

Groton Daily Independent

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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

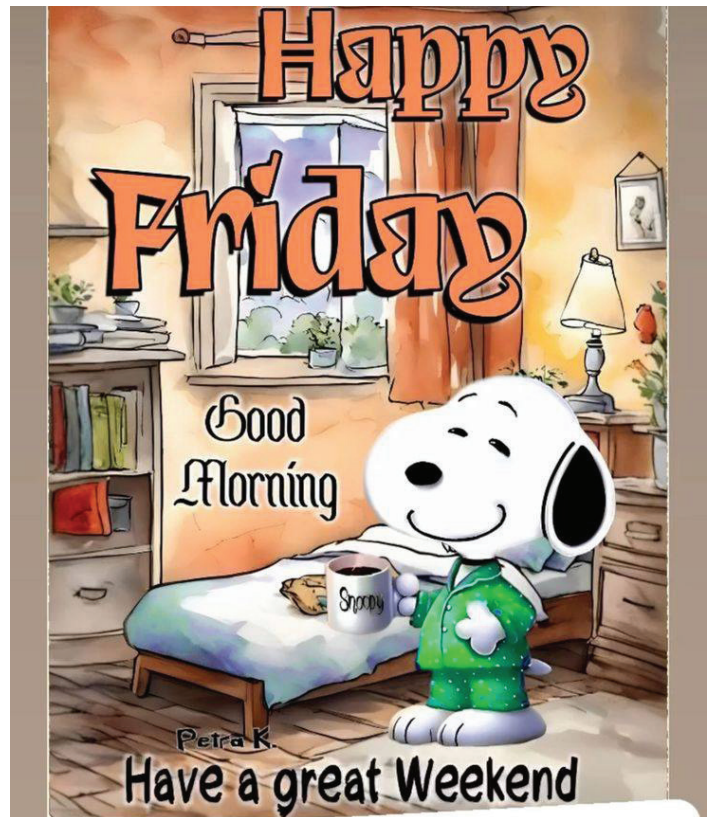
HS Baseball Practice, 6 p.m., GHS Gym

Saturday, March 14

HOSA 5K run, 1 p.m.

State A GBB Tourney in Watertown

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



Sunday, March 15

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.; Choir, 6 p.m.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6th grade BB Practice, 6 pm., Arena

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1440

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

TSA Pay Delay

Transportation Security Administration agents are on track to miss their first full paycheck today amid a weeklong partial government shutdown. The lapse is expected to prompt more agents to call out sick as they take on other jobs to meet their financial obligations.

The nationwide callout rate for TSA agents is now 6% on average, triple the 2% rate of unscheduled absences before Department of Homeland Security funding expired Feb. 14. Passengers have complained of long lines at airports, especially in Houston. The issue has stabilized somewhat, but could soon worsen, the TSA warns. More than 300 officers have quit since last month. Shutdowns tend to be followed by a wave of resignations and make it harder to recruit; after last year's shutdown, the TSA lost nearly 1,100 officers.

Meanwhile, the impasse continued yesterday as the Senate failed to reach a 60-vote threshold to reinstate DHS funding.

History of Friday the 13th

Today marks Friday the 13th, a date long regarded in Western culture as a symbol of bad luck and superstition, though its exact origins remain uncertain.

Historians trace the belief to Christian and Norse traditions, linking it to Judas Iscariot—the 13th guest at the Last Supper who betrayed Jesus—and Loki, the uninvited 13th guest at a divine banquet. Friday's reputation as unlucky likely stems from the belief that Jesus was crucified on that day. Despite its reputation, no statistics show the date brings more misfortune than others. Still, the superstition endures, costing businesses hundreds of millions in lost travel and commerce. It has also inspired secret societies, novels, and the "Friday the 13th" horror franchise.

The fear even has a name: paraskevidekatriaphobia, coined by psychologist Donald Dossey, who told his patients, "When you learn to pronounce it, you're cured!" For the superstitious, it's pronounced par-skev-ee-dek-uh-try-uh-FOE-bee-uh.

Assimilation By Law

China adopted an "ethnic unity" law yesterday. Supporters say the law will promote national identity; critics warn it could erode and rights of 55 minority groups, making up roughly 9% of the population. Han Chinese are the remaining 91%.

The measure empowers authorities to promote a common culture and discourage customs they deem outdated. It also obligates parents to instill Communist Party loyalty in their children, who are now required to study primarily in Mandarin, China's official language. The change nationalizes language policies the government has been trickling out in minority regions for years. Beyond the classroom, the law makes it illegal for anyone to oppose inter-ethnic marriages—which made up under 3% of households in 2010—and encourages mixed neighborhoods. Lawmakers say intermixing will spur economic development, but scholars warn it could become legal grounds to weaken minority communities.

Individuals and organizations, inside and outside China, can be prosecuted for violating the law, which experts say offers few objective measures for compliance.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

René Redzepi steps down as head chef of acclaimed Copenhagen restaurant Noma amid abuse and assault allegations.

Chile's Smiljan Radic Clarke wins Pritzker Prize, widely considered architecture's equivalent of the Nobel Prize.

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Netflix developing drama series about Mexican art couple Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, based on book by French novelist Claire Berest.

Actress Maya Rudolph to make Broadway debut in "Oh, Mary!" beginning April 28.

Pussycat Dolls announce 53-date reunion world tour with original members Nicole Scherzinger, Kimberly Wyatt, and Ashley Roberts to celebrate 20th anniversary of debut album.

Science & Technology

NASA clears Artemis moon rocket for April launch following repairs; the mission, which has been delayed multiple times, will take four astronauts to the moon for the first time in over 50 years.

Google researchers use Gemini AI model to analyze roughly 5 million news articles, creating a map that predicts flash floods for urban areas with limited government resources across 150 countries.

Palm-sized magnet reaches 42 tesla, approaching the strength of the world's most powerful magnets while using a few thousand times less power and over 1,000 times smaller coil volumes.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close down (S&P 500 -1.5%, Dow -1.6%, Nasdaq -1.8%).

Oil closes at \$100 per barrel after Iran says Strait of Hormuz must remain blocked.

BMW profits fall 11.5% in 2025—their lowest level since the pandemic—amid international trade tension and competition in China.

Honda cancels plan to develop three electric vehicles for the US, also citing tariffs and China.

Quince, a direct-to-consumer online retailer, reaches \$10B valuation after raising \$500M in latest funding round.

Politics & World Affairs

Former National Guardsman previously convicted of ISIS support kills one person, wounds two others at Old Dominion University in Virginia.

Armed assailant is killed by security personnel after ramming vehicle into Temple Israel Synagogue in West Bloomfield, Michigan; one security guard was wounded.

US military refueling plane crashes in western Iraq, near the Jordanian border; rescue efforts were ongoing as of this writing, with the status of crew not publicly known.

European Union's top court rules member countries must provide passports for transgender citizens reflecting their gender as opposed to sex at birth.

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I'm in Groton but am willing to drive to nearby towns!

The advertisement features a colorful illustration of a teddy bear, a baby bottle, and stacking toys on the left, and a yellow bucket with cleaning supplies on the right. At the bottom, a red car is shown driving on a road towards a house in a green landscape.

Groton seventh-grader Reif shows grit after snowmobile crash

For most seventh graders, a February snowmobile trip to West Yellowstone would be remembered for the scenery and the fun. For 13-year-old Cash Reif of Groton, it became a test of toughness, patience and determination after a frightening crash left him with a broken femur and a long road back.

The Groton Area Middle School student was riding on the first full day of the trip — Monday, Feb. 2 — when the accident happened.

"We were out there where there were some shrubs and little creek drainages," Cash said. "I went down into one and then came up and started wheeling. I didn't see the other one. I set the front end down in it, my thigh hit the handlebar and I flew over."

Cash immediately knew something was wrong.

"It felt like my leg was straight, but it was sideways," he recalled.

His father and friends rushed to help, fashioning a temporary brace in the snow using shovel heads and paracord. The group tried to move him on a snowmobile, but deep, crusted snow and the rough terrain made the effort difficult. With no cell service, help seemed far away — until his father found a single bar of reception while placing his phone on the snowmobile dash and called 911, using onboard maps to guide rescuers to their location.

Emergency crews arrived with a rescue sled, administered pain medication and stabilized Cash's leg before a helicopter transported him to Idaho Falls.

"I just stared at the ceiling," Cash said of the flight.

At the hospital, X-rays confirmed a broken femur — the largest bone in the body. Surgeons inserted a metal rod and three screws during surgery the following morning. Cash remained hospitalized another day before making the long drive home to Groton.

Recovery began quickly. Within one to two weeks, he started physical therapy, working through leg lifts, bends and resistance exercises. Today, he continues strengthening routines that include stair work, stretching and resistance training.

Returning to school wasn't easy.

"For the first week I did half days," Cash said. "It was pretty hard getting around on crutches."

Teachers helped by allowing him to leave class early to avoid crowded hallways, and after just a week he was back to full days. He got off crutches last week and now walks steadily, with only minor discomfort during therapy sessions.

Cash is scheduled to see his doctor again next week, but his recovery has already impressed those around him. Just over a month removed from the accident, he's back in school, back on his feet and already talking about the future — including riding again.

His snowmobile, meanwhile, needed only minor repairs.

"Nothing broke," Cash said. "The handlebars just got bent."

For a 13-year-old who endured a traumatic injury in the backcountry, the experience has become less about the crash itself and more about perseverance — and getting back up after being knocked down.



Cash Reif will be back on a snowmobile soon after Yellowstone crash. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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2026 SDHSAA State Girls Basketball Tournaments, Quarterfinal Recap

SDPB | By Nate Wek

The 2026 SDHSAA state girls' basketball tournaments began on Thursday from Rapid City (AA), Watertown (A), and Brookings (B). Here's a recap of the quarterfinal round from all three tournaments.

Class AA

No.1 Brandon Valley 78 No. 8 Tea Area 53

Brandon Valley stormed their way to a quarterfinal win over Tea Area, 78-53, on Thursday afternoon. Alyvia Padgett led the team in points with 36 and assists with six. London Geiver, Gracie Salter, and Ava Kellenberger combined for the remaining 42 points by the Lynx. Anna Binde was the top scorer for Tea Area, who finished the game with 13 points.

No. 5 Aberdeen Central 53 No. 4 Rapid City Stevens 42

Aberdeen Central defeated Rapid City Stevens 53-42 on Thursday in Rapid City. The Golden Eagles saw a nice performance from Taryn Hermansen, who scored 16 points and snagged 16 rebounds in the win. Lauryn Burckhard also contributed 13 points on offense for Aberdeen Central. Haley Falcon, Hayden Thorton, and Finley Love all scored nine-points in the loss for the Raiders.

No. 2 O'Gorman 55 No. 7 Mitchell 44

O'Gorman moved past Mitchell 55-44 in the opening round. The Knights were led by Sydney Terveen and Ruby Moore, who both scored 18 points in the winning effort. Terveen had a double-double with ten rebounds as well. Mitchell's top scorer on offense was Addie Siemsen. She finished with 15 points and grabbed nine rebounds too.

No. 3 Sioux Falls Washington 66 No. 6 Sioux Falls Jefferson 44

Sioux Falls Washington defeated Sioux Falls Jefferson 66-44 in the quarterfinal night cap. Dana Harpe led the Warriors with a double-double performance of 27 points and ten rebounds. Josie Biteler also had eleven points in the winning effort. Brinley Altenburg also had a double-double performance of 24 points and ten rebounds for Jefferson in the loss.

Class A

No. 1 Hamlin 61 No. 8 Lakota Tech 52

Hamlin held off a determined Lakota Tech team to win 61-52 in the 'A' quarterfinal round. Addelyn Jensen led the way for the Chargers with a double-double performance, 22 points and 13 rebounds, in the win. Addie Neuendorf also had a 16 point, eight rebound performance in the win. Amelia Shangreaux led Lakota Tech with 15 points, while Lizzie and Kate Robinson each notched 12-points in the loss as well.

No. 5 Lennox 42 No. 4 Sioux Valley 28

Lennox defeated Sioux Valley 42-28 in the quarterfinal round. The Orioles were led on offense by Bergan Musser and Tori Gerdes. Musser scored 13, while Gerdes had 12. Musser also led Lennox in rebounds with nine in the win. Sioux Valley's leading scorer in the contest was Masey Top, who finished with ten points in the loss.

No. 2 Mahpiya Lúta 65 No. 7 West Central 42

Mahpiya Lúta defeated West Central 65-42 in the quarterfinals. Ashlan Carlow-Blount led the team with 24 points, eight rebounds, six steals, and five assists. Mya Mills also had a big game with 18 points, all coming from beyond the arc. Jacey Jatón led West Central with 14 points, six rebounds, and three steals.

No. 6 Sioux Falls Christian 61 No. 3 Wagner 49

Sioux Falls Christian defeated Wagner 61-49 on Thursday night in Watertown. The Chargers were led by Lezlei Setzer, who recorded a double-double with 20 points and 12 rebounds. Ruth Dvoracek also added 18 points and five rebounds in the win. Ashlyn Koupal led Wagner with 15-points and nine rebounds in the loss.

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Class B

No. 8 Corsica-Stickney 65 No. 1 Lyman 56

Corsica-Stickney upset Lyman 65-56 to start the Class B tournament. Braylee Bordewyk led the Jaguars with 26-points and five assists. Hadynn Johnson also added 15 points and nine rebounds in the winning effort as well. For Lyman, Jordan Scott led the team with 28-points and three blocks. Kenzie Wagner also contributed for the Raiders with 12-points and seven rebounds.

No. 4 Ethan 51 No. 5 Colman-Egan 42

Solid perimeter shooting lifted Ethan to a 51-42 win over Colman-Egan in the quarterfinal round. The Rustlers shot 36% from beyond the arc and shot 46% in the game from the field. Ethan was led by Rachel Klock, who finished with 17 points. 12 of those points were off of three-pointers. Klock also led the team in rebounds with nine. Taziah Hawkins contributed with 12-points in the win too, five of them coming from the free throw line. Colman-Egan's top offensive performer was Jolie Flatter, who notched 22 points in the loss.

No. 2 Parkston 46 No. 7 Centerville 39

Parkston outlasted Centerville 46-39 on Thursday night. Berkley Ziebart scored 26 points on 12 of 17 from the field. Keeara Oakley also had a big performance for the Trojans, scoring 13 points and grabbing 12 rebounds. She also led Parkston with four assists. Centerville was led by Izzie Eide who scored 22 points and grabbed eight rebounds.

No. 6 Harding County 58 No. 3 Bennett County 50

Harding County defeated the defending champions Bennett County in the quarterfinal round 58-50. The Ranchers were led on offense by Kaylen Padden, who scored 15-points in the win. Maci Wammen also added 12-points in the winning effort. For Bennett County, Peyson and Reagan O'Neill combined for 45-points and 22 rebounds, each recording a double-double in the loss.

Friday's Schedule

Class AA

Consolation Semifinals

No. 8 Tea Area vs No. 4 Rapid City Stevens – 11 am MT

No. 7 Mitchell vs No. 6 Sioux Falls Jefferson – 12:45 pm MT

Semifinals

No. 1 Brandon Valley vs No. 5 Aberdeen Central – 5 pm MT

No. 2 O'Gorman vs No. 3 Sioux Falls Washington – 6:45 pm MT

Class A

Consolation Semifinals

No. 8 Lakota Tech vs No. 4 Sioux Valley – 11 am CT

No. 7 West Central vs No. 3 Wagner – 12:45 pm CT

Semifinals

No. 1 Hamlin vs No. 5 Lennox – 5 pm CT

No. 2 Mahpiya Lúta vs No. 6 Sioux Falls Christian – 6:45 pm CT

Class B

Consolation Semifinals

No. 1 Lyman vs No. 5 Colman-Egan – 11 am CT

No. 7 Centerville vs No. 3 Bennett County – 12:45 pm CT

Semifinals

No. 8 Corsica-Stickney vs No. 4 Ethan – 5 pm CT

No. 2 Parkston vs No. 6 Harding County – 6:45 pm CT

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...WINTER STORM WATCH REMAINS IN EFFECT FROM SATURDAY AFTERNOON THROUGH SUNDAY EVENING...

URGENT - WINTER WEATHER MESSAGE

National Weather Service Aberdeen SD

254 AM CDT Fri Mar 13 2026

McPherson-Brown-Marshall-Roberts-Edmunds-Day-Including the cities of Eureka, Aberdeen, Sisseton, Ipswich, Webster, and Britton

* WHAT...Blizzard conditions possible. Total snow accumulations between 7 and 12 inches possible. Winds could gust as high as 45 mph.

* WHERE...Portions of north central and northeast South Dakota.

* WHEN...From Saturday afternoon through Sunday evening.

* IMPACTS...Travel could be very difficult. Whiteout conditions may make travel extremely dangerous or impossible. Gusty winds could bring down tree branches.

PRECAUTIONARY/PREPAREDNESS ACTIONS...

Prepare for possible blizzard conditions. Continue to monitor the latest forecasts for updates on this situation.

PUBLIC NOTICE TO GROTON PROPERTY OWNERS

Notice is hereby given that City Council, sitting as the Local Board of Equalization, will meet at City Hall, 120 N Main Street, Groton, SD, for the purpose of reviewing, correcting and equalizing the assessment of property on March 18, 2026, at 8:30 pm, following the regular council meeting.

Appeals must be submitted in writing with supporting documentation by 5:00pm Thursday, March 12th at City Hall or mail appeals to the Finance Officer, PO Box 587 Groton, South Dakota. Those appealing will be notified of their scheduled time to meet with the Board. Contact City Hall for more information at 605-397-8422.

Douglas J. Heinrich, Groton City Finance Officer

Multiple Wildfires Reported in Custer County Area

RAPID CITY, S.D. – Multiple wildfires are currently burning in the Custer County area, prompting road closures and evacuations as firefighters work to contain the rapidly moving fires.

Emergency crews from several agencies are responding to the fires, which are being driven by strong winds and dry conditions. These conditions can cause fires to spread quickly and change direction with little warning.

Authorities urge residents and travelers to avoid the fire areas so firefighters and emergency personnel can safely perform their duties.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol says there are multiple road closures in the affected area, and additional closures may occur as conditions change.

Residents in and around the fire areas should monitor local news and official alerts for evacuation notices, road closure information, and other emergency instructions.

Motorists are reminded to slow down in emergency areas, watch for responders and equipment on roadways, and never drive around barricades or closures.

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Lawmakers adopt \$7.5 billion budget with 1.4% increase for schools, state workers, health providers

Legislators pass spending measure as final week of annual session concludes

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER

PIERRE — South Dakota lawmakers approved a balanced \$7.5 billion state budget on Thursday at the Capitol, up about \$172.2 million, or an increase of 2.4%, from the budget they adopted last year.

Sen. Mark Lapka, R-Leola, is a member of the Legislature's main budget panel, the Joint Appropriations Committee. He reminded lawmakers that they started out with a "bleak" budget in December, after Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden projected lower-than-anticipated revenue. That has since changed to a "better financial position," after the committee adopted revenue projections \$30 million higher than the governor projected two months prior.

"This is a budget that invests in the people of South Dakota where they need it the most, and that will have a positive impact on future generations," Lapka said.

Some lawmakers criticized the budget because of its growing size, support for South Dakota Public Broadcasting and dependence on federal funding.

The budget is for fiscal year 2027, which begins in July. It includes \$3.1 billion in federal funding, a 0.35% decrease from last year. It also includes the equivalent of 14,121.3 full-time employees, an increase of 26 from last winter's budget bill.

Thursday was the final day of the annual legislative session, except for a day on March 30 to consider vetoes from the governor.

'Big three' funding increase goes from flat to 1.4%

The so-called "big three" budget priorities — education, state employees and health care providers who treat Medicaid patients — received 1.4% funding increases, which equates to \$34.5 million more than the governor's proposed flat funding in December.

Lawmakers learned in February that they had enough money on hand from higher sales tax revenue projections to support an increase in funding for the "big three." At the time, Rhoden supported a 1% increase.

Sen. Taffy Howard, R-Rapid City, sits on the budget committee. She voted against the budget Wednesday in the committee and on Thursday in the Senate partly because it didn't include an increase in state education funding that met state law.

The law requires an annual increase of 3% or inflation, whichever is less — also called the index factor. Lawmakers often "ignore" that requirement, Howard said, because they rewrite the law each year to provide more or less funding than what is statutorily required.

"Instead, we increase welfare program spending, we add all these other additional programs that are new spending programs that we didn't have before," Howard said on Wednesday. "I just get really frustrated that we aren't even taking care of what we're already lawfully obligated to do, and yet we go out and keep spending on other things."

If lawmakers increased "big three" funding by inflation — 2.5% — it would have cost the state roughly another \$27 million. Just increasing state education funding to 2.5% would have cost another \$11.7 million.

South Dakota Bureau of Finance and Management Commissioner Jim Terwilliger told lawmakers on the budget committee that state funding increases for education are 7.9 percentage points above what the

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index factor required since 2019, due to larger increases in prior years.

Other budget decisions

The budget passed by lawmakers differs from the budget recommended by Rhoden in December.

Lawmakers on the budget committee approved more funding for new positions in the South Dakota Treasurer's Office, the Attorney General's Office and the Public Utilities Commission. The four positions will cost \$443,611 combined.

Lawmakers on the committee also voted to partially restore state funding for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, which was cut by 30% last year. The increase will cost \$427,000 in state funding and authorize the state Department of Social Services to spend another \$427,000 in federal funds carried over from prior years. The decision reduces a 10% cut in benefits for families to a 5% cut.

The committee increased state funding for the state Education Department by \$592,224 to reimburse schools for reduced priced meals for students who are eligible, although the bill directing the department to do that is still awaiting the governor's consideration.

The Department of Social Services received funding to implement a newly adopted ban on the purchase of soft drinks by people in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. That will require two full-time employees and software to track sales, file reports and help retailers determine which drinks are banned, needing \$165,300 in state funds and \$55,100 in federal funds.

The committee also increased funding for Medicaid reimbursement rates for critical access hospitals, which cost \$1.3 million in state funding and \$1.4 million in federal funding, and for Federally Qualified Healthcare Centers, which cost \$3.4 million in state funding and \$3.5 million in federal funding.

Critical access hospitals and Federally Qualified Healthcare Centers largely serve rural, underserved populations in the state, and directors of some centers told members of the Joint Appropriations Committee earlier this session that they were close to closing centers because of the low reimbursement rates.

Lawmakers doubled state funding for the Unified Judicial System alternative care grant program, which funds beds for the Teen Challenge program in Brookings. They passed a bill earlier this session that they believe will double the number of offenders referred to the nonprofit, faith-based addiction recovery program.

Current budget revisions

Lawmakers also approved a bill to revise the state budget for the current fiscal year, up about \$111 million. The money includes state general fund dollars from higher-than projected revenue, as well as dollars from the federal government and other funds, including fees paid to state agencies.

The revised 2026 fiscal year budget uses \$34.1 million more from the general fund. Sen. Paul Miskimins, R-Mitchell, told senators Thursday that the budget bill "makes key one-time investments to support state government and institutions."

"We have bolstered infrastructure, provided additional security at correctional facilities, and invested in our technical colleges," Miskimins said. "We continue to invest and reallocate taxpayer money into our core responsibilities while making measured investments when funds are available."

Specifically, the bill pumps \$555,000 of general fund dollars into the corrections budget for security equipment and \$1.5 million for court security equipment, \$10 million into information technology infrastructure and \$3.1 million for tech upgrades in the state's reemployment assistance fund program. The state's technical colleges are in line for \$4.3 million in general fund dollars for equipment.

That was possible in part because of a "lower than expected utilization in Medicaid," which Miskimins said allowed the state to direct \$7 million toward other priorities. The state also reallocated \$15.8 million available because of lower public school student enrollment.

South Dakota Searchlight Senior Reporter John Hult contributed to this report.

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.

New law limiting utilities' liability approved as wildfires break out in Black Hills

Governor also approves new TIF district guardrails and rural infrastructure funding

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

As wind-driven wildfires flared up Thursday in the Black Hills and an electrical provider proactively shut off power to some customers, South Dakota's governor signed a bill into law that will give utilities greater protection from wildfire lawsuits in exchange for filing wildfire mitigation plans.

Under the terms of the new law, private utilities may submit mitigation plans to the state Public Utilities Commission, while electric cooperatives and municipal utilities can submit plans to their boards or city councils. The utilities that do so will have to file annual compliance reports.

The law includes required elements for plans, such as identifying higher-risk areas, establishing inspection and operating standards, implementing vegetation management strategies, and coordinating with the appropriate wildfire agencies.

For utilities and cooperatives that participate, the new law will change the legal playing field after a wildfire by barring the application of "strict liability" to them in wildfire-damage lawsuits. That is a legal standard that makes entities responsible for harm they cause, regardless of whether they were negligent or intended to cause it.

