

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 1 of 73

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 News Headlines](#)
- [3- Baby-sitter Ad](#)
- [4- National Honor Society](#)
- [5- Name Released in Gregory County Fatal Crash](#)
- [5- Lincoln County Fatal Crash](#)
- [6- Graduation Cards Ad](#)
- [7- GDI Fitness Center Ad](#)
- [8- SD SearchLight: Higher sales taxes for lower property taxes: Final plan takes shape at South Dakota Legislature](#)
- [9- SD SearchLight: Legislative budget committee partially restores cuts to needs-based assistance for families](#)
- [10- SD SearchLight: South Dakota lawmakers reject mandatory E-Verify checks of worker citizenship, immigration status](#)
- [11- SD SearchLight: Adding more carcinogenic smoke to indoor spaces with cigar bars makes no sense](#)
- [12- SD SearchLight: Governor signs lab-grown meat moratorium, property protections, crypto, national security bills](#)
- [13- SD SearchLight: Long security lines start popping up at airports as TSA officers go without pay](#)
- [15- SD SearchLight: Dems demand swift Pentagon investigation into deadly air strike on girls' school in Iran](#)
- [16- SD SearchLight: Johnson leads in new poll about South Dakota Republican governor primary race](#)
- [16- SD SearchLight: Trump's Iran war is estimated to cost in the billions already, with no end in sight](#)
- [19- SD SearchLight: Summit permit for CO2 storage voided as second judge finds North Dakota law unconstitutional](#)
- [21- SD SearchLight: Republicans target public lands protections in a new way](#)
- [24- Weather Pages](#)
- [29- Daily Devotional](#)
- [30- Subscription Form](#)
- [31- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [32- News from the Associated Press](#)



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

Saturday, March 14

State A GBB Tourney in Watertown
Pickleball, 9:30 a.m., Elementary Gym

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 2 of 73

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.

Oil Lifeline Unlocked

The International Energy Agency, a coalition of 32 nations including the US, agreed yesterday to release a record 400 million barrels of oil from emergency reserves to ease disruptions caused by the Iran war.

The move comes amid escalating tensions in the Strait of Hormuz, which normally transports about 20% of the world's oil. Tehran claimed responsibility for at least one of three attacks on commercial vessels in and around the strait yesterday, while the US military said it attacked 16 Iranian mine-laying ships near the channel Tuesday. Oil flow through the strait has fallen to less than 10% of prewar levels, sending gasoline prices up roughly 20% for US consumers. The IEA's 400 million-barrel release—over 22% of its stockpile—is about how much oil typically passes through the strait every 20 days.

Since its founding in 1974, the energy watchdog has tapped its reserves five other times. The previous record release was about 182.7 million barrels in 2022, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Underwater Bees

Queen bumblebees are able to breathe underwater while hibernating, a study revealed yesterday. The physical mechanism behind this process is yet to be fully understood.

Queens are the only colony members that survive winter, spending six to nine months in a hibernating state called diapause. Their shallow burrows tend to become waterlogged, and in a 2024 study, a researcher studying the impact of pesticides accidentally discovered bees can survive while totally submerged. To examine this phenomenon, scientists placed bees underwater in refrigerated conditions for up to eight days. They noticed the bees were producing small amounts of carbon dioxide.

Researchers suspect the bees may have a physical gill—a thin layer of air surrounding them, enabling small amounts of oxygen intake and the release of carbon dioxide. While diapausing, the bees lower their metabolism by 99%, reducing energy intake needs. Even so, lactate accumulated, indicating the bees were supplementing with anaerobic respiration (as humans do during intense activity).

Central US Tornadoes

At least two people were killed and several others were wounded this week amid severe weather spanning Texas to Michigan. More than 18 million people were under a tornado watch as of this writing, with conditions expected to ease today.

Tornadoes are columns of rotating air formed by wind shear, when wind rapidly changes speed and direction with height, trapping air and circulating it horizontally. There is no national tornado season as there is with Atlantic hurricanes. Twisters typically form in the presence of thunderstorms in the afternoon and early evening. Tuesday saw as many as a dozen storms in Texas, Oklahoma, Iowa, Indiana, and Illinois—located in the US' so-called Tornado Alley. Several were nighttime tornadoes, which tend to occur less frequently but may be deadlier, in part due to low visibility.

The storms came after at least eight people were killed in tornadoes last week.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Iran's soccer team will not compete in the 2026 World Cup, according to the nation's sports minister; the decision comes after President Donald Trump reportedly said the team was welcome to play.

Barbra Streisand to receive honorary Palme d'Or at Cannes Film Festival in May for her work across theater and film.

Quentin Tarantino's first stage play—a comedy set in 1830s Europe—to debut in London's West End early next year.

Team USA wins three gold medals in Paralympic cross-country skiing events; eight-time Paralympian Oksana Masters secures 22nd career medal.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 3 of 73

Science & Technology

Anthropic forms think tank to address threats AI poses to society amid dispute with federal government over AI use in warfare.

Meta unveils four in-house AI chips as it seeks to reduce reliance on Nvidia and AMD.

Scientists engineer biodegradable nanoparticles that teach the immune system to find and kill disease-causing cells, a feat that could improve cancer and autoimmune disease treatments.

Aging gastrointestinal tracts create molecules that weaken gut-brain connection, causing cognitive decline, according to study on mice; hormonal treatments reverse memory deficits.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 -0.1%, Dow -0.6%, Nasdaq +0.1%).

Consumer prices rise 2.4% in February, matching January's increase; experts anticipate a sharper rise in March due to the war in Iran.

Oracle shares rise 9.2% on strong third quarter earnings report and reassurance the company will not raise additional debt to fund AI projects.

Rivian spinoff Mind Robotics raises \$500M to build industrial AI-powered robots.

President Donald Trump says the US will build first domestic oil refinery in nearly 50 years, with a \$300B investment from India's largest privately held energy company; the refinery will be located in Texas.

Politics & World Affairs

Preliminary inquiry from the Pentagon finds a US strike was responsible for bombing an Iranian school for girls, relied on outdated targeting information.

Members of the UK's House of Lords drop objection to the ousting of 92 remaining aristocrats who inherited their positions; dukes, earls, and viscounts are expected to be ejected from the legislative upper chamber within weeks.

Department of Homeland Security restores Global Entry at US airports; the agency had suspended the program amid ongoing partial shutdown.

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Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 4 of 73



National Honor Society

National Honor Society Induction Ceremony will be March 17, 2026 @ 6:00pm. Ceremony will be held in the library conference room.

Left back- Brody Lord and Blake Lord
Left Middle- Liby Althoff, Halee Harder, Taryn Traphagen, Hailey Pauli, Emerlee Jones, Kella Tracy, Teagan Hanten, Kira Clocksene, and Carlee Johnson
Left Front- Paisley Mitchell, McKenna Tietz, Leah Jones, Ashlynn Warrington, Avery Crank
Not pictured- Claire Schuelke

Name Released in Gregory County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash

Where: 339th Avenue near 292nd Street, one mile east and three miles south of Gregory, SD

When: 4:47 p.m., Saturday, March 7, 2026

Vehicle 1: 2016 Honda UTV

Driver 1: Brett David Oliver, 53-year-old male from Gregory, SD, fatal injuries

Seat belt Used: No

Gregory County, S.D. – A Gregory, SD man died Saturday in a single-vehicle crash on 339th Avenue, three miles south of Gregory.

Preliminary crash information indicates Brett David Oliver, the driver of a 2016 Honda UTV, was traveling southbound on 339th Avenue near 292nd Street when the vehicle left the roadway and entered a steep embankment and rolled into a creek.

The time of the crash is under investigation. The driver was transported to a nearby hospital where he died from injuries sustained in the crash.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol is investigating the crash. All information released so far is preliminary. The Highway Patrol is an agency of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.

Lincoln County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash

Where: Interstate 29, mile marker 71, four miles south of Sioux Falls, SD

When: 11:38 a.m., Tuesday, March 10, 2026

Vehicle 1: GMC Denali

Driver 1: 47-year-old male from Sioux Falls, SD, fatal injuries

Seat belt Used: No

Lincoln County, S.D. – A Sioux Falls man died yesterday in a single-vehicle crash on I-29, four miles south of Sioux Falls.

The name of the person involved has not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates that a 2007 GMC Denali was traveling northbound on I-29 near mile marker 71 when the vehicle gradually traveled off the roadway into the media where it vaulted of a culvert and began to roll. The driver was ejected. The driver was transported to Sanford Hospital where he was pronounced deceased.

The driver was not wearing a seat belt.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol is investigating the crash. All information released so far is preliminary. The Highway Patrol is an agency of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 6 of 73



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Higher sales taxes for lower property taxes: Final plan takes shape at South Dakota Legislature

Major bills await governor's signature as annual session heads into last day

BY: MEGHAN O'BRIEN AND SETH TUPPER

PIERRE — After dozens of bills and months of debate about options for reducing homeowner property taxes, South Dakota lawmakers settled Wednesday on plans to use revenue from new and increased sales taxes.

State senators voted 20-13 on Wednesday in favor of the last major part of a multi-bill approach. Senate Bill 245 would capture \$114 million in ongoing annual revenue from next year's scheduled increase of the statewide sales tax rate from 4.2% to 4.5%, and would use that money to reduce local school district property taxes on owner-occupied homes. Schools fund whatever portion of their budget they can with local property taxes, and the rest of their funding comes mostly from state government.

The legislation, which now goes to the governor, would also take about \$56 million from state reserves to get the effort started before the sales tax rate increase.

"This provides statewide relief," said Senate Majority Leader Jim Mehlhaff, R-Pierre. "It spreads the tax base for how we fund education. I think it gets more people to have skin in the game funding education."

Total sales taxes could hit 8%, senator says

Three years ago, state legislators and then-Gov. Kristi Noem approved a temporary state sales tax reduction from 4.5% to 4.2% and scheduled it to sunset in July 2027.

South Dakota currently has the 36th highest sales tax rate in the nation, averaging about 6% after optional local sales taxes are included. The statewide rate increase, combined with other legislation and local decisions, could raise the total sales tax to 8% in some areas of the state, said Senate President Pro Tempore Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls.

"Our 'crowning achievement' is going to potentially raise our sales tax up to 8% in the state on communities to provide property tax relief — not to all people that are paying in these taxes, but just to some," he said. "There has to be quality, good tax policy, and this is not it."

Karr was referencing the possibility of new sales taxes from the other major bill in the package, Senate Bill 96. It will give counties the option to impose up to a half-percent sales tax, with proceeds used for credits to offset the county portion of property taxes on owner-occupied homes. It passed through both chambers and awaits a signature from the governor, who proposed it.

Another, separate bill awaiting the governor's consideration would allow cities to impose additional, temporary sales taxes up to 1% to pay for specific projects, if approved by at least a 60% vote of the public.

Cities can already charge sales taxes up to 2%, plus an additional 1% on lodging, prepared food, alcohol and event ticket sales. Counties are not currently allowed to have sales taxes.

Earlier this session, Karr tried and failed to make the state sales tax rate reduction permanent. Some senators said Wednesday that they are resigned to the reality of the rate going back up.

"Accept it and move on," said Sen. Taffy Howard, R-Rapid City. "I would much rather have that increase go to help fund education to a greater degree, and in the process help homeowners."

The bill capturing revenue from the sales tax rate increase appears to have the support of Gov. Larry Rhoden, who endorsed a five-bill property tax reduction package last week with legislative leaders. The final version of the bill capitalizing on the sales tax increase was proposed by House Speaker Jon Hansen,

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 9 of 73

one of three people running against Rhoden for the Republican nomination for governor in the June 2 primary election.

Savings on property tax, extra spending on sales tax

Lawmakers have been hearing complaints about homeowner property taxes since the COVID-19 pandemic, when a surge of in-migration and other factors drove up taxes along with home prices.

If both of the major property tax reduction bills are signed into law, South Dakota homeowners could save hundreds of dollars annually. Rhoden's office has estimated that the money from the statewide sales tax increase will reduce homeowner property taxes 14-22%, equating to a savings of \$548 on a home valued at \$325,000.

In counties that adopt the optional half-percent sales tax, Rhoden's office estimates another 10-25% property tax reduction, or an average savings of \$660 per homeowner.

Consumers will also spend untold additional amounts on sales taxes. Under questioning by South Dakota Searchlight, state Bureau of Finance and Management Commissioner Jim Terwilliger estimated recently that the optional county sales tax alone would cause him to spend an additional \$160 in sales taxes each year for his four-person family.

Fate of other tax bills

The state's budget-setting committee also approved House Bill 1051 on Wednesday, which sets lower maximum property tax levies for education, by accounting for the extra state money in the education funding formula from the statewide sales tax rate increase. That will be considered by the rest of the Legislature on Thursday, the final day of the annual legislative session except for a day to consider vetoes from the governor on March 30.

Two other bills from the five-bill property tax plan failed. Those were House Bill 1323, which would have made it easier for citizen petitioners to force elections on local government decisions that increase property taxes, and House Bill 1253, which would have limited growth in taxable home valuations to 5% a year with a reset to market values every five years.

Some other property tax bills passed this legislative session, including expansions to property tax relief programs for veterans, and bills making other minor adjustments to the property tax system.

Lawmakers and Rhoden also passed a major property tax bill last year to slow property tax increases. Among other provisions, that law temporarily caps the countywide growth of taxable home values, and temporarily limits the value from new construction and growth that can be used to increase property tax collections. It also prevents some home improvements from causing higher home valuations.

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.

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

Legislative budget committee partially restores cuts to needs-based assistance for families

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER

PIERRE — The South Dakota Legislature's main budget committee voted Wednesday to partially restore cuts made to a federal-state program that provides needs-based financial support for families.

The same committee voted last year, due to lower-than-anticipated state revenues, to cut state funding for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families by 30% while authorizing the state Department of Social Services to use excess federal funds carried over from prior years. The change decreased state funding to

the minimum amount required to receive federal funding, also called the "maintenance of effort."

TANF is a federal-state program used in South Dakota to provide assistance to families with children who need financial support because of the death of a parent, an absent parent, or the unemployment or physical or mental incapacity of a parent. Caregiver participants are required to work, search or train for a job.

Instead of replacing the decrease in state funds entirely with carryover federal funds last year, the state Department of Social Services cut TANF benefits by 10%. The move saved the state about \$1.5 million, department Secretary Matt Althoff said at the time, and was expected to reduce benefits for the average household by \$51 per month.

The program distributed \$15.3 million in benefits in fiscal year 2024, and the average monthly benefit per household was \$518.06. Nearly 5,000 people in the state, most of them children, benefit from the program.

Althoff said last year that the department would gradually cut benefits until it reached a 30% reduction.

That decision set off a monthslong tug-of-war between the department and Rep. Erik Muckey, D-Sioux Falls, who serves on the budget committee, about whether the committee truly understood the department's plan when the committee approved it last year.

Wednesday's decision to partially restore funding for benefits passed with an 11-7 vote. Two members of the committee, including Muckey, are Democrats, while the rest are Republicans. The decision incorporates the funding into the broader annual budget legislation that will be considered by the full Legislature on Thursday, which is the last day of the annual legislative session except for a day March 30 to consider vetoes.

"Caring for those in poverty is not a partisan issue," Muckey told South Dakota Searchlight after the meeting, "and today demonstrated that the Legislature is indeed focused on caring for the vulnerable, managing our financial obligations responsibly and not putting folks in deep poverty on the chopping block to do so."

The decision includes a \$427,000 increase in state funding coupled with another \$427,000 increase in the department's authority to spend carryover federal funds. Together, that's a 5% increase in TANF benefits — restoring half of the benefit cut the state Department of Social Services implemented last year.

Muckey said he hopes the Legislature works with the department to define the future of the program, better understand how the funds are spent and avoid future cuts.

"This clarifies the intent of the Legislature more than anything else," Muckey said, adding, "we have to figure out how, going forward, we're going to sustain those benefits while also understanding that the reserves are finite."

Sen. Taffy Howard, R-Rapid City, said she was concerned increasing the funds was premature and would lead to future increases. She added that some TANF recipients receive benefits from other state and federal programs.

"When we voted last year to get this down to the maintenance of effort," Howard said, "we do not now — one year later — need to undo that."

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

South Dakota lawmakers reject mandatory E-Verify checks of worker citizenship, immigration status

BY: MEGHAN O'BRIEN

PIERRE — A bill that would have required some South Dakota employers to use a federal website to verify employees' work eligibility failed in the state Senate on Wednesday, the second-to-last day of the annual legislative session.

E-Verify is a free website from the federal government that compares records from the U.S. Department

of Homeland Security and the U.S. Social Security Administration to the information on an employee's I-9, an employment verification document that employers must file for all new employees, regardless of citizenship status.

In its final, amended form, House Bill 1209 would have required employers with more than 25 employees to check an employee's documents with E-Verify within 10 days of their first day of work. The state's Department of Labor requires employers to file new hire documents within 20 days.

Sen. Sue Peterson, R-Sioux Falls, said she contacted small-business owners in her district about the bill. "They were already doing what they were required to do, and adding E-Verify to it didn't add anything," she said. "In fact, they were happy to do it as their patriotic duty."

The bill said that if the state's attorney general investigated a business and had reasonable cause to believe an employer committed a violation, the state could recover \$2,000 in civil penalties per unauthorized or unverified employee.

Including E-Verify as another step in the hiring process could curb unauthorized immigration to the state, according to the bill's supporters. But it also would put undue burdens on small-business owners, according to Sen. Randy Deibert, R-Spearfish.

"Yes, there's a problem. Does this solve the problem? Absolutely not," he said. "It increases my overhead, which means I'm charging each of you more for my services."

The bill in its initial form succeeded in the House in February. Senators later amended it, as did a conference committee of members from each chamber.

The amended bill failed 15-18 on Wednesday in the Senate, and a subsequent attempt to revive the bill also failed.

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.

COMMENTARY

Adding more carcinogenic smoke to indoor spaces with cigar bars makes no sense

by Sara Alhasnawi

South Dakota voters have already made their position clear: They want smoke-free public spaces.

Lawmakers, however, seem to think they know better. They are attempting to significantly weaken that law via House Bill 1215, which has passed both chambers of the Legislature and awaits consideration by the governor.

HB 1215 would allow local municipalities to grant licenses to bars to allow cigar smoking, an erosion of the voter-approved comprehensive smoke-free law.

That law was first passed with bipartisan legislative support and signed by the governor in 2009. It was challenged and sent to the ballot in 2010, where voters decisively reaffirmed it by prohibiting smoking in nearly all workplaces, including restaurants, bars and gaming facilities. The initiative received 64% approval — a clear signal that voters understood the dangers of secondhand smoke.

Public support for smoke-free spaces has only grown in the years since. Voters recognized a simple truth: There is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke, and they did not want it in their public spaces. HB 1215 weakens that law, which was updated in 2019 to include e-cigarettes.

As has become typical in our state, HB 1215 moved through the Legislature with little public notice or meaningful discussion. If enacted, it would increase the number of businesses allowing indoor smoking.

The consequences would be both swift and damaging.

In recent years, South Dakota lawmakers have increasingly taken steps to undercut voter-approved initiatives. Medicaid expansion, for example, has been challenged multiple times with varying degrees of success, as lawmakers fast-track changes to policies that citizens spent months organizing and working

to pass.

They are now handing a significant gift to Big Tobacco, which does plenty to undercut the health of South Dakotans. Tobacco products remain the leading preventable cause of disease and death in the state as smoking is linked to at least 12 types of cancer, including lung, liver and colorectal as well as heart disease. The industry further stresses the state's health care system as smoking adds \$433 million to South Dakota health care costs each year, including \$75.5 million in Medicaid alone. There will be 6,200 South Dakotans diagnosed with cancer this year and 1,810 cancer deaths. Of those deaths, nearly 30% will have been caused by smoking.

Big Tobacco works tirelessly to undermine the voter-supported laws designed to prevent South Dakotans from suffering the health consequences of exposure to their deadly and addictive products.

Allowing more establishments to permit smoking in the public spaces where South Dakotans work, gather and spend time with friends and family puts both employees and patrons at risk. Adding more carcinogenic smoke to indoor spaces simply makes no sense — except for Big Tobacco's profit margin.

Earlier this year, with a dangerous Medicaid expansion repeal bill on the table, lawmakers reversed course and affirmed the voter-approved law.

Lawmakers and Gov. Rhoden should, now again, honor the will of the voters.

Sara Alhasnawi is the state lead ambassador for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network South Dakota, and a medical student and research fellow at the University of South Dakota-Sanford School of Medicine.

Governor signs lab-grown meat moratorium, property protections, crypto, national security bills

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

Gov. Larry Rhoden signed a compromise bill Wednesday imposing a five-year moratorium on lab-grown meat in South Dakota after rejecting a permanent ban last month.

"By talking to producers, legislators, and other stakeholders, we worked together to chart a strong path forward," Rhoden, a Republican, said in a press release.

The new law bars the sale, manufacture or distribution of "cell-cultured protein" products from July 1 this year through June 30, 2031. Violations are punishable by up to 30 days in jail, a fine of up to \$500, or both.

Rhoden previously vetoed another bill that would have effectively banned lab-grown meat by adding it to a list of adulterated foods. In his veto letter, Rhoden said "it's against our values to ban products just because we don't like them" and instead backed a moratorium to allow for more study and for litigation over bans in other states to play out.

Lawmakers then sent him a bill doing exactly that. They have not yet acted on his veto, which would require a two-thirds majority of each chamber to override.

The moratorium bill was one of many Rhoden signed on Wednesday, including those listed below. He has signed 147 bills into law and vetoed one so far this legislative session, which ends Thursday except for a day on March 30 to consider vetoes.

'Bossly Bill'

Senate Bill 88 states that if a property owner denies permission, only an "examination," not a "survey," is permitted by an entity asserting a right to access land via the power of eminent domain. Developers will need a pending or approved siting permit application detailing where and when they plan to enter, how long they plan to be there, and what they'll be doing.

The bill defines an "examination" as a minimally invasive procedure that causes no more than minor soil disturbance, while defining a "survey" as a more detailed investigation.

The bill was dubbed the "Bossly Bill" for Jared Bossly of rural Aberdeen. He became a prominent opponent of Summit Carbon Solutions' proposed carbon dioxide sequestration pipeline after confrontations

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 13 of 73

with the company during its attempts to access his land for surveys. Lawmakers and Rhoden adopted a law last year banning eminent domain for carbon pipelines, and the project remains stalled.

National security bills

Senate Bill 17 bans South Dakota candidates and political committees from accepting campaign contributions from foreign nationals.

Senate Bill 40 aims to tighten compliance with South Dakota's foreign-owned ag-land restrictions by allowing the attorney general to seek civil penalties for those failing to file federal ownership reports.

Senate Bill 60 bans China, Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Russia or Venezuela from holding property in South Dakota.

Senate Bill 130 appropriates \$8 million from the state general fund to the South Dakota Ellsworth Development Authority for roads and other infrastructure near Ellsworth Air Force Base, which is undergoing heavy construction in anticipation of the arrival of B-21 bomber planes.

Digital currency fraud

Senate Bill 98 regulates virtual currency kiosks — ATM-like devices, sometimes with Bitcoin logos on the sides — to curb fraud by limiting users to \$1,000 per day and \$10,000 over 30 days, capping transaction charges at 25%, and requiring refunds for fraud victims who meet certain requirements.

Senate Bill 43 makes digital currency a seizable asset in criminal investigations, which Attorney General Marty Jackley's office said will give law enforcement tools to confiscate illicit cryptocurrency assets.

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.

Long security lines start popping up at airports as TSA officers go without pay

BY: JACOB FISCHLER

Passengers at a handful of airports this week waited in hours-long security lines as the government shutdown of the Department of Homeland Security dragged on.

Though Transportation Security Administration officers are required by law to work during a lapse in funding, more than usual have been absent after receiving only a partial paycheck during the most recent pay period. TSA officers will miss an entire paycheck this weekend if the shutdown is still in effect then.

