

# Groton Daily Independent

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## 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

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

## Groton Daily Independent

PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460



## 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.**

## Beef Walkout

Union workers went on strike yesterday at one of the US' largest meatpacking plants. Roughly 3,800 workers walked out of the Swift Beef Co. plant in Greeley, Colorado.

At issue for employees are allegations of retaliation and unfair labor practices. That includes claims Swift's parent company, JBS USA, charged workers at least \$1,100 for personal protective equipment. Almost all workers (99% per the union's local president) voted to authorize this week's strike. The union alleges the company refused to negotiate in the lead-up to Sunday's contract deadline.

The strike comes as meat prices rise and the country's cattle population is at a 75-year low. The walkout is the first of its kind since the 1985-86 strike at Minnesota's Hormel plant. That strike lasted for over a year and involved violent clashes, with only 20% of employees getting their jobs back.

## Ecuador Antidrug Operation

Ecuador's government deployed 75,000 soldiers and police officers to four provinces Sunday. The US-backed crackdown involves nighttime curfews and will also include helicopters and armored cars. It is scheduled to last two weeks.

It was not immediately clear whether US soldiers would participate in the operation. Ecuadorian President Daniel Noboa is a staunch ally of US President Donald Trump, and came to office in 2023 on a mission to crack down on cartel-fueled violence. Noboa is part of the US' 17-country antidrug alliance announced this month—a group composed primarily of Latin American countries. Last week, the FBI said it would open an office in Ecuador, working with local police to crack down on crime and corruption.

Roughly 70% of cocaine from Colombia and Peru, two of the world's largest cocaine exporters, travels through Ecuador. Despite Noboa's efforts, the country's murder rate rose by over 30% between 2024 and 2025.

## Going Once, Going Tri-ce ...

A 66-million-year-old triceratops fossil hits the auction block today, with bids projected to reach as high as \$5.5M through the March 31 deadline. Roughly the size of a minivan and nicknamed "Trey," the fossil is one of the most complete triceratops skeletons ever unearthed.

Trey was discovered in 1993 near Wyoming's Lance Formation, a geologically rich area home to low-lying floodplains and rivers at the end of the Cretaceous period—a sedimentary environment ideal for preserving remains. For paleontologists, the region provides a snapshot just before the cataclysmic asteroid that wiped out the dinosaurs. The sale comes as the auction market for dinosaur fossils has surged, with recent bids including "Stan" the T. rex in 2020 (\$31.8M), "Apex" the stegosaurus in 2024 (\$44.6M), and an unnamed ceratosaurus in 2025 (\$30.5M).

Dinosaurs roamed the Earth for over a hundred million years.

## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Men's First Four games in the NCAA college basketball tournament begin tonight; No. 16 seeds UMBC and Howard face off (6:40 pm ET, TruTV), followed by No. 11 seeds Texas and NC State (9:15 pm ET, TruTV).

USA faces Venezuela in tonight's World Baseball Classic championship game (8 pm ET, Fox and Fubo).

Vinyl sales hit \$1B in revenue last year for the first time since 1983, Recording Industry Association of America reveals; sales were fueled by Taylor Swift's album "The Life of a Showgirl".

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## Science & Technology

Federal judge temporarily blocks Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s changes to the childhood immunization schedule and remaking of a vaccine advisory panel, finding the moves likely violated the Administrative Procedure Act.

Chipmaker Nvidia kicks off its annual GPU Technology Conference, dubbed the "Super Bowl of AI"; see expected announcements.

Brain-computer interface allows patients with paralysis and neurodegenerative diseases like ALS to communicate at up to 22 words per minute via thought.

## Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +1.0%, Dow +0.8%, Nasdaq +1.2%) as US crude oil prices fell over 5% to settle at \$93.50 per barrel.

Federal regulators to propose eliminating requirement for publicly traded companies to release quarterly earnings, according to reports; companies would have option for semiannual reporting.

Bank of America settles civil lawsuit brought by victims of deceased sex criminal Jeffrey Epstein, alleging the bank helped facilitate abuse by ignoring suspicious financial transactions.

## Politics & World Affairs

At least 200 US soldiers have been wounded in the war with Iran.

White House Chief of Staff Susie Wiles has been diagnosed with breast cancer, will continue working throughout treatment, President Donald Trump reveals.

Millions of Americans impacted by Midwest blizzard, East Coast storms.

Cuba experiences islandwide blackout, impacting roughly 11 million people amid ongoing fuel and energy crisis.

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## Sons of American Legion: March Meeting Summary

### Opening and Roll Call

The meeting opened with a prayer and Pledge of Allegiance, following traditional ceremonial protocol. Roll call established a quorum with seven members present. Minutes from previous meetings (Feb 17 and March 15) were reviewed and approved.

### Officer Updates & Introductions

Bob Tomlinson introduced as new Sal District 4 commander and interim vice commander, expressing commitment to the Legion's ideals and support for the squadron.

Bruce announced as newly elected district commander (term starting after June convention). He will remain involved locally as Americanism officer.

### Financial and Administrative Updates

New checking account for the squadron is officially open after overcoming administrative hurdles. Current balance is approximately \$540 after recent dues payments and expenditures.

Access to the account is held by two members (Aaron and Paul).

Discussion about the need to finalize and sign the squadron charter. Decision made: all members who have paid dues by March 23rd will be included as original charter members. Motion was passed to set this deadline.

### Fundraising Initiatives

Proposal discussed to raffle a rare \$500 bill: 100 squares at \$40 each, aiming for \$2500 profit for the Sons after reimbursing the \$1500 investment.

Steps needed: Build/display raffle board, get approval from bar management (Roxie), and notify the SD Secretary of State as required by law.

Action plan: Bruce will contact the Secretary of State, Roxie will be approached for bar approval. Once all approvals are in place, the raffle can proceed.

### Technology and Payment

Inquiry about establishing a Venmo account for easier dues/fund collection. Motion passed for Paul to set up and manage the squadron's Venmo account.

### Merchandise

Discussion about ordering squadron caps (approx. \$50 each). Plan to proceed with ordering; debit card is pending.

### Membership & Reports

District report: South Dakota Sons of the American Legion at ~90% membership goal, but renewals lagging.

Incentive shirt program for recruiting new Legion members explained.

Administrative reminders: Consolidated Squadron Reports due June 1, data reports by July 1. Important for documenting community service and activities.

Discussion of potential for a lifetime membership program within the Sons (currently only in some states, not transferable).

### Upcoming Events & Community Involvement

June 6: Legion Riders and associated breakfast event in Groton. Sons encouraged to help serve and document participation for annual reports.

Noted that collaboration between the Legion, Sons, and Auxiliary is increasing, with opportunities for joint activities and community service (e.g., color guard, youth programs).

### Closing

Meeting closed with a prayer and flag salute, following ceremonial protocol. Members reminded to keep documentation for all activities.



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## Groton Area Boys are State Bound

Pictured in back, left to right, are statistician Kristi Erickson, Assistant Coach Ryan Tracy, Easton Weber, Jace Johnson, Jordan Schwan, Jayden Schwan, Logan Warrington, Ryder Johnson, Head Coach Greg Kjellsen, Gage Sippel, Becker Bosma, Ethan Kroll, Blake Lord, Brody Lord and Assistant Coach Jordan Carson; in the middle row, left to right, are Ball Boy Kinton Tracy, Sam Crank, Ryder Schelle, Anthony Tracy, Keegen Tracy, Karson Zak, Asher Johnson, JJ Muller and Ball Boy Greyson Warrington. In front are cheerleaders Novalea Warrington, Natalia Warrington, Rylie Rose, Mya Feser, Addison Hoeft, Breslyn Jeschke, Paisley Mitchell and Elizabeth Cole. (Photo Courtesy Paula Johnson)

Good Luck from these area businesses: Avantara, Bary Keith at Harr Motors, BaseKamp Lodge, Bierman Farm Service, BK Custom T's & More, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Doug Abeln Seed Company, Farmers Union Co-op, Full Circle Ag, Groton Ag Solutions, Groton Chamber, Groton Chiropractic Clinic, Groton Dairy Queen, Groton Independent, Groton Legion, Hanlon Brothers, Harry Implement, John Sieh Agency, Jungle Lanes & Cafe, Kari Bartling Law, Ken's Food Fair, KR Body Shop, Krueger Brothers, Locke Electric, Lori's Pharmacy, Malpert Insurance - Dylan Hanson, McGannon Plumbing, Heating & Cooling, Milbrandt Enterprises Inc, MJ's Sinclair, NVC, Poet, Professional Management Services, Spanier Custom Harvesting, The MeatHouse, Thunder Seed - John Wheeting, Weber Landscaping, Weismantel Agency.

