism Science Foundation and other groups note that non-autistic relatives of people with the disorder often have the same antibodies, suggesting they're not a factor in the condition.

While there is no single cause behind autism, most researchers say science points to genetic and environmental factors as playing a role.

Oscars performers include trio behind HUNTR/X, Misty Copeland, Josh Groban and Raphael Saadiq

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

Josh Groban, Misty Copeland and the singing voices behind HUNTR/X are all taking the stage at the Oscars, just not at the same time.

The show's producers on Tuesday revealed more details about Sunday night's big performances of the Oscar-nominated songs "Golden," from "Kpop Demon Hunters," and "I Liked to You," from "Sinners."

Miles Caton and Raphael Saadiq will be on hand for the "Sinners" moment, which aims to explore the role music plays in the film with the help of Copeland, blues musicians Eric Gales, Buddy Guy and Christone "Kingfish" Ingram, actors Jayme Lawson and Li Jun Li as well as Brittany Howard, Bobby Rush, Shaboozey and Alice Smith.

Rei Ami, EJAE and Audrey Nuna are also set to perform "Golden" around a broader showcase of the folklore behind the animated sensation, including Korean instrumentalists and dance.

Groban's involvement in the show is being left more ambiguous, but more details are expected in the days leading up to the 98th annual Academy Awards.

Here's everything else you need to know.

When are the Oscars?

The Academy Awards will be held on Sunday, March 15, at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles. The show, to be broadcast live by ABC, is scheduled to begin at 7 p.m. Eastern/4 p.m. Pacific.

Who's hosting?

After successfully presiding over the 97th Oscars, Conan O'Brien is returning to host for the second year. His return to the Oscars stage was announced almost a year ago. In a statement last March, he said "The only reason I'm hosting the Oscars next year is that I want to hear Adrien Brody finish his speech."

Are the Oscars streaming?

Like last year, the Oscars will be streamed live on Hulu. You can also watch via Hulu Live TV, YouTubeTV, AT&T TV and FuboTV. With authentication from your provider, you can watch on ABC.com and the ABC app.

Who's nominated for an Oscar this year?

This year's nominees for best actress are Jessie Buckley for "Hamnet," Rose Byrne for "If I Had Legs I'd Kick You," Renate Reinsve for "Sentimental Value," Emma Stone for "Bugonia" and Kate Hudson for "Song Sung Blue."

The best actor nominees are Timothée Chalamet for "Marty Supreme," Leonardo DiCaprio for "One Battle After Another," Ethan Hawke for "Blue Moon," Michael B. Jordan for "Sinners" and Wagner Moura for "The Secret Agent."

In the supporting actor categories, the nominees are Jacob Elordi for "Frankenstein," Sean Penn and Benicio Del Toro for "One Battle After Another," Stellan Skarsgård for "Sentimental Value" and Delroy Lindo for "Sinners."

The supporting actress nominees are Elle Fanning and Inga Ibsdotter Lilleaas for "Sentimental Value," Amy Madigan for "Weapons," Wunmi Mosaku for "Sinners" and Teyana Taylor for "One Battle After Another."

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Who are the favorites to win?

For months, "One Battle After Another" has been the clear front-runner for best picture and best director but in the past week it's looking like it might be a closer race in a showdown with "Sinners," which is this year's leading nominee, breaking the record for most nominations by a single film with 16. Associated Press Film Writers Jake Coyle and Lindsey Bahr predict that "One Battle After Another" will still take best picture and best director. They also think Buckley will win best actress, Jordan will get best actor and Taylor supporting actress, but they're split on supporting actor: Coyle thinks it will go to Penn, Bahr is staking her bet on Lindo.

Who is performing at the show?

The show will feature live performances of best song nominees "Golden," from "KPop Demon Hunters," and "I Lied to You," from "Sinners."

How can I watch the Oscar-nominated films?

Some of the nominees are still in theaters, but many of this year's Oscar nominees are streaming on various platforms. The AP has a handy guide available here.

What stars are presenting awards?

Last year's best actor winners Adrien Brody and Mikey Madison and supporting actor winners Kieran Culkin and Zoe Saldana will hand out trophies at the show, as will the likes of Gwyneth Paltrow, Robert Downey Jr., Chris Evans, Javier Bardem, Maya Rudolph, Chase Infiniti, Demi Moore, Kumail Nanjiani, Anne Hathaway, Will Arnett, Priyanka Chopra Jonas and Paul Mescal.