No end to the shutdown appeared imminent Wednesday, as the U.S. Senate rejected a bill that would have funded TSA and other agencies in DHS that are not related to immigration enforcement.

In the meantime, TSA officers are not being paid.

Most live paycheck-to-paycheck, said Johnny Jones, the secretary-treasurer of the American Federation of Government Employees Council 100, which represents TSA agents.

The lack of pay has contributed to absenteeism, Jones added. The union does not condone coordinated "sick-outs," which are illegal.

But individual officers miss work for one of three reasons during a shutdown, he said: pre-planned time off, legitimate illness or personal emergencies, and those calling in sick but seeking other work to pay bills.

"If you're normally receiving a paycheck, you wouldn't have that third group," he said.

Some of those who are working are going without lunch or making other sacrifices, Jones added. And he said two colleagues were evicted during the most recent shutdown last fall, which lasted for 43 days.

The U.S. war against Iran, which has an estimated price in the billions of dollars in just its first two weeks, has also driven resentment among TSA workers, Jones said.

"One of the things that I've heard from the colleagues is that, man, we got plenty of money to go fight wars and bomb Iran, but we can't pay our own employees," he said.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 14 of 73

Long lines

No exceptionally long wait times were reported Wednesday, but the previous few days saw several examples of snarled security lines.

Security lines topped three hours at Houston's William P. Hobby International Airport on Monday and Tuesday.

Lines at Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport were up to two hours Monday and the airport's social media drew a direct line to the shutdown.

"Due to impacts from the federal government's partial shutdown, there continues to be a shortage of TSA workers at the security checkpoint ... which is causing longer-than-average lines," the airport's X account posted.

Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport also urged passengers to leave extra time to account for factors including "TSA staffing constraints."

CBS News reported Wednesday that more than 300 TSA agents have left their jobs since the shutdown began. TSA officials did not respond to messages seeking confirmation of that figure.

Senate gridlock

The top Democrat on the U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee, Washington's Patty Murray, sought unanimous consent Wednesday for the Senate to approve a bill that would fund all of DHS other than Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Customs and Border Protection, and the secretary's office.

Sen. Katie Britt, an Alabama Republican who chairs the subcommittee on Homeland Security funding, objected.

Murray's bill "would effectively defund our law enforcement officers that are charged with keeping Americans safe," Britt said.

Each party blamed the other for the impasse, which has been unbreachable since the department's funding lapsed Feb. 14.

Following the January fatal shootings of two U.S. citizens by immigration officers in Minneapolis, Democrats are demanding changes to immigration agencies' conduct as a condition of funding the department.

Republicans have said they are willing to negotiate the issue, but the parties disagree on what to do for the department, which also includes the Coast Guard and the Federal Emergency Management Agency, in the meantime.

Republican leaders sought to pass a short-term continuing resolution to fund the entire department, but Democrats rejected it, saying it would allow the operation of immigration agencies without adding accountability measures.

"Right now, TSA agents are going without pay because Republicans and the White House have decided they would rather shut down all of DHS than pass some very basic reforms to rein in ICE and Border Patrol," Murray said. "We also want TSA and FEMA funded, but we are not going to be blackmailed into cutting a blank check for ICE to get it done."

Politics cited

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, of South Dakota, said Democrats have stopped negotiating on DHS funding in a bid to keep the issue alive for the November midterm elections.

"The American people are tired," he said. "Lines get longer at the airports because TSA isn't funded. The American people want us to do our jobs. Republicans are at the table. We're ready to work toward a solution. Democrats have walked away."

Jones, the AFGC member and TSA officer, declined to say which approach to short-term funding was preferable, but said it was Congress' job to fund the federal government.

"We all swear the same oath to the same Constitution," he said. "Now my job function is a little different than theirs, so they need to do theirs so I can do mine."

Jacob covers federal policy and helps direct national coverage as deputy Washington bureau chief for States Newsroom. Based in Oregon, he focuses on Western issues. His coverage areas include climate, energy development, public lands and infrastructure.

Dems demand swift Pentagon investigation into deadly air strike on girls' school in Iran

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — The Department of Defense must quickly release the results of its investigation into whether the U.S. military bombed a girls' elementary school in Iran that left at least 168 people dead, according to a letter sent Wednesday that was signed by nearly every Senate Democrat.

"To be clear, the war against Iran is a war of choice without Congressional authorization," they wrote. "Nonetheless, as these military actions continue, the United States and Israel must abide by U.S. and international law, including the law of armed conflict."

The letter from 46 senators to Secretary Pete Hegseth calls on Pentagon officials to conduct "a swift investigation into the strikes on this school and any other potential U.S. military actions causing civilian harm, and the findings must be released to the public as soon as possible, along with any measures to pursue accountability."

A spokesperson for the Department of Defense said in a statement the "incident is under investigation."

US responsibility probed

President Donald Trump said while leaving the White House Wednesday that he didn't know anything about preliminary reports that the U.S. is responsible for the bombing. The New York Times reported earlier in the day that an "ongoing military investigation has determined that the United States is responsible for a deadly Tomahawk missile strike on an Iranian elementary school."

The lawmakers' letter requests the Pentagon answer a series of questions, including whether the U.S. military conducted the strike on Feb. 28 on the girls' elementary school. If it was a U.S. strike, what the military meant to bomb and what led to the school being hit instead. Whether the department is "complying with rules to prevent the commission of war crimes." If the DOD created a "no-strike list" before bombing began in Iran and what other steps military officials have taken to reduce or prevent harm to civilians. Whether the military is using artificial intelligence tools in its operations in Iran. What steps the department took to comply with the laws of war.

Senators signing letter

The letter was signed by Arizona Sens. Ruben Gallego and Mark Kelly, California Sens. Alex Padilla and Adam Schiff, Colorado Sens. Michael Bennet and John Hickenlooper, Connecticut Sens. Richard Blumenthal and Chris Murphy, Delaware Sens. Lisa Blunt Rochester and Chris Coons, Georgia Sens. Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock, Hawaii Sens. Mazie Hirono and Brian Schatz, Illinois Sens. Tammy Duckworth and Dick Durbin, Maryland Sens. Angela Alsobrooks and Chris Van Hollen, Massachusetts Sens. Ed Markey and Elizabeth Warren, Michigan Sens. Gary Peters and Elissa Slotkin, Minnesota Sens. Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith, Nevada Sens. Catherine Cortez Masto and Jacky Rosen, New Hampshire Sens. Maggie Hassan and Jeanne Shaheen, New Jersey Sens. Cory Booker and Andy Kim, New Mexico Sens. Martin Heinrich and Ben Ray Lujan, New York Sens. Kirsten Gillibrand and Chuck Schumer, Oregon Sens. Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden, Rhode Island Sens. Jack Reed and Sheldon Whitehouse, Vermont Sen. Peter Welch, Virginia Sens. Tim Kaine and Mark Warner, Washington Sens. Maria Cantwell and Patty Murray, and Wisconsin Sen. Tammy Baldwin. All are Democrats.

Maine Sen. Angus King and Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, both independents who caucus with the Democrats, signed the letter as well.

Pennsylvania's John Fetterman was the sole Democrat not to sign the letter.

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.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 16 of 73

Johnson leads in new poll about South Dakota Republican governor primary race

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

A new poll shows U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson leading the race for South Dakota's Republican nomination for governor by a 10-point margin, but still below the level needed to avoid a runoff.

The KELOLAND-commissioned Emerson College Polling survey results, released Wednesday, found Johnson at 28%, followed by businessman Toby Doeden at 18%, Gov. Larry Rhoden at 17% and state House Speaker Jon Hansen at 14%. Another 23% were undecided.

Under state law, if no candidate wins at least 35% in the June 2 primary election, the top two advance to a runoff eight weeks later.

Emerson said it surveyed 413 Republican primary voters March 7-9, with a credibility interval — which Emerson said is similar to a margin of error — of plus or minus 4.8 percentage points.

Johnson also polled at 28% and had leads in two South Dakota News Watch-Chiesman Center for Democracy polls conducted last year.

In April results, Johnson had 28%, Rhoden 27%, Marty Jackley (who has since declared himself a candidate for U.S. House rather than governor) 18%, Doeden 4% and Hansen 2%. In October results, Johnson had 28% and Rhoden 27%, with Doeden rising to 15% and Hansen to 10%.

In a broader survey of 1,000 South Dakota voters, the Emerson poll found that 55% approve of President Donald Trump's job performance, while approval ratings were 37% for U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds, 35% for Rhoden and Johnson, and 34% for U.S. Senate Majority Leader John Thune, who are all Republicans.

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.

Trump's Iran war is estimated to cost in the billions already, with no end in sight

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — Members of Congress have not formally authorized a war in Iran, though they may soon be expected to approve emergency funding for the endeavor without any projection from the Trump administration as to how long it may last or the full cost, not just in dollars but in American troop and civilian lives.

Experts on defense spending interviewed by States Newsroom say the cost of weeks of air bombing will mount into the billions of dollars, a sum that will balloon if ground troops are sent into Iran to undertake regime change and if the war extends for months to come.

Defense Department officials briefed Congress on Monday that the Pentagon spent \$5.6 billion on munitions alone during the first two days of the war, according to a congressional aide not authorized to speak publicly. The aide expects DOD has spent into the double digits in the days since.

President Donald Trump has sent mixed signals about the timeline and end goals for the war, called Operation Epic Fury. He at first said the bombing campaign he began alongside the Israeli government could last between four and six weeks and on Monday said it is possible it will end "quickly." Trump, however, hasn't ruled out a longer assault or the deployment of ground troops.

Republican lawmakers who control Congress say the ongoing attack is an essential national security undertaking and that they won't constrain Trump in his role as commander-in-chief.

Democrats, who tried unsuccessfully to remove U.S. troops from hostilities until approved by Congress, will be needed to provide enough votes to move any supplemental spending request through the Senate — one possible obstacle to a prolonged conflict.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 17 of 73

Even a relatively brief war will have long-lasting, far-reaching consequences for the millions of people pulled into the conflict.

"One lesson of history is that a war that is supposedly short or brief has these huge repercussions that ripple across time," said Stephanie Savell, director of the Cost of War project at the Watson School of International & Public Affairs at Brown University.

Neither the White House nor the Office of Management and Budget have disclosed publicly how much the bombing has cost taxpayers so far or how much spending it might eventually require. A Defense Department spokesperson said they "have nothing to provide on this at this time." The top Democrat on the House Budget Committee, Rep. Brendan Boyle of Pennsylvania, has asked the Congressional Budget Office to come up with a number.

Comparison with Iraq, Afghanistan

Michael O'Hanlon, director of research in the foreign policy program at the liberal-leaning Brookings Institution, said a ballpark estimate for the military costs of war during an "extended air campaign" would normally run a couple of billion dollars a month.

"But at this point, I think we're more likely in the couple billion a week range," he said.

Achieving long-lasting regime change, which Trump has spoken about often since the war began, could be much more costly, both in terms of American spending and troops' lives, as well as civilian casualties.

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq averaged about \$1 million per deployed U.S. troop per year once all of the infrastructure, equipment, health care and other factors were rolled into the cost of war.

During the peak of those wars, O'Hanlon said, there were about 100,000 to 175,000 troops in those two countries and the United States was spending about \$200 billion annually.

"If you needed at least 100,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan, you could conceivably need a quarter million or more in Iran if you're really going to try to occupy and stabilize the whole country," he said. "So that means now you're getting into the range of \$250 to \$300 billion a year for a presence that would stay in Iran for a full 12 months. And then each and every year it would be additional."

That, however, is just the potential cost for the military. It doesn't include damage to U.S. diplomatic facilities in the region or other costs associated with war.

"You've got your infrastructure damage as well as higher energy costs around the world. And already talk of less fertilizer being produced, which is going to reduce crop yields," O'Hanlon said. "So there are all sorts of second-order effects."

'Wars are never quick or cheap or easy'

The death toll for U.S. troops, seven of whom have already died, could also increase depending on the scope of the conflict.

There were about 150 combat fatalities during the first Gulf War in the early 1990s, as well as about 150 deaths from training and accidents in the lead-up and aftermath, O'Hanlon said.

The war in Afghanistan led to the deaths of about 2,500 U.S. troops across roughly two decades. About 4,500 Americans died in the 15 years of the war in Iraq, he said.

Savell, of the Cost of War program at Brown University, said research has shown that "wars are never quick or cheap or easy."

The Iraq War that began in 2003, she said, is one of many examples of political leaders messaging ahead of time that a conflict would be "short and decisive and relatively inexpensive."

"We see many of those kinds of narratives being, you know, a refrain these days in relation to Iran as well," Savell said. "So I think that the comparison in that sense is apt."

The Iraq war also had major unanticipated consequences for those living in the region, including "that the U.S. invasion was partially responsible for the rise of the Islamic State," Savell said.

"And that militant group has now spread its terror attacks around the world," she said.

In addition to the direct deaths of both troops and civilians that come from bullets, bombs and other

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 18 of 73

weapons of war, there will be indirect deaths that stem from a lack of clean water, food and medical care. "Those kinds of things have really, really long-lasting and deep impacts for people, especially women and children," Savell said. "In contemporary wars, children ages zero to five are often the ones who end up suffering in the long term because of the diseases and the malnutrition that can be a reverberating effect of war."

Regime change ambitions

Seth G. Jones, president of the defense and security department at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said during a roundtable discussion that he believes it will be "very difficult" for the U.S. and Israeli militaries to cause "major damage to the Iranian regime largely from air and naval assets."

"I think even with ground troops, trying to social engineer a foreign government is incredibly difficult," he said.

The U.S. military's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as operations in Libya, he said, all used a combination of tactics, including ground forces.

"Those wars persisted for years, if not decades, after that. And we saw civil wars in all three cases and insurgencies," Jones said. "So, trying to do that without a meaningful ground presence, I think, is going to be virtually impossible. And then you run the risk of what the U.S. did in 1991 in Iraq and Hungary in 1956, which is it urged individuals to rise up, and they were slaughtered in both cases, the Kurds and the Hungarians."

Shaping an entirely new Iranian regime, he said, would take "months if not longer."

A prolonged conflict could lead to several challenges for the U.S. military, one of which will be restocking munitions like the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, or THAAD, about a quarter of which were drawn down in 2025, according to Jones.

"The more the U.S. fires, the less munitions it has, offensive and defensive, including available for its war plans ... against China in the Taiwan Strait, against North Korea on the Korean Peninsula and against Russia," Jones said.

There is also a chance the conflict could widen even further if Iranian supporters outside of that country decide to begin targeting the U.S. military or civilians.

"Do the Houthis start firing from Yemen? Do we see Iraqi Shia militia start conducting attacks, including against U.S. forces in Syria, Iraq, Jordan, or other locations?" Jones said. "Or do we see the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Quds Force and its partners conduct attacks elsewhere? We know they've conducted assassination plots, at least, in the U.S., including in the city of Washington. So how does that expand?"

The defense budget

Mara Karlin, visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution and a professor of practice at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies, said during a panel discussion that while the U.S. military has a large budget, its resources aren't infinite.

Congress approved \$838.7 billion for the Department of Defense in January as part of its annual government funding process. Republicans approved another \$150 billion for the Pentagon to spend on specific programs, like air and missile defense, as well as shipbuilding, in their "big, beautiful" law enacted in 2025.

"Fundamentally, the U.S. military can often find ways to walk and chew gum; it just gets really hard to do so and the costs can only increase," she said.

And while the possibility of Trump sending in U.S. ground forces isn't completely out of the picture, Karlin said that "is almost inconceivable."

"Ground troops mean you're getting ready for a lot of casualties, especially given that you have the potential for regime collapse," she said.

Making that type of choice, to put U.S. troops into Iran, would likely ensure the war "will be long and it will be ugly," despite the possibility of significant change.

"Iraq 2026 actually looks pretty different. The costs to get to that from 2003 onward were so extraor-

dinarily high," Karlin said. "And I think that it is safe to assume that if one were to use that analogy, you would see something as rough, if not much, much worse."

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.

Summit permit for CO2 storage voided as second judge finds North Dakota law unconstitutional

BY: JACOB ORLEDGE

A North Dakota judge has revoked Summit Carbon Solutions' permits for underground carbon dioxide storage, ruling parts of the state law they were issued under is unconstitutional, in another blow to the company's plans for a carbon pipeline network.

The latest ruling was issued in response to an appeal by a group of landowners who object to the state's attempt to force them to participate in Summit's project, which would store carbon dioxide under their land against their will.

"This decision stands as an important victory not only for our family, but for all North Dakota landowners who believe that private property rights and constitutional protections still matter," said Kurt Swenson, one of the landowners.

The decision written by South Central Judicial District Judge Jackson Lofgren is the second time this winter a North Dakota judge has reached the conclusion that the 2009 state law violates the state's constitution. The law authorizes regulators to permit the storage of carbon dioxide beneath the property of nonconsenting landowners.

"The district court just reversed the Industrial Commission's decision," said Derrick Braaten, the landowners' attorney in this case. "What that means is it essentially dismissed and invalidated the decision from the Industrial Commission to issue all these permits to Summit."

Northeast Judicial District Judge Anthony Swain Benson released a similar decision in December in a related lawsuit, filed by the Northwest Landowners Association, that directly challenged the law's constitutionality.

"While this case presents the issue in the context of an administrative appeal, the Court largely reaches the same conclusion," Lofgren wrote in the decision. "Because the findings and conclusions of the NDIC are not sustained by the North Dakota Constitution, they must be reversed."

Attorney Drew Wrigley said the North Dakota Legislature carefully weighed the interests of all private property owners who would be directly impacted by the law when it was proposed in 2009.

"They crafted this legislation mindful of their constitutional and stewardship responsibilities to all affected," Wrigley said in a statement. "We are carefully reviewing the district court decision and will chart a path toward a final resolution of this important public policy issue."

Summit's planned \$8 billion project would gather carbon dioxide emissions from ethanol plants in five states and bring it to North Dakota to be stored underground. The planned 2,500-mile pipeline network would include Tharaldson Ethanol near Casselton.

The project would inject the carbon dioxide into pore space, cavities in underground rock formations where emissions can be trapped, under 90,000 acres of land in parts of Oliver, Mercer and Morton counties. Approximately 92% of the landowners in the project area have voluntarily signed leases giving permission for their pore space to be used.

The Industrial Commission approved permits for the project in December 2024 and issued administrative orders that forcibly included the pore space of nonconsenting landowners in the project area, a process known as amalgamation. Carbon dioxide, once injected underground, will emanate outward and cross property lines without regard for whether the owner of the surface has signed a lease.

The 2009 law gives the Industrial Commission the power to authorize the use of this pore space over

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 20 of 73

the landowners' objections if at least 60% of the affected landowners have agreed to the project. It also states the agency must ensure the landowners "are or will be equitably compensated" as a condition of issuing the permit.

Lofgren determined this violates two protections afforded to private property owners when the government decides to take their property for public use. He pointed out the North Dakota Constitution guarantees property owners the right to have compensation determined in a jury trial and also requires the compensation be paid before the property is taken.

The judge ruled the Industrial Commission's decision to approve Summit's permits is reversed because it relied on a law now determined to be unconstitutional.

"As it stands right now, Summit no longer has any permits to do carbon sequestration in North Dakota," Braaten said.

The court rejected the state's arguments that the law is constitutional under legal precedent crafted to ensure shared resources, like oil reservoirs, are developed efficiently. That legal doctrine, Lofgren wrote, limits a property owner's right to "capture" a resource that is shared with their neighbors, such as water or an oil reservoir that crosses property lines.

The judge determined that is fundamentally different from this case, where Summit is seeking to permanently store a substance, carbon dioxide, under the property. There is no resource being captured and therefore the legal doctrine cited by the state, known as correlative rights, does not apply.

The decision is the latest setback for Summit's plans to construct a carbon pipeline with North Dakota as the destination. The company has received the requisite permits for the pipeline route in North Dakota, Iowa and Minnesota and Nebraska has no state permitting authority for carbon pipelines.

But the company has faced significant opposition in South Dakota. The state passed a law in 2025 prohibiting the use of eminent domain for carbon pipelines. Iowa's legislature is considering a similar bill. Summit is also facing a legal challenge to its Iowa permit, in addition to the two lawsuits in North Dakota.

A Summit spokesperson said Tuesday the company is reviewing the decision and evaluating next steps. "Summit has already leased a significant amount of pore space in the project area and will continue working to ensure we can access our permitted storage," the company said in a statement. "This project remains critically important to strengthening markets for ethanol and corn producers while supporting long-term energy security."

Braaten expects the case to be appealed to the state Supreme Court, whether by the state or by Summit. Attorneys for the state have previously said they plan to appeal in the Northeast Judicial District case as well.

Braaten said it is possible the two cases could be consolidated for purposes of the appeal.

Swenson said the conflict with Summit and state regulators has taken an "immense emotional and financial toll" on his family since they were first approached by a representative of the company in 2021. He's asking for an apology from the Department of Mineral Resources and the Industrial Commission for the way landowners who didn't consent to the project have been treated.

"While this decision represents an important affirmation of constitutional rights, it does not erase what our family has endured over the past five years," Swenson said. "The process administered by the NDIC and the Department of Mineral Resources was marked by an atmosphere of hostility toward the very citizens it is meant to serve."

North Dakota Monitor reporter Jacob Orledge can be reached at jorledge@northdakotamonitor.com.

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Republicans target public lands protections in a new way

Some experts fear it could create chaos for endangered species and coal miners alike

BY: ALEX BROWN

Over the past year, GOP leaders and the Trump administration have used a law known as the Congressional Review Act to push for coal mining in Montana, oil drilling in Alaska and copper mining in Minnesota, while also attempting to reverse protections for a national monument in Utah.

The rarely used act gives Congress a few months to revoke new federal regulations. Only in the past year has it ever been used to overrule land management plans.

Conservation advocates say Congress is recklessly throwing out detailed plans, which are created after years of research, public meetings and local collaboration. They fear lawmakers' intervention could upend the long-standing management system that governs hundreds of millions of acres of public lands — with consequences that could threaten endangered species and coal miners alike.

But the fallout could be much more far-reaching than the rollback of protections for specific areas, some legal experts say. By using their review authority in a way that was never thought to apply to land management plans, lawmakers are calling into question the validity of well over 100 other such plans that were never submitted to Congress for review.

If those plans are challenged, it could create legal uncertainty for tens of thousands of leases and permits for oil and gas, mining, cattle grazing, logging, wind and solar farms and outdoor recreation.

"Using the Congressional Review Act (to revoke management plans) is really unprecedented and will have unforeseen consequences," said Robert Anderson, who served as solicitor for the Department of the Interior during the Biden administration. "There's a huge playing field of actions that would be forbidden if none of these management plans are lawfully in place. This could bring things to a screeching halt."

Republicans have argued that congressional action is necessary to unleash President Donald Trump's "energy dominance" agenda. Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum frequently refers to public lands as "America's balance sheet," and has pledged to increase returns by extracting more resources like oil, minerals and timber.

Montana U.S. Rep. Troy Downing, a Republican who sponsored a resolution to revoke a management plan in his home state, argued during debate on the measure that Montana's economy and energy demands rely on coal production.

"When the federal government acts recklessly, it is the responsibility of Congress to step in and course correct. ... The war on coal must end," he said.

What's the Congressional Review Act?

The Congressional Review Act, which was signed into law in 1996, requires federal agencies to submit new regulations to Congress before they can take effect. Congress then has 60 working days to review those regulations, and may vote to revoke them.

If lawmakers reject a rule, federal agencies are barred from crafting a new one in "substantially the same form," unless Congress passes a new law.

For 20 years, the Congressional Review Act was rarely invoked. But during Trump's first term, Republicans used it to overturn 16 regulations, such as a rule to protect streams from coal mining pollution. Democrats used the act to revoke three rules from Trump's first presidency.