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Single: \$35.15 per month or \$319.50 per year  
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Family: \$67.10 per month or \$702.26 per year

### MONTH-TO-MONTH

Student: \$35.15 per month  
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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Call or Text Tina at 605/397-7285

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## Boys State A Send-Off

Tues., March 17,

2:45 p.m.

GHS Arena

Groton  
Area  
Tigers  
Groton, SD

# GDILIVE



A production of the

**Groton Daily Independent**

For more info: [GDILIVE.COM](http://GDILIVE.COM)



## 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](mailto: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.

## New Process for Distributing Cards Among 13 Changes in High School Soccer Rules

BY NFHS ON MARCH 16, 2026 | NFHS NEWS, PRESS RELEASE, SOCCER STORY

Several rules updates were approved in high school soccer for next school year, including new guidance on carding, penalty kick encroachment, a longer time limit for goalkeepers to release the ball, and additional clarifications on equipment and electronic devices.

These changes were among 13 rules proposals recommended by the NFHS Soccer Rules Committee at its February 9-11 meeting in Indianapolis and subsequently approved by the NFHS Board of Directors.

"This year's updates represent another exciting step in our ongoing effort to modernize the NFHS Soccer Rules Book," said Julie Cochran, NFHS director of sports and liaison to the Soccer Rules Committee. "With major rewrites to Rules 13 and 14, we've made significant progress in creating a resource that is clearer, more intuitive, and easier for coaches, players and officials to use. These aren't just rule changes; they're part of a broader commitment to building a rules book that truly serves the high school game. We look forward to continuing this work in the years ahead."

Changes to Rule 5-3-1 f-j concern a new process for distributing yellow cards and red cards. Amended language states that officials shall hold a yellow or red card and indicate the substitute, coach or bench personnel being cautioned. If there's an ejection, and the reason was receiving a second caution in the same game, the referee shall show a yellow card indicating the subsequent caution followed immediately by showing a red card. The referee must then direct any player shown a yellow or red card to leave the field of play.

Additionally, the official must "notify both coaches, the scorer, and other official(s) of the nature of the misconduct after showing a yellow or red card to a player, coach or bench personnel."

Language was added to Rule 8-1-2 clarifying that all players, except the player taking the kickoff, must be on their half of the field or the kickoff shall be retaken. In addition, an indirect free kick is awarded to the opponent if the offensive player who took the kickoff touches the ball after the kick before it is played or touched by another player on either team.

Language in Rule 12-1-2c regarding conditional free kick fouls, was revised to state that "A player shall not charge into, or challenge, an opposing goalkeeper who is controlling the ball with their hands as in 12-3-2a. Outside the penalty area, the goalkeeper has no more privileges than any other player."

The change aligns the rule with consistent officiating practice, removes redundancies and improves clarity without materially altering when a charge is or is not permitted.

Goalkeeper restrictions were also updated, which affects several rules. Starting next school year, goalkeepers will have eight seconds instead of six before releasing the ball. Under the new rules, a corner kick will be awarded if the goalkeeper holds the ball past eight seconds instead of an indirect free kick.

Under Rule 12-2-3, "biting" was incorporated into direct free kick fouls. The rule now states a player shall not spit at or bite anyone listed on a roster or a game official, or a direct free kick foul will be awarded.

In addition, Rules 12-3-6 and 12-3-7 were added to include verbal offenses. By including "other verbal offenses" as an indirect free kick foul, it gives officials more flexibility when disciplining verbal offenses: they are now considered fouls at a minimum and may rise to the level of misconduct depending on the circumstances.

Under changes to Rule 12-3-5 regarding indirect free kicks, clarifying language was added to considerations for dangerous play that include actions preventing a nearby opponent from playing the ball for fear of injury.

Changes were also made to Rule 12-6-1 regarding ejections. The revisions clarify and simplify language surrounding Denying an Obvious Goal Scoring Opportunity (DOGSO) ejections by removing redundant wording, eliminating references to "attempted" DOGSO — since intent is not part of the decision — and aligning with previous wording within Rule 12. The updated structure provides clear situations for which

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denying a goal or obvious goal-scoring opportunity is penalized with an ejection.

Revisions to Rule 13-1 through 13-3 clarify procedures for restarts on free kicks by breaking the rule into distinct categories, outlining when and where free kicks are awarded, and detailing how they are to be taken. It also specifies the correct restart locations and provides guidance for officials on managing these situations. The update incorporates restart procedures for scenarios involving outside agents, offenses occurring off the field, thrown objects, individuals entering the field illegally, players leaving the field without permission, and offenses that occur outside the field of play.

Rule 14 regarding penalty kicks will have changes to ensure that encroachment is penalized only if the offense has a clear impact on the penalty kick.

Goalkeepers will now receive a warning for a first offense rather than an immediate caution, acknowledging that such infractions often stem from mis-anticipation.

Regarding the kicker on a penalty kick, the revisions continue to allow deceptive movements and stutter-stepping during the run-up; however, the change strictly prohibits feinting once the approach to the ball is completed.

Finally, in rare instances where both the kicker and goalkeeper offend simultaneously during a penalty kick, the kicker is penalized, as the kicker's illegal feinting is typically the catalyst for the goalkeeper's infraction. The penalty chart is also updated and reformatted for clarity.

"These revisions to the penalty kick rule better reflect the spirit of the game," said Gibby Reynolds, NFHS Soccer Rules Committee chair. "As arbiters of the game, officials now can apply judgment and only penalize offenses, like encroachment, when there is an impact."

Clarifications for uniform and equipment rules were also a part of the changes.

In Rule 4-1-4c, the word "dark" was added to clarify that the home team must wear socks that contrast with the away team's solid white socks. In Rule 4-2-7, subsections 'd' and 'e' were added to clarify that mouth protectors, if worn by players, should not serve any function other than to protect the teeth or mouth.

Additions were also made to Rule 4-2-11 a-c, stating that no athlete participating in a match is permitted to wear any type of audio or video device to record, transmit or livestream, aligning with other NFHS rules books. State associations may further restrict electronic devices.

A complete listing of the soccer rules changes will be available on the NFHS website at [www.nfhs.org](http://www.nfhs.org). Click on "Activities & Sports" at the top of the home page and select "Soccer." The print version of the 2026-27 Soccer Rules Book will be available for purchase in late May at [www.NFHS.com](http://www.NFHS.com), and the digital version will be available via NFHS Digital at [www.NFHS.org](http://www.NFHS.org).

According to the most recent NFHS High School Athletics Participation Survey, soccer is the fourth-most popular sport for boys with 484,908 participants in 12,969 schools nationwide. For girls, it ranks third with 393,048 participants at 12,516 schools.

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## Groton City Council Meeting Agenda

March 17, 2026 – 7:00pm  
City Hall – 120 N Main Street

(IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CALL IN TO THIS MEETING, PLEASE MAKE PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS TO DO SO BY CALLING CITY HALL 605-397-8422)

1. Approval of Agenda
2. Public Comments - pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1  
(Public Comments will offer the opportunity for anyone not listed on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. No action will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)
3. Appoint Jordan Voss-Severson as Ward 3 Councilperson
4. Additional Soil Exploration STI – IMEG Corp.
5. Approval of Special Event Alcoholic Beverage License – Graduation Party on May 9, 2026, at Community Center – Julie Sandness
6. Approval of Special Event Alcoholic Beverage License – Graduation Party on May 15, 2026, at Community Center – Jason Warrington & Pat Krause
7. Review Estimate from H&M Custom Coating for Exterior Painting of City Hall
8. Review Gravel Quotes
9. February Finance Report
10. Minutes
11. Bills
12. Reminder: Nominating Petitions for Municipal Election – Due by March 24 at 5:00pm
13. Announcement: City Offices to be Closed on April 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>, 2026, for Good Friday and Easter Monday
14. Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
15. Hire Applicants for Summer Employment
16. Adjournment

Equalization Meeting to Follow at Approximately 8:30pm.