The law says plaintiffs will be able to recover losses only by proving that the utility failed to "substantially comply" with an "essential element" of a plan, and "that failure was the actual and proximate cause of the damages to the plaintiff."

The bill was sponsored by Sen. Steve Kolbeck, R-Brandon, who works as a director of business affairs at Xcel Energy, an investor-owned utility with over 100,000 customers in the state.

"We want to make people whole. We just don't want to make them rich," Kolbeck said during testimony on the legislation.

The bill was signed as wildfires broke out near the city of Custer and other areas of the Black Hills, where dry vegetation from a historically warm and dry winter ignited and spread with gusting winds. Black Hills Energy shut off power to hundreds of residents in the southern Black Hills as a precaution against live power lines falling and sparking more fires.

Other bills signed

Separately, Gov. Larry Rhoden signed other bills including Senate Bill 228, which tightens rules for tax increment financing districts. Cities and counties use TIF districts to finance infrastructure that aids development, and the new and higher property taxes from the development are used to pay off the financing.

TIFs came under scrutiny this winter when, in Rapid City, a TIF included millions of dollars in discretionary funds for the developer. About 70% of voters in Rapid City rejected that TIF after the city council had approved it.

The new law bars the use of a county "discretionary formula" tax break inside a TIF, requires districts to be in a contiguous area, lowers the TIF value cap for large cities from 10% to 7.5% of total assessed value, and more. The bill was a compromise meant to add guardrails while keeping TIFs available.

Additionally, Rhoden signed Senate Bill 240. The bill appropriates \$5 million to the state Department of Revenue to deposit into existing rural access infrastructure funds, which help local governments cover costs of repairing and replacing critical small structures.

Thursday was the last day of the annual legislative session, except for a day on March 30 to consider vetoes from the governor. Rhoden has signed 161 bills into law and vetoed one so far this session.

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.

Governor signs bills to reduce homeowner property taxes with higher sales taxes

Inflation adjustment complicates Rhoden's claim of 'largest property tax cut in South Dakota history'

BY: MEGHAN O'BRIEN

PIERRE — Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden signed two bills into law Thursday that he said will work in tandem to provide “the largest property tax cut in South Dakota history,” although a past tax cut may have been bigger when adjusted for inflation, and the new laws rely on increased sales taxes to fund property tax relief for homeowners.

The last time the state approved a historic reduction in property taxes was in 1995 under then-Gov. Bill Janklow, which current Lt. Gov. Tony Venhuizen said was worth about \$100 million, or \$120 million when incorporating further relief measures passed in successive years.

That relief would be worth more than \$250 million today, after adjusting for inflation.

One of the bills signed by Rhoden will collect an estimated \$114 million in additional sales taxes annually by allowing the state sales tax rate to go from 4.2% to 4.5% next year, as lawmakers scheduled it to do when they temporarily lowered the rate three years ago. That revenue will be inserted into the state education funding formula to lower school district property taxes by an equivalent amount. Schools fund whatever portion of their budget they can with local property taxes, and the rest of their funding comes mostly from state government.

Before the sales tax increase takes effect, the state will use \$56 million from its reserve funds to kick-start the relief effort.

An untold additional amount of new sales tax revenue could be raised by counties, which will be given the option to impose a half-percent sales tax with proceeds offsetting the county portion of homeowner property taxes. That will show up as a credit on homeowners' tax bills.

“We have estimates, county by county, of what it would raise. It really depends on which counties implement it,” Venhuizen said. “That’s hard to predict.”

The bill capturing revenue from the scheduled statewide sales tax increase was proposed by Speaker of the House Jon Hansen, R-Dell Rapids, who’s running against Rhoden for the Republican nomination for governor in the June 2 primary election. The other Republican candidates are U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson and businessman Toby Doeden.

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.

Rhoden proposed the other bill, which will give counties their first opportunity to impose sales taxes. They currently rely on property taxes.

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

His office did not officially estimate how much the average South Dakotan would spend on higher sales taxes. Under questioning by South Dakota Searchlight last month, state Bureau of Finance and Management Commissioner Jim Terwilliger estimated 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.

Lawmakers and Rhoden also passed a major property tax bill last year to slow property tax increases. That law temporarily capped the countywide growth of taxable home values, temporarily limited the value from new construction and growth that can be used to increase property tax collections, prevented some home improvements from causing higher home valuations, and expanded income eligibility for property tax relief programs for elderly and disabled people.

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.

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.

Tax relief, victim services, infrastructure: How lawmakers are spending \$96M in one-time money

Decisions help take reserve funds down from 16.5% of general fund to just over 10%

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER

PIERRE — By tapping into reserves and higher-than-expected revenue, South Dakota lawmakers are doling out \$96 million in one-time state general funds to address a variety of special projects across the state — nearly seven times more than the amount Gov. Larry Rhoden originally left open for special legislative projects in December.

Rhoden laid out \$14 million in his recommended budget for special legislative projects, with another \$23.3 million for his own projects, in order to decrease the state's reserve funds to 12.5% of the general fund.

The reserve funds have ballooned in recent years, due to high end-of-year surpluses. The reserve funds are currently at 16.5%. Since December, lawmakers have debated whether to pull more money from the funds.

Lawmakers on a budget committee decided on Wednesday — the second-to-last day of the annual legislative session — to decrease the reserve funds to just over 10%. The state maintains reserves of at least 10% for "true emergencies," Rhoden told lawmakers in December.

Those transfers will decrease the state reserve funds to \$255.8 million.

Lawmakers also learned in February that the current fiscal year's estimated revenue is \$16.8 million more than Rhoden projected in December.

Senate Majority Leader Jim Mehlhaff, R-Pierre, told members of the media at Thursday's Republican leadership press conference that the one-time spending decisions are "investments" into the state.

Most of the bills are still awaiting the governor's consideration, but are expected to be signed into law pursuant to discussions between the executive and legislative branches.

The money is being used to:

Seed a fund to offset property taxes:

\$56 million will be transferred from reserves in July to the newly established homeowner property tax reduction fund, which will be used to buy down general education property tax levies on owner-occupied homes. The money is part of a multifaceted approach to property tax relief adopted by lawmakers that will include putting future annual revenue into the property tax reduction fund from next year's scheduled increase of the state sales tax rate from 4.2% to 4.5%, and also giving counties the option to impose a half-percent sales tax for property tax credits.

Support surface water protection projects:

\$10 million will be given to the state Department of Agriculture, with \$2 million funding state-approved wastewater and storm water infrastructure projects and \$8 million funding the state's riparian buffer project, which acts as a barrier between erosion or field runoff and rivers, lakes and streams.

Repair roads near Ellsworth Air Force Base:

\$8 million will be transferred from the general fund to the South Dakota Ellsworth Development Authority to help restore roads damaged from construction on the base in anticipation of B-21 Raider stealth bombers soon calling the base home.

Sustain services for victims of sexual abuse and domestic violence:

\$5.5 million will be appropriated to the Department of Public Safety to fund grants to nonprofits that provide services to victims of child abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault and trafficking. Federal funding for the programs, which normally sustain the services, has decreased in recent years. The state funded similar appropriations in 2025 and 2024, each at \$5 million.

Help local governments repair and replace bridges and culverts:

\$5 million will be given to the state Department of Revenue to deposit into existing rural access infrastructure funds, which help local governments cover costs of repairing and replacing critical small structures.

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Offer personal protective equipment grants to volunteer firefighters:

\$5 million will be given to the state Department of Public Safety to offer grants to volunteer fire departments throughout the state. Lawmakers approved \$5 million in grant funding in 2023 as well. More than 250 departments applied for those grants, requesting \$10 million more than what was available at the time.

Seed money for water infrastructure projects:

\$3 million will be transferred from the general fund to a newly established water infrastructure development fund to support the construction, planning and development of water projects in the state.

Build a regional juvenile center:

\$2 million will be appropriated to the state Department of Education to fund a grant for a nonprofit to build or buy a building that would serve as an alternative learning option for students with behavioral health concerns. State lawmakers also approved legislation that would allow school boards to temporarily reassign violent or aggressive students to an alternative learning setting.

Restoring the Capitol building:

\$1.1 million will be used to create the Capitol restoration fund. A full restoration of the Capitol could cost at least \$150 million, according to the Bureau of Human Resources and Administration. The last full restoration was conducted for the 1989 state centennial.

Help challenged students graduate:

\$500,000 will be used to expand the Jobs for America's Graduates program in South Dakota to more schools and boost private fundraising of the program. JAG-SD, which has 18 programs across 12 school districts, teaches life, leadership and educational skills to students facing barriers to graduation, employment or postsecondary education.

Governor's projects:

Lawmakers also approved special funding for a number of projects recommended by Gov. Larry Rhoden earlier this year, including:

\$6 million to build an advanced manufacturing center for Southeast Technical College in Sioux Falls.

\$5 million to purchase a new airplane and equipment for law enforcement surveillance.

\$4.2 million to backfill the state emergency and disaster fund.

\$2.7 million to backfill the state fire suppression fund.

\$2.35 million to renovate and expand the Sturgis Readiness Center for the National Guard.

\$1.3 million to pay medical professionals in the Rural Recruitment Assistance Program.

\$682,825 to demolish the Pierre Minimum Center, a portion of the women's prison complex that is no longer needed due to the additional women's prison under construction in Rapid City.

\$650,000 to backfill the extraordinary litigation fund.

\$425,000 to increase income qualifications for tax refund programs for elderly and disabled homeowners.

South Dakota Searchlight Reporter Meghan O'Brien contributed to this report.

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.

Senate panel pushes stricter reporting for foreign funding to US colleges and universities

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA

WASHINGTON — Members of a U.S. Senate panel expressed bipartisan consensus Thursday that the country should be cautious of “malign” foreign dollars flowing to American colleges and universities, with some Democrats also arguing recent funding cuts undermine the country’s lead in global research.

The hearing in the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions on “malign foreign influence in higher education” came as President Donald Trump and congressional Republicans have pushed for increased transparency requirements when it comes to foreign gifts and contracts entering these schools.

Higher education institutions receiving federal financial assistance are required to disclose any foreign gifts or contracts valued at or above \$250,000 annually. The requirement has been in place since 1986, when the Higher Education Act of 1965 was amended to include the reporting provision, known as Section 117.

Sen. Bill Cassidy, a Louisiana Republican and chair of the panel, said college is ultimately “about setting students up for success and they should be our priority, but that priority can be undermined when foreign adversaries attempt to exercise influence on college campuses ... inherently threatening national security.”

A bill that would broaden Section 117 disclosure requirements and lower the reporting threshold from \$250,000 to \$50,000 passed the House in March 2025. Rep. Michael Baumgartner, a Washington state Republican, sponsored the measure.

Cassidy, who is co-leading a Senate companion bill with North Carolina GOP Sen. Thom Tillis, called for protecting college campuses through “transparency,” noting that his legislation would be the next step in that effort.

Thursday’s hearing also came as the administration continues its efforts to dismantle the 46-year-old Education Department, including through a series of interagency agreements that outsource several of its responsibilities to other departments.

In one of those agreements, the State Department will help Education manage foreign gift and contract reporting under Section 117.

Research cuts add vulnerabilities

Though Democrats saw a need to root out “malign” foreign influences in higher education, a handful took aim at the administration’s cuts to federal research funding and broader “attacks” on higher education.

“While I agree that it’s important to stamp out dangerous sources of foreign influence in our higher education system, I think it’s important that we also address how cuts to research funding can increase foreign influence on the global stage and undermine U.S. competitiveness,” said Sen. Angela Alsobrooks.

The Maryland Democrat pointed to the impact of the administration’s cuts to the National Institutes of Health, the country’s premier medical research agency under the Department of Health and Human Services that is headquartered in her state.

Sen. Tim Kaine pointed to a loss of researchers in the United States as a result of research funding cuts.

“This administration has canceled billions of dollars in federal research, making many of our researchers vulnerable to being recruited by universities in other countries, not necessarily China, but Canada, the (United Kingdom) and universities in Europe,” the Virginia Democrat said.

Sen. Patty Murray said she found it “absurd” that Trump and Republicans are “willing to burn billions of dollars a day” in the ongoing war with Iran, when she and many others are fighting “tooth and nail” to get the administration to “release billions of dollars that Congress appropriated to be delivered to our students.”

“It’s not happening, and states like mine are having to routinely file lawsuits,” the Washington state Democrat said, while also calling on Education Secretary Linda McMahon to testify before the panel on the ongoing dismantling efforts.

Cassidy said the panel was in talks with the department to schedule McMahon’s testimony.

Transparency dashboard

The department's public transparency dashboard — housed on a portal launched in January where colleges and universities are responsible for disclosing foreign gifts and contracts — also came to the forefront during Thursday's hearing.

The dashboard, visualizing four decades of data, offers a snapshot of the foreign funding disclosures submitted by colleges and universities.

At least 559 institutions have disclosed \$72.1 billion in foreign gifts and contracts between 1986 and late January 2026, according to the dashboard.

But the current version of the dashboard's usability is limited by an inability to filter by year.

Robert Daly, senior fellow at the Asia Society and former director of the Kissinger Institute on China and the United States at the Wilson Center, told the panel the dashboard's cumulative nature is one of its "biggest silences." The tool does not allow the public to see any fluctuation over the years in the amount of money in foreign gifts and contracts received by schools.

He added that "not only do we need to see how giving from each country is moving over time, we need to be able to distinguish different kinds of giving."

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

Bike and walking trails lose hundreds of millions under Trump

Cities and states turn to lawsuits, alternative funding amid federal cuts

BY: SHALINA CHATLANI

Cities and states are filing lawsuits and scrambling for alternative sources of money as the Trump administration seeks to shut off the federal funding spigot for biking and walking trails.

Since the early 1990s, there has been fairly consistent — and largely bipartisan — federal support for bicycle and pedestrian projects. Federal funding for such projects reached new heights during the Biden administration, as major spending measures in 2021 and 2022 included billions in new money for them.

But in his efforts to eliminate what he perceives as diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives — and to roll back anything associated with his predecessor — President Donald Trump has targeted hundreds of millions in federal grants for biking and pedestrian projects. And further cuts could be coming.

The broad tax and spending measure Trump signed last summer rescinded \$2.4 billion from the Biden administration's Neighborhood Access and Equity Program, money included in the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act to address long-standing safety issues stemming from past infrastructure projects, including interstate highways that split minority communities.

Of that total, at least \$750 million was specifically earmarked for trails, walking paths and bike lane projects, according to data on grant recipients collected by Rails to Trails Conservancy, a nonprofit that advocates for trails and the construction of multiuse paths in abandoned railroad corridors.

Mark Treskon, a principal research associate at the nonprofit Urban Institute, said the administration seems to view bike and pedestrian trails as "a policy thing that people on the left like," and is cutting funding as a "knee-jerk reaction" to former President Joe Biden's policy priorities.

But Nate Sizemore, a spokesperson for the U.S. Department of Transportation, said the Trump administration is simply "getting back to basics" by "building the essential infrastructure needed to safely move people and commerce."

"As grant programs become available for applicants, we will ensure that every taxpayer dollar is reinvested into rebuilding the roads and bridges our economy demands. ... This decision reflects a significant shift away from the previous administration's costly social and climate initiatives that deprioritized the needs of American drivers and increased congestion risks," Sizemore wrote in an email.

Already reeling from the \$750 million in cuts included in Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill Act, cities and states that are counting on federal money for biking and pedestrian projects are worried about further

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cuts when Congress reauthorizes a broad transportation funding law that expires on Sept. 30. Biden's 2021 infrastructure measure boosted the amount of money available for bike and pedestrian projects under that law.

"Everything is on the table, and there's lots of risks to not only some of these grants that have been given under the last transportation bill ... but it also implicates programs that are like the bread and butter of building trails, walking and biking infrastructure that have been around for many decades," said Kevin Mills, vice president of policy at Rails to Trails Conservancy.

"We've heard warning signs from the administration, from leaders in Congress and from the heads of state transportation departments that they are looking to focus more on cars and less on active transportation, and sometimes less on transit as well."

Seeking alternatives

In the aftermath of last year's cuts and uncertainty over the future of federal funding, some states and cities have seen their projects completely stall, while others have found ways to move forward while decreasing their reliance on federal support.

In Connecticut, Rick Dunne, the executive director of the Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments, the federal metropolitan planning organization in that area of Connecticut, said the Trump administration pulled \$5.7 million in funding to build around 9 miles on a 42-mile trail project known as the Naugatuck River Greenway Trail last September.

"It would have leveraged a whole bunch of state money and local dollars to build these sections," Dunne said, noting that the council was hoping to use the federal funds to get matching dollars locally. "It would have advanced all of the activities on the trail and built major sections using other state, federal and local funding for construction."

Dunne said Connecticut is limited in how it raises transportation funds because it doesn't have counties.

"It's either paid for by those small local towns, 10,000 to 20,000 people, or it's paid for by the state," Dunne said. "But once we lose the federal funding, then we start losing some of the state funding and local funding that would have matched it."

Dunne said the council has not received any further communication from the U.S. Department of Transportation.

In Albuquerque, New Mexico, Terry Brunner, director of the city's Metropolitan Redevelopment Agency, said the Trump administration last September pulled an \$11.5 million grant to build part of a 7.5-mile pedestrian and bike lane around the city's downtown.

The city decided to sue the administration in November to get those funds back, and the case is still wrapped up in court.

"We're hoping we get a positive outcome on the lawsuit," Brunner said. "We've also got a backup plan to ask for another federal funding source, or try to get funding from the state of New Mexico to the city of Albuquerque to complete the section, because we were about 90% done with the design of this trail."

Brunner said Albuquerque has one of the highest pedestrian and cyclist death rates in the country, so getting people off the streets onto a safe trail is a priority for the city.

"I don't think they're going to stop us, but they'll delay us," he said, noting that the city is lucky because the state is offering funding and that the city budget may have some flexibility.

"Historically, we've always had a good partnership in Albuquerque with the federal government, and this is taking away a little bit of that shine and making us feel as if the federal government just really doesn't care about Albuquerque."

Projects in Republican-led states

The Trump administration also rescinded a \$147 million grant for Jacksonville, Florida, to complete the 30-mile urban Emerald Trail.

Kay Ehas, CEO of Groundwork Jacksonville, the city's nonprofit partner in building the Emerald Trail and restoring Hogans and McCoys creeks, says the group is continuing to work with the city "to identify fund-

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ing to replace the federal grant that was rescinded last year.”

“We are enlisting the support of corporate and private donors to fund design, which keeps the project moving while we seek government dollars for construction,” Ehas told Stateline.

Meanwhile, in Georgia, the Atlanta Regional Commission is continuing to plan and develop Flint River Gateway Trails, said Josh Phillipson, principal program specialist at ARC. The 31-mile network of bike and pedestrian paths would connect communities along the Flint River in the southern portion of the metro Atlanta area. The commission has tapped local sources for the \$3.5 million it needs to draft a master plan for the project, despite losing a \$65 million federal grant.

“We are not doing anything on the construction because we don’t have those dollars at this point,” Phillipson said. “We’re stepping back a little bit more into our traditional role of doing the long-range planning, but we’re going to be sticking with this project, committed for the next few years.”

Mills, of Rails to Trails Conservancy, lamented the loss of the Neighborhood Access and Equity grants, which would have helped areas “where historic transportation investments had split communities in two,” cutting off residents from economic opportunities and their neighbors.

In Atlanta, for example, Phillipson said the trails project was meant to “bridge over core infrastructure decisions of the last century that were overwhelmingly impacting more diverse communities,” making it “difficult now to walk or ride a bike between two adjacent communities.”

Treskon, of the Urban Institute, said cities and states will be hard-pressed to replace all the federal money they lost.

“It’s a pretty big hit across the board for the places that had built that into their financial plans,” he said.

Stateline reporter Shalina Chatlani can be reached at schatlani@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.

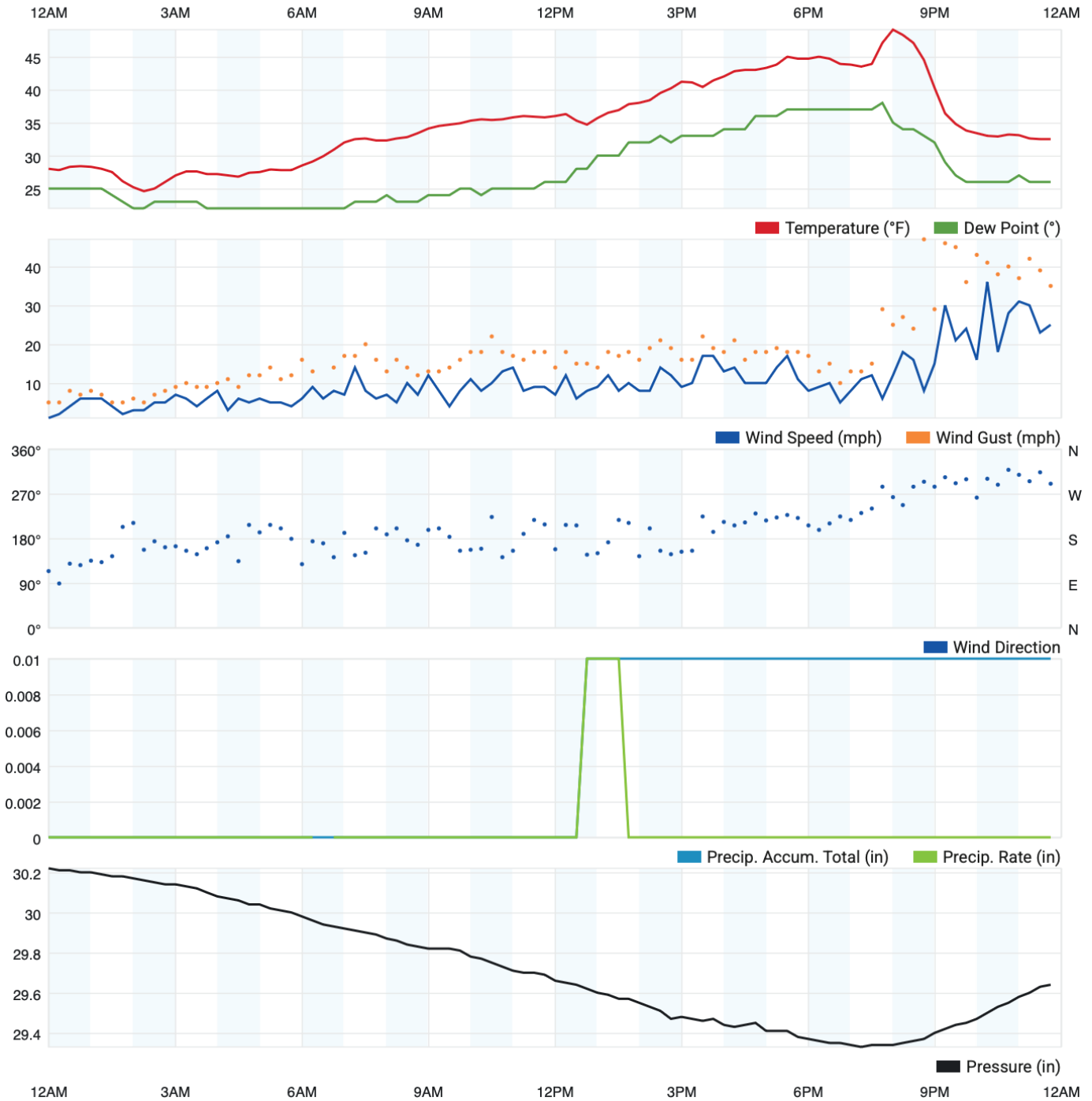
Shalina Chatlani covers health care and environmental justice for Stateline.