But in 2025, Congress and Trump revoked 22 Biden-era rules.

"It seems increasingly popular from Congress as a way to get a quick win to reverse something that happened under the previous administration," said Devin O'Dea, Western policy and conservation manager with Backcountry Hunters & Anglers, which has opposed efforts to open public lands for resource extraction. "The long-term implications are what we're concerned about."

Until recently, management plans for public lands were not considered subject to congressional review. Federal agencies have issued well over 100 such plans without ever submitting one to Congress. Those documents guide the work of agency officials who oversee specific areas of land, often covering millions

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 22 of 73

of acres.

Created after years of public meetings and local feedback, they determine which landscapes will be leased for oil and gas drilling, protected for endangered species or open for off-road vehicles, along with a multitude of other uses.

But last year, Republicans asked the Government Accountability Office, a nonpartisan advisory agency for Congress, to affirm a sweeping new view of the Congressional Review Act. The office found that certain management plans were subject to review because their land-use decisions "prescribed policy," and determined that lawmakers' queries had opened the 60-day review "clock" for the plans in question.

"A very long deliberative process goes into these plans," said Justin Meuse, government relations director for climate and energy with The Wilderness Society, a conservation nonprofit. "These plans are so broad and multifaceted and deal with so many different things. This is taking a hatchet to something that should be done with a scalpel."

Using this new tool, Republicans have revoked plans that restricted mining and oil production on federal lands in Alaska, Montana, North Dakota and Wyoming. Meanwhile, House Republicans voted in January to overturn a regulation that blocked development of a mine near the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in Minnesota, a move that now awaits a vote in the Senate.

And GOP lawmakers from Utah are seeking to overturn the management plan for Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in that state.

Conservation leaders say the rollbacks are unprecedented.

"It's very surprising," said Autumn Gillard, coordinator with the Grand Staircase-Escalante Inter-Tribal Coalition, a group of tribal nations working to protect the monument. "The (resource management plan) is created as a set of advisement points to land managers to reflect on when making decisions. It's not a direct set of rules."

In Minnesota, advocates for the Boundary Waters wilderness area say it is treasured for its pristine lakes, where paddlers can fill their water bottles straight from the surface. They fear efforts to allow a copper mine near the headwaters of the area will irreversibly pollute the most popular wilderness in the country.

"We weren't expecting the Congressional Review Act to be on the table in this way," said Libby London, communications director with Save the Boundary Waters, a coalition seeking to protect the wilderness area. "It sets a really scary precedent that undermines decades of land management decisions."

Officials at the Department of the Interior and the Bureau of Land Management did not grant interview requests. Staff at the House Committee on Natural Resources did not grant an interview with U.S. Rep. Bruce Westerman, an Arkansas Republican who chairs the committee and who has championed using the Congressional Review Act to allow more mining and drilling.

Legal questions

Environmental groups have condemned Republicans' use of the act to push for more resource extraction. If Trump wants more mining and drilling, they say, then federal agencies should take the time to draft new management plans using the same rigorous process.

But perhaps more concerning to some public land stakeholders are the potential implications for a whole host of other lands. None of the plans issued by federal land managers over the past 30 years were ever submitted for review, because no one at the time considered them to be rules.

In other words, hundreds of plans covering millions of acres of land could be deemed invalid under the new congressional interpretation that they qualify as rules.

"That right there is chaos," said Peter Van Tuyn, a longtime environmental lawyer and managing partner at Besseney & Van Tuyn LLC. "Those (plans) go across the full spectrum of what land managers do: conservation and preservation, mining approvals, oil and gas drilling, resource exploitation, public access and recreation. There's a very real chance that a court could say that a resource management plan was never in effect and all the implementation actions under the umbrella of that plan are invalid."

In a letter to the Bureau of Land Management late last year, The Wilderness Society and other organizations identified more than 5,000 oil and gas leases that could be legally invalid, as they were issued under

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 23 of 73

management plans that were never reviewed by Congress.

Public lands advocates say the same logic could be applied to mining leases, grazing permits, logging, outdoor recreation and many other activities covered by agency planning documents. Many industries that rely on public lands, such as hunting and fishing guides, could be thrown into chaos.

"Let's say you're operating as an outfitter," said Ryan Callaghan, president and CEO of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers. "Having something like an entire resource management plan rolled back would be a huge curveball, and something you'd have an absolute inability to plan for as a business owner. It's very reasonable to have a lot of questions as to what the ramifications are."

Industry concerns

Some industry leaders are also worried about the precedent Congress is setting by wiping out plans that were created after years of local input and consultation.

"I'm fairly concerned about that," said Kathleen Sgamma, a longtime oil and gas advocate who now serves as principal for Multiple-Use Advocacy, a consulting group focused on federal land policy. "It's not unreasonable to think about a future day where there is a Democratic trifecta and they would be able to (revoke) old plans likewise."

Sgamma was nominated by Trump to lead the Bureau of Land Management, but withdrew her nomination last spring amid fierce opposition from conservation groups, and following the publication of a memo in which she had criticized Trump's role in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.

She said she was less concerned with the idea that previous plans could be declared invalid. She argued that, if challenged, agency officials could submit those old plans to Congress and start the 60-day review "clock" before litigation advanced.

The greater uncertainty, Sgamma said, is the provision that agencies cannot adopt rules in "substantially the same form" as those that have been revoked by Congress. While Republicans intend to target restrictions on drilling and mining, they are using the Congressional Review Act to revoke entire plans. That could prevent agencies from issuing new plans covering less controversial topics, such as campgrounds and trails.

Van Tuyn, the environmental lawyer, shared that concern.

"If they have a plan that looks 80% like the previous plan, and a court says 80% is 'substantially similar,' what does the agency do? Go back to the drawing board and say 50%? You used to have all this public access and now you can't?" he said.

The Public Lands Council, which advocates for ranchers who operate on public lands, did not respond to an interview request. Western Energy Alliance, which advocates for oil and natural gas production, did not grant an interview request. The American Petroleum Institute did not respond to an interview request. Public Lands For The People, which advocates for mining on public lands, did not respond to an interview request.

Stateline reporter Alex Brown can be reached at abrown@stateline.org.

This story was originally produced by Stateline, which is part of States Newsroom, a nonprofit news network which includes South Dakota Searchlight, and is supported by grants and a coalition of donors as a 501c(3) public charity.

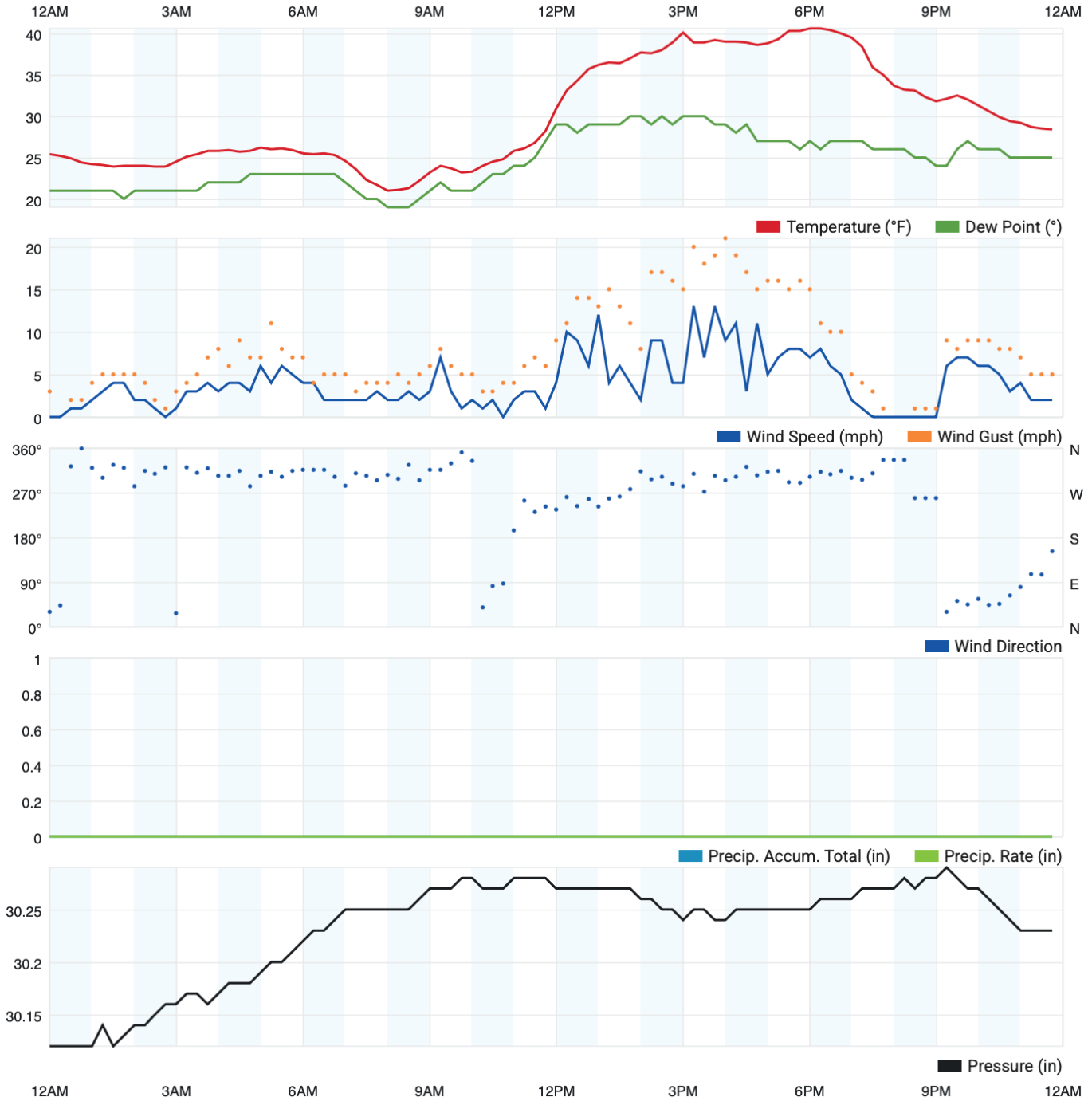
Based in Seattle, Alex Brown covers environmental issues for Stateline. Prior to joining Stateline, Brown wrote for The Chronicle in Lewis County, Washington state.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 24 of 73






Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

March 11, 2026



Broton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 25 of 73

Today	High Wind Warning Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
				
60 %			30%	30 % → 60 %
High: 53 °F	Low: 22 °F	High: 34 °F	Low: 23 °F	High: 36 °F
Rain/Snow Likely then Chance Rain and Breezy	Partly Cloudy and Windy	Mostly Cloudy	Chance Snow	Chance Snow then Snow Likely



Strong Winds Starting This Afternoon/Evening

March 12, 2026
2:01 AM

Increasing Confidence For Extremely Strong Winds Later Today

Key Messages

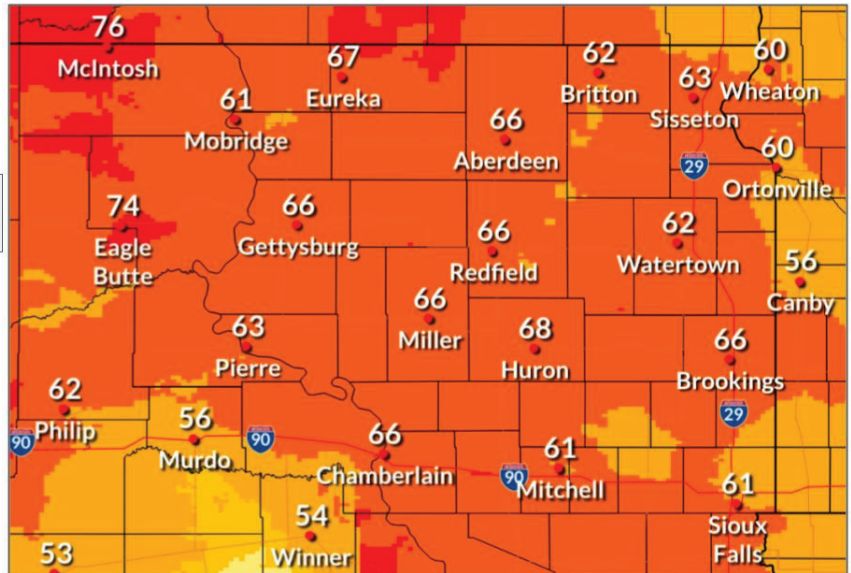
- Winds broadly gusting 55 to 65+ mph Thursday afternoon into the overnight hours. **Locally higher gusts could top 75 mph in central/north central SD.**
- **Hazardous travel for high profile vehicles. Property damage possible.**
- Winds shift from southwest to northwest this afternoon/evening.
- Strong winds continue into the day Friday. (See wind chart next slide).

Important Updates

- Red Flag Warning for central & north central South Dakota.

Next Scheduled Briefing

- Thursday Afternoon.



Peak Winds Today: See Chart For Specific Timing (Next Slide)



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Winds will be on the increase but really get going when a front comes through later this afternoon and evening. Winds will stay up all night. This will also increase the risk for fires across the region

Broton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 26 of 73



Strong Winds This Afternoon & Evening

March 12, 2026
2:09 AM CDT

	Thu											Fri										
	10am	11am	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm	9pm	10pm	11pm	12am	1am	2am	3am	4am	5am	6am	7am
Aberdeen	25↑	23↑	30↑	33↑	36↑	39↑	45↑	48↑	49↑	46↑	43↑	59↑	67↑	60↑	56↑	53↑	48↑	41↑	37↑	32↑	29↑	24↑
Britton	25↑	30↑	30↑	33↑	36↑	35↑	45↑	47↑	46↑	45↑	43↑	54↑	62↑	61↑	58↑	55↑	51↑	43↑	39↑	37↑	33↑	29↑
Chamberlain	23↑	28↑	30↑	31↑	38↑	45↑	52↑	56↑	63↑	62↑	60↑	58↑	54↑	54↑	52↑	49↑	46↑	41↑	37↑	32↑	30↑	28↑
Clark	32↑	29↑	30↑	31↑	35↑	37↑	40↑	47↑	51↑	56↑	55↑	54↑	61↑	63↑	61↑	59↑	53↑	47↑	43↑	38↑	35↑	30↑
Eagle Butte	33↑	37↑	43↑	48↑	54↑	61↑	66↑	70↑	74↑	74↑	70↑	66↑	59↑	54↑	48↑	43↑	37↑	32↑	28↑	25↑	22↑	20↑
Eureka	23↑	30↑	33↑	36↑	44↑	49↑	51↑	58↑	59↑	59↑	63↑	67↑	64↑	60↑	55↑	48↑	47↑	41↑	37↑	33↑	31↑	23↑
Gettysburg	18↑	26↑	29↑	35↑	40↑	48↑	54↑	60↑	56↑	61↑	63↑	66↑	62↑	55↑	49↑	46↑	43↑	36↑	32↑	30↑	28↑	24↑
McIntosh	36↑	43↑	47↑	52↑	58↑	63↑	69↑	75↑	76↑	76↑	74↑	69↑	63↑	58↑	53↑	37↑	39↑	36↑	32↑	28↑	25↑	17↑
Milbank	29↑	31↑	28↑	29↑	32↑	36↑	35↑	39↑	39↑	38↑	44↑	48↑	54↑	59↑	61↑	60↑	58↑	51↑	47↑	44↑	41↑	37↑
Miller	31↑	30↑	32↑	35↑	38↑	44↑	49↑	53↑	61↑	62↑	66↑	66↑	63↑	61↑	58↑	53↑	49↑	41↑	35↑	30↑	26↑	23↑
Mobridge	20↑	28↑	30↑	37↑	44↑	48↑	56↑	58↑	61↑	59↑	61↑	59↑	54↑	52↑	47↑	43↑	40↑	33↑	29↑	25↑	24↑	20↑
Murdo	32↑	36↑	36↑	40↑	44↑	48↑	51↑	54↑	55↑	56↑	56↑	54↑	51↑	46↑	41↑	36↑	31↑	28↑	25↑	23↑	21↑	18↑
Pierre	18↑	25↑	26↑	30↑	38↑	43↑	53↑	55↑	58↑	60↑	62↑	62↑	59↑	52↑	46↑	41↑	38↑	30↑	25↑	22↑	18↑	16↑
Redfield	25↑	29↑	30↑	33↑	37↑	41↑	46↑	51↑	53↑	56↑	53↑	64↑	66↑	61↑	60↑	54↑	52↑	44↑	39↑	35↑	30↑	25↑
Sisseton	23↑	25↑	25↑	30↑	38↑	39↑	41↑	44↑	45↑	44↑	39↑	43↑	56↑	63↑	63↑	61↑	58↑	49↑	46↑	44↑	40↑	36↑
Watertown	28↑	31↑	31↑	32↑	36↑	36↑	38↑	41↑	47↑	47↑	52↑	48↑	55↑	61↑	62↑	60↑	54↑	49↑	46↑	41↑	37↑	35↑
Webster	28↑	29↑	29↑	31↑	36↑	37↑	39↑	43↑	45↑	48↑	47↑	48↑	58↑	61↑	59↑	55↑	52↑	45↑	41↑	39↑	37↑	33↑
Wheaton	26↑	28↑	29↑	29↑	31↑	32↑	35↑	35↑	35↑	37↑	39↑	40↑	51↑	56↑	59↑	60↑	58↑	52↑	48↑	45↑	43↑	39↑

Highest gusts of 55 to 65+ mph this afternoon into the overnight. Locally higher gusts could top 75 mph in north central/central SD



High winds may toss loose debris, damage property & cause power outages.

Hazardous Travel, especially for high profile vehicles.



HAZARDOUS TRAVEL



LIGHTWEIGHT OBJECTS BLOWN AROUND

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Winds will be on the increase, peaking just as a front swings through this afternoon and evening, with winds staying up through the night. Secure loose objects outside and ensure any outdoor fires have been extinguished.



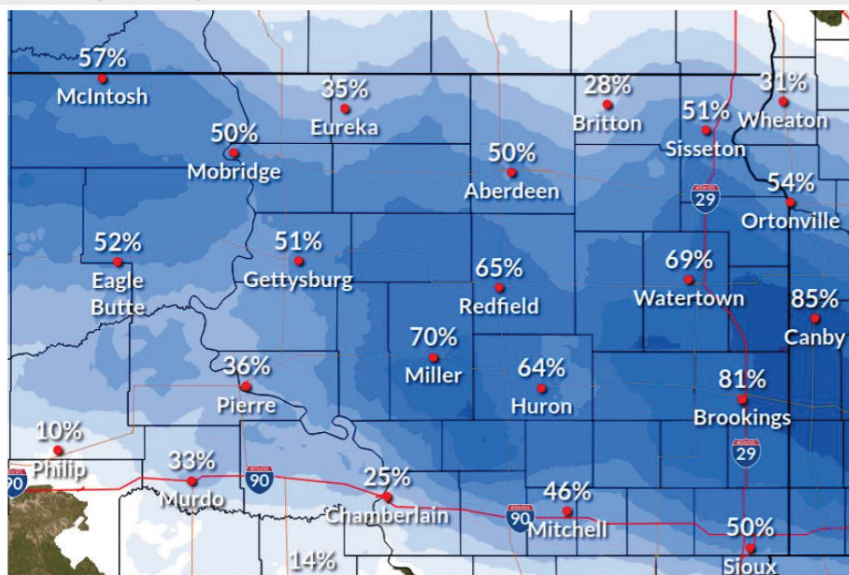
Winter Weather Returns For The Weekend

March 12, 2026
2:21 AM

Heavy Snow Plus Strong Winds - Anticipate Impacts To Travel

Key Messages

- Snow starting Saturday continues into Sunday.
- Snow Potential: 6+ inches with possibly higher across east central South Dakota.
- Northeast winds 30-40mph resulting in blowing snow.



Probability of Exceeding 6"

Groton Daily Independent

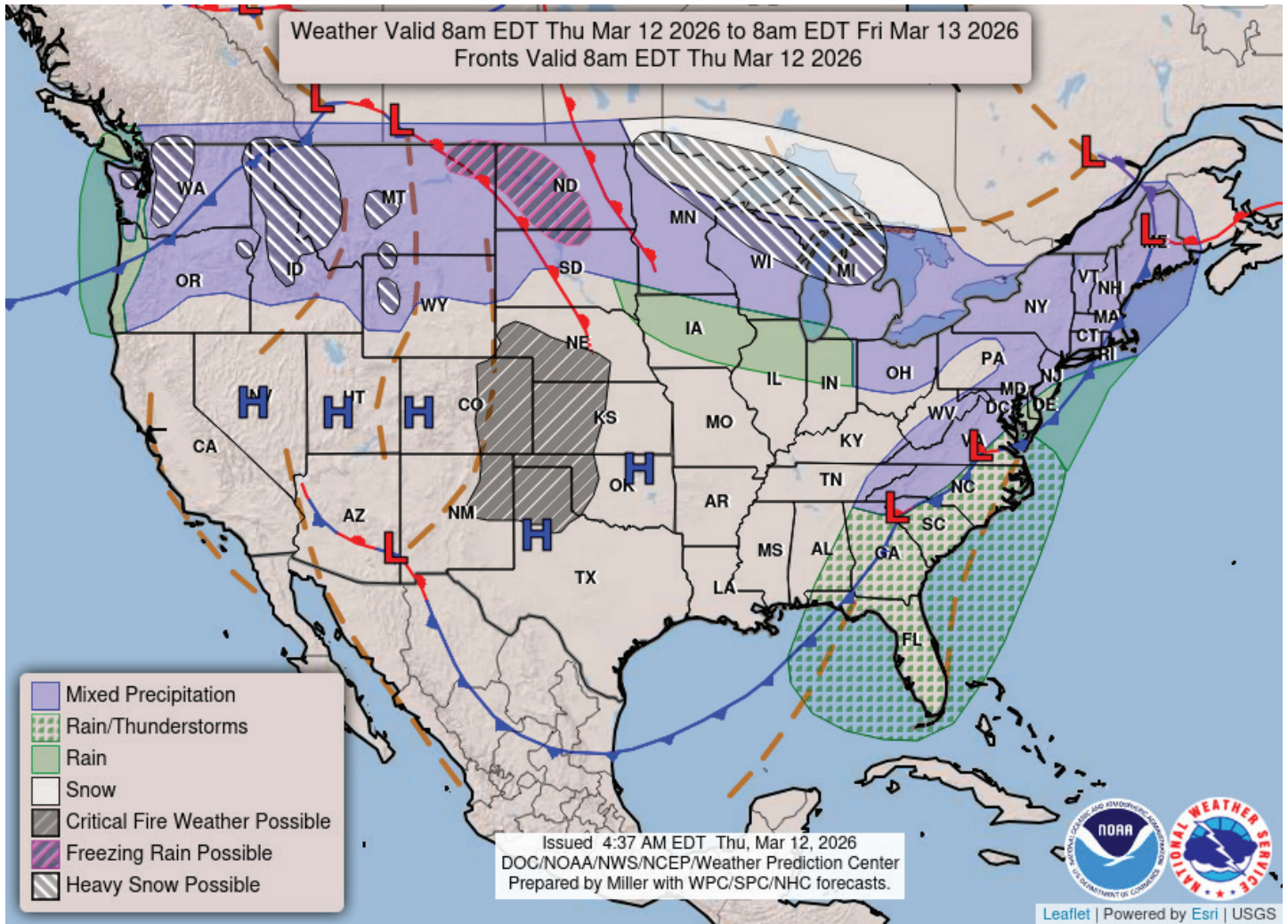
Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 27 of 73

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 41 °F at 5:52 PM
Low Temp: 21 °F at 8:03 AM
Wind: 23 mph at 4:02 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 72 in 2016
Record Low: -20 in 1897
Average High: 39
Average Low: 18
Average Precip in Mar.: 0.29
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 1.46
Precip Year to Date: 1.33
Sunset Tonight: 7.32 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:50 am



Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 28 of 73

Today in Weather History

March 12th, 1995: Due to warm temperatures, rapid snowmelt caused widespread flooding of streams, low areas, and farmland. Flood waters covered many roads, with some washed out. Some utility poles and lines were damaged. High water levels destroyed some schools, houses, and other buildings. Day County was especially stricken, with road damage estimated at \$75,000. Ice jams exacerbated the flooding on some culverts and streams.