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## Groton City Board of Equalization Agenda

March 17, 2026 – 8:30pm (approximately)

City Hall – 120 N Main Street

(IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CALL IN TO THIS MEETING, PLEASE MAKE PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS TO DO SO BY CALLING CITY HALL 605-397-8422)

1. Convene as Groton City Board of Equalization
2. Appeals Filed:
  - a. Parcel No. 18828 – 12 N Main Street
  - b. Parcel No. 18821 – 30 N Main Street
3. Review Assessments
4. Adjournment

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**BROWN COUNTY COMMISSION AGENDA  
GENERAL MEETING  
TUESDAY, MARCH 17, 2026, 8:45 A.M.  
COMMISSIONER'S CHAMBERS  
COURTHOUSE ANNEX - 25 MARKET STREET, ABERDEEN SD**

1. Call To Order - Pledge of Allegiance
2. Approval of the Agenda
3. Opportunity for Public Comment
  - ❖ *Public comment will be limited to 10 minutes or at Boards Discretion. Presentations will be limited to 3 minutes.*
4. Bid Opening for Landfill Cell #5
5. First Reading of Ordinance # 322 – Rezone for Donna Keatts
6. Approve & Authorize Chairman to sign the following Fair Contracts:
  - a. Fireworks Permit
  - b. Entertainment Contracts - Confidential
7. Surplus Property – Treasurer’s office to be disposed of at the Landfill
8. Approve & Authorize Chairman to sign 2026 Declarations with SD Public Assurance Alliance
9. Consent Calendar
  - a. Approval of the General Meeting Minutes of March 10, 2026
  - b. Claims
  - c. HR Report
  - d. Auditor’s Report of Accounts for January 2026
  - e. Travel Requests
  - f. Abatements
10. Other Business
11. Executive Session (if requested per SDCL 1-25-2)
12. Adjourn

You can join the Brown County Commission Meeting via **your computer, tablet, or smartphone** at <https://meet.goto.com/BrCoCommission>

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**Official Recordings of Commission Meetings along with the Minutes can be found at** [Commission Meetings | Brown County](#)



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### Nearly four years later, sentence comes in killing of transgender Native American woman

**Family 'trying to cope' after losing another member to homicide**

**BY: JOHN HULT**

The people who loved Acey Morrison spent nearly as much time waiting for justice as her killer is likely to spend locked up.

It doesn't feel like much, her family said. But at this point, nearly any measure of justice is welcome.

A judge this month sentenced 55-year-old Gregory Edward Landers to seven years in prison for fatally shooting Morrison in 2022. South Dakota lawmakers passed a truth in sentencing bill in 2024 that requires people serving time for violent crimes to serve all or most of their prison terms, but the law wasn't retroactive. With credit for the two years he's served in jail, Landers could be eligible for parole within a few years.

Landers pleaded guilty to second-degree manslaughter in November 2024. In exchange, prosecutors dropped first-degree manslaughter and a weapons charge, and agreed to ask for a sentence of no more than 10 years in prison, with three suspended.

"It was about the best outcome that we could hope for," said Stevie Cross Dog, Morrison's brother. "It should have been longer than seven years, but that's what we agreed to."

Given Landers' unsuccessful assertions of self-defense before the plea and his repeated attempts to withdraw the plea in the months that followed, there were times Stevie, his twin sister Raena Cross Dog and their mother, Edelyn Catches, wondered if the sentencing date would ever come.

Catches is glad it did, but the wait and the knowledge that Landers may be eligible for parole in a few years dull the feeling of justice for her daughter, she said.

Meanwhile, the family is still waiting for justice in the killing of Daniel Freeman, who was fatally stabbed in Pine Ridge 14 months after Morrison died.

Freeman is a biological nephew raised by Catches from infancy. She's all but given up hope that his killer or killers will face justice.

She's struggled to sleep for four years. Thus far, she told South Dakota Searchlight, the sentence for Landers hasn't changed that.

"After all this time, you lose a lot of faith in the system," said Catches, who's now raising Freeman's two children.

#### **Self-defense claim stalls prosecution**

Morrison was a 30-year-old transgender woman and member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, recognized in the tribe's traditions as a "Two-Spirit." She'd cry about getting haircuts that made her "look like a boy," her mother remembers, and wanted to wear girls' clothes from a young age.

"I always knew she was Two-Spirit," Catches said.

Stevie and Raena, who are six years younger than Morrison, always knew her as an older sister. She often worked three jobs at a time, Raena said, and struggled to deal with "verbal and mental abuse" she'd experienced growing up transgender and Native American while going to school in Oehlrichs, a town in Fall River County about a dozen miles from Pine Ridge Reservation borders, and while living in Rapid City as an adult.

By mid-2022, though, Raena and Stevie both said Morrison seemed to have turned a corner after struggles with substance abuse and low-wage work. Instead of three jobs, she had one, as a hotel manager, and

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was "in the process" of adopting Freeman's young son. The boy was living with Morrison and Stevie at their Rapid City apartment.

"It broke me," Raena said of Morrison's killing, "because of all the progress she'd made in the past 10 years."

Morrison met Landers through a dating app called Grindr. The altercation that ended her life took place the morning after she arrived at his trailer on Aug. 20, 2022.

Landers told police the two drank alcohol, but hadn't slept together. Morrison attacked him when he asked her to leave in the morning, Landers argued throughout court proceedings. They struggled over a shotgun, he said, which Landers said he'd fired during the struggle to protect himself.

After a self-defense immunity hearing in 2024, though, Judge Heidi Linngren ruled "clear and convincing evidence" suggested that Landers hadn't acted in self-defense. The ruling allowed the prosecution to proceed.

There were too many inconsistencies and inaccuracies in his story, the judge wrote, to dismiss the manslaughter charges without a trial. The area of the bedroom where the altercation allegedly happened was largely undisturbed. Landers had accused Morrison of factory resetting his phone, but later admitted that he'd scrubbed the phone himself. He said Morrison showed up without a phone, but also that she'd asked Siri, an iPhone voice assistant, to call the police.

Even so, convincing a jury that Landers had committed manslaughter beyond a reasonable doubt wouldn't have been easy, Pennington County State's Attorney Lara Roetzel told South Dakota Searchlight.

Pulling together enough evidence to make that possible was part of the reason more than a year passed between the killing and Landers' indictment, she said.

"Really, every expert was saying 'We don't really have any idea what happened in that room,'" said Roetzel, who also noted that her office was in a leadership transition after the departure of former state's attorney Mark Vargo, who was a few months into his interim stint as South Dakota's attorney general when the homicide took place.

Morrison was taller and heavier than Landers. They'd both been drinking. Landers was injured when police arrived, with a fractured hand and bruised ribs.

"In the end, it was all the lying and the inconsistencies," Roetzel said, that led her to conclude that Landers had been the aggressor, even though "a lot of prosecutors wouldn't have even charged this case."

He pleaded guilty to second-degree manslaughter, which under South Dakota law constitutes the "reckless killing of one human being" by another.

"I stand by my decision to charge it," said Roetzel. "I believe beyond a reasonable doubt that he killed Acey, certainly in the manner of the charge he pleaded to."

## Delays, hearings

At his plea hearing in late 2024, Linngren asked Landers if he was satisfied with the advice of his court-appointed lawyer and if he was making the plea of his own free will, without undue pressure. Linngren informed him of his rights he'd be giving up with his plea and asked him if he was prepared to give them up.

All the answers were "yes."

Normally, a sentencing hearing would happen within a month or so of such a plea. But within weeks, Landers moved to fire his attorney. He was appointed a new one, who needed time to review the case. Then Landers moved to take back his plea, which led to multiple hearings and another ruling from Linngren, this time saying that his plea had been knowing and voluntary.

"Reasserting the same claims after his guilty plea is not a persuasive reason to allow withdrawal" of a plea, she wrote.

In letters to the judge, Landers said the case was political because of Morrison's transgender and Native American identities, and that the prosecution had been malicious. He was defending himself, he said, and needed to "get home" to his aging parents in Indiana.

Landers' mother sent South Dakota Searchlight messages in 2025 and again in 2026 saying her son acted

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in self-defense. His mother did not reply to messages seeking comment after the sentencing.

