

Groton Daily Independent

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The Groton Area School District will be opening 2 hours late on Monday, March 16, 2026. OST will be open at 7AM

Monday, March 16

Senior Menu: Lasagna, broccoli, fruit, bread stick.
School Breakfast: Eggs.
School Lunch: Sloppy joes, baked beans.
Groton Senior Citizens, 1 p.m., Community Center
Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Christian Literature Circle, 7:30 p.m.
1st Grade Boys Basketball Practice, 4:30 p.m., elementary gym
HS Baseball Practice, 6 p.m., HS Gym

Tuesday, March 17

St. PATRICK'S DAY
Senior Menu: Baked turkey crunch, peas, fruit, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Scones.
School Lunch: Chicken nuggets, mashed potatoes.
City Council meeting, 7 p.m., Cit Hall

Groton Daily Independent
PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445
Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460



St. John's Lutheran: Quilting, 9 a.m.
United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.
HS Baseball Practice, 6 p.m., HS Gym
Biogirls, 3:45 p.m., elementary gym
National Honor Society Ceremony, 6 p.m.
Northwestern CDE

Wednesday, March 18

Senior Menu: Ham, roasted potatoes, green beans, fruit, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza.
School Lunch: Pizza crunchers.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.; Soup Supper (League hosts), 6 p.m.; League, 6:30 p.m.; Lenten Service, 7 p.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.; Lent Supper, 6 p.m.; Lent Service at St. John's, 7 p.m.
United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton Ad Council, 7 p.m.
4th Grade NAEP Testing
Pickleball, 5:30 p.m. Elementary Gym
6th Grade Boys Basketball, 6 p.m., HS Gym
Groton C&MA: Kid's Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study, 7 p.m.

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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.

One Win After Another

"One Battle After Another" was the big winner at the 2026 Academy Awards last night, taking home the ceremony's top prize of best picture, along with five other awards, including best director (Paul Thomas Anderson), best supporting actor (Sean Penn), and best adapted screenplay.

The other big winner of the night was "Sinners," which won four awards including best actor (Michael B. Jordan) and best original screenplay. Jessie Buckley continued her sweep this awards season, winning best actress for her role in "Hamnet." Meanwhile, "Golden" became the first K-pop song to win an Oscar for best original song. See the full list of winners here.

Iran War Week 3

Israel launched a wave of new airstrikes against Iran and Lebanon yesterday, claiming more than 7,000 strikes since the war began late last month. The country says it plans to strike thousands of additional targets, anticipating at least three more weeks of hostilities.

The updates come as the US military struck Kharg Island, vital to Iran's oil industry. The US and Iran said those strikes did not impact Iran's oil infrastructure. However, President Donald Trump threatened further action if Iran continued to block the Strait of Hormuz, which normally transports 20% of the world's oil. Trump called on China, France, Japan, South Korea, the UK, and others to help secure ships' passage.

Meanwhile, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi denied Trump's claim that the country is interested in a ceasefire. He also said Russia and China were providing Iran with military cooperation.

March Madness Begins

The 68-team field for the 2026 men's college basketball tournament was revealed yesterday, with Duke, Michigan, Arizona, and defending champion Florida grabbing No. 1 seeds. The overall top-seeded Blue Devils are led by freshman Cameron Boozer—son of former star Carlos Boozer—widely considered the best player in the country.

Miami (Ohio), which went 31-1 but whose strength of schedule was ranked 339, enters as an 11 seed.

On the women's side, Connecticut looks to defend last year's title while closing out its seventh perfect season (undefeated in both regular and postseason play). The Huskies are joined by UCLA, Texas, and South Carolina as the other No. 1 seeds. Each of the top 16 teams will host first- and second-round games at home locations.

Not an expert, but have a little basketball knowledge? Your odds of a perfect bracket are roughly one in 120 billion.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Italy's Jannik Sinner defeats Russia's Daniil Medvedev to win Indian Wells final; comes after Medvedev defeated World No. 1 Carlos Alcaraz in Saturday's semifinal.

US' Cameron Young wins 2026 Players Championship, PGA Tour's headline event, taking home \$4.5M.

USA beats Dominican Republic to win World Baseball Classic semifinal game and face Italy or Venezuela in Thursday's finals game; Italy and Venezuela face off tonight at 8 pm ET on FS1.

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Science & Technology

Trump administration reopens underwater oil and gas operations off the coast of Santa Barbara, California, amid oil supply disruptions; pipeline ruptured in 2015, releasing more than 100,000 gallons of oil along the coast.

Genetic mutations behind leaky blood vessels in the brains of patients with Rett syndrome identified; neurological disease affects roughly 1 in 10,000 girls, rarely seen in boys.

Simulations suggest primordial magnetic fields shortly after the Big Bang may resolve the "Hubble tension," or discrepancies in measurements of how quickly the universe is expanding.

Business & Markets

US stock markets continue downward trend Friday (S&P 500 -0.6%, Dow -0.3%, Nasdaq -0.9%) amid ongoing disruption from Iran war; S&P down 5% from record high in late January.

Brent crude oil futures close Friday above \$103 per barrel.

Meta to lay off around 20% of its workforce amid mounting AI costs; company to spend \$600B on AI infrastructure by 2028, calls proposed layoffs "theoretical".

US Treasury to receive \$10B fee from investors for facilitating the sale of TikTok's US operations to an American ownership group led by Oracle.

Politics & World Affairs

Ugandan opposition leader Bobi Wine flees the country after two months in hiding; Wine says Ugandan military was searching for him after disputing January's presidential election.

Cuban protesters vandalize Communist Party offices in the city of Moron, east of Havana, amid ongoing blackouts worsened by US fuel blockade.

Taiwan reports return of Chinese military planes near the island—more than two dozen Chinese military aircraft and at least seven naval ships—after drop in flights over recent weeks .

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Groton Area March Students of the Month



Rylee Dunker
Senior



Carlee Johnson
Junior



Kinsley Rowen
Sophomore



Brooklyn Spanier
Freshman



Cameron Feist
Eighth Grade



Elias Heilman
Eighth Grade



Lillian Davis
Seventh Grade



Avery Huber
Sixth Grade

Groton Area School works to ensure that all levels of academic instruction also include the necessary life skills teaching, practicing, and modeling that encourages essential personal life habits that are universally understood to facilitate helping our students become good human beings and citizens.

It is learning with our heads, hearts, and hands to be caring and civil, to make healthy decisions, to effectively problem solve, to be respectful and responsible, to be good citizens, and to be empathetic and ethical individuals.

Students are selected based on individual student growth in the areas of: positive behavior, citizenship, good attendance, a thirst for knowledge, and high academic standards.



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We'll finish up the roster breakdown next week, but we have to talk about this big news coming out of the Twin Cities. NFL free agency started last week, and the Vikings have been dominating the news cycle thanks to a potentially franchise-altering pickup. There were also some moves the Vikings made that left me scratching my head.

We'll start with the good news. The Vikings signed former number one overall pick Kyler Murray, who was released by the Arizona Cardinals last week. This signing has a ton of interesting threads. Does Murray fit in Kevin O'Connell's offense? What does this mean for J.J. McCarthy? What happens next year? How much does the signing actually improve the Vikings'

chances in 2026?

First, a little backstory on Kyler Murray. After throwing for 4,361 yards and 42 touchdowns, plus adding another 1,001 yards and 12 touchdowns on the ground, Murray won the 2018 Heisman award. The Arizona Cardinals took him first overall in 2019, and he proceeded to win Offensive Rookie of the Year. He was then selected to the Pro Bowl after the 2020 and 2021 seasons. Things were looking bright for Murray and the Arizona Cardinals. Then the injuries started piling up. After only missing three games in his first three seasons, Murray missed 27 games from 2022 to 2025.

Finally free of Arizona, Murray chose the Vikings. And who can blame him? Going from one of the worst-run teams in the league to a team consistently ranked as one of the best, getting to play under QB-whisperer Kevin O'Connell, getting to throw to Justin Jefferson and Jordan Addison, being protected by one of the best left tackles in the NFL... there are plenty of reasons why he chose Minnesota.

The big question is the fit. Obviously, O'Connell wouldn't have signed him if he didn't believe he could take advantage of Murray's dual-threat abilities. But it remains to be seen if the marriage can actually work. Under KOC, the Vikings have traditionally had pocket passers. Kirk Cousins and Sam Darnold are not known for their scrambling ability, but rather their ability to stand in the pocket and make throws to every level of the field. Murray, on the other hand, is a short QB (5'10") who excels when plays break down and he can improvise. There is no doubt Murray is a playmaker. Now we get to see if KOC can adjust his game plan to take advantage of his new QB's unique skillset.

So what does this mean for J.J. McCarthy, who is entering his third season after being a top-10 pick in 2024? According to KOC, Murray was brought in to compete with McCarthy, not to be the clear starter. So what this means for JJM depends entirely on the man himself. If he takes this as a challenge and improves his game, the QB1 role is still available. If he fails to keep up with (or surpass) Murray, JJM will likely be looking for a new team in 2027.

For now, the Vikings are in the best position they could hope for, all things considered. They now have two QBs to compete for the starting role. Murray is only costing them \$1.3 million (Arizona is paying the rest of his salary), while JJM is still on a rookie contract. If Murray plays well, the Vikings can re-sign him and trade McCarthy. If McCarthy plays well, they will let Murray walk and likely receive a compensatory draft pick, similar to the comp pick they received from letting Darnold walk. And, worst-case scenario, neither QB takes the job, and the Vikings keep the search going next offseason.

Other news and notes

Free agency additions:

The Vikings signed free agent CB James Pierre to a two-year deal.

Free agency losses:

WR Jalen Nailor signed with the Las Vegas Raiders.

Punter Ryan Wright signed with the New Orleans Saints.

Other offseason moves:

The Vikings re-signed linebacker Eric Wilson, safety Tavierre Thomas, and long snapper Andrew DePaola. They also tendered defensive lineman Jalen Redmond and linebacker Ivan Pace Jr.

The Vikings have re-worked the contracts of tight end T.J. Hockenson and running back Aaron Jones, keeping them both in Minnesota for the 2026 season.

The Vikings released defensive linemen Jonathan Allen and Javon Hargrave, while also releasing safety Harrison Smith (it's a procedural move to give Smith time to decide if he wants to come back for one final season).

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Single: \$40.48 per month
2-Person: \$59.78 per month
Family: \$72.43 per month
Senior/PT: \$20 per month



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Runners take off at the beginning of the Go For The Green 5K on Saturday afternoon. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

HOSA raising funds for medical mission to Belize

By Elizabeth Varin

Students in the Groton Area High School HOSA chapter are raising funds for a trip that will take their learning far beyond the classroom and into communities in need.

Seventeen students from the organization are preparing for an educational and medical mission trip to Belize, where they will staff a health clinic in an area with limited access to healthcare. The experience will allow students interested in healthcare careers to work alongside medical professionals while learning about global health and service.

To help make the trip possible, the group has organized several fundraisers in recent months, including their latest effort — Saturday's Go For The Green 5K.

According to HOSA advisor and health science teacher Brittany Hubbard, the trip will give students a unique opportunity to both serve others and gain hands-on experience in the healthcare field.

"We're going on a medical mission trip with Global Brigades, where we actually will get to staff a mobile health clinic in areas where they don't have a lot of healthcare options," Hubbard said. "So students will get the opportunity to work triage and check in, and education, and pharmacy, and observe doctors.



Kaylee Raba, Emme Fliehs and Becah Fliehs run by the skating rink on the west side of Groton during the Go For The Green 5K on Saturday afternoon. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

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And just make a difference while learning and doing things too."

While the fundraising efforts help cover travel and trip costs, Hubbart said the events are also designed to bring the community together.

"Beyond just a fundraiser, I think it's good for community involvement," she said. "I think we have tried to do things that get the community interacting with each other and our organization. And to me, that's more important than the actual fundraising outcome."

Two of the students preparing for the trip are junior Emerlee Jones and senior Jaedyn Penning. Both say they are excited for the opportunity to travel and serve others while gaining valuable experience.



Costumed racers Jaedyn Penning, Aspen Beto, Talli Wright, Gentry Pigors, and Natalia Warrington head down West Third Avenue during the Go For The Green 5K. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

(Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

"I'm excited to just help people and have that experience and get out across the world," Jones said. "It'll be a really great experience to have."

Penning agreed, noting the trip will give students the chance to experience a new culture while fulfilling the mission of their organization.

"We will get to go to a whole different country and see new things and experience new things," Penning said. "We also get to go do some fun things there and then help people, which is what our club is for."

In the months leading up to the trip, HOSA members have organized a variety of fundraisers, including several new ideas aimed at bringing more people together.

"I think we've done a really good job of finding new ones and ones that haven't always been here, like the 5K," Jones said. "We have done a lot more new ones and creative ones that want to get people interacting."

Penning added that the events have felt more like community gatherings than traditional fundraisers.

"And it's fun," Penning said. "It doesn't seem like we're trying to raise money. It's like just getting a bunch of groups of people together and doing fun things, which is exciting."



Taylor Flihs heads down North Third Street toward the finish line of the Go For The Green 5K on Saturday afternoon. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

(Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

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The students say they have been encouraged by the strong support they've received from the community.

"Oh, yeah," Jones said when asked if they've seen local support.

"We have the best community," Penning added.

Jones said the variety of events has helped bring in new participants and keep the fundraisers fresh.

"We're bringing in all different kinds of people, which is exciting, and it's good for our community," she said. "It's really nice that there's different people, because then if you ask the same people to pay money every time, then they get a little over it. So it's a really great thing."

Beyond the travel and service work, the students say they are looking forward to learning new skills and gaining experiences that could shape their future careers.

"We're going to be taught life lessons," Penning said. "We're going to be taught new things, like we're going to be taught how to do blood pressure and how to do all those things to then help people, which could help us in our futures."

Jones said the trip will also give students a new perspective on healthcare access around the world.

"I think another really good thing for us is that some of us haven't really experienced anything like where people don't have a clinic to go to," she said.



Brody Lord was one of the costumed runners at the Go For The Green 5K on Saturday afternoon. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



The top three male runners (from left: Rylan Evenson, Jayden Schwan and Riley Shellenberger) pose after the Go For The Green 5K on Saturday afternoon. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



The top three female runners (from left: Mikayla Arechigo, Andi Iverson and Taryn Traphagen) pose for a photo after the Go For The Green 5K on Saturday afternoon. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

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"It'll be really nice to see that and understand that in a new perspective."

Penning agreed, saying the experience will be eye-opening.

For Penning, one of the most important lessons she hopes to take away from the experience is an appreciation for opportunities many people often take for granted.

"I think it's, honestly, not to take life for granted," Penning said. "From what we've seen about what we're going to go do, it's like it's a whole different world. It just shows that everything we have is a privilege, and to really take that in and have that in our heart, that we get that every day."

Those interested in supporting the students' trip can contact Hubbart by phone or email (605-397-8381 or Brittany.Hubbart@k12.sd.us), or drop off a donation at the Groton Area School District office. Donors are asked to note that the contribution is designated for Groton Area HOSA's Belize trip.



The top male and female runner (Jayden Schwan and Mikayla Arechigo) pose for a photo after the Go For The Green 5K on Saturday afternoon. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



The winners of the individual and group costume contest (from left: Natalia Warrington, Gentry Pigors, Alandra Harrelson, Talli Wright, Jaedyn Penning and Aspen Beto) pose for a photo after the Go For The Green 5K. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

"Old Age, Only 10 Years Away"

Every year I ask my students, "How old is old?" The answers vary, but the most honest response I've ever received came from a patient who said, "Old is 10 years older than my age." We all tend to push aging just out of reach, as though it belongs to someone else.

As a physical therapist, professor and researcher in aging, I see the consequences of that distance every day. When we mentally place older adults in a separate category, we give ourselves permission to speak and act in ways that quietly do harm. We call someone an "old lady" without pause. We dismiss a symptom as "expected at your age." We offer the well-meaning but quietly deflating compliment that someone is doing well "for their age." Each of these small moments narrows what we believe is possible for that person.

This is ageism. Generally unintentional, ever-present in our society.

The problem is not acknowledging that aging brings real changes. It does. Health conditions, pain, and mobility challenges become more common with age, but not in some uniform pattern that warrants focus on a number. The problem is when age becomes the answer rather than the starting point. When decline is the expectation, we stop asking about goals, we stop noticing strengths and we start designing lives around an assumed limitation.

Consider a common piece of advice: move to a single-story home as you grow older. It sounds reasonable. But research tells a more nuanced story. Studies have found that those living in homes with stairs showed less decline in physical function over time compared to those without. Climbing stairs is demanding, repetitive physical work for the legs and heart. Removing that daily challenge in the name of safety may quietly accelerate the very decline we hope to prevent.

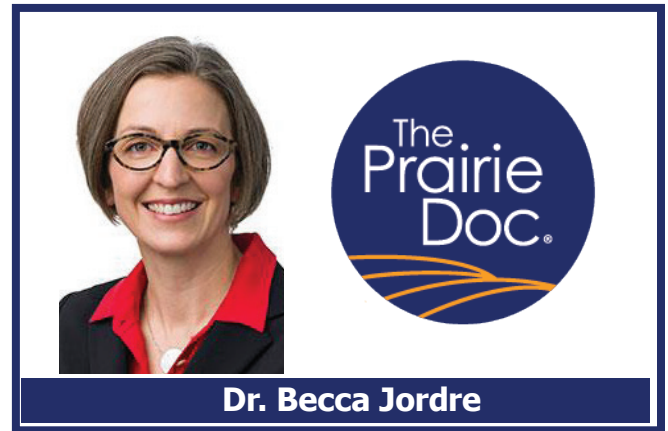
This pattern holds more broadly. Research consistently shows that vigorous exercise, not just gentle stretching or slow walks, produces the greatest health benefits as we age. Higher-intensity activity improves strength, balance, heart health and cognitive function in people well into their 80s and 90s. When we steer older adults toward only the lightest, most cautious forms of movement, we deprive them of the very stimulus their bodies need. In trying to protect, we inadvertently take away opportunity.

Language works the same way. When family members, neighbors and health care providers speak as though decline is inevitable, we coach people toward caution, avoidance and withdrawal. Expectation shapes behavior, and low expectations are their own kind of harm.

The answer is not to ignore age or pretend it doesn't matter. It is to treat aging as a human experience, seeing a person not as a number but as an individual with unique aspirations, interests and abilities.

None of us are exempt from aging. We are all just at different points on the same road. The assumptions we make about older adults today are the assumptions that may one day be made about us. That alone is reason enough to think more carefully about what we say, what we recommend, and what we decide is possible with each passing year.

Dr. Jordre is a professor of physical therapy in the School of Health Sciences at the University of South Dakota. She earned her Doctor of Physical Therapy degree from Duke University in 2002 and her Ph.D. in Health Sciences from the University of South Dakota in 2021. She is board certified in Geriatric Physical Therapy and is a Certified Exercise Expert for Aging Adults. Her research centers on healthy aging, with a particular focus on athletes age 50 and older. Follow The Prairie Doc® at www.prairiedoc.org, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Tik Tok. Prairie Doc Programming includes On Call with the Prairie Doc®, a medical Q&A show (most Thursdays at 7pm on SDPB, YouTube and streaming on Facebook), 2 podcasts, and a Radio program (on SDPB, Sundays at 6am and 1pm).



EMPLOYMENT

The City of Groton is seeking an experienced lineman to join our municipal electric department. Duties include but are not limited to maintenance, inspection, construction, and repair of the city's electrical distribution systems, street lighting, substations, and related equipment. Applicants must be citizens of the United States, have a high school diploma or GED, and possess a valid commercial driver's license (or be able to acquire CDL within 6 months of employment). Journeyman certification highly preferred.

Benefits package includes paid time off, medical insurance, life insurance, and SD Retirement. Position is open until filled.

If you are interested in applying, please email completed application/resume to city.doug@nvc.net. You can also drop off, or mail completed application/resume to Groton City Hall, 120 North Main St, Groton, SD 57445. The City of Groton is an equal opportunity employer.

EARTHTALK

River Otter Rebound: Playful Aquatic Mammals Stage Comeback Across U.S. by Ester Weinhardt

Dear EarthTalk: How are North American river otters faring these days? – L. C., via email

North American river otters, famous for their cute whiskered faces and playful behavior, make their home across North America in marine and freshwater rivers, lakes and marshes. While they live alone, they are still social creatures and use a variety of vocalizations to communicate.

From the 1500s onward, European settlers in North America trapped river otters, using their waterproof pelts in the fur trade. In the 1900s, their wetland habitats were drained to make room for farmland and urban projects, and the remaining water was often polluted by agricultural and industrial runoff. All three of these dangers led to the historic range of river otters being reduced by more than 75 percent.

In the 1970s, state wildlife organizations became concerned for the river otter populations and began reintroduction efforts. Between 1976 and 2010, over 4,000 otters were captured and moved from areas of high abundance to low abundance across 23 states. The next important steps were improvements in habitat quality and thorough population management. Happily, research from 2016 reported that all states showed stable or increasing river otter populations. Surprisingly, they are still legally trapped in 40 states, with trapping/harvest surveys being a valuable—and the most common—source of population data.

River otters are important players in their ecosystems, for both other animals and humans. They eat a variety of prey, from fish to crustaceans, and they are valuable indicators of freshwater health. Scientists have even been using their scat samples to monitor parasites present in river habitats. Reflecting in 2018 on the reintroduction efforts and resilience of otters, ecologists John Erb, Nathan Roberts and Chris Dwyer shared that, “The success of populations on some landscapes has shown us that river otters can not only persist, but sometimes thrive in areas historically considered not pristine enough to support them.”

However, we must continue steps to maintain this success, especially as laws concerning environmental protection are always in flux. For example, the 2023 Supreme Court decision *Sackett v. EPA* reduced the scope of the Clean Water Act, limiting federal authority over wetlands.

If you want to help out the river otters, there are a variety of ways to do so! Of course, it is important to vote in local and national elections to protect environmental regulations. You should wash your car at a car wash when possible so that contaminated water doesn't go straight into streams, and dispose of household chemicals and medications properly, not down the drain.



After a tough 300 years or so, river otters are finally starting to come back across the United States thanks to the efforts of dedicated conservationists. Credit: Pexels.com.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Wildfire near Custer damages 10 properties, authorities say **Some homes lost but no injuries reported as Black Hills blaze grows beyond 7,000 acres**

BY: SETH TUPPER

A wildfire that's grown to more than 11 square miles near the city of Custer in South Dakota's Black Hills had not caused any injuries as of Saturday night but had damaged about 10 properties, the Custer County Sheriff's Office said.