1888 — A blizzard paralyzed southeastern New York State and western New England. The storm produced 58 inches of snow at Saratoga NY, and 50 inches at Middletown CT. The blizzard was followed by record cold temperatures, and the cold and snow claimed 400 lives. New York City received 20.9 inches of snow, Albany NY reported 46.7 inches. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1954 — A blizzard raged from eastern Wyoming into the Black Hills of western South Dakota, while a severe ice storm was in progress from northeastern Nebraska to central Iowa. The ice storm isolated 153 towns in Iowa. Dust from the Great Plains caused brown snow, and hail and muddy rain over parts of Wisconsin and Michigan. (11th-13th) (The Weather Channel)

1967 — A tremendous four day storm raged across California. Winds of 90 mph closed mountain passes, heavy rains flooded the lowlands, and in sixty hours Squaw Valley CA was buried under 96 inches (eight feet) of snow. (David Ludlum)

1987 — Unseasonably cold weather prevailed in the southeastern U.S., with gale force winds along the Middle Atlantic Coast. A storm in the Pacific Northwest produced rain and gale force winds. Crescent City CA received 2.27 inches of rain in 24 hours. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — A powerful storm produced high winds and heavy snow in the Upper Mississippi Valley and the Upper Great Lakes Region. Winds gusting to 70 mph produced snow drifts six feet high in Minnesota, and sent twelve foot waves on Lake Superior over the breakwalls of the ship canal at Duluth MN. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 — An early season heat wave continued in the southwestern and central U.S. Nineteen cities reported record high temperatures for the date. Wichita Falls TX, which six days earlier reported a record low of 8 above, reported a record high of 95 degrees. Childress TX was the first spot in the country in 1989 to hit the century mark. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 — Unseasonably warm weather prevailed from the Southern and Central Plains to the Southern and Middle Atlantic Coast, with afternoon highs in the 70s and 80s. Seventy-six cities reported record high temperatures for the date. Downtown Baltimore MD was the hot spot in the nation with a record high of 95 degrees, which smashed their previous record for the date by nineteen degrees. Other record highs included 89 degrees at Washington D.C. and 90 degrees at Raleigh NC. (The National Weather Summary)

2006 — High school senior Matt Suter survives being blown 1,307 feet by a tornado. (The exact distance is determined by NWS GPS.) The twister rips open his grandmother's mobile home and tosses Suter into the night, launching him over a barbed wire fence and eventually depositing him on the soft grass in an open field. He suffers only a head wound from being hit by a lamp. - The Weather Doctor's Diary



Daily Devotion

How God Reveals His Presence The Lord is active in the world today and wants to share His peace, courage, and joy with you.

Psalms 16:7-9: 7 I will bless the LORD who has counseled me; Indeed, my mind instructs me in the night.
8 I have set the LORD continually before me; Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.
9 Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will dwell securely.

If you've never experienced the presence of God, you may wonder how He reveals Himself to believers. Our heavenly Father has many different ways of reaching out to His children:

God speaks. We may not hear the Lord's audible voice, but He still speaks clearly and forcefully to our heart. His communication can be so unmistakable that those who hear Him remember the message and the excitement they felt long after.

God sends a message. Sometimes the Lord communicates to us through another person. King David received God's correction through the prophet Nathan (2 Samuel 12:1-7). Today we may sense God guiding us in a sermon or in a conversation with a wise friend. It's unwise to ignore such promptings—the message might be harder to receive outside of the Father's perfect timing.

God makes His presence known through His Word. The Lord speaks to us through the pages of Scripture. When we spend time meditating on His Word, God keeps giving us new truths and insights (Psalm 1:2; Psalm 119:99).

The Lord is real and present in this world. He wants to share Himself with us so we can draw contentment, courage, and joy from His presence. However, to know what He's saying, we must be willing to slow down and listen.

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

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 30 of 73

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WINNING NUMBERS

MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.11.26

1 2 3 19 38 4

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

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 9 Mins 2 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.10.26

16 21 30 35 65 7

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$50,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 54 Mins 3 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.11.26

1 3 22 28 40 7

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$18,150,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 9 Mins 3 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.11.26

2 13 14 17 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$23,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 24 Mins 3 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.11.26

6 7 42 43 59 21

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 53 Mins 2 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.11.26

3 6 55 58 63 12

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$75,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 53 Mins 2 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Senegal is the latest African country to toughen punishment for homosexual acts

By BABACAR DIONE Associated Press

DAKAR, Senegal (AP) — Senegal's parliament has approved a new bill that toughens punishment for homosexuality in the largely Muslim West African nation, the latest African country to impose harsh penalties against the LGBTQ+ community.

The new bill, which was introduced to parliament last month by Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko, describes homosexual acts as being "against nature." It doubles the punishment for those convicted from prison sentences of one to five years to between five and 10 years.

Nearly all lawmakers voted in favor of the bill during Wednesday's plenary, with no opposition and three abstentions. It needs presidential assent before becoming a law, with Senegal's President Bassirou Diomaye Faye widely expected to sign it.

In another change, the proposed law punishes what it calls the "promotion" or "financing" of homosexuality, an attempt to crack down on organizations that support sexual and gender minorities.

The fines for the offense were also raised to a maximum of 10 million CFA (\$17,609), but the bill retains the offense as a misdemeanor rather than a crime. During the parliamentary session, ministers argued that the previous 1966 law was too lenient.

The proposed law classifies homosexuality along with necrophilia and bestiality under the "acts against nature" offenses. But it also punishes anyone who accuses a person of homosexual acts "without proof."

Laws proscribing homosexuality are common across Africa: more than 30 of the 54 countries criminalize same-sex sexual acts. Senegal has joined countries like Kenya, Sierra Leone, and Tanzania, where penalties can include 10 or more years of imprisonment. In Somalia, Uganda, and Mauritania, the offense can carry the death penalty.

Rallies in support of the new legal measure have been organized in recent weeks by groups promoting Islamic values, and the police have cracked down on alleged gay people and arrested at least a dozen people.

The proposed law fulfills a campaign promise of the prime minister, who had tried but failed to introduce it when he was in the opposition.

Iran's unrelenting attacks on Mideast shipping and energy infrastructure send oil prices soaring

By JON GAMBRELL, DAVID RISING and SALLY ABOU ALJOUND Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Unrelenting Iranian attacks on shipping traffic and energy infrastructure pushed oil above \$100 a barrel Thursday, as American and Israeli strikes pounded the Islamic Republic with no sign of an end to the war in sight.

Iran hit a container ship off the coast of Dubai, caused a blaze near Bahrain's international airport, targeted a major Saudi oil field with a drone and forced Iraq to halt operations at all of its oil terminals after attacking its port of Basra on the Persian Gulf.

Iran flouted a U.N. Security Council resolution from the previous day demanding that it halt strikes on its Gulf neighbors, with new attacks also reported in Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates.

Sirens wailed before dawn in Jerusalem as Israel intercepted incoming Iranian missiles, and loud booms were heard later in the day in another attack on the city.

Israel launched a "wide-scale wave of strikes" on Tehran and in Lebanon, where Israel says it is targeting Iran-linked Hezbollah militants, 11 people were killed in two early morning strikes.

Since the United States and Israel started the war with a Feb. 28 attack on Iran, Tehran has focused on

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 33 of 73

inflicting enough global economic pain to pressure them to halt their attacks.

U.S. President Donald Trump suggested that was not imminent, however, promising to "finish the job" even though he claimed Iran is "virtually destroyed."

"We don't want to leave early do we? We've got to finish the job," he said at an event Wednesday in Kentucky.

Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei hasn't yet made a statement or been seen since being chosen to succeed his father Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who was killed in the opening day of the conflict. But Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian suggested online Thursday that for the war to end, the world would need to recognize Iran's "legitimate rights," pay reparations and offer guarantees against future attacks.

In addition to attacking energy infrastructure around the region, Iran has a stranglehold on the Strait of Hormuz, the waterway leading from the Persian Gulf toward the Indian Ocean through which a fifth of the world's oil is transported.

Amid speculation that the U.S. might target Kharg Island in the Persian Gulf, Iran's main oil terminal, Iran's parliamentary speaker threatened that any attempt to take Iranian islands would "make the Persian Gulf run with the blood of invaders."

"The blood of American soldiers is Trump's personal responsibility," Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf added in a social media post.

With traffic in the strait effectively stopped, the price of Brent crude oil, the international standard, rose another 9% to more than \$100 a barrel, up some 38% over what it cost when the war started.

Iran fires at Gulf Arab countries and hits ship in Persian Gulf

The U.N. Security Council voted Wednesday to approve a resolution demanding a halt to Iran's "egregious attacks" on its Gulf neighbors, but Tehran showed no signs of changing its strategy.

As the day began Thursday, a container ship in the Persian Gulf was hit with a projectile off the coast of Dubai, sparking a small fire, according to British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations Center. It said the crew of the vessel were safe.

In Bahrain, an Iranian attack sparked a major fire on Muharraq Island, home to the country's international airport. Sirens sounded again later in the morning with more incoming Iranian fire.

Kuwait's Defense Ministry said an Iranian drone smashed into a residential building, wounding two people. The UAE said it had activated air defenses twice to protect Dubai from attacks, and firefighters extinguished a blaze at a tower in Dubai Creek Harbor after a drone hit.

Saudi Arabia said it shot down a drone targeting the diplomatic quarter of the capital, Riyadh, and also reported downing drones in the kingdom's east, including at least one trying to target its Shaybah oil field.

Following an attack on Iraq's Basra port Wednesday that killed at least one person, officials said Thursday that operations were halted at all the country's oil terminals.

Farhan al-Fartousi, the director-general of the General Company for Ports of Iraq, said the attack targeted a vessel in a ship-to-ship transfer area of the Persian Gulf port.

In the UAE, CitiBank said it would close all its branches except one due to a threat by Iran, not yet realized, to target financial institutions in the region. Other financial institutions have reportedly urged their staff to work from home for the time being.

Explosions heard in Jerusalem while Lebanon and Tehran are hit

In addition to the attacks on Jerusalem, in which no casualties were immediately reported, missile launches from Iran and Hezbollah also sent Israelis to shelters in multiple other areas, including Tel Aviv and the northern border with Lebanon.

An Israeli strike hit a car Thursday in Ramlet al-Bayda, a major seaside tourist area of Beirut where dozens of displaced people have been sheltering. Eight people were killed and 31 others were wounded, the Lebanese Health Ministry said. The Israeli military press office told The Associated Press it was "not aware" of a strike at that location.

In Aramoun, a town about 10 kilometers (6 miles) south of Beirut, another three people were killed and a child was wounded in another early Israeli attack.

In Tehran, security force checkpoints came under attack for the first time on Wednesday night, the semiofficial Fars news agency reported. At least 10 people were killed in the suspected drone assaults.

Israel and the U.S. military's Central Command did not immediately respond to requests for comment over whether they were behind the attacks.

Hundreds of thousands displaced

At least 634 people have been killed in Lebanon since the latest fighting began, the Lebanese Health Ministry said Wednesday.

The U.N. refugee agency said at least 759,000 people have been internally displaced in Lebanon.

Iranian authorities say 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.

Damage to historical sites in Iran raises alarm about war's impact on protected places

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — U.S. and Israeli strikes on Iran have damaged at least four cultural and historical sites, including palaces and an ancient mosque, raising alarms about the impact of the widening war on protected landmarks that are important to Iranian identity and world history.

The speed and extent of the damage have so concerned Iran and Lebanon that they sent a request to the United Nations' cultural agency, UNESCO, this week to add more sites to its enhanced protection list.

UNESCO confirmed that it has verified damage to the lavish Qajar-era Golestan Palace in Tehran as well as the 17th century Chehel Sotoun palace and the Masjed-e Jāme, the country's oldest Friday mosque, both in Isfahan. There also was verified damage at buildings close to the Khorramabad Valley, which includes five prehistoric caves and one rock shelter providing evidence of human occupation dating to 63,000 B.C.

At Golestan Palace, shattered glass from the mirrored ceilings blanketed the floors alongside broken archways, blown-out windows and damaged molding scattered below its glass-mosaic walls, according to Associated Press video taken March 3.

UNESCO said it provided all parties to the conflict with the geographical coordinates of the heritage sites ahead of time, "to take all feasible precautions to avoid damage."

The impact to cultural sites has not been isolated to Iran but has been felt across the Middle East and beyond, with UNESCO tracking damage to the White City in Israel, Tyre in Lebanon and elsewhere.

Collateral damage to such places has been part of the fabric of war for decades, including in conflicts between Russia and Ukraine as well as Israel and Hamas, in which dozens of sites have been damaged or destroyed.

"What is happening is clear to all: In these increasingly modern conflicts, it's civilians who pay the price, it's civilian infrastructure that pays the price, and we've all seen the destruction of priceless historical heritage," U.N. spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said this week.

Damage to history

Human rights advocates are echoing that sentiment, warning that the Iran war not only has killed more than 1,000 people but upended the institutions and historical places that communities rely on.

"It causes harm to civilians because it damages or destroys a piece of their history that can be significant both to the world and also to a specific region or community," said Bonnie Docherty, senior researcher in the arms division at Human Rights Watch. "It undermines the sort of shared identity of a local community, which can often be important for bringing people together."

Arash Azizi, who grew up in Iran before moving to the U.S. as an adult, said that because his family couldn't afford to travel abroad when he was a child, they visited historical sites across the country. This, he says, is how he learned about his cultural identity and history.

"At times where school kids are killed, when human life is at stake, when the stakes are very high, people might think, 'What are a couple of broken tiles or broken glasses?'" the 38-year-old New York resident said.

"I think this is the wrong attitude," he added. "We need a cultural context. We need to know who we

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 35 of 73

are, and where we come from, and what does it all mean?"

Iranian American sees one damage site as deeply personal

For Shabnam Emdadi, a 35-year-old Iranian American also in New York, the damage to the Safavid-era Chehel Sotoun Palace in Isfahan is deeply personal. She traveled there with her dad a few years before he died.

"Those Iran trips with him were my most fond memories of him at his happiest, where he felt most at home and alive, and I'll never forget them," Emdadi said. "Which is why every day when I see the damage of these sites that are the core of my memories, I feel like I am also losing a piece of him."

It was unclear if it was U.S. or Israeli strikes that caused the damage. The Pentagon did not provide comment. The Israeli Defense Forces said it was "unfamiliar" with claims of damage to UNESCO sites.

One nonprofit group pointed to U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth saying last week that America's approach to the war would not include "stupid rules of engagement."

"That's an extremely important statement because it's those rules of engagement that embody international humanitarian law, which is not just the protection of cultural heritage, but the protection of all civilian populations and structures, including your hospitals, your schools, etc.," said Patty Gerstenblith, president of the U.S. Committee of the Blue Shield, an international organization dedicated to protecting heritage in conflict, disaster and crisis.

UNESCO's protections

The affected sites are among the nearly 30 Iranian sites designated as under special protection as part of UNESCO's World Heritage list.

Other notable landmarks on the list include the Great Wall of China, the Egyptian pyramids, the Taj Mahal and the Statue of Liberty.

The agency's World Heritage Committee annually designates sites considered "of outstanding value to humanity" and intervenes when sites are in danger of destruction or damage. The program provides countries with technical assistance and professional training to preserve the sites.

The Trump administration announced last July that it would once again withdraw from UNESCO as it distances the U.S. from some international organizations.

The White House cited similar concerns as it did in 2018, saying it believes U.S. involvement is not in its national interest and accusing the agency of promoting anti-Israel speech. The decision won't go into effect until December.

Brent crude oil briefly tops \$100 a barrel as Iran attacks on shipping worsen supply concerns

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

BANGKOK (AP) — The price of a barrel of Brent crude oil briefly topped \$100 a barrel early Thursday, just days after it spiked near \$120 in the latest jolts to financial markets and the global economy as a whole.

Oil prices initially shot more than 9% higher as supply concerns worsened with Iranian attacks on commercial shipping around the Strait of Hormuz. The U.S. campaign of airstrikes in Iran is now in its 13th day.

U.S. benchmark crude oil jumped 4.5% to about \$91 a barrel. Brent, the international standard, was trading 5.3% higher at about \$97 per barrel.

Iran has escalated its attacks aimed at generating enough global economic pain to pressure the United States and Israel to end the war. But there was no sign the conflict was subsiding.

Iran has targeted oil fields and refineries in Gulf Arab nations and effectively stopped cargo traffic through the narrow Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of all traded oil passes.

In response, the International Energy Agency agreed Wednesday to release 400 million barrels of oil, the largest volume of emergency oil reserves in its history, in a bid to counter the war's effects on energy markets. The U.S. planned to release 172 million barrels of oil next week from its Strategic Petroleum Reserve to combat steep prices.

The IEA's announcement came a day after energy ministers from the Group of Seven — the leading

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 36 of 73

industrialized nations of Canada, the United States, France, Italy, Japan, Germany and Britain — met in Paris to look at ways to bring down prices.

But the continued strife and uncertainty have fueled speculation prices could push still higher, and that pulled shares lower.

The future for the S&P 500 lost 0.4% while that for the Dow Jones Industrial Average was 0.5% lower. Germany's DAX lost 0.4% to 23,533.60, while the CAC 40 in Paris lost 0.7% to 7,982.64. Britain's FTSE 100 sank 0.7% to 10,285.91.

During Asian trading, Tokyo's Nikkei 225 fell 1% to 54,452.96. In South Korea, the Kospi lost 0.5% to 5,583.25, while Hong Kong's Hang Seng gave up 0.7% to 25,716.76.

The Shanghai Composite index shed 0.1% to 4,129.10 and in Australia, the S&P/ASX 200 dropped 1.3% to 8,629.00.

On Wednesday, U.S. stocks were little changed as the S&P 500 edged 0.1% lower for a second day of modest moves following a wild stretch caused by the war with Iran. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 0.6%, to its lowest level this year, and the Nasdaq composite rose 0.1%.

Since the start of the war, sharp moves for oil prices have triggered swings up and down for financial markets worldwide, sometimes by the hour. Oil prices briefly spiked to their highest levels since 2022 this week because of the possibility that production in the Middle East could be blocked for a long time, which in turn raised worries about a surge of debilitating inflation for the global economy.

In a report, Oxford Economics said "the swings in Brent crude oil prices over the past several days are eye-catching and odds are volatility will remain because of the absence of a timeline for when the conflict will de-escalate and when the Strait of Hormuz, which is effectively closed, will see traffic begin to recover."

The level of volatility suggests that depending on news developments, oil prices could spike as high as \$140 per barrel, it said.

A report released Wednesday showed U.S. consumers paid prices for groceries, gasoline and other costs of living that were 2.4% higher in February than a year earlier.

That's the same level as the month before and better than the 2.5% that economists expected, but it remains above the Federal Reserve's 2% target and doesn't include the spike in gasoline prices this month due to the war.

High inflation combined with a stagnating economy would create a worst-case scenario called "stagflation" that the Federal Reserve has no good tools to fix. Stagflation fears are rising not just because of higher oil prices but also because of weakness in hiring by U.S. employers.

In other dealings early Thursday, the dollar fell to 158.84 Japanese yen from 158.95 yen. The euro fell to \$1.1553 from \$1.1566.

South Korean lawmakers pass law to manage Seoul's pledge of \$350 billion in US investments

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korean lawmakers on Thursday passed a law to implement a pledge of \$350 billion in U.S. investments Seoul made last year to avoid the Trump administration's highest tariffs.

Government officials had urged lawmakers to quickly pass the contested bill, submitted in November, as uncertainty mounts for the country's trade-dependent economy, already rattled by President Donald Trump's protectionist swing and now fearing the fallout from his war on Iran.

The bill's passage came hours after the Trump administration increased pressure on trade partners by opening a new investigation into manufacturing in foreign countries, including China and U.S. allies South Korea and Japan, which could result in new import taxes if U.S. officials see their practices as unfair.

Trump and his team have made clear they're seeking to use new tariffs to recoup lost revenue after the U.S. Supreme Court invalidated his sweeping tariffs issued with emergency powers.

China expressed opposition to the move and called for negotiations to resolve any differences. "China

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 37 of 73

opposes any form of unilateral tariff measures," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said in Beijing. "Tariff wars and trade wars serve no one's interests."

The South Korean law, which passed 226 to 8, calls for establishing a public corporation to manage the promised U.S. investments, including reviewing and selecting projects based on input from South Korean and U.S. trade authorities.

Some lawmakers spoke against the bill ahead of the vote, expressing frustration over Trump's new trade investigations and the potential impact of the war in the Middle East, which has exposed the vulnerability of South Korea's export-dependent economy and reliance on imported fuel.

"We cannot be the money machine Trump wants us to be," said Son Sol, a member of the minor opposition Progressive Party. She said the bill does not give the legislature sufficient power to review and reject investments that could go against South Korean business or public interests.

Following months of tense negotiations, South Korea finalized an agreement with the United States in November to invest \$200 billion in U.S. semiconductor and other high-tech industries and another \$150 billion in shipbuilding in exchange for Washington lowering reciprocal tariffs on Seoul from 25% to 15%.

The agreement, which followed a breakthrough at an October summit between Trump and South Korean President Lee Jae Myung, also caps South Korean investments at \$20 billion a year to protect the country's foreign currency reserves.

Lee's liberal Democratic Party introduced the legislation in November but faced resistance from opposition lawmakers worried about the economic impact. The legislative holdup frustrated Trump, who in January threatened to raise tariffs on South Korean autos, pharmaceuticals and other goods back to 25%, increasing pressure on the opposition to move the bill forward.

State lawmakers rush to set rounding rules for when there are no pennies

By HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

Months after the last of the United States' 1-cent coins were pressed, some states are beginning to offer their own 2 cents on the penny problem by setting rounding guidance for cash purchases.

President Donald Trump announced early last year an end to penny production, saying it was wasteful. It cost 3.7 cents to make each 1-cent coin in 2024, according to the U.S. Mint. The move led to a shortage of pennies in cash registers last summer, forcing consumers and businesses to confront a penniless future in which making exact change would be difficult.

The Treasury Department has said it will continue circulating the roughly 114 billion pennies that exist for "as long as possible." Pennies must still be accepted as payment.

One solution to the penny problem is rounding to the nearest nickel, using a practice called symmetrical rounding. If the final price, after taxes, ends in one, two, six or seven cents, payment in cash rounds down. For example, \$1.91 or \$1.92 becomes \$1.90. If the price ends in three, four, eight or nine, cash payment rounds up. For \$1.98 or \$1.99, the consumer pays \$2.

A bill introduced last year in Congress and passed out of the House financial services committee would apply symmetrical rounding across the country. U.S. Rep. Lisa McClain, R-Mich., said in an email the federal law is important to prevent a "confusing patchwork of state policies."

The bill hasn't been voted on in the House and would still need to move through the U.S. Senate before reaching Trump's desk.

Some states are looking to what's next

In the meantime, bills to deal with penniless cash transactions have passed both chambers and await the governor's signature in Arizona, Florida, Oregon, Tennessee, Virginia and Washington. Some states are proposing to allow businesses to round cash purchases, while others consider requiring it.

In Indiana, a bill signed into law this month by Republican Gov. Mike Braun tells businesses they must round cash purchases for all transactions that do not end in a zero or five. Lawmakers revised that provision in a second bill that makes rounding optional, which would take effect Sunday if Braun signs it into law.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 38 of 73

In both bills, Indiana businesses can choose to always round cash purchases up to the nearest nickel, always round down or round up or down depending on the amount.