FAA briefly grounds all JetBlue flights due to short system outage

By MICHELLE CHAPMAN AP Business Writer

All JetBlue flights were briefly grounded by the Federal Aviation Administration early Tuesday at the request of the airline as it dealt with a short system outage.

The ground stop was lifted about 40 minutes after it was imposed, the agency said in a notice posted to its website.

"A brief system outage has been resolved and we have resumed operations," JetBlue said in a statement. The airline did not provide further information.

JetBlue, which was founded more than 25 years ago, has its headquarters in New York City and its flagship terminal at the city's John F. Kennedy International Airport.

Outages do occur from time to time that impact airline travel. In October Alaska Airlines had to ground its planes for hours because of an information technology outage. Three months earlier, Alaska grounded all of its flights for about three hours after the failure of a critical piece of hardware at a data center.

In August a technology issue prompted United Airlines to ground planes at major U.S. airports and more than 1,000 flights were delayed. The system outage, as the company described it, lasted several hours.

In 2024 Delta Air Lines struggled for several days to recover from a worldwide technology outage caused by a faulty software update. The outage also hit other airlines, hospitals and businesses around the world.

War with Iran delivers another shock to the global economy

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The war with Iran is doing collateral damage to the world economy.

The conflict is driving up energy and fertilizer prices; threatening food shortages in poor countries; destabilizing fragile states such as Pakistan; and complicating options for the inflation fighters at central banks like the Federal Reserve.

Causing much of the pain: the Strait of Hormuz — through which a fifth of the world's oil passes — was effectively shut down after the U.S. and Israel launched missile strikes Feb. 28 that killed Iranian leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

"For a long time, the nightmare scenario that deterred the U.S. from even thinking about an attack on Iran and which got them to urge restraint on Israel was that the Iranians would close the Strait of Hormuz,"

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said Maurice Obstfeld, a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics and former chief economist at the International Monetary Fund. "Now we're in the nightmare scenario."

With a key shipping route cut off, oil prices have surged — from less than \$70 a barrel on Feb. 27 to a peak of nearly \$120 early Monday before settling closer to \$90. They've taken gasoline prices with them.

According to AAA, the average price of U.S. gasoline has shot up to \$3.48 a gallon from just under \$3 a week ago. Prices could be felt even more significantly in Asia and Europe, which are more dependent on Middle Eastern oil and gas than the United States.

In India, restaurants are already warning of possible shutdowns as the government prioritizes gas supplies for households. Thailand has suspended overseas travel for civil servants and urged them to take stairs instead of elevators. The Philippines has introduced a temporary four-day work week for some government agencies, while Vietnam is encouraging people to work from home.

20 million barrels of oil a day go missing

Every 10% increase in oil prices — provided they persist for most of the year — will push up global inflation by 0.4 percentage points and reduce worldwide economic output by as much as 0.2%, said Kristalina Georgieva, managing director of the International Monetary Fund.

"The Strait of Hormuz has to be reopened," said economist Simon Johnson of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and recipient of the 2024 Nobel memorial prize in economics. "It's 20 million barrels of oil a day going through there. There's no excess capacity anywhere in the world that can fill that gap."

The world economy has shown it can take a punch, absorbing blows from the Russian invasion of Ukraine four years ago and from President Donald Trump's massive and unpredictable tariffs in 2025.

Many economists express hope that global commerce can stagger through the latest crisis.

"The world economy has shown itself capable of shaking off significant shocks like broad U.S. tariffs, so there is room for optimism that it will prove resilient to the fallout of the war on Iran," said Eswar Prasad, professor of trade policy at Cornell University.

Timing is everything

Especially if oil prices can fall back to the \$70-to-\$80-a-barrel range, wrote economist Neil Shearing of Capital Economics, "the world economy may absorb the shock with less disruption than many fear."

But a lot of ifs remain.

"The question is how long is it going to go on?" said Johnson, also former IMF chief economist. "It's hard to see Iran backing down now that it's announced this new leader" — Mojtaba Khamanei. The son of the slain ayatollah is believed to be even more of a hardliner than his father.