Landers also unsuccessfully attempted, through a handwritten motion, to get the state Supreme Court to intervene.

For Stevie Cross Dog, his sister and his mother, it felt like Landers was doing everything he could to delay his sentencing.

"The letter of the law has to be followed, but I think he signed the plea deal and he admitted guilt," Stevie said. "I don't think he should've gotten so much time to keep the process going. It's been two and a half years of continuances and delays."

## Family tragedy mirrors national issues

Catches and her surviving children have all but given up waiting for an arrest in Freeman's murder. It's been classified a "cold case," Catches said.

"Nothing has happened," she said. "Nobody's been arrested."

A spokesperson for the U.S. Attorney's Office of South Dakota, which would be the prosecuting agency for a homicide on the Pine Ridge Reservation, told South Dakota Searchlight there was nothing to share on the Freeman case. A different spokesperson gave the same response in 2024.

The family's experience since 2022 stands as a stark reflection of a reality shared by Native American families across South Dakota and the U.S. Homicide is the fourth-leading cause of death for Native American men and sixth-leading cause for Native American women, according to the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Transgender people, meanwhile, are four times more likely to be victims of violent crimes, according to the Williams Institute. The figures are more disproportionate still for Two-Spirit people, according to a 2025 report from the Human Rights Campaign that found four in five experience violence in their lifetime.

Raena Cross Dog said the loss of two relatives, the wait for closure and other struggles since Morrison's death have been a lot to take, especially in such rapid succession.

She "went numb" after Freeman's death. Stevie said it felt "like starting all over again."

Their mother's health problems, often attended to by Morrison, have worsened since then. Catches has withdrawn from family and friends, she said, who are "tired of me crying."

About a year after Freeman's death, Raena lost a child to miscarriage.

"We're very broken, if I'm being honest. We're a broken family," Raena said. "We're trying to cope."

Trying to cope is the first step, Stevie said. At least with the sentencing, he sees some possibility for closure and healing.

Like his mother, though, he doesn't feel it yet. He's not sure when he will.

"It's just surviving first," Stevie said.

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

## Economic developers emerge mostly unscathed from critical winds that blew into Pierre

**Efforts to incentivize data centers failed, but many bills seeking to restrict government's role in business were defeated**

**BY: JOSHUA HAIAR**

Economic developers in South Dakota say they've been under "attack," and while they failed in their efforts to incentivize data centers this legislative session, they mounted a counter-campaign that warded off many other efforts to restrain government aid for business and industry.

Their campaign included public messaging about the state's business incentive "toolbox," in response to a bruising stretch of controversies.

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"Over the past year or so, an attack on economic development has caused turbulence in South Dakota's business community," reads the "Building Better SD" campaign website, published by the South Dakota Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

During the legislative session that ended last week at the state Capitol in Pierre, there were numerous bills introduced by lawmakers seeking to change various aspects of the government's economic development role. Some of that legislation was from state Sen. Taffy Howard, R-Rapid City, who said the bills were motivated by legitimate complaints.

"The sentiment is coming from the average citizen seeing what's been done in the name of economic development," Howard said. "It's the abuse of these tools that has to stop."

Howard said the conflict began several years ago when, as she describes it, development advocates framed opponents of Iowa-based Summit Carbon Solution's five-state pipeline as a vocal minority with illegitimate concerns. The pipeline would capture carbon dioxide from ethanol plants, transport it to an underground sequestration site in North Dakota, and capitalize on federal tax credits that incentivize the prevention of heat-trapping gases from entering the atmosphere.

The company tried to exercise eminent domain, the legal process for acquiring access to private property for a public use.

"And that kind of woke people up," Howard said.

Subsequently, a property rights revolt helped oust 14 incumbent Republican legislators in favor of Republican challengers in 2024, and those new lawmakers helped adopt a law last year banning eminent domain for carbon pipelines. The Summit proposal stalled, and other economic development fights ensued.

## Complaints, controversies pile up

During Republican former Gov. Kristi Noem's six years in office, she incited a backlash against her controversial uses of the state's Future Fund for economic development, including for a fireworks show at Mount Rushmore, a Rapid City-area shooting range that legislators refused to fund, a Sioux Falls rodeo, and a workforce recruitment campaign that Noem starred in.

The workforce ad campaign was especially controversial across the political spectrum.

"When you see the Future Fund can be used to run a personal public relations campaign, there is something wrong," Howard said.

The fund was created in 1987 at the request of then-Gov. George Mickelson, a Republican. It was placed under the governor's exclusive control, enabling quick action when economic opportunities arise. South Dakota employers contribute fees to the Future Fund when they remit payroll taxes for unemployment benefits.

In a more recent controversy, South Dakota Searchlight reported on the close connections between state government and CJ Schwan's, a company that has benefited from \$69 million worth of tax rebates, grants and loans from the state — including the Future Fund — to help build a \$550 million, 650-employee food production plant in northern Sioux Falls.

Noem's former economic development commissioner, Steve Westra, signed the first pledge of state aid before ultimately leaving and going to work for the company after waiting the legally mandated one year. Jeff Erickson, the chairman of the state Board of Economic Development, is on the CJ Schwan's corporate board and is involved with a corporation renting space to CJ Schwan's in downtown Sioux Falls. Erickson abstained from state board decisions involving the company.

In another economic development flashpoint, Howard helped lead a voter revolt to reject a \$125 million tax increment financing district in Rapid City in January.

TIF districts have traditionally been used to provide upfront financing for development projects, such as streets and connections to water and sewer lines. The new, higher property taxes generated by the development are then used to pay off the financing.

The Rapid City TIF included \$46.5 million of discretionary money for developers of a proposed Liberty-land residential and entertainment district. About 70% of voters in Rapid City rejected the TIF after the

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city council had approved it.

This legislative session, lawmakers and the governor enacted a law that will prevent properties within a TIF district from receiving a tax break known as the discretionary formula; restrict the maximum value of TIFs for the state's largest cities to 7.5% of the total assessed value in the city, rather than 10%; raise the "blight" threshold in a district from 25% to 50% for TIFs that use blight as a legal justification for their creation; and require a third-party review of projects.

## Data center incentives blocked

The latest front in the economic development fight played out in the Legislature, where lawmakers rejected proposed sales tax exemptions and rebates for data centers — the massive warehouses full of computer servers for artificial intelligence, cryptocurrency and other data-intensive processes. Without those incentives, developers have said some proposed data centers in South Dakota will not be built.

A bill to exempt data centers' backup electrical power generation from state permitting also failed. The only major data center bill to make it through the Legislature — pending the governor's consideration — is one that would impose new regulations on data centers' demands for electrical power and water for cooling, while also preventing the state from overriding local data center ordinances.

Tim Hanigan, the CEO of Aberdeen Development Corporation, was discouraged by legislators' rejection of data center incentives.

"When we're looking at ways to reduce property tax or it's a tight budget year, just saying no outright to an entire industry, with no conversation, just seems too far," he said.

Economic developers in the state, including Hanigan, argue that large data centers bring jobs, expand local property tax bases, and generate millions of dollars in sales tax revenue from the massive amounts of electricity they consume.

Hanigan and other developers see the pushback against data centers as part of a growing "anti-growth" mood in Pierre.

The issue has also emerged as a key factor in this year's race for governor. House Speaker Jon Hansen of Dell Rapids and Aberdeen businessman Toby Doeden are seeking the Republican nomination for governor in the June primary. Hansen has criticized the state's economic development approach as "corporate welfare," and Doeden has alleged the state focuses too much on recruiting out-of-state businesses at the expense of local entrepreneurs.

Another Republican candidate, U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, has described attacks on economic development as bad for the state and has promised to be a "builder." On Friday, he pledged to invest \$2 million from the Future Fund into an initiative to help more South Dakotans turn their ideas into businesses.

Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden has been handing out economic development awards as he seeks to retain his job, but has also made some concessions, including signing legislation that defines the purposes for which he can make grants and loans from the Future Fund, along with other guardrails.

Economic developers and their allies, meanwhile, have recently gotten more organized.

## Economic developers fight back

The "Building Better SD" campaign pushes back against criticism by promoting the role and value of the state's economic development programs. The campaign's website argues that South Dakota's economy hasn't "happened by chance."