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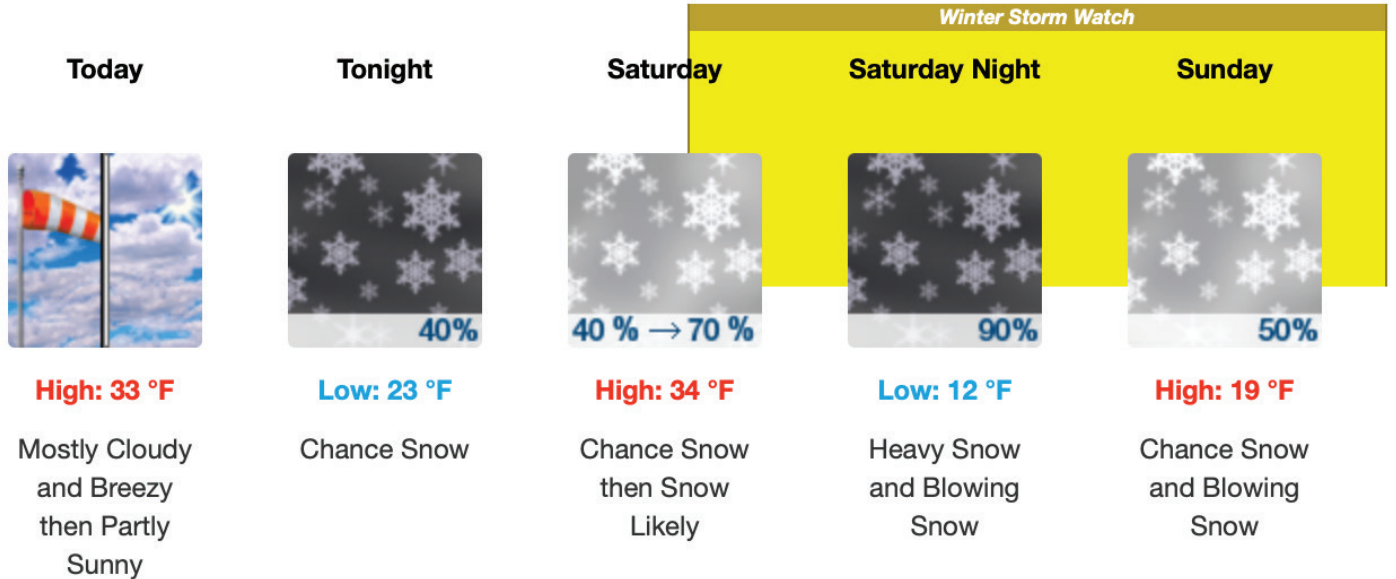
Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

March 12, 2026



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Winter Weather Returns for the Weekend

March 12, 2026 3:33 PM CDT

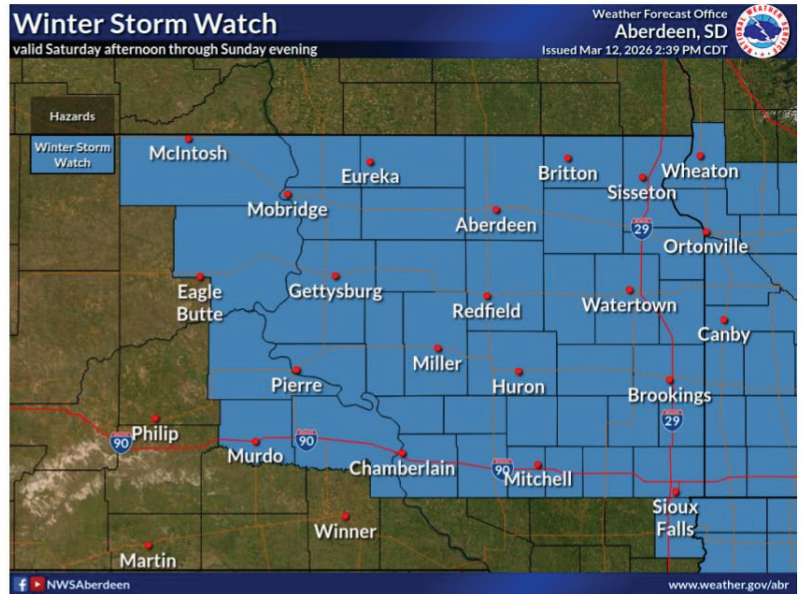
Heavy Snow Plus Strong Winds - Anticipate Impacts To Travel

Key Messages

- Confidence is increasing for a strong storm system with potential for heavy accumulating snow
 - Still uncertain on the track, therefore, lower confidence on locations of heaviest snowfall
- Northeast winds increase Sunday with gusts of 35 to 50 mph possible. This could result in drifting and blowing snow, decreasing visibilities at times. **Anticipate impacts to travel both Saturday and Sunday**

What Has Changed

- The potential for 6+ inches of snowfall has increased to 50-90%, mainly James Valley and east
- A Winter Storm Watch has been issued for central and northeast SD into west central MN



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Confidence is increasing for a strong storm system to impact the area this weekend. Uncertainty still exists on the track of the system and therefore, confidence is low on the locations of heaviest snowfall. A Winter Storm Watch has been issued for all of central and northeast SD into west central MN for Saturday afternoon through Sunday evening. Northeast winds of 35 to 50 mph Sunday afternoon will result in decreasing visibilities at times. Anticipate impacts to travel both Saturday and Sunday.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 49 °F at 7:59 PM

Low Temp: 25 °F at 2:14 AM

Wind: 47 mph at 8:38 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 71 in 2025

Record Low: --28 in 1896

Average High: 40

Average Low: 18

Average Precip in Mar.: 0.32

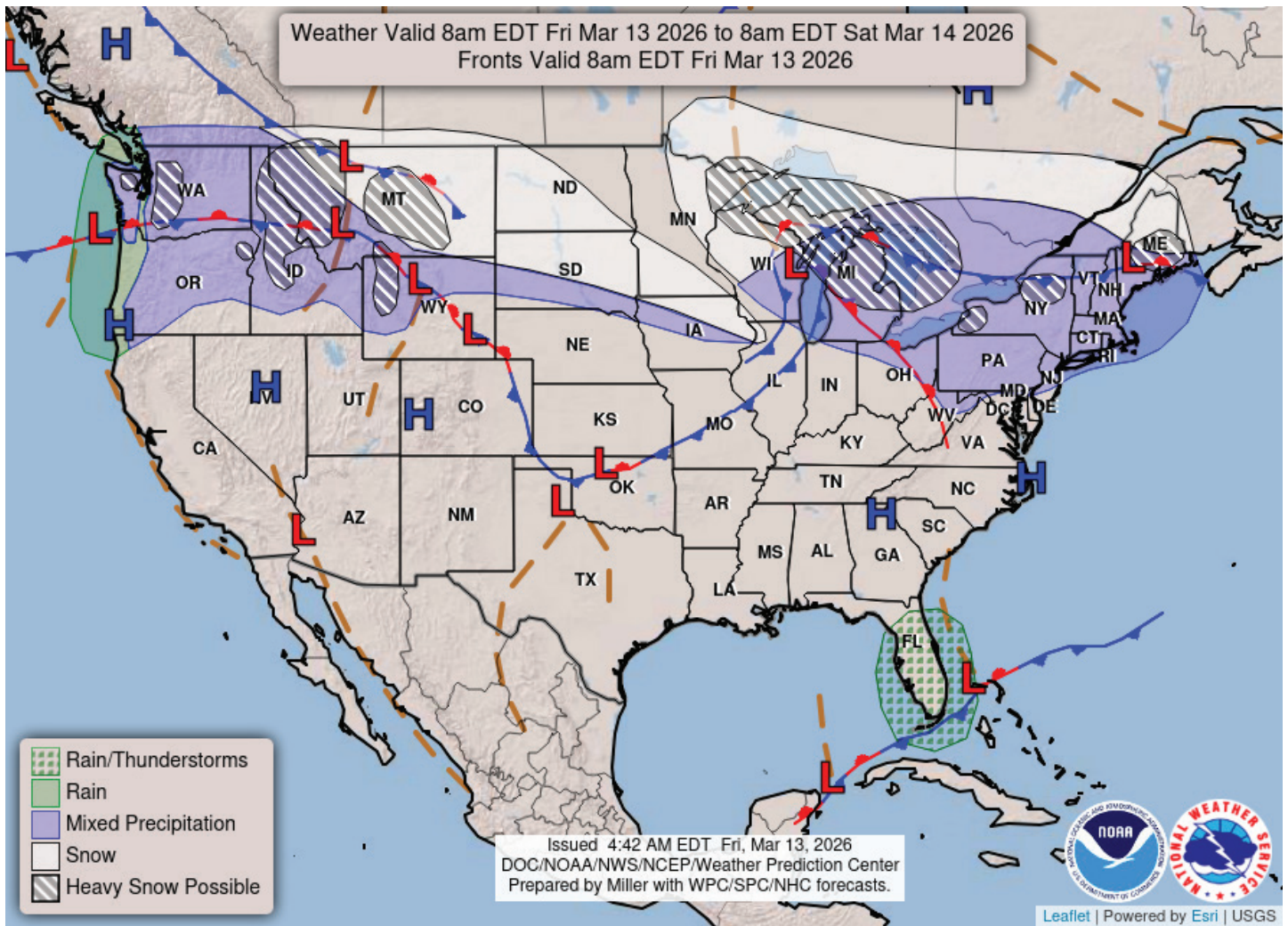
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 1.49

Precip Year to Date: 1.33

Sunset Tonight: 7.35 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:46 am



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Today in Weather History

March 13th, 1971: Lightning destroyed a transformer plant at Coleman in Moody County during an evening thunderstorm. Damages were estimated at \$250,000.

March 13th, 1997: A winter storm began with widespread freezing drizzle, creating icy roadways and walkways before changing to snow. Before the snow was over, 2 to 8 inches had fallen on an already expansive and deep snowpack. The winds accelerated to 20 to 40 mph, resulting in widespread blowing and drifting snow. Visibilities were reduced to near zero at times, making travel treacherous. Many roads again became blocked by snowdrifts, and several were closed. Many area schools were still closed, adding to an already substantial total of days missed for the winter season. Some people were stranded and had to wait out the storm. Some airport flights were canceled. The icy roads and low visibility resulted in several vehicle mishaps as well. There was a rollover accident west of Mobridge and an overturned van 7 miles west of Webster. On Interstate 29, several rollover accidents occurred, including vehicles sliding off the road. Some snowfall amounts included 4 inches at Timber Lake, Mobridge, Eureka, Leola, Britton, and Clark, five at Leola, six at Waubay and Summit, and eight at Pollock.

1907 — A storm produced a record 5.22 inches of rain in 24 hours at Cincinnati, OH. (12th-13th) (The Weather Channel)

1951 — The state of Iowa experienced a record snowstorm. The storm buried Iowa City under 27 inches of snow. (David Ludlum)

1977 — Baltimore, MD, received an inch of rain in eight minutes. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1987 — A winter storm produced heavy snow in the Sierra Nevada Range of California, and the Lake Tahoe area of Nevada. Mount Rose NV received 18 inches of new snow. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — Unseasonably cold weather prevailed from the Plateau Region to the Appalachians. Chadron NE, recently buried 33 inches of snow, was the cold spot in the nation with a low of 19 degrees below zero. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 — Residents of the southern U.S. viewed a once in a life-time display of the Northern Lights. Unseasonably warm weather continued in the southwestern U.S. The record high of 88 degrees at Tucson AZ was their seventh in a row. In southwest Texas, the temperature at Sanderson soared from 46 degrees at 8 AM to 90 degrees at 11 AM. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 — Thunderstorms produced severe weather from northwest Texas to Wisconsin, Iowa and Nebraska during the day, and into the night. Severe thunderstorms spawned 59 tornadoes, including twenty-six strong or violent tornadoes, and there were about two hundred reports of large hail or damaging winds. There were forty-eight tornadoes in Kansas, Nebraska and Iowa, and some of the tornadoes in those three states were the strongest of record for so early in the season, and for so far northwest in the United States. The most powerful tornado of the day was one which tore through the central Kansas community of Hesston. The tornado killed two persons, injured sixty others, and caused 22 million dollars along its 67-mile path. The tornado had a life span of two hours. Another tornado tracked 124 miles across southeastern Nebraska injuring eight persons and causing more than five million dollars damage.

The Purification of Our Faith

Like a master sculptor, God carefully chisels away anything in us that doesn't reflect His character.

Hebrews 11:32-40: 32 And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets,

33 who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions,

34 quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

35 Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection;

36 and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment.

37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated

38 (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.

39 And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised,

40 because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.

Most of us would love to have the heroic faith of the saints mentioned in Hebrews 11—it's exciting to read about the great victories and accomplishments of those who relied upon the Lord. But the descriptions in verses 36-38, well, those are another matter, if we're being honest. Enduring the process God uses to develop this kind of trust is less attractive.

Picture the Lord as a master sculptor standing before a block of marble. That slab is you. Envisioning the hidden work of art within the rock, He lovingly and carefully chips away at everything that does not fit the masterpiece He's creating.

One of the first areas the Lord deals with is your character. His goal is to shape you into the image of His Son. And His chisel lays bare roots of sin and selfishness.

When anything or anyone becomes more important to us than the Lord, we have an idol in our life. To protect us, God sometimes uses adversity to strip away everything we have relied upon so that we will cling only to Him.

The chisel hurts—it sometimes feels as if God is taking away everything we hold dear. But if we trust Him and yield to His shaping tool of adversity, our faith will be purified and strengthened through challenging times (James 1:2-4).

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

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- 9 Months..... \$52.00
- 12 Months..... \$60.00

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City _____

State, Zip Code _____

Phone Number _____

The following will be used for your log-in information.

E-mail _____

Password _____

Pay with Paypal. Type the following into your browser window:

paypal.me/paperpaul

Pay with Venmo: @paperpaul Phone Number to Confirm: 7460

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WINNING NUMBERS

MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.12.26

10 24 37 49 54 5

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

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 41 Mins 15 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.10.26

16 21 30 35 65 7

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$50,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 26 Mins 15 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: 1 Days 16 Hrs 41 Mins 15 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.11.26

2 13 14 17 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$23,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 56 Mins 15 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.11.26

6 7 42 43 59 21

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 25 Mins 15 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: 1 Days 17 Hrs 25 Mins 14 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the **AP** Associated Press

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

SDHSAA State Tournament=

Quarterfinal=

Class A=

Hamlin 61, Lakota Tech 52

Lennox 42, Sioux Valley 28

Mahpiya Luta Red Cloud 65, West Central 42

Sioux Falls Christian 61, Wagner 49

Class AA=

Aberdeen Central 53, Rapid City Stevens 42

Brandon Valley 76, Tea 53

Sioux Falls O'Gorman 55, Mitchell 44

Sioux Falls Washington 66, Sioux Falls Jefferson 44

Class B=

Corsica/Stickney 65, Lyman 56

Ethan 51, Colman-Egan 42

Harding County 58, Bennett County 50

Parkston 46, Centerville 39

Under pressure from Trump, Republicans plan long talkathon on voting bill

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Under pressure from President Donald Trump, Senate Republicans plan to launch a “full and robust debate” next week on legislation to impose strict new proof-of-citizenship requirements, an effort to show Trump that they are serious about the bill even though it doesn’t have enough support to pass.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., is planning a talkathon on the Senate floor for an indefinite period of time, though it won’t officially be the “talking filibuster” that Trump has suggested. Republicans plan to hold the floor for days, if not weeks, to pressure Democrats.

“I can guarantee that we are going to put Democrats on the record,” Thune said on the Senate floor Thursday as he announced the plan to take up the bill, which has already passed the House.

Trump has said he won’t sign any other legislation until the bill — known as the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility or SAVE America Act — is passed. It faces unified opposition from Democrats, meaning that the Senate likely can’t approve it unless Republicans change the rules and eliminate the filibuster. Many GOP senators are unwilling to go that far.

Trump has made the bill a priority ahead of the midterm elections, arguing that Republicans need it to win — even as his party won the presidency and congressional majorities in 2024 without it. Federal law already requires that voters in national elections affirm under oath, at the risk of prosecution, that they are U.S. citizens.

The bill would also require that voters provide a photo ID when casting ballots, as many states already require.

An alternate path

The president’s insistence on the bill, and an energized push from the GOP base, has put pressure on Thune. The GOP leader has repeatedly said they don’t have the votes to eliminate the filibuster, which triggers a 60-vote threshold, or even to move to the talking filibuster that Trump has aggressively lobbied

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them to deploy.

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

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

Caught between Trump and Democratic opposition, Republican senators have come up with an alternate plan to hold the floor themselves — denying Democrats the opportunity for a weeklong stage to talk. The strategy avoids the procedural pitfalls, even if the process is likely to end with a failed vote. Republicans are also expected to consider several amendments on issues that Trump has named as priorities, including an end to most mail-in balloting.

"Republicans are looking forward to this debate," Thune said.

Hoping to appease Trump

Similar to the talking filibuster, though, the plan does have risks — mainly that it won't satisfy Trump, who has demanded passage and threatened to hold up almost everything else in Congress.

Utah Sen. Mike Lee, a Republican who has led the effort with Trump to pass the SAVE America Act and has pushed for the talking filibuster, said Thursday that it's not yet clear how it will play out.

"I think he understands that we need to put in an aggressive effort here," Lee said of Trump. "And a lot of that is going to have to be determined in real time as we go about it."

The extent of Trump's satisfaction with the process, Lee said, "will depend on whether in his view, we gave it everything we have."

Republican Sen. Katie Britt of Alabama said the goal is to figure out how to put it on the floor and "actually achieve a result."

"We're working through what that means and what we need to be prepared to do," Britt said.

Democrats ready to push back

Democrats uniformly oppose the legislation, arguing that it would disenfranchise some 20 million American voters who don't have birth certificates or other documents readily available.

Sen. Alex Padilla, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Rules Committee, said his side of the aisle is organizing "to bring our arguments — and the facts — to the floor as well."

He said it would be more accurate to call it the "Save Trump's Ass Act," because the only way he said Republicans can try to hold on to power in this November's elections is to make it harder for eligible people to vote.

Padilla said the SAVE America Act "is not a voter ID bill. It is a voter suppression bill. It is a voter purging bill."

World shares decline, while oil pops above \$100 a barrel over Iran war worries

By CHAN HO-HIM AP Business Writer

HONG KONG (AP) — World shares retreated on Friday while oil prices again popped above \$100 per barrel as anxiety remained over the Iran war and its impact on supplies of crude oil and gas.

U.S. futures slipped, with the futures for the S&P 500 and Dow Jones Industrial Average down 0.3%.

In early European trading, Britain's FTSE 100 fell 0.7% to 10,235.29. Germany's DAX lost 1% to 23,345.90, while France's CAC 40 dropped 1.2% to 7,887.18.

In Asian trading, Tokyo's Nikkei 225 index slipped 1.2% to 53,819.61. Technology-related stocks saw some of the bigger losses, with SoftBank Group falling 4.5%.

South Korea's Kospi fell 1.7% to 5,487.24.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng lost 1% to 25,465.60, while the Shanghai Composite index was down 0.8% at 4,095.45.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 edged 0.1% lower to 8,617.10.

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Taiwan's Taiex was trading 0.5% lower, and India's Sensex dropped 1.8%.

Oil prices held steady as Brent crude, the international standard, traded at \$101 per barrel. Benchmark U.S. crude was up 0.5% at \$96.23 per barrel.

On Thursday, Iran's new Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, in his first public statements, vowed Iran would keep fighting and continue to use the Strait of Hormuz — a crucial waterway for oil and gas transport which has been effectively closed with significant marine traffic disruptions — as leverage against the U.S. and Israel.

Roughly 20% of the world's oil is estimated to flow through the strait, and attacks on ships in or around the strait have already heightened concerns "over the scale of supply disruption and persistent shipping bottlenecks," wrote analysts at Mizuho Bank in a commentary.

The remarks from Iran's new leader came after U.S. President Donald Trump said the war was "very complete," which have raised worries over how much longer the tensions could last. Intense strikes hit Iran's capital Tehran Friday morning.

Oil prices have been volatile since the Iran war began. While the International Energy Agency said Wednesday its members would make a record 400 million barrels of oil available from their emergency reserves, some economists believe that would do little to reassure markets.

Global inflation will likely worsen as oil prices jump, and rising fuel costs are already starting to hurt consumers globally. Rising energy prices could also, for example, push up AI and chip development and production costs, some analysts say.

Wall Street recorded losses Thursday following volatile swings this month. The S&P 500 dropped 1.5% and the Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 1.6%. The Nasdaq composite shed 1.8%.

Shares at some of the companies heavily reliant on fuel costs saw bigger drops. Cruise-ship operator Carnival fell 7.9%, and United Airlines sank 4.6%.

In other dealings early Friday, gold and silver prices fell. The price of gold fell 0.8% to \$5,082.70 an ounce, and the price of silver dropped 3.2% to \$82.38 per ounce.

The U.S. dollar rose to 159.43 Japanese yen from 159.34 yen. The euro was trading at \$1.1449, down from \$1.1512.

Trump threatens Iran following new wave of attacks on Gulf states and Israel

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

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran launched multiple attacks early Friday on Gulf Arab states, including dozens of drones at Saudi Arabia, following warnings from its new supreme leader about hosting American bases, and U.S. President Donald Trump threatened major new retaliation.

"Watch what happens to these deranged scumbags today," Trump wrote in a post on his social media platform Truth Social. "Iran's Navy is gone, their Air Force is no longer, missiles, drones and everything else are being decimated, and their leaders have been wiped from the face of the earth."

The comments came the day after Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei vowed to "not refrain from avenging the blood" of Iranians killed, and warned Gulf Arab nations to shut U.S. bases, saying the notion of American protection was "nothing more than a lie."

A large midday explosion rocked a Tehran square filled with demonstrators who were there for the annual Quds Day event in support of Palestinians, Iranian state television reported.

The cause of the blast in Ferdowsi Square wasn't immediately known, but came shortly after Israel had warned people to clear the area because it planned a strike. There were no immediate reports of casualties or damage.

Ongoing attacks didn't deter thousands of people to take to the streets for Quds Day, with crowds chanting "death to Israel" and "death to America."

With growing global concerns about a possible energy crisis and no end to the war in sight, the price of Brent crude oil, the international standard, remained over \$100 per barrel as Iran kept its stranglehold

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on shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, the strategic waterway through which a fifth of the world's oil transits on its way from the Persian Gulf to the open seas.

Brent prices have spiked as high as about \$120 per barrel and are about 40% higher than when Israel and the United States attacked Iran on Feb. 28 to start the war.

Iran has been attacking ships that try to transit the strait, and Khamenei's comments — his first to the public since being named to replace his father, who was killed during the first day of the conflict — said that Iran would continue to block the waterway.

In Iraq, recovery efforts were underway after an American KC-135 refueling plane went down, according to U.S. Central Command. And a French soldier who was stationed in the north of the country was killed in an attack, the French president said Friday.

New attacks on Gulf nations

Iran has been attacking oil and other infrastructure around the Gulf region, and on Friday Saudi Arabia that it had downed nearly 50 drones sent in multiple waves.

In Oman, two people were killed when two drones crashed in an industrial area in the region of Sohar, the Oman News Agency reported.

Sirens also sounded in Bahrain warning of incoming fire, and black smoke billowed from an industrial area in Dubai, after a blaze that authorities said was sparked by debris from an interception.

A building at the Dubai International Financial Center also sustained damage when hit with debris from what authorities described as a "successful interception." DIFC is an economic free zone for banks, capital traders and wealth managers, home to exclusive restaurants and nightclubs for the city-state's elite.

Iran said earlier this week that it would target banks and financial institutions, after an airstrike hit a bank in Tehran.

Nearly 60 people were wounded in northern Israel after Lebanese militant group Hezbollah said that it had fired several rocket salvos toward the area and at Israeli troops in southern Lebanon. Almost all the injuries were described as very minor.

One person was killed in southwestern Beirut in an Israeli strike, according to the Lebanese Health Ministry, and another attack hit an apartment in the capital, leaving it engulfed in flames. Following the attacks, the Israeli army said that it had been targeting a member of Iran-linked Hezbollah.

In eastern Lebanon, a strike on an apartment wounded a local official with the Lebanese branch of the Muslim Brotherhood and killed his two sons, the state-run National News Agency reported. For the past two years, Israel has targeted officials with the group, known as al-Jamaa al-Islamiya or the Islamic Group.

More than 600 people have been killed in Lebanon since the fighting began, the Health Ministry has reported. and nearly 800,000 have been internally displaced, according to the U.N. refugee agency.

Israel also said it had begun a wave of strikes on Iran targeting infrastructure. The military said that the Israeli air force had hit more than 200 targets in Iran over the past 24 hours, including missile launchers, defense systems and weapons production sites.

Before the blast in Tehran's Ferdowsi Square, Israel's military issued a warning on its Farsi-language X account that it would "conduct operations" there later in the day.

"Your presence in these areas puts your life at risk," the Israeli military said.

It wasn't clear how people in Tehran would have been able to see the message, with the internet broadly shut down by Iran's theocracy, though many have workarounds.

Iranian authorities say that more than 1,300 people have been killed there, and Israel has reported 12 deaths. The U.S. has lost at least seven soldiers, while another eight have suffered severe injuries.

In his Friday morning post, Trump said that "we are totally destroying the terrorist regime of Iran, militarily, economically, and otherwise."

"They've been killing innocent people all over the world for 47 years, and now I, as the 47th President of the United States of America, am killing them," Trump said. "What a great honor it is to do so!"

The U.S. military said that American forces have now struck more than 6,000 targets since the operation against Iran began, including more than 30 minelaying vessels.