Also muddying the outlook for an end to the crisis is uncertainty about what the United States is trying to achieve. "This is all about President Trump," Johnson said. "It's not clear when he's going to declare victory."

Economic winners and losers

For now, the war is likely to create economic winners and losers.

Energy importers — most of Europe, South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, India and China — will get clobbered by higher prices, Shearing wrote in a commentary for London's Chatham House think tank.

Pakistan finds itself in an especially bleak position. The South Asian country imports 40% of its energy and relies especially heavily on liquified natural gas from Qatar, supplies of which have been cut off by the conflict. Higher energy prices will squeeze Pakistani families and damage their economy.

Far from cutting interest rates to provide some relief, though, the country's central bank will probably have to raise them instead, say economists Gareth Leather and Mark Williams of Capital Economics. That is partly because inflation remains uncomfortably high in Pakistan — and higher energy prices threaten to make it worse.

But oil-producing countries outside the warzone — Norway, Russia, Canada — will benefit from high oil prices without the risk of missile and drone attacks.

Energy isn't the only issue. Up to 30% of world fertilizer exports — including urea, ammonia, phosphates, and sulfur — pass through the Strait of Hormuz, according to Joseph Glauber of the International Food Policy Research Institute.

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Disruption in the Strait has already cut off fertilizer shipments, raising costs for farmers – and is likely pushing food prices higher.

“Any countries with significant agriculture sectors, including the United States, would be vulnerable,” Obstfeld said. “The effects are going to be most devastating in low-income countries where agricultural productivity may already be challenged. Add this extra cost component and you get the prospect of significant food shortages.”

Where things stand in the US

The United States, now a net exporter of energy, should gain slightly overall from higher oil and gas prices. But ordinary families will feel the pain at a time when Americans are already furious about high costs ahead of November’s midterm elections.

U.S. households pay \$2,500 a year, or nearly \$50 a week, to fill up their cars, said Mark Mathews, chief economist at the National Retail Federation. A 20% increase in gasoline prices means an extra \$10 a week out their budgets, forcing them to cut back elsewhere. “If I have to pay more for an essential, then I would reduce a discretionary item,” Mathews said.

If oil prices remain around \$100 a barrel, analysts at Evercore ISI calculated, the resulting higher gasoline prices will wipe out for most Americans the benefits of higher tax refunds this year arising from Trump’s 2025 tax cuts. Only the top 30% would still see a gain.

A quandary for central banks

The Iran crisis also puts the world’s central banks in a bind. Higher energy prices feed inflation. But they also hurt the economy. So should central bankers raise rates to curb inflation — or cut them to give the economy a lift?

The Fed is already divided between policymakers who think a weak American job market needs help from lower rates and those still worried that inflation remains stuck above the central bank’s 2% target.

“Their minds will easily go to the 1970s,” Johnson said, when conflict in the Middle East and an Arab oil embargo sent oil prices rocketing. Central bankers are haunted by the memory that their predecessors “didn’t get it right in the 1970s. They thought it was a temporary shock. They thought they could accommodate with lower interest rates, and they ended up regretting that because inflation became much higher.”

Johnson predicted that higher energy prices ignited by the war with Iran are “going to massively intensify the debate inside the Fed” and make U.S. rate cuts less likely.

Kenneth Walker III joins Mahomes in KC and Malik Willis starts QB reset in Miami, AP sources say

By SCHUYLER DIXON AP Pro Football Writer

Super Bowl MVP Kenneth Walker III is the new running back for Patrick Mahomes in Kansas City, Miami settled on Malik Willis for a reset at quarterback and receiver Mike Evans is headed to San Francisco after 12 years in Tampa Bay.

People with knowledge of the agreements told The Associated Press on Monday, the opening day of NFL free agency, that Walker was leaving Seattle after winning a championship and the Dolphins reached a deal with Willis after announcing earlier in the day that they were releasing Tua Tagovailoa.

The people spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because contracts can’t be signed until Wednesday, the first day of the new league year.

The negotiating window opened with a flurry of significant deals, including the Indianapolis Colts keeping their top free agent in receiver Alec Pierce.

Edge rusher Jaelan Phillips and the Carolina Panthers agreed on a four-year, \$120 million contract with \$80 million guaranteed. Philadelphia was hoping to retain Phillips after sending a third-round pick to Miami for him at the trade deadline last season. Phillips had five sacks combined for the Dolphins and the Eagles.