The campaign spotlights the economy-growing role of government programs, including the governor-controlled Future Fund, the state Revolving Economic Development and Initiative (REDI) Fund, local tax increment financing districts (TIFs), loans and grants from the South Dakota Housing Development Authority, and the Build Dakota Scholarship Fund.

"Without these programs, tools in our toolbox, South Dakota would not have such a strong and well-diversified economy," said First Premier Bank Chairman and CEO Dana Dykhouse in an ad. "That's why it's vital that we all understand the importance of these economic development tools."

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Dykhouse received the Excellence in Economic Development Award at the 2026 Governor's Conference on Economic Development in Pierre for his leadership in workforce development.

He told South Dakota Searchlight that development incentives are not "anti-free-market" as some critics have claimed, but rather tools that governments use to encourage growth that benefits the broader public.

Dykhouse said development incentives built South Dakota, citing the federal government's Homestead Act (which granted free land to homesteaders), mortgage interest tax deductions, and government programs supporting low-interest loans for first-time homebuyers.

Multiple economic development leaders at the conference said South Dakota is short on economic development incentives, so making TIFs, low-interest loans, grants or sales tax relief programs harder to use would make it tougher to grow the state's economy.

The Building Better SD campaign included distributing red boxes, designed to look like toolboxes, to legislators in Pierre that contained information on the economic development programs advocates are defending. The effort also includes a broader media campaign, including television ads and online messaging.

The toolbox campaign was led by the South Dakota Economic Development Professionals Association and the South Dakota Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Ryan Budmayr is the chamber's president and CEO. He said business leaders worry they are losing the broader narrative that economic development supports schools, infrastructure and basic services, especially in rural counties facing decline.

"I think there is a skepticism that is warranted in some ways," he said. "And then I think there is a skepticism that may not see the big picture of what these programs are doing across the state, and is instead zeroing in on ones that didn't work."

Budmayr said much of the skepticism also stems from anger over inflation and a broader distrust of government and big business.

"But if we don't continue to look for ways to grow our economy, the basic services we want to improve and tax relief we want to deliver will never happen," Budmayr said.

Mike Bockorny, CEO of the South Dakota Economic Development Professionals Association, doesn't deny that recent controversies helped fuel criticism.

"The pipeline was a case study for exactly how not to do business," he said, referencing the Summit project.

Yet Bockorny said the public conversation about economic development has focused on a handful of high-profile disputes. He said that ignores quieter work that most local development offices engage in: helping South Dakota businesses expand and entrepreneurs launch new ventures.

Similarly, at the state level, the Governor's Office of Economic Development told South Dakota Searchlight that 1,691 awards have been made from the Future Fund since its inception in 1987. They include projects across the state and 318 awards allocated to entities or projects serving the entire state, according to the office.

Through the office's loan programs, 18 loans were approved last year, totaling \$45.8 million. Those loans are expected to help generate 981 jobs.

Howard said she's not trying to take tools out of the toolbox. She said her goal is accountability and transparency when government is involved in economic development.

Joe Fiala, the deputy commissioner of the Governor's Office of Economic Development, spoke this week with the state Board of Economic Development about this year's legislative session. He said the office had to spend more time than usual explaining to lawmakers what the office does and how proposed bills could affect economic development.

"We are going to spend a significant amount of time over the next several months just visiting with legislators, other economic development stakeholders, city and county officials, to make sure they understand: What is economic development? What does GOED do? How does our board function?" he told the board.

Fiala noted most of this year's bills seeking to restrain economic development tools were either withdrawn or failed, which he described as a good outcome for the state.

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## **Bills affecting economic development in the 2026 legislative session**

Most efforts to restrain the state's role in economic development failed during this year's South Dakota legislative session, although there was success in placing new guardrails on the governor-controlled Future Fund and local tax increment financing districts, and in imposing new regulations on data centers rather than offering them tax incentives.

Senate Bill 1 would have required governor-controlled Future Fund grants to be approved by a majority vote of the Board of Economic Development, rather than by the governor alone. The bill was rejected 5-4 after its initial committee hearing.

House Bill 1230 would have created an opt-in process for the employer fee that funds the Future Fund, rather than the current automatic system. It would have required the Department of Labor and Regulation to distribute an opt-in form quarterly and deem employers opted out unless they opt in. The bill failed in the House 31-36.

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

House Bill 1222 would have prohibited a Board of Economic Development member from owning an interest in, or serving on, the board of any entity approved by the Board of Economic Development to receive public funds. It failed 29-36 in the House.

Senate Bill 93 would have amended a law that requires state officers and employees involved in awarding or overseeing a contract with a company to wait one year after leaving government service before taking a job with the company. The bill aimed to extend the waiting period to two years for contracts exceeding \$5 million. It was amended against the prime sponsor's will and was then tabled by the House.

Senate Bill 109 would have tightened requirements for creating a tax increment financing district. It would have limited the portion of a local government's property value that can be tied up in a tax increment financing district, reducing the cap from 10% of a community's total assessed value to 2.5%. It was defeated on a 4-0 vote in a committee.

Senate Bill 192 would have doubled the "blight" threshold and tightened the legal findings that local officials must adopt to approve a TIF district. The bill would have allowed a TIF only in areas where at least 50% of the area is "blighted," rather than 25%. It was defeated by a 4-0 committee vote.

Senate Bill 228 will prevent properties within a TIF district from receiving a tax break known as the discretionary formula; restrict the maximum value of TIFs for the state's largest cities to 7.5% of the total assessed value in the city, rather than 10%; raise the "blight" threshold from 25% to 50% for TIFs that use blight as a legal justification; and require a third-party review of the project. It was signed into law by the governor.

House Bill 1173 would have required environmental impact studies for carbon dioxide pipelines. A Senate committee defeated the bill on a 5-3 vote.

House Joint Resolution 5001 would have asked voters to narrow the use of eminent domain. Increases in the tax base, tax revenues, employment, or general economic health would no longer justify its use, and the need for a project would need to be publicly declared before any condemnation proceedings could commence. It failed in the Senate on a 14-19 vote.

Senate Bill 88 will limit the ways developers can use eminent domain to enter private land when a landowner says no. It was signed into law by the governor.

Senate Bill 135 would require data center companies to ensure that a facility's water use will not overburden local resources and to pay for the electricity costs incurred by the facility. It also prohibits the state from overriding local governments' authority regarding data center ordinances. The bill awaits the governor's consideration.

Senate Bill 193 would have exempted large backup generators that are not connected to the grid — such

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as those used by large data centers — from regulatory and siting review by the state Public Utilities Commission. It failed in the Senate on a 17-17 vote.

House Bill 1246, which would have banned government bodies from entering into nondisclosure agreements for data center projects, failed in a 30-37 vote in the House.

Senate Bill 293 would have expanded the state's Reinvestment Payment Program to incentivize data centers. It failed in the Senate on a 16-17 vote.

House Bill 1005, which would have granted data centers 50-year exemptions from sales taxes on their equipment and software purchases, was rejected by a committee 9-3.

*Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.*

## **COMMENTARY**

### **School board negotiations with teachers could benefit from sunshine**

**by Dana Hess**

The nation is celebrating Sunshine Week March 15 through 21. It's a time to shine a light on the importance of open records and open government. Too often in South Dakota, Sunshine Week is a time for complaining about the cloudy nature of this state's government openness.

Many of our public records that should be open to the public are closed. Our local governments operate in secret when they want to, knowing that no one in South Dakota has ever been prosecuted for breaking the state's executive session law. The Republican super-majorities in the state's House and Senate meet in closed caucuses every day during the legislative session, essentially deciding the fate of South Dakota in secret.

There are, however, some bright spots breaking through the clouds:

When the GOP super-majorities aren't conferring in secret, they're operating in a Legislature that requires all bills to get a public hearing. For their part, the public has multiple chances to follow the action from Pierre through South Dakota Public Broadcasting.

Attorney General Marty Jackley has consistently been a proponent of laws that help open local governments to public scrutiny. He also resurrected the Open Meetings Commission to help shed a light on those boards and commissions that break the law.

In the just-concluded legislative session, lawmakers overwhelmingly approved a bill that would allow for the quick dismissal of meritless, intimidating lawsuits — known as Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation or SLAPP. Those lawsuits are designed specifically to silence free speech and a free press.