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French soldier killed in Iraq

On Friday, French President Emmanuel Macron said that a French soldier was killed in an attack targeting Irbil in Iraq's northern Kurdish region. France earlier said that six soldiers had been hurt in a drone strike in Irbil, where French troops are deployed as part of a multinational counterterrorism mission supporting Iraqi forces in their fight against militants from the Islamic State group.

In the same region, U.K. officials said that several U.S. personnel suffered minor injuries Wednesday when drone strikes hit a base in Irbil that houses both British and American troops.

Italy said that a base where it has troops in Irbil was also hit Wednesday, but that there were no injuries. The Italian contingent in the region trains local Kurdish troops at the request of the Iraqi government.

Recovery efforts were underway in western Iraq on Friday after the American KC-135 refueling aircraft crashed. It wasn't immediately clear whether there were any casualties, but the aircraft had five crew on board.

U.S. Central Command said that the crash wasn't related to friendly or hostile fire, and that two aircraft were involved, including one that landed safely.

The KC-135 is the fourth publicly acknowledged aircraft to crash as part of the U.S. military's operations against Iran. Last week, three American fighter jets were mistakenly downed by friendly Kuwaiti fire.

A US military refueling plane crashed in Iraq. Here's what to know

By KIM TONG-HYUNG and ADAM SCHRECK Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — The U.S. military says a KC-135 refueling aircraft supporting operations against Iran crashed in western Iraq and rescue operations are underway.

The U.S. Central Command, which oversees the Middle East, said the crash followed an unspecified incident involving two aircraft in "friendly airspace," and that the other plane landed safely.

Here's what is known so far about the tanker, which is the fourth publicly acknowledged U.S. aircraft to crash during the war against Iran:

The KC-135 is a long-serving tanker plane

The KC-135 Stratotanker is a U.S. Air Force aircraft used to refuel other planes in midair, allowing them to travel longer distances and maintain operations longer without landing. The plane is also used to transport wounded personnel during medical evacuations or conduct surveillance missions, according to military experts.

Based on the same design as the Boeing 707 passenger plane, the tanker has been in service for more than 60 years, supporting the U.S. Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps as well as allied aircraft, according to an Air Force description. The aging plane is set to be phased out as the air force receives a full complement of next-generation KC-46A Pegasus tankers.

Despite upgrades over the years, the KC-135s' age has fueled concern about their reliability and durability.

"The last of these planes were produced in the 1960s," said Yang Uk, a security expert at South Korea's Asan Institute for Policy Studies. He added that the transition to the KC-46A has progressed more slowly than expected.

According to the Congressional Research Service, the Air Force last year had 376 KC-135s, including 151 on active duty, 163 in the Air National Guard and 62 in the Air Force Reserve.

A basic KC-135 crew has three people: a pilot, co-pilot and boom operator. Nurses and medical technicians are added in aeromedical evacuation missions.

Refueling typically happens at the back of the plane, where the boom operator is located. A fuel boom is lowered to connect with fighters, bombers or other aircraft. On many of the planes, the boom operator works lying face down while looking out of a window on the underside of the plane.

Some KC-135s can also refuel planes from pods on their wings. The tankers also have room above the fuel stores to carry cargo or passengers if needed.

Refueling tankers could play an increasingly important role if the Iran war drags on, as U.S. aircraft may need to fly longer missions to pursue Iranian forces retreating deeper into the country, said Yang.

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Cause of crash and condition of crew not immediately known

It was not immediately clear if there were any casualties from the crash in Iraq. A U.S. official, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss the developing situation, said the plane was carrying at least five crew members.

A second U.S. official, who also spoke on condition of anonymity, said the other plane involved in the incident was also a KC-135. Yechiel Leiter, the Israeli ambassador to the U.S., wrote on X that the other plane landed safely in Israel.

The U.S. Central Command did not elaborate on the circumstances of the crash, but said it "was not due to hostile fire or friendly fire."

Yang said it would be rare for a refueling tanker to be downed by enemy fire because such operations are usually conducted in the rear of combat zones.

The crash came after three U.S. F-15E fighter jets were mistakenly downed last week by friendly Kuwaiti fire.

Past accidents

KC-135s have been involved in several fatal accidents. The most recent happened on May 3, 2013, when a KC-135R crashed after takeoff south of Chaldovar, Kyrgyzstan while taking part in the war in Afghanistan.

In that crash, the crew experienced problems with the plane's rudder, according to a U.S. Air Force investigation. While they struggled to stabilize the plane, the tail section broke away and the plane exploded midair, killing all three crewmembers onboard.

The most serious mid-air collision involving the plane happened in 1966, when a B-52 bomber carrying nuclear bombs struck a tanker near Palomares, Spain.

The accident caused the tanker to crash, killing four onboard. The disaster led to an extensive decontamination effort to clean up nuclear material dispersed when conventional explosives in the hydrogen bombs detonated after hitting the ground.

Iran war disrupts energy supplies as Iran's new leader resolves to keep fighting

By JON GAMBRELL, GHAYA BEN MBAREK, SARAH EL DEEB and JULIE WATSON Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran's secretive new leader issued his first public statements Thursday, resolving to keep fighting, promising more pain for Gulf Arab states and threatening to open "other fronts" in a war that has already disrupted world energy supplies, the global economy and international travel.

Early Friday, U.S. President Donald Trump issued a new threat online to Iran, writing: "Watch what happens to these deranged scumbags today." Trump tallied the damage inflicted on Iran and its leaders and called it a "great honor" to be responsible for it.

The remarks by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei came as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said his country's attacks were creating conditions for the Iranian population to topple the government.

"It is in your hands," Netanyahu said at a news conference, addressing the Iranian people. "We are creating the optimal conditions for the fall of the regime."

Since the start of the war, U.S. and Israeli strikes have targeted security checkpoints in Iran to undermine the government's ability to suppress dissent, according to Armed Conflict Location and Event Data, the U.S.-based independent monitoring group known as ACLED.

Intense airstrikes hit early Friday around Iran's capital, Tehran, as well as outlying areas. It was not immediately clear what had been targeted.

Netanyahu denounces Iranian leader

Netanyahu denounced Khamenei as a "puppet of the Revolutionary Guards."

Khamenei is close to Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard and is widely seen as even less compromising than his father, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

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Khamenei said in a statement read by a state TV news anchor that he was keeping a "file of revenge." He did not appear on camera and has not been seen since his father and wife were killed in the war's opening salvo, which also wounded him, according to an Iranian ambassador.

Oil prices spiral again and stocks sink

The war continued to escalate on its 13th day as oil prices spiraled up again to \$100 per barrel, and stocks sank worldwide over fears that the conflict could drag on longer than hoped.

To relieve the surge in prices, the U.S. Treasury Department announced it was further easing sanctions on Russian oil by granting a license that authorizes the delivery and sale of some Russian crude oil and petroleum products for the next month.

Trump signaled earlier this week that he would take more action to address the squeeze on oil flows. The move follows the administration's decision to grant temporary permission for India to buy Russian oil.

The new exemption applies only to Russian oil already at sea. Last week, analysts estimated there were about 125 million barrels loaded on tankers. To put that in perspective, about 20 million barrels of oil per day usually pass through the Strait of Hormuz, according to the International Energy Agency.

Iran has made clear it plans to keep up attacks on energy infrastructure across the region and use the effective closure of the strait as leverage against the United States and Israel. A fifth of the world's traded oil flows through the waterway leading from the Persian Gulf toward the Indian Ocean.

At a news conference Thursday, Iran's ambassador to Tunisia, Mir Masoud Hosseini, said Iranian naval forces "have established full control" over the strait and "carried out precise strikes in response to attacks on our oil infrastructure."

"Global energy security is contingent on respect for Iran's sovereignty," he said.

The pinch was being felt worldwide. South Korea reinstated government-set caps on oil prices for the first time in three decades as it sought to calm soaring fuel costs. The two-week caps, which took effect Friday, set maximum prices for petroleum products supplied by refiners to gas stations and other businesses.

Iranian leader calls for the shutdown of US bases

Hosseini told The Associated Press the new supreme leader was wounded in the attack on his family's home, but "it is not serious." The hope is he will attend the massive, state-organized Eid prayer next week that his father traditionally led. However, Khamenei remains a target for the Israelis, who have vowed to kill him.

Hosseini said Iran's strikes on Gulf nations have been strategic. "Even when we targeted hotels, we had precise information that they were hosting American and Israeli soldiers," he said.

Khamenei called on Gulf Arabs to "shut down" U.S. bases in the region, saying protection promised by Washington was "nothing more than a lie."

He also said Iran has studied "opening other fronts in which the enemy has little experience and would be highly vulnerable" if the war continues. He did not elaborate, but Iran has been linked to previous attacks on U.S., Israeli and Jewish targets around the world.

Attacks on Gulf states continued Friday with Saudi Arabia's defense ministry saying its air defenses downed more than three dozen drones headed toward the kingdom's Eastern Province over the span of a few hours, marking an unusually large barrage.

Iran's nuclear program takes more hits

Trump said in a social media post Thursday that ensuring Iran does not develop a nuclear weapon was a higher priority than soaring oil prices.

Hours later, Netanyahu announced Israeli attacks had killed a top Iranian nuclear scientist and hit others but gave few details.

Israel said earlier it struck a nuclear facility in Iran in recent days that it had destroyed with an airstrike in October 2024. Earlier this year, satellite photos raised concerns that Iran was working to restore the facility.

France says soldier killed in attack in Iraq

The U.S. military said American forces have now struck more than 6,000 targets since the operation against Iran began, including more than 30 minelaying vessels.

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In the same region, British officials said several U.S. personnel suffered minor injuries Wednesday when drone strikes hit a base in Irbil that houses both British and American troops.

And on Thursday in western Iraq, rescue efforts were underway after an American military refueling plane went down. U.S. Central Command, which oversees the Middle East, said in a statement that two aircraft were involved, including one that landed safely, and that the cause was not related to friendly or hostile fire.

Israel targets heart of Beirut in fight with Hezbollah militants

Israeli warplanes pummeled Lebanon, targeting even the busy heart of Beirut, in response to missiles from Iran-backed Hezbollah fighters launched into Israel. One strike hit in a neighborhood that is close to Lebanon's parliament, United Nations offices and international embassies.

Israeli military spokesperson Avichay Adraee said forces were targeting a "facility affiliated with Hezbollah."

An Israeli strike hit in the vicinity of Lebanon's only public university, killing a professor and the director of the science faculty at the campus in Hadath, on the outskirts of Beirut's southern suburbs. There was no immediate comment from Israel.

Israeli strikes also killed 15 other people, including five children, in southern Lebanon, the Lebanese Health Ministry said. An AP photographer saw several buildings flattened in one village where rescue workers searched through the rubble.

Gay Muslim influencer hosts inclusive Ramadan meal and calls for acceptance across faiths

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Ali Darwich, a gay Muslim influencer in Berlin, picks up a date from his plate, takes a sip of water, and addresses the 15 friends sitting around the table and breaking the Ramadan fast with him.

The 33-year-old German with Palestinian and Lebanese roots — who goes by @alifragt or "Ali asks" on Instagram — has a quickly growing following on Instagram, where he draws attention to the difficulties of living as a young, queer Muslim and calls for more tolerance and inclusiveness.

"Tonight we want to send a message that no matter where a person comes from, no matter who that person loves, no matter how queer that person is, they cannot be too queer ... because they are exactly as they should be," Darwich says, smiling at the diverse group of Muslims and Christians, Germans and immigrants, gay and straight people sharing this meal with him as the sun sets over Berlin.

"I am a believer, I believe in God, and I find Islam beautiful, just like Christianity or Judaism and many other religions," he says. But he adds that it's not always easy for homosexuals to be accepted — not just for Muslims but also for queer Christians and believers of many other religions.

Indeed, attacks against LGBTQ+ people and gay-friendly establishments are rising across Germany, including in Berlin, a city that has historically embraced the community.

According to the latest figures from 2024, there was a 40% increase in violence targeting LGBTQ+ people in 12 of Germany's 16 federal states as compared to 2023, according to the Association of Counseling Centers for Victims of Right-Wing, Racist and Antisemitic Violence.

Darwich calls for inclusion of homosexual Muslims

In one of his Instagram videos, Darwich sits by himself on a table during Ramadan and talks about the loneliness some Muslim homosexuals face when they are shunned by their families. It makes life hard, he says, especially during holidays that are usually a time of togetherness.

He calls on people to open their hearts and doors to queer Muslims so they don't have to be alone for Iftar, the evening meal during Ramadan.

And for his gay followers he also has a message on Instagram: "You deserve to break your fast sur-

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rounded by people who accept you — fully and without conditions.”

Darwich’s coming out a few years ago wasn’t easy.

When he told his mother about it, she at first didn’t want to believe him, then she cried and they didn’t talk for half a year. Many other members of his extended family also were taken aback.

“From one day to the next, I was no longer invited. Not only to Ramadan, but also to family celebrations, and that was a very difficult time for me,” he told The Associated Press in an interview this week.

Friends stepping up when your family shuns you

While Darwich and his mom are getting along just fine now, he said it helped him tremendously at the time that his friends stepped up and became a kind of family for him, supporting and accepting him.

For this week’s “real life” Iftar in Berlin, his friend Randa Weiser, 40, a German-Palestinian influencer who shares her everyday life with three kids and husband on social media under the handle @randa_and_the_gang, has opened her home for Ali and his and her friends.

She cooked up a feast of freekeh soup, fragrant yellow rice with almonds, raisins and cardamon, grilled chicken drumsticks, and a variety of sweets for desserts.

“It’s an absolute colorful mix tonight,” she said referring to the crowd around the Iftar table. While most people are German, many of their families originally come from faraway places like Jordan, Lebanon and Morocco, Turkey, Chechnya and Syria, Iran and Peru.

Weiser said she got “some hate” on Instagram when she posted earlier in the day that she was about to host an inclusive Iftar, but mostly, she says her followers agree that “you can be Muslim and gay or lesbian.”

As the crowd — many of them influencers as well — dug into Weiser’s food, they didn’t miss an opportunity to shoot video of one another and post it quickly on their accounts.

One of them, Darwich’s good friend Haidar Darwish, a belly dancer and artist who came from Syria in 2016, had dressed up for the occasion with a red fez and a white, gold-embroidered gallabiyah.

“The hate and crimes against women, Muslim people, Jewish people also, and queers and trans siblings of mine have increased,” said Darwish, who goes by @thedarvishofficial on Instagram.

“But no matter how much the others will show us hate, we can show more love only if we are believing in ourselves,” he said, adding that they will be fine as long as they have “the help of our allies and friends and people that have our backs.”

US weather to go nuts with blizzard, polar vortex, heat dome, atmospheric river all at once

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

Nearly every part of the United States is getting walloped by wild weather or just about to be.

Days of downpours have begun in Hawaii. The Southwest will soon bake with day after day of record 100-degree-plus (38 Celsius-plus) heat. Two storms will dump snow by the foot over northern Great Lakes states. And the dreaded polar vortex will again invade the Midwest and East with soul-crushing Arctic chill.

This forecast of extremes comes as weather whiplash already hit much of the East. On Wednesday, Washington, D.C. residents walked around in shorts in record-breaking 86 degrees Fahrenheit (about 30 Celsius). On Thursday, it snowed.

“All of the country, even if you’re not necessarily seeing extremes, are going to see generally changing from cold to warm, or warm to cold to warm,” said meteorologist Marc Chenard of the weather service’s Weather Prediction Center in Maryland.

Former National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration chief scientist Ryan Maue said he expects extreme weather in all 50 states.

Triple-digit heat persists in Southwest

A heat dome will form early next week and park over the Southwest, baking temperatures to triple digits that haven’t been seen this early in the year, Maue and Chenard said.

Some forecasts see 98 (almost 37 Celsius) in Phoenix on Tuesday, followed by 103, 105 and two days of

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107 (almost 42 C). In 137 years of record-keeping, Phoenix never hit 100 before March 26 and usually hit its first 100-degree day in early May, according to the weather service, which warned people: "Since we are not acclimated to this level of heat this early in the year, it will be more impactful than usual."

It has already started in Los Angeles with unusual 90-degree March weather that had people in shorts and tank tops seeking shade anywhere they could get it, even if it was as slender as a light post.

Shane Dixon, 40, usually runs about 5 miles near his home in Culver City without much effort, he said, his face glistening with sweat and his T-shirt tucked into his shorts. But Thursday was hard because of the heat, and he had to cut it short.

"The back of my neck was melting," he said. But he preferred it to the cold and snow that will hit elsewhere.

"I could go literally soak myself and walk out in the sun and I'll make it home fine. If it was freezing cold I could not do this," he said.

Single-digit cold invades North

Around the same time as the heat starts blasting Phoenix, the polar vortex — a system that usually keeps frigid air penned up near the North Pole — is forecast to send its chill deep into the Midwest and East, even bordering some of the Southeast, Maue said

Minneapolis will hover around zero for a low, and Chicago will be in the single digits Tuesday. The next day "temperatures in the teens and 20s in the northeast and 20s in the Mid-Atlantic," Maue said. Even Atlanta could drop to the 20s.

One-two snowstorm punch

Two storm systems in a row — one Friday, then another Sunday into Monday — will chug along the country's northern tier and Great Lakes and between them could dump 3 to 4 feet of snow in places, Maue said.

That bigger second storm system will see its barometric pressure drop so quickly and sharply — meaning it is intensifying and winds are strengthening — that it will qualify as a bomb cyclone, which is quite unusual to develop over land. Normally bomb cyclones get their energy from warm ocean waters, but this one will draw power from the polar vortex.

Even Alaska and Hawaii aren't quite right

Maue said Hawaii is getting an atmospheric river that will have such persistent heavy rain that flooding will be a major issue. Oahu is under a flash flood warning.

And Alaska is normally frigid now, but it will be about 30 degrees colder than usual, he said.

It is "the time of year where we can see stuff like this," Chenard said. "But this does seem even anomalous from what you would typically see. I mean, some of these areas will be setting records. Record-high temperatures for March and maybe multiple times."

In the past week or so, tornadoes have killed at least eight people in Oklahoma, Michigan and Indiana. The forecast for severe storms doesn't look as big or widespread for the next week, but dangerous thunderstorms could pop up "anywhere from the Mississippi Valley toward the East Coast" on Sunday or Monday, Chenard said.

The jet stream goes nuts

Underlying this is a jet stream gone wild, Maue and Chenard said.

The jet stream is the river of air that moves weather from west to east on a roller-coaster-like path. Usually the plunges are as mild as a kiddie roller coaster. But now that jet stream is going on near-vertical, scream-inducing drops following by straight-up ascents.

"Which means you get a lot of extremes next to each other," Maue said. Storm fronts coming from the Pacific hit that high pressure heat dome in the Southwest and are pushed north to climb that mountainous jet stream peak, "grab access to that cold air reservoir up there" and bring it back down south down the other side of the hill, he said.

Numerous studies have connected unusual jet stream and polar vortex activity to shrinking Arctic sea ice and human-caused climate change.

But there is hope.

"The first day of spring is 20th (of March), and then after that we get recovery," Maue said.

Investigators work to determine exact reason for attack at Michigan synagogue

By COREY WILLIAMS and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WEST BLOOMFIELD, Mich. (AP) — Investigators worked Friday to determine the exact reason a man with a rifle crashed into a large Michigan synagogue in what federal officials are saying was an attack carried out by a 41-year-old naturalized U.S. citizen born in Lebanon.

Ayman Mohamad Ghazali was killed by security after ramming into Temple Israel in West Bloomfield Township near Detroit, Michigan, and driving down a hallway in a vehicle that then caught fire, according to authorities.

The FBI, which is leading the investigation, described the attack on one of the nation's largest Reform synagogues as an act of violence targeting the Jewish community.

The synagogue's staff, teachers and 140 children at its early childhood center were not injured, according to Oakland County Sheriff Mike Bouchard.

Ghazali came to the U.S. in 2011 on an immediate relative visa as the spouse of a U.S. citizen and was granted U.S. citizenship in 2016, according to the Department of Homeland Security.

In the minutes after the attack, smoke billowed from the synagogue. One security officer was hit by the vehicle and knocked unconscious but did not suffer life-threatening injuries, Bouchard said. And 30 law enforcement officers were treated for smoke inhalation.

Cassi Cohen, director of strategic development at Temple Israel, was in the hallway where the crash happened. She described hearing a loud bang and said she grabbed a few staff members, ran into her office and locked the door.

"When I heard the crash, I knew it was bad," Cohen said.

She said the crash happened near a classroom and, in addition to the children, there were also more than 30 staff members in the synagogue.

Rabbi Arianna Gordon, from Temple Israel, thanked the security team, law enforcement and early childhood teachers for getting the children out safely and reunited with their parents.

About a dozen parents sprinted to get their children soon after authorities cleared the building. Other families were reunited at a nearby Jewish Community Center.

Allison Jacobs, whose 18-month-old daughter is enrolled in Temple Israel's day care, said she got a message from a teacher saying the children were OK even before she knew what happened.

"There are no words. I was in complete and utter shock," she said.

Synagogues around the world have been on edge and ramping up security since the U.S. and Israel launched a war with Iran with missile strikes on Feb. 28.

The FBI has warned that Iranian operatives may be planning drone attacks on targets in California. Two men brought explosives to a far-right protest outside the New York mayoral mansion on Saturday. Investigators allege they were inspired by the Islamic State extremist group.

And an assailant drove a car into people outside an Orthodox synagogue in Manchester, England, on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish calendar. He stabbed two people to death before officers shot and killed him.

President Donald Trump said he had been fully briefed on the attack, calling it a "terrible thing."

Steven Ingber, the CEO of the Jewish Federation of Detroit, said Thursday: "I'd love to say that I'm shocked, that I'm surprised, but I'm not."

The attack was the second at a house of worship in Michigan within the past year. Last September, a former Marine fatally shot four people at a church north of Detroit and set it ablaze. The FBI later said he was motivated by "anti-religious beliefs" against The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Oakland County is Michigan's second-largest county with roughly 1.3 million people. The majority of Detroit-area Jewish residents live there. Temple Israel has 12,000 members, according to its website.

Democratic senators file war powers resolution to check Trump on Cuba

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Democrats have filed legislation that would prevent the U.S. from attacking Cuba without congressional approval as they seek to force a vote on President Donald Trump's stated goal of a "takeover" of the Caribbean country.

Democrats have repeatedly used war powers resolutions to force debate on Trump's foreign policy moves, though Republicans have so far mostly backed the president. The resolution filed Thursday by Democratic Sens. Tim Kaine, Ruben Gallego and Adam Schiff would require the president to remove the military from any hostilities with Cuba and could potentially receive a vote by the end of the month.

"Only Congress has the power to declare war under the Constitution, but he operates with the belief that the U.S. military is a palace guard, ordering military action in the Caribbean, Venezuela, and Iran without Congress' authorization or any explanation for his actions to the American people," Kaine said in a statement.

Trump said earlier this week that Secretary of State Marco Rubio was negotiating with Cuba's leadership as the country faces a crippling energy crisis that has been exacerbated by a U.S. blockade of the island.

"It may be a friendly takeover, it may not be a friendly takeover," Trump told reporters this week at a news conference in Florida. He added that he and Rubio would focus on that goal after the war with Iran.

The U.S. for decades has had a tense relationship with Cuba, but Trump's turn to using military action to take out foreign opponents has raised anticipations that the island could be next. Rubio, whose family immigrated to the U.S. from Cuba in the 1950s, has long pushed for the U.S. to aggressively oppose the Caribbean nation's leadership.

Rubio told senators earlier this year that the Trump administration would "love" to see a Cuban regime change, but cautioned that "does not mean we are going to provoke it directly." Republicans in Congress have mostly stood behind the Trump administration's aggressive foreign policy

However, Democrats have turned repeatedly to war powers resolutions in order to force debates over how Trump can use military force in foreign nations. They have not succeeded in passing any of the resolutions so far, but the tactic at times has compelled the Trump administration to explain its goals to Congress.

Democrats are also planning next week to potentially force votes on a series of war powers resolutions that apply to Iran unless Republicans agree to hold public hearings on the conflict.

"He ran on America First, but now it's clear he's become a puppet of the war hawks in his party," Gallego said in a statement.

Old Dominion shooter convicted of Islamic State ties released from prison just 2 years before attack

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS undefined

Court documents show less than two years after Mohamed Bailor Jalloh was released from prison for attempting to aid the Islamic State, he opened fire in a classroom at Virginia's Old Dominion University on Thursday before ROTC students subdued and killed him.

The shooting that left one person dead and another two injured has raised questions about why Jalloh, who the FBI identified as the gunman, was imprisoned and the conditions of his release — with some elected officials questioning how someone with known ties to the Islamic State was able to carry out such an attack.

"The horrific tragedy that occurred today on ODU's campus never should have happened," U.S. Rep. Jen Kiggans, who represents the congressional district neighboring the university, wrote on Facebook.