The damage ranges from sheds and garages "all the way up to some homes being lost," said Sgt. Derrick Reifenrath in a video update on Facebook about the Qury Fire.

He said local road closures remained in effect and asked for patience as firefighting continued and hazards from heavy smoke and potentially falling trees remained.

But he said authorities would be allowing some people to visit their property if they pick up a tag at the Custer County Search and Rescue office. The tag will allow them to legally go around barricades, Reifenrath said.

He issued a warning to operators of all-terrain vehicles and side-by-side vehicles who were illegally driving on areas of the forest that firefighters cleared with bulldozers.

"You will be stopped, your name will be given to the Forest Service, and I assure you that they will prosecute you on that," Reifenrath said.

What he called "dozer cuts" are parts of a vegetation-free line that firefighters are trying to achieve around the fire to halt its progress. Other segments could consist of lines cut by hand with shovels, as well as roads and natural barriers such as streams and rock outcroppings.

By Sunday morning, authorities said the firefighting force had grown to about 280 personnel. They estimated 2% of the fire was contained, while snow and higher humidity that moved into the area Saturday were expected to aid firefighting efforts, to a point. Too much snow could hinder firefighters' movements, said the U.S. Forest Service's Adam Ziegler during a Custer community meeting livestreamed to Facebook on Saturday.

Temporary flight restrictions remain in place. "Please do not fly any unauthorized aircraft over the fire," said a news release from authorities. "If you fly, we can't."

News releases about the fire from state and federal officials have said the cause is under investigation. The Qury Fire started Thursday in a forested, mountainous area about 2 miles southeast of Custer in the southern Black Hills, where the winter has been unusually warm and dry. The fire's size by Sunday morning was estimated at 7,200 acres.

On Friday, the Federal Emergency Management Agency authorized the use of federal funding to fight the fire. At the time, FEMA reported that the fire was threatening more than 100 homes in the vicinity of Custer, as well as bridges, utilities, and radio and cellphone towers. Mandatory evacuations were in place for more than 100 people and a shelter had been opened in Custer.

The funding authorization makes FEMA funding available to pay 75% of the state's eligible firefighting costs under a grant for managing, mitigating and controlling designated fires. The grant does not provide assistance to individual home or business owners, FEMA said, and does not cover other infrastructure damage caused by the fire.

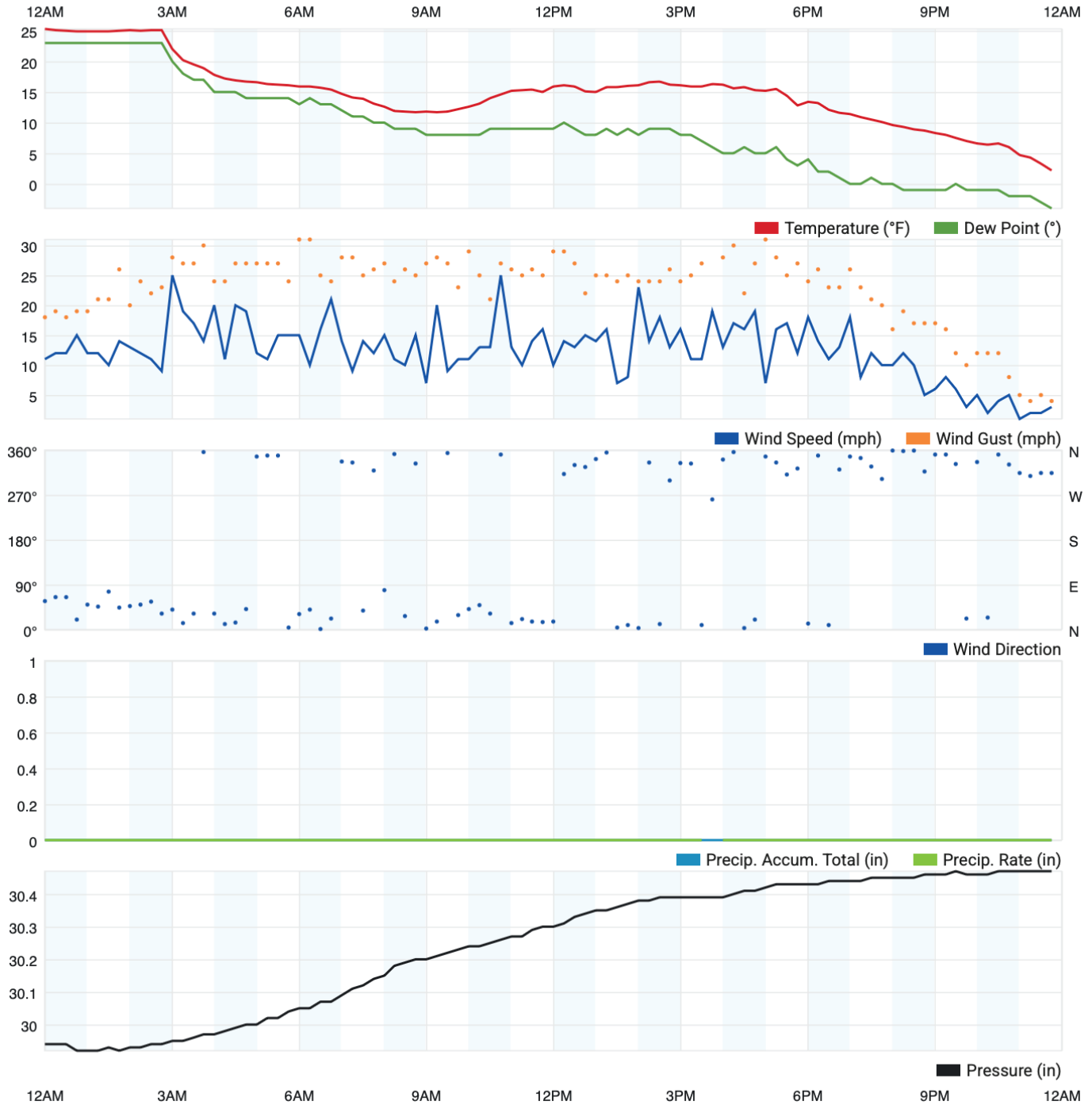
Seth is editor-in-chief of South Dakota Searchlight. He was previously a supervising senior producer for South Dakota Public Broadcasting and a newspaper journalist in Rapid City and Mitchell.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

March 15, 2026



Broton Daily Independent

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Today



High: 16 °F

Sunny

Tonight



Low: 1 °F

Increasing
Clouds

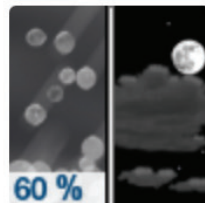
Tuesday



High: 31 °F

Wintry Mix
and Patchy
Blowing Snow

Tuesday Night



Low: 22 °F

Sleet Likely
then Partly
Cloudy

Wednesday



High: 47 °F

Partly Sunny



Very Cold Wind Chills This Morning

March 16, 2026
3:24 AM CDT

Wind Chill (°F) Forecast

3/16
Mon

	4am	5am	6am	7am	8am	9am	10am	11am	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm
Aberdeen	-8	-7	-11	-18	-15	-14	-10	-6	-4	-1	1	2	5	7	9	8
Britton	-16	-17	-17	-16	-16	-15	-11	-8	-8	-5	-3	-1	0	2	3	3
Chamberlain	-12	-13	-14	-14	-15	-11	-6	-1	3	6	10	11	14	15	15	15
Clark	-17	-18	-20	-21	-22	-21	-17	-14	-13	-10	-10	-7	-7	-5	-4	-1
Eagle Butte	-21	-21	-18	-13	-12	-9	-3	1	6	9	11	16	17	18	19	16
Eureka	-8	-13	-13	-13	-15	-12	-8	-5	-4	-1	3	6	6	9	9	7
Gettysburg	-13	-15	-17	-17	-18	-13	-10	-5	-3	2	5	9	10	12	12	10
McIntosh	-8	-10	-11	-10	-10	-8	-3	2	6	10	13	15	16	17	18	15
Milbank	-20	-20	-21	-21	-23	-20	-17	-15	-13	-10	-8	-7	-5	-3	-2	-3
Miller	-12	-12	-14	-19	-20	-16	-11	-8	-5	0	1	4	7	9	9	9
Mobridge	1	-9	-9	-9	-10	-7	-2	1	5	8	12	14	13	17	17	15
Murdo	-10	-11	-13	-14	-14	-12	-4	-1	3	8	12	16	17	19	18	17
Pierre	3	3	2	-10	-6	-5	1	4	8	11	13	17	19	22	23	21
Redfield	-8	-9	-13	-18	-20	-17	-12	-10	-8	-3	-2	1	4	7	6	5
Sisseton	-17	-18	-20	-21	-23	-20	-17	-14	-13	-10	-7	-6	-3	-2	0	-1
Watertown	-18	-19	-20	-21	-22	-20	-16	-14	-12	-10	-8	-7	-6	-5	-3	-2
Webster	-15	-16	-19	-21	-22	-19	-15	-14	-12	-10	-8	-7	-5	-3	-3	-2
Wheaton	-18	-19	-20	-21	-20	-16	-15	-13	-11	-8	-7	-7	-3	-3	-3	-3

- Cold air mass (for mid-March) overhead today. ***Much below normal temperatures.***
- ***Very cold wind chills*** in the teens below to 20s below zero this morning.

KNOW THE SIGNS OF HYPOTHERMIA

- Shivering
- Cold Hands & Feet
- Poor Coordination
- Numbness
- Loss of Dexterity
- Mental Sluggishness
- Pain from Cold



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Northwest winds in place this morning, combined with a very cold air mass for mid-March, will bring very cold wind chills in the teens below to 20s below zero. Expect improvements by this afternoon.

Broton Daily Independent

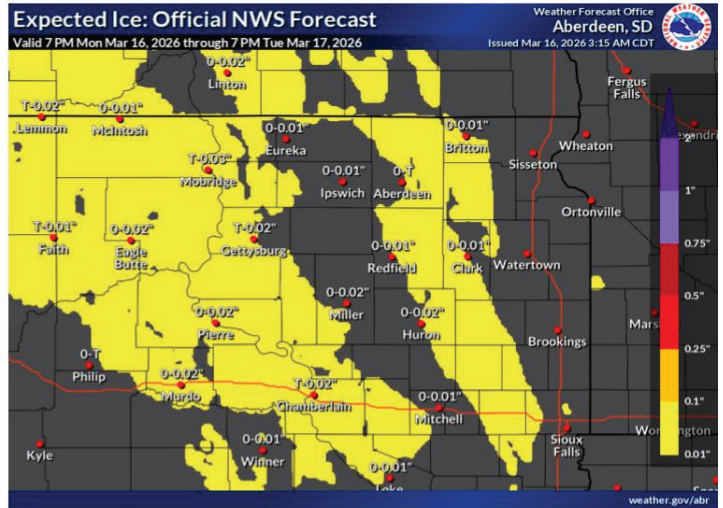
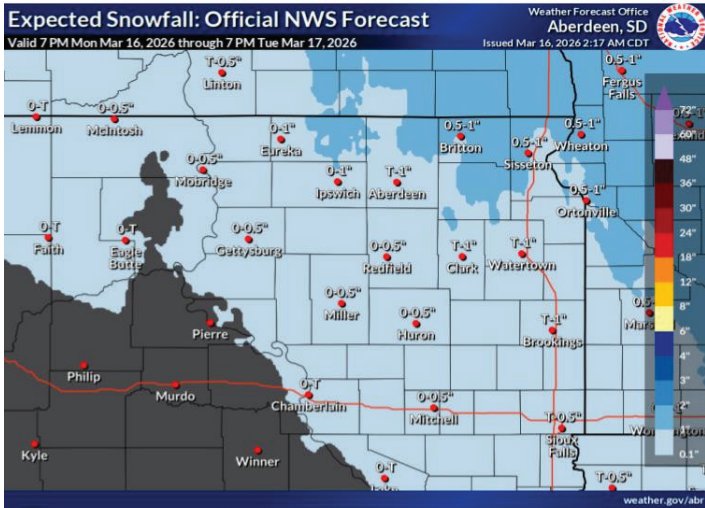
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More Snow and Mixed Precipitation

March 16, 2026
3:27 AM CDT

- Light snow moving in Tuesday, with light freezing rain possible as well.
- Light accumulations forecast for both snow and ice.
- Minor travel impacts possible.



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Another system will move into the region on Tuesday, bringing light snow and potentially areas of light freezing rain. This system will be much weaker than what moved through this past weekend, but it still looks to bring light snow accumulations around an inch, and icing of a light glaze. Minor traffic impacts are possible.

Groton Daily Independent

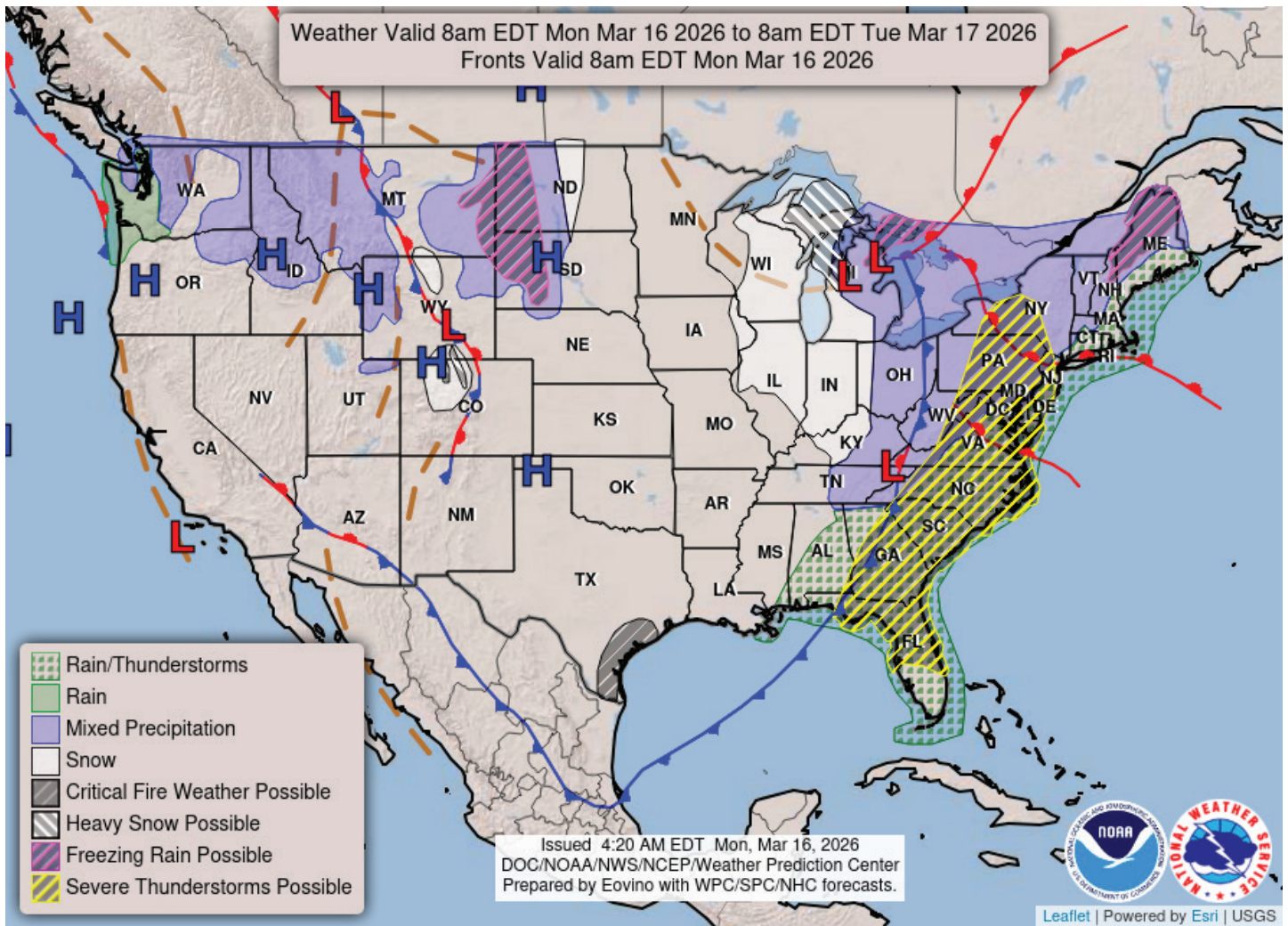
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 25 °F at 12:00 AM
Low Temp: 3 °F at 11:22 PM
Wind: 31 mph at 5:51 AM
Precip: : 3.5 inches of snow = .29 moisture

Today's Info

Record High: 81 in 2012
Record Low: -17 in 1906
Average High: 42
Average Low: 20
Average Precip in Mar.: 0.40
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.29
Average Precip to date: 1.57
Precip Year to Date: 1.62
Sunset Tonight: 7.39 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:41 am



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Today in Weather History

March 16, 2012: Temperatures reaching eighty degrees or higher in March across central and northeast South Dakota are rare, and for this to occur in mid-March is exceedingly rare. On March 16th, several locations across the area set record highs by topping the 80-degree mark, including Aberdeen, Mobridge, and Pierre. Sisseton and Watertown also set records for March 16th. Aberdeen topped out at 81 degrees, Mobridge reached 83 degrees, with 86 degrees at Pierre.

1942 — Two tornadoes, 24 minutes apart, struck Baldwin, MS, resulting in 65 deaths. (David Ludlum)

1975 — A single storm brought 119 inches of snow to Crater Lake, O,R establishing a state record. (The Weather Channel)

1986 — A small but rare tornado touched down perilously close to Disneyland in Anaheim CA. (Storm Data)

1987 — Softball size hail caused millions of dollars damage to automobiles at Del Rio TX. Three persons were injured when hailstones crashed through a shopping mall skylight. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data) (The Weather Channel)

1988 — A winter storm produced heavy snow in the Central Rockies. Winds gusted to 80 mph at Centerville UT. Eighteen cities in the southeastern U.S. reported new record low temperatures for the date, including Tallahassee FL with a reading of 24 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 — A winter storm brought heavy snow and high winds to the southwestern U.S. Winds gusted to 60 mph at Lovelock NV, Salt Lake City UT, and Fort Carson CO. Snow fell at a rate of three inches per hour in the Lake Tahoe area of Nevada. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 — Thunderstorms developing ahead of a cold front produced large hail and damaging winds from northwest Florida to western South Carolina. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 75 mph at Floridatown FL. Sixteen cities across the northeastern quarter of the nation reported record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 78 degrees at Burlington VT smashed their previous record for the date by 23 degrees. New York City reported a record high of 82 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

Called for Service

All who trust in God are invited to participate in His work..

1 Corinthians 1:26-31: 26 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;

27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,

28 and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are,

29 so that no man may boast before God.

30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,

31 so that, just as it is written, ``LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD.”

Think of a time when you were asked to handle a task for the Lord but felt you didn't have the knowledge, experience, or ability to do it. We've all felt like this before—and perhaps even offered God excuses why we can't be the one to take on the project. But He doesn't always use strong, influential, or accomplished people to do His work. In fact, He often chooses the opposite.

The Lord is looking for humble people who are totally dependent upon Him and willing to make themselves available for whatever He calls them to do. Moses didn't feel God could use him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt because he wasn't eloquent, but he became one of the greatest leaders in Israel's history (Deuteronomy 34:10-12). David was young and had no experience as a warrior, but the Spirit of God empowered him to fell a giant with one small stone (1 Samuel 17:48-49).

By accomplishing great things through unexceptional people, the Lord proves that the world's wisdom is foolishness. We have no power to save ourselves and no ability to serve Him apart from His strength and wisdom. It doesn't matter how experienced you are or how qualified you feel. If you'll simply depend on Jesus, make yourself available, and obey Him, He'll use you for His glory.

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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

03.15.26

1 21 29 46 50 1

TOP PRIZE:

\$1,000,000/year

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 47 Mins 11 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

03.13.26

6 19 36 40 55 9

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$60,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 32 Mins 11 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

03.14.26

8 9 25 36 44 10

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$18,620,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 47 Mins 10 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

03.14.26

6 14 29 30 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$26,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 2 Mins 10 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

03.14.26

24 30 50 53 61 17

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 31 Mins 10 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

03.14.26

9 30 42 50 52 21

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$88,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 31 Mins 10 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Jenna Guyer has Green Bay women back in March Madness as one of several noteworthy mid-major players

By STEVE MEGARGEE AP Sports Writer

Jenna Guyer's breakthrough season with Green Bay has the fifth-year senior reconsidering her post-college plans.

For now, though, she is trying to put off those choices by delaying the end of her college career as much as possible.

Guyer has Green Bay back in the NCAA Tournament for a third straight year after scoring 21 points in the Phoenix's 57-49 Horizon League Tournament championship game victory over Youngstown State. Green Bay (25-8) will try to advance beyond the opening round of the NAAs for the first time since 2012 on Friday at Minnesota (22-8).

"It's kind of been our main goal this year, is getting into the tournament, but we don't just stop there," the 6-foot-2 forward/center said. "We say we want to win a game and do some damage there."

Green Bay showed it could play at this level last year, when the 12th-seeded Phoenix trailed Alabama by just five points with seven minutes left before falling 81-67. This year, Guyer wants to help her team take the next step.

"Knowing we can compete with anybody is huge going into this tournament," Guyer said.

Guyer played 15 minutes off the bench in that Alabama game as part of a senior-laden team, but she needed to take on a greater role this season. She also had to adapt to playing power forward as well as center.

She responded by averaging 15.1 points and 6.3 rebounds as the Horizon League player of the year. Guyer also was the most valuable player of the Horizon League Tournament.

Guyer graduated with a degree in human biology in December 2024 and is on track to finish her master's program for applied biotechnology this fall. Guyer plans to pursue a career in the medical field but could put that on hold to play basketball overseas.

"I feel like this year I've had so much fun," Guyer said. "It's kind of hard to put so much time into something and then it just be over. I'm kind of maybe just thinking about playing a year or two and seeing where that takes me."

Guyer is one of several women's players from one-bid conferences who bear watching in this year's NCAA Tournament. Here's a look at some others.

Taryn and Taylor Barbot, Charleston

Opening game: Friday at Duke.