The Dallas Cowboys added edge rusher Rashan Gary in a trade with Green Bay for a 2027 fourth-round pick. The Packers acquired star Micah Parsons from the Cowboys a week before the season started last year. Gary was the 12th overall pick in the draft in 2019, two years before Dallas drafted Parsons in the

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same spot.

Tennessee was among the teams with the most to spend going into free agency and tapped connections to first-year coach Robert Saleh and new offensive coordinator Brian Daboll on a busy day for the Titans.

Walker and the Chiefs agreed to a three-year deal worth up to \$45 million, with \$28.7 million guaranteed. The 25-year-old fills perhaps the biggest need as the Chiefs try to bounce back from a 6-11 season. Kareem Hunt and Isiah Pacheco, their top two running backs, are both free agents.

The deal came as Kansas City was nearing an agreement to bring back four-time All-Pro tight end Travis Kelce for his 14th season.

Walker is the fourth Super Bowl MVP to change teams the following season: Larry Brown went from the Cowboys to the Raiders in 1996, Desmond Howard from the Packers to the Raiders in 1997 and Dexter Jackson from Tampa Bay to Arizona in 2003.

The Dolphins reached an agreement with Willis a few hours after dumping Tagovailoa, who later agreed to a one-year deal with Atlanta, and incurring a record \$99 million hit on their salary cap. Willis will reunite with general manager Jon-Eric Sullivan and first-year coach Jeff Hafley. They were together in Green Bay, where Willis spent the past two seasons.

Miami made another move by agreeing to trade safety Minkah Fitzpatrick to the New York Jets for a seventh-round pick.

The Jets further revamped their defense by agreeing to deals with former Saints linebacker Demario Davis, who will return for a third stint in New York, former Falcons defensive tackle David Onyemata, former Bengals edge rusher Joseph Ossai and former Packers pass rusher Kingsley Enagbare.

The 49ers added a proven pass catcher in Evans for quarterback Brock Purdy, agreeing to a three-year contract with a player who had 1,000 yards receiving in each of his first 11 seasons before injuries limited Evans to eight games in 2025.

The move for the 32-year-old comes with the Niners planning to release Brandon Aiyuk; they placed him on the reserve/left squad list last season after he stopped showing up to rehabilitate a knee injury that had sidelined him for a year.

The Colts keeping Pierce on a \$116 million, four-year deal coincided with them sending Michael Pittman Jr. to Pittsburgh for a late-round draft pick. Pittman spent his first six seasons with Indianapolis.

Tennessee's headliners were defensive end John Franklin-Myers and cornerback Alontae Taylor on deals with annual average values of at least \$20 million. Franklin-Myers played for the Jets when Saleh was head coach.

The Titans filled a need at receiver by adding Wan'Dale Robinson, who was drafted by the Giants when Daboll was a rookie head coach in 2022. Daboll was fired by the Giants last season.

Another former Giants player, cornerback Cor'Dale Flott, also is headed to the Titans, who are rebuilding a battered secondary and have a decision looming on L'Jarius Sneed's future.

The 25-year-old Robinson was the first player 5-foot-8 or shorter with 1,000 yards receiving since 5-7 Richard Johnson in 1989 and the third since the 1970 AFL-NFL merger. Robinson had 1,014 yards on 92 catches.

Davis was drafted in the third round by the Jets in 2012 and returned in 2017 after a year in Cleveland. The 37-year-old played the last eight seasons for the Saints — including three with current Jets coach Aaron Glenn as the defensive backs coach.

Onyemata, a fourth-round pick of the Saints in 2016, also knows Glenn from their time in New Orleans. He played the past three years in Atlanta and has 31 career sacks and 401 tackles.

Ossai had five sacks in each of the last two seasons for Cincinnati.

The Vikings kept one of their unrestricted free agents off the market with a new contract for 10th-year veteran linebacker Eric Wilson, and they agreed to terms with former Pittsburgh Steelers cornerback James Pierre.

Wilson, who returned to his original team last season, had career highs in tackles for loss (17), sacks (6 1/2), quarterback hits (10) and forced fumbles (four).