The sunshine could break through even more if local governments would rethink the way that they use closed-door meetings, known as executive sessions. Executive session laws in this state are written in such a way that certain matters — personnel, student discipline, consulting with legal counsel or employee contract negotiations — may be held in executive session. They may be held in executive session, but they don't have to be.

One of the subjects that could use a dose of sunshine is the negotiations that go on between school boards and teachers. Often the start of those negotiations are a one-line item in local news coverage and another one-line item in the school board minutes. The board and negotiators for the teachers often meet multiple times to hammer out the new contract. At the end of negotiations, both sides offer a short news release about how happy they are with the outcome.

In the meantime, the public is left in the dark about how the board and the teachers arrived at decisions that will result in the single largest line item in the school district budget — teacher salaries.

This may be the perfect time for school boards and teachers to shed some light on negotiations. The tug of war between school district budgets and skyrocketing property tax bills isn't going to end any time soon.

In the recently completed legislative session, property tax reform seemed to be a constant topic of dis-

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cussion. Lawmakers considered almost 50 property tax bills as well as three failed attempts at joint resolutions that would have had citizens voting to change the state Constitution as it applies to property taxes.

During debates about how to cut property taxes, some lawmakers have tried to place the blame for the rising tax bills on the spendthrift ways of county commissions and school boards. The best way for school districts to combat those arguments is through greater transparency about how budget decisions are made during negotiations.

By opening negotiations to the public, school boards will let their constituents know just how their tax dollars are being spent. More transparency will give the public insight into the funding challenges faced by school boards and the things that teachers believe they need in order to do their jobs.

At a time when there is so much emphasis on property tax reform, school districts have to throw back the curtains to let the light in and show how they manage their money. One of the best ways to do that would be to conduct teacher negotiations in public. If the public, and lawmakers, got a better understanding of the funding challenges that schools face, it may be more likely that any meaningful property tax reform would include a path to keeping education funding intact.

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

## Workers begin strike at JBS meatpacking plant in Colorado

BY: CHASE WOODRUFF

Nearly 4,000 Colorado workers at one of the country's largest meatpacking plants began a strike Monday over wages, working conditions and "unlawful union busting" by the plant's corporate owner.

Members of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 7 voted nearly unanimously last month to authorize the so-called unfair labor practices strike. The union has been in talks with JBS on a new collective bargaining contract since a previous four-year agreement expired in July.

"For months now, JBS has been insisting on poverty-level wages for workers at the plant, offering less than 2% in average annual wage increases, far below the level of inflation in Colorado, while at the same time putting all the risk of rising healthcare costs on workers," UFCW Local 7 President Kim Cordova said in a press release.

The Greeley walkout is believed to be the largest strike at a U.S. meatpacking facility in decades. UFCW Local 7 said that it had offered to meet with company representatives over the weekend to avert a strike, but the company refused.

JBS did not immediately respond to a request for comment Monday. A multinational company based in Brazil, it maintains its U.S. corporate headquarters in Greeley, and its sprawling meatpacking facility there is one of the largest in the country, accounting for roughly 5% of U.S. beef-processing capacity.

Workers say the company has created dangerous working conditions by increasing processing speeds while cutting worker hours and failing to provide "life-saving personal protective equipment." The union also alleges that the company has violated federal labor laws by refusing to bargain in good faith and retaliating against union members.

"We want to be treated like human beings. We will not be intimidated, retaliated against, or suffer in silence," Deborah Rodarte, a worker at the Greeley plant, said in a statement. "We work very hard, in difficult conditions, and want JBS to negotiate fairly for a contract that will allow us to live with dignity. We will stand together on the picket line until JBS recognizes our value and treats us fairly."

UFCW Local 7 say they plan for the unfair labor practices strike to last two weeks.

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

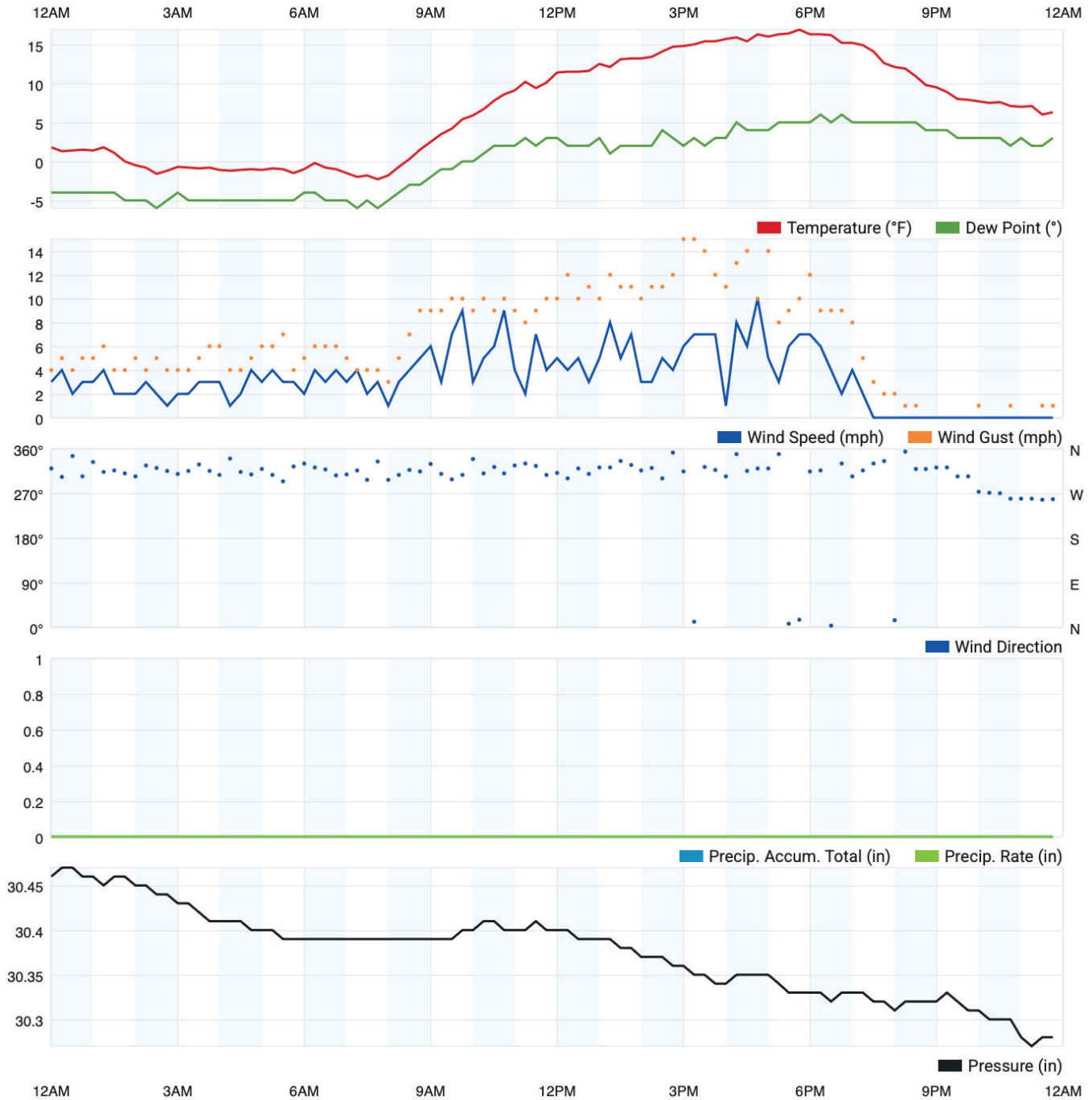
*Chase Woodruff is a senior reporter for Colorado Newsline. His beats include the environment, money in politics, and the economy.*