Notes: These twin sisters from Floral Park, New York, have helped Charleston reach the NCAA Tournament for the first time ever. Taryn Barbot is a two-time Coastal Athletic Association player of the year who has scored at least 30 points four times this season. Taryn is the CAA's leading scorer, while Taylor tops the league in assists and assist-turnover ratio. Taryn scored 23 points in the CAA championship game, while Taylor had 16 points and eight assists.

Kaety L'Amoreaux, Fairfield

Opening game: Saturday vs. Notre Dame at Columbus, Ohio.

Notes: This 5-6 guard leads the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference in points per game (17.6) and was named the league's player of the year. She also has 5 rebounds, 4.4 assists and 2.1 steals per game. L'Amoreaux showed her ability to produce against major-conference foes by collecting 15 points, eight assists and six rebounds in a loss to North Carolina. L'Amoreaux will be looking to bounce back after totaling five points and nine turnovers in her last two MAAC Tournament games.

Peyton McDaniel, James Madison

Opening game: Saturday vs. Kentucky at Morgantown, West Virginia.

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Notes: McDaniel had 28 points, 10 assists, four assists and four steals in James Madison's Sun Belt Tournament championship game triumph over Troy. The 6-footer was named the tournament's most outstanding player. She has earned first-team all-Sun Belt honors each of the last two seasons. McDaniel is averaging 18.9 points, 7.5 rebounds and 2.2 assists.

Brooklyn Meyer, South Dakota State

Opening game: Friday vs. Washington at Fort Worth, Texas.

Notes: Meyer is one of five finalists for the Becky Hammon Mid-Major Player of the Year Award. She has scored over 2,000 career points. The 6-2 forward has averaged 22.4 points, 8 rebounds and 2.7 assists this season. That includes a 27-point performance against Duke and a 20-point effort against Texas. Meyer had 19 points and eight rebounds in South Dakota State's first-round NCAA Tournament victory over Oklahoma State last season.

Mia Nicastro, Western Illinois

Opening game: Friday at North Carolina.

Notes: Nicastro is one of five finalists for the Becky Hammon Award. The 6-2 forward has averaged 24.2 points and 9.9 rebounds as the Ohio Valley Conference player of the year. She has three straight double-doubles, including 21 points and 12 rebounds in an OVC championship game victory over Lindenwood. Nicastro had 20 points and seven rebounds in a loss to Iowa this season. This is her second year at Western Illinois after two seasons at Saint Louis.

Madison St. Rose, Princeton

Opening game: Saturday vs. Oklahoma State at Los Angeles.

Notes: After a torn anterior cruciate ligament limited her to four games last season, St. Rose has come back to earn first-team all-Ivy League honors while leading the 23rd-ranked Tigers to the league's regular-season and tournament titles. The 5-10 guard has 16 points, 4.5 rebounds and 2.2 assists per game. She scored 22 points in an NCAA Tournament first-round loss to West Virginia in 2024. St. Rose had 20 points in a loss to Maryland this season.

Iranian women's soccer team to depart Malaysia for Oman after asylum reversal

By EILEEN NG and ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP) — The Iranian women's soccer team is set to leave Malaysia on Monday night, ending days of uncertainty after most of the seven squad members who sparked a diplomatic furor by seeking asylum in Australia reversed their decisions and rejoined the team in Kuala Lumpur.

The Asian Football Confederation general secretary Windsor John told The Associated Press that the team's departure Monday night was arranged by the Iranian embassy. He said the AFC, which is supporting the Iranian team in Kuala Lumpur, was told they are flying to Oman but that isn't their final destination. He said he wasn't aware of their full travel plans.

Asked if confederation is satisfied that the women will be safe back in Iran, Windsor said that both the AFC and FIFA will check up on them regularly with the Iranian football federation "as they are our girls as well."

Requests for asylum, and changes of heart

The squad flew from Sydney to Kuala Lumpur on March 10 after being knocked out of the Women's Asian Cup in Australia, initially leaving behind six players and a support staff member who had accepted protection visas.

Four players and the staffer have since rejoined the team in Kuala Lumpur, the latest flying in on Monday. No reasons have been given for the changes of heart. The Iranian diaspora in Australia blames pressure from Tehran.

Windsor said at a news conference earlier that his confederation had not received any direct complaints from players about returning home, despite media reports their families in Iran could face retaliation for the team failing to sing their national anthem before the opening match.

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The silence during the anthem was variously reported as an act of resistance or a show of mourning. The team didn't clarify, and it sang at the opening of a later match.

"We couldn't verify anything. We asked them and they said, 'No, it's ok,'" he said. "They are actually in high spirits... they didn't look afraid."

Two players remain in Australia

Iranian authorities have welcomed the women's decisions to reject asylum as a victory against Australia and U.S. President Donald Trump.

Iran's squad had arrived in Australia for the tournament shortly before the war in the Middle East began on Feb. 28, complicating travel arrangements.

Assistant Immigration Minister Matt Thistlethwaite described the women's plight in Australia as a "very complex situation."

"These are deeply personal decisions, and the government respects the decisions of those that have chosen to return. And we continue to offer support to the two that are remaining," Thistlethwaite said.

Those who stayed in Australia have been moved to an undisclosed safe location and are receiving assistance from the government and the Iranian diaspora community, he said.

A 'propaganda war'

Kylie Moore-Gilbert, a political scientist at Sydney's Macquarie University who spent more than two years in Iranian prisons on spying charges from 2018 to 2020, said "winning the propaganda war" had overshadowed the women's welfare.

"The high stakes made the Iranian regime sit up and pay attention and try to force their hand in response, in my view," Moore-Gilbert said.

"I do think in this case, had these woman quietly sought asylum without that publicity around them, it's possible that the Islamic Republic officials might have, as they have in the cases of other Iranian sports people in the past who've defected ... simply allowed that to happen," she added.

Iran's Tasnim News Agency said the players who left Australia were "returning to the warm embrace of their family and homeland," describing their return as a failure of what it called an American-Australian political effort.

Concerns about the team's safety in Iran heightened when the players didn't sing the Iranian national anthem.

The Australian government was urged to help the women by Iranian groups in Australia and by Trump.

The embassy in the national capital Canberra remains staffed, despite the Australian government expelling the ambassador last year.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese cut off diplomatic relations with Iran in August after announcing that intelligence officials had concluded that the Revolutionary Guard had directed arson attacks on a Sydney kosher food company and Melbourne's Adass Israel Synagogue in 2024.

Australian-Iranian Society of Victoria vice president Kambiz Razmara said the women who accepted asylum had been under pressure from the Tehran regime.

"They've had to make decisions at the spur of the moment with very little information and they've had to react to the circumstance," Razmara said. "I'm surprised that they've decided to go, but I'm actually not surprised because I appreciate the pressures that they're experiencing."

How Poland went from post-Communist wreck to one of the world's 20 biggest economies

By CLAUDIA CIOBANU and DAVID McHUGH Associated Press

POZNAN, Poland (AP) — A generation ago, Poland rationed sugar and flour while its citizens were paid one-tenth what West Germans earned. Today its economy has edged past Switzerland to become the world's 20th largest with over \$1 trillion in annual output.

It's a historic leap from the post-Communist ruins of 1989-90 to today's European growth champion that economists say has lessons on how to bring prosperity to ordinary people — and that the Trump

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administration says should be recognized by Poland's presence at a summit of the Group of 20 leading economies later this year.

The transformation is reflected in people like Joanna Kowalska, an engineer from Poznan, a town of half a million people midway between Berlin and Warsaw. She returned home after five years in the U.S.

"I get asked often if I'm missing something by coming back to Poland, and, to be honest, I feel it's the other way around," Kowalska said. "We are ahead of the United States in so many areas."

Kowalska works at the Poznan Supercomputing and Networking Center, which is developing the first artificial intelligence factory in Poland and integrating it with a quantum computer, one of 10 on the continent financed by a European Union program.

Kowalska worked for Microsoft in the U.S. after graduating from the Poznan University of Technology in a job she saw as a "dream come true."

But she missed having a "sense of mission," she said.

"Especially when it comes to artificial intelligence, the technology started developing so rapidly in Poland," Kowalska added. "So it was very tempting to come back."

Multiple factors in breaking out of poverty

The guest invitation to the G20 summit is mostly symbolic; no guest country has been promoted to full member since the original G20 met at the finance minister level in 1999, and that would take a consensus decision of all the members. Moreover, the original countries were chosen not just by GDP rank, but by their "systemic significance" in the global economy.

But the gesture reflects a statistical truth: In 35 years — a little less than one person's working lifetime — Poland's per capita gross domestic product rose to \$55,340 in 2025, or 85% of the EU average. That's up from \$6,730 in 1990, or 38% of the EU average and now roughly equal to Japan's \$52,039, according to International Monetary Fund figures measured in today's dollars and adjusted for Poland's lower cost of living.

Poland's economy has grown an average 3.8% a year since joining the EU in 2004, easily beating the European average of 1.8%.

It wasn't simply one factor that helped Poland break out of the poverty trap, says Marcin Piątkowski of Warsaw's Kozminski University and author of a book on the country's economic rise.

One of the most important factors was rapidly building a strong institutional framework for business, he said. That included independent courts, an anti-monopoly agency to ensure fair competition, and strong regulation to keep troubled banks from choking off credit.

As a result, the economy wasn't hijacked by corrupt practices and oligarchs, as happened elsewhere in the post-Communist world.

Poland also benefited from billions of euros in EU aid, both before and after it joined the bloc in 2004 and gained access to its huge single market.

Above all, there was the broad consensus, from across the country's political spectrum, that Poland's long-term goal was joining the EU.

"Poles knew where they were going," Piątkowski said. "Poland downloaded the institutions and the rules of the game, and even some cultural norms that the West spent 500 years developing."

As oppressive as it was, communism contributed by breaking down old social barriers and opening higher education to factory and farmworkers who had no chance before. A post-Communist boom in higher education means half of young people now have degrees.

"Young Poles are, for instance, better educated than young Germans," Piątkowski said, but earn half what Germans do. That's "an unbeatable combination" for attracting investors, he said.

An electric bus ride to success

Solaris, a company founded in 1996 in Poznan by Krzysztof Olszewski, is one of the leading manufacturers of electric buses in Europe with a market share of around 15%. Its story shows one hallmark of Poland's success: entrepreneurship, or the willingness to take risks and build something new.

Educated as an engineer under the Communist government, Olszewski opened a car repair shop where

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he used spare parts from West Germany to fix Polish cars. While most enterprises were nationalized, authorities gave permission to small-scale private workshops like his to operate, according to Katarzyna Szarzec, an economist at the Poznan University of Economics and Business. "These were enclaves of private entrepreneurship," she said.

In 1996, Olszewski opened a subsidiary of the German bus company Neoplan and started producing for the Polish market.

"Poland's entry to the EU in 2004 gave us credibility and access to a vast, open European market with the free movement of goods, services and people," said Mateusz Figaszewski, responsible for institutional relations.

Then came a risky decision to start producing electric buses in 2011, a time when few in Europe were experimenting with the technology. Figaszewski said larger companies in the West had more to lose if switching to electric vehicles didn't work out. "It became an opportunity to achieve technological leadership ahead of the market," he said.

An aging population is still a challenge

Challenges still remain for Poland. Due to a low birth rate and an aging society, fewer workers will be able to support retirees. Average wages are lower than the EU average. While small and medium enterprises flourish, few have become global brands.

Poznan Mayor Jacek Jaškowiak sees domestic innovation as a third wave in Poland's postsocialist economic development. In the first wave, foreign countries opened factories in Poland in the early 1990s, taking advantage of a skilled local population.

Around the turn of the millennium, he said, Western companies brought more advanced branches, including finance, IT and engineering.

"Now it's the time to start such sophisticated activities here," Jaškowiak says, adding that one of his main priorities is investing in universities.

"There is still much to do when it comes to innovation and technological progress," added Szarzec, the Poznan economist. "But we keep climbing up on that ladder of added value. We're no longer just a supplier of spare parts."

Szarzec's students say more needs to be done to reduce urban-rural inequalities, make housing affordable and support young people starting families. They say Poles need to acknowledge that immigrants, such as the millions of Ukrainians who fled the Russian invasion in 2022, contribute to economic development in an aging population.

"Poland has such a dynamic economy, with so many opportunities for development, that of course I am staying," said Kazimierz Falak, 27, one of Szarzec's graduate students. "Poland is promising."

Iran hits Gulf neighbors and keeps stranglehold on oil shipping as concerns rise of energy crisis

By DAVID RISING, SALLY ABOU ALJOUND and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

BEIRUT, Lebanon (AP) — Explosions echoed across Beirut early Monday as Israel struck the Lebanese capital. It also launched a new wave of attacks on Tehran, while Dubai was forced to temporarily close its airport after an Iranian drone hit a fuel tank.

Since being attacked by the United States and Israel more than two weeks ago, Iran has been regularly hitting Israel, American bases and its Gulf Arab neighbors' energy infrastructure with drones and missiles.

It has also effectively stopped shipping traffic in the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's oil is transported, giving rise to growing fears of a global energy crisis and putting pressure on Washington as consumers are already feeling the pain at the pump.

Brent crude, the international standard, remained stubbornly over \$100 a barrel on Monday. It was at \$104 in early trading, up nearly 45% since the U.S. and Israel attacked Iran on Feb. 28. It has spiked as high as about \$120 during the conflict.

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President Donald Trump said he has made demands to about seven countries to send warships to keep the Strait of Hormuz open, but his appeals have brought no commitments. His party is increasingly concerned that rising prices for American consumers will hurt the Republicans in elections this fall.

"I'm demanding that these countries come in and protect their own territory, because it is their own territory," Trump told reporters as he flew back to Washington from Florida aboard Air Force One. He did not identify the countries, but has previously appealed to China, France, Japan, South Korea and Britain.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi called claims that his country may be seeking a negotiated end to the war "delusional," saying in a social media post early Monday that his country was seeking neither "truce nor talks."

"Our Powerful Armed Forces will keep firing until POTUS realizes that illegal war he's imposing on both Americans and Iranians is wrong and must never be repeated," he wrote on X.

Iran hits Dubai airport, forcing temporary closure

As morning broke Monday, a drone hit a fuel tank near Dubai International Airport, the world's busiest for international passenger traffic, causing a large fire.

Firefighters were able to contain the blaze and there were no injuries reported but the airport temporarily suspended all flights before resuming them a few hours later.

Later, a person was killed in the capital when an Iranian missile hit a vehicle, the Abu Dhabi media office said. Fire also broke out at an oil facility in Fujairah, one of the UAE's seven emirates, following a drone attack.

Iran has fired hundreds of missiles and drones toward Gulf countries hosting U.S. military assets since the war began. Emirati authorities say most have been intercepted by air defenses, though debris and some drones have fallen inside the country.

Iranian officials have recently accused the UAE of allowing its territory to be used for attacks against Iran. Emirati officials have rejected the allegations as misleading and said the country's actions have been defensive.

Saudi Arabia, meantime, said it had intercepted a wave of 35 Iranian drones sent at its eastern region, home to major oil installations.

Israel's military said early Monday that Iran launched missiles toward Israel as well.

Israel's military says Iran is firing cluster bombs that can evade some air defenses and scatter submunitions across multiple locations.

Israel hits Beirut and launches new attacks on Tehran

Massive explosions were heard in Beirut as Israel launched new attacks on the Lebanese capital before dawn, saying it was striking infrastructure related to the Iran-linked Hezbollah militia group.

The Israeli army has issued evacuation orders for many neighborhoods in Beirut as well as southern Lebanon. To date, over 800,000 people have been displaced by Israel's campaign in Lebanon.

At least 850 people have been killed by Israeli strikes so far, including 107 children and 66 women.

Not long after Israel's military announced it had launched new strikes on Tehran targeting infrastructure, explosions were heard in the Iranian capital and outlying areas.

More than 1,300 people have been killed in Iran so far, according to the Red Cross.

In Israel, 12 people have been killed by Iranian missile fire and more have been injured, including three on Sunday. At least 13 U.S. military members have been killed, six in a plane crash in Iraq last week.

Trump threatens to 'remember' which allies do not help

On Air Force One, Trump wouldn't say which countries could be part of the coalition he wants to police the Strait of Hormuz to provide security for oil tankers and other commercial ships passing through.

But he said he won't forget the countries that decline to help. He named British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who he said initially declined to put British aircraft carriers "into harm's way."

"Whether we get support or not, but I can say this, and I said to them: We will remember," Trump said.

Ahead of a meeting in Brussels, the European Union's foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said the bloc's foreign ministers would discuss possibly extending its Aspides naval mission, which protects ships in the Red Sea, to the Strait of Hormuz, without giving any details on how such a mission would work or how

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long it would take to decide on it.

Europeans have been critical of the U.S. and Israel for failing to provide clarity on their objectives in the war, and German Foreign Minister Johann Wadepuhl on Sunday questioned EU involvement, saying security for the Strait of Hormuz can only come "if there is a negotiated solution."

"Europe always gives constructive support when it comes to securing sea routes, but I see neither an immediate necessity nor above all Germany participating," he said on ARD television.

Monday Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi told parliament that her government "has not heard anything" from Washington about Trump's call help protecting the Strait of Hormuz.

Japan imports more than 90% of its crude oil from the Middle East, however, and she said there had been discussions about what could be done to protect Japanese ships "regardless of a U.S. request."

Japan on Monday began releasing its oil reserves to address concerns about supply shortages and rising prices.

Trump has speculated that prices would fall, but wouldn't directly answer whether his administration is talking about selling oil futures as a way to cap surging oil prices, something his interior secretary had mentioned as a possibility.

"The prices are going to come tumbling down as soon as it's over. And it's going to be over pretty quickly," he told reporters.

Trump suggests he may delay China trip as he pressures Beijing for help with Strait of Hormuz

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is suggesting he may delay his much-anticipated visit to China at the end of the month as he seeks to ramp up the pressure on Beijing to help reopen the Strait of Hormuz and calm oil prices that have soared during the Iran war.

In an interview Sunday with the Financial Times, Trump said China's reliance on oil from the Middle East means it ought to help with a new coalition he is trying to put together to get oil tanker traffic moving through the strait after Iran's threats have throttled global flows of oil. Trump said "we'd like to know" before the trip whether Beijing will help. "We may delay," Trump said in the interview.

The uncertainty underscores just how much the U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iran have reshaped global politics in the past two weeks. Calling off the face-to-face visit with Chinese President Xi Jinping could have its own major economic consequences: Relations between Washington and Beijing have been fraught as both sides have threatened the other with steep tariffs over the past year.

The White House did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

In Beijing, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson said only that China and the U.S. have maintained communication on Trump's visit. "Head-of-state diplomacy plays an irreplaceable strategic guiding role in China-U.S. relations," Lin Jian said at a daily briefing.

Trump's new comments came as U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent was meeting with Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng on Monday in Paris for a new round of trade talks that were meant to pave the way for Trump's Beijing trip. The U.S. and China have declared a truce that has prevented both sides from levying dueling tariffs, but the stakes remain high.

In the early days of the Iran conflict, Trump had said U.S. navy vessels would escort oil tankers through the strait, and downplayed the threat posed by Iran. But as oil prices soared, he and his administration have been forced to consider new options — including the idea, broached this weekend, for other countries to join the push with their own warships. So far, none has yet formally heeded the call.

Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One as he returned to Washington from a weekend in Florida that the U.S. had spoken to "about seven" nations about offering military support. He wouldn't say which ones, though, and demurred when he was asked directly about China — though he subsequently suggested that he'd made such an offer to Beijing.

"China's an interesting case study," he said, noting its reliance on Gulf oil. "So I said, 'Would you like to

come in' and we'll find out. Maybe they will, maybe they won't."

War in Iran has sent the price of oil skyrocketing, which has raised the price Americans pay at the pump, just as the midterm election season begins to heat up. China, though, has faced its own economic pressures and recently lowered its 2026 target for growth slightly to 4.5% to 5%, its slowest projected growth since 1991 — meaning prolonged disruptions in the strait could have long-term impacts for Beijing as well.

Lin, at the briefing in Beijing, did not respond directly to questions about Trump's call for outside help in the strait. He noted the impact on goods and energy trade and repeated his government's call for an end to the fighting.

"China once again calls on all parties to stop military actions immediately, avoid further escalation of tensions, and prevent instability in the region from having a greater impact on global economic development," he said.

Hospital officials say Israeli strikes killed 12 in Gaza, including 2 children and a pregnant woman

BY SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — At least 12 Palestinians, including two boys, a pregnant woman and eight police officers, were killed Sunday by Israeli airstrikes in the war-torn Gaza Strip, hospital authorities said.

A strike Sunday morning hit a house in the urban refugee camp of Nuseirat in central Gaza and killed four people, including a couple in their 30s and their 10-year son, according to the nearby Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital. The woman had been pregnant with twins, the hospital said.

The fourth fatality, a 15-year-old neighbor, was taken to the Awda hospital in Nuseirat.

"We were sleeping and got up to the strike of a missile. The strike was strong," said Mahmoud al-Muhtaseb, a neighbor. "There was no prior warning."

Another strike Sunday afternoon hit a police vehicle on the south-north Salah al-Din route at the entrance of the central town of Zawaida, the Hamas-run Interior Ministry said.

The strike killed eight police officers, including Col. Iyad Ab Yousef, a senior police official in central Gaza, the ministry said.

The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, which received the bodies, confirmed the toll. It said 14 others were wounded.

The Israeli military said it struck a Hamas militant Sunday in response to an earlier incident in which a militant opened fire at troops. It didn't provide further details.

Hamas oversees a police force that maintained a high degree of public security after the militants seized power in Gaza in 2007, while also cracking down on dissent.

The police largely melted away during the war as Israeli forces seized large areas of Gaza and targeted Hamas security forces with airstrikes.

But following an October ceasefire, they have reappeared in Gaza streets and reasserted control in areas not controlled by the Israeli military.

Killings continue despite ceasefire

Sunday's deaths were the latest fatalities among Palestinians in the coastal enclave since the ceasefire deal attempted to halt a more than two-year war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza.

While the heaviest fighting has subsided, the ceasefire has still seen almost daily Israeli fire. Israeli forces have carried out repeated airstrikes and frequently fire on Palestinians near military-held zones, killing more than 650 Palestinians, according to Gaza health officials.

Israel says it has responded to violations of the ceasefire or targeted wanted militants. But about half of those killed have been women and children, according to the Gaza Health Ministry.

They were among more than 72,200 Palestinians killed in the war, which was triggered when Hamas-led militants attacked southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023. The militant attack killed over 1,200 people and took over 250 others hostage.