In Republican-led Tennessee, legislation makes symmetrical rounding exempt from legal claims under a state consumer protection law but does not require rounding.

"It is to provide safe harbor for private businesses," said Republican Rep. Charlie Baum, the bill sponsor in Tennessee, during floor debate.

Rounding bills have been introduced in about two dozen states since late last year, according to an Associated Press analysis using the bill-tracking service Plural.

Outside of lawmaking bodies, some state agencies have published guidelines to advise that rounding should happen after tax, and that businesses must make sure the full taxed amount still goes to the state.

Will consumers pay more with rounding?

Cash isn't used as ubiquitously since the rise in electronic payment methods. Still, about 8 in 10 U.S. adults said they recently used cash in a 2024 survey conducted by the Federal Reserve. Cash was more often used by older adults and those in lower-income households.

The Treasury wrote online that prices would be "rounded down just as often as they will be rounded up, so there should be no overall effect on consumer prices."

But researchers at the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond used a 2023 survey to show prices that didn't end in zero or five were especially likely to end in eight or nine. Payment amounts could be different when multiple items are purchased or depending on the tax rate, but overall, prices more often being rounded up would lead to millions of dollars gained by businesses and lost by consumers collectively, amounting to a few pennies lost per person.

Do people think it's fair?

As businesses have introduced rounding, some Americans have taken to social media to say they feel scammed, even if it is a penny or two at a time.

Nikki Capozzo-Hennessy, 50, said she tends to pay in cash because it makes her more conscious of her spending. The Trumbull, Connecticut, resident posted her grocery store receipt online when she noticed the rounding adjustment on a purchase of \$8.73, with tax. The store chose to round down and she gained three cents.

Capozzo-Hennessy said it might feel taxing if she had to hand over extra pennies every time, but she also thinks it's practical to stick with one rule. She runs a food truck business and said they'd likely use symmetrical rounding to be consistent.

"At the end of the day it's three cents, but I can imagine with all the purchases that you make, it can add up," Capozzo-Hennessy said.

Washington state Rep. April Berg, who introduced a rounding bill there, said she understands people who feel frustrated losing a penny but that the elimination of the hard currency leaves little option.

"We did make sure that everyone is allowed to pay exactly what they owe," Berg said of her legislation.

What about the nickel?

The Treasury says ceasing penny production will save \$56 million annually, but rounding could increase demand for nickels. The 5-cent coins also are costly to make, reaching nearly 14 cents each in 2024, according to the Mint.

The proposed federal legislation currently includes a potential cost-saving solution, allowing the Treasury to adjust the coin's composition to use cheaper zinc and nickel instead of copper and nickel.

Trump visa changes squeeze rural schools relying on international teachers

By MICHAEL MELIA Associated Press

Like many school systems facing teacher shortages, South Carolina's Allendale County has looked overseas for help. A quarter of the teachers in the rural, high-poverty district come from other countries.

The superintendent praises the international educators — mostly from Jamaica and the Philippines — for

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 39 of 73

their skill and dedication, but she is preparing to lose some of them as the Trump administration reshapes visa programs.

Facing higher visa sponsorship costs and uncertain immigration policies, Superintendent Vallerie Cave said it feels too risky to extend some international teachers whose contracts are up or bring on others.

"Some of my very best teachers are having to return to their countries," Cave said.

For rural schools especially, President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown is pinching a pipeline used widely to fill staffing shortages that worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Rural districts can struggle to attract American teachers to remote areas that lack plentiful housing, shopping and services such as health care, especially for lower salaries than some bigger districts offer.

Cave is hoping to hire local teachers to fill the gaps left by several teachers' impending departures. If she can't, she may expand the district's use of online teachers. Elsewhere, districts are considering hiring uncertified instructors, combining classes or dropping course offerings.

In September, the White House announced a \$100,000 fee on H-1B visas, which allow highly skilled foreign workers to be employed in the U.S. The Trump administration argued American employees were being replaced, particularly in highly paid roles at tech companies. Critics have argued the fee will worsen labor shortages outside of tech.

More than 2,300 people with H-1B visas work as educators across 500 school districts, according to an analysis by the National Education Association teachers union. In a December lawsuit challenging the fee, a coalition of 20 states argued that the fees would effectively prevent school districts from hiring international teachers.

The Trump administration has provided a form to request exemptions on the fee, and educators and advocacy groups have argued it's in the public's interest for teachers to be exempted. Teachers also can come to the U.S. on the more common J-1 visa, which allows short-term stays for cultural exchange programs and is not subject to the new fee.

In rural Oregon, the Umatilla School District recruited two teachers from Spain for math and science instruction. The teachers were "phenomenal," Superintendent Heidi Sipe said, but they returned home in the summer.

"Unfortunately, due to some things at home and then the stress of the unknown, they did choose to go back," Sipe said.

The district did not look for international candidates to replace them because of the cost and uncertainty, but it was able to advertise early and found local candidates for the openings, Sipe said. Other school leaders are not optimistic they will have the same success.

In Allendale County, the international teachers — on a mix of H-1B and J-1 visas — have taught subjects including math, science and language arts, plus special education. Even before the hike in fees, it would cost between \$15,000 to \$20,000 to sponsor a single teacher every year, Cave said.

School leaders agree hiring in-person, certified staff is the best option — teachers who can sit with students to explain a concept and build closer relationships throughout the school day. When that option fails, they weigh tradeoffs.

Cave said she will look to introduce more virtual teachers through Fullmind, a company the district already is using to provide three state-certified instructors. Students meet in a classroom, and their teacher joins them via video chat. Fullmind announced Thursday it had acquired Elevate K-12 and now provides the remote instruction for more than 225 school systems.

South Carolina lets districts hire non-certified teachers to meet staffing needs, but Cave said she would bring in more online teachers before pursuing that option. Her challenges with teacher shortages, she said, have not let up since the pandemic, when many school districts used federal relief money to post new positions, then had difficulty finding enough teachers.

"I can't really do competitive pay," she said. "For rural America, impoverished America, it is still a problem recruiting teachers."

At Halifax County Schools in rural North Carolina, 103 of the 159 teachers are from other countries. For the longer term, the district is pursuing ways to recruit future educators as early as their junior and senior

years in high school.

More immediately, the district is hoping to hire international teachers coming from other districts who want to have their J-1 visas changed to H-1B visas, which could allow the school system to avoid the \$100,000 fee, said Carolyn Mitchell, the district's executive director of human resources.

"You have to try to figure out every alternative way when you know that you may need people," Mitchell said.

Tornadoes kill 2 in northwestern Indiana and raze buildings in Kankakee, Illinois

By NAM Y. HUH and KATHY McCORMACK Associated Press

KANKAKEE, Ill. (AP) — Major storms whipped up tornadoes that killed at least two people in northwest Indiana and leveled buildings in Kankakee, Illinois, authorities said Wednesday, as another round of rain, hail and strong winds made its way through the region.

Several intense supercell thunderstorms moved across northern Illinois and northwestern Indiana the previous day, including one responsible for at least four tornadoes, according to the National Weather Service office in Chicago.

The Newton County Coroner's office said Edward L. Kozlowski, 89, and his wife Arlene Kozlowski, 84, were killed when a tornado struck their home in Lake Village, in northwestern Indiana. The couple appeared to have been killed by blunt force trauma, the coroner's office said, and an autopsy was scheduled for Friday.

"They were wonderful, just really wonderful human beings," son-in-law Steve Rehfeldt told CBS News in Chicago. "You know, tough old guy and sweet old lady."

They left behind four children, seven grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

The storms shattered windows, tore off roofs and smashed vehicles in Kankakee, Illinois. Wood planks and other debris littered yards, streets and parking lots. A landscape and garden center was seriously damaged, some parts completely destroyed.

Storms also dropped 1 to 2 inches (2.5 to 5 centimeters) of rain and left piles of hail in the Grand Rapids area in western Michigan, said Alex Manion, a weather service meteorologist in Detroit. Streets flooded, swamping cars with water above their doors in some places.

The weather service said crews were determining the strength and number of tornadoes, and parts of Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky and Ohio remained under a tornado watch Wednesday.

Suspected tornadoes last week killed four people in southwestern Michigan and two in eastern Oklahoma.

A tornado leaves a small Indiana community in tatters

In Lake Village, where the Kozlowskis died, crews rescued some people who were trapped in damaged homes. At least 70 utility poles were knocked down and many roads were rendered unpassable, Newton County officials said.

"Please do not come here. Do not try to help right now," Sheriff Shannon Cothran said in a video shot in front of a destroyed home.

Laurie Postma, a spokesperson for the Lake Township Volunteer Fire Department, said the storm injured less than 10 people in Lake Village. Cothran said no other significant injuries had been reported but search and rescue operations were continuing.

Lake Village is about 60 miles (95 kilometers) southeast of Chicago and 25 miles (40 kilometers) east of Kankakee.

Resident says not all warning sirens sounded

David Ferris of Lake Village said he, his wife, and their dogs "rode it out in our downstairs bathtub." They were unscathed, except for losing power. Ferris, who is a paramedic, helped rescue and treat injured people.

"We had another house where a guy crawled out," Ferris said. "He was having some trouble breathing because he was covered in house insulation."

Ferris said a Family Dollar store and a gas station were destroyed, and multiple large trees were uprooted.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 41 of 73

Newlywed Cassidy Sinwelski, 23, said she and her husband were aware of the tornado watch in their Lake Village neighborhood and were expecting a run-of-the-mill storm until her husband spotted dark clouds barreling toward them.

"We went into the bathroom, got a piece of plywood and within minutes, I closed my eyes, the lights flickered, and we just — there was nothing," Sinwelski said.

Then she heard loud rumbles and the sound of shattering glass.

"I just kept crying out for God, because I didn't know what else to do," she said.

Jennifer Telford, 49, said she hid in her basement in Lake Village while she followed news reports of the storm. She did not hear the tornado, which struck to the south, but heard the hail pelting her roof.

"The siren in town didn't go off," she said. "The sirens outside town did."

The power was back on in the morning at the truck stop where she works, but elsewhere, "everything is closed due to the downed trees and power lines."

About 4,300 customers in Lake Village and surrounding communities were without power late Wednesday morning, down from more than 11,000 at the peak of the storm, the Northern Indiana Public Service Co. reported.

Giant hailstones pelted an Illinois community

In Kankakee, the storms produced exceptionally large hail, ranging from 3 to 5 inches (7.6 to 12.7 centimeters) in diameter. One 6-inch (15.2-centimeter) hailstone may have set a new state record, the weather service said.

A tornado touched down near the fairgrounds before traveling northeast into the small suburb of Aroma Park, where it caused extensive damage, the Kankakee County Sheriff's Office said.

Nine people in the county had minor injuries, officials said at a news conference. Kevin Birk, a meteorologist in the NWS Chicago office, confirmed at least one tornado touched down in the area.

The storm shattered a longtime garden center's spring plans

Tholens' Garden Center on the south side of Kankakee was hit hard by the tornado, owner Nancy Tholen said.

"We have multiple buildings, and lots of them are destroyed," Tholen said. "This is our 50th year in business, and this was not how we planned to kick off our spring."

Workers had just left for the day when the tornado hit Tuesday afternoon, she said. Thankfully, no one was hurt.

"You know, we make our living in the next 12 weeks," Tholen said. "We'll figure something out to open, but it's just ... it's crazy. But again, everybody's safe, so we're thankful for that."

In Aroma Park, just southeast of Kankakee, restaurateur and village trustee Kathleen Slavin watched the destruction of the tornado and "baseball-sized hail" from the village hall, where she attended a village board meeting.

"It took down trees that are probably over a hundred years old, huge trees came down. It took out main power lines," Slavin said.

Her friend, 69-year-old Ruth Denoyer, swept up glass after the tornado blew out her windows.

"It took our whole garage down, our pool, we have broken windows in the house, glass everywhere," Denoyer said. "But we still have a roof, unlike some people out here."

Iran targets busiest international airport as top UN body demands halt to attacks on Gulf neighbors

By JON GAMBRELL, SALLY ABOU ALJOUD and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran targeted the world's busiest international airport Wednesday and attacked commercial ships as U.S. and Israeli strikes rocked Tehran, while the United Nations' most powerful body demanded a halt to the Islamic Republic's strikes on its Gulf neighbors that threaten global oil supplies.

The latest attacks marked an escalation in Iran's campaign aimed at generating enough global economic

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 42 of 73

pain to pressure the United States and Israel to end the war that started 12 days ago. But there were no signs that the conflict was subsiding.

On Thursday, an Iranian attack sparked a major fire on Bahrain's Muharraq Island, home to the island kingdom's international airport. Authorities urged people to stay indoors and close windows to avoid smoke. The airport has jet fuel tanks, and other tanks in the area serve the kingdom's oil industry.

Also, an attack on Iraq's Basra port killed at least one person and forced a halt to operations at all the country's oil terminals. Farhan al-Fartousi, the director-general of the General Company for Ports of Iraq, said the attack targeted a vessel in a ship-to-ship transfer area at the port on the Persian Gulf. Iraq's commercial ports remained open, though the oil terminals had been shut, according to his statement carried by the state-run Iraqi News Agency.

The first week of war with Iran cost the United States \$11.3 billion, according to the Pentagon, which provided the estimate to Congress in a briefing earlier this week, according to a person familiar with the situation who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the private meeting. The military reported spending \$5 billion on munitions alone in the war's first weekend.

Both sides have dug in, hoping to outlast the other as the conflict upends trade routes, chokes supplies of fuel and fertilizer coming out of the Gulf and threatens air traffic through one of the world's most-traveled regions.

Iran has targeted oil fields and refineries in Gulf Arab nations and effectively stopped cargo traffic through the narrow Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of all traded oil passes.

In response, the International Energy Agency agreed to release 400 million barrels of oil, the largest volume of emergency oil reserves in its history, in a bid to counter the war's effects on energy markets. The U.S. planned to release 172 million barrels of oil next week from its Strategic Petroleum Reserve to combat steep prices.

UN body demands Iran stop 'egregious attacks' on Gulf nations

The U.N. Security Council voted Wednesday to approve a resolution demanding a halt to Iran's "egregious attacks" on its Gulf neighbors.

Among the most recent attacks, four people were wounded after two Iranian drones hit near Dubai International Airport in the United Arab Emirates, though flights continued, the Dubai Media Office said. Firefighters extinguished a blaze early Thursday at a luxury apartment tower in Dubai Creek Harbor after an Iranian drone strike.

At Oman's Port of Salalah, crews battled a blaze at fuel storage tanks there, according to the Oman News Agency.

"The international community is resolute in rejecting these Iranian attacks against sovereign countries that are threatening the stability of the peoples, especially in a region of strategic importance to global economy, energy, security and security of global trade," said Bahrain's U.N. ambassador, Jamal Alrowaie.

The 13-0 vote in the U.N.'s most powerful body reflects Iran's isolated position as it has aggressively responded to Israeli and U.S. strikes. China and Russia — two Iranian allies — abstained from the vote.

Their U.N. ambassadors called the proposal "extremely unbalanced" in not mentioning the strikes against Tehran that began the war.

Russia's U.N. ambassador, Vassily Nebenzia, said it might leave the impression that Iran, "on its own volition and out of malice, conducted an unprovoked attack on Arab states." Iranian U.N. Ambassador Amir Saied Irvani said the resolution "deliberately ignores the root causes of the current crisis."

Meanwhile, more attacks in Gulf countries were reported.

Drones were launched toward the cities of Irbil and Sulaymaniyah in Iraq's Kurdistan region, while in the southern part of the country, an oil vessel flying the Australian flag was struck near Khor Al-Zubair Port, according to two Iraqi navy officials who also spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to comment publicly.

The official said 25 members of the crew were rescued. It was not immediately clear whether any others were missing.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 43 of 73

Explosions rock Jerusalem while Lebanon hit by Israeli strikes

On Thursday, sirens wailed and loud explosions were heard shortly after midnight in Jerusalem and other parts of Israel. The Israeli military said it was responding with another "wide-scale wave of strikes" in Tehran.

The fallout across the Middle East widened as Israel also struck what it said were targets connected to Iran-backed Hezbollah militants in Lebanon.

An Israeli strike hit a car Thursday in Ramlet al-Bayda, a major seaside tourist area of Beirut where dozens of displaced people have been sheltering. Seven people were killed and 21 others were wounded, the Lebanese Health Ministry said. The Israeli military press office told The Associated Press it was "not aware" of a strike at that location.

Blasts shook Beirut's southern suburbs Wednesday, producing fires and plumes of smoke. Israel's military said the strikes were in response to Hezbollah firing dozens of rockets fired simultaneously across northern Israel. It marked some of the heaviest fighting between the two since the war began.

One rocket hit a house near the Israeli town of Karmiel, lightly injuring two people, according to Israeli rescue services.

At least 634 people have been killed in Lebanon since the latest fighting began, the Lebanese Health Ministry said Wednesday.

The U.N. refugee agency said at least 759,000 people have been internally displaced in Lebanon.

Iranian authorities say 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.

Outdated intel likely led US to carry out deadly strike on Iranian elementary school, AP sources say

By AAMER MADHANI, JULIA FRANKEL, MICHAEL BIESECKER and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press
WASHINGTON (AP) — Outdated intelligence likely led to the United States carrying out a deadly missile strike on an elementary school in Iran that killed over 165 people, many of them children, in the opening hours of the conflict, according to a U.S. official and a second person briefed on findings of a preliminary U.S. military investigation into the incident.

The bombing of the school and its casualties involving children has become a focal point of the war, and if ultimately confirmed to be at the hands of the U.S., would also stand among the highest civilian casualty events caused by the American military operations in the last two decades.

President Donald Trump initially blamed Iran for the attack, later said he wasn't certain who was to blame, and then said he would accept the results of the Pentagon's investigation. The issue took on added urgency on Wednesday after the New York Times first reported that a preliminary investigation found that the U.S. was responsible.

U.S. Central Command relied on target coordinates for the strike using outdated data provided by the Defense Intelligence Agency, according to the person familiar with the preliminary finding.

The agency did not respond to a request for comment.

The preliminary finding prompted immediate calls for more information from the Pentagon. White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said that "the investigation is still ongoing."

Both the U.S. official and the person familiar with the matter spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive matter.

Dozens of Democratic senators demanded answers from the Trump administration on Wednesday as a growing body of evidence suggested that the U.S. was likely responsible for the strike.

The letter from more than 45 senators pressed Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth on whether the U.S. was culpable for the strike and what previous analysis of the building had been done. The senators also raised concerns about the Pentagon hollowing-out a congressionally mandated office set up specifically to reduce civilian casualties.

"Under this administration, budgetary and personnel cuts at the Department have robbed military com-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 44 of 73

mands of crucial resources to prevent and respond to civilian casualties," the senators wrote. Those include cuts at U.S. Central Command, whose forces are leading the military campaign against Iran, and the Civilian Protection Center of Excellence, which was signed into law in 2022 as part of a Pentagon ambition to reduce death tolls from strikes.

The revelation could threaten to erode public support in the U.S. effort against Iran at a time when Trump, who as a candidate railed against American involvement in "stupid" overseas wars, faces persistent questions about the purpose and of the conflict and what would bring it to an end.

One former Pentagon official said the Feb. 28 strike that hit Shajareh Tayyebbeh Elementary School, which is located near a neighboring base for the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, came as a natural result of changes made by the Trump administration to reduce staff to mitigate civilian harm and Hegseth's emphasis on lethality over legality.

Evidence mounts pointing to US responsibility for strike

There are several indications that the strike on the school may have been avoidable.

It happened Saturday morning, the start of the Iranian school week, when the building was full of young children. Satellite analysis by the AP shows that the school, as well as other targets struck the same day, had characteristics visible from the air that could have identified them as civilian sites before they were struck.

The AP reported last week that satellite images, expert analysis, a U.S. official and public information released by the U.S. military all suggested it was likely a U.S. strike. That evidence grew stronger on Monday, as new footage emerged showing what experts identified as a U.S.-made Tomahawk cruise missile slamming into the military compound as smoke was already rising from the area where the school was located.

Publicly available satellite imagery shows the school building was part of the military compound until about 2017, when a new wall was added to separate the two. A watchtower on the property was also removed. Around the same time, the imagery shows the walls surrounding the building were painted with murals in vibrant colors, primarily blue and pink, so bright they're visible from space

The school was clearly labeled as such in online maps and has an easily-accessible website full of information about students, teachers and administrators.

International law governing warfare bars strikes on structures, vehicles and people that are not military objectives and combatants. Civilian homes, schools, medical facilities and cultural sites are generally off limits for military strikes. The proximity of a school to a valid military target does not change its status as a civilian site, said Elise Baker, a senior staff lawyer at the Atlantic Council, a Washington-based nonprofit think tank.

If the U.S. is found responsible, said Sen. Tim Kaine during a briefing with journalists on Wednesday: "It's either we've changed our traditional targeting rules or we made a mistake."

"If we've changed our traditional targeting rules and we no longer provide the same level of protection for civilians, that would be tragic," Kaine said.

Some Republicans, too, are sounding alarms.

Sen. Kevin Cramer of North Dakota told reporters that an investigation needs to "get to the bottom of it," and then "admit if you know whose fault it is."

If the U.S. was behind it, Cramer said, the military must "do everything you can to eliminate those mistakes going forward."

He added: "But you also can't undo it."

Guardrails to curb civilian deaths have been gutted

Congress directed the Pentagon to create the Civilian Protection Center of Excellence in late 2022 as part of the wide-ranging annual defense authorization bill, which passed both chambers with broad bipartisan support. The bill said the center was to "institutionalize and advance knowledge, practices, and tools for preventing, mitigating, and responding to civilian harm."

The measure put into law an initiative that had already been started by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin

earlier that year. The 36-step action plan was "ambitious and necessary," Austin said at the time.

In April 2023, that office had a full-time director hired by the Army and an initial core staff of 30 civilians, according to a 2024 Pentagon report that said that the workforce was expected to grow.

Wes Bryant began working there in 2024 as the Branch Chief of Civil Harm Assessments. One of the things the office was discussing was updating the "no strike list," he said, a series of civilian targets in other countries that the Pentagon keeps. When he was working at the Pentagon, it was well known that the list was out-of-date, he said. But under Hegseth, the office's size was slashed and the work on updating the no-strike lists stopped, he said.

"They have no budget. They're just sitting there trying to maintain any semblance of the mission," he said.

Capt. Tim Hawkins, the spokesman for U.S. Central Command, denied reports that the military command only had a single person assigned to the mission but would not offer any further details, citing the ongoing investigation.

Trump touts cutting drug prices, slams fellow Republican Rep. Massie during stops in Ohio, Kentucky

By WILL WEISSERT and SAGAR MEGHANI Associated Press

HEBRON, Ky. (AP) — President Donald Trump on Wednesday touted lowering prescription drug prices in Ohio and campaigned in the Kentucky district of Rep. Thomas Massie, calling his fellow Republican a "nutjob" he said should lose their party's upcoming primary.

It was a full day on the road as Trump attempted to project economic and political strength even as war in Iran has scrambled financial markets and hurt his poll numbers.

Massie is one of the few remaining Republicans who has dared defy Trump in Congress, and the president took the unusual step of holding a rally in Massie's northern Kentucky district. He gleefully told the crowd, "I just can't stand this guy," and called him "stupid" and a "disaster."

"We've got to get rid of this loser," said Trump, who has endorsed Massie's challenger, Ed Gallrein, in Kentucky's primary on May 19.

The event felt like vintage Trump from his reelection bid in 2024 — so much so that he briefly called Gallrein, a farmer, business owner and retired Navy SEAL, to the stage. There, Gallrein declared, "Tom Massie stands with the ladies of 'The View.' Mr. President, we stand with you!"

The trip was 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.

Polls show that Americans were increasingly wary of Trump's handling of the economy even before the conflict 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."