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

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Tuesday

Tuesday Night

Wednesday

Wednesday  
Night

Thursday



High: 32 °F

Snow and  
Patchy  
Blowing Snow



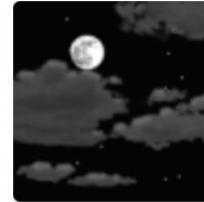
Low: 28 °F

Mostly Cloudy



High: 47 °F

Partly Sunny



Low: 30 °F

Partly Cloudy



High: 60 °F

Mostly Sunny



## Snapshot of Precipitation Type & Timing

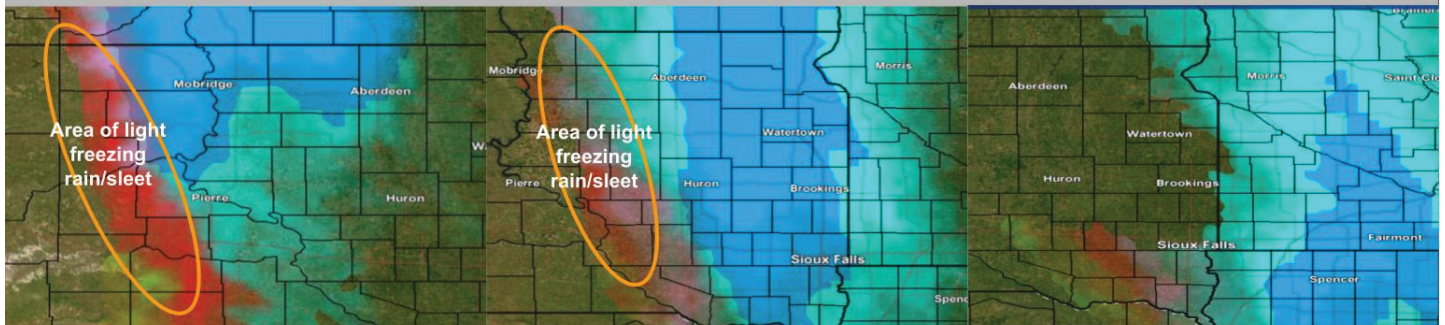
March 17, 2026  
3:07 AM

Band of snowfall, with mixed precipitation on back edge

8 AM CDT

12 PM CDT

4 PM CDT



Snow

Fz Rain

Mixed

Rain

- Band of snow moves east today, with **brief** (1-3 hrs) mixed precipitation potential on back edge.
- Increasing southerly wind gusts (25-35mph) will bring **patchy/areas of blowing and drifting snow**.
- **Light amounts of snow from 0.5 to 2 inches, highest across northeast SD. Icing of a light glaze possible central SD.**
  - **Minor travel impacts possible. Roads could be slick across portions of central SD this morning. Blowing/drifting snow may reduce visibility at times and create minor snow drifts.**

A band of snow will move east across the region today ahead of a warm front. It will arrive in central SD this morning and exit eastern counties by mid/late afternoon. There is potential for areas of light freezing rain or sleet on the back edge, mainly over central SD. Only light amounts of snow from a half inch or around 2 inches are forecast.

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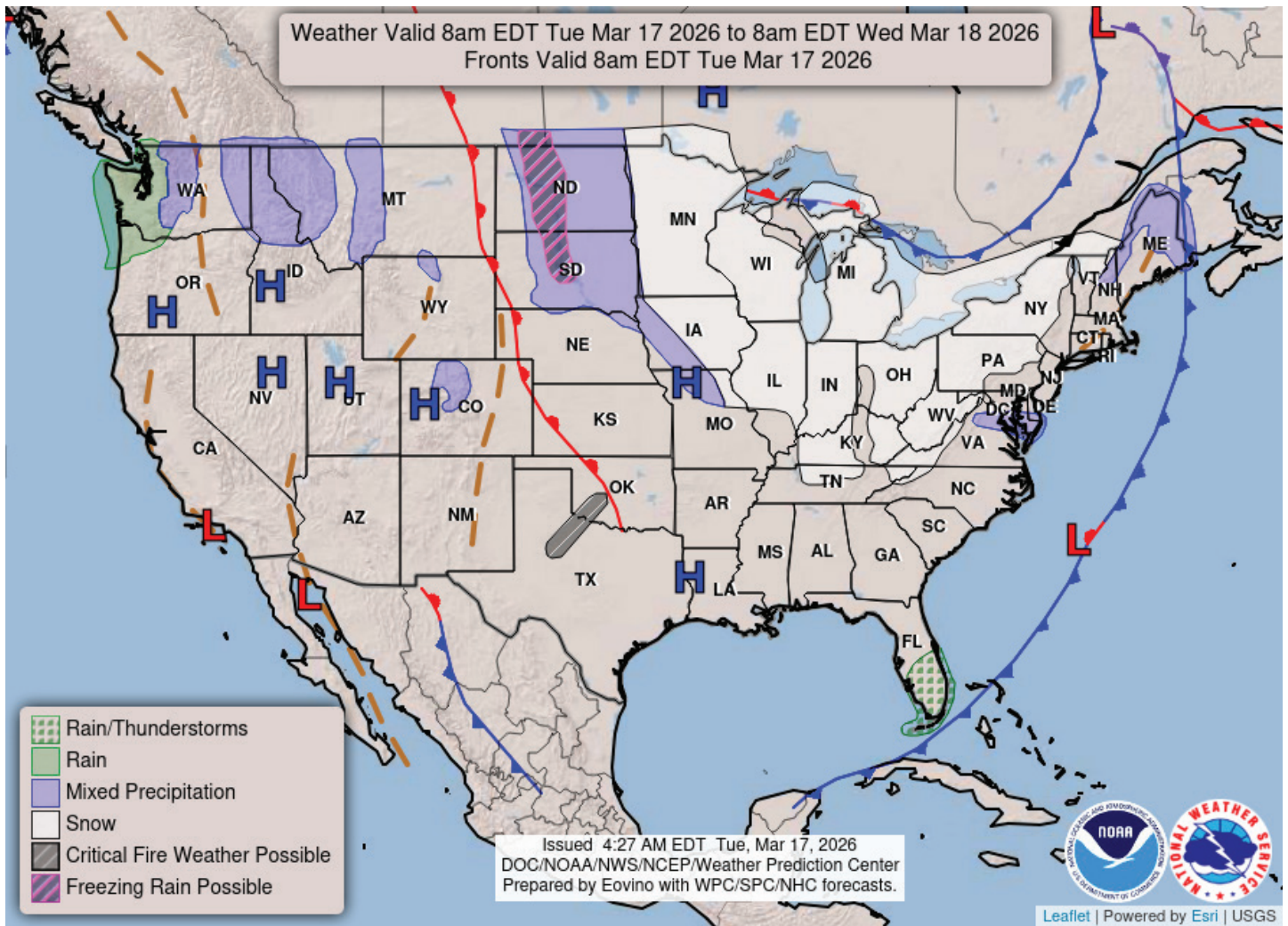
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 17 °F at 5:51 PM**  
**Low Temp: -2 °F at 7:43 AM**  
**Wind: 16 mph at 2:59 PM**  
**Precip: : 0.00**

## Today's Info

Record High: 77 in 2012  
Record Low: -10 in 1906  
Average High: 42  
Average Low: 20  
Average Precip in Mar.: 0.43  
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.29  
Average Precip to date: 1.60  
Precip Year to Date: 1.62  
Sunset Tonight: 7:40 pm  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:39 am



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## Today in Weather History

March 17th, 1997: High winds of 30 to 50 mph, gusting to over 60 mph, occurred over much of northeast South Dakota through the morning and into the early afternoon. Several homes and businesses sustained some roof damage. In Aberdeen, the high winds tore a large piece of the roof off the bowling alley and also ripped a part of a roof off an appliance store. The winds damaged some power lines and connections in Aberdeen, including some traffic lights. In Aberdeen, the power was out for 2500 customers for a few hours in the morning. The wind also damaged two old farm buildings west of Aberdeen. One barn lost 75 percent of its roof. The second barn was pushed six inches off its foundation and suffered minor structural damage. The Edmunds County Highway Department Shop, under construction east of Ipswich, suffered much damage as many rafters came down and the sidewall frame shifted. Finally, many small to medium-sized branches were brought down by the high winds. Some peak wind gusts across the area included 58 mph in Aberdeen and 63 mph in Watertown.