The health ministry, which is part of the Hamas-led government, maintains detailed casualty records that

are seen as generally reliable by U.N. agencies and independent experts. But it does not give a breakdown of civilians and militants.

Militants have carried out shooting attacks on troops, and Israel says its strikes are in response to that and other violations. Four Israeli soldiers have been killed since the ceasefire.

Israel to allow reopening of Rafah crossing

Separately, Israel announced it will allow the reopening of Gaza's Rafah crossing with Egypt starting Wednesday after more than two-week hiatus.

COGAT, the Israeli military body in charge of coordinating aid to Gaza, said in a statement that the crossing will resume operations with "limited" passenger traffic in both directions. No cargo will be allowed through the crossing, it said.

COGAT said procedures will be the same as before the crossing closed after Israel and the U.S. launched devastating strikes on Iran on Feb. 28, triggering an expanding war in the region.

Since its opening earlier this year, Israel allowed a limited evacuation of patients and wounded people for treatment outside Gaza - a fraction of more than 20,000 requiring medical evacuations, according to the Gaza Health Ministry.

Some Palestinian who were treated in Egypt during the war were also allowed to return to the strip. Some of the returnees reported abuses by Israeli troops once they crossed the Palestinian gate of the crossing.

'One Battle After Another' triumphs at 98th Academy Awards in coronation for Paul Thomas Anderson

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Paul Thomas Anderson's "One Battle After Another" was crowned best picture at the 98th Academy Awards, handing Hollywood's top honor to a comic, multi-generational American saga of political resistance.

The ceremony Sunday, which also saw Michael B. Jordan win best actor and "Sinners" cinematographer Autumn Durald Arkapaw make Oscar history as the first female director of photography to win the award, was a long-in-coming coronation for Anderson, a San Fernando Valley native who made his first short at age 18 and has been one of America's most lionized filmmakers for decades. Before Sunday, Anderson had never won an Oscar.

But "One Battle After Another," the favorite coming in, won six Oscars, including best director and best adapted screenplay for Anderson, the Oscars' first trophy for best casting and best supporting actor for an absent Sean Penn.

"I wrote this movie for my kids to say sorry for the housekeeping mess that we left in this world — we're handing off to them," said Anderson while accepting the screenplay trophy. "But also with the encouragement that they will be the generation that hopefully brings us some common sense and decency."

Ryan Coogler's Jim Crow-set, blues-soaked vampire tale "Sinners," which came in with a record 16 nominations, also landed some big and even historic wins. Coogler, the widely loved filmmaker, won the first Oscar in an unblemished career that started out with Jordan in 2013's "Fruitvale Station."

Arkapaw was also the first Black person to win for best cinematography. Only the fourth female cinematographer ever nominated, her win was a long-in-coming triumph for women behind the camera.

"I really want all the women in room to stand up," said Arkapaw. "Because I don't feel like I get here without you guys."

And Jordan, one of Hollywood's most liked leading men, won best actor in one of the night's closest races. The Dolby Theatre rose to its feet in the most thunderous applause of the night.

"Yo, momma, what's up?" said Jordan after staggering to the stage.

The Oscar night belonged to Warner Bros., the studio of "One Battle After Another" and "Sinners," which scored a record-tying 11 wins. It was an oddly poignant note of triumph for the fabled studio, which weeks earlier agreed to a sale to Paramount Skydance, David Ellison's rapidly assembled media monolith. The

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\$111 billion deal, which awaits regulatory approval, has Hollywood bracing for more layoffs.

But "Sinners" and "One Battle After Another" — the much-acclaimed heavyweights of the season — were each Hollywood anomalies: big-budget originals born from a personal vision. In a year where anxiety over studio contraction and the rise of artificial intelligence often consumed the industry, both films gave Hollywood fresh hope.

Jessie Buckley won best actress for her performance as Agnes Shakespeare in "Hamnet," making her the first Irish performer to ever win in the category. At an Oscars where no other acting award seemed a sure thing, Buckley cruised into Sunday's Oscars at the Dolby Theatre as the overwhelming favorite.

"It's Mother's Day in the U.K.," said Buckley on the stage. "I would like to dedicated this to the beautiful chaos of a mother's heart."

'KPop' and 'Frankenstein' win for Netflix

From the start, when host Conan O'Brien sprinted through the year's nominees as Amy Madigan's character in the horror thriller "Weapons" in a pre-taped bit, Sunday's ceremony was quirky, a little clunky and preoccupied with the shifting place of movies in culture. There was, of all things, a tie for best live-action short film.

As expected, the Netflix sensation "KPop Demon Hunters," 2025's most-watched film, won best animated feature, as well as best song for "Golden." It was a big win for Netflix but a more qualified victory for the movie's producer, Sony Pictures. Though it developed and produced the film, Sony sold "KPop Demon Hunters" to the streaming giant instead of giving it a theatrical release.

On Netflix, "KPop Demon Hunters" became a cultural phenomenon and the streaming platform's biggest hit. It has more than 325 million views and counting.

"This is for Korea and Koreans everywhere," said co-director Maggie Kang.

Another Netflix release, Guillermo del Toro's "Frankenstein" picked up three awards for its lavish craft, for costume design, makeup and hairstyling and for production design.

Amy Madigan won best supporting actress for her performance in the horror thriller "Weapons," a win that came 40 years after the 75-year-old actor was first nominated, in 1986, for "Twice in a Lifetime." Letting out a giant laugh as she hit the stage, Madigan exclaimed, "This is great!"

O'Brien presides over a ceremony shadowed by politics

Hosting for the second time, O'Brien began the Dolby Theatre show alluding to "chaotic and frightening times." But he argued that the current geopolitical climate made the Oscars all the more resonate as a globally unifying force.

"We pay tribute tonight, not just to film, but to the ideals of global artistry, collaboration, patience, resilience and that rarest of qualities today — optimism," O'Brien said. "We're going to celebrate. Not because we think all is well, but because we work, and hope, for better."

Throughout the show, O'Brien hit a number of targets, like Timothée Chalamet — who again missed out on winning his first Oscar, this time for "Marty Supreme" — for his diss of opera and ballet. But the ceremony seldom wasn't shadowed by politics, whether in references to changes under U.S. President Donald Trump or the recently launched war in Iran.

Joachim Trier, whose Norwegian family drama "Sentimental Value" won best international film, quoted James Baldwin in his acceptance speech: "All adults are responsible for all children," he said. "Let's not vote for politicians that don't take this seriously into account."

Presenter Jimmy Kimmel, whose late-night show last year was suspended after comments he made about Charlie Kirk's killing, was among the most blunt.

"There are some countries that don't support free speech," said Kimmel. "I'm not at liberty to say which. Let's just leave it at North Korea and CBS."

Shortly after, "Mr. Nobody Against Putin," a film about a Russian primary schoolteacher who documents his students' indoctrination to support Russia's war with Ukraine, won best documentary.

"Mr. Nobody Against Putin" is about how you lose your country," co-director said. "And what we saw when working with this footage is that you lose it through countless, small, little acts of complicity."

"We all face a moral choice," he added, "but, luckily, a nobody is more powerful than you think."

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Tributes to Reiner, Redford and others

Elegy also marked the Oscars. Producers expanded the in memoriam segment following a year that featured the deaths of so many Hollywood legends, including Keaton, Robert Duvall and Redford. Barbra Streisand spoke about Redford, her "The Way We Were" co-star.

"Bob had real backbone," said Streisand, who called Redford "an intellectual cowboy" before singing a few bars of "The Way We Were."

Billy Crystal paid tribute to Rob and Michele Reiner, who were killed in their home in December. Crystal, a close friend of Rob Reiner's who memorably starred in 1989's "When Harry Met Sally..." and 1987's "Princess Bride." In his moving remarks, Crystal quoted the latter.

"All we can say is: Buddy, how much fun we had storming the castle," said Crystal.

Theatrical bests streaming, again

Yet again, the night's final award again didn't go to a streaming release; Apple's "CODA" remains the only streaming film to achieve that distinction. "Sinners" and "One Battle After Another" were both theatrical releases shot on film.

Apple's top contender this time, the Formula One race drama "F1," a movie that it partnered with Warner Bros. to distribute theatrically, won for best sound. The lone blockbuster of the year to go home with a win was "Avatar: Fire and Ash," for visual effects.

Some of O'Brien's best digs came at the expense of the streamers. Netflix chief Ted Sarandos, he joked, was in a theater for the first time. The host also lamented the lack of nominees for Amazon MGM: "Why isn't the website I order toilet paper from winning more Oscars?"

"I'm honored to be the last human host of the Academy Awards," said O'Brien. "Next year it's going to be a Waymo in a tux."

Republicans resist calls for Iran war hearings, creating a new standoff with Democrats

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The United States' war with Iran is entering its third week, but Congress has yet to publicly test the Trump administration's case for the conflict.

Republicans in Congress have so far side-stepped public debate over the war, even as Senate Democrats reach for every tool at their disposal to demand hearings with Trump administration officials. Increasingly frustrated, Democrats are threatening this week to force a series of votes on the war, hoping that the effort to gum up the Senate's voting schedule will prod Republicans to action.

"We've had no oversight whatsoever over what the executive is doing as we're spending a billion dollars a day, and we have failed to have any real substantive debate or discussion," said Sen. Cory Booker, D-N.J.

The role of Congress in the deliberations is an unsettled question with enormous stakes, given that lawmakers have the power to shape the trajectory of the conflict as it grows in cost and casualties. So far, 13 military members have been killed and billions of dollars have been spent, but President Donald Trump has not sought congressional approval for attacking Iran.

As the 17th day of the conflict dawned Monday, Republican lawmakers remained mostly resistant to the idea of quickly forcing public testimony before Congress.

How GOP leaders are handling calls for hearings

Senate Majority Leader John Thune told reporters last week that he didn't expect public hearings specifically on the Iran war, but noted it would inevitably come up in the regular rhythm of testimony on military policy and spending.

"They have briefed us," Thune, R-S.D., said, pointing to classified briefings from the Trump administration. Those sessions have been held behind closed doors and most lawmakers refuse to disclose more than the broad topics of discussion.

Thune also noted there have been regular news conferences from Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and

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Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. They are "answering the hard questions that are being asked," Thune said.

The GOP chairs of committees dealing with national security have also said they don't have plans in the near term to hold hearings specifically on the war, though some acknowledged the value of lawmaker questioning.

Sen. Roger Wicker, the chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee, argued that the regular run of hearings on Capitol Hill would provide lawmakers with plentiful opportunities to ask questions.

"We're going to conduct generous oversight, thorough oversight," said Wicker, R-Miss.

Some Republicans are looking ahead to an expected supplemental budget request from the Trump administration to cover the costs of the war. That request, however, is likely weeks away and faces a difficult path through Congress.

Democrats have pointed out that the Pentagon has already received additional funding from Republicans' marquee tax cut law that was passed last year and provided funding for GOP priorities, including at the Pentagon.

Wariness growing from some Republicans

Still, agitation from a few Republicans at the lack of high-level responses from the Trump administration is starting to show, especially as they brace for a hefty war bill from the administration.

"I don't want to just be given the invoice from the Department of Defense, saying this is what it's going to cost," said Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska. "I want them to be engaged with us."

She added that it was important for lawmakers to get information both in classified briefings and public hearings "so that the public can better understand this, too."

Another GOP senator on the powerful Appropriations Committee, Louisiana's John Kennedy, exited a classified briefing last week fuming that it had been a "total waste of time" because the officials were not able to provide the answers that top-level Cabinet officials could.

Republicans have almost uniformly backed Trump's decision to launch an attack on Iran, though many are wary of a lengthy conflict. Trump has cycled through different objectives for the war, ranging from crippling Iran's military capabilities to a demand for "unconditional surrender."

"I think we have to let the objective play out as far as we can, and if then the effort gets murky on how to get to the objective, that might be a good time to have some hearings, but it's too early," said Sen. Cynthia Lummis, a Wyoming Republican.

But as the midterm elections approach, Republicans are also aware that public support for the war remains tepid.

"I wish we could disclose a lot of this publicly because it would make it a whole lot easier to explain to the American people," said Sen. Mike Rounds, R-S.D., adding that classified briefings were necessary to protect U.S. service members now that the war is under way.

How Democrats may force a debate

Democrats, meanwhile, are threatening to do just about everything in their power to bring attention to the war, even if it means repeatedly forcing votes that fail.

A group of six Democrats has said that unless hearings are scheduled with Hegseth, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and other Cabinet officials, they will call up daily votes on a series of war powers resolutions that if passed would require Trump to gain congressional approval before carrying out any more attacks on Iran. Similar resolutions have already been rejected by both chambers in the Republican-controlled Congress.

The votes, however, would eat up valuable time on the Senate floor and set the ground for a debate on the conflict just as Senate Republicans plan to spend much of the week trying to pass Trump's priority legislation to impose strict new proof-of-citizenship requirements for voting.

The group of Democratic senators also hinted at using other tactics to slow the Senate's work on other business.

Sen. Chris Murphy, a Connecticut Democrat, told reporters that unless there is a commitment for public hearings, "We're not going to let the Senate go on with business as usual. We're not going to let the Senate be silenced."

3,800 workers are set to strike Monday at one of the nation's largest meatpacking plants

GREELEY, Colo. (AP) — About 3,800 workers at one of the nation's largest meatpacking plants were set to strike Monday morning in Colorado in what union representatives said would be the first walkout at a U.S. beef slaughterhouse since the 1980s.

The strike at the Swift Beef Co. plant in Greeley was set to begin at 5:30 a.m. MDT, said Kim Cordova, president of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 7, which represents the workers.

It follows accusations from union officials that owner JBS USA retaliated against workers and committed other unfair labor practices amid contract negotiations. A previous contract was due to expire at midnight Sunday.

The expected strike comes at a 75-year low for the U.S. cattle population, with a Jan. 1 inventory of 86.2 million animals -- down 1% from the prior year. Beef prices have added to economic anxiety in the U.S., while the administration of President Donald Trump has turned to a trade deal with Argentina in efforts to lower prices for food, including beef.

It also follows the January closure of a meatpacking plant in Lexington, Nebraska, which was expected to ripple through the local economy and community.

At the Greeley plant, the company tried to intimidate workers to quit the union in one-on-one meetings, union general counsel Matt Shechter said.

Cordova said 99% of workers voted to authorize the strike. No formal negotiations took place over the weekend after the company refused a union request to negotiate on Saturday, Shechter said.

JBS USA said in statement that any employee who didn't want to strike would have work and be paid. The company said it would operate two shifts at the plant Monday and would temporarily move production as needed to other JBS facilities.

The statement said the company operates in full compliance with federal and state labor and employment laws.

"Our goal is to minimize impact to our customers, our partners, and the broader marketplace while we work toward a fair resolution in Greeley," the company said.

It's the first strike at a U.S. slaughterhouse since workers walked out at a Hormel plant in Minnesota in 1985, Cordova said. That strike lasted more than a year and included violent confrontations between police and protesters, according to the Minnesota Historical Society.

Severe storms pummel parts of US with snow and high winds and raise tornado threat

By SOPHIA TAREEN, GARY D. ROBERTSON and MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Successive punches of snow and wind were set to impact the eastern half of the United States on Monday as severe weather swept across much of the nation and made roads impassable in the Upper Midwest.

Forecasters said mid-Atlantic states and Washington, D.C., were at greatest risk for high winds and tornadoes. The cold front was expected to move off the East Coast by Tuesday, bringing sharply colder weather in its wake, forecasters said.

The late winter blast comes as Hawaii continued to be affected by a separate storm system that caused severe flooding over the weekend.

Forecasters warn about line of storms, tornadoes

The National Weather Service that warned a line of severe storms with damaging winds would cross much of the Eastern U.S. After firing up Sunday, the storms were crossing the Mississippi, Tennessee and Ohio valleys.

The storm threat was expected to enter the Appalachians, then move toward the East Coast, where "severe thunderstorms with widespread damaging winds and several tornadoes" were expected, the ser-

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vice said.

A stretch from parts of South Carolina to Maryland appeared most likely to experience the greatest damaging winds Monday afternoon, the weather service said. That could include Raleigh, North Carolina, Richmond, Virginia, and the nation's capital.

Officials said schools in Raleigh and Chapel Hill, North Carolina, would be closed Monday. Gov. Josh Stein urged residents to enable emergency alerts on their phones ahead of expected wind gusts of 74 mph (119 kph).

Beyond the threat to lives and property, "whether it's wind gusts from a squall line, blizzard or snow, or just wind because of the storm, you're looking at several major airports being impacted," said AccuWeather senior meteorologist Tyler Roys.

Big snows in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan

An area from central Wisconsin to Michigan's Upper Peninsula was likely to see over 2 feet (60 centimeters) of snow, with higher isolated totals on the peninsula, Roys said. Lower snow accumulations in places such as Chicago and Milwaukee will likely create trouble for commuters on Monday, he added.

Jim Allen, 45, who lives on the Upper Peninsula, said his family stocked up on necessities and he was ready to clear snow several times Sunday with a shovel and snowblower.

"We're basically prepared to just kind of hunker down for a few days if we need to," Allen said.

More than 600 flights were canceled at Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport, according to FlightAware, which tracks flight disruptions. Dozens more through Detroit were scrapped. O'Hare and Midway international airports in Chicago reported more than 850 cancellations.

Power outages remain, some from earlier high winds

More than 210,000 utility customers in six Great Lakes states were without electricity Sunday, according to PowerOutage.us. Some originated on Friday when gusts in the region reached 85 mph (137 km). Widespread outages also were reported in parts of Pennsylvania and Arkansas.

In Nebraska, about 30 National Guard members were deployed to combat multiple wildfires across a broad swath of range and grassland, state officials said. One fire-related fatality was reported.

Landslides, rescues, collapsed home on Maui

Rain continued falling on Sunday in Hawaii, where acres of farmland and homes have been flooded, roads have been closed and shelters opened. Some areas of Maui received more than 20 inches (51 centimeters) of rain, Maui County Mayor Richard Bissen said in a social media post.

Maui County later on Sunday downgraded an evacuation notice and said crews were pumping water from retentions basins to keep them at safe levels.

Resident and real estate broker Jesse Wald, who recorded video of a coastal road's collapse Saturday, said other parts of the road were flooded out by mud and sediment.

"In the 20 years I've been here I've never seen this much rain," he said.

US-China trade talks open in Paris, paving the way for Trump-Xi summit

BEIJING (AP) — Representatives from Beijing and Washington began their economic and trade talks in Paris on Sunday, paving the way for U.S. President Donald Trump's state visit to Beijing to meet Chinese leader Xi Jinping in about two weeks.

The delegations, led by U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng, convened in the French capital in the morning, China's official news agency Xinhua reported. The White House has said that Trump will travel to China from March 31 to April 2, though Beijing has not officially confirmed it.

Bessent said on Thursday that his team will continue to deliver results that put America's farmers, workers and businesses first. The U.S. Treasury Department said Bessent will meet He on Sunday and Monday.

China's commerce ministry said Friday the two sides are set to discuss "trade and economic issues of

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mutual concern.”

Trump’s visit to China will be the first for a U.S. president since he went in his first term in 2017. It will come five months after the two leaders met in the South Korean city of Busan and agreed to a one-year truce in a trade war that temporarily saw tit-for-tat tariffs soar to triple digits before the two sides climbed down.

Still, trade remains a source of tensions. The commerce ministry hit back against the Trump administration’s new trade investigation into 16 trading partners, which included China. The investigation — which came after a Supreme Court ruling struck down Trump’s sweeping global tariffs that were imposed last year — could pave the way for new tariffs.

The U.S. also launched a separate investigation into the import of goods made with forced labor from countries including China.

China said Monday that it had already made representations over concerns about the new investigation to the U.S. “It’s a mistake on top of a mistake, that severely harms the global supply chain’s safety and stability,” according to a statement from the Ministry of Commerce.

Another issue that could be discussed is the Iran war, especially when global anxiety is soaring over oil prices and supplies. Trump said Saturday that he hopes China, France, Japan, South Korea, the United Kingdom and others will send warships to keep the Strait of Hormuz “open and safe.”

Before Sunday’s talks, Gary Ng, a senior economist at French bank Natixis and a research fellow at the Central European Institute of Asian Studies, said the Paris meeting is likely the most important bilateral one before the Xi-Trump summit.

The key issue is “whether China and the U.S. can agree on what is agreed and manage disagreement. Iran is a new factor, but Beijing is more concerned about the flip-flopping of U.S. policies,” he said.

Last week, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said it would be a “big year” for China-U.S. relations. While he did not confirm the state visit, Wang said that “the agenda of high-level exchange is already on the table.”

Bessent and He have led trade negotiations between the countries since last year, having met in Geneva, London, Stockholm, Madrid and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Snow and wind batter parts of US, with threat of thunderstorms and tornadoes starting later Sunday

By SOPHIA TAREEN and GARY D. ROBERTSON Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — A broad and erratic patchwork of severe weather rumbled across much of the U.S. on Sunday, dumping heavy snow and making roads impassable in the Upper Midwest while damaging high winds swept across the Plains.

Hawaii continued to be affected by severe flooding.

And portions of the mid-South readied for late-day thunderstorms.

Forecasters said the storms would spread eastward by Monday, with mid-Atlantic states and Washington, D.C., at greatest risk for high winds and tornadoes.

Successive punches of snow, wind and severe weather were set to impact the eastern half of the United States, said AccuWeather senior meteorologist Tyler Roys.

Beyond the threat to lives and property, “whether it’s wind gusts from a squall line, blizzard or snow, or just wind because of the storm, you’re looking at several major airports being impacted,” Roy said.

Big snows in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan

An area from central Wisconsin to Michigan’s Upper Peninsula was likely to see over 2 feet (60 centimeters) of snow, with higher isolated totals on the peninsula, Roys said. Lower snow accumulations in places such as Chicago and Milwaukee will likely create trouble for commuters on Monday, he added.

Over 20 inches (51 centimeters) of snow fell in some portions of southeastern Minnesota and western Wisconsin as of Sunday afternoon, according to National Weather Service reports. Transportation officials warned of worsening conditions with low visibility and snow-covered roadways.

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Wisconsin snowplow driver Aaron Haas said it was one of the worst storms he had seen in years. On Sunday around the town of Marshfield, Haas was stacking piles of snow as high as his truck.

"You can't see anything when you're on the highways outside of the city," he said.