Iran looms large in both Ohio and Kentucky stops

Trump's swing began with a tour of Thermo Fisher Scientific in suburban Cincinnati. There, he discussed his administration's efforts to persuade major manufacturers to lower prescription medication prices so that they are closer to what is charged abroad.

"I used some very strong negotiating talent to get every single country to almost immediately approve," he told reporters.

But the president also told reporters that what was happening in Iran was "an excursion that will keep us out of a war." He added of Tehran, "for them, it's a war. For us, it's turned out to be easier than we thought."

Later, at the Kentucky rally, Trump suggested the conflict wasn't about to end, saying, "We don't want to leave early, do we? We've got to finish the job."

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 46 of 73

He said that Iran was on the verge of rebuilding its nuclear capabilities, saying that fighting needed to continue so, "We don't want to go back every two years."

That contradicts many previous Trump claims and justifications for the U.S. and Israel launching strikes on Iran — not the least of which was Trump saying U.S. strikes last summer had obliterated that country's nuclear capabilities.

Also Wednesday, Trump did an interview with Cincinnati's WKRC-TV CBS and said he planned to tap the nation's Strategic Petroleum Reserve, in an effort to bring down gasoline prices.

"Right now, we'll reduce it a little bit, and that brings the prices down," Trump said, without providing details.

That interview followed the president acknowledging during the tour of the drug factory that stock markets had been volatile as gas prices have risen, saying, "I figured we'd be hit a little bit. But, we were hit probably less than I thought."

"We'll be back on track in a pretty short while," Trump said. "Prices are coming down very substantially. Oil will be coming down."

Trump laces into Massie

At the rally, the president stressed the importance of Republicans winning the midterms, ticking off his administration's accomplishments while telling the crowd, "The midterms are going to be very, very important to keep it going."

But that doesn't extend to Massie, who Trump called "the worst."

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 criticized the U.S. strike on Venezuela that toppled then-President Nicolás Maduro and, most recently, the war in Iran.

Massie told The Cincinnati Enquirer that Trump's endorsement is "all my opponent has going for him." adding that Gallrein "has promised to be a rubber stamp when he gets to Washington D.C. and I don't think people here want a rubber stamp."

Wednesday's swing was part of a tour the White House said would see Trump travel the country and attempt to show that he's taking kitchen table issues seriously and reassure voters nervous about still-rising prices and economic growth. It followed Democrats pushing the message that the everyday cost of living remained too high and winning the Virginia and New Jersey governors' races in November.

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

Even in Kentucky, Trump spent long stretches mocking his Democratic predecessor, President Joe Biden, and slammed California Gov. Gavin Newsom for publicly talking about his dyslexia, saying "I don't want the president of the United States to have a cognitive deficiency."

Then, while flying back to Washington, Trump took to his social media website to again criticize Newsom on dyslexia, which is a learning disability. Trump called the governor "a Cognitive Mess."

Trey Hendrickson joins Ravens, Maxx Crosby still on Raiders and Daniel Jones re-signs with Colts

By JOSH DUBOW AP Pro Football Writer

The Baltimore Ravens landed their star pass rusher in Trey Hendrickson, Maxx Crosby is back in Las Vegas for now and Daniel Jones is staying in Indianapolis as part of a busy start to the new league year.

The biggest move Wednesday came when the Ravens agreed to a four-year, \$112 million contract with four-time Pro Bowl defensive end Trey Hendrickson a day after backing out of a deal with the Raiders for Crosby over a failed physical, a person with knowledge of the deal told The Associated Press.

Hendrickson was an All-Pro for Cincinnati in 2024 when he led the NFL with 17 1/2 sacks. He played

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 47 of 73

in only seven games because of injuries last season and had four sacks but has reached double digits in sacks four times in the previous five seasons.

It was a quick pivot for the Ravens after the surprising development Tuesday night when Baltimore pulled out of the trade that was supposed to send two first-round picks to Las Vegas.

A person with knowledge of Baltimore's decision told the AP that Crosby failed his physical. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because those results are private.

Crosby had surgery in January to repair a torn meniscus in his left knee. He missed the final two games of the season because of the injury despite wanting to play through it at the time.

The Raiders, who have been among the biggest spenders in the opening days of free agency, now must figure out what to do with Crosby. Las Vegas still has plenty of cap room to keep the five-time Pro Bowler on the roster with his \$30 million salary if the team can't find another trade. Crosby was back in the team facility in Nevada on Wednesday, a person with knowledge of his whereabouts said on condition of anonymity.

Jones and the Colts agreed on a two-year contract that is worth up to \$100 million, a person with knowledge of the contract told the AP. The person requested anonymity because the deal had not yet been announced.

Jones will receive \$88 million over the next two seasons with \$50 million guaranteed instead of playing on the \$37.8 million transition tag. He can make an additional \$12 million through incentives.

Jones led the Colts offense to a productive 10-game start. But following the bye week, Jones played through a hairline fracture in his left leg and then wound up suffering a season-ending torn right Achilles tendon in early December.

Jones set career highs in passer rating (100.2) and completion rate (68%) as Indianapolis ranked fifth in the NFL in scoring at 28.9 points per game before he went down for the season.

All the people who confirmed new deals with players on Wednesday spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because teams hadn't announced the moves or other developments.

Buffalo reached a three-year agreement with pass rusher Bradley Chubb, a person familiar with the deal said. Chubb agreed to terms with the Bills shortly after the Miami Dolphins announced his release.

The 29-year-old Chubb has eight seasons of NFL experience. He spent the past three-plus years in Miami, including missing the entire 2024 season because of a torn knee ligament. He had 8 1/2 sacks last season.

All-Pro safety Kevin Byard left Chicago to reunite with his former coach Mike Vrabel, agreeing to a one-year, \$9 million deal with New England, a person familiar with the contract said. Byard led the NFL with seven interceptions last season. Byard played under Vrabel for five-plus seasons in Tennessee.

Washington agreed to terms with edge rusher K'Lavon Chaisson on a one-year contract worth \$12 million with \$10.3 million guaranteed, according to Athletes First, the agency that represents him. Coming off ranking last in the NFL on defense, the Commanders also reached deals with linebacker Leo Chenal, safety Nick Cross, cornerback Amik Robertson and tight end Chig Okonkwo.

The Buccaneers agreed on one-year contracts with defensive lineman A'Shawn Robinson and backup quarterback Jake Browning, two people with knowledge of the deals said. Robinson is getting \$10 million guaranteed, one of the people said.

The New York Jets agreed to terms with former Las Vegas Raiders left guard Dylan Parham on a two-year, \$20 million contract. The signing helps offset the free agency losses of Alijah Vera-Tucker (Patriots) and John Simpson (Ravens) and gives New York a new starter on an offensive line that'll help protect Geno Smith — Parham's former teammate for one season in Las Vegas.

New Orleans announced a multiyear contract with veteran tight end Noah Fant and a two-year extension for reserve defensive tackle John Ridgeway III. Fant spent last season with Cincinnati, where he caught 34 passes for 288 yards and three TDs. He spent his previous three seasons with Seattle and his first three with Denver, and has 334 career receptions for 3,593 yards and 18 TDs.

Jacksonville agreed to a two-year deal with former Commanders running back Chris Rodriguez Jr., giving the Jaguars another option in the backfield after losing Travis Etienne in free agency. Rodriguez rushed for 500 yards and six TDs last season for Washington.

Several other players hit the open market after being released by their former teams at the start of the league year, with many of these moves having already been telegraphed.

Among those are Arizona quarterback Kyler Murray, Atlanta QB Kirk Cousins, Minnesota defensive tackles Javon Hargrave and Jonathan Allen, and Detroit edge rusher Josh Paschal.

Hargrave immediately agreed to a new deal, getting a two-year, \$23 million contract with \$10.5 million guaranteed from Green Bay, according to his agent, Drew Rosenhaus. The deal will pay Hargrave \$13 million in his first year as he joins his fourth team in five seasons. He has 49 sacks in 10 seasons.

The Cowboys also made a pair of trades, sending pass-rushing defensive tackle Osa Odighizuwa to San Francisco for a third-round pick and defensive lineman Solomon Thomas to Tennessee as part of a seventh-round pick swap.

Epstein's longtime accountant testifies on his wealth and business ties

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House lawmakers were digging into Jeffrey Epstein's sprawling financial portfolio on Wednesday as a committee deposed his former accountant and tried to understand his connections to some of the world's wealthiest men.

Richard Kahn, who worked closely with Epstein for years and now serves as an executor of his estate, appeared for the closed-door deposition on Capitol Hill. He told lawmakers that he had not personally seen evidence of Epstein's sexual abuse, but provided a fuller picture of how Epstein acquired his wealth. The wealthy financier made hundreds of millions of dollars over two decades, during which he struck up friendships with some of the world's most powerful men.

Kahn "was under the impression that Epstein made his money as a tax advisor and a financial planner," said Rep. James Comer, the Republican chair of the House Oversight Committee. Lawmakers argued that a fuller picture of Epstein's finances could help the public understand how, for years, he was able to get away with trafficking and sexually abusing underage girls.

"Jeffrey Epstein's sex trafficking ring would not have been possible without Richard Kahn, who managed Epstein's money for years, authorized payments, including payments to victims and survivors," said Rep. James Walkinshaw, D-Va., who added that Kahn told them he was unable to recall details of some of the transactions and communications that he was asked about.

Kahn has said that he was unaware of Epstein's sexual abuse and had not seen any of his victims.

Comer, R-Ky., also said that lawmakers confirmed during the deposition that Epstein received significant amounts of money from former retail shopping chain executive Les Wexner, hedge fund manager Glenn Dubin, tech entrepreneur Steven Sinofsky, investor Leon Black and the Rothschilds, a wealthy banking family.

None of those people have been accused of wrongdoing in their relationships with Epstein, but Democrats on the committee argued that anyone with ties to the wealthy financier should be scrutinized. Wexner was deposed by the committee last month, and Comer has also called on Black, among several others, to appear for transcribed interviews.

Kahn also told lawmakers that Epstein had financial ties to Ehud Barak, who was the prime minister of Israel from 1999 to 2001, according to Democratic Rep. Suhas Subramanyam. Barak has not been accused of wrongdoing and has said he regrets his friendship with Epstein.

Comer also said Wednesday that the committee has reviewed over 40,000 documents that it subpoenaed from JPMorgan Chase and Deutsche Bank. Epstein was connected to at least 64 business entities, according to Comer.

Republican President Donald Trump has strongly denied any wrongdoing in his own ties to Epstein, and Comer said that Kahn had never seen any financial transactions between Epstein and Trump. Comer said that Kahn is the latest witness to testify that they had never seen Trump doing anything wrong with Epstein.

"The investigation's about getting the truth to the American people, trying to figure out how the government failed, answer questions we all have," Comer said.

Trump administration kicks off new process to try to replace tariffs struck down by Supreme Court

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration on Wednesday opened a new trade investigation into manufacturing in foreign countries — an effort that comes after the Supreme Court struck down President Donald Trump's previous use of tariffs by declaring an economic emergency.

Trump and his team have made clear that they're seeking to replace the hundreds of billions of dollars in lost revenues after the Supreme Court's February ruling by using different laws to establish new tariffs.

In this case, the administration is starting investigations under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, which could eventually lead to new import taxes. But U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer, in a Wednesday call with reporters, said he didn't want to prejudge the outcome of the process.

"The policy remains the same — the tools may change depending on, you know, the vagaries of courts and other things," said Greer, stressing that the goal was to protect American jobs.

The start of the process to fully replace Trump's prior tariffs could invite a return of much of the drama that rattled the global economy last year. The since-overturned tariffs led to new frameworks with U.S. trade partners — and it's unclear what impact a new set of import taxes could have on those agreements. Greer described the trade frameworks as standing on their own and suggested they were separate from the new investigation.

This new set of tariffs could play out against the backdrop of a war in Iran and midterm elections in which Democrats are running against Trump's Republican allies by emphasizing that the public is owed tariff refunds following the Supreme Court decision.

Greer said that the investigation would examine excess industrial capacity and government backing that could give foreign companies an unfair advantage over U.S. companies.

The entities subject to the investigation include China, the European Union, Singapore, Switzerland, Norway, Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia, Thailand, South Korea, Vietnam, the self-governing island of Taiwan, Bangladesh, Mexico, Japan and India. The government is looking for what it deems to be persistent trade surpluses with the U.S. and policies such as subsidies and the suppression of workers' wages, among other factors.

The administration is also rolling out a Section 301 investigation to ban the importing of goods made by forced labor.

Greer indicated that there could be additional Section 301 investigations over issues such as digital service taxes, pharmaceutical drug pricing and ocean pollution, among other possibilities. The Commerce Department has separate trade investigations under Section 232 of the 1962 Trade Expansion Act.

There are timeline pressures for the administration to complete its investigations. The administration has imposed 10% tariffs on foreign-made goods under section 122 of the 1974 Trade Act, but those expire after 150 days on July 24. Trump said he planned to raise that import tax to 15%, but he has yet to do so.

Greer said the administration is "keying off" the new investigation based on the 150-day deadline, saying that the goal is to bring "potential options" to Trump as soon as possible.

Greer said the investigations would be separate from the trade frameworks announced last year by Trump that set baseline tariff rates, which led to 15% rates charged on goods from the European Union, Japan and South Korea, among other places, that have since been overturned by the Supreme Court. Still, he suggested that the frameworks could play a factor.

"My sense is that these countries continue to want to deal, and President Trump continues to want the deal," Greer said, adding that since tariffs are in play the commitments that the countries have made and the implementation of the frameworks would be considered as they "bump" against the demands of the Section 301 process.

Trump keeps telling America he's winning in Iran. He's less clear in explaining how the war ends

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Facing jittery global markets and drooping poll numbers since launching a war with Iran, President Donald Trump has cycled from calls for “unconditional surrender” to sounding amenable to an end state in which Iran trades one hard-line ayatollah for another.

Shifting comments from the Republican president and his top aides are adding to the precariousness of the 12-day-old conflict, which is impacting nearly every corner of the Middle East and causing economic tremors around the globe. With neither side budging, the war is now on an unpredictable path and a credible endgame is unclear.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said Tuesday it was up to Trump “whether it’s the beginning, the middle or the end” of the war. Trump, during the course of one speech at a House Republican gathering Monday, went from calling the war a “short-term excursion” that could end soon to proclaiming “we haven’t won enough.”

“We have hit them harder than virtually any country in history has been hit, and we’re not finished yet,” Trump told reporters at the White House on Wednesday.

The vacillation has fueled criticism from those who say Trump lacks a clear goal. “They didn’t have a plan,” Sen. Mark Kelly, D-Ariz., told reporters. “They have no timeline. And because of that, they have no exit strategy.”

A constantly shifting goal line

Since ordering the Iran bombardment, Trump has continually shifted his timelines and goals for the war. Over the past few days, Trump has called for the “unconditional surrender” of Iran’s leaders, while suggesting he had already succeeded in achieving his objective of decimating Iran’s military.

At the same time, Trump’s team has sought to soothe anxious Americans that the war will not be long and drawn out even as the president has insisted he has not ruled out the option of using U.S. ground troops.

The U.S. military says it has effectively destroyed the Iranian navy and made huge strides in defanging Iran’s ability to launch missiles and drones at its neighbors. Yet the critical Strait of Hormuz, through which roughly 20% of the world’s oil passes on a typical day, remains essentially closed to business, and Iranian leaders are unbowed.

The Revolutionary Guard said Iran would not allow “a single liter of oil” through the vital waterway until the United States stopped its bombing campaign. Ali Larijani, Iran’s top national security official, offered a menacing message on Tuesday after Trump had threatened to attack Iran “TWENTY TIMES HARDER” if Tehran stopped oil flowing through the strait.

“The sacrificial nation of Iran doesn’t fear your empty threats,” Larijani wrote on X. “Even those bigger than you couldn’t eliminate Iran. Be careful not to get eliminated yourself.”

Trump ally Newt Gingrich, a former Republican House speaker, said the administration should have moved on securing the strait on Day One of the conflict.

“If they can’t keep it open, this war will in fact be an American defeat before very long, because the entire world, including the American people, will react to the price of oil if the strait stay closed very long,” Gingrich said in an appearance on Fox Business.

Making the case to Americans

Trump has struggled to make his case to Americans about why preemptive action against Iran was necessary and how it squared with his pledge to keep the United States out of the “forever wars” of the past two decades. Thus far, seven U.S. troops have been killed and about 140 injured in the retaliatory salvos from Iran.

One of several reasons Trump has offered to justify launching the war was that he had a “feeling” that Iran was getting set to attack the U.S.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt slightly amended that position, telling reporters that the president “had a feeling” that was “based on fact.”

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 51 of 73

But Pentagon officials have told congressional staffers in private briefings that the U.S. does not have intelligence indicating that Iran was planning to preemptively attack the U.S.

Recent polling shows Trump's decision to attack Iran has not come with the rallying-around-the-flag effect that has typically accompanied the start of recent U.S. wars.

About half of voters in Quinnipiac and Fox News polls said the U.S. military action in Iran makes the U.S. "less safe," while only about 3 in 10 in each poll said it made the country safer. A CNN poll found about half of U.S. adults thought the military action would make Iran "more of a threat" to the U.S., while only about 3 in 10 thought it would lessen the danger.

In that CNN poll, about 6 in 10 U.S. adults said they trusted Trump "not much" or "not at all" to make the right decisions about the U.S. use of force in Iran.

European allies are treading carefully after British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez faced the wrath of Trump, who deemed them not sufficiently supportive in backing his war of choice.

Trump on Wednesday lashed out again at Spain, which has said it will not allow the U.S. to use jointly operated bases in southern Spain in any strikes not covered by the U.N. charter.

"I think they've been very bad — not good at all," Trump said. "We may cut off trade with Spain."

Even German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, who has been broadly supportive of the U.S.-Israeli campaign against Iran, said on Tuesday that "more questions arise with every day of war."

Deflecting responsibility for school bombing

Trump has chosen to deflect responsibility for the bombing of a girl's school in southern Iran on the first day of the conflict, killing at least 165 people.

Trump on Saturday blamed the attack on Iran, saying its security forces are "very inaccurate" with munitions.

On Monday, after the investigative group Bellingcat posted verified video that showed a U.S. Tomahawk cruise missile hitting a Revolutionary Guard facility near the school, causing the explosion, Trump again insisted it could have been Iran's fault but said that he would accept whatever a U.S. investigation into the matter might find.

The president erroneously claimed that Tehran had access to Tomahawks, a U.S.-manufactured weapon system that is only available to the U.S. and a few close allies.

Asked by a reporter, Leavitt did not directly answer why Trump falsely asserted that Iran has access to the U.S.-made missile.

Instead, she responded in part that "the president has a right to share his opinions with the American public" while noting "he has said he'll accept the conclusion of that investigation."

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., told reporters that Trump's claim "is beyond asinine."

"Again, he says whatever pops into his head no matter what the truth is," Schumer said. "And we all know he lies, but on something as formidable as this, it's appalling."

Sen. Kevin Cramer, R-N.D., was among Trump allies gently making the case that it was important for the administration to clarify what happened to the school.

Cramer said the military must "do everything you can to eliminate those mistakes going forward."

"But you also can't undo it," he added.

FACT FOCUS: The Trump administration is falsely claiming Jimmy Carter was against mail-in voting

By MELISSA GOLDIN Associated Press

The Trump administration is using a 20-year-old report to misrepresent former President Jimmy Carter's views on mail-in and absentee ballots as it pushes for federal legislation that would impose strict new proof-of-citizenship and photo ID requirements for voting ahead of the midterm elections.

On two successive days this week, President Donald Trump and White House press secretary Karoline

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 52 of 73

Leavitt invoked the 2005 report by the Commission on Federal Election Reform while advocating for the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility, or SAVE America Act. The commission's co-chairs were Carter, a Democrat, and former Secretary of State James Baker, who held senior government positions in the administrations of three Republican presidents — Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush.

Trump and Leavitt falsely claimed that Carter was against the use of mail-in and absentee ballots because they can lead to fraud, a mischaracterization of the report's conclusions.

Here's a closer look at the facts.

TRUMP, at the Republican Members Issues Conference on Monday: "Jimmy Carter, the best thing he ever did, he headed a commission after he was president. It was the single best thing. And he did a thing on mail-in ballots. He said mail-in ballots should not be allowed because they are inherently dishonest."

LEAVITT, at a White House press briefing on Tuesday: "The bipartisan 2005 report of the Commission on Federal Election Reform, shared by, of all people, former President Jimmy Carter and former Secretary of State James Baker, concluded that, quote, 'absentee ballots remain the largest source of potential voter fraud.'"

THE FACTS: Carter supported mail-in voting and absentee ballots, according to statements by the late president, his grandson Jason Carter and The Carter Center. The 2005 report stated that absentee and mail-in ballots can create opportunities for fraud, but also suggested ways to reduce that risk and recommended further research on the issue. Experts say there is no evidence that mail-in and absentee voting leads to widespread fraud, either now or 20 years ago.

"My grandfather supported mail-in voting — so much so that he used it himself," Jason Carter, chair of The Carter Center's board of trustees, told The Associated Press in a statement on Wednesday. "Any claim to the contrary unnecessarily sows doubt in election integrity and undermines voter confidence in a consequential election year."

President Carter himself publicly endorsed mail-in voting and absentee ballots in 2020, a view that continued until his death in 2024.

"I urge political leaders across the country to take immediate steps to expand vote-by-mail and other measures to help protect the core of American democracy — the right of our citizens the vote," he said in May 2020 amid concerns about elections during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Four months later, in response to news reports about his opinion of absentee ballots, Carter said: "I approve the use of absentee ballots and have been using them for more than five years."

Voting by mail remains popular with voters of both major parties. During the 2024 election, which Trump won, roughly 30% of voters cast mailed ballots, according to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission. That was higher than pre-pandemic levels, when about a quarter of voters used mailed ballots. Three of the four states where use of mailed ballots was higher than in 2020 are controlled politically by Republicans — Indiana, South Dakota and Utah.

Trump himself has voted by mail in his home state of Florida.

A misrepresented report

The Commission on Federal Election Reform, organized by American University's Center for Democracy and Election Management and funded by a group of philanthropic organizations, published a report, "Building Confidence in U.S. Elections," in 2005. Among its findings were that "absentee ballots remain the largest source of potential voter fraud" and that voting by mail is "likely to increase the risks of fraud and of contested elections" in certain states.

However, the report did not discourage the use of mail-in and absentee ballots. Rather, it included suggestions for how to reduce the risk of fraud.

The report made three recommendations related to absentee ballots and voter registration fraud: that jurisdictions only allow specific people to handle ballots, and prohibit candidates or party workers from picking up and delivering absentee ballots; that states should pass legislation to minimize fraud from payments for voter registration, absentee ballot or signature collection efforts; and that states should not discourage legal voter registration or get-out-the-vote work.

It also suggested that states should implement better safeguards for ballot integrity and encouraged further research on the pros and cons of mail-in and early voting. The report noted that in Oregon, which had been using vote-by-mail for seven years, there was "little evidence of fraud."

"The administration's claims about President Carter's views on mail-in voting are not true," the Carter Center said in a statement this week to The Associated Press.

It said the claims do not "consider the rest of the report's findings or President Carter's acknowledgment of the safeguards that have emerged in the 20+ years since this report came out."

No rampant fraud

Mail-in and absentee voting does not cause widespread election fraud, according to experts, even as their use has increased in the past two decades, from roughly 13% of voters in 2004 to nearly a third of all ballots cast two years ago.

"There's no evidence that mail-in voting fraud was rampant then, and it's not rampant now," said Mark Lindeman, policy and strategy director at Verified Voting, a nonpartisan group focused on election technology. "Mail voting has become more common and more mature. So, over that period of time, states have learned from each other — best practices for not only avoiding fraud, but just generally administering mail balloting well."

For example, ballot tracking, curing ballots that had initially been rejected, and the ability to identify and address duplicate voter registrations have improved.