After Jalloh pleaded guilty in October 2016 to providing material support to a designated foreign terrorist organization — the Islamic State group — a federal judge sentenced him in 2017 to an 11-year prison

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term with credit for time served retroactive to his July 2016 arrest.

Jalloh was released from federal custody Dec. 23, 2024. It wasn't immediately clear why his release from prison was moved up. Inmates can get time off of their sentences for a variety of reasons, but it isn't known if that happened in this case.

He was on supervised release, which is comparable to probation, when he carried out the attack on Thursday. Based on his release date, that would've run into 2029.

Confessions to undercover agents

Jalloh's October 2016 plea came after a three-month sting operation in which he, then 26, confessed to an undercover FBI agent that he was thinking about carrying out an attack similar to the 2009 shootings at Fort Hood, which left 13 people dead. Authorities launched the 2016 operation after Jalloh made contact with Islamic State members in Africa earlier that year.

Jalloh later told the informant that the Islamic State group had asked if he wanted to participate in an attack. He tried to donate \$500 to the group, but the money actually went to an account controlled by the FBI, according to court documents.

Jalloh then tried to buy an AR-15 assault rifle from a Virginia gun store but was turned away because he lacked the proper paperwork. The affidavit says he returned the next day and bought a different assault rifle. Prosecutors said the rifle was rendered inoperable before Jalloh left the store, unbeknownst to Jalloh. He was arrested the following day.

Debate over sentencing

The Justice Department in 2017 requested a 20-year prison sentence for Jalloh, noting that he had made multiple attempts to join the Islamic State and had attempted to acquire a gun to carry out a murder plot.

"The defendant was fully aware of what he was doing, and the consequences of those actions. His only misgivings seemed to be a fear that he would waver at the critical moment," prosecutors wrote in a sentencing memorandum.

They added: "By putting the idea of this murder plot into religious terms, and by suggesting that murdering members of the US military would be a path to heaven, the defendant showed how strongly committed he was to the deadly ideology" of the Islamic State.

Jalloh's lawyers asked for a sentence of 6½ years in prison and requested that he be placed in a facility that provides residential drug treatment for inmates with addiction and substance abuse issues.

U.S. District Judge Liam O'Grady, an appointee of former President George W. Bush, sentenced him instead to 11 years in prison.

The judge also ordered Jalloh to participate in a program for substance abuse testing and treatment and mental health treatment, and requested that he be evaluated for the federal prison system's residential drug program.

Completing the Residential Drug Abuse Program can reduce an inmate's prison sentence by up to a year, according to the federal Bureau of Prisons. It wasn't immediately clear if Jalloh qualified for the program. Normally, inmates serving sentences for terrorism-related offenses aren't eligible.

In addition, some inmates who stay out of trouble in prison can reduce their sentence by earning up to 54 days of good conduct time credit for each year of their sentence. However, under the 2018 prison reform law known as the First Step Act, inmates convicted of terrorism-related offenses are not eligible for such credit.

Troubled shooter lured by radical cleric

Little is publicly known about Jalloh, who was a naturalized citizen from Sierra Leone. But court documents depict him as a troubled man who was radicalized by Anwar al-Awlaki, a well-known American imam who became an al-Qaida propagandist.

The Virginia Army National Guard confirmed he served as a specialist from 2009 until 2015, when he was honorably discharged. Jalloh told a government informant he quit the National Guard after hearing lectures from al-Awlaki, according to a 2016 FBI affidavit filed in his criminal case.

In a letter to the federal judge that presided over his sentencing, Jalloh wrote: "I feel deep regret in

having been driven by my emotions rather than my intellect and becoming involved with such an evil organization. ... I reject and deplore terrorism and any groups associated with it, especially ISIL."

He wrote that he started using drugs after his girlfriend ended their six-year relationship.

"The pain I felt internally was unbearable, and drugs and alcohol were the only things that took that pain away," Jalloh wrote. "I started doing marijuana, coke and mushrooms using one of them at least on a daily basis in order to kill the pain I was in and to fill in the void I felt internally."

The letter itself remains under seal, but his lawyer included excerpts of it in his sentencing memorandum.

ROTC students at Old Dominion University subdued and killed shooter who left 1 dead, 2 hurt

By JONATHAN MATTISE, OLIVIA DIAZ and MICHAEL BIESECKER Associated Press

A former Army National Guard member who had spent eight years in prison for attempting to aid the Islamic State opened fire on a classroom at Virginia's Old Dominion University on Thursday before ROTC students subdued and killed him, authorities said.

He had yelled "Allahu Akbar" before the shooting, which left one person dead and two wounded, according to the FBI.

Dominique Evans, special agent in charge of the FBI's Norfolk field office, said at a news conference that the Reserve Officers' Training Corps students showed "extreme bravery and courage" and prevented further loss of life by stopping the gunman, Mohamed Bailor Jalloh.

The students subdued him and "rendered him no longer alive," Evans said. "I don't know how else to say it." She confirmed Jalloh wasn't shot but didn't provide further details.

The campus shooting is being investigated as an act of terrorism, FBI Director Kash Patel said on social media.

Background on the gunman

Evans said Jalloh aspired to conduct a terrorist attack like the 2009 killings at Fort Hood.

Jalloh had pleaded guilty in 2016 to attempting to aid the Islamic State and was sentenced to 11 years in prison.

He was on supervised release, which is comparable to probation, when he carried out the attack on Thursday. It wasn't immediately clear why his release from prison had been moved up. Inmates can get time off of their sentences for a variety of reasons, but it isn't known if that happened in this case.

Ashraf Nubani, a Virginia attorney who represented Jalloh in his 2016 criminal case, said in a statement that he'd had no recent contact with Jalloh and had no information about Thursday's events. "Any loss of life is tragic, and violence against innocent people is completely contrary to Islamic teachings and basic human morality," Nubani added.

Jalloh's sister, Fatmatu Jalloh of Sterling, Virginia, said Thursday she knew nothing about the attack. She said she last saw her brother two days earlier.

"I have no idea what is going on," she said. "I know nothing. I don't even know who to call."

Shooter confirmed dead within 10 minutes of call

Old Dominion University Police Chief Garrett Shelton said less than 10 minutes passed between when officers were called about a shooting in the university's business school building and when responders determined the shooter was dead.

Shelton said authorities hadn't yet fully determined the shooter's cause of death. He did not confirm whether any officers fired a weapon.

Lt. Col. Jimmy Delongchamp, public information officer for the U.S. Army Cadet Command at Fort Knox, Kentucky, told The Associated Press that two of the people who were shot were part of the Army ROTC at ODU.

ROTC is a program where students receive a scholarship to attend college while training to become commissioned officers in the U.S. military. They are committed to serve as an officer for a period of time

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after they graduate.

Voorhees University in South Carolina confirmed the victim who died was Lt. Col. Brandon Shah, the son-in-law of a Voorhees trustee.

Shah attended ODU as an ROTC student, according to his biography on the university's website, and had returned in 2022 as a leader for the program. In the Army, Shah had flown helicopters over Iraq, Afghanistan and Eastern Europe as a pilot.

Shooter's Guard service and Islamic State ties

Jalloh is a naturalized U.S. citizen from Sierra Leone.

The Virginia Army National Guard confirmed he served as a specialist from 2009 until 2015, when he was honorably discharged.

According to a 2016 FBI affidavit filed in his criminal case, Jalloh told a government informant he quit the National Guard after hearing lectures from radical cleric Anwar al-Awlaki.

A court affidavit recounts a three-month sting operation in which Jalloh, then 26, said he was thinking about carrying out an attack similar to the 2009 shootings at Fort Hood, which left 13 people dead. Authorities launched the 2016 operation after Jalloh made contact with Islamic State members in Africa earlier that year.

Jalloh later told the informant that the Islamic State group had asked if he wanted to participate in an attack. He tried to donate \$500 to the Islamic State, but the money actually went to an account controlled by the FBI, according to court documents.

Jalloh then tried to buy an AR-15 assault rifle from a Virginia gun store but was turned away because he lacked the proper paperwork. He returned the next day and bought a different assault rifle that was rendered inoperable before he left the store, prosecutors said. He was arrested the following day.

The Justice Department in 2017 requested a 20-year prison sentence for Jalloh, noting that he had attempted to acquire a gun to carry out a murder plot in the United States. Jalloh's lawyers requested a 6½-year prison sentence and placement in a facility with residential drug abuse treatment.

"By putting the idea of this murder plot into religious terms, and by suggesting that murdering members of the US military would be a path to heaven, the defendant showed how strongly committed he was to the deadly ideology of the Islamic State," prosecutors wrote in a sentencing memorandum.

U.S. District Judge Liam O'Grady, an appointee of former President George W. Bush, sentenced him instead to 11 years in prison with credit for time served and five years of supervised release. He also ordered Jalloh to participate in programs for substance abuse and mental health treatment. Based on his release date, he would have been under supervised release until 2029.

Inmates convicted of terrorism-related offenses are not eligible to reduce their sentences for good behavior or participation in a residential drug abuse treatment program.

In a letter to O'Grady prior to his sentencing, Jalloh wrote that he started using drugs after his girlfriend ended their six-year relationship.

"I feel deep regret in having been driven by my emotions rather than my intellect and becoming involved with such an evil organization," he said. "I reject and deplore terrorism and any groups associated with it, especially ISIL."

People wounded in the shooting

One of the people who was hospitalized after the shooting is in critical condition Thursday, according to Sentara Health. The other had been treated and released.

The public university in Norfolk canceled classes and suspended operations on its main campus through Friday.

In a message to the university community, ODU President Brian Hemphill expressed gratitude for the swift emergency response and extended his thoughts and prayers to those impacted.

The school in coastal Norfolk has about 24,000 students and says nearly 30% of its students are military-affiliated. The area is also home to Naval Station Norfolk, the largest naval station in the world.

China positions itself as force for global stability at its annual Congress

By KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — While much of the world's attention is on the Iran war, that hasn't stopped China from moving ahead with national priorities with global repercussions.

Not that China doesn't care about the war and its impact on energy supplies and geopolitics. But for the world's second largest economy, its growing rivalry with the United States revolves around a different battle: the development of the cutting-edge technologies shaping the 21st century.

That message came through in a five-year plan formally endorsed Thursday by the National People's Congress at the end of its annual meeting, the nation's biggest political event of the year. If anything, China is doubling down on a push to transform its economy and be at the forefront of technology. State media described China's determination to stay the course on economic development as a force for stability in an uncertain world.

"A stable and developing China injects more stability and certainty into a world fraught with change and turbulence," the official People's Daily newspaper said in a front-page column on Wednesday. Other state-media echoed that view.

The commentaries and official statements didn't mention U.S. President Donald Trump, whose tariffs and use of military force from Venezuela to Iran are shaking up the global order that has governed international relations in the post-World War II era. China publicly defends that system, while calling for making it more equitable to reflect the interests of developing countries as well as rich ones.

Trump is due to visit Beijing in three weeks to hold talks with his counterpart, Chinese leader Xi Jinping.

The National People's Congress also rubber-stamped three laws, including one governing ethnic minorities, at its closing session. The votes are ceremonial and nearly unanimous, designed to show unity behind the ruling Communist Party's vision for the nation. The five-year plan was approved with 2,758 votes in favor, one against, and two abstentions.

"We are forging ahead at full speed in building a great country," Foreign Minister Wang Yi said at an annual news conference during the Congress.

Banking on tech for growth

Many economists believe that China needs to do more to put more money into the hands of consumers to boost domestic spending and reduce its dependence on export-led growth.

China's leaders agree in concept, but the five-year plan puts technology front and center, confirming it remains the top priority. Analysts expect any steps to boost consumption to happen only gradually, such as expanding social security and health care benefits, while government funds are poured into artificial intelligence, robotics and other areas.

Chinese Premier Li Qiang announced an economic growth target of 4.5% to 5% for 2026 at the start of the Congress, a level that gives the government more leeway to focus on the longer-term goals of the five-year plan rather than meeting a higher target this year.

Staying conservative on climate

The five-year plan doesn't pledge to reduce carbon emissions overall, but only to reduce "emissions intensity" — how much pollutants are emitted relative to the size of the economy. That means emissions could still grow as the economy does.

The target for a reduction in intensity was set at 17%, a level that could allow emissions to rise 3% or more, analysts said. "International good practice is to move away from intensity targets towards absolute emission reduction targets," said Niklas Hohne of the NewClimate Institute in Germany.

China has a history of setting conservative targets and its rapid expansion in solar and other clean energies may drive emissions down anyway. The country is the world's No. 1 emitter of greenhouse gases, but leaders have long argued that the size of its population and economy must be considered when evaluating its pollution levels.

Regulating ethnic groups

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A sweeping ethnic minorities law endorsed by the Congress solidifies what critics say is a government policy of assimilation, emphasizing the creation of "a common consciousness of the Chinese nation."

The government said it is meant to foster a stronger sense of community and shared economic development among its ethnic groups. The law encapsulates an approach under Xi that has promoted unity over ethnic cultures and their languages.

"It puts a death nail in the party's original promise of meaningful autonomy," said James Leibold, a professor at Australia's LaTrobe University who has studied China's changing policies towards its ethnic minorities.

Seeking a "right to rest" for workers

Formal proposals and other suggestions to reduce work hours in a variety of ways were among those that got the most attention on social media during this year's Congress.

Many focused on a "right to rest," including calls to give employees the right not to respond to work messages after hours. Many Chinese workers get only five days of paid vacation a year. Yu Miaojie, an economist and deputy to the Congress, proposed raising the minimum statutory annual leave from five to 10 days.

The popularity of the proposals reflects concern about the intense workplace competition in China. Giving workers more leisure time is also seen as a way to boost consumption by giving them more free time to spend.

A 5.5 quake jolts central Turkey, sending residents into the cold streets

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — A moderately strong earthquake struck central Turkey on Friday, Turkey's emergency response said. The tremor sent some residents rushing into the streets but no damage has been reported.

The magnitude 5.5 quake was centered in the town of Niksar in Tokat province, at a depth of 6.4 kilometers (4 miles), according to the Disaster and Emergency Management agency, AFAD.

It occurred at 3:35 a.m. and was felt in several provinces, AFAD said, adding that "no adverse developments" were reported.

Still, many residents were seen waiting in cars or in the streets despite the cold, afraid to return to homes, Haberturk news channel reported.

Turkey sits on top of major fault lines and earthquakes are frequent.

In 2023, a magnitude 7.8 earthquake killed more than 53,000 people in Turkey and destroyed or damaged hundreds of thousands of buildings in 11 southern and southeastern provinces. Another 6,000 people were killed in the northern parts of neighboring Syria.

Trump administration denounces CNN for airing messages from Iranian leaders

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

The Trump administration denounced CNN on Thursday for airing a portion of the new Iranian supreme leader's public statement, the second time in three days that he's targeted the network for reporting on how the regime is responding to the American attacks.

The attack illustrated the care news outlets must take in reporting during wartime, and the responsibilities of American journalists to report the perspective of countries its government views as enemies. It also exposed inconsistencies. The message of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei during his first public statement since he succeeded his father, who was killed in an Israeli airstrike, was widely available elsewhere.

The White House said on social media that "fake news CNN just aired four straight minutes of uninterrupted Iranian state TV, run by the same psychotic and murderous regime that prided itself on brutally slaughtering Americans for 47 years."

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Earlier CNN interview criticized by Trump's communications leader

Two days earlier, White House communications director Steven Cheung took issue with CNN anchor Erin Burnett's interview with Hossein Mousavian, a former Iranian nuclear negotiator. Burnett asked Mousavian what he had been hearing about the Iranian government's interest in having talks with the United States. There wasn't much, he said.

"Ever notice how CNN just regurgitates quotes and unverified information from Iranian terrorists?" Cheung wrote on X. "Total disgrace. They have become the murderous Iranian Regime's version of Pravda," he said, referring to the official newspaper of the former Soviet Union.

CNN did not address Cheung's statement but did respond to the White House attack on Thursday. It noted that CNN, Sky News and Al Jazeera also showed portions of the ayatollah's statement live.

"The world is watching with anticipation which direction this war will take," CNN said. "Purported remarks from Iran's new supreme leader are a critical component in helping audiences understand where this conflict is heading and were aired for their obvious news value."

Other news outlets, including The Associated Press, sent out alerts on what Khamenei said. His vow to keep up attacks on other Arab countries in the region and plans to choke off the world's oil supply were headlines. The New York Times led its website with a story on the speech in its immediate aftermath, later writing that the speech "was an early indication of how the new supreme leader would approach the war, as well as how he would lead the country."

CNN has long been a favored target of President Donald Trump, dating back to his first term. It's a particularly vulnerable time for the network with Paramount Global's agreement to purchase CNN's parent company, Warner Bros. Discovery, raising questions about its future editorial independence.

CNN showed a news anchor reading a portion of Khamenei's remarks in Farsi, with an English translation. It did not air them in full. After the speech, correspondent Nick Paton Walsh gave a debrief to anchor Kate Bolduan, noting how the non-appearance of the leader — reportedly injured in an air attack — was as important as what he said.

"We were waiting to see the face of the man to have proof of his health and survival," Walsh said, "and they've not met that moment. Instead, a handwritten message, it seems, that mostly reiterates things we kind of already knew."

A social media message board for Iran's point of view

The Tech Transparency Project has reported that several Iranian leaders and institutions maintain verified accounts on X, formerly Twitter, owned by Trump ally Elon Musk. CNBC said Thursday that Khamenei has one of them, and an X account with his portrait posted the text of his remarks, available in Farsi and in an English translation.

Even though Khamenei's father is dead, an account with his portrait was active on Thursday, mainly reposting messages from his son. "The revenge we have in mind is not just because of the martyrdom of the illustrious Leader of the Revolution," read one message posted Thursday. "Every member of the nation martyred by the enemy is a separate case that demands we seek revenge."

X is officially blocked in Iran, though many use a virtual private network to bypass restrictions. A message sent to the platform on Thursday was not immediately returned.

There's a long history of journalists seeking interviews with world leaders, even when they are regarded as enemies of the United States. Most notable was "60 Minutes" correspondent Mike Wallace's interview with Iran's Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1979, when that country was holding Americans hostage.

Thursday's remarks by Iran's new supreme leader were absolutely newsworthy and legitimate for CNN to air them, said Jane Ferguson, a veteran international correspondent and founder of the journalism platform Noosphere. It's not the job of government leaders to pick apart what CNN is reporting, she said.

"We've always faced this," she said, about when reporters interview leaders or other figures hostile to American interests. "This has been a bit of low-hanging fruit for awhile."

Historian Douglas Brinkley of Rice University said that it's unfair for CNN to be singled out in this instance. He, too, believes it is newsworthy to learn what leaders of an adversary are thinking, but it's important to make sure that journalists are careful.

"You have to be leery of being used as a propaganda tool by the Iranian regime," he said. "On the other hand, knowing what the enemy is saying and looking for a sign of a peace offering or a nuance is important ... It's a difficult balance."

Man who rammed his vehicle into Michigan synagogue was naturalized citizen from Lebanon, DHS says

By COREY WILLIAMS and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WEST BLOOMFIELD, Mich. (AP) — The armed man who rammed his vehicle into one of the nation's largest Reform synagogues Thursday has been identified as a 41-year-old naturalized citizen born in Lebanon, according to federal officials.

Ayman Mohamad Ghazali was fatally shot by security officers after driving through a hallway at Temple Israel in West Bloomfield Township near Detroit, Michigan, in a vehicle that then caught fire, authorities said.

Ghazali came to the U.S. in 2011 on an immediate relative visa as the spouse of a U.S. citizen and was granted U.S. citizenship in 2016, according to the Department of Homeland Security.

Jennifer Runyan, the special agent in charge of the FBI's Detroit field office, called the crime a "targeted act of violence against the Jewish community" and said at a news conference Thursday that the FBI is leading the investigation.

Investigators have not determined a motive yet.

"What drove this person into action has to be determined by the investigation," said Oakland County Sheriff Mike Bouchard.

None of the synagogue's staff, teachers or the 140 children at its early childhood center were injured, Bouchard said.

In the minutes after the attack, smoke billowed from the synagogue. One security officer was hit by the vehicle and knocked unconscious but did not suffer life-threatening injuries, the sheriff said. And 30 law enforcement officers were treated for smoke inhalation.

West Bloomfield Police Chief Dale Young said Temple security officers "engaged the individual and neutralized the threat."

The suspect was found dead inside his vehicle, according to Bouchard.

Cassi Cohen, director of strategic development at Temple Israel, was standing at the hallway where the crash happened. She said she heard a loud bang, grabbed a few staff members, ran into her office and locked the door.

"When I heard the crash, I knew it was bad," Cohen said.

She said a classroom was near where the car rammed the synagogue and, in addition to the children, who were as old as 4, there were also more than 30 staff members in the synagogue.

"Thankfully, we have had many active shooter drills and our staff is prepared for these situations," she said.

Rabbi Arianna Gordon, from Temple Israel, thanked the security team, law enforcement and early childhood teachers for getting the children out safely and reunited with their parents, calling them the "true rock stars of the day."

Parents raced to retrieve children who were in the synagogue

About a dozen parents sprinted to get their children soon after authorities cleared the building. Other families were reunited at a nearby Jewish Community Center.

Allison Jacobs, whose 18-month-old daughter is enrolled in Temple Israel's day care, said she got a message from a teacher saying the children were OK even before she knew what happened.

"There are no words. I was in complete and utter shock," she told the AP. "I was hoping that it was a false report."

Jacobs, whose family is Jewish, said she tries not to think about all that's going on in the world.

"You never think that this is actually going to happen to you," she said. "But I know that it's — it's just terrible. This morning I was mourning the loss of the school that got hit in Iran."

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Synagogues increased security since the start of Iran war

Synagogues around the world have been on edge and have been ramping up security since the U.S. and Israel launched a war with Iran with missile strikes on Feb. 28.

The FBI has warned that Iranian operatives may be planning drone attacks on targets in California. Two men brought explosives to a far-right protest outside the New York mayoral mansion on Saturday. Investigators allege they were inspired by the Islamic State extremist group.

And an assailant drove a car into people outside an Orthodox synagogue in Manchester, England, on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish calendar. He stabbed two people to death before officers shot and killed him.

President Donald Trump said he had been fully briefed on the attack, calling it a "terrible thing."

Steven Ingber, the CEO of the Jewish Federation of Detroit, lamented the fact that his organization had to train and prepare for an attack.

"I'd love to say that I'm shocked, that I'm surprised, but I'm not," he said during a news conference Thursday.

Attack brings back memories of prior massacres

Oakland County is Michigan's second-largest county with roughly 1.3 million people. The majority of Detroit-area Jewish residents live there.

"This is heartbreaking," Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer said in a statement. "Michigan's Jewish community should be able to live and practice their faith in peace."

It was the second attack at a house of worship in Michigan within the past year. Last September, a former Marine fatally shot four people at a church north of Detroit and set it ablaze. The FBI later said he was motivated by "anti-religious beliefs" against The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Temple Israel has 12,000 members, according to its website, which says the synagogue is "passionate about helping Jewish communities across the globe" and that its mission is to "create a community building through the lens of Reform Judaism."

The Jewish Federation of Detroit briefly advised all Jewish organizations in the area to lock down.

Rabbi Jeffrey Myers, a survivor of the 2018 Pittsburgh synagogue massacre, said in a statement that the Michigan attack demonstrates yet again the consequences of hatred.

"We lose our humanity when we seek violent means as a solution," said Myers, rabbi of the Tree of Life Congregation, where 11 worshippers died in the deadliest antisemitic attack in U.S. history. "No one should dwell in fear because of who they are."

Cuba will release 51 people from prison in an unexpected move

HAVANA (AP) — Cuba's government said Thursday night that it would release 51 people from the island's prisons in an unexpected move.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the release in the upcoming days stems from a spirit of goodwill and close relations with the Vatican.

The government did not identify who it would release, except to say that "all have served a significant part of their sentence and have maintained good conduct in prison."

The announcement was made just hours Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel is scheduled to speak early Friday in another rare meeting with the press "to address national and international issues."

The government said it has granted pardons to 9,905 inmates since 2010. It added that in the past three years, another 10,000 people sentenced to imprisonment were released.

In January 2025, Cuba released prominent dissident José Daniel Ferrer as part of a government decision to gradually free more than 500 prisoners following talks with the Vatican.

Ferrer left Cuba last October and is now in the United States.

He was one of several prisoners released in early 2025 as part of talks with the Vatican. The releases began a day after President Joe Biden's administration announced his intent to lift the U.S. designation of Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism.

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It wasn't immediately known if any of the people the government plans to release are political prisoners. The nonprofit Prisoners Defenders has said there were 1,214 political prisoners in Cuba as of February 2026.