Jim Allen, 45, who lives on the Upper Peninsula, said his family stocked up on necessities and he was ready to clear snow several times Sunday with a shovel and snowblower.

"We're basically prepared to just kind of hunker down for a few days if we need to," Allen said.

More than 600 flights were canceled at Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport Sunday, according to FlightAware, which tracks flight disruptions. Dozens more through Detroit were also scrapped. O'Hare and Midway international airports in Chicago, where rain and snow was expected overnight into Monday, reported more than 850 cancellations.

Landslides, rescues, collapsed home on Maui

Rain continued falling on Sunday in Hawaii, where acres of farmland and homes have been flooded, roads have been closed and shelters opened. PowerOutage.us, which tracks outages nationwide, reported almost 40,000 electric customers in Hawaii without power by midday Sunday.

Flash flooding has been a major problem in recent days in places like Maui, Molokai and the Big Island, where rain had been falling from 1 to 2 inches (2.5 to 5 centimeters) an hour overnight, according to the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency.

Some areas of Maui received more than 20 inches (51 centimeters) of rain, Maui County Mayor Richard Bissen said in a social media post late Saturday.

"We're seeing flooding, landslides, sinkholes, debris and downed power lines across the county," he said. Expressing gratitude in the Hawaiian language, the mayor added, "mahalo for continuing to look out for one another."

Video footage with Bissen's post showed washed out or collapsed roads, a car stuck by floodwaters and raging waterways. National Guard members and fire department workers made multiple floodwater rescues, Bissen said.

Tom and Carrie Bashaw said they could do little to prevent part of their home in Maui's Iao Valley from collapsing beneath rising waters. On Friday, the water's force starting overtaking nearby trees.

"When we lost the mango and monkey pod, we started throwing stuff in bags and packing up," Tom Bashaw told HawaiiNewsNow. They returned Saturday morning and "the whole backside of the house" was gone, he said.

Maui resident and real estate broker Jesse Wald, who recorded video of a coastal road's collapse Saturday, said other parts of road were flooded out by mud and sediment.

"In the 20 years I've been here I've never seen this much rain," Wald said. "I'm from Wisconsin and we get thunderstorms, you know pretty often in the summer, so it felt like a Wisconsin thunderstorm but times 10."

Maui County later on Sunday downgraded an evacuation notice and said crews were pumping water from retentions basins to keep them at safe levels.

Power outages remain, some from earlier high winds

More than 210,000 utility customers in six Great Lakes states were without electricity as of Sunday afternoon, according to PowerOutage.us. Some originated on Friday when gusts in the region reached 85 mph (137 km).

In Nebraska, about 30 National Guard members were deployed to combat multiple wildfires across a broad swath of range and grassland, state officials said.

Three of the largest wildfires had damaged more than 900 square miles (2,331 square kilometers) as of Saturday, officials said. One fire-related fatality was reported Friday. Nebraska Gov. Jim Pillen urged residents to follow locally-issued evacuation orders, adding that winds were "supposed to be extraordinary."

The weather service issued a high-wind warning for most of Nebraska, with gusts of up to 60 mph (97 kph) possible amid falling snow. Roys said high winds would affect a region stretching from the U.S.-Mexico border to the Great Lakes, and from Denver eastward to the Appalachian Mountains.

Forecasters warn about line of storms, tornadoes

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The weather service warned that a line of severe storms with damaging winds would cross much of the Eastern U.S. by late Monday. It was to begin Sunday afternoon and cross the Mississippi, Tennessee and Ohio valleys.

The storm threat was expected to enter the Appalachians early Monday, then move toward the East Coast, where "severe thunderstorms with widespread damaging winds and several tornadoes" were expected Monday, the service said.

A stretch from parts of South Carolina to Maryland appeared most likely to experience the greatest damaging winds Monday afternoon, the weather service said. That could include Raleigh, North Carolina; Richmond, Virginia, and the nation's capital. It said an increased — albeit much lower — risk stretched north to New York and south to Florida, with thunderstorms possible in New England.

Officials said schools in Raleigh and Chapel Hill, North Carolina would be closed Monday and the state's governor urged residents to enable emergency alerts on their phones ahead of expected wind gusts of 74 mph (119 kph).

Analysis: Two weeks into war with Iran, Trump has been knocked back on his political heels

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

ABOARD AIR FORCE ONE (AP) — In the two weeks since the U.S. and Israel launched strikes on Iran, President Donald Trump increasingly has been knocked on his political heels.

He's grown more agitated with news coverage and has failed to find a way to explain why he started the war — or how he will end it — that resonates with a public concerned by American deaths in the conflict, surging oil prices and dropping financial markets. Even some of his supporters are questioning his plan and his overall poll numbers are declining.

Meanwhile, Moscow is getting a boost from the war's early days after Trump eased sanctions on some Russian oil shipments. That, combined with rising oil prices, undercut the yearslong push to crimp President Vladimir Putin's ability to wage war in Ukraine.

Then there are Democrats, who were left reeling after Trump won the 2024 election. With control of Congress at stake in November's midterms, the party has come together to oppose Trump's Iran policy and point to the economic turmoil as proof that Republicans haven't kept their promises to bring down everyday costs.

"I think Democrats are well-positioned for this November and the midterms," said Kelly Dietrich, CEO of the National Democratic Training Committee, which trains party backers to run for office and staff campaigns.

Dietrich said the past two weeks show the Trump administration has failed at long-term planning. "They're flying by the seat of their pants, and the rest of us are paying the price," he said.

Trump let some of his frustrations show on Air Force One as he flew back from a weekend at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida, lashing out at allies and other countries dependent on Middle Eastern oil for not doing more to counter Iran and specifically name-checking British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who he said initially declined to put British aircraft carriers "into harm's way."

"Whether we get support or not," Trump said, "I can say this, and I said to them: We will remember."

Trump seeks help securing the Strait of Hormuz

The president spent much of his weekend at his golf club in West Palm Beach, Florida. He also attended a closed-door fundraiser for his MAGA Inc. super PAC at Mar-a-Lago on Saturday night.

Last weekend, Trump played golf at another of his South Florida properties a day after witnessing the dignified transfer for six U.S. soldiers killed in the Iran war. A political action committee used a photo of the solemn event in a fundraising email, but Trump brushed off a question about whether it was appropriate, saying "there's nobody that's better to the military than me."

Trump and his White House have increasingly complained about media coverage of the conflict. On Saturday, he cheered on his broadcast regulator for threatening to pull broadcast licenses unless they "correct course."

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He angrily told reporters flying with him on Air Force One that coverage of the war had been influenced by Iranian propaganda, which exaggerated the military and political strength of Iran's leaders and their support among the country's people.

The president — who kept allies other than Israel in the dark about his war plans for Iran — this weekend began suggesting the U.S. would need to lean on the international community to help oil tankers move through the Strait of Hormuz, where transportation has been severely disrupted, throwing global energy markets into a tailspin.

Iran has said it plans to keep up attacks on energy infrastructure and use its 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.

Trump said the U.S. was talking to "about seven" countries about providing military support to help reopen the strait. But he wouldn't say which ones and gave no indication of when such a coalition might be formed.

"It's something that we don't need and these countries do need," the president said, adding "I think it's a good thing for other countries to come in."

Singling out allies in Europe, Trump also said, "We're always there for NATO" and "It'd be interesting to see what country wouldn't help us with a very small endeavor."

"Really I'm demanding that these countries come in and protect their own territory," Trump said.

But other countries have reacted to that call only cautiously so far.

South Korea plans to "closely coordinate and carefully review" Trump's comments, while Japan is closely watching developments. Britain's defense ministry said it was "discussing with our allies and partners a range of options to ensure the security of shipping in the region."

A spokesperson for the Chinese Embassy in Washington said keeping the strait "safe and stable serves the common interests of the international community" and that "as a sincere friend and strategic partner of Middle Eastern countries, China will continue to strengthen communication with relevant parties." Trump — who is slated to visit Beijing later this month — declined to say whether China would join the effort.

Trump had pledged at the beginning of the war that U.S. naval ships would escort tankers through the waterway. But that hasn't happened yet.

In the meantime, questions about the strait continue to undermine Trump's recent pronouncement during a Kentucky rally that, "We've won."

"You know, you never like to say too early you won. We won," he said. "We won the, in the first hour, it was over."

The war has far-reaching political implications

The U.S. Treasury Department announced this past week a 30-day waiver on Russian sanctions, aiming to free up Russian oil cargoes stranded at sea to help ease supply shortages caused by the Iran war.

That's despite analysts saying that spiraling oil prices due to Persian Gulf production blockages are benefiting the Russian economy. Moscow relies heavily on oil revenue to finance its war on Ukraine, and sanctions were a growing handicap.

Some of Washington's key allies have decried the move as empowering Putin. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called easing sanctions "not the right decision" and said it "certainly does not help peace" because it leads to a "strengthening of Russia's position."

With midterm races now starting to heat up, Trump was asked about the potential political impact of voters seeing gas prices jump.

"Politically, sure, everybody has concern — I have to do what's right," Trump said Sunday night. "I can't say that 'Gee, I don't want to have any impact on oil prices for three or four weeks, or two months, and we're going to let Iran have a nuclear weapon.'"

Energy Secretary Chris Wright said of higher energy prices on NBC's "Meet the Press" that "Americans are feeling it right now" and would "for a few more weeks."

Iran also has even divided Trump's "Make America Great Again" base, between those who support the action and others who say that Trump expressly campaigned on ending wars.

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The political turbulence has some Democrats predicting their party could see midterm gains rivaling 2018's "blue wave" election during Trump's first term.

"Democrats just have to keep reminding people that he made a promise to bring prices down, and they're still going up," Democratic strategist Brad Bannon said of Trump. "And now they're going to go up even more because prices in gasoline can increase prices of everything else, including at the grocery store."

Trump says that he's asked 'about 7' countries to join coalition to police Iran's Strait of Hormuz

By SAM METZ, WILL WEISSERT, JULIA FRANKEL and CARA ANNA Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — President Donald Trump said Sunday that he has demanded about seven countries send warships to keep the Strait of Hormuz open, but his appeals have brought no commitments as oil prices soar during the Iran war.

The president declined to name the countries heavily reliant on Middle East crude that the administration is negotiating with to join a coalition to police the waterway where about one-fifth the world's traded oil normally flows.

"I'm demanding that these countries come in and protect their own territory, because it is their own territory," Trump said about the strait, claiming the shipping channel is not something the United States needs because of its own access to oil. Trump spoke while answering reporters' questions as he flew back to Washington from Florida aboard Air Force One.

Trump said China gets about 90% of its oil from the strait, while the U.S. gets a minimal amount. He declined to discuss whether China will join the coalition.

"It would be nice to have other countries police that with us, and we'll help. We'll work with them," Trump said. Previously, he has appealed to China, France, Japan, South Korea and Britain.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi earlier told CBS that Tehran has been "approached by a number of countries" seeking safe passage for their vessels, "and this is up to our military to decide." He said a group of vessels from "different countries" had been allowed to pass, without providing details.

Iran has said the strait is open to all except the United States and its allies.

Araghchi added that "we don't see any reason why we should talk with Americans" about finding a way to end the war, noting that Israel and the U.S. started the fighting with coordinated attacks on Feb. 28 during indirect U.S.-Iran talks on Iran's nuclear program. He also said Tehran had "no plan to recover" the enriched uranium that is under rubble following U.S. and Israeli attacks last year.

Countries are cautious after Trump's call

U.S. Energy Secretary Chris Wright told NBC earlier Sunday that he has been "in dialogue" with some of the countries Trump had mentioned previously, and said he expected China "will be a constructive partner" in reopening the strait.

But countries made no promises.

Britain said Prime Minister Keir Starmer on Sunday discussed with Trump the importance of reopening the strait "to end the disruption to global shipping," and spoke with Canada's prime minister about it separately.

Aboard Air Force One, Trump specifically named Starmer, who he said initially declined to put British aircraft carriers "into harm's way."

"Whether we get support or not, but I can say this, and I said to them: We will remember," Trump said.

A spokesperson for China's embassy to the U.S., Liu Pengyu, said previously that "all parties have the responsibility to ensure stable and unimpeded energy supply" and that China would "strengthen communication with relevant parties" for de-escalation.

South Korea's Foreign Ministry said it "takes note" of Trump's call and that it "will closely coordinate and carefully review" the situation with the U.S.

Expectations are high that Trump will ask Japan directly when Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi meets him on Thursday at the White House.

France previously said it is working with countries — President Emmanuel Macron mentioned partners

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in Europe, India and Asia — on a possible international mission to escort ships through the strait but has stressed it must be when “the circumstances permit,” when fighting has subsided.

Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul of Germany, which was not mentioned in Trump’s call, told ARD television: “Will we soon be an active part of this conflict? No.”

Meanwhile, emergency oil stocks “will soon start flowing to global markets,” the International Energy Agency said Sunday, describing the collective action to lower prices “by far the largest ever.”

It updated last week’s announcement of 400 million barrels to nearly 412 million. Asian member countries plan to release stocks “immediately,” and reserves from Europe and the Americas will be released “from the end of March.”

Trump didn’t directly answer whether his administration is talking about selling oil futures as a way to cap surging oil prices.

“The prices are going to come tumbling down as soon as it’s over. And it’s going to be over pretty quickly,” he told reporters.

More missile and drone attacks are reported

Gulf Arab states including the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain reported new missile or drone attacks a day after Iran called for the evacuation of three major ports in the United Arab Emirates — the first time it has threatened a neighboring country’s non-U.S. assets.

Dubai temporarily suspended flights at its international airport — the world’s busiest — after a drone hit a fuel tank and caused a fire. Civil defense crews contained the blaze and no injuries were reported, authorities said.

Tehran has claimed that Friday’s U.S. strikes on Kharg Island, home to Iran’s primary oil terminal, were launched from the UAE, without providing evidence. It has threatened to attack U.S.-linked “oil, economic and energy infrastructures” if its oil infrastructure is hit.

U.S. Central Command said it had no response to Iran’s claim, and Anwar Gargash, a diplomatic adviser to the UAE president, rejected it. Gulf countries that host U.S. bases have denied allowing their land or airspace to be used for military operations against Iran.

Iran has fired hundreds of missiles and drones at Arab Gulf neighbors during the war, causing significant damage and rattling economies even as most are intercepted. Tehran says it targets U.S. assets, even as Iranian strikes are reported at civilian sites such as airports and oil fields.

War’s toll mounts across the region

Iranian strikes have killed at least a dozen civilians in Gulf countries, most of them migrant workers.

In Iran, the International Committee for the Red Cross said more than 1,300 people have been killed. Iran’s Health Ministry said 223 women and 202 children are among the dead, according to Mizan, the judiciary’s official news agency.

Iran’s government on Sunday showed journalists buildings damaged by strikes in Tehran on Friday. A police station was hit and surrounding buildings were damaged. Some apartments’ outer walls had been stripped away.

“God had mercy on all of us,” said Elham Movagghari, a resident. Other Iranians are leaving the country.

In Israel, 12 people have been killed by Iranian missile fire and more have been injured, including three on Sunday. At least 13 U.S. military members have been killed, six in a plane crash in Iraq last week.

At least 820 people have been killed in Lebanon, according to its Health Ministry, since Iran-backed Hezbollah hit Israel and Israel responded with strikes and sent additional troops into southern Lebanon. In just 10 days, more than 800,000 people — nearly one out of every seven residents of Lebanon — have been displaced.

More Iranian missile strikes hit Israel

Israel’s military said early Monday that Iran launched missiles toward Israel.

Earlier, several strikes hit central Israel and the Tel Aviv area, where they caused damage at 23 sites and sparked a small fire. Magen David Adom, Israel’s rescue service, released video showing a large crater in a street and shrapnel damage to an apartment building.

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Israel's military says Iran is firing cluster bombs that can evade some air defenses and scatter submunitions across multiple locations. ____

This version corrects to say Araghchi was speaking to CBS, not NBC as previously reported.

Duke, Arizona, Michigan, Florida get top seeding for March Madness. Miami (Ohio) gets a shot

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

The team that went undefeated in the regular season, racked up more victories than anyone but Duke and Arizona — and fewer losses than any team at all — is anything but your run-of-the-mill basketball behemoth.

In fact, Miami (Ohio), despite that 31-1 record and maybe because of a little chip that's been placed on its shoulder, is one of those plucky underdogs that makes the NCAA Tournament what it is.

Welcome to March Madness with a twist.

While Duke (32-2) took the overall top seed on Selection Sunday, with Arizona (32-2), Michigan (31-3) and defending champion Florida (26-7) also on the top line, the RedHawks barely scratched their way into the bracket.

They are an 11 seed and have to play a First Four game against SMU on Wednesday. But after all the debate and hand-wringing that came with their single loss last week, which immediately turned them from sure thing into bubble team, they now enjoy the same privilege as the other 67 teams in the field.

They will have a chance to win and advance, with no selection committee, bracketologists or former coaches-turned-TV experts deciding their fate.

"I was very confident," Miami forward Eian Elmer said. "I think it's hard to leave a team that's 31-0 in a regular season out. It just wouldn't look right for the sport, diminishing something like that, something that's very rarely done."

After the First Four, the full slate of games begins Thursday and Friday, with the national champion set to be crowned in Indianapolis on April 6.

The chair of the selection committee, Keith Gill, tried to explain how Miami of the lightly regarded Mid-American Conference ended up where it did. The RedHawks, he said, were not the last of the 37 at-large teams slotted into the field.

But, he said, they were ranked last of those 37 teams because once they got in, they were compared against other teams close to them, and things like their 339th-ranked strength of schedule and zero wins (in fact, zero games) against top-caliber, or Quadrant 1, opponents worked against them.

Other factors worked for them, including having the nation's second-ranked scoring offense, along with a "strength of record" in the top 30 and "wins above bubble" in the top 40 (each of those statistics would take a small pamphlet to explain).

"They have some really strong resume metrics that show their accomplishments," Gill said.

For what it's worth, Miami is an 8 1/2-point underdog against SMU and a 2000-1 longshot to win it all, according to BetMGM Sportsbook.

Unlikely, indeed, but still better odds than the much-cited 9.2 quintillion-1 odds a person has of filling out a perfect bracket.

Some conference tournaments mean more than others

The favorite to win the national championship, according to BetMGM, is Michigan, which was listed at 13-4 shortly after the bracket came out, just a tad ahead of Duke, which was 10-3.

The Wolverines took a mini-hit in the seedings, dropping a notch to overall No. 3 after an eight-point loss to Purdue in the Big Ten title game. The Boilermakers are a 2 seed instead of a 3 with the win, heading to St. Louis to play tournament first-timer Queens.

The conference title did not do as much for St. John's (28-6), which stayed where it's been predicted most of the season — as a No. 5 — even after a 20-point win over UConn for the Big East title.

"Their results in the nonconference did not have kind of the same depth and quality of some of the folks

that are ahead of them," Gill said of the Red Storm's less-than-stellar non-conference showing this season.

Last year, St. John's became the sixth team coach Rick Pitino had led to the tournament. This year, the Johnnies go again but they must travel to San Diego to face Northern Iowa in the first round.

"I said, 'Don't take it as a negative,'" Pitino said. "I've had teams go to a Final Four that first had to go to Portland and then Arizona from Louisville."

Bubble bursts for Auburn, San Diego State and others

Among those left out were San Diego State, Indiana, Oklahoma and Auburn.

The Tigers had 16 losses but the nation's third-best strength of schedule. The snub drew predictable blowback from Bruce Pearl, their former coach and father of their current coach, who was working for CBS and said "they played the toughest schedule in the country and I don't know if they were rewarded for it."

Even with Oklahoma and Auburn left out, the Southeastern Conference led the way by placing 10 teams in the field of 68, four short of its record from last year.

The Big Ten followed with nine, the ACC and Big 12 with eight apiece -- an unsurprising result in an era of massive conference expansion and NIL compensation drawing top players to the biggest spenders.

The Gators are the defending champion, trying to repeat their back-to-back titles from 2006-07. Last season, Florida was part of an all-No. 1 Final Four -- the first time that had happened in 17 seasons.

Houston gets a No. 2 seed and a potential regional in its hometown

No. 2 Houston got placed in the South Regional, with its potential Sweet 16 and Elite Eight games scheduled for Houston. In the mix is a possible rematch of last year's national final against Florida, which would essentially be a road team with a better seed.

"If we have to run into that issue, there's worse problems in the world," Gators coach Todd Golden said earlier this week. But "I would enjoy somebody else in Houston (rather) than Houston."

Giving teams home games in regionals is something the NCAA tries to avoid. Gill said it wasn't possible in this case, and pointed out that last year, Houston was a No. 1 seed that beat Purdue in Indianapolis, which is located an hour away from the Boilermakers campus.

"What I would say is, it's the NCAA Tournament," Gill said. "You're going to have to win games away from home against really tough opponents, and that's why this is the best postseason in sports."

Israeli military claims brother of man who attacked Michigan synagogue was Hezbollah commander

By JULIA FRANKEL AND BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The man who attacked a Michigan synagogue was the brother of a Hezbollah commander killed earlier this month in an Israeli airstrike, Israel's military claimed Sunday.

Ibrahim Ghazali was killed in the March 5 strike in Lebanon along with three other relatives of the attacker in Michigan — a week before authorities allege Ayman Mohamad Ghazali drove his car into a major synagogue outside Detroit and killed himself after security fired at him.

The FBI's Detroit office, which is investigating the synagogue attack, declined to comment on the claims by Israel's military about Ibrahim Ghazali.

"Out of respect for the ongoing investigation, we will continue to refrain from commenting on its substance," FBI spokesman Jordan Hall said in an email Sunday.

The Israeli military alleges Ibrahim Ghazali was a Hezbollah commander who managed weapons for a unit that fired rockets at Israel.

A Lebanese official, who requested anonymity because he could not publicly discuss details of the airstrike, has confirmed Ibrahim Ghazali's death. The official told The Associated Press that Ghazali's children, Ali and Fatima, and brother, Kassim, were also killed in the strike that struck their home just after sunset.

In a statement sent to the AP in Beirut, Hezbollah said that the brothers, Ibrahim and Kassim, were a referee in a local soccer league and a scout member, and they were targeted at home along with their children, but didn't explicitly deny that Ibrahim was in the group.

Authorities have said that Ayman Ghazali, 41, carried out the synagogue attack after learning that four

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of his family members were killed in the Israeli strike.

Israel has stepped up attacks on the Iranian-backed militant group Hezbollah in Lebanon as the war with Iran has spread violence across the Middle East.