Trump has flip-flopped on mail-in voting over the years. He preemptively argued that mail balloting was bad months before voting even began in the 2020 election. At the same time, he encouraged voters in Florida — a state he won — to vote by mail. Trump and other Republicans then blamed mail-in voting for his loss.

The GOP, and sometimes even Trump, urged voters to cast their ballots by mail ahead of the 2024 election when it was seen as a necessary course correction during a tight race.

Asked whether Trump stands by the statements he and Leavitt made, White House spokeswoman Abigail Jackson said: "President Trump and Karoline are completely right -- and Karoline read a direct quote from the report during her briefing."

She added that the press release The Carter Center published in May 2020 that included Carter's endorsement of mail-in voting "does not invalidate the findings" of the 2005 report.

Files show British prime minister was warned of 'reputational risk' in appointing Mandelson

By JILL LAWLESS and BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British Prime Minister Keir Starmer was warned that Peter Mandelson's friendship with convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein exposed the government to "reputational risk," but he still appointed him as ambassador to the United States, documents released Wednesday show.

Starmer fired Mandelson after nine months in the job when new details of the relationship with Epstein emerged, and now faces a political storm over the appointment. The newly published files show the prime minister ignored red flags raised by his staff when he appointed the savvy but controversial Mandelson to the U.K.'s most important diplomatic post.

Mandelson was briefly arrested last month by police investigating allegations he passed sensitive government information to Epstein a decade and a half ago.

A two-decade friendship with Epstein

Concerns were raised in a document sent to Starmer in December 2024 when he was considering appointing Mandelson, an elder statesman of the governing Labour Party, to a diplomatic post seen as vital to establishing relations with U.S. President Donald Trump's administration.

A "due diligence report" prepared by senior civil servants summarized a relationship between Mandelson and Epstein that ran from at least 2002 — the year Mandelson "facilitated" a meeting between Epstein and then-Prime Minister Tony Blair — to 2019, the year of Epstein's death.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 54 of 73

The document notes that "Mandelson reportedly stayed in Epstein's house while he was in jail in June 2009" for sexual offenses involving a minor, and cites a 2019 report commissioned by JPMorgan which said Epstein had "particularly close relationship" with the then-Prince Andrew and with Mandelson.

It also spelled out unrelated reputational issues over Mandelson's work in a previous Labour government — when he twice had to resign over financial matters — and his work at Global Counsel, a lobbying firm he co-founded.

Despite the red flags in the documents, Cabinet minister Darren Jones said the due diligence "did not expose the depth and extent" of Mandelson's friendship with Epstein. He said Mandelson had lied to Starmer about the friendship.

"Peter Mandelson should never have been afforded the privilege of representing this country," Jones told lawmakers in the House of Commons. "I reiterate for the House that the prime minister deeply regrets taking him at his word. It was a mistake to do so."

Political fallout could hit Starmer

Starmer fired Mandelson in September after an earlier release of documents showed he had maintained contact with Epstein after the financier's 2008 conviction.

Further details about Mandelson's ties with Epstein, revealed in a huge trove of files published by the U.S. Department of Justice in January, raised new questions about Starmer's judgment, driving opponents and even some members of the governing Labour Party to call for the prime minister's resignation.

Starmer survived the immediate danger, but his position remains fragile, even though he never met Epstein and is not implicated in his crimes.

The 147 pages of documents published Wednesday were released after lawmakers forced Starmer's government to disclose thousands of files about the decision to name Mandelson to the key diplomatic post at the start of Trump's second term.

The government says the files will show Mandelson misled officials.

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 published Wednesday note that Mandelson was asked questions about his relationship with Epstein, and say the prime minister's communications director was "satisfied with his responses."

The responses themselves have not yet been published because of the police investigation.

And the files raise more questions for Starmer. After Mandelson was fired, National Security Advisor Jonathan Powell told the prime minister's lawyer that he had raised concerns about "the individual and reputation" and found the appointment process "weirdly rushed," the documents show.

Ed Davey, leader of the opposition Liberal Democrats, said Starmer had made a "catastrophic failure of judgment."

Conservative lawmaker Alex Burghart said that while Mandelson might have lied to the prime minister, "he wasn't lied to by this due diligence document.

"The prime minister knew all he needed to know. It was on him. It's on him now. He let his party down. He let his country down. I very much doubt that either will trust him again."

Mandelson faces a police probe

The Epstein files released in January suggest 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, 72, 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.

He has been forced to resign from the House of Lords, and has lost his 157,000 pound (\$210,000) a year ambassador's salary. The documents show that after being sacked Mandelson asked for a 547,000 pound payoff, the rest of his four-year salary.

In the end, the government gave him 75,000 pounds.

Video appears to show New York City bomb suspect buying fuse at a fireworks store

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ and MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Newly released surveillance video appears to show a man buying a fuse at a fireworks store days before authorities say he and another man brought homemade bombs to a protest outside the New York City mayor's residence.

Emir Balat, 18, visited a Phantom Fireworks store near his suburban Philadelphia home on March 2, and he purchased 20 feet (6 meters) of consumer fireworks safety fuse, the company said Wednesday.

Balat and Ibrahim Kayumi, 19, were arrested on Saturday after police said they attempted to set off a pair of improvised explosives at a small anti-Muslim rally near Gracie Mansion in Manhattan.

After their arrests, the men said they were inspired by the Islamic State group, according to law enforcement officials and a criminal complaint charging them with providing material support to a foreign terrorist organization and using a weapon of mass destruction.

They were not required to enter a plea at an initial court appearance Monday and were ordered held without bail.

Security camera footage released by Phantom Fireworks shows a man the company identified as Balat shopping at its store in Penndel, Pennsylvania. Balat is from neighboring Langhorne, and Kayumi is from Newtown, about 4 miles (6.5 kilometers) north.

The man in the video is seen holding a coiled item and placing it on a counter as he speaks with an employee, hands her what appears to be an identification card and writes on a form. Later, he is seen at a checkout counter paying cash for the item. Phantom Fireworks said the fuse cost \$6.89.

A message seeking comment was left for Balat's lawyer, Mehdi Essmidi.

The footage and purchase details offer a new window into the potential planning for the attack as investigators probe possible motives and the relationship between Balat and Kayumi.

Prosecutors, police and FBI officials say Balat and Kayumi drove from Pennsylvania to New York City and joined a throng of counterprotesters at the rally, whose organizer, far-right activist Jake 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 he was tackled and arrested, according to a court complaint.

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.

The FBI said it has conducted multiple searches in connection with the investigation.

Overnight Monday, FBI bomb technicians conducted controlled detonations of explosive residue found during a search of storage facility in Langhorne.

Balat, a senior at Neshaminy High School in Langhorne, enrolled in a virtual program in September and had not attended in-person classes since, a school spokesperson said. Kayumi graduated in 2024 from Council Rock High School North, according to a school spokesperson.

After Balat's court appearance, 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.

"They are not known to each other. They do not live together. They did not have friendly, family or school

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 56 of 73

ties," Essmidi said. "There is no reason to believe they knew each other prior to this incident, and I don't know how well they knew each other at the time of this incident."

Kayumi's lawyer did not speak to reporters following a court hearing Monday and declined to comment when reached by The Associated Press.

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.

US stock market remains calm, even as oil prices rise

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The U.S. stock market remained calm Wednesday, even as the price of oil got back to rising.

The S&P 500 edged down 0.1% for a second day of modest moves following what had been a wild stretch caused by the war with Iran. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 289 points, or 0.6%, and the Nasdaq composite rose 0.1%.

Since the start of the war, sharp moves for oil prices have triggered swings up and down for financial markets worldwide, sometimes by the hour. Oil prices briefly spiked to their highest levels since 2022 this week because of the possibility that production in the Middle East could be blocked for a long time, which in turn raised worries about a surge of debilitating inflation for the global economy.

The International Energy Agency said Wednesday that its members will release a record amount of oil, 400 million barrels, from stockpiles they've set aside for emergencies. Such moves push downward on oil prices in the near term, but it will likely require a full resumption of the flow of oil and natural gas from the Persian Gulf area to fully ease the market. That has investors worldwide anxiously awaiting the end of the war.

The price for a barrel of Brent crude, the international standard, rose 4.8% to settle at \$91.98. A barrel of benchmark U.S. crude gained 4.6% to \$87.25.

Worries are centered on the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow waterway off Iran's coast where a fifth of the world's oil sails on a typical day. The war has halted most of that traffic, which means storage tanks for crude in the region are filling up because the oil has nowhere else to go. That in turn is pushing oil producers to say they're cutting their output.

The United States 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.

All this is happening at a time when inflation was already relatively high in the United States. A report released Wednesday showed that U.S. consumers paid prices for groceries, gasoline and other costs of living that were 2.4% higher in February than a year earlier.

To be sure, that inflation rate was the same as the prior month's and better than the 2.5% that economists expected, but it remains above the 2% target the Federal Reserve has set for the economy. It also doesn't include the spike in gasoline prices that's happened this month because of the war.

"Looking forward, we expect a spring bulge in inflation due to the spike in energy prices tied to the Iran war, the duration of which will dictate the landing spot for headline inflation by year end," according to Gary Schlossberg, global strategist at Wells Fargo Investment Institute.

High inflation combined with a stagnating economy would create a worst-case scenario called "stagflation" that the Federal Reserve has no good tools to fix. Stagflation fears are rising not just because of higher oil prices but also because of weakness in hiring by U.S. employers.

On Wall Street, the majority of stocks fell. Campbell's sank 7.1% after the soup company reported a weaker profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected. It was hurt by struggles for its snack business, and it cut its forecasts for revenue and profit this fiscal year.

Helping to limit Wall Street's losses was Oracle, which jumped 9.2%. The tech giant reported stronger profit and revenue for the latest quarter than analysts expected. It also raised its forecast for revenue

growth next fiscal year, in part because of demand for cloud computing for artificial-intelligence training and inferencing.

All told, the S&P 500 fell 5.68 points to 6,775.80. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 289.24 to 47,417.27, and the Nasdaq composite rose 19.03 to 22,716.13.

In stock markets abroad, indexes fell in Europe following better performances in Asia. Germany's DAX lost 1.4%, while Japan's Nikkei 225 rose 1.4%.

In the bond market, Treasury yields rose because of the upward pressure from higher oil prices. The yield on the 10-year Treasury climbed to 4.22% from 4.15% late Tuesday, a notable move for the bond market. Higher yields crank up the pressure on other investments, pushing downward on their prices.

Because of the spike for oil prices, traders have pushed back forecasts for when the Fed could resume its cuts to interest rates. President Donald Trump has been angrily calling for such cuts, which would give the economy and job market a boost but also potentially worsen inflation.

Inflation held steady last month, but that was before the attack on Iran sent energy costs soaring

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER and ANNE D'INNOCENZIO Associated Press Writers

KANSAS CITY (AP) — Inflation remained stubbornly elevated last month as gas prices rose, but it's a snapshot of consumer prices before a U.S.-Israeli attack on Iran sent energy costs soaring.

Consumer prices rose 2.4% in February compared with a year earlier, the Labor Department said Wednesday, matching January's increase. Excluding the volatile food and energy, core prices climbed 2.5% from a year ago, also matching January's level, which was the lowest in five years. Both remain above the Federal Reserve's 2% target.

Wednesday's data has been overtaken by a conflict that began when the U.S. and Israel attacked Iran on Feb. 28, causing wild gyrations in oil prices as shipping lanes through the Persian Gulf suffered a rare shutdown. Gas prices have jumped sharply and are expected to fuel higher costs broadly. Inflation data for this month will be released in early April.

The price spike will challenge the inflation-fighters at the Federal Reserve and could slow consumer spending, which drives two-thirds of the nation's economic growth.

Prices could retreat if the war ends soon, as President Donald Trump has hinted. But rising oil prices threaten to worsen inflation for at least a few months with Americans already worn down by nearly five years of sharply higher costs. "Affordability" has become a thorny political issue for congressional Republicans with midterm elections later this year.

On a monthly basis, prices rose 0.3% in February from the previous month, up from 0.2% in January. Increases at that pace for an extended period would push yearly inflation higher. Core prices moved up just 0.2%, down from a 0.3% rise in January.

There were some positive signs in Wednesday's report, with rental inflation falling to just 0.1% on a monthly basis, the smallest increase in five years. New car prices were unchanged in February and used car prices fell 0.4%.

But grocery prices rose more quickly than in January, a trend that has hammered family budgets. They rose 0.4% in February and were up 2.4% from a year earlier. Gas prices increased 0.8% last month, though they're down 5.6% compared with a year ago. And clothing costs jumped 1.3% just in February, likely due to tariffs.

"Ahead of the energy shock, trends in the consumer price index were relatively tame," said Laura Rosner-Warburton, senior economist at MacroPolicy Perspectives. But she cautioned that the Federal Reserve's preferred inflation measure, which puts less weight on items that are cooling, such as rents, will likely come in higher when it is reported on Friday.

Fuel prices are on track to soar 20% this month, she added, "and that's huge." Monthly inflation could rise by as much as 0.9% this month, she estimates, which would be the highest in four years.

Oil prices that soared close to \$120 a barrel late Sunday fell to \$87 by Wednesday after Trump suggested

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 58 of 73

that the conflict would be a "short-term excursion." Still, he has also threatened more attacks and there is no sign of a let-up.

Companies bracing for higher energy costs are already wrestling with tariffs, inflation, and growing labor costs. Many still want to avoid passing costs on to customers, but that depends heavily on the duration of the war.

Isaac Lee Collins, CEO of Fifth & Emery Frozen Yogurt & Chocolate in Kansas City, said rising gas prices will make doing business more expensive.

The chocolate he imports from France got 15% to 20% more expensive last year, mostly because of tariffs. "It's just another surcharge that we're going to get hit with," Collins said.

Stew Leonard Jr., CEO of the Stew Leonard's supermarket chain, fears his suppliers will start increasing prices as gasoline prices spike. He receives truck loads of meats and fresh produce daily.

"He's a regular guy that has a family, and if it's costing him more money to put fuel in this truck, he's going to knock on my door and say 'Hey, Stew. I need a little more for that,'" he said.

If the costs of doing business increase at Stew Leonard's, there may be price hikes on some goods, he said.

Some analysts warn prices will rocket higher if the Strait of Hormuz remains closed. About 20% of the world's oil and natural gas is shipped through the narrow channel every day. On Wednesday, a projectile hit a Thai cargo ship off the coast of Oman leading into the Strait of Hormuz, setting it ablaze.

Oil prices could soar to \$150 a barrel in the coming weeks if shipments don't resume, according to Wood Mackenzie, an energy analytics firm.

The national average for regular gasoline in the U.S. jumped to \$3.58 a gallon Wednesday, according to AAA, an increase of about 20% just in one month.

Core prices will be much less affected this month, but could tick higher over time as more expensive gas pushes up airline fares, shipping, and other transportation costs.

Darren Rebelez, the CEO of Casey's General Stores, told investors Tuesday that he doesn't expect a significant pullback in customer spending unless gasoline nears \$5 per gallon.

Even if price increases are 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 unexpectedly sharp job losses for February as employers slashed 92,000 jobs. The unemployment rate ticked up to 4.4%.

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 inflation is a concern.

"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."

Iran war has blocked the Strait of Hormuz, a vital oil choke point. Reopening it is a big challenge

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Gasoline prices are rising largely because of the Iran war's impact on the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial passageway for oil and gas from the Persian Gulf. The waterway off Iran's coast, now effectively closed, is so vital for the global economy that governments are working on blueprints to speedily reopen it to shipping when the shooting stops.

In Europe, French President Emmanuel Macron is leading an international effort to unblock the energy

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 59 of 73

choke point, so that oil, gas and goods could flow freely again "when circumstances permit." He envisions countries using warships to escort tankers and container vessels through the strait when fighting is less intense, whenever that may be.

Former naval officers who have served in the Hormuz passage say vessels would be sitting ducks, with little room for maneuver in the strait's narrow shipping lanes, if foreign naval forces attempted to reopen the waterway before a cessation of hostilities.

"In today's context, sending warships or civilian vessels into the Strait of Hormuz would be suicidal," French navy retired Vice Adm. Pascal Ausseur said in an interview with The Associated Press.

A ceasefire agreement with Iran "would make the situation shift from suicidal to dangerous. At that point, military ships could be deployed. And then escort operations could begin," he said.

Here's a look at how Hormuz might be made navigable again:

Battle-hardened in the Red Sea

French, American, British and other naval crews already have valuable experience of fighting off missiles and drones in the region. They have escorted and defended cargo vessels through attacks in the Red Sea carried out by Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen.

French frigates used machine guns, cannons and sophisticated air-defense missiles to fend off Houthi strikes. French frigate Alsace downed three ballistic missiles in the Red Sea in 2024 as it was escorting a container ship. The ship's commander at the time, Capt. Jérôme Henry, told the AP that being on the receiving end of the potentially deadly strikes was unnerving and exhausting. The sea battles also took a toll on U.S. Navy ships and personnel.

"There were repeated attacks, either by drones or missiles," Henry said in an interview. "The crew didn't get much sleep."

French retired Vice Adm. Michel Olhagaray, a former head of France's center for higher military studies, says that "all navies learned a great deal" about working together and escorting ships from their Red Sea missions and have also drawn on Ukraine's experiences against Russian barrages of missiles and drones during Moscow's war.

"It would allow us to deploy to that region with fairly refined know-how and a high level of cooperation — and that is extremely important," said Olhagaray, who commanded a French frigate that patrolled the Strait of Hormuz during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s.

Higher risks

Iran is militarily far better equipped than its Houthi proxies in Yemen, which caused considerable damage and disruption in the Red Sea between November 2023 and January 2025. Armed by Iran, the rebels targeted more than 100 merchant vessels with missiles and drones, sinking two and killing four sailors, and greatly reduced trade flows.

Iran can reach all of the Strait of Hormuz and its approaches with anti-ship cruise missiles that it developed off Chinese-made weapons, according to mapping by the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency. It can also target vessels with longer-range missiles, drones, fast attack craft and naval mines, which it used during the Iran-Iraq war. U.S. strikes on mine-laying Iranian vessels in this latest conflict underscore the gravity of that danger.

With war raging, the Hormuz passage is "very, very dangerous" and the risks for shipping are "much greater" than in the Red Sea against the Houthis, Olhagaray said.

"The means to counter this threat must be far more substantial and far more effective," he said. "Before the heat can decrease ... most of the offensive installations on land in Iran would have to be eliminated. There would need to be constant monitoring, patrols, extremely close surveillance, and a very high level of intelligence to be able to say that it would be possible to allow tankers to transit, even with military escorts."

"That will not happen at all — not at all — in the near future."

Reassuring insurers

Experts say another challenge will be reassuring shipping insurers and companies that navigating in Hormuz waters is feasible again. Insurance premiums for shipping in the strait have soared to levels that

France's transport minister described as "insane," causing "a big problem" for shippers.

"Maritime traffic is a business. That business has to make money. If insurance costs are so high that you can't make a profit by sailing through a given area, then you don't sail through that area," said Ausseur, now a director of the Mediterranean Foundation for Strategic Studies, a think tank.

Insurance rates for oil tankers that want to transit through Hormuz are many times higher than they were before the war and are approaching levels that have been charged for ships carrying grain from Ukraine during the ongoing war with Russia, said Marcus Baker, global head of marine, cargo and logistics for insurance broker and risk adviser Marsh Risk.

Potential naval escorts for commercial ships "would be helpful," Baker said.

"That's been done before in conflicts past, so that's not something unusual and that will obviously give a degree of confidence to the insurers that the vessels are going to have a greater degree of safety," he said.

King penguins are the rare species benefiting from a warming world. But that could change

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The warming world has disrupted the timing for plant and animal reproduction, and it's usually bad news for species that depend on each other — like flowers blooming too early and pollinating bees arriving too late. But researchers have found the rare critter that's getting a boost from the change: King penguins.

A new study of 19,000 king penguins in a sub-Antarctic island chain found their breeding is starting 19 days earlier than it did in 2000. Mating earlier has increased the breeding success rate by 40%, according to a study in Wednesday's journal Science Advances.

The study of timing in nature is called phenology. It's been a major concern for biologists because predators and prey and pollinators and plants are mostly adapting to warmer climates at different rates. And that means crucial mismatches in timing.

It's especially common in birds and pollinating species such as bees. Most birds, especially in North America, aren't keeping pace with changes in phenology, according to Clemson University biological sciences professor Casey Youngflesh, who wasn't part of the study.

Having a species like the king penguin adapt so well to seasonal shifts and timing changes "is unprecedented," said study co-author Celine Le Bohec, a seabird ecologist at the French science agency CNRS. "It's quite striking."

Unlike other penguins — which are threatened with dwindling numbers because of earlier breeding — the king penguin has the ability to breed from late October to March. And they are taking advantage of that flexibility, Le Bohec said.

They are succeeding even though the water is warming and the food web that they rely on is changing with it, said Le Bohec and study lead author Gaël Bardon, a seabird ecologist at the Scientific Centre of Monaco.

"They can adjust really well their foraging behavior," Bardon said. "We know that some birds are going directly to the south, to the polar front. Some are going to the north. Some are staying around the colony and so they can adjust their behavior and that's what makes king penguins cope really well with such changes for the moment."

Le Bohec added that it may only be a temporary adjustment to an environment that is changing quickly. "So that's why for the moment the species is able to cope with this change, but till when? This, we don't know, because it's going very, very fast."

Other penguins that have limited diets are more threatened by changes coming from a warming ocean and the makeup of the food chain. But king penguins — which are so abundant they are considered a species of least concern — can eat other prey besides the lanternfish that makes up their primary diet, researchers said.

"The king penguin may have a bit of flexibility as a trick up its sleeve, and may be in a good position to

adapt as their environment changes," said Michelle LaRue, a professor of Antarctic marine science at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand who was not part of the study. But she said she wonders what happens after breeding because king penguins live 20 or more years in the wild and this study looks at only a small part of their lifespan.

Outside scientists are just as cautious as Le Bohec and Bardon over whether to declare the king penguins a rare good-news climate change story.

"Winning for this species might mean losing for another species if they are competing for resources," Clemson's Youngflesh said.

Ignacio Juarez Martinez, a biologist at Oxford University in the United Kingdom, who conducted a study of different penguins with earlier breeding, said: "This study shows that king penguins might be a winner for now, which is excellent news, but climate change is ongoing and future changes to currents, precipitation or temperatures can undo these gains."

King penguins are the rare species benefiting from a warming world. But that could change

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Man taken into custody after driving van into security gate outside White House, authorities say

WASHINGTON (AP) — A man was taken into custody on Wednesday after driving his van into a security barrier outside the White House, authorities said.

The Secret Service said the man crashed into the temporary security barrier just before 6:30 a.m. He was immediately arrested by officers from the Secret Service's uniformed division, the agency said.

The man, whose identity was not immediately released, was being interviewed by investigators. Criminal charges were pending, the Secret Service said.

A police bomb squad was called to the scene, checked the vehicle and determined it to be safe.

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

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 63 of 73

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.

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."

A drone strike hits school and medical center in southern Sudan, killing 17, mostly schoolgirls

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — An explosive-laden drone blamed on Sudanese paramilitaries struck a secondary school and a health care center in southern Sudan Wednesday, killing at least 17 people, mostly schoolgirls, a hospital official and a medical group said.

At least 10 people were wounded in the strike in the village of Shukeiri in the White Nile province, according to Dr. Musa al-Majeri, director of the Douiem Hospital, the nearest major medical facility to the village.

Al-Majeri told The Associated Press three girls suffered serious injuries; two of them underwent surgeries at the hospital while the third was evacuated to the capital, Khartoum.

The war-tracking Sudan Doctors Network reported the strike first, saying those killed included two teachers and a health care worker. The group said there was no military presence in the village.

Both the medical group and al-Majeri blamed the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces for the strike. The RSF didn't respond to a request for comment.