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Cleveland added guard Zion Johnson, a 2022 first-round pick who spent his first four seasons with the Los Angeles Chargers. The Browns are looking at an overhaul in the offense, with several starters in free agency.

Running back J.K. Dobbins is returning to Denver on a two-year contract. He ran for 772 yards and four touchdowns over 10 games before a foot injury in November ended his season. Dobbins returned to practice before the AFC championship game but didn't dress for the Broncos' 10-7 loss to New England.

Detroit agreed to a contract with Larry Borom, the likely replacement for Taylor Decker after he asked for his release before the start of free agency. Borom has 38 starts over five seasons with Miami and Chicago. The Lions also added Cade Mays, who started 20 games at center the past two seasons in Carolina.

Buffalo has a starting need at cornerback and agreed to a three-year deal with Dee Alford. He has 23 starts in 64 games over four seasons with Atlanta. Alford could start opposite Christian Benford. The Bills also agreed to sign quarterback Kyle Allen to a two-year contract, bringing him back for a second stint as Josh Allen's backup following Mitch Trubisky's departure to Tennessee.

The Giants brought in two players familiar to new coach John Harbaugh from his time in Baltimore, adding tight end Isaiah Likely and All-Pro punter Jordan Stout. They also filled a defensive need with linebacker Tremaine Edmunds.

Looking to bounce back from a 5-12 season, Washington spent big money in free agency to sign edge rusher Odafe Oweh, while also bringing back starting left tackle Laremy Tunsil. Oweh's contract is worth \$100 million over four years, with \$68 million guaranteed.

The Cowboys made another move for a beleaguered defense that was among the NFL's worst last season, agreeing on a three-year deal with safety Jalen Thompson, who spent his first seven seasons in Arizona.

Today in History: March 11, massive earthquake and tsunami in Japan kill nearly 20,000

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Wednesday, March 11, the 70th day of 2026. There are 295 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On March 11, 2011, a magnitude 9 earthquake and resulting tsunami struck Japan's northeastern coast, killing nearly 20,000 people and severely damaging the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station.

Also on this date:

In 1918, what were believed to be the first confirmed U.S. cases of a deadly global flu pandemic were reported among U.S. Army soldiers stationed at Fort Riley, Kansas; 46 soldiers would die. (The influenza outbreak would ultimately kill an estimated 20 million to 40 million people worldwide.)

In 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Lend-Lease Act, which provided war supplies to Allied countries during World War II.

In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev was chosen to succeed the late Konstantin Chernenko as general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party.

In 2004, three days before general elections in Spain, 10 bombs exploded in quick succession inside commuter trains in Madrid, killing 193 people in an attack linked to al-Qaida-inspired militants.

In 2006, former Serb leader Slobodan Milošević was found dead at age 64 of a heart attack in his prison cell in the Netherlands, abruptly ending his four-year U.N. war crimes trial.

In 2010, a federal appeals court in San Francisco upheld the use of the words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance and "In God We Trust" on U.S. currency.

In 2012, U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Robert Bales shot and killed 16 Afghan villagers — mostly women and children — as they slept. (Bales later pleaded guilty and was sentenced to life in prison without parole.)

In 2021, President Joe Biden signed into law a \$1.9 trillion COVID relief package that he said would help defeat the virus and nurse the economy back to health. Lower-income Americans would receive up to \$1,400 in direct payments, along with extended unemployment benefits.

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In 2025, Philippine ex-President Rodrigo Duterte was arrested on a warrant issued by the International Criminal Court on charges of crimes against humanity for his alleged involvement in killings in a war he waged against drugs in a political career spanning decades.

Today's birthdays: Media mogul Rupert Murdoch is 95. Former ABC News correspondent Sam Donaldson is 92. Singer Bobby McFerrin is 76. Actor Elias Koteas (ee-LY'-uhs koh-TAY'-uhs) is 65. Actor Alex Kingston is 63. Actor John Barrowman is 59. Singer Lisa Loeb is 58. Actor Terrence Howard is 57. Actor Johnny Knoxville is 55. Basketball Hall of Famer Becky Hammon is 49. Rock musicians and twins Benji and Joel Madden (Good Charlotte; The Madden Brothers) are 47. Singer LeToya Luckett is 45. Actor Thora Birch is 44. Actor Jodie Comer is 33. Actor Madison Brydges is 22.