Trump bragged about low gas prices. The Iran conflict has him doing an about-face

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Since starting a war with Iran caused oil and gasoline prices to spike, President Donald Trump has pivoted from a focus on keeping energy prices low to trying to paint high oil prices as a positive.

The about-face comes as Trump's team has struggled to offer a clear plan for opening up the critical Strait of Hormuz so that tankers full of oil and natural gas are no longer stranded — even as the administration took a series of decisions to try to quickly stabilize surging prices.

"The United States is the largest Oil Producer in the World, by far, so when oil prices go up, we make a lot of money," Trump said Thursday on his social media site.

It was only last month, in his State of the Union address, that Trump had bragged about gas prices at \$2.30 a gallon, a figure that has since soared more than 50% to a national average of \$3.60 a gallon, according to AAA.

The flip-flop shows Trump's political interests at home are suddenly at odds with his desire to flex America's muscles on the global stage. It comes at a precarious time for Trump's party, ahead of the November midterm elections. Trump has said that high gas prices helped him defeat his predecessor, Joe Biden. But he told reporters on Saturday that he had no worries about the rising costs that could influence voters this year, and create pressure for him to end the conflict prematurely.

The investment bank Goldman Sachs on Thursday said that based on its forecasts and historic experience, higher oil prices would cause inflation to be higher, growth to be slower and the unemployment rate to increase by the end of the year.

A new move to add more Russian oil to the market

Normally, about 20 million barrels of oil pass through the Strait of Hormuz each day, but most tankers are now avoiding it. Benchmark oil prices have swung violently with the uncertainty, and on Thursday the global crude oil benchmark price jumped to \$100 a barrel.

"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 deescalate and when the Strait of Hormuz, which is effectively closed, will see traffic begin to recover," analysts at the consultancy Oxford Economics concluded on Wednesday.

The president has given a series of contradictory messages about his plans to address this issue. He said in a Monday news conference that the Strait of Hormuz "is going to remain safe" well after it was identified as a danger zone, claiming that the presence of the U.S. Navy and insurance for tankers would keep things secure.

By Tuesday, he said on Truth Social that Iran would face "Military consequences" that would be "at a level never seen before" if it placed mines in the Strait of Hormuz, later stressing that the U.S. military was blowing up Iran's mine-laying ships.

On Wednesday, Trump's Energy Secretary Chris Wright briefly posted that the U.S. Navy had escorted a tanker through the strait — later deleting the false claim.

Trump on Wednesday had said "the straits are in great shape" and said he thought oil companies should use them. But on Thursday, Wright could not provide a timeline on when the U.S. Navy might escort tankers through the strait. "It'll happen relatively soon, but it can't happen now," Wright told CNBC. "We're simply not ready. All of our military assets right now are focused on destroying Iran's offensive capabilities."

Wright acknowledged the conflict was causing "a significant disruption" in short-term gas prices, but sought to emphasize the long-term benefits of an Iran that no longer poses a threat to the U.S. and Middle

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Eastern nations.

Late on Thursday, the Treasury Department announced that it would take another step to free up Russian oil stranded on tankers at sea due to U.S. sanctions for its war on Ukraine, granting a license to waive those sanctions for a month. That builds on a move last week to give India temporary permission to buy Russian oil.

The move follows the Trump administration granting temporary permission for India to buy Russian oil. Last week, analysts estimated there were about 125 million barrels loaded on tankers at sea.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent posted on X that the expanded waiver was a "narrowly tailored, short-term measure" that would "not provide significant financial benefit to the Russian government, which derives the majority of its energy revenue from taxes assessed at the point of extraction."

Trump also changed his mind on strategic reserves

Earlier on Thursday, the White House said it was looking at waiving Jones Act requirements to use U.S.-flagged ships to move goods between U.S. ports, a temporary move that White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said could "ensure vital energy products and agricultural necessities are flowing freely to U.S. ports."

That followed a shift on Wednesday, when Trump said the U.S. would join with other countries and release oil to lower prices. He had initially downplayed the need to tap strategic reserves. The coordinated release among countries is unlikely to bring down oil prices, so much as stabilize the market.

"Such a move will slow rather than stop rising oil prices and offer a temporary salve to the searing burn of rising gasoline prices," said Joe Brusuelas, chief U.S. economist at the consultancy RSM.

Venezuela and Colombia abruptly cancel planned presidents' meeting, citing 'force majeure'

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — The governments of Venezuela and Colombia on Thursday announced the cancellation of a highly anticipated meeting between their presidents planned for the following day at their shared border.

The talks were to be Venezuelan acting President Delcy Rodríguez's first official meeting with a Latin American leader since she was sworn in January following the U.S. military operation to capture then-President Nicolás Maduro. Rodríguez and Colombian President Gustavo Petro were expected to address shared interests in border security, due to the presence of illegal armed groups associated with drug trafficking and the potential for Colombia to import Venezuelan natural gas.

In a joint statement released by Venezuela's Foreign Affairs Ministry, the governments attributed the cancellation to "force majeure," which they did not explain, and said the meeting would take place at a later time.

The statement added that Petro maintains his invitation to Rodríguez to hold the presidential meeting and indicated that both governments remain committed "to strengthening trust, cooperation and bilateral relations."

Shortly before Thursday's announcement, Petro's office said the Colombian leader had a phone call with U.S. President Donald Trump in which he wished him "success" in his meeting with Rodríguez.

The Latest: Man fatally shot attacking Michigan synagogue

A man armed with a rifle rammed a vehicle into a major synagogue in a Detroit suburb and was fatally shot by security, authorities said.

The vehicle caught on fire after crashing into the Temple Israel synagogue in West Bloomfield Township.

The name and possible motives of the suspect were not disclosed. However, Jennifer Runyan, the special agent in charge of the FBI's Detroit field office, called it a "targeted act of violence against the Jewish community."

"No kids or no staff were injured whatsoever," Oakland County Sheriff Mike Bouchard said. He said one

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security officer was hit by the vehicle but did not suffer life-threatening injuries.

Synagogues around the world have increased security and protections for worshippers since the U.S. and Israel launched a war with Iran on Feb. 28.

Here's the Latest.:

FBI calls attack 'targeted act of violence against Jewish community'

Jennifer Runyan, the special agent in charge of the FBI's Detroit field office, said it was a "deeply disturbing and tragic incident."

She said the FBI was leading the investigation and considered the crime a "targeted act of violence against the Jewish community."

Earlier during a news conference, Oakland County Sheriff Mike Bouchard said: "What drove this person into action has to be determined by the investigation."

What is Reform Judaism?

The Reform denomination, part of the wider progressive Judaism, values Jewish tradition along with the use of reason and individual conscience.

According to the Union for Reform Judaism, Temple Israel's congregation is the second-largest in the denomination.

The synagogue was founded in 1941 in Detroit and relocated to suburban West Bloomfield in the 1980s. The congregation counts about 3,500 families and over 12,000 members, according to the temple's website.

Rabbis, leaders and practitioners often support social and racial justice along with gender equality and LGBTQ+ people.

According to Temple Israel's website, its mission is to "be an inclusive congregation that demonstrates respect for the needs of all," valuing each person as "created in the image of God."

Women can become rabbis in Reform communities. And in contrast to the rules in more traditional denominations, Reform rabbis are allowed to perform interfaith marriages.

Read more here about Reform Judaism

CEO of American Jewish Committee urges 'violent hatred' not be tolerated

Ted Deutch, CEO of the American Jewish Committee, said in a statement that Jews in America are "increasingly behind metal detectors and under the watch of armed security."

"We're not asking for special treatment. We're not asking for more outrage. We're asking for something simple: that people everywhere stand up, clearly and unequivocally, and say that this violent hatred will no longer be tolerated."

Authorities have not yet named a suspect in the attack or a possible motive.

Union for Reform Judaism decries violence at Temple Israel

The group said in a statement: "A synagogue is meant to be a sanctuary — a place of prayer, learning, and community. Violence and antisemitism have no place in our society."

It added: "We appreciate all the voices speaking with moral clarity against this terrible form of hate and urge all people of goodwill to join in condemning and fighting antisemitism."

"We stand with the Temple Israel community and with the entire greater Detroit Jewish community, praying for healing, safety, and strength. In the face of hate, we remain committed to building communities rooted in dignity, justice, and peace."

The Union for Reform Judaism is the umbrella group for Reform congregations in North America.

Authorities have not yet named the suspect or disclosed a possible motive.

Orthodox Union says it's 'outraged and shaken'

The Orthodox Union, the nation's largest Orthodox Jewish umbrella organization, issued a statement decrying the violence and said it was "outraged and shaken."

"Once again, a house of worship has been shattered by an act of violence intended to kill Jews. ... The swift actions of those on the scene helped prevent what could have been a far more tragic outcome."

"This incident is a stark and frightening reminder that Jewish institutions across the United States continue to face serious and persistent threats, and the escalating hateful rhetoric in the public discourse puts a target on the backs of all Jews," it said.

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The Orthodox Union called for "sufficient funding" for security at Jewish institutions.

The identity of the gunman and his possible motive have not yet been released.

Temple Israel expresses gratitude for community that helped after attack

Temple Israel released a statement on Thursday afternoon confirming that no one had been physically harmed in the attack, including the 140 students who were in the early childhood learning center when the car barreled in.

The statement credited security personnel who "confronted and neutralized" the driver, and said that teachers used established protocols to keep the children safe.

The statement also expressed gratitude for the Michigan community that came forward immediately following the attack to support members of the synagogue, including the Shenendoah Country Club that sheltered and fed staff, children and parents amid the chaos.

"What incredible neighbors we have. What incredible police force we have," the message read.

Israel foreign minister expresses shock

In a post on social media, Israel Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar said: "Shocked by the attack on a synagogue near Detroit. We are in contact with the Jewish community and local authorities. Antisemitism must never be allowed to rear its ugly head."

It was not immediately known who carried out the attack or a possible motive.

Mom of girl who goes to day care at synagogue: 'I was in complete and utter shock'

Allison Jacobs's 18-month-old daughter goes to day care at Temple Israel, and got word of the attack.

"There are no words. I was in complete and utter shock," she told the AP. "I was hoping that it was a false report. You know, sometimes that can happen."

Jacobs said she tries not to think about all that's going on in the world.

"You never think that this is actually going to happen to you," she said. "But I know that it's — it's just terrible. This morning I was mourning the loss of the school that got hit in Iran."

Trump says he's been 'fully briefed' on attack on synagogue outside Detroit

The president said at a White House event marking Women's History Month, "I want to send our love to the Michigan Jewish community and all of the people" in the Detroit area.

Trump added, "It's a terrible thing, but it goes on" and said that authorities would be working to get "right down to the bottom of it."

"It's absolutely incredible that things like this happen," Trump said.

He then returned to his prepared remarks, without providing details on the investigation.

Rabbi, survivor of Pittsburgh synagogue massacre, decries attack

Rabbi Jeffrey Myers, a survivor of the 2018 Pittsburgh synagogue massacre, said the Michigan attack demonstrates yet again the consequences of hatred.

"We lose our humanity when we seek violent means as a solution," Myers said in a statement. "No one should dwell in fear because of who they are."

Myers is rabbi of the Tree of Life Congregation, where 11 worshippers from three congregations were killed in the deadliest antisemitic attack in U.S. history. The gunman is now on death row.

It was not immediately known who carried out the attack or a possible motive.

Muslim civil rights group condemns attack on synagogue

The Michigan chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations is condemning the incident.

"There is no justification for anyone to direct violence toward any house or worship or religious institution," it said in a statement.

Investigators were still working to identify the man and a possible motive for the attack, according to a person familiar with the matter who spoke to the AP on the condition of anonymity.

The person cautioned that the investigation was still in the early stages.

CAIR is a Muslim civil right and advocacy organization.

Synagogue houses early childhood center

Authorities said none of those who attended were injured.

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"No kids or no staff were injured whatsoever," Oakland County Sheriff Mike Bouchard.

The Oakland County Sheriff's office cleared the building and about a dozen parents sprinted to get their children from the early childhood learning center inside. West Bloomfield School District went on lockdown.

Security guard hurt after car rams into synagogue

Police say a security guard was injured after a car crashed into a synagogue outside Detroit on Thursday.

Oakland County Sheriff Michael Bouchard said a person drove a car through Temple Israel's doors and was driving down the hall with "purpose" and struck a security guard.

Security personnel opened fire on the vehicle, Bouchard said.

One person was found dead in the car although Bouchard said it's unclear how that person died. The injured security guard was taken to a hospital and is expected to survive, Bouchard said.

Synagogues have been on edge since Iran war

Synagogues around the world have been on edge and ramping up security since the U.S. and Israel launched a war with Iran with missile strikes on Feb. 28.

The FBI has warned that Iranian operatives may be planning drone attacks on targets in California. Two men brought explosives Saturday to a far-right protest outside the New York mayoral mansion on Saturday. Investigators allege they were inspired by the Islamic State extremist group.

In a similar incident to what happened in West Bloomfield Township, an assailant drove a car into people outside an Orthodox synagogue in Manchester, England, on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish year in October. He stabbed two people to death before officers shot and killed him.

Seeking identity of attacker

The vehicle caught on fire after crashing into the Temple Israel synagogue in West Bloomfield Township, according to a person familiar with the matter who spoke to The Associated Press on Thursday.

Investigators were still working to identify the man and a possible motive for the attack. The person cautioned that the investigation is still in the early stages

The person could not publicly discuss details of the investigation and spoke to AP on condition of anonymity.

Oakland County Sheriff Mike Bouchard confirmed during an earlier news conference that security at the synagogue had engaged in gunfire with at least one person, and that no one was in custody.

Gunman rams vehicle into synagogue

A man armed with a rifle rammed a vehicle into the nation's largest Reform synagogue, a source tells The Associated Press. The attack occurred at Temple Israel synagogue in West Bloomfield Township.

Source tells AP: Gunman was killed by security

A man armed with a rifle rammed a vehicle into a major synagogue in a Detroit suburb and was fatally shot by security. That's according to a person familiar with the matter who spoke to The Associated Press on Thursday.

The person said the vehicle caught on fire after crashing into the Temple Israel synagogue in West Bloomfield Township.

Investigators are still working to identify the man and a possible motive for the attack. The person cautioned that the investigation is still in the early stages. The person could not publicly discuss details of the investigation and spoke to AP on condition of anonymity.

Iran-linked hackers take aim at US and other targets, raising risk of cyberattacks during war

By DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pro-Iranian hackers are targeting sites in the Middle East and starting to stretch into the United States during the war, raising the risk of American defense contractors, power stations and water plants being swept into a wave of digital chaos that could expand if Tehran's allies join the fray.

Hackers supporting Iran claimed responsibility for a significant cyberattack Wednesday against U.S. medical device company Stryker. Since the war began Feb. 28, they also have tried to penetrate cameras

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in Middle Eastern countries to improve Iran's missile targeting. They have targeted data centers in the region, as well as industrial facilities in Israel, a school in Saudi Arabia and an airport in Kuwait.

Iran has invested heavily in its offensive cyber capabilities while cultivating ties to hacking groups. In recent years, groups working for Tehran have infiltrated the email system of President Donald Trump's campaign, targeted U.S. water plants and tried to breach the networks used by the military and defense contractors.

The goal is to wear down the American war effort, drive up the costs of energy, strain cyber resources and cause as much pain as possible for American companies that depend on the defense industry.

"Something is going to happen because the gloves are off," said Kevin Mandia, founder of the cybersecurity companies Mandiant and Armadin.

Who is being targeted

Pro-Iranian, pro-Palestinian hackers claimed credit for disrupting systems at Stryker, a Michigan-based medical technology company. A group known as Handala said the attack was in retaliation for suspected U.S. strikes that killed Iranian schoolchildren.

Like other ideologically motivated hackers, profit is not Handala's goal, according to Ismael Valenzuela, vice president of threat intelligence at the cybersecurity company Arctic Wolf.

"What distinguishes this group is its clear focus on data destruction rather than financial extortion," he said in an email.

Polish authorities are investigating a recent cyberattack — on a nuclear research facility — that may have ties to Iran, though they acknowledge that another group could be behind the attack and using the Iran war to mask its identity.

Going forward, U.S. defense contractors, government vendors and businesses that work with Israel are likely targets, as is critical infrastructure such as hospitals, ports, water plants, power stations and railways.

Pro-Iranian hackers openly discuss their plans in Telegram and other online message boards.

"The datacenters need to be taken out," wrote one user, as uncovered by researchers at U.S.-based SITE Intelligence Group. "They host the brains of USAs military communication and targeting systems."

Cyber operations also gather intelligence — for example, Iran's effort to hack into cameras in neighboring countries to aid its missile targeting. Infiltrating U.S. networks, meanwhile, would offer view into military planning or supply chains.

Going after easy targets

The strikes on Iran's military as well as internet outages may have limited Iran's cyberattacks in the short term. But experts say Iranian hackers and their allies will aim for quick victories by targeting the weakest links in American cybersecurity.

Often, local water plants or health care facilities lack the funds and know-how to install the latest software patches or take other security steps. That has made them a favorite target, both because of the relative ease of penetrating them and because of the panic these disruptions can cause.

This can include denial-of-service attacks, in which hackers try to jam a network so legitimate users cannot use it, and website defacements, which can prevent a company from communicating with customers. Hack-and-leak operations, where hackers threaten to release sensitive stolen material, are another possibility.

The attacks are not that sophisticated, according to Shaun Williams, a former FBI and CIA officer who is now a senior director at the cybersecurity firm SentinelOne. But if a business or government agency has failed to keep up with its cybersecurity, it could pay a steep price, he said.

"Patch your systems. Ensure your firewalls and security solutions are up to date," Williams said. "Remove your stale accounts. All the cyber hygiene that you should be doing, it's more critical now than ever. Prepare for disruption."

When it comes to cyber, Iran is considered a chaos agent

Russia and China present the greatest cyber threats to the U.S., while North Korea is a growing concern. But what Iran has lacked in resources it has made up for in ingenuity, experts say.

In recent years, Tehran's digital warriors have impersonated American activists online to covertly encour-

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age protests against Israel on college campuses. They have set up fake news websites and social media accounts primed to spread false and exaggerated claims before big U.S. elections.

In 2024, Iranian hackers infiltrated the email system of the Trump campaign and later tried to disseminate files that the hackers said they stole. Hackers linked to Iran also tried to hack into the WhatsApp accounts of both Trump and his then-Democratic opponent, President Joe Biden.

The activity prompted the Department of Homeland Security to issue a public warning last year about Iranian cyber threats.

"Iran and especially the proxies don't care how big or smart you are. This is about making an impact, about creating chaos," said James Turgal, a cybersecurity expert who spent 22 years as an FBI agent and is now a vice president at Optiv, a Denver-based information security firm.

Next moves from Russia and China

Experts are watching closely to see if Russia, China or hacking groups allied with either country provide hacking assistance to Iran, mounting attacks intended to undermine American operations in Iran and make it harder for the U.S. to sustain its fight.

While China has so far taken a cautious approach, there is evidence that pro-Iranian hackers in Russia are already at work. Researchers at the cybersecurity firm CrowdStrike detected a surge of activity from Russian hackers in support of Tehran since the war began.

One group known as Z-Pentest claimed responsibility for disrupting several U.S. networks, including some involved in closed-circuit video cameras.

The timing of the attack suggests the hackers were targeting U.S. interests because of the war in Iran, according to Adam Meyers, head of counter adversary operations at CrowdStrike.

"Western organizations should continue to remain on high-alert," Meyers said.

Oil jumps to \$100 per barrel and stocks sink worldwide with no clear end in sight for the Iran war

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — With no clear end in sight, the war with Iran sent oil prices back to \$100 per barrel on Thursday, and stocks sank worldwide.

The S&P 500 fell 1.5% and resumed its sharp swings following a couple days of relative calm. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 739 points, or 1.6%, and the Nasdaq composite lost 1.8%.

The center of action was again the oil market, where the price of a barrel of Brent crude, the international standard, climbed 9.2% to settle at \$100.46. Worries are worsening that the war could block the production of oil in the Persian Gulf for a long time and cause a debilitating surge of inflation for the global economy.

Iran's new supreme leader released his first statement Thursday since succeeding his late father, saying his country would keep up attacks on Gulf Arab neighbors and use the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz as leverage against the United States and Israel. A fifth of the world's oil typically sails through the strait, and oil producers in the region are cutting production because their crude has nowhere to go.

Countries around the world are trying to make up for that, and the International Energy Agency said Wednesday that its members would release a record amount of oil, 400 million barrels, from stockpiles built for such emergencies.

But such moves are short-term fixes, and they do not clear the long-term risks. Analysts have said that if the Strait of Hormuz remains closed, oil prices could jump to \$150.

To be sure, the U.S. stock market has a history of bouncing back relatively quickly from military conflicts in the Middle East and elsewhere, as long as oil prices don't stay too high for too long. Even with all the up- and- down swings of the last couple weeks, many rocking markets hour to hour, the S&P 500 is just 4.4% below its all-time high set in January.

What's made this jump for oil prices frightening is not only the degree — prices jumped near \$120 this week to their highest level since 2022 — but that they're occurring during an uncertain time for the economy.

Last month's hiring by U.S. employers was surprisingly weak, which raised worries about a possible

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worst-case scenario for the economy called "stagflation." That's where economic growth stagnates while inflation remains high, and it's a miserable mix that the Federal Reserve has no good tools to fix.

A more encouraging signal arrived Thursday. A report said that the number of U.S. workers applying for unemployment benefits inched lower last week. That's a sign that layoffs are potentially remaining low around the country.

Dollar General, meanwhile, reported better profit and revenue for the latest quarter than analysts expected. But the retailer with relatively low prices, whose customers often have the least cushion to absorb higher gasoline prices, gave forecasts for revenue this upcoming year that indicated a potential slowdown in growth. Its stock fell 6.1%.

Some of Wall Street's worst losses again hit companies with big fuel bills. Cruise-ship operator Carnival fell 7.9%, and United Airlines sank 4.6%.

Worries about the private-credit industry also continued to hurt the market. Investors have been pulling their money out of some funds and companies that have lent to businesses whose profits are under threat. Many of the worries are focused on business that may not pay back their loans because of competition from AI-powered rivals.

Morgan Stanley fell 4.1% after its North Haven Private Income Fund said it allowed investors to redeem 5% of its total shares instead of the nearly 11% they had requested. That 5% cap is the advertised limit.

All told, the S&P 500 fell 103.18 points to 6,672.62. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 739.42 to 46,677.85, and the Nasdaq composite sank 404.16 to 22,311.98.

In stock markets abroad, indexes fell across Europe and Asia.

Japan's Nikkei 225 dropped 1%, and France's CAC 40 sank 0.7% for two of the world's bigger moves.

In the bond market, Treasury yields continued to climb because of upward pressure from rising oil prices. The yield on the 10-year Treasury rose to 4.26% from 4.21% late Wednesday and from just 3.97% before the war started.

Higher yields make all kinds of borrowing more expensive, such as mortgages for potential U.S. homebuyers and bond offerings for companies looking to expand. They also push down on prices for all kinds of investments, from stocks to crypto.

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.

A barrel of benchmark U.S. crude rose 9.7% to settle at \$95.73.

A grim list: Some notable attacks on houses of worship around the world in recent years

By The Associated Press undefined

Statistically, attending a weekly worship service is a remarkably safe thing to do. Global annual attendance totals many billions; the number of people killed in attacks on individual houses of worship in any given year is generally less than a few hundred.

But an ambush Thursday targeting one of the nation's largest synagogues — the latest in a spate of recent attacks targeting religious buildings — has intensified fear among clergy and worshippers worldwide.

Here is a list of some of the notable attacks that have occurred on houses of worship in the past 15 years.

United States

March 12, 2026: A man armed with a rifle rammed his vehicle into a major reform synagogue in a Detroit suburb and was fatally shot by security. The attacker drove through a set of doors and into a hallway where something in the vehicle ignited, a sheriff said. In the minutes after the attack, smoke billowed from the synagogue, which also houses an early childhood center. No one was injured.

Sept. 29, 2025: An ex-Marine smashed a pickup truck into a Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints church in Michigan, opened fire and set the building ablaze during a crowded Sunday service and then was fatally shot by police. Four people were killed and eight wounded.

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Aug. 27, 2025: Two children were killed and several others were injured in a shooting during Mass at the Church of the Annunciation in Minneapolis. The shooter, who authorities say died of a self-inflicted gunshot, was a former student at the parish's school.

Oct. 27, 2018: Eleven Jews attending services at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh were fatally shot by a white supremacist with a history of antisemitism. The gunman, Robert Bowers, faces execution after his conviction on multiple federal charges.

Nov. 5, 2017: A family feud is believed to have prompted the deadliest mass shooting in modern Texas history. Twenty-five people, including a pregnant woman, were killed at First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs.