On Thursday, Ayman Ghazali waited in his car outside Temple Israel, near Detroit, for about two hours with a rifle, commercial grade fireworks and jugs of liquid believed to be gasoline, before crashing into the building full of dozens of children, according to authorities.

He started firing his gun through the windshield, exchanging fire with an armed security guard. Ghazali fatally shot himself after he got stuck in his vehicle and the engine caught fire, said Jennifer Runyan, the special agent in charge of the FBI's Detroit field office. No staffers or children inside the synagogue were hurt, likely due to beefed up security in recent months.

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. But the agency said it didn't have enough evidence yet to call it an act of terror.

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.

He lived in a single-story brick home in the Detroit suburb of Dearborn Heights about 40 miles (60 kilometers) south of the synagogue.

The attack on the Michigan synagogue took place on the same day as a former Army National Guard member who served years in prison for attempting to aid the Islamic State group opened fire on a classroom at Old Dominion University in Virginia, killing one person and wounding two others.

'Hoppers' holds onto the No. 1 box office spot as 'Reminders of Him' overperforms

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Pixar's "Hoppers" held onto the top slot at the box office, bouncing back with \$28.5 million in its second weekend, according to studio estimates Sunday, while Colleen Hoover's "Reminders of Him" added to the author's successful streak at the box office.

After its \$45.3 million debut, The Walt Disney Co.'s "Hoppers" release dipped a modest 37% in its follow-up weekend, a promising sign for an animated movie hoping to have strong legs through March. The Pixar original, about a young woman who transforms into the body of a beaver to help defend a pond from development, is hoping to keep attracting audiences with good reviews (94% fresh on Rotten Tomatoes) and strong audience scores (an "A" CinemaScore).

While many of Pixar's sequels have been blockbusters on arrival — like 2024's "Inside Out 2" (\$1.7 billion worldwide) — their originals have recently needed time to get going. In 2023, "Elemental" launched with a disappointing \$29.6 million but went on to gross a hefty \$496.4 million globally.

"Hoppers," which has taken in \$164.7 million globally thus far, has a long way to go to match that, but it's off to a good start. It faced little direct new competition this weekend. The upcoming Amazon MGM sci-fi adventure "Project Hail Mary," however, will soon take up IMAX screens and compete for family moviegoers.

Universal's "Reminders of Him" debuted in second place this weekend with a better-than-expected \$18.3 million. The film, starring Maika Monroe as a woman attempting to rebuild her life after prison, is the third Colleen Hoover adaptation to reach the big screen, following 2024's "It Ends With Us" (\$351 million worldwide for Sony) and 2025's "Regretting You" (\$91 million for Paramount).

"Reminders of Him," which cost about \$25 million to make, got poor reviews (56% fresh on Rotten Tomatoes) and notched a not-great "B" CinemaScore with audiences. But the film, the first from a screenplay co-written by Hoover, extends the bestselling author's popularity with moviegoers.

"Undertone," a micro-budget horror movie from A24, opened with \$9.3 million. The film, written and directed by Ian Tuason, has been touted as A24's best horror film since Ari Aster's "Hereditary" (2018), one of the movies that helped put the indie studio on the map. With a budget of just \$500,000, "Undertone" makes particular use of sound design in a one-setting tale about a paranormal podcaster (Nina Kiri)

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caring for her dying mother.

After its disappointing debut, Warner Bros. "The Bride!" plummeted in its second weekend, dropping 70% with just \$2.1 million. The Maggie Gyllenhaal-directed riff on "The Bride of Frankenstein" cost about \$80-90 million to produce, but so far has grossed just \$11.3 million domestically.

Oscar weekend is often slow in theaters, with the industry's attention largely focused on Sunday's Academy Awards. But the trio of moderate successes in "Hoppers," "Reminders of Him" and "Undertone" lifted moviegoing ahead of Hollywood's biggest night. Year-to-date ticket sales are up 15.2% from the same point last year, according to Comscore.

Top 10 movies by domestic box office

With final domestic figures being released Monday, this list factors in the estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theaters, according to Comscore:

1. "Hoppers," \$28.5 million.
2. "Reminders of Him," \$18.3 million.
3. "Undertone," \$9.3 million.
4. "Scream 7," \$8.4 million.
5. "Goat," \$4.7 million.
6. "The Bride!" \$2.1 million.
7. "Kiki's Delivery Service," \$1.7 million.
8. "Wuthering Heights," \$1.7 million.
9. "TMNT II," \$1.5 million.
10. "Crime 101," \$1.1 million.

'Radiant' mother from Kentucky among 6 US service members who died in air crash in Iraq

By MARK SCOLFARO Associated Press

A woman raising two children was among the six U.S. service members killed last week when a refueling plane involved in the war with Iran crashed in western Iraq.

Tech Sgt. Ashley B. Pruitt, 34, hailed from a large family in Bardstown, Kentucky, and was "very, very" proud of her military career, her husband Gregory Pruitt said Sunday.

"I'll give you something brief -- in a word, radiant," he said on a phone interview, trying to hold back tears. "If there was a light in the room, she was it."

Survivors include the couple's 3-year-old daughter and Sgt. Pruitt's stepson.

Most recently, she had served with the 99th Air Refueling Squadron from Sumpter Smith Joint National Guard Base in Birmingham, Alabama. She was an assistant flight chief of operations and was an instructor in operating the boom of a KC-135.

Pruitt joined the military nine years ago and had previously deployed overseas three times. She had nearly 900 combat flight hours and two associate degrees from the Community College of the Air Force.

Crash in friendly airspace

The U.S. military late Saturday identified Pruitt and the other five crash victims, three connected to the 6th Air Refueling Wing at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida, and Sumpter Smith; the other three were out of an Ohio Air National Guard base in Columbus.

"To lose a member of the Air Force family is excruciatingly painful, especially to those who know them as son, daughter, brother, sister, spouse, mom, or dad," said U.S. Air Force Col. Ed Szczepanik, commander of the 6th Air Refueling Wing, in a news release. "To lose them at the same time is unimaginable."

Maj. Gen. Matthew S. Woodruff, the Ohio adjutant general, called the three from Columbus "remarkable Airmen whose service and commitment embodied the very best of our Ohio National Guard. Their impact on their teammates and our mission will not be forgotten."

The aircraft was in "friendly" airspace, supporting operations against Iran, when an unspecified incident involving another aircraft occurred on Thursday, according to U.S. Central Command. The other plane

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landed safely, U.S. military officials said. The crash is being investigated.

The KC-135 aircraft refuels other planes in midair, allowing them to fly longer distances and sustain operations without landing. The plane also can be used to transport wounded personnel and conduct surveillance missions, according to military experts.

The Congressional Research Service says 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. It has been in service for more than 60 years.

A new father and a new major

Maj. John A. "Alex" Klinner, 33, had just been promoted to major in January and had been deployed less than a week when the crash occurred, his brother-in-law said.

The pilot left behind three small children: 7-month-old twins and a 2-year-old son, according to his brother-in-law, James Harrill.

Klinner was a graduate of Auburn University and an eight-year U.S. Air Force veteran from Birmingham, Alabama. He had just moved with his family into a new home, his wife Libby Klinner said in an Instagram post mourning his death.

He was the chief of squadron standards and evaluations at the Birmingham air base.

An outdoorsman who enjoyed hiking, Klinner was also ready to help others. When Harrill last saw him in January, Klinner had shoveled Harrill's vehicle out of the snow during a family wedding.

"Alex was one of those guys that had this steady command about him," said Harrill, of Atlanta, who helped set up a GoFundMe site for Klinner's family. "He was literally one of the most kindest, giving people."

Libby Klinner said in a post that her heart is broken for their children, who will grow up not knowing their father.

"They won't get to see firsthand the way he would jump up to help in any way he could," she wrote. "They won't see how goofy and funny he was. They won't witness his selflessness, the way he thought about everyone else before himself. They won't get to feel the deep love he had for them."

He deployed four times since 2019 and had put in 362 combat hours and 181 combat support hours.

A man with a ready smile

Tech Sgt. Tyler Simmons, 28, served with the Ohio Air National Guard's 166th Air Refueling Squadron as a boom operator responsible for transferring fuel from the tanker to the receiving aircraft, according to his Air Force biography.

His mother, Cheryl Simmons, said Saturday that she was making funeral plans for her son, who lived in Columbus.

In a statement obtained by WCMH-TV in Columbus, Tyler Simmons' family said it was saddened beyond measure to hear of the fatal crash.

"Tyler's smile could light up any room, his strong presence would fill it. His parents, grandparents, family and friends are grief stricken for the loss of life," they said.

Simmons joined the Air Force in 2017 and earned an associate degree from the Community College of the Air Force. He became a refueling specialist in 2022 and was made a technical sergeant in 2023. He deployed three times in the past decade and had 230 combat hours.

Pilot with Birmingham, Alabama, squadron

Capt. Ariana G. Savino, 31, was a pilot with the 99th Air Refueling Squadron, serving as its chief of current operations. She was responsible for the flying hour program and managing daily flight scheduling, among other duties.

Savino, from Covington, Washington, was a product of the Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps program at Central Washington University, earning an active duty commission in 2017.

She served at bases in Georgia and Mississippi and had more than 300 combat hours. She was made captain in 2021.

A captain with more than 2,000 flight hours

Capt. Seth R. Koval, 38, was an instructor pilot for the KC135R Stratotanker with 19 years of service,

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according to the Ohio National Guard.

A resident of Stoutsville, Ohio, Koval was an aircraft commander with the 121st Air Refueling Wing out of Rickenbacker Air National Guard Base in Columbus. The military said he had trained pilots in air refueling, aeromedical, cargo and passenger operations.

A statement from the U.S. government said Koval was from Mooresville, Indiana.

Koval had a bachelor's degree in aviation operations from Purdue University and deployed five times in the past 12 years. His assignments included stops in Indiana, Ohio, Alabama, Texas and Oklahoma.

Koval had more than 2,000 flight hours, including 443 in combat, the Ohio Guard said. He was promoted to captain in 2022.

Degree in aerospace engineering

Capt. Curtis J. Angst, 30, was in the military for a decade after getting a bachelor's degree in aerospace engineering from the University of Cincinnati. He enlisted in the Ohio Air National Guard in 2015, with deployments in 2015 and this year.

Angst was a KC-135R pilot with the 166th Air Refueling Squadron and lived in Columbus. A statement about his death from the federal government indicated he was from Wilmington, Ohio.

He had 880 flight hours, including 67 combat hours. Angst was promoted to captain in November.

From slavery to the White House, the Ficklin family served presidents for nearly 8 decades

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — John Wroly Ficklin was 7 when he learned that his father, the son of a slave, was important.

It was 1963, and the nation was mourning President John F. Kennedy. Wroly Ficklin was sitting with his mother and brother, watching funeral coverage on TV in the family's Washington apartment, when she gasped.

His father, John Woodson Ficklin, was wearing a morning suit and standing beside Kennedy's casket with other White House ushers. He was a White House butler at the time, but Kennedy's widow, Jacqueline, asked that he join the ushers that day.

Woodson Ficklin worked a remarkable 44 years on the White House residence staff. His son, Wroly Ficklin, had a lengthy White House career, too — 40 years on the staff of the National Security Council.

Presidents come and go from the White House every four years or eight years, but the Ficklin family — Woodson Ficklin, his wife, some of his brothers and sisters, and son Wroly Ficklin — was a constant presence there for nearly eight decades, serving 13 presidents from Franklin D. Roosevelt to Barack Obama.

One family by the president's side for one-third of America's 250-year existence.

With his 2015 retirement, Wroly became the last Ficklin employed there full time, capping a record of family service documented in his book, "An Unusual Path: Three Generations from Slavery to the White House."

"The book is my family's history, it's African American history and it's our country's history," he told The Associated Press in an interview. "My dad and I both stand on my grandfather's shoulders, and I like to think that we both contributed a lot to our country."

Family story starts with grandfather born enslaved

The first chapter in what Wroly Ficklin described as a "truly American story" opens with his grandfather, James Strother Ficklin, who was born a slave around 1854 in Rappahannock County, Virginia.

Strother was a water boy for the Confederate army during the Civil War. After emancipation, he did odd jobs for the family that used to own him.

He remarried in 1894 after his first wife died during childbirth, and moved to Youngstown, Ohio, to escape racism in Virginia and earn a living in the booming coal and steel industries. Records showed they returned to Rappahannock some years later, though it was unclear why.

Strother and his second wife, Helen, had saved enough money to buy 37 acres (0.15 square kilometers)

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of land in Amissville, Virginia, in 1901. He built a house and farmed the land to help feed the family. After Helen died while giving birth, Strother married his third wife, Vallie Lee Davenport, in 1907. They had 10 children — five girls and five boys.

One of those boys was John Woodson Ficklin.

The Ficklin brothers worked together at the White House

Woodson Ficklin was 15 when he moved to Washington in 1934 to live with an older sister and her husband. He worked odd jobs and went to high school at night, graduating in 1939 — the year an older brother, Charles, began work as a White House butler. Charles Ficklin helped him land a part-time position washing dishes and doing whatever the butlers did not have time to do themselves.

Military service during World War II briefly interrupted their White House careers, but they received promotions after they came home, with Charles Ficklin and Woodson Ficklin becoming head butler and butler, respectively. Woodson Ficklin met President Harry Truman and first lady Bess Truman on his second day as a butler when he served the couple breakfast.

New promotions followed under Dwight Eisenhower, with Charles Ficklin becoming maître d' — the most senior butler — and Woodson Ficklin taking over as head butler, putting him in charge of six full-time butlers.

Woodson Ficklin succeeded his brother again in March 1967, when Charles Ficklin retired.

Woodson Ficklin worked closely with the first ladies

Woodson Ficklin was now responsible for the planning and execution of White House social events, ranging from luncheons and state dinners to birthday parties and South Lawn barbecues.

There were visits by British royals and the annual round of Christmas parties, the White House wedding of Richard Nixon's daughter Tricia in 1971, and Gerald Ford's daughter Susan's decision to host her senior class prom at the White House.

Along the way, Woodson Ficklin earned the trust and confidence of the presidents and first ladies who relied on his expertise. Some sent thank-you notes after flawlessly executed events.

First lady Patricia Nixon wrote in October 1969 about "the great number of complimentary remarks we receive following each White House social event," according to a copy of the letter reprinted in the book. "Our family is most grateful to you for the time and interest you devote to make each occasion so enjoyable and memorable for our guests and for us."

President Jimmy Carter expressed appreciation in a March 1979 letter for the work Woodson Ficklin and his team did surrounding the signing of an Egypt-Israel peace treaty.

"Everything was perfect and we are grateful," Carter wrote.

Woodson Ficklin retired in May 1983. In perhaps the biggest show of appreciation for his 44-year career, the Reagans invited him and his wife, Nancy, to a state dinner that year for the emir of Bahrain.

He is believed to be the first member of the White House residence staff to be a guest at a state dinner, and he became the subject of a media blitz as a result. Woodson Ficklin sat at the first lady's table and told an interviewer that she "put me at ease and made me feel like a guest." Asked about the service, he replied, "Those are my boys. I trained them."

Woodson Ficklin died in December 1984 at 65.

Wroly Ficklin spent most of his career in national security

"Seeing my Dad on television was a big deal, and to see him participating in our president's funeral service was beyond my youthful comprehension," Wroly Ficklin wrote. He said years passed before he understood "the severity and the importance" of his father's work.

Yet Wroly Ficklin ended up doing important work at the White House, too, after a summer job during high school delivering sealed envelopes between the White House and the special prosecutor on the Watergate investigation. He also worked for his father in the pantry during state dinners and other big events.

Wroly Ficklin joined the NSC staff in 1975, beginning a 40-year tenure that overlapped with his father and other family members. He started by working evenings as a clerk while attending college during the day and by 1987 was training new staff.

Under Obama, Wroly Ficklin was promoted to special assistant to the president for national security

affairs. He retired in 2015 with a special request for his boss, national security adviser Susan Rice: Could he attend a state dinner, like his dad?

Wroly Ficklin and his wife, Patrice, were invited to the 2015 state dinner for Chinese President Xi Jinping. With some minor alterations, he wore the tuxedo jacket and cummerbund his father wore in 1983.

The dinner was the highlight of his career, he said.

"Just to experience firsthand the quality of the service, the precision of the butlers, the type of service that they provided, was a legacy to my dad, actually," Wroly Ficklin said in the interview.

AP finds an Israeli group discreetly organized the mystery flights evacuating Palestinians from Gaza

By SAM MEDNICK, JULIA FRANKEL, TOQA EZZIDIN and JAMES POLLARD Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — The plane carrying about 150 Palestinians from Gaza came as a surprise to everyone on the ground when it landed in South Africa in November.

It wasn't the only one. Since May, at least three flights filled with Gaza residents who'd signed up to leave the war-torn enclave have landed in Indonesia and South Africa.

An Israeli group whose founder adamantly supported U.S. President Donald Trump's proposal to resettle Palestinians from Gaza is behind the flights, an AP investigation has found, raising further questions about the motives behind the evacuation of hundreds of people from the strip.

At the time, South African Foreign Minister Ronald Lamola called the flights a "clear agenda to cleanse out the Palestinians out of Gaza and the West Bank."

Ad Kan, an Israeli organization founded by soldiers and former intelligence officers, worked via another company to distance links to Israel and organize the flights, according to a contract, passenger lists, text messages, financial statements, and interviews with more than two dozen Israelis, Palestinians and other people involved with the trips.

Several of the passengers — who fled after more than two years of a devastating war that has decimated Gaza — said they didn't know who was behind the trip. But they largely didn't care, they said, as long as they could leave.

"There was famine, and we had no options. My children were almost killed," said a 37-year-old Palestinian who arrived in South Africa in November and, like the other passengers, spoke on condition of anonymity, fearing he could face punishment. "Death and destruction was everywhere, all day, for two years, and nobody came to the rescue."

'Supporting Palestinian lives'

Ad Kan kept a distance from the flights. The evacuations were organized through a company called Al-Majd, which describes itself on its website as a humanitarian organization "supporting Palestinian lives" and providing aid for Muslim communities in conflict.

However, a look at the history of Ad Kan and its founder, Gilad Ach, suggests the Israeli group may have been driven, at least in part, by a different agenda.

"Ad Kan," Hebrew for "enough is enough," has for years worked covertly to infiltrate groups and expose what they say are antisemitic or anti-Israel activities.

Ach, an Israeli combat reservist, is a West Bank settler activist who was a staunch supporter of Trump's proposal last year to transfer 2 million Palestinians out of Gaza.

After Trump floated his proposal, Ach published a report detailing how he'd implement the "voluntary exit." The document proposed that Israel complete the Palestinian emigration process from Gaza within six to eight months and coordinate with the U.S. to enlist receiving countries. It said the migration of all Palestinians was "entirely feasible," that they wanted to leave, and that emptying the territory of its Palestinian population was an Israeli interest.

Trump later abandoned his plan — which drew widespread international condemnation and accusations from Palestinians, rights groups and even the U.N. secretary-general that such a proposal could amount to "ethnic cleansing" — and said Palestinians could remain in Gaza.

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But far-right Israeli groups, including members of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's governing coalition, continue to support the idea of removing Gaza's Palestinians in hopes that Israel could one day resettle the area. With the knowledge of the U.S., Israel's government has approached several governments — Somaliland, South Sudan and Sudan — in hopes of facilitating emigration from Gaza.

Early last year, Israel created the Voluntary Emigration Bureau, run by Israel's Defense Ministry. Group founder says the flights were humanitarian

After the war began in 2023, Ach founded a group called The Israeli Reservists Generation of Victory. In a November 2024 interview with Arutz Sheva, a religious nationalistic news site aligned with the West Bank settler movement, Ach said the group's message included the "emigration of our enemies."

His group also circulated ads on buses in Israel featuring a portrait of Trump beside the Hebrew words: "Victory = Voluntary migration ... This bus could be full of Gazans. Listen to Trump, let them out!"

In an interview with right-wing outlet the Jewish News Syndicate shortly after the war erupted, Ach said victory in Gaza meant taking part of the land and opening the borders so people could leave. "They lost their territory, they lost population, this is a clear victory," he said.

Ach declined to be interviewed for this story and said in a text message to AP that he was proud to lead organizations voicing support for the rights of Palestinians in Gaza who want to leave for safer parts of the world, free from Hamas. He denied South Africa's allegation that the flights were meant to cleanse Gaza and the West Bank of Palestinians. He said they were humanitarian flights and that those who left reached out for help, with some paying part of the costs.

He noted "profound hypocrisy," with countries unwilling to accept Palestinian refugees.

"Their continued presence in Gaza, under dire conditions, serves as a tool to pressure Israel internationally and allows Hamas to maintain its rule over this suffering population," he said.

Ach did not respond to questions about using Al-Majd to distance links to Israel.

Critics say such emigration from Gaza is not voluntary after the war left much of the strip uninhabitable. Rights groups also warn that people need to be allowed to return, and Israel has a decades-long track record of making it difficult for Palestinian to return to Gaza.

How the flights worked

AP spoke to six Palestinians who left Gaza via the flights.

Some said they started hearing about a company transferring people out of Gaza in early 2025. Some saw ads online or on social media or were sent to Al-Majd's website through friends.

With fighting raging and much of Gaza reduced to rubble, some said they didn't know where they were going. They wanted only to get away.

Months before the flight landed in Johannesburg last November, an earlier flight in May took nearly 60 Palestinians from Israel via Hungary to Indonesia and a handful of other locations. A second flight, in October, took some 170 people from Israel to South Africa via Kenya, according to people who helped organize the planes, flight-tracking information and Palestinians who used the service.

The six Palestinians who spoke to AP said they paid up to \$2,000 per person through bank and cryptocurrency transfers.

They said the website indicated they'd be taken to South Africa, Indonesia, or Malaysia but did not give an option to choose. When the flight was ready, the Palestinians received messages telling them to meet at a location where they were transported by bus out of Gaza to Israel, searched and allowed to take a few belongings onto the plane.

American-Israeli businessman Moti Kahana signed a contract in August, shared with AP, to organize a flight for Ad Kan.

Kahana, who has experience evacuating people from conflict zones including Afghanistan, Ukraine and Syria, said he was approached to help arrange a flight for more than 300 Palestinians to Indonesia from Ramon airport, in southern Israel. The contract with Ad Kan stated that his company would provide a "flight rescue service" for a minimum payment of \$750,000.