"This horrific crime represents a continuation of the violations committed by the RSF in the White Nile," said Dr. Razan Al-Mahdi, a spokeswoman for the medical group, adding that the paramilitaries attacked several civilian facilities in the past two days, including a student dormitory and a power station.

The strike in the village of Shukeiri in the White Nile province was the latest deadly attack in Sudan's nearly three-year war.

Sudan slid into chaos in April 2023 when a power struggle between the military and the RSF exploded into open fighting in Khartoum and elsewhere in the country.

The devastating war has killed more than 40,000 people, according to U.N. figures, but aid groups say that is an undercount and the true number could be many times higher.

The fighting has centered in the sprawling Kordofan region, where deadly attacks, mostly by drones, were reported daily.

The war has been marked by atrocities including mass killings, gang rapes and other crimes, investigated by the International Criminal Court as potential war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The most recent atrocities happened in October when the RSF and its Janjweed allies overran the Darfur city of el-Fasher. The RSF attack there bore "hallmarks of genocide," according to United Nations-commissioned experts.

At least 6,000 people were killed in three days in October in el-Fasher, the U.N.'s Human Rights Office said.

Jill Biden opens up in memoir about Joe Biden's decision to end his 2024 reelection bid

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Jill Biden is breaking her silence about Joe Biden's decision to abruptly end his 2024 presidential reelection bid under pressure from Democrats concerned about his age, health and viability against Republican Donald Trump in a rematch of their 2020 campaign.

A political spouse for nearly 50 years, Jill Biden said she has never publicly discussed her feelings about the three-week stretch when her husband ended his political career, instead saving her thoughts for the pages of her soon-to-be-released memoir.

Gallery Books, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, on Wednesday announced that her book, "View from

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 65 of 73

the East Wing: A Memoir," is scheduled to be published June 2.

Jill Biden told The Associated Press in a brief telephone interview that the book is a "reflection of my four years as first lady" and that writing it was somewhat healing.

"It was kind of cathartic for me to write it, and I wrote about all the, you know, sometimes painful — but other times, most of it really beautiful moments that Joe and I shared during his presidency," she said.

Jill Biden declined on Tuesday to discuss any of those moments, good or bad — including watching her husband work his way to the decision to end his five-decade-long political career by dropping out of the 2024 presidential race.

In an announcement video shared on Instagram, she said she wants to "set the record straight."

The last chapter of her husband's political career

In April 2023, then-President Joe Biden was 80 and the oldest president in U.S. history when he announced he was running for a second term. His age and fitness to serve another four years — which would take him to age 86 — became a source of concern for the public. Some fellow Democrats began to pressure him to step aside after he turned in a disastrous debate performance against Trump in June 2024 in which he struggled, in a raspy voice, to land his debating points and often appeared to lose his train of thought. Aides blamed the poor performance on a cold.

Joe Biden at first insisted that he would stay in the race, but after a few weeks he withdrew from the campaign and endorsed Democrat Kamala Harris, his vice president. Harris became the party's presidential nominee but lost to Trump in the November 2024 election.

Jill Biden said that, with the book, "I have put things in perspective," presenting what she describes as a "more balanced view" of her husband's time as president.

The memoir is also a tribute of the sorts to women who, like herself, juggle multiple roles.

"It's also a story about my being able to balance life, you know, as a working woman and as a mother, a grandmother, a first lady," she said.

During her four years in the role, Jill Biden, 74, made history as the first first lady to continue the career she had before entering the White House. She had taught English and writing for decades at the community college level, and she continued teaching twice a week at a Northern Virginia school while serving as first lady.

Joe Biden 'doing well' after his cancer diagnosis

The former president's office announced in May 2025 that he was diagnosed with an aggressive form of prostate cancer and that it had spread to his bones. He's receiving treatment.

Jill Biden said it was "quite a shock getting the diagnosis" for her husband, who's now 83.

"The fact that it is in his bones means that he will have cancer, you know, all his lifetime," Jill Biden said. She said the doctors say he will "live out his natural life."

"Like most retired couples, he'll probably drive me crazy till the end of it," she joked.

She said he visits Washington at least once a week for meetings or to give speeches.

A unique period in American history

The former first lady also writes in the book about serving during a unique period in U.S. history, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the aftermath of the insurrection at the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, according to the publisher.

Her husband was sworn into office on the steps of the Capitol on Jan. 20, 2021, just two weeks after a mob of Trump supporters, spurred by his false claims that the Republican lost because of election fraud, stormed the building in a violent attempt to keep lawmakers from certifying Joe Biden's victory.

Joe Biden's first year in office was dominated by the federal response to the pandemic and, while he mostly stayed at the White House, Jill Biden wore face mask and traveled around the country to encourage people to get their vaccinations. She also continued her advocacy on behalf of military families, education and community colleges, cancer prevention and women's health initiatives.

Before she became first lady, Jill Biden was second lady of the United States from 2009 to 2017, when her husband was Barack Obama's vice president. She currently chairs the Milken Institute's Women's Health Network.

Jill Biden is also the author of "Where the Light Enters," published in 2019, in which she writes about meeting Joe Biden, then a U.S. senator from Delaware, and marrying and building a life with him. She also has written three children's books.

Suspect in fatal Swiss bus fire had no terror links, police say

By JAMEY KEATEN and CLAUDIA CIOBANU Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — A bus passenger who doused himself in a flammable substance and set it on fire, killing six people, had previously been reported missing by his family and didn't appear to have any terror-related motive, Swiss authorities said Wednesday.

The suspect is believed to be among the deceased aboard the burning bus on Tuesday in the town of Kerzers, about 25 kilometers (15 miles) west of Switzerland's capital, Bern. Five other people were injured.

Police had previous knowledge of the Swiss suspect and his profile in a medical context rather than a criminal one, according to Raphaël Bourquin, the regional attorney general. No further details were given.

Philippe Allain, a regional police commander, told reporters that investigators have received information the man had psychological problems.

Identification of the bodies could take days. For locals, the tragedy echoes the New Year's Eve fire in the Swiss ski resort of Crans-Montana that killed 41 young people.

"It shocks and saddens me that once again people have lost their lives in a serious fire in Switzerland," 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."

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 engulfing the vehicle.

"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 transported three people with severe injuries to hospitals, while two others were treated at the scene, police said.

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

Oil built the Persian Gulf. Desalinated water keeps it alive. War could threaten both

By ANNIKA HAMMERSCHLAG Associated Press

As missiles and drones curtail energy production across the Persian Gulf, analysts warn that water, not oil, may be the resource most at risk in the energy-rich but arid region.

On Sunday, Bahrain accused Iran of damaging one of its desalination plants. Earlier, Iran said a U.S. airstrike had damaged an Iranian plant.

Hundreds of desalination plants sit along the Persian Gulf coast, putting individual systems that supply water to millions within range of Iranian missile or drone strikes. Without them, major cities could not sustain their current populations.

In Kuwait, about 90% of drinking water comes from desalination, along with roughly 86% in Oman and about 70% in Saudi Arabia. The technology removes salt from seawater — most commonly by pushing it through ultrafine membranes in a process known as reverse osmosis — to produce the freshwater that sustains cities, hotels, industry and some agriculture across one of the world's driest regions.

For people living outside the Middle East, the main concern of the Iran war has been the impact on energy prices. The Gulf produces about a third of the world's crude exports and energy revenues underpin

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 67 of 73

national economies. Fighting has already halted tanker traffic through key shipping routes and disrupted port activity, forcing some producers to curb exports as storage tanks fill.

But the infrastructure that keeps Gulf cities supplied with drinking water may be equally vulnerable.

"Everyone thinks of Saudi Arabia and their neighbors as petrostates. But I call them saltwater kingdoms. They're human-made fossil-fueled water superpowers," said Michael Christopher Low, director of the Middle East Center at the University of Utah. "It's both a monumental achievement of the 20th century and a certain kind of vulnerability."

Early signs of risk

The war that began Feb. 28 with U.S. and Israeli attacks on Iran has already brought fighting close to key desalination infrastructure. On March 2, Iranian strikes on Dubai's Jebel Ali port landed some 12 miles from one of the world's largest desalination plants, which produces much of the city's drinking water.

Satellite data initially suggested a possible fire near the Fujairah F1 power and water complex in the United Arab Emirates following nearby strikes, though the plant's operator said Tuesday that the facility had not been damaged and remained fully operational.

Damage was reported at Kuwait's Doha West desalination plant. The damage appeared to have resulted from nearby port attacks or debris from intercepted drones.

On Sunday, Bahrain accused Iran of indiscriminately attacking civilian targets and damaging one of its desalination plants, though it didn't say supplies have gone offline. The island nation, home to the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet, has been among the countries targeted by Iranian drones and missiles.

Earlier, Iran said a U.S. airstrike damaged an Iranian desalination plant. Abbas Araghchi, the country's foreign minister, said the strike on Qeshm Island in the Strait of Hormuz had cut into the water supply for 30 villages. He warned that in doing so "the U.S. set this precedent, not Iran."

Many Gulf desalination plants are physically integrated with power stations as co-generation facilities, meaning attacks on electrical infrastructure could also hinder water production. Even where plants are connected to national grids with backup supply routes, disruptions can cascade across interconnected systems, said David Michel, senior fellow for water security at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"It's an asymmetrical tactic," he said. "Iran doesn't have the same capacity to strike back at the United States and Israel. But it does have this possibility to impose costs on the Gulf countries to push them to intervene or call for a cessation of hostilities."

Desalination plants have multiple stages — intake systems, treatment facilities, energy supplies — and damage to any part of that chain can interrupt production, according to Ed Cullinane, Middle East editor at Global Water Intelligence, a publisher serving the water industry.

"None of these assets are any more protected than any of the municipal areas that are currently being hit by ballistic missiles or drones," Cullinane said.

A long-standing concern

Gulf governments and U.S. officials have long recognized the risks these systems pose for regional stability: if major desalination plants were knocked offline, some cities could lose most of their drinking water within days. A 2010 CIA analysis warned attacks on desalination facilities could trigger national crises in several Gulf states, and prolonged outages could last months if critical equipment were destroyed.

More than 90% of the Gulf's desalinated water comes from just 56 plants, the report stated, and "each of these critical plants is extremely vulnerable to sabotage or military action."

A leaked 2008 U.S. diplomatic cable warned the Saudi capital of Riyadh "would have to evacuate within a week" if either the Jubail desalination plant on the Gulf coast or its pipelines or associated power infrastructure were seriously damaged.

Saudi Arabia has since invested in pipeline networks, storage reservoirs and other redundancies designed to cushion short-term disruptions, as has the UAE. But smaller states such as Bahrain, Qatar and Kuwait have fewer backup supplies.

Climate change could threaten water plants

As warming oceans increase the likelihood and intensity of cyclones in the Arabian Sea and raise the chances of landfall on the Arabian Peninsula, storm surge and extreme rainfall could overwhelm drainage

systems and damage coastal desalination.

The plants themselves contribute to the problem. Desalination is energy-intensive, with plants worldwide producing between 500 and 850 million tons of carbon emissions annually, approaching the roughly 880 million tons emitted by the entire global aviation industry.

The byproduct of desalination, highly concentrated brine, is typically discharged back into the ocean, where it can harm seafloor habitats and coral reefs, while intake systems can trap and kill fish larvae, plankton and other organisms at the base of the marine food web.

As climate change intensifies droughts, disrupts rainfall patterns and fuels wildfires, desalination is expected to expand in many parts of the world.

The threat is not hypothetical

During Iraq's 1990-1991 invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent Gulf War, Iraqi forces sabotaged power stations and desalination facilities as they retreated, said the University of Utah's Low. At the same time, millions of barrels of crude oil were deliberately released into the Persian Gulf, creating one of the largest oil spills in history.

The massive slick threatened to contaminate seawater intake pipes used by desalination plants across the region. Workers rushed to deploy protective booms around the intake valves of major facilities.

The destruction left Kuwait largely without fresh water and dependent on emergency water imports. Full recovery took years.

More recently, Yemen's Houthi rebels have targeted Saudi desalination facilities amid regional tensions.

The incidents underscore a broader erosion of long-standing norms against attacking civilian infrastructure, Michel said, noting conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza and Iraq.

International humanitarian law, including provisions of the Geneva Conventions, prohibit targeting civilian infrastructure indispensable to the survival of the population, including drinking water facilities.

The potential for harmful cyberattacks on water infrastructure is a growing concern. In 2023 and 2024, U.S. officials blamed Iran-aligned groups for hacking into several American water utilities.

Iran's own water supply at risk

After a fifth year of extreme drought, water levels in Tehran's five reservoirs plunged to some 10% of their capacity, prompting President Masoud Pezeshkian to warn the capital may have to be evacuated.

Unlike many Gulf states that rely heavily on desalination, Iran still gets most of its water from rivers, reservoirs and depleted underground aquifers. The country operates a relatively small number of desalination plants, supplying only a fraction of national demand.

Iran is racing to expand desalination along its southern coast and pump some of the water inland, but infrastructure constraints, energy costs and international sanctions have sharply limited scalability.

"They were already thinking of evacuating the capital last summer," Cullinane of Global Water Intelligence said. "I don't dare to wonder what it's going to be like this summer under sustained fire, with an ongoing economic catastrophe and a serious water crisis."

Ravens nix trade for Raiders' Crosby after he fails physical, pivot to Hendrickson, AP source says

By MARK ANDERSON, NOAH TRISTER and ROB MAADDI AP Sports Writers

The blockbuster trade sending star pass rusher Maxx Crosby to the Baltimore Ravens is off — and the fallout from that reversal could have a ripple effect throughout the NFL as the new league year begins.

The Ravens quickly pivoted to Trey Hendrickson, agreeing on a four-year, \$112 million deal with the four-time Pro Bowl edge rusher on Wednesday morning, a person with knowledge of the deal told The Associated Press.

The person spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because the contract can't be finalized until the start of the league year at 4 p.m. EDT.

The Las Vegas Raiders said Tuesday night that Baltimore backed out of the trade that was supposed to send Crosby to the Ravens for two first-round draft picks. The deal was agreed to last Friday but couldn't

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 69 of 73

be finalized until Wednesday.

A person with knowledge of Baltimore's decision told the AP that Crosby failed his physical. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because those results are private.

Crosby had surgery in January to repair a torn meniscus in his left knee. He missed the final two games of the season because of the injury despite wanting to play through it at the time.

Crosby said on a recent appearance on "The Herd with Colin Cowherd" that he was "ahead of schedule" in his rehab.

One of his agents, CJ LaBoy, posted on social media Tuesday night that Crosby is recovering well under the care of noted orthopedist Dr. Neal ElAttrache.

"Maxx continues to be on track in his recovery and if anything is ahead of schedule according to his surgeon," LaBoy wrote. "Maxx remains on track to return during the offseason program & will undoubtedly return as the dominant game wrecker he has been these past 7 seasons."

Crosby's addition was supposed to help lift the Ravens over the top, with the draft picks expected to be part of a rebuilding effort for the Raiders. The 28-year-old Crosby had 10 sacks and a career-high 28 tackles for loss last season, and has reached double-digit sacks four times in his seven seasons.

Trading even one first-round pick for a veteran was out of character for Baltimore, which has taken drastic measures to try to recover from last season's 8-9 showing. The Ravens fired coach John Harbaugh after 18 seasons and then were prepared to give up a lot for Crosby. His expected addition made Monday — when Baltimore lost several free agents to new agreements elsewhere — a bit easier for Ravens fans to bear.

Tyler Linderbaum, a Pro Bowl center for Baltimore, agreed to a contract with the Raiders. Tight end Isaiah Likely, punter Jordan Stout and safety Ar'Darius Washington reached deals to follow Harbaugh to the New York Giants. There were other departures too, such as pass rusher Dre'Mont Jones — seemingly expendable with Crosby on his way.

Baltimore has a first-year coach in Jesse Minter and is in a win-now mode with two-time MVP quarterback Lamar Jackson. Crosby would have been a significant boost for a defense that finished tied for 28th in the league in sacks with only 30 last season.

So, the Ravens shifted course. The 31-year-old Hendrickson had his own injuries that limited him to seven games last season but he didn't cost the team two valuable draft picks. Baltimore also had been hoping to sign Jackson to an extension before the new league year.

The Raiders, meanwhile, own the No. 1 pick in the draft and are widely expected to select Indiana quarterback Fernando Mendoza. Las Vegas has been extremely aggressive at the start of free agency, agreeing to deals with several new players and agreeing to trade quarterback Geno Smith to the New York Jets, according to several people familiar with the moves who spoke on condition of anonymity because the deals can't be finalized until Wednesday.

The biggest move the Raiders made was agreeing to a deal with Linderbaum, a three-time Pro Bowler. He gets a three-year, \$81 million contract with \$60 million guaranteed to leave Baltimore and join Las Vegas.

That was one of a number of moves the Raiders made on Monday. They were the NFL's busiest team in agreeing to contracts with free agents and their own players.

Because they entered free agency with nearly \$112 million in salary cap space, according to overthecap.com, Raiders general manager John Spytek has room to continue to be aggressive with or without Crosby's cap hit. He signed a three-year extension a year ago worth \$106.5 million, with \$91.5 million guaranteed, that briefly made him the highest-paid non-quarterback in league history.

Where the Raiders go from here remains to be seen. It's unlikely they can bring back Crosby given the enmity between him and the organization. He wasn't happy about going through another rebuild and was especially upset after the club sidelined him with two games to go last season.

If the Raiders shop him again — which they probably will be forced to try — getting the same kind of offer the Ravens made likely would be difficult at best.

Clubs also might be hesitant to be aggressive in pursuing someone with Crosby's injury history even if his production has remained at a high level when he's been on the field.

MLB report settles World Series Game 7 plate drama: IKF was out by feet, not inches

By BEN WALKER Associated Press

It was the most debated play of the year in Major League Baseball, perhaps the most dissected and discussed sequence in World Series history.

Should Isiah Kiner-Falefa have taken a bigger lead? Why did the third base coach draw a line in the dirt right there? What if IKF sprinted to the plate instead of sliding?

"I'll think about it until the day I leave this earth," Toronto Blue Jays manager John Schneider lamented.

Crazily close to dethroning the champion Dodgers in a pulsating Game 7. A couple mere inches, a cleat mark just short of winning the crown, right?

In fact, no.

Not that it'll lessen the sting for the Blue Jays and their fans, but the intense drama over Los Angeles catcher Will Smith lifting his spike off the plate and then resetting on second baseman Miguel Rojas' throw home was moot: IKF was already out.

"After reviewing all relevant angles, the replay official definitively determined the catcher's foot was touching the plate when the ball contacted the interior of his mitt," read the official report by MLB, which recently provided it to The Associated Press.

A final piece of the puzzle, a last look at a play that still fascinates the sports world. Smith's foot was on the plate when he caught the ball, and that's when Kiner-Falefa was forced out.

So how close did Toronto really come to winning there in the bottom of the ninth inning? Make it more like 3 feet.

"I never felt my foot come off," Smith said this month at a World Baseball Classic practice session. "I didn't really realize it (was close) until I saw the replay, so I wasn't trying to go back and touch it."

The three-time All-Star said he hadn't seen the MLB report from the replay center.

"I just cared that he was out," Smith said.

MLB Statcast doesn't have an exact measurement -- the tracking data put IKF's center of mass about 5 feet from the plate, his left leg was extended farther.

"I've seen that video 3,000 times and 1,500 of them it looks like Will is off the plate. You know what I mean?" Schneider said at the winter meetings in December, a month after that 5-4 loss in 11 innings. "And the other half it looks like he's on. So, that's how close it was."

Kiner-Falefa signed with the Boston Red Sox last month. At his introductory news conference, his near-miss in Toronto remained a fresh topic. He was criticized all offseason for a conservative 7.8-foot lead off third base. He said he would have been more aggressive if not for a mandate from the Blue Jays to stay close to the bag.

"Didn't realize that it was actually going to be that close of a play," he said. "If I was a step further, yeah, I would have been safe. But I wasn't."

Turns out he needed a few more feet, not inches.

Rojas' solo home run with one out in the top of the ninth tied it at 4. The Blue Jays loaded the bases with one out in the bottom half, with Kiner-Falefa on third base as a pinch-runner for Bo Bichette.

As Daulton Varsho batted against Dodgers ace Yoshinobu Yamamoto, third base coach Carlos Febles used his cleats to draw a line in the basepath, showing Kiner-Falefa how far to take his lead. It seemed significantly shorter than usual, and many fans blamed that for costing Toronto the title. The Blue Jays said they were worried about Smith trying a pickoff throw at third.

Varsho hit a grounder that caused a drawn-in Rojas to take a brief stumble backward, but he recovered to make an accurate throw home. After Smith caught the ball, his back right foot briefly came off the plate before retouching. Kiner-Falefa slid home, focused on preventing Smith from making a double-play relay to first.

Plate umpire Jordan Baker signaled out, and the Blue Jays challenged the ruling. Replay umpire Dan Iassogna, a veteran crew chief who has worked three World Series on the field, confirmed the call.

TV replays clearly showed Smith's foot re-tapped the plate with Kiner-Falefa's foot only a few inches away. Many fans assumed that's where the out occurred — but the official report confirms IKF was already erased.

Smith hit a home run in the 11th and the Dodgers held on for their second straight championship. He said he's replayed the moment at the plate in his mind several times, and gives more credit to Rojas.

"I think it was more of an impressive play by Miggy in that situation. Tough hop," he said. "All I had to do was catch the ball and get my foot down."

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 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 (92 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.

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.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 72 of 73

"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

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, March 12, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 280 ~ 73 of 73

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."

Today in History: March 12, Gandhi begins 'Salt March'

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, March 12, the 71st day of 2026. There are 294 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On March 12, 1930, Mohandas Gandhi began his 24-day, 240-mile "Salt March" to the Indian village of Dandi (then called Navsari) as an act of nonviolent civil disobedience to protest the salt tax levied by colonial Britain.

Also on this date:

In 1912, the Girl Scouts of the USA had its beginnings as Juliette Gordon Low of Savannah, Georgia, founded the first American troop of the Girl Guides.

In 1928, the St. Francis Dam north of Los Angeles, California failed, sending over 12 billion gallons of water into San Francisquito Canyon and killing over 400 people.

In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt delivered the first of his "fireside chats," a series of evening radio broadcasts to the American public.

In 1938, Nazi Germany annexed Austria, as German troops crossed the border into the country.

In 1947, President Harry S. Truman announced what became known as the "Truman Doctrine" to help Greece and Turkey resist communism during the Cold War.

In 1980, a Chicago jury found John Wayne Gacy Jr. guilty of the murders of 33 men and boys. (The next day, Gacy was sentenced to death; he was executed in May 1994.)

In 2003, Elizabeth Smart, the 15-year-old girl who vanished from her Utah bedroom nine months earlier, was found alive in a Salt Lake City suburb with two drifters, Brian David Mitchell and Wanda Barzee. (Mitchell is serving a life sentence for kidnapping Smart; Barzee was released from prison in 2018.)

In 2009, disgraced financier Bernard Madoff pleaded guilty in New York to the largest Ponzi scheme in history, having defrauded his clients of nearly \$65 billion; he would later be sentenced to 150 years behind bars. (Madoff died in prison in April 2021.)

In 2021, the city of Minneapolis agreed to pay \$27 million to settle a lawsuit filed by George Floyd's family over the murder of the Black man by police.

Today's Birthdays: Politician and civil rights activist Andrew Young is 94. Actor Barbara Feldon ("Get Smart") is 93. Actor-singer Liza Minnelli is 80. Politician Mitt Romney is 79. Singer-songwriter James Taylor is 78. Actor Lesley Manville is 70. Singer Marlon Jackson (The Jackson Five) is 69. Actor Courtney B. Vance is 66. Democratic Sen. Tammy Duckworth of Illinois is 58. Actor Aaron Eckhart is 58. Actor Jaimie Alexander is 42. Actor Malina Weissman is 23.