June 17, 2015: A young man walked into a Bible study session at the historic Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, and killed nine people. The victims included the senior pastor, Clementa Pinckney. The shooter was an avowed white supremacist who is awaiting execution after his conviction on multiple federal charges.

Aug. 5, 2012: Six people at the Sikh Temple of Wisconsin in the town of Oak Creek were shot to death by a 41-year-old white supremacist who had discussed a racial holy war. One of the injured victims died in 2020 from his head wound, becoming the seventh fatality.

Australia

Dec. 14, 2025: A father and son fatally shot 15 people at a Hanukkah festival on the famous Bondi Beach. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese called the massacre an act of antisemitic terrorism that struck at the heart of the nation.

Dec. 6, 2024: As part of a wave of antisemitic attacks, a synagogue in Melbourne was firebombed. The building was heavily damaged, and a congregation member was injured. Australian authorities have accused Iran of directing that attack.

Congo

July 27, 2025: Several dozen people were killed in Congo's Ituri province when rebels stormed a Catholic church during a vigil and opened fire on worshippers.

Egypt

Egypt reeled in November 2017 from the killing of more than 300 people in a startlingly grisly militant attack on a mosque in northern Sinai frequented by Sufis, followers of a mystic movement within Islam. At that point, Egypt's military and security forces had already been waging a campaign against militants in northern Sinai.

April 9, 2017: Suicide bombers struck hours apart at two Coptic churches in northern Egypt, killing more than 40 people and turning Palm Sunday services into scenes of horror and outrage. The Islamic State group claimed responsibility and vowed to continue attacks against Christians.

Britain

Oct. 2, 2025: An attack on a synagogue in Manchester, England, by a knife-wielding assailant left two congregation members dead. According to police, it was carried out by a man who had pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group.

June 19, 2017: A man drove a van at pedestrians near a mosque in London as worshippers were leaving after prayers. One man died; a dozen others were injured. The attacker was sentenced to at least 43 years in prison. A judge said he had been radicalized by far-right and Islamophobic propaganda online.

France

Oct. 29, 2020: Three people were killed in a stabbing attack at a Catholic basilica in the French Riviera city of Nice. A Tunisian man charged with the attack was later sentenced to life imprisonment without parole, France's most severe sentence possible.

July 26, 2016: Two assailants slit the throat of an 85-year-old priest after staging an attack on a Mass at a Catholic church in Normandy. The attackers were killed by police as they left the church. The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the attack.

Germany

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Oct. 9, 2019: A right-wing extremist tried to shoot his way into a synagogue in Halle on Yom Kippur while broadcasting the attack live on a popular gaming site. After failing to open the building's heavy doors, he shot and killed a woman in the street and a man at a nearby kebab shop. He was convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison.

March 9, 2023: A former member of the Jehovah's Witnesses opened fire during a service at a Witnesses hall in Hamburg, killing six people and then himself. Nine other people were wounded.

Oct. 18, 2023: Assailants threw two Molotov cocktails at a synagogue in Berlin. The firebombs burst on the sidewalk next to the building, and two people who had approached the synagogue with them ran away with their faces covered. The attempted arson shortly after Hamas' attack on Israel drew strong condemnation.

New Zealand

March 15, 2019: A white supremacist gunned down worshippers at two mosques in Christchurch during Friday prayers, killing 51. The attacks prompted new laws banning an array of semiautomatic weapons and high-capacity magazines. They also prompted global changes to social media protocols after the gunman livestreamed his attack on Facebook. The assailant was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole, the first time the maximum available sentence had been imposed in New Zealand.

Norway

Aug. 10, 2019: A white nationalist Norwegian, Philip Manshaus, killed his Chinese-born stepsister and then drove to a mosque in an Oslo suburb where three men were preparing for Eid al-Adha celebrations. He fired rifle shots at the mosque's glass door before being overpowered by one of the men.

Syria

June 22, 2025: A suicide bomber opened fire and then detonated an explosive vest inside a Greek Orthodox church near Damascus filled with people praying, killing more than 20 and wounding dozens, state media reported.

Senate passes bipartisan housing bill to improve access and affordability

By CHARLOTTE KRAMON, ALEX VEIGA and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate passed a broad bill on Thursday to make U.S. housing more accessible and affordable, a rare bipartisan effort in Congress to address a growing national problem.

The bill, which passed 89-10, would reduce regulations, regulate corporate investors and expand how housing dollars can be used to build affordable homes and rentals. It will now head back to the House, which passed a similar bill earlier this year.

"We have a housing shortage all across America," said Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren, who worked with Republicans to win overwhelming support from both parties for the legislation. "We need more housing of every kind. More housing for first-time home buyers, more housing for renters, more housing for seniors, more housing for people with disabilities, more rural housing, more urban housing, more, more, and more."

The legislation, she said, "will help drive down prices."

Senate Banking Committee Chairman Tim Scott, R-S.C., led the effort with Warren. He said ahead of the vote that the Senate would "do what so many people failed to do in this legislative body for the last few decades, and that is pass consequential legislation that makes it easier to become a homeowner."

Roadblocks ahead for the legislation

Despite the bipartisan vote in the Senate and a shared eagerness to pass the legislation ahead of the midterm elections, It's unclear whether the House will take up the bill again — or if President Donald Trump will sign it.

Trump has backed the legislation through the bipartisan negotiations, but he has also slowed its momentum with a declaration last weekend that he won't sign any new measures unless Congress passes legislation that would require voters to show proof of citizenship and end most mail-in balloting. The Senate is

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expected to begin consideration of that bill next week, but it is unlikely to pass as all Democrats oppose it.

At the same time, House leaders have indicated that they are unlikely to accept the Senate version of the housing legislation and have suggested they could launch a formal conference process to negotiate a final deal between the chambers — a process that could take months.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., said ahead of the bill's passage that conference negotiations are a possibility, "but obviously the quickest way to do this would be to pick up the Senate bill and pass it."

If the White House wants that to happen, he said, "they'll probably have to make that argument to House leadership."

House Financial Services Chairman French Hill, R-Ark., said in a statement that Senate passage is "an important step" but added that, "it is critical we get the details right and mitigate some of the concerns raised by House members with the Senate bill."

Making housing more attainable

Both Republicans and Democrats have embraced the legislation as there has been a national shortage of home construction and as prices have climbed faster than incomes. The bill would give local governments more power on housing issues, allow banks to invest more in affordable housing and lift limits on the number of public housing units that can receive private financing through Section 8 funding to rehabilitate properties.

"You've got many provisions in this bill that stop treating the U.S. like one single housing market and start giving local leaders the tools they need to fix their unique regional puzzle," said Peter Carroll with Cotality, a company that tracks housing data.

The bill aims to make homebuilding easier by streamlining some regulations that require environmental reviews and inspections. It also lifts a limit on a grant for emergency shelter beds and street homelessness outreach.

As many affordable housing developers are leaning on manufactured and modular homes that can be transported to areas that need housing, the legislation also would eliminate the requirement that they have to be built on a permanent chassis, reducing costs and making them easier to build and design.

Corporate investors

One of the more contested provisions of the bill would bar institutional investors from buying single-family homes — a top priority for Trump.

The bill defines such investors as any that directly or indirectly own 350 or more single-family homes. Investors of any size would not be required to sell single-family homes bought before the date that the bill becomes a law.

They would still be allowed to buy or build single-family homes if they rent them out, but would be required to sell them to an individual homebuyer after seven years.

Trump has pushed the ban as he has been under pressure to address voters' concerns about affordability ahead of the midterm elections. "People live in homes, not corporations," Trump said in a social media post in January, calling on Congress to act.

Critics of the bill's limits on large institutional investors say it will lead to less rental housing inventory and higher rents as landlords face less competition. At the same time, it's unclear how a ban that targets institutional investors that own 350 or more single-family homes would meaningfully reduce competition that ordinary homebuyers may face when they shop for a home.

A need for reform

The U.S. housing market has been in a slump dating back to 2022, when mortgage rates began to climb from pandemic-era lows.

Sales of previously occupied U.S. homes have been hovering close to a 4-million annual pace now going back to 2023 — well short of the 5.2-million annual pace that's historically been the norm. They slowed last year to a 30-year low and have remained sluggish so far this year, declining in January and February versus a year earlier.

A sharp run-up in home prices, especially in the early years of this decade, and a chronic shortage of homes nationally worsened by years of below-average home construction have left many aspiring home-

owners priced out of the market.

Meanwhile, while the median U.S. monthly rent has been declining for more than two years, it was still 15.2% higher in January than it was at the start of 2020, according to data from Realtor.com.

Trump discourages Iranian soccer team from attending the World Cup, citing safety concerns

By SEUNG MIN KIM and GRAHAM DUNBAR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said he did not think it would be “appropriate” for the Iranian soccer team to attend this year’s World Cup, co-hosted by the United States, and cited safety concerns as a reason on Thursday while the countries remained embroiled in a war.

“The Iran National Soccer Team is welcome to The World Cup,” Trump wrote on his social media site, “but I really don’t believe it is appropriate that they be there, for their own life and safety.”

Iranian leaders said earlier this week that it’s “not possible” for the country to participate in the World Cup.

Trump’s message appears to depart somewhat from what the Republican president relayed Tuesday at the White House to FIFA President Gianni Infantino, who later publicly said that Trump assured him the Iranian players and coaches would be welcome.

A White House official, who insisted on anonymity to discuss private conversations, had confirmed Trump’s message to Infantino about Iran’s participation.

On Thursday, the White House did not immediately clarify what Trump meant by “their own life and safety,” such as whether he anticipated threats against them while in the United States after U.S. and Israeli strikes on Iran that began Feb. 28.

Iran, one of 48 teams in the tournament, is scheduled to play in Inglewood, California, against New Zealand on June 15 and Belgium on June 21 before finishing group play in Seattle against Egypt on June 26. The U.S. is hosting the tournament with Canada and Mexico from June 11 to July 19.

Iran’s soccer federation has planned to take the team in June to a tournament base camp in Arizona, at the Kino Sports Complex in Tucson.

Since June, Iran has been subject to a travel ban into the U.S. as part of the Trump administration’s immigration crackdown. But athletes and coaches from the target nations are exempt, which means the Iranian team would be allowed to enter the U.S.

But there are also likely fears from Iranian soccer players about playing in a tournament abroad where they could be feted by an anti-regime diaspora while their families face threats back home.

The Iranian women’s soccer team, which arrived in Australia to play at its Asian Cup tournament before the U.S. and Israeli bombing attacks on Iran started, did not sing the Iranian national anthem before its first game. That was widely interpreted as a gesture of protest or an act of mourning. Several members of the team stayed in Australia on humanitarian visas afterward.

At the 2022 men’s World Cup, played in Qatar, the Iranian team did not sing the anthem before a game against England and did not celebrate the two goals scored in a 6-2 loss. At that time, Iran was in turmoil several weeks after the death in police custody of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, who had been detained for allegedly violating a strict Islamic dress code.

FIFA’s own evaluation was “low risk” for World Cup safety and security plans proposed by the U.S., Canada and Mexico soccer federations, which are guaranteed by their governments. Trump has often taken credit for “winning” the World Cup hosting rights in 2018, when the three neighbors easily beat Morocco in a vote by FIFA member federations.

“All parties have experience of hosting major sports events on a regular basis and established arrangements are in place for managing security and safety at stadiums and for high-profile individuals,” FIFA’s in-house inspection team wrote eight years ago.

Iranian athletes who previously defied the Islamic regime have left the country to continue their careers. Iran’s first female athlete to win an Olympic medal, Kimia Alizadeh, a bronze medalist at the 2016 Rio

de Janeiro Games in taekwondo, criticized wearing the mandatory hijab headscarf. She competed for the Olympic refugee team at Tokyo in 2021 and for Bulgaria at the 2024 Paris Olympics.

Judoka Saeid Mollaei went into hiding in Germany after a dispute with Iranian team officials at the 2019 world championships. Mollaei, the defending champion, said he was ordered to lose a bout to avoid a potential gold medal match against an Israeli opponent. He got Mongolian citizenship and took silver at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

Landslides in southern Ethiopia leave at least 50 people dead and 125 missing

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia (AP) — Disastrous landslides that struck southern Ethiopia following a week of heavy rains have killed at least 50 people and left 125 others missing, an official said Thursday.

The landslides happened in recent days in the Gamo Zone districts of Gacho Baba, Kamba and Bonke, said Mesfin Manuqa, the Gamo Zone director of disaster response.

One person was pulled out of the mud alive during a rescue operation, Manuqa said.

The Gacho Baba District communication chief, Abebe Agena, said most of those who died were found buried in the mud. It is not yet clear how many households were affected.

Tilahun Kebede, president of the South Ethiopia Regional State, expressed his sorrow over the disaster and urged residents to move to higher ground as rains continue.

"Given that it is the rainy season and these types of disasters could happen again, I am calling on communities living in the highlands and flood-prone areas to take the necessary precautions," he said.

Mudslides and floods caused by heavy rainfall are common in Ethiopia, especially during the rainy season. In July 2024, a deadly mudslide caused by heavy rain claimed the lives of 229 people in southern Ethiopia.

After years of growth, Georgia's film industry hits a painful reset

By R.J. RICO Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Chris Ratledge used to make as much as \$9,500 a week working on film sets around Atlanta. Now, he's on food stamps.

The 48-year-old digital imaging technician moved from Indiana to Georgia in 2017 as studios — lured by generous tax credits — turned Atlanta into the "Hollywood of the South," the backdrop for hundreds of productions like "The Hunger Games," "Stranger Things" and more than a dozen Marvel blockbusters.

Ratledge said the work was grueling — 70-hour weeks were normal — but the \$72-an-hour pay was transformative. "I paid off three years of back taxes in one year, just from the money I made," says Ratledge, who worked on the Netflix movie "Red Notice," as well as shows like TBS' "Miracle Workers" and Starz's "P-Valley."

Those times are long gone: Ratledge has worked just four days on set since May 2024.

Instead, he's been working part-time at the front desk of a local tennis center and stringing rackets on the side, trying somehow to support his family of five on \$15 an hour without health insurance. His wife, a cancer survivor, has started cleaning houses a few days a week, and they've downsized their rental home. But their \$2,000-a-month income hardly even covers their rent, a shortfall that has left Ratledge in debt and deeply depressed.

"All I want for Christmas is for my film career back," Ratledge wrote on Instagram in December.

Georgia's boom goes bust

After hitting a peak of \$4.4 billion in 2022, spending on film and TV production in Georgia has tumbled, reaching just \$2.3 billion in the last fiscal year, as total productions dropped from 412 in 2022 to 245 last year. The decline accelerated after the 2023 writers and actors strikes halted productions for months, dealing a blow to an industry still recovering from COVID-19 shutdowns.

"We saw a lot of productions start looking overseas, knowing that they wouldn't have another work stoppage," said Lee Thomas, the deputy commissioner of the Georgia Film Office. "We knew that it would be

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like a reset to the industry ... but it certainly was a bigger, harder fall than we anticipated — and longer.”

Marvel has left Georgia’s market — its last movie filmed there was 2025’s “Thunderbolts” — and shifted its massive productions to the United Kingdom, where labor and production costs are cheaper. Streamers like Netflix are also increasingly filming abroad, while producing fewer shows in general. Other states, including California and Texas, have upped incentives to compete with Georgia’s tax credits, which can cover up to 30% of production costs.

Local industry Facebook groups are filled with complaints about a lack of work, with some people griping about well-established veterans taking up the few jobs available, said Monique Younger, an Atlanta costume supervisor. Younger says her work is less than half what it once was, making her “feel a little bit useless.”

Jen Farris, an Atlanta native and longtime location scout, said she used to reject offers because she had too much work. Now, she’s navigating two- or three-month gaps in between projects, forcing her to “watch her pennies.”

“You just pray that you have nested away enough to float a little bit,” she said.

Training crews for an uncertain future

Despite the bleak landscape, Shadowbox Studios, one of metro Atlanta’s largest soundstage operators, is betting on the area’s future and has urged local filmmakers and industry leaders to rethink what’s possible.

Shadowbox has been pitching its mammoth spaces to everyone from indie filmmakers to content creators and esports organizers. But it also wants to make sure the city’s crew base remains robust.

Atlanta has for years served as the country’s “antidote” to Hollywood blockbusters moving overseas, said Shadowbox COO Mike Mosallam, pointing to the city’s experienced crews, comparatively lower production costs, extensive soundstage space and diverse landscapes. Keeping that talent pipeline strong is key to keeping more productions from leaving, he said.

In November, Shadowbox hosted about 25 Black college students for Backlot Academy, a program launched in 2022 to diversify the ranks of professions where personal connections often determine who gets hired.

Veteran crew members taught the participants how to decipher call sheets, use walkie-talkie lingo and survive 12-hour days on their feet. Participants could enroll for free in a multiweek digital course on the ins and outs of production and get mentorship as they try to book their first gig.

Trainee Julian Williams grew up in Atlanta and watched his city become a playground for Hollywood. One of the “Alvin and the Chipmunks” movies was even filmed on his street. Now a 24-year-old digital media student at Georgia Piedmont Technical College, Williams is determined to break into the industry as a production assistant, with the hope of one day becoming an assistant director.

He’s prepared to follow his film dreams wherever they lead, but for now, he’s betting on Atlanta and its collaborative film community.

“People are genuinely helpful and willing to share what they know,” Williams said.

Among those helping Williams and the other trainees was Joseph Jones, a Backlot alumnus who credits Shadowbox with helping him embark on a rewarding career as a production assistant. “It changed my life,” said Jones, 53, who spent years working in hotels but always knew he wanted to work on films.

But Shadowbox officials aren’t downplaying reality: The industry is down, especially in Atlanta. On the day of the training, just one of Shadowbox’s nine soundstages was booked for a production, said Jeremiah Cullen, director of sales.

Cullen said Shadowbox has been forced to adapt, cutting deals to meet filmmakers’ budgets while frequently calling former clients to see how they can fit their needs.

“Hey, we miss you on the lot,” he tells them. “You got anything cooking?”

Searching for a reset

Ratledge grew up loving movies, too, especially when, as a 9-year-old, he saw his rural Indiana town of Milan immortalized in 1986’s “Hoosiers.” He has continued to reach out to his network, but he’s ready to move on.

Ratledge said he isn’t looking for a miracle — just one steady TV job that would give him breathing room to stabilize his finances and figure out his next move. A five- or six-month series, he said, would allow him

to restore his health insurance, file for bankruptcy and "hit the reset button."

"I don't think I'm any different than the people who worked in Detroit when the auto industry collapsed in the '70s and everything went overseas," he said.

It's a concern even President Donald Trump has weighed in on, calling last year for tariffs aimed at keeping film production in the U.S. — a plan that experts have called vague and impractical.

Thomas, of the Georgia Film Office, said that business is up significantly from the last fiscal year. She partially credits the rebound to a new state law that allows Georgia's tax incentives to apply to more types of productions, including short-form vertical videos and free ad-supported streaming channels like Tubi.

Some Atlanta veterans still see a path forward, including Farris, the location scout. She said too many talented, creative people are in Atlanta for it all to simply fade away.

"People moved their families here. They're raising children here. This wasn't just about film," she said. "It changed our landscape — it brought in brilliant new minds. Artists. Creators. And I really believe Georgia will find a way to foster an entirely new wave of artistic possibility."

Smaller portions are a big restaurant trend as customers watch their budgets and waistlines

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

The biggest new restaurant trend is small.

Special menus with petite, less expensive portions are popping up all over, from large chains like Olive Garden and The Cheesecake Factory to trendy urban eateries and farm-to-fork dining rooms.

Restaurants hope that offering smaller servings beyond the children's menu will meet many different diners' needs. Some people want to spend less when they go out. Others are looking for healthier options or trying to lose weight. Younger consumers tend to snack more throughout the day and eat smaller meals, said Maeve Webster, the president of culinary consulting firm Menu Matters.

"These are really driven by, I think, changes in the way people are thinking about their relationship with food, the way they spend money on food, what is a good value and what's not," Webster said.

Looking for value

Beth Tipton, the co-owner of Daniel Girls Farmhouse Restaurant in Connersville, Indiana, introduced an eight-item Mini Meals menu last fall after several customers requested smaller portions. The menu, which includes daily specials like a half piece of meatloaf with green beans, mashed potatoes and gravy for \$8, now accounts for about 20% of the restaurant's orders, she said.

Older adults make up about half of the restaurant's clientele, Tipton said, and some customers told her the regular menu was a stretch for their budgets. As someone who underwent weight-loss surgery, she also knew from experience that many restaurants won't allow adults to order from their children's menus.

"We wanted it to be available to all without the word 'kids meals' attached," Tipton said. "With the rising costs all around us we wanted to help in any way we can, and this is a great option."

Eating out and GLP-1s

Some restaurants are adding menus to court users of GLP-1 weight-loss and diabetes drugs like Zepbound, Wegovy, Ozempic and Mounjaro.

Last fall, restaurateur Barry Gutin ran into two different friends who told him they were taking GLP-1s and struggling to find restaurant meals that met their dietary needs and smaller appetites. GLP-1 users tend to eat less, so they need nutritionally dense foods that are low in fat and high in protein and fiber.

Gutin, the co-owner of Cuba Libre Restaurant and Rum Bar in Philadelphia, Washington, Atlantic City, New Jersey, and Orlando, Florida, reached out to a doctor who specializes in weight loss and to Cuba Libre's culinary director, Angel Roque. Over the next month, they developed the chain's GLP-Wonderful menu, which is available during dinner.

The menu has five classic Cuban options. Roque said the pollo asado on Cuba Libre's regular menu has nearly 1,000 calories; on the GLP-1 menu, that's slimmed down to 400 calories, but heavy on protein and

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fiber. He said it was also important to keep the GLP-1 meals flavorful and colorful, to stimulate appetites.

"Many times when people are on those kind of regimes, they feel that they can't do the same as everybody else. So we wanted to show them, yes, at Cuba Libre, you can," Roque said.

Gutin said the menu has increased business. He estimated that 10 to 20 groups at each location every week have at least one person who requests the GLP-Wonderful menu.

"People say, 'Thank you for serving us,'" Gutin said.

Big chains go small

Olive Garden, whose seven-item "Lighter Portions" menu rolled out nationwide in January, said GLP-1 users were one consideration. The Italian-style restaurant chain also wanted to appeal to patrons pursuing healthier diets or more affordable meals, said Rick Cardenas, the president and CEO of Olive Garden's parent company, Darden Restaurants.

"There is a consumer group out there that believes in abundance, but abundance is different for everybody," Cardenas said in September during a conference call with investors. "So consumers can choose. We're not changing our entire menu to make it a smaller portion."

The Asian fusion chain P.F. Chang's began offering medium-sized portions last fall. The Cheesecake Factory added smaller, lower-priced Bites and Bowls to its menu last summer, while TGI Fridays recently began testing an "Eat Like A Kid" menu with smaller portions.

A long-term change

Smaller portions aren't a new concept. Twenty years ago, small-plate tapas restaurants were all the rage, for instance.

But to Webster, the menu consultant, the scaled-down dishes appearing now feel like a longer-term shift. For one thing, the trend is not tied to any particular cuisine. Webster also thinks consumers are thinking more about food waste than they used to, and smaller portions can alleviate some of their concerns.

"I think it is a core need that consumers have, and a demand that has been lingering under the surface for a long time because restaurant meals, particularly at chains, have become so large," she said. "Sure, it sounds great to take leftovers home, but they never taste as good."

During a recent visit to Shelburne, Vermont, from his home in North Carolina, Jack Pless was delighted to see the Teeny Tuesday menu at Barkeaters Restaurant, which specializes in locally sourced food. Pless, who's in his 60s and used to own a restaurant, said he can't eat as much as he used to at meals.

"So many times you go out to restaurants, especially me or my wife, and we'll take home a box and it'll sit in the refrigerator for two, three days and start to grow a beard," he said.

Julie Finestone, the co-owner of Barkeaters, said she introduced the Teeny Tuesday menu last month to bring in more weekday business during the winter. She was concerned about the cost of offering lower-priced food options, like \$12 reuben sliders, but said the decision has brought in more business than she expected.

Finestone said she's pretty confident Teeny Tuesday will become a year-round fixture.

"Some people, it's dietary. Some have smaller appetites. Some people don't like to overindulge in the middle of the week," Finestone said. "I think that it just spoke to people."

NFL free agency: Panthers, 49ers, Patriots, Jets and Rams are early winners

By ROB MAADDI AP Pro Football Writer

Winning free agency doesn't guarantee success.

It's still a good start.

NFL teams have committed billions of dollars in free agency, hoping the players they've added can help them win a Super Bowl.

Some of the more aggressive teams — the Raiders and Titans — would be happy if new players just make them more competitive after futile seasons.

There have been several surprises, including a voided blockbuster trade that sent star edge rusher Maxx

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Crosby back to the Raiders.