But during planning, the route was changed to South Africa, he said, and his participation with the flights

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ended.

After the second South Africa-bound flight landed in November, the government revoked its 90-day visa exemptions for Palestinian passport holders, citing "deliberate and ongoing abuse" by Israelis linked to emigration efforts.

Kahana said Ach told him about Ad Kan's connection to Al-Majd, describing it as run by both Arabs and Israelis in Israel but not wanting to promote its Israeli ties.

"It's the same people, the same company, different names," Kahana said. "They have a group of Arab-speaking people that answer the phone, and they don't want to show Israel involvement; they have like an Arab face to it."

Kahana said Ach's team gave him a spreadsheet listing people who paid for the flights. The document — seen by AP — includes the names of at least 13 people whose families said they registered and paid through Al-Majd and flew to South Africa.

Al-Majd's website says it was founded in 2010 in Germany and has an office in east Jerusalem, without providing an address. The company doesn't appear in online databases for registered German charities or businesses.

It's unclear if Ad Kan was working directly with Israel's government, but Palestinians need Israeli permission to leave Gaza. Muayad Saidam, a Palestinian identified on the group's website as its Gaza humanitarian project manager, told AP in a phone call to the number listed on Al-Majd's website that he didn't know of Ad Kan or Ach but acknowledged that travel arrangements for Palestinians must be made with Israeli authorities. He declined to elaborate.

Getting out of Gaza

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office and COGAT, the defense body that facilitates departures to Palestinians leaving Gaza, declined to comment on the flights. COGAT has previously said it allows departures for Palestinians from Gaza through Israel if they have visas to the destination countries.

Netanyahu's office, COGAT and Ach also wouldn't answer AP's questions about whether Palestinians who fled would be allowed to return.

Families who flew to South Africa told AP they weren't aware that Israelis were behind the flights but that in the end, it didn't matter.

"I agreed to the flight, and I didn't know the destination," said a Palestinian who used Al-Majd to send his wife and son to South Africa.

"All I cared about was getting my family out of Gaza and saving them."

A media-rating company says a Trump agency is threatening its livelihood

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

As media organizations go, NewsGuard cuts a low public profile as it follows its mission of issuing credibility ratings about news outlets. The Trump administration knows about it, though, and the company has joined a lengthening list of journalism organizations to face the White House's wrath.

A dispute between President Donald Trump's regulators and the news monitoring service has spilled into court, with NewsGuard Technologies suing the Federal Trade Commission and its chairman, Andrew Ferguson, to shut down an investigation. The FTC accuses the company of trying to suppress conservative speech. NewsGuard says it is being forced to kneel before vindictive power.

Since Trump returned to office in January 2025, the Republican administration has fought The Associated Press in court over the outlet's claim it is being punished for not adopting his preferred name for the Gulf of Mexico; settled with CBS News' corporate parent in a dispute over "60 Minutes" editing; sued The Wall Street Journal for its reporting on Trump and Jeffrey Epstein; and is in a legal fight with The New York Times over Pentagon reporting restrictions.

NewsGuard's lawsuit, filed last month in U.S. District Court in the District of Columbia, accuses Trump's FTC of "brazenly using its power not for any issue concerning trade or commerce but rather to censor

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speech simply because it disagreed with NewsGuard's judgments about the reliability of news sources."

The FTC calls NewsGuard's accusations "untethered from both law and fact."

The FTC, normally low-key, is busier under Trump

Like the Federal Communications Commission under Brendan Carr, Ferguson's FTC is a normally sleepy federal agency that has sprung to life to address issues of importance to Trump and his supporters, particularly involving the media. The FCC has launched investigations of media companies and this weekend Carr, responding to a Trump complaint about negative coverage of the Iran war, warned broadcasters "running hoaxes and news distortions" to correct course or see their licenses threatened.

Ferguson has made no secret about where he takes his cues. He said in an interview in July that "I am a law enforcer, and I will follow the law. But the policy priorities are set by the man the people chose to run this government."

The liberal lobbying group Media Matters for America was one of his targets. A federal judge last summer halted an FTC investigation over efforts to promote advertising boycotts of companies the group opposes, saying the inquiry violated MMA's free speech rights.

While NewsGuard may not be a big name, money is at stake for news outlets friendly to the president. The company began in 2018, started by Court TV founder Steven Brill and Gordon Crovitz, a former Journal publisher. NewsGuard uses journalists to examine thousands of news outlets and websites, giving them ratings based on the credibility and reliability of their journalism.

A monthly subscription costs \$4.95. Much of its business comes from companies that advise advertisers where to hawk their products, showing them which news sites may be toxic to their brands, and artificial intelligence companies looking to see where they would be more likely to find information they could trust.

Making a powerful enemy in Newsmax

NewsGuard made an enemy of the Trump-friendly television network Newsmax, giving its website a 20 on a scale where 100 is the best score. NewsGuard says "this website is unreliable because it severely violates basic journalism standards." Newsmax has since repeatedly urged Republican lawmakers or regulators to do what they can to silence NewsGuard, the company said in its lawsuit.

"NewsGuard was started by Steve Brill to target conservative media and get ad agencies to deny them advertising revenue as a means of censorship," Newsmax spokesman Bill Daddi said. "Brill is a Democratic Party activist and donor over many decades with a long history of advocating for liberal causes. He is not a respected journalist and in no way should be running a ratings service used by major ad agencies."

Brill said his only political activity was working for Republican John Lindsay, New York City's mayor in the late 1960s and early 1970s, while a college and law school student. "I have been a journalist ever since," Brill said, adding that he has not donated money to any politicians.

NewsGuard says its ratings are based on clearly defined criteria, such as whether or not an outlet publishes false or misleading material, whether it distorts arguments and uses multiple sources, whether it distinguishes between news and opinion and regularly corrects errors. To counter charges that it unfairly boosted liberals, the company noted times where Fox News scored higher in its ratings than the former MSNBC.

Yet the conservative Media Research Center has published studies contending that NewsGuard is more likely to give higher ratings to outlets with a liberal bent. In court papers, the FTC said it began investigating NewsGuard because congressional investigators connected the company's services to "coordinated actions to demonize disfavored media entities."

The agency has asked the company to produce reams of internal documents, emails, financial reports and subscriber lists dated to its founding. Not only does NewsGuard consider that task unduly expensive and burdensome, it worries that regulators will use that information to target its subscribers.

The FTC, as a condition to approving a merger of two of the world's biggest media buying firms, Omnicom and IPG, prohibited the new company from using a service that reviews and rates news sites. That is designed to eliminate the company's ability to deny advertising based on politics, the agency said.

It has already cost NewsGuard business, the company asserts.

"The whole idea that any speaker has to justify to the government that it's not biased is a really troubling

thought," Brill said in an interview. "We have a constitutional right to be biased. It just so happens that we started the company on the core principle that we were going to be totally apolitical."

Continuing until NewsGuard 'knuckles under'

The FTC's press department did not return a message seeking comment. But in court papers, the agency said it was conducting a broad investigation into whether advertiser boycotts violated antitrust laws and that it has issued more than a dozen orders for information similar to the one given to NewsGuard. The company's charges are "completely meritless," the agency said.

If its order was so demanding, the FTC wondered why it took NewsGuard eight months after it was issued to sue.

"We tried to cooperate in the belief that the more that we told them what we do, the more likely it would be that they would decide that they didn't have any case," Brill said. "We soon realized that they weren't worried about the merits."

The company argues that the FTC actions "will continue until NewsGuard knuckles under." Asked if he thought the government agency's goal was to put his company out of business, Brill declined to comment.

Pakistan says it hit militant hideouts in Afghanistan's Kandahar as fighting shows no letup

By MUNIR AHMED and ABDUL QAHAH AFGHAN Associated Press

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan (AP) — Pakistan said Sunday it targeted militant hideouts in Afghanistan's Kandahar region overnight, as the fighting that erupted between the two neighbors late last month showed no signs of abating.

The cross-border fighting, which has included Pakistani airstrikes in the Afghan capital, Kabul, is the deadliest yet between the two South Asian nations. Islamabad has referred to the conflict as an "open war," adding to concerns about regional stability as the U.S.-Israeli war with Iran engulfs the Middle East and beyond.

In a post on X, Pakistan's Information Minister Attaullah Tarar said the military had struck equipment storage facilities and "technical support infrastructure" in overnight attacks in Kandahar.

Afghan government spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid said Pakistan had hit two locations: a site used by security guards during the day that was empty at night, and a drug rehabilitation center that suffered slight damage. He said there were no casualties, but that the strikes showed that Pakistan was "continuing to invade and fuel the fire of war."

Afghanistan's Defense Ministry said it carried out an attack on a Pakistani army camp in Pakistan's South Waziristan area on Sunday in retaliation for the strikes in Kandahar. It claimed the attack destroyed most of the camp's command center and other facilities, and inflicted heavy casualties on the Pakistani military.

Pakistan's Ministry of Information rejected the claim as "propaganda," saying that a small drone was struck down and that "no military installation or infrastructure was hit."

Afghanistan also said it carried out operations inside Pakistan across the border from Kunar and Nangarhar provinces, claiming to have captured a Pakistani military outpost and killed several soldiers. Pakistan also rejected those claims.

Pakistan accuses Afghanistan's Taliban rulers of harboring militant groups, particularly the Pakistani Taliban, or Tehrik-e-Taliban, which stage attacks inside Pakistan. Afghanistan denies the charge, insisting it does not allow its territory to be used against other countries.

The latest fighting erupted in late February, when Afghanistan launched a cross-border attack into Pakistan in retaliation for Pakistani airstrikes inside Afghanistan days earlier that it said had killed only civilians. The clashes upended a ceasefire that had been brokered by Qatar last October following fighting that had killed dozens of soldiers, civilians and suspected militants.

On Sunday, a mortar fired from Afghanistan destroyed a home in Bajaur, a district in northwestern Pakistan, killing at last four members of the same family and wounding two others, local government official

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Adnan Khan said.

Both sides have accused the other of targeting civilians, and dozens have been killed.

Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari on Saturday said Afghanistan's government had "crossed a red line" by launching drone attacks on civilian areas in Pakistan, and hours later the country reportedly conducted strikes on an Afghan drone storage facility.

Zelenskyy says Ukraine is waiting on US and Russia to set the next round of talks

By SUSIE BLANN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in comments released Sunday that he was ready for the next round of trilateral peace talks to end Russia's more than 4-year-old invasion of Ukraine, but that it was up to Washington and Moscow to agree on where and when to meet.

Zelenskyy said the U.S. had proposed hosting the next meeting between American, Ukrainian and Russian negotiating teams, which include U.S. envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, but Moscow had refused to send a delegation.

"We are waiting for a response from the Americans. Either they will change the country where we meet, or the Russians must confirm the U.S.," Zelenskyy said in a media briefing Saturday. "We are not blocking any of these initiatives. We want a trilateral meeting to take place."

The U.S. has postponed its sponsored talks between the two sides due to the war in the Middle East. The Iran war, which erupted on Feb. 28 following U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iran and spread across the region, has drawn the international spotlight away from Ukraine's plight as it strives to hold back Russia's bigger army.

Speaking to journalists, Zelenskyy also warned of a "very high" risk that the Iran war could drain the air defense stockpiles Ukraine depends on to counter Russian missile strikes.

Zelenskyy said he lacked a clear picture of available stockpiles and had discussed with French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris on Friday whether SAMP/T systems could serve as an alternative to U.S.-made Patriot batteries for intercepting ballistic missiles. He said Ukraine would be "first in line" to test any viable alternative.

US requested Ukrainian drone assistance

He also appeared to push back against U.S. President Donald Trump's recent assertion that Washington has no need for Ukrainian drone technology.

"No, we don't need their help on drone defense," Trump said in a Fox News Radio interview that aired Friday.

Zelenskyy said Washington had reached out to Ukraine "several times" to request assistance for a particular country or for support for Americans, without giving specifics. He said the requests had come from various U.S. military institutions to Ukraine's Ministry of Defense and other military leaders.

"All our institutions received these requests, and we responded to them," Zelenskyy said.

He said he had offered Washington a defense cooperation deal last year worth \$35 billion–\$50 billion that would have given the U.S. administration access to technology from roughly 200 Ukrainian drone, AI and electronic warfare firms, with half of all production earmarked for partners, primarily the U.S.

According to the Ukrainian leader, American military officials had expressed strong interest in the proposal, and Trump himself had indicated he was receptive.

"We received a message from them, and directly from the president as well, that they are interested," Zelenskyy told reporters. "We did not sign the document with President Trump. I do not have an answer as to why. Perhaps it will happen later, but I am not sure."

Zelenskyy warns of 'blackmail' over oil transit

With regard to reopening the Druzhba pipeline, which until late January transported Russian oil to Hungary and Slovakia, Zelenskyy said he was against allowing Russian oil to transit through Ukraine while the EU imposes sanctions on its sale elsewhere.

"Why can we, in one case, tell the United States that we oppose lifting sanctions, while on the other hand forcing Ukraine to resume oil transit through Druzhba — and at a political price that effectively pays for anti-European policies?" Zelenskyy said. The U.S. has temporarily eased some sanctions on Russian oil shipments, reflecting global concerns over sharply higher crude prices due to supply shortages stemming from the Iran war.

Zelenskyy said if conditions imposed on Ukraine because of the dispute threatened weapons supplies, Kyiv would have no choice but to resume oil transit, but said he told EU partners this would amount to "blackmail."

Oil deliveries through the Druzhba have been halted since Jan. 27, leading to an escalating feud between Hungary and Ukraine. The Ukrainian government says that a Russian drone strike damaged the pipeline's infrastructure, but Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has accused Zelenskyy of deliberately holding up oil supplies.

In response, Orbán vetoed a new round of EU sanctions against Russia, and is blocking a major 90-billion euro (\$106 billion) EU loan for Ukraine until flows are resumed.

AP finds an Israeli group discreetly organized the mystery flights evacuating Palestinians from Gaza

By SAM MEDNICK, JULIA FRANKEL, TOQA EZZIDIN and JAMES POLLARD Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — The plane carrying about 150 Palestinians from Gaza came as a surprise to everyone on the ground when it landed in South Africa in November.

It wasn't the only one. Since May, at least three flights filled with Gaza residents who'd signed up to leave the war-torn enclave have landed in Indonesia and South Africa.

An Israeli group whose founder adamantly supported U.S. President Donald Trump's proposal to resettle Palestinians from Gaza is behind the flights, an AP investigation has found, raising further questions about the motives behind the evacuation of hundreds of people from the strip.

At the time, South African Foreign Minister Ronald Lamola called the flights a "clear agenda to cleanse out the Palestinians out of Gaza and the West Bank."

Ad Kan, an Israeli organization founded by soldiers and former intelligence officers, worked via another company to distance links to Israel and organize the flights, according to a contract, passenger lists, text messages, financial statements, and interviews with more than two dozen Israelis, Palestinians and other people involved with the trips.

Several of the passengers — who fled after more than two years of a devastating war that has decimated Gaza — said they didn't know who was behind the trip. But they largely didn't care, they said, as long as they could leave.

"There was famine, and we had no options. My children were almost killed," said a 37-year-old Palestinian who arrived in South Africa in November and, like the other passengers, spoke on condition of anonymity, fearing possible punishment.

'Supporting Palestinian lives'

The evacuations were organized through a company called Al-Majd, which describes itself on its website as a humanitarian organization "supporting Palestinian lives" and providing aid for Muslim communities in conflict.

However, a look at the history of Ad Kan and its founder, Gilad Ach, suggests the Israeli group may have been driven, at least in part, by a different agenda.

Ad Kan has for years worked covertly to infiltrate groups and expose what they call antisemitic or anti-Israel activities.

After Trump floated his proposal last year to transfer 2 million Palestinians out of Gaza, Ach — an Israeli combat reservist — published a report detailing how he'd implement the "voluntary exit."

Trump later abandoned his plan, which drew widespread international condemnation, and said Palestinians could remain in Gaza.

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Group founder says the flights were humanitarian

After the war began in 2023, Ach founded a group called The Israeli Reservists Generation of Victory. His group circulated ads on buses in Israel featuring a portrait of Trump beside the Hebrew words: "Victory = Voluntary migration ... This bus could be full of Gazans. Listen to Trump, let them out!"

Ach declined to be interviewed and said in a text message to AP that he was proud to lead organizations voicing support for the rights of Palestinians in Gaza who want to leave for safer parts of the world, free from Hamas. He denied South Africa's allegation that the flights were meant to cleanse Gaza and the West Bank of Palestinians. He said they were humanitarian flights and that those who left reached out for help, with some paying for part of the costs.

Critics say such emigration from Gaza is not voluntary after the war left much of the strip uninhabitable. Rights groups also warn that people need to be allowed to return, and Israel has a decades-long track record of making it difficult for Palestinian to return to Gaza.

How the flights worked

AP spoke to six Palestinians who left Gaza via the flights.

Some said they started hearing about a company transferring people out of Gaza in early 2025. Some saw ads online or on social media or were sent to Al-Majd's website through friends.

Months before the flight landed in Johannesburg last November, an earlier flight in May took nearly 60 Palestinians from Israel via Hungary to Indonesia and a handful of other locations. A second flight, in October, took some 170 people from Israel to South Africa via Kenya, according to people who helped organize the planes, flight-tracking information and Palestinians who used the service.

The six Palestinians who spoke to AP said they paid up to \$2,000 per person through bank and cryptocurrency transfers.

They said the website indicated they'd be taken to South Africa, Indonesia, or Malaysia but didn't give an option to choose.

American-Israeli businessman Moti Kahana signed a contract in August, shared with AP, to organize a flight for Ad Kan.

Kahana, who has experience evacuating people from conflict zones, said he was approached to help arrange a flight for more than 300 Palestinians to Indonesia from Ramon airport, in southern Israel. The contract stated that his company would provide a "flight rescue service" for a minimum payment of \$750,000.

But during planning, the route was changed to South Africa, he said, and his participation ended.

Kahana said Ach told him about Ad Kan's connection to Al-Majd, describing it as run by both Arabs and Israelis in Israel but not wanting to promote its Israeli ties.

"It's the same people, the same company, different names," Kahana said. "They have a group of Arab-speaking people that answer the phone, and they don't want to show Israel involvement; they have like an Arab face to it."

Kahana said Ach's team gave him a spreadsheet listing people who paid for the flights. The document — seen by AP — includes the names of at least 13 people whose families said they registered and paid through Al-Majd and flew to South Africa.

Getting out of Gaza

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office and COGAT, the defense body that facilitates departures to Palestinians leaving Gaza, declined to comment on the flights.

Netanyahu's office, COGAT and Ach also wouldn't answer AP's questions about whether Palestinians who fled would be allowed to return.

Families who flew to South Africa told AP they weren't aware that Israelis were behind the flights but that in the end, it didn't matter.

"All I cared about was getting my family out of Gaza and saving them," said a Palestinian who used Al-Majd to send his wife and son to South Africa.

Prince Harry and Meghan slam author of new book on royals for 'deranged conspiracy'

LONDON (AP) — Prince Harry and his wife Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, have hit back at the author of a new book on Britain's royal family, describing his writing as "deranged conspiracy and melodrama."

In a strongly worded statement issued on Saturday, Harry and Meghan said author Tom Bower "has long crossed the line from criticism into fixation."

In extracts of Bower's book published in the Times of London on Friday, the author claimed that Queen Camilla once told a friend Meghan had "brainwashed" her husband. He also alleged that Prince William and his wife Catherine "evidently saw Meghan as a threat rather than an ally" as tensions soared ahead of the Sussexes' decision to leave Britain for the United States and split from the royal family.

"This is someone who has publicly stated, 'the monarchy in fact depends on actually obliterating the Sussexes from our state of life,' language that speaks for itself," Harry and Meghan's statement said.

"He has made a career out of constructing ever more elaborate theories about people he does not know and has never met," it continued. "Those interested in facts will look elsewhere; those seeking deranged conspiracy and melodrama know exactly where to find him."

The extracts from Bower's book included passages critical of the couple's financial situation, their charity work and Harry's Invictus Games, an annual sporting competition he founded for wounded, injured and sick military veterans.

Bower previously published "Revenge: Meghan, Harry, And the War Between the Windsors" in 2022.

Pope escalates call for ceasefire in Iran by addressing those responsible for the war

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Leo XIV demanded a ceasefire in the Middle East on Sunday in his strongest comments to date, directly addressing the leaders who launched the war in Iran.

"On behalf of the Christians of the Middle East and all women and men of good will, I appeal to those responsible for this conflict," Leo said. "Cease fire so that avenues for dialogue may be reopened. Violence can never lead to the justice, stability, and peace that the people are waiting for."

Leo didn't cite the United States or Israel by name in his comments at the end of his Sunday noon blessing. But history's first U.S. pope mentioned the attacks that targeted a school, an apparent reference to the missile strike on an elementary school in Iran in the opening days of the war that killed over 165 people, many of them children.

U.S. officials have said outdated intelligence likely led to the United States launching the strike, and that an investigation is ongoing.

The Vatican has highlighted the carnage of the Minab strike, running an aerial photo of the mass grave being dug for the young victims on the March 6 front page of its official newspaper, L'Osservatore Romano, under the headline "The Face of War."

Leo said he was close to the families of those who had been killed in the attacks "which have hit schools, hospitals and residential centers." He expressed particular concern about the impact of the war in Lebanon, where aid groups are warning of a humanitarian crisis.

The plight of Christian communities in southern Lebanon is of particular concern to the Vatican, since they have long represented a bulwark for Christians throughout the majority Muslim region.

For the two weeks since the start of the U.S.-Israeli war, the pope has limited his comments to muted appeals for diplomacy and dialogue in an apparent attempt to avoid pitting himself as an American political counterweight to President Donald Trump. He hasn't named the U.S. or Israel publicly, but that is also in keeping with the Vatican's tradition of diplomatic neutrality.

On Friday, for example, in a speech to priests attending a Vatican class on the sacrament of confession, Leo said the sacrament was a workshop that restores unity and peace.

"One might well ask: do those Christians who bear grave responsibility in armed conflicts have the humility and courage to make a serious examination of conscience and to go to confession?" he said.

But while Leo has sought to keep his messaging indirect and apolitical to avoid inflaming tensions, some of his U.S. cardinals and the Vatican secretary of state have not.

Cardinal Robert McElroy, the archbishop of Washington, said the war was morally unjustifiable. Chicago Cardinal Blase Cupich said it was "sickening" how the White House was splicing video game imagery into its social media messaging about the war.

The Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, rejected Washington's claim of a "preventive war." But he said this week that the Holy See was regardless keeping dialogue open.

"The Holy See speaks with everyone, and when necessary we speak also with the Americans, with the Israelis and show them what to us are the solutions," he said.

As Trump pushes deportations, immigration data becomes harder to find

By REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration likes to promote its immigration enforcement agenda through numbers, with ambitious goals to deport 1 million people, report zero releases at the U.S.-Mexico border and arrest thousands of alleged gang members.

For all the boasting, the administration has been releasing less reliable, carefully vetted data than its predecessors on a signature policy that has become one of the most contentious of Trump's second term.

The gap in information and a loss of figures from an office that has tracked immigration data back to the 1800s have left researchers, advocates, lawyers and journalists without important statistics to hold the Republican administration to account.

"They aren't publishing the data," said Mike Howell, who heads the conservative Oversight Project, an advocacy group pushing for more deportations. Instead, Howell said, the Department of Homeland Security has put out numbers in news releases "that purport to be statistics with no statistical backup and the numbers have jumped all over the place."

With mass deportations a priority, new restrictions and increased enforcement have led to a surge in immigration arrests, detentions and deportations.

But finding the metrics that once measured those changes can be hard. It is an extension of earlier administration moves to limit the flow of government information by scrubbing or removing federal datasets or by the firing last year of the top official overseeing jobs data.

Important data is no longer publicly available

The Office of Homeland Security Statistics is responsible for publishing figures from Homeland Security agencies, including removals and the nationalities of those deported, to provide a comprehensive picture of immigration trends at the border and inside the United States.

Originally known as the Office of Immigration Statistics, it tracked such data since 1872. In its current form, created under the Biden administration, it also started publishing monthly reports that allowed researchers to track developments almost in real time.

But key enforcement metrics on its website have not been updated since early last year. A note on the page where the monthly reports were says it "is delayed while it is under review."

"It's the most timely data. It's the most reliable data," Austin Kocher, research professor at Syracuse University who closely follows immigration data trends, said about the monthly reports. "It has the most omniscient view of immigration enforcement across the entire agency."

An interactive dashboard launched by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in December 2023 once let users examine whom the agency was arresting, their nationalities, criminal histories and removal numbers. ICE called it a "new era in transparency."

Though intended for quarterly updates, the latest data is from January 2025. The agency's annual report, typically released in December, had not been published as of mid-March.

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Other agencies also publish data that touches on immigration, and parts of it do continue to roll out, such as U.S. Customs and Border Protection statistics detailing border encounters or data from the Department of Justice's immigration courts.

But experts say other data has slowed.

The State Department's most recent visa issuance data is from August. Key statistics from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services have not been updated since October.

The now-missing data had helped researchers study the effects of different policies. Lawyers could cite the figures to support their litigation. Journalists saw in them a powerful tool to hold the government to account on public claims or to report on important trends.

"We're all a little bit in the dark about exactly how immigration enforcement is operating at a time when it's taking new and unprecedented forms," said Julia Gelatt, associate director of the U.S. Immigration Policy Program at the Migration Policy Institute.

DHS did not respond to detailed questions about why it was no longer releasing specific data.

"This is the most transparent Administration in history, we release new data multiple times a week and upon reporter request," the department said in a statement.

Researchers contend with a patchwork of numbers

Figures the administration has released are inconsistent and unverifiable.

In a Jan. 20 news release, DHS said it had deported more than 675,000 people since Trump returned to the White House. A day later, in a second release, the department put the figure at 622,000. In congressional testimony March 4, Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said the figure was 700,000.

But ICE, an agency within DHS, also releases figures on how many people it has removed from the country, part of a large data release mandated by Congress. An Associated Press analysis of the figures put that number at roughly 400,000 over Trump's first year.

DHS has said 2.2 million people who were in the U.S. illegally have gone home on their own, but the department has given no explanation for the count. Experts have questioned the source of that figure, saying this was not something that DHS historically has tracked.

The department did not respond to questions about where that data came from.

With key sources of data halted, researchers, advocates and others have had to rely on information the administration is obliged to report or that has come to light through legal action.

The publication of ICE detention figures — how many people are detained, for how long and whether they have committed a crime — is required by Congress and is generally released every two weeks. But the figures' release has faced some delays and its data gets overwritten with every new publication, complicating the work of people who need access to it.

The University of California, Berkeley's Deportation Data Project, a research initiative, successfully sued through the Freedom of Information Act to access data about ICE arrests including nationalities, conviction status and whether arrests occurred at jails or in the community.

Graeme Blair, co-director of the project, said every administration has struggled with transparency in immigration enforcement, and given the Trump administration's ambitious enforcement goals, the team wanted to secure and verify information that the government might not publicly release.

"Given the scale of what they were talking about doing, it seemed really important to be able to understand, to be able to double check those numbers," he said.

But there are limitations, he said. The data obtained through the lawsuit only runs through Oct. 15. It does not cover recent operations such as the Minneapolis enforcement surge, when federal immigration officers fatally shot two protesters, leading to widespread demonstrations and scrutiny of enforcement tactics.

The absence of data is one of the few issues that has drawn bipartisan criticism.

"We deserve to know the numbers, just like we deserve to know who's in our country and who needs to leave," Howell said.

Kimi Antonelli takes his first F1 win with victory in China to extend Mercedes' dominant start

SHANGHAI (AP) — He's been defined by being Lewis Hamilton's successor and George Russell's teammate. Now Kimi Antonelli is a Formula 1 race-winner in his own right, and the second-youngest in history.

The 19-year-old Italian pulled clear of an entertaining battle between Russell and the two Ferraris to take a commanding win at the Chinese Grand Prix on Sunday and share the podium with his teammate and Hamilton, the seven-time champion he replaced last year.

"I'm speechless. I'm about to cry, to be honest," Antonelli said, holding back tears. "Thank you so much to my team because they helped me to achieve this dream."

Wolff's gamble pays off

It's a vindication of the gamble Mercedes team principal Toto Wolff took in picking the youngster, who'd joined Mercedes' junior program aged just 11, to replace an all-time great when Hamilton moved to Ferrari for 2025. There were plenty of doubters when Antonelli crashed 10 minutes into his practice debut in 2024.

"Many said it was just too early last year, and obviously we asked ourselves that question, whether it was too much to throw him into this pressure cooker," Wolff told Sky Sport Germany.

"One year with ups and downs and he's young. We have to forgive him these mistakes, and now he's in the second Grand Prix (of 2026) and brings it home ruthlessly. It's good."

The 19-year-old Italian was the youngest pole-position starter and briefly lost the lead to Hamilton at the start but retook it soon after and was in control the rest of the way.

Locking up a tire near the end caused him "a little bit of a heart attack," but he made it to the end to celebrate with his father, who once sneaked his then seven-year-old son into the F1 paddock hidden in a stack of tires to get closer to the action.

It was another 1-2 finish for Mercedes to start the season as Russell came through a battle with both Ferraris to finish second. Hamilton was third for his long-awaited first Grand Prix podium finish for Ferrari.

The only driver younger than Antonelli to win a Grand Prix was Max Verstappen, who was 18 when he took his first victory in 2016. He's the first Italian to win since Giancarlo Fisichella in 2006, five months before Antonelli was born.

Russell bests Ferraris in thriller

The new regulations again produced a dramatic fight for position between Mercedes and the fast-starting Ferraris as Russell fought his way past Charles Leclerc and Hamilton in a multi-lap battle with numerous changes of position. That allowed Antonelli to build his lead at the front.

Even after Russell had pulled away to secure second place, teammates Leclerc and Hamilton kept up their own fight for third. "This is quite a fun battle," Leclerc exclaimed over the radio.

Leclerc was fourth with Oliver Bearman fifth for Haas, Pierre Gasly sixth for Alpine and Liam Lawson seventh for Racing Bulls. Isack Hadjar recovered from an early spin to place eighth for Red Bull, ahead of Carlos Sainz, Jr. in ninth for Williams, while Franco Colapinto was 10th for Alpine to score his first point since 2024.

Max Verstappen was running sixth when his car lost power and he had to limp back to the pits in another blow for the four-time champion, who has been a leading critic of F1's new cars.

Double disaster for McLaren

Formula 1 champion Lando Norris and his McLaren teammate Oscar Piastri were both unable to start after encountering technical problems minutes before the race began.

Piastri was due to start fifth and Norris sixth for Sunday's race. Norris was in his car in the pits but didn't leave for the grid, before Piastri was then withdrawn from the grid.

McLaren said it found "two different electrical problems on the power unit side" after an investigation. It's the second time Piastri has failed to start in 2026 after he crashed before the start of last week's race in Australia. Only 18 of 22 cars took the start, with Audi's Gabriel Bortoleto and Williams' Alex Albon also unable to make it, before both Aston Martin cars and Verstappen hit trouble in the race too.

F1 is racing hours after it announced next month's races in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia will not go ahead because of the war in the Middle East.

As other Iran-allied groups are engaging in the Mideast war, Yemen's Houthis hold back

By FATMA KHALED Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels have so far remained on the sidelines as the Iran war widens across the Middle East, raising questions about why — and when the battle-hardened group might join the fight.

Iran has retaliated against the United States and Israel with missiles and drones, targeting American military bases and other locations in Gulf Arab countries, disrupting trade routes, choking fuel supplies and threatening regional air traffic.

Iran's new supreme leader, Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, suggested on Thursday in his first written statement since succeeding his father, who was killed in the war's opening salvo, that Iran may open up new fronts in the conflict — a sign, analysts say, the Houthis may get involved soon.

Until now, the Houthis have been reluctant to fight, fearing assassinations of their leaders, internal divisions in Yemen and uncertainties over weapons supplies, the experts said.

But that may change as Iran seeks to increase pressure on global oil supply routes through potential attacks by the Houthis, who have had previous success targeting oil facilities in the region, the analysts said.

Iran has asserted its influence across the Middle East through its proxy forces in Gaza, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen's Houthis.

Some of its closest allies have already joined the conflict, with Hezbollah resuming strikes on Israel within two days of the attack on Iran — and just 15 months after the last Israel-Hezbollah war ended in a November 2024 ceasefire. Militias linked to the Islamic Resistance in Iraq have claimed drone strikes on U.S. bases in Irbil.

Meanwhile, the Houthis have only held protests and issued declarations condemning the Iran war, in contrast to the waves of missile and drone attacks they launched on Israel and shipping in the Red Sea after the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas attacks on Israel sparked the war in the Gaza Strip.

Here's a look at the Houthis' military capabilities and where they stand in the conflict.

Houthi ties to Iran

Armed by Iran, the Houthis seized most of Yemen's north and its capital, Sanaa, in 2014, pushing the country's internationally recognized government into exile. A Saudi-led coalition backing Yemen's government entered the conflict the following year, and the Houthis have since fought a long-running but largely stalemated civil war in Yemen.

While the Houthis share some political and religious ties with Iran, they follow a different doctrine of Shiite Islam and are independent of Iran's supreme leader, unlike the Lebanese militant Hezbollah group and several Iran-backed Iraqi militias.

Still, they are key to Iran's regional influence and the current war is unlikely to weaken that, according to Ahmed Nagi, a senior Yemen analyst at the International Crisis Group think tank.

"From Tehran's perspective, the Houthis have proven themselves to be a capable and effective front, able to generate real pressure," Nagi said.

He said the Houthi leaders' decision to distance themselves from the conflict is a calculated choice that has been fully coordinated with the Iranians.

Two Houthi members of the group's media and political offices told The Associated Press that the rebels' weapons stockpile is running low after its attacks during the Israel-Hamas war. The Iran war has further impeded the flow of weapons, said the officials, speaking on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to talk to the media.

Still, the group has a large stockpile of drones, said another official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the weapons issue, about which he is well-informed.

Nagi said the Houthis appear to be building up their forces by recruiting more fighters, relying on local weapons production and sending reinforcements to Yemen's western coastline on the Red Sea, signaling they are preparing for escalation.

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"The decision is not about unwillingness to intervene, but about timing," Nagi said. "Iran's broader strategy seems to be to avoid throwing all its cards on the table at once, instead using its partners and capabilities gradually as the confrontation evolves."

The Houthis are likely to step in if the conflict widens, Nagi added, or if they perceive an existential threat to Iran, such as significant deterioration in military capabilities.

Houthis have targeted oil shipping and infrastructure

Houthi leader Abdulmalik al-Houthi has repeatedly emphasized the group is ready to intervene, claiming their "hands are on the trigger," though it's unclear what that involvement would entail.

"Houthis, of course, are always ready for any war," said Farea al-Muslimi, a research fellow at the Chatham House think tank in London. "Some weaponry moved in different areas inside Yemen recently ... but it's still not clear whether it's for a military escalation."

If the Houthis enter the war, they will most likely resume attacks on shipping in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, while also striking Israel, Nagi said. They could also join Iran's attacks on Gulf countries, targeting U.S. military assets and interests.

Attacks on vessels during the Israel-Hamas war upended shipping in the Red Sea, through which about \$1 trillion worth of goods passed each year before the war. The rebels also fired drones at Israel.

Should the Houthis join the Iran war, their primary targets would likely be oil tankers, the analysts said, since shipping offers the most immediate pressure point and attacking it would signal escalation while impacting energy supply chains.

Attacks on oil installations could also be considered. The Houthis have previously struck oil facilities in Saudi Arabia during their long-running conflict against the Saudi-led coalition.

Meanwhile, U.S. military sites in the region might also become targets, Nagi said.

What's at risk

Abdel-Bari Taher, a political analyst and former head of the press syndicate in Yemen, said any decision to join the war is impacted by the internal situation in Yemen, including recent deadly clashes in south Yemen, public opposition in Sanaa to joining the war and heightened caution among Houthi leaders after high-profile assassinations.

The two Houthi officials from the group's media and political offices said the U.S. has sent warnings via Omani mediators against participating in the war. They said Houthi political and security leaders have also been alerted that their cellphones are under surveillance by the U.S. and Israel. Fearing potential Israeli assassinations, Houthi leaders have been instructed not to appear in public, the officials said.

"Despite these constraints and the complex domestic and regional dynamics, Houthi involvement in the conflict remains a possibility," Taher said.

Al-Muslimi, the Chatham House analyst, said the Houthis don't have the military capabilities or an internal Yemeni interest that would force them to join the war, and the group seems committed to a ceasefire with the U.S. that was brokered by Oman last year.

"They hope to fight, especially with Israel, but they can't be the ones to fire the first shot," al-Muslimi said.

He said the Houthis would likely need a local Yemeni cause to join the fighting — a reason that would strengthen support among their local base.

Notes al-Muslimi: The Houthis "are a local group that Iran uses and supports, but didn't create."

The US hit Iran's Kharg Island, key to its economy and security. What to know about Iran's islands

By SAM METZ Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The islands off Iran's coast have become the latest focus of the war after a U.S. strike destroyed military sites last week on Kharg Island, which is vital to Iran's oil network.

The strike on Friday on the island in the Persian Gulf left its oil infrastructure intact and vessels were still seen arriving and loading up with fuel, according to satellite imagery posted on Saturday and Sunday by the platform TankerTrackers.

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Though U.S. President Donald Trump said the United States “totally obliterated” the island’s military assets, he warned that if Iran or anyone else interferes with ships passing through the Strait of Hormuz, he will reconsider his decision not to target oil infrastructure.

Iran’s islands account for only a small share of its territory but have outsized importance because of their oil facilities and strategic location.

Here’s what to know about Iran’s islands in the Persian Gulf up to the Strait of Hormuz:

Kharg Island

“He who controls Kharg Island, controls the destiny of this war,” U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, one of Trump’s close Republican allies, posted on social media on Saturday.

The small coral island about 33 kilometers (21 miles) 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.

Iran gets a significant share of its revenue from oil, with shipments flowing to countries like China. Expanded strikes on Kharg would not only further damage Iran’s current government but could also undermine the viability of whatever might eventually replace it.

The island has storage tanks and 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. It also is home to a medieval Portuguese fortress and the ruins of one of the oldest Christian monasteries in the Persian Gulf.

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 there, it would be difficult for the country to function, even though the island is not 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 last week in an investment note that a strike on the island would have major economic implications or “immediately halt the bulk of Iran’s crude exports, likely triggering severe retaliation in the Strait of Hormuz or against regional energy infrastructure.”

Friday’s strikes hit more than 90 targets, including air defenses, a radar site, the airport and a hovercraft base according to satellite analysis by the Institute for the Study of War and American Enterprise Institute’s Critical Threats Project.

Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunb

Iran said the U.S. also struck Abu Musa — one of three tiny islands that have long been a front line in tensions between Iran and Gulf states allied with the U.S.

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. U.S. Central Command did not immediately acknowledge Iran’s claim of strikes on Abu Musa.

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 supplied water to about 30 villages.

Bracket Watch: UMBC is back in the NCAA Tournament for the 1st time since pulling a 16-over-1 upset

By NOAH TRISTER AP Sports Writer

Top seeds beware: Maryland-Baltimore County is back in the NCAA Tournament.

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UMBC is headed to the Big Dance for the first time since 2018, when the Retrievers beat Virginia to become the first No. 16 seed to beat a No. 1 in the history of the men's tournament. UMBC beat Vermont 74-59 to win the America East Tournament on Saturday.

Ten other automatic bids were at also stake for the men's tournament Saturday, including some in top conferences. St. John's won the Big East Tournament with a 20-point victory over UConn, and Arizona held off Houston for the title in the Big 12. Florida lost in the SEC semifinals but may hold on to a No. 1 seed thanks to the losses by UConn and Houston.

Duke made its bid for the No. 1 overall seed with a four-point win over Virginia in the ACC Tournament final.

Bubble watch

One possible bid thief is still out there — Dayton in the Atlantic 10. The Flyers beat Saint Louis, which is expected to receive an at-large slot, and now Dayton takes on Virginia Commonwealth in the conference tournament final. Bubble teams will hope that VCU wins — or that a loss to Dayton becomes enough to knock the Rams out of the NCAA field.

Two other potential bid thieves went by the wayside when Arkansas beat Mississippi in overtime in the SEC semifinals and Utah State beat San Diego State to win the Mountain West Tournament.

The experts say

Last four in according to ...

ESPN: Missouri, Miami (Ohio), SMU, Texas.

The Athletic: VCU, Miami (Ohio), Texas, Auburn.

Fox Sports: Missouri, VCU, SMU, Texas.

First four out according to ...

ESPN: Oklahoma, Auburn, San Diego State, New Mexico.

The Athletic: SMU, San Diego State, New Mexico, Oklahoma.

Fox Sports: San Diego State, Auburn, Oklahoma, New Mexico.

Automatic bids

Here's who has claimed an automatic bid to this year's men's NCAA Tournament: Long Island University (NEC), Tennessee State (OVC), Northern Iowa (MVC), High Point (Big South), Queens (ASUN), North Dakota State (Summit), Troy (Sun Belt), Furman (SoCon), Wright State (Horizon), Hofstra (CAA), Siena (MAAC), Gonzaga (WCC), McNeese (Southland), Lehigh (Patriot), Idaho (Big Sky), UMBC (America East), Howard (MEAC), Utah State (Mountain West), Arizona (Big 12), St. John's (Big East), Prairie View A&M (SWAC), Akron (MAC), Kennesaw State (Conference USA), Duke (ACC), Hawaii (Big West), Cal Baptist (WAC).

Shammah Scott's 3-pointer for Akron with 6 seconds left gave the Zips a 79-76 win over Toledo, denying the Rockets their first NCAA appearance since 1980.

Cal Baptist beat Utah Valley 63-61 when Dominique Daniels made a 3-pointer and then UVU's Isaac Davis missed a dunk on the receiving end of an alley-oop in the final seconds.

Up next

The last five automatic bids will be determined Sunday:

Ivy (Yale vs. Penn)

SEC (Arkansas vs. Vanderbilt)

Atlantic 10 (VCU vs. Dayton)

American Athletic (South Florida vs. Wichita State)

Big Ten (Michigan vs. Purdue)

Today in History: March 16, the My Lai massacre in Vietnam

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Monday, March 16, the 75th day of 2026. There are 290 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On March 16, 1968, during the Vietnam War, U.S. Army soldiers hunting for Viet Cong fighters and

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sympathizers killed as many as 500 unarmed villagers in two hamlets of Son My village, in what became known as the My Lai massacre.

Also on this date:

In 1802, President Thomas Jefferson signed a measure authorizing the establishment of the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York.

In 1935, Adolf Hitler broke the military terms set by the Treaty of Versailles by ordering the rearming of Germany and resuming military conscription.

In 1968, Sen. Robert F. Kennedy of New York announced his candidacy for the Democratic presidential nomination.

In 1972, in a nationally broadcast address, President Richard Nixon called for a moratorium on court-ordered school busing to achieve racial desegregation.

In 1984, William Buckley, the CIA station chief in Beirut, was kidnapped by Hezbollah militants; he would be tortured by his captors and killed in 1985.

In 1985, Associated Press correspondent Terry Anderson was kidnapped in Beirut by Hezbollah militants; he would spend nearly seven years in captivity before being freed in December 1991.

In 1994, figure skater Tonya Harding pleaded guilty in Portland, Oregon, to conspiracy to hinder prosecution for covering up an attack on rival Nancy Kerrigan, avoiding jail but drawing a \$100,000 fine and three years of probation.

In 2016, President Barack Obama nominated Merrick Garland to take the seat of Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, who had died the previous month. Republicans who controlled the Senate would stick to their pledge to leave the seat empty until after the presidential election; they confirmed Trump nominee Neil Gorsuch in April 2017.

In 2020, global stocks plunged amid coronavirus concerns, with the Dow Jones Industrial Average falling 2,997 points (12.9%), the largest point drop and second-largest single-day percentage decline in history.

Today's Birthdays: Business executive Sanford Weill is 93. Actor Erik Estrada is 77. Football Hall of Famer Joe DeLamielleure is 75. Rock musician Nancy Wilson (Heart) is 72. Football Hall of Famer Ozzie Newsome is 70. Rapper-actor Flavor Flav is 67. Folk musician Patty Griffin is 62. Actor Lauren Graham is 59. Actor Judah Friedlander is 57. Actor Alan Tudyk is 55. Actor Alexandra Daddario is 40. R&B singer Jhené Aiko is 38. Rock musician Wolfgang Van Halen is 35. NBA center Joel Embiid is 32. Actor and singer Ajiona Alexus is 30. MLB first baseman Vladimir Guerrero Jr. is 27.