Here's some early winners and losers:

WINNERS: Carolina Panthers

The NFC South champion Panthers added edge rusher Jaelan Phillips (\$120 million) and linebacker Devin Lloyd (\$45 million), two of the best players available at their positions. Phillips and Lloyd join interior lineman Derrick Brown and cornerback Jaycee Horn to give Carolina top players at each level on defense.

The Panthers lost defensive lineman A'Shawn Robinson, running back Rico Dowdle and center Cade Mays.

WINNERS: San Francisco 49ers

The 49ers snagged six-time Pro Bowl receiver Mike Evans from Tampa Bay on a three-year deal that could be worth \$60.4 million but only includes \$16.3 million guaranteed over one year, according to a person who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the details weren't public. San Francisco also acquired defensive tackle Osa Odighizuwa from Dallas for a third-round pick; added swing tackle Vederian Lowe and center Brett Toth; and re-signed tight end Jake Tonges and kicker Eddy Piniero.

The 32-year-old Evans can still be an elite player in coach Kyle Shanahan's system, giving Brock Purdy a top target.

The Niners lost wideout Kendrick Bourne.

WINNERS: New England Patriots

An excellent offseason last year helped the Patriots win 10 more games and reach the Super Bowl. They've followed up with another strong spending spree, adding wideout Romeo Doubs (\$70 million), guard Alijah Vera-Tucker (\$42 million), Pro Bowl safety Kevin Byard (\$9 million), edge rusher Dre'Mont Jones (\$39.5 million), fullback Reggie Gilliam, tight end Julian Hill, safety Mike Brown and linebacker K.J. Britt.

They traded center Garrett Bradbury and lost defensive lineman Khyiris Tonga, tight end Austin Hooper and safety Jaylinn Hawkins.

WINNERS: New York Jets

Geno Smith is back in New York and the Jets strengthened their defense by acquiring veteran safety Minkah Fitzpatrick and defensive lineman T'Vondre Sweat in other trades and signing two-time Pro Bowl linebacker Demario Davis and edge rusher Joseph Ossai (\$34.5 million).

They also signed defensive tackle David Onyemata, edge Kingsley Enagbare, safety Dane Belton and cornerback Nashon Wright, giving Aaron Glenn several new players to bolster the defense. Left guard Dylan Parham fills a vacancy on the offensive line and backup tackle Max Mitchell returns.

The Jets lost linebacker Quincy Williams, guards Vera-Tucker and John Simpson and kicker Nick Folk.

WINNERS: Los Angeles Rams

After trading for cornerback Trent McDuffie, the Rams signed cornerback Jaylen Watson and re-signed safety Kam Curl to further boost the secondary.

Tight end Tyler Higbee returns to provide depth and long snapper Joe Cardona arrives to help on special teams.

LOSERS: Tampa Bay Buccaneers

They lost Evans not over money but because he wanted a new challenge and views the 49ers as closer to winning. The defense lost a pair of starters in cornerback Jamel Dean and defensive lineman Logan Hall.

The Buccaneers signed Robinson to improve the defensive line, linebacker Alex Anzalone, running back Kenneth Gainwell and backup quarterback Jake Browning.

LOSERS: Philadelphia Eagles

The two-time defending NFC East champions make this list because they lost three starters on defense: Phillips, linebacker Nakobe Dean, safety Reed Blankenship.

The Eagles signed cornerback Riq Woolen and tight end Johnny Mundt and re-signed tight end Grant Calcaterra.

They gave defensive tackle Jordan Davis a contract extension and have to extend several young stars on a defense that dominated Kansas City in the Super Bowl two years ago. Philadelphia can't pay everyone, and general manager Howie Roseman always finds a way to compensate for losing talented players.

LOSERS: Jacksonville Jaguars

The AFC South champions lost Lloyd, running back Travis Etienne and cornerback Greg Newsome. They've signed backup running back Chris Rodriguez Jr. and retained cornerback Montaric Brown and linebacker Dennis Gardeck.

The Jaguars have more work to do in the offseason.

Zelenskyy says Ukraine awaits White House sign-off on US drone production deal

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine is awaiting White House approval for a major drone production agreement proposed by Kyiv last year, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Thursday, as countries scramble to modernize their air defenses after the Iran war exposed shortcomings.

The proposed U.S.-Ukraine deal would cover various types of drones and air defenses that operate as a single system capable of protecting against swarms of hundreds or even thousands of Iranian-designed Shahed drones and missiles, Zelenskyy said in a message on social media.

"We have not yet had the opportunity to sign this document," Zelenskyy said.

Russia, which invaded its neighbor just over four years ago, has fired more than 57,000 Shahed drones at Ukraine, the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry said earlier this week. It launched more than 800 drones and decoys in its biggest nighttime barrage of Ukraine.

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

A Patriot air defense missile costs \$3 million–\$4 million, while a Shahed costs about \$130,000–\$150,000, Zelenskyy said during a visit to Romania, adding that the United States produces about 60–65 Patriot missiles per month.

Ukraine has pioneered the development of cut-price drone killers, some of which cost a few thousand dollars, that have rewritten the air defense rule book. The conflict unfolding in the Middle East might prompt American officials to sign the drone production proposal, Zelenskyy said.

Ukraine is keen to lock in future foreign support for its ongoing effort to thwart Russia's invasion, and drone production agreements could bring Kyiv some diplomatic leverage in negotiations with Moscow.

U.S.-mediated talks seeking to stop Europe's biggest conflict since World War II are on hold due to the Iran war, though they could resume next week, according to the Ukrainian leader.

Russia's oil earnings boosted by Iran war

Zelenskyy was in NATO member Romania a day before he visits French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris, as new research indicated Russian oil revenue that helps drive its invasion of Ukraine has risen since the Iran war began.

Russia's daily revenue from oil sales during the Iran conflict, which has brought a sharp increase in the price of crude, has been on average 14% higher than in February, according to the nonprofit Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air. Oil revenue is crucial for Moscow's war effort.

Russia has been earning 510 million euros (\$588 million) every day this month from oil and liquefied natural gas exports, according to Isaac Levi of the CREA. Most Russian LNG goes to the European Union, while China, Turkey and India currently make up 90% of all Russia's crude oil exports, he told The Associated Press in an interview.

The windfall is boosting the Russian economy, which previously was feeling the pinch of international sanctions, he said.

Macron's office said his talks with the Ukrainian leader will focus on efforts to counter Russia's so-called shadow fleet of tankers that are shipping oil in violation of international sanctions but are hard to stop.

Zelenskyy met in Bucharest with Romanian President Nicușor Dan, who told a news conference that the two countries signed documents for joint drone production and energy sector cooperation.

Ukraine has exported a significant amount of its grain through Romania during the war, and Bucharest has provided energy support to Kyiv as Moscow's forces blast Ukraine's power grid.

Ukraine targets Russian energy sites

Long-range drones operated by a special operations unit of the Ukraine Security Service struck a major oil depot and transshipment terminal in southern Russia's Krasnodar region, a senior Ukrainian official claimed Thursday.

The attack dealt a significant blow to Russia's fuel logistics, according to the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to comment publicly.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that a separate drone attack on a compressor station serving a natural gas pipeline to Turkey was an "absolutely reckless action."

The Russian Defense Ministry said air defenses shot down 10 Ukrainian drones overnight around the compressor station in the Krasnodar region. It said there was no damage to the facility.

The islands off Iran's southern coast are key to its economy and security. What to know about them

By SAM METZ Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Iran's parliament speaker warned on Thursday that attacks on the Persian Gulf islands that form Iran's southern maritime frontier would provoke a new level of retaliation, underscoring how central they are to the country's economy and security.

In a social media post, Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf said Iran "will abandon all restraint" if the islands come under attack and said U.S. President Donald Trump will be responsible for "the blood of American soldiers."

Although they account for only a small share of Iran's territory, the islands carry outsized importance because of their oil facilities and strategic location.

It was not clear what prompted Qalibaf's remarks, but he was not the first to raise the possibility of an attack on the islands since the Iran war began Feb. 28.

The U.S. and Israel both have suggested expanding their list of targets beyond military and nuclear sites. Officials in Israel's government haven't publicly referenced the island, but opposition leader Yair Lapid has called for striking energy infrastructure on Kharg Island.

"That is what will cripple Iran's economy and topple the regime," he wrote on X last Sunday.

Here's what to know about Iran's islands in the Persian Gulf up to the Strait of Hormuz:

Kharg Island

The small coral island about 21 miles (33 kilometers) off Iran's coast is the primary terminal through which nearly all of Iran's oil exports pass. Iran has exported 13.7 million barrels since the war started, and multiple tankers were seen on satellite imagery Wednesday loading at Kharg, according to TankerTrackers.com, maritime intelligence company.

Iran gets a significant share of its revenue from oil, with shipments flowing to countries like China. A strike on Kharg would not only damage Iran's current government but also could undermine the viability of whatever might eventually replace it.

The island has storage tanks in the south, along with housing for thousands of workers. Gazelles roam freely near the refineries and depots that make Kharg one of Iran's most valuable — and sensitive — assets.

Petras Katinas, an energy researcher at the Royal United Services Institute, said Kharg Island was critical to funding Iran's government and military.

If Iran were to lose control of Kharg, it would be difficult for the country to function, even though the island isn't a military or nuclear target, he said.

"It doesn't matter which regime is in power — new or old," Katinas said. A takeover would give the U.S. leverage over negotiations with Iran because the island is "the main node" of its economy.

JPMorgan's global commodity research team warned this week in an investment note that a strike on the island would have major economic implications.

"The island has often been viewed as a critical vulnerability, yet it has rarely been directly targeted," it said. "A direct strike would immediately halt the bulk of Iran's crude exports, likely triggering severe retali-

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ation in the Strait of Hormuz or against regional energy infrastructure.”

Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunb

The three tiny islands have long been a front line in tensions between Iran and Gulf states allied with the United States.

Iranian forces seized the islands in November 1971, days after the United Kingdom withdrew from the Gulf and just before the sheikhdoms joined to form the United Arab Emirates. Iran maintains military assets and garrisons on the islands.

The territorial dispute over the islands remains one of the Gulf’s most persistent flashpoints.

Qeshm Island

The largest island in the Persian Gulf sits near the Strait of Hormuz and is home to about 150,000 residents. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said the U.S. struck a desalination plant on the island on March 8 — a claim not acknowledged by Washington.

“Attacking Iran’s infrastructure is a dangerous move with grave consequences,” Araghchi warned in a March 7 post on X. “The U.S. set this precedent, not Iran.”

The desalination plant supplies water to about 30 villages.

In Bahrain — home to the U.S. Navy’s 5th Fleet — the Interior Ministry said an Iranian drone had “caused material damage” to a desalination plant there the next day, although water supplies were never disrupted.

AP Exclusive: Smithsonian museum will revamp its slavery exhibit after artifact loan runs out

By GARY FIELDS, RIVER ZHANG and JACQUELYN MARTIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Smithsonian museum exhibit about the maritime journey that millions of Africans were forced to take across the Atlantic to slavery in the Americas will change later this month, when a remnant from one of the first sunken slave ships ever recovered is taken off display in Washington.

The National Museum of African American History and Culture says a timber piece of the slave ship, the São José-Paquete de Africa, on display in its “Slavery and Freedom” exhibit, will soon be prepared for a trip back to its home museum in South Africa.

The 33-pound (15-kilogram) timber piece has been prominently displayed — seemingly suspended over a dark void, a ballast at its side — as part of a loan agreement to the museum since it opened in 2016. The agreement, examined by The Associated Press, was initially five years and then was extended another five in 2021, ending July 1.

The ship remnant will be among several items sent back to the Iziko Museums of South Africa later this year. Because of its delicate nature, a special crate has to be built for its transport.

Other items from the ship, including the ballasts that served as counterweights for the human cargo, are remaining on display and will be returned to South Africa in two years. A manifest of the cargo on the ship will replace the timber piece.

The last day for museum visitors to see the timber piece on display is March 22.

A relic of the trans-Atlantic slave trade was recovered in 2015

The São José, a Portuguese vessel bound for Brazil with more than 400 captives from Mozambique, struck a rock and sank in December 1794 off the coast of Cape Town, South Africa. Half of the people aboard perished. Survivors were resold into slavery in the Western Cape, according to the Smithsonian.

Recovered in 2015, the ship was identified and studied through the Slave Wrecks Project, an international network of institutions that confirmed it was associated with the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The ship is among the first known wreckage of such a ship that was recovered, in which enslaved Africans died.

The São José piece is in the lowest public level of the museum and is part of the larger “Slavery and Freedom” exhibit, which focuses on the slave trade, including the ships and conditions of transport, as well as artifacts, such as shackles.

The exhibit addresses the Middle Passage, an especially fraught part of the Atlantic Ocean crossing where many of the captives died. While there is no exact count, the number of people who perished during the

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journey is in the millions, according to Paul Gardullo, the assistant director of history at the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Slavery exhibit changes unrelated to Trump museum review

The alteration of the slavery exhibit comes at a time when any changes related to history and the American story at federal parks, museums or other public spaces are being scrutinized. President Donald Trump's administration has focused on putting the U.S. in a good light as the country prepares to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

The displays, exhibits and programming of several Smithsonian museums are under review as part of an executive order signed in March 2025 by the Republican president, titled "Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History." The National Museum of African American History and Culture is one of the institutions named in the order.

Michelle Commander, the museum's deputy director, told the AP the exhibit change is entirely related to the loan agreement but understood the timing might raise questions.

"That's why we're being transparent in this moment, because we are aware that there are those kinds of questions," Commander said. "But, as we've said, this is really about the conservation needs of that item."

As part of the loan, Gardullo said, the South African government has a robust cultural patrimony law that dictates how its artifacts and historical materials are treated and how long they can be loaned out.

"The wooden materials are more fragile, and they need a little more close care," he said.

'Extraordinarily powerful'

Recent visitors to the National Museum of African American History and Culture spoke of the power of the display with the slave ship timber, unaware that it would be altered shortly.

Lines wait to enter the darkened gallery, entitled the Middle Passage, where there is a solemnity as people study the dark space where the timber sits next to a ship's ballast. The tangible nature of the exhibit takes it out of textbooks and into reality, said Krystina Hernandez, who was there chaperoning her 7-year-old son's schoolmates.

Anehtra Reynolds, from northern Virginia, was emotional as she exited the area. She said the presentation, including the artifacts and the darkness of the gallery, gave her a "piece of what they felt in terms of their misery."

"I think there was a sign in there that mentioned there were some slaves who starved themselves to death in hopes that they would, when they died, they would be returned to their land," Reynolds said.

Jim Carnes, who was in Washington visiting family from Birmingham, Alabama, said he was familiar with much of the information because he has worked in civil rights education in Birmingham and Montgomery, two places central to the nation's civil rights history.

"The artifacts are extraordinarily powerful," he said, adding that he's left feeling sadness and anger, not just at the conditions of the enslaved people but at the current push by the federal government to "deny this ever happened."

Jorge Carvajal, who is originally from Colombia but lives with his wife in south Florida, said seeing the exhibit silenced the stereotypes, especially that Black people are unreasonably angry.

"Empathy is what I'm trying to say. This will help people empathize a lot more. I mean, at least you would hope," he said.

Commander said the staff at the museum will work to make sure that the exhibit continues to have the same impact with the remaining artifacts and displays.

"The story does not leave the museum because this timber is going to be returned to its owners," she said.

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

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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 commands 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

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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 lists," lists of protected sites in other countries, such as hospitals, schools, churches and mosques, 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.

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

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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.

Drivers wonder if they should go electric as the war spikes gas prices

By ALEXA ST. JOHN and TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

When Kevin Ketels bought an electric 2026 Chevrolet Blazer last year, he wasn't thinking about the cost of gas. He just thought EVs were better and "wanted to be part of the future." Now that the Iran war is spiking prices at the pump, the Detroit man is happy he is no longer filling up his 11-year-old gas-powered SUV.

"Electricity can go up, but it won't go up nearly as much as gas will and it won't go up nearly as fast, either," said Ketels, 55, an assistant professor of global supply chain management at Wayne State University.

Experts say prolonged high gas prices may drive some EV interest and sales, especially if drivers assume their electricity prices won't be affected by the crises.

But many factors influence consumer EV purchases — and electricity rates.

Are EV owners truly insulated from price hikes?

Drivers of gas-powered vehicles are much more vulnerable to fluctuating prices that result from global conflict than those who charge their cars. The national average for a gallon of regular gas this week was \$3.57, up from \$2.94 a month ago, according to AAA.

Meanwhile, "residential electricity prices are regulated and are much less volatile than gasoline prices," said University of California, Davis economics professor Erich Muehlegger. "As a result, EV owners are largely unaffected by oil price shocks."

But experts say electricity prices have been increasing nationally for a variety of reasons, including surging power demand from new data centers.

"This is an inflationary event," Holt Edwards, principal in Bracewell's Policy Resolution Group, said of the war. "Is this the driver in electricity prices? I think probably not. But it's certainly a contributing factor."

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To what extent oil and gas conflicts could translate to the electricity sector is yet to be seen.

What about how different grids are powered?

When it comes to the electricity an EV owner is tapping, much of the cost depends on which sources of electricity are in a local grid's power mix, experts say.

Because regulators set residential electricity prices annually, most households are sheltered from month-to-month changes in natural gas costs. Though experts say higher natural gas prices can increase the cost of generating electricity, natural gas prices haven't risen as quickly or as much as oil prices have recently.

Those are just two of many energy sources — including coal, nuclear and renewables — that power the electric grid.

"The energy component varies depending on the energy you're using and the price of the energy that you're using to generate electricity," said Pierpaolo Cazzola, an energy expert at Columbia University's Center on Global Energy Policy. "What happens is that in the U.S., the variation of the price of the energy component is smaller than it is elsewhere."

The experts said persistent war could affect electricity bills in the future. And that is all the more reason for countries to transition to clean power, they said.

"Clean power and electrification combined is what provides the most security," said Euan Graham, an analyst at energy think tank Ember.

Michael B. Klein, a 56-year-old software developer in Evanston, Illinois, has driven EVs for the past eight years to save on fuel costs and because of environmental concerns.

Every time electrical grid efficiency improves — especially as renewables are added — "I get that benefit no matter what," said Klein, who drives a Chevy Bolt. "They can improve the efficiency of gas engines, but you have to get a new car in order to reap the benefit of that."

So will EV demand rise?

Several experts say high gasoline prices are a strong driver of EV sales, particularly if high prices persist. Drivers also consider more gasoline-efficient hybrid vehicles during these times.

Car-shopping resource Edmunds analyzed consumer shopping data for the week starting March 2, after the Iran war had begun. They found that interest in hybrids, plug-in hybrids and battery EVs accounted for 22.4% of all vehicle research activity on their site that week, up from 20.7% the previous week. Analysts also looked back at the last major nationwide fuel price surges in 2022, and they saw that consideration of electrified vehicles consideration rose sharply then, too.

But whether this means more EV purchases depends on whether buyers expect to save not just now but in the future, experts say.

Adding to the complexity: A sudden increase in EV demand could drive up prices, Graham said.

"I think the real step change would be in whether this causes governments to shift tax, tariff policies around EVs," Graham said. Doing so would help reduce fossil fuel dependence, he said.

Does driving electric really save money?

Pretty much.

People who buy EVs have a "really substantial" gas savings over the life of their vehicles even without government tax credits, said Peter Zalzal, an attorney with Environmental Defense Fund.

"We're talking about thousands and thousands of dollars" in savings, Zalzal said. "And as gas prices increase, those savings are only greater. Fuel costs are a big piece of overall vehicle costs, and increases in fuel prices have significant impacts on people."

However, the upfront cost of a new EV is still more than that of a gasoline-powered vehicle; new EVs sold for an average of \$55,300 last month, while new vehicles overall sold for an average \$49,353, according to auto-buying resource Kelley Blue Book. Some experts also expressed national security concerns with EVs because China dominates significant parts of the EV supply chain.

Ketels, the EV owner and professor, said he believes EVs and renewable energy should be a strategic priority for individuals and the U.S. because they could be produced domestically "and we don't have those fluctuations and those worries."

But because the federal government has withdrawn many incentives for both, "it puts us at a disadvantage globally," Ketels said. "I think it's been a terrible mistake to withdraw these incentives and to attack the sustainable energy industry," and the war "is just making it that much more obvious."

Google overhauls its Maps app, adding in more AI features to help people get around

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

Google Maps will depend more heavily on artificial intelligence to help people figure out where they want to go and the best way to get there as part of a major redesign unveiled on Thursday.

The overhaul driven by Google's Gemini technology will introduce two AI features into a digital mapping service used by more than 2 billion people worldwide.

One tool called Ask Maps will expand upon conversational abilities that Google brought to the service last November, giving suggestions to users looking for things such as nearby places to charge their devices, cafes with short lines or a detailed itinerary for a road trip involving several stops and excursions.

Gemini's recommendations will draw upon a database spanning more than 300 million places and reviews from more than 500 million contributors that have been accumulated since Google Maps' debut more than 20 years ago. Google executives declined to answer a question about whether the company eventually plans to sell ads to boost businesses' chances of being displayed in Ask Maps' recommendations. Ask Maps initially will be available on Google Maps' mobile app for iPhones and Android software in the U.S. and India, before expanding to personal computers and other countries.

In what Google executives are billing as the biggest change to the maps' driving directions, Gemini has also created a new tool dubbed Immersive Navigation that will present a three-dimensional perspective designed to give users a better grasp of where they are at any moment in time. The 3D renderings created by Gemini will include landmarks such as notable buildings, medians in the roads and other aspects of the terrain that drivers are seeing around them as they drive to help them get their bearings more quickly.

Google believes its AI guardrails are now strong enough to prevent the Gemini technology underlying Immersive Navigation from fabricating bogus places to go, a malfunction known within the industry as a "hallucination."

Immersive Navigation is also supposed to help Google Maps more clearly explain the pros and cons of different driving routes to the same recommendation, as well as point to the best places to park once a user arrives at a designated destination. The new AI-powered navigation will only be available in the U.S. initially, on Google Maps' mobile app for the iPhone and Android, as well as cars equipped with options to activate CarPlay and Android Auto.

The increased reliance on AI in Google Maps follows the company's introduction of more Gemini technology to make two of its other most popular products — Gmail and the Chrome web browser — more proactive and helpful to their billions of users. The expansion underscores Google's confidence in the Gemini 3 model that the Mountain View, California, company released late last year as part of an intensifying battle for AI supremacy with up-and-coming rivals such as OpenAI and Anthropic.

In rural America, a teacher pipeline from abroad starts to dry up

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 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.

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"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 one-time \$100,000 fee on new 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 noncertified 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

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\$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.

Today in History: March 13, Francis becomes first non-European pope in over 1,250 years

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, March 13, the 72nd day of 2026. There are 293 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On March 13, 2013, Jorge Bergoglio of Argentina was elected pope, choosing the papal name Francis. He was the first pontiff from the Americas, and the first from outside Europe since Pope Gregory III's death in the year 741. Pope Francis died on April 21, 2025.

Also on this date:

In 1781, the seventh planet of the solar system, Uranus, was discovered by astronomer William Herschel.

In 1925, the Tennessee General Assembly approved the Butler Act, which prohibited public schools from teaching the theory of evolution. (Gov. Austin Peay signed the measure on March 21; the bill was challenged in court later that year in the famous Scopes Monkey Trial. Tennessee ultimately repealed the law in 1967.)

In 1946, U.S. Army Pfc. Sadao Munemori was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for sacrificing himself to save fellow soldiers from a grenade explosion in Seravezza, Italy; he was the only Japanese American service member so recognized in the immediate aftermath of World War II.

In 1954, the pivotal Battle of Dien Bien Phu began during the First Indochina War as Viet Minh forces attacked French troops, who were defeated nearly two months later.

In 1996, a gunman entered an elementary school in Dunblane, Scotland, and opened fire, killing 16 children and a teacher before killing himself; it remains the deadliest mass shooting in British history.

In 2020, President Donald Trump declared a national emergency in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2020, Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old Black woman, was fatally shot in her Louisville, Kentucky, apartment during a botched raid by plainclothes narcotics detectives searching for a suspected drug dealer; no drugs were found, and the warrant used to enter by force was later found to be based on false information.

Today's Birthdays: Songwriter Mike Stoller is 93. Singer-songwriter Neil Sedaka is 87. Actor William H. Macy is 76. Actor Dana Delany is 70. Republican U.S. Sen. John Hoeven of North Dakota is 69. Bassist Adam Clayton (U2) is 66. Jazz musician Terence Blanchard is 64. Actor Annabeth Gish is 55. Rapper-actor Common is 54. Actor Emile Hirsch is 41. Olympic skiing gold medalist Mikaela Shiffrin is 31. Rapper Jack Harlow is 28. Tennis star Coco Gauff is 22.