1892 — A winter storm in southwestern and central Tennessee produced 26 inches of snow at Riddleton, and 18.5 inches at Memphis. It was the deepest snow of record for those areas. (David Ludlum)

1906 — The temperature at Snake River, WY, dipped to 50 degrees below zero, a record for the U.S. for the month of March. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1987 — A powerful spring storm produced severe thunderstorms over the Central Gulf Coast States, and heavy snow in the High Plains Region. A tornado caused three million dollars damage at Natchez MS, and six inches of rain in five hours caused five million dollars damage at Vicksburg MS. Cactus TX received 10 inches of snow. Western Kansas reported blizzard conditions. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — A winter storm produced heavy snow from the northeast Texas panhandle to the Ozark area of Missouri and Arkansas. Up to fifteen inches of snow was reported in Oklahoma and Texas. Snowfall totals in the Ozark area ranged up to 14 inches, with unofficial reports as high as 22 inches around Harrison AR. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 — Strong northerly winds ushered snow and arctic cold into the north central U.S. Winds gusted to 58 mph at Sydney NE and Scottsbluff NE, Cadillac MI received 12 inches of snow, and International Falls MN reported a record low of 22 degrees below zero. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 — Showers and thunderstorms associated with a slow moving cold front produced torrential rains across parts of the southeastern U.S. over a two day period. Flooding claimed the lives of at least 22 persons, including thirteen in Alabama. Up to 16 inches of rain deluged southern Alabama, with 10.63 inches reported at Mobile AL in 24 hours. The town of Elba AL was flooded with 6 to 12 feet of water causing more than 25 million dollars damage, and total flood damage across Alabama exceeded 100 million dollars. Twenty-six counties in the state were declared disaster areas. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

## Can You Trust Your Conscience?

**Ask God to show you how well your conscience is operating..**

1 Timothy 1:18-19: 18 This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight,

19 keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.

To help us distinguish between right and wrong, God has given us a conscience that serves as a kind of spiritual radar. The condition you keep it in will determine how much you can trust it.

The sacred conscience is one that has been kept spotless through confession of sin (1 John 1:9) and reflects a desire to know and follow God's will. Once we are cleansed, we can live without guilt, walking openly and transparently. When we do sin, we know immediately that we need to get right with God.

The struggling conscience is clogged with rules and regulations, and its spirit of legalism makes us critical of our performance. Having created our own system of "should, ought, and must," we use it to determine right or wrong. In doing so, we show a lack of understanding about God's righteousness, which can never be replaced with self-righteousness (Philippians 3:8-10).

The soiled conscience is stained from harboring sin. If we consistently choose our way over God's, we lose sight of what's beautiful and true.

The seared conscience is insensitive to sin. When we resist and ignore its warnings, it will become numb and unresponsive.

Ask God to show you how well your conscience is operating, and where there's room for improvement, allow Him to restore it.

*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:  
03.16.26

2 16 30 41 49 4

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

NEXT DRAW: 18 Hrs 12 Mins 49 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:  
03.13.26

6 19 36 40 55 9

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$60,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 57 Mins 49 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:  
03.16.26

14 20 22 29 44 7

All Star Bonus: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$18,880,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 12 Mins 49 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
03.14.26

6 14 29 30 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$26,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 27 Mins 49 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
03.16.26

9 11 34 41 51 4

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

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 56 Mins 49 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:  
03.16.26

7 10 20 47 52 20

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$101,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 56 Mins 50 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

## News from the **AP** Associated Press

### **Suspected suicide bombers target Nigeria's Maiduguri city, killing 23 people and injuring over 100**

MAIDUGURI, Nigeria (AP) — At least 23 people were killed and more than 100 wounded in suspected suicide bombings Monday night that targeted Maiduguri city in northeastern Nigeria, police said Tuesday. It was one of the deadliest attacks in the conflict-battered city in recent history.

Residents and emergency services earlier told The Associated Press that three explosions were reported in crowded places in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state, including in a major market and at the entrance of the University of Maiduguri Teaching Hospital.

"Regrettably, a total of 23 persons lost their lives, while 108 others sustained varying degrees of injuries," Borno police spokesperson Nahum Kenneth Daso said in a statement that blamed the attacks on suspected suicide bombers.

No group has claimed responsibility for the attacks, but suspicion quickly fell on the Boko Haram jihadi group, which in 2009 launched an insurgency in northeastern Nigeria to enforce their radical interpretation of Shariah.

Boko Haram has since become stronger, with thousands of fighters and different factions, including the Islamic State West Africa Province, which is backed by the Islamic State group.

Maiduguri city has been at the heart of the deadly violence but has in recent years experienced relative peace even as the countryside is often battered by extremists.

The attack took place less than 24 hours after the Nigerian military repelled attacks by militants on the outskirts of Maiduguri, in what some residents say could have been planned as a distraction.

By Tuesday morning, there was heavy security deployment in the affected locations and along major roads in the city, but many public places remained closed amid heightened fear.

"Investigations are ongoing to further ascertain the circumstances surrounding the incidents and to bring perpetrators to justice," the Borno police command said.

Explosions rocked crowded places almost simultaneously

The first explosion was recorded at about 7:30 p.m. at the entrance of the teaching hospital, while the second and third followed few minutes later at the popular Monday Market and nearby Post Office business hub, both located about 4 kilometers (2.5 miles) from the hospital.

Witnesses recounted the chaos that followed at the scenes and at hospitals as security forces and the emergency services quickly intervened.

"This attack has been one of the deadliest in Maiduguri in years," said Mohammed Hassan, a member of a volunteer group assisting security forces in fighting extremists. "We're in dire need of blood," he said of the situation hours after the attack.

The extremists have intensified their attacks against Nigerian military bases in recent weeks, killing several senior officers and soldiers, and stripping the bases of stocks of weaponry and ammunition.

The multiple attacks could be seen as a major victory for the jihadis in a city seen as impregnable despite the jihadis often targeting troops and villages on the outskirts of the city.

Past attacks in the city have been limited to one-off incidents that occur once in a long while, including a suicide attack that killed five at a mosque on Christmas Eve last year.

"Maiduguri being attacked is like an insult for the security forces ... and for the (jihadi) groups, it is symbolic because it shows nowhere is out of their reach," said Malik Samuel, a Nigerian security researcher with Good Governance Africa.

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## Israel says it has killed head of Iran's Basij militia

By JON GAMBRELL, DAVID RISING and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Israel said Tuesday it had killed the head of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards' all-volunteer Basij force, a key force used to suppress demonstrations in the Islamic Republic, as Gulf Arab nations came under renewed missile and drone fire Tuesday from Iran.

Dubai, a major transit hub for international travel, briefly shut its airspace as the military said it was "responding to incoming missile and drone threats" around the city, and a man was killed by the debris of a missile intercepted over Abu Dhabi.

The Israeli military also said early Tuesday it had begun a "wide-scale wave of strikes" across Iran's capital and was stepping up strikes on Iran-backed Hezbollah militants in Lebanon. Israel also reported two incoming salvos before dawn from Iran at Tel Aviv and elsewhere, and said Hezbollah targeted Israel's north.

Israel says it has killed head of Iranian militia force

The Israeli military said a strike Monday killed Gholamreza Soleimani, but Iran did not immediately acknowledge the militia leader's death.

"The Basij forces are part of the armed apparatus of the Iranian terror regime," the Israeli military said in its statement. "During internal protests in Iran, particularly in recent periods as demonstrations intensified, Basij forces under Soleimani's command led the main repression operations, employing severe violence, widespread arrests and the use of force against civilian demonstrators."

The U.S. Treasury lists Soleimani as having been born in 1965. He has been sanctioned by the U.S., the European Union and other nations over his role in helping suppress dissent for years through the Basij.

Since the war began Feb. 28, Israel has launched specific attacks targeting Iran's leadership, killing 86-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and other military commanders.

Killing Soleimani would likely further strain the command and control of the Basij, which would be crucial in putting down any uprising against the theocracy. The Basij and other internal security forces have been a target of attack by both the Americans and the Israelis so far.

Iranian strikes pressure neighbors and oil markets

Iran kept up the pressure on the energy infrastructure of its Gulf Arab neighbors, hitting an oil facility in Fujairah, a UAE emirate on the country's east coast with the Gulf of Oman that has been repeatedly targeted. State-run WAM news reported that no one had been injured in the blast from the drone strike.

The man killed by falling debris from an intercepted missile was the eighth person to die in the UAE since the start of the war, authorities said.

Iran's attacks on Gulf nations and its grip on the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's oil is transported, has given rise to increasing concerns of a global energy crisis. Early Tuesday it hit a tanker anchored off the coast of Fujairah, one of about 20 vessels hit since Israel and the United States started the war with an attack on Iran on Feb. 28.

Iran's parliamentary speaker, Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, said his country had been given no choice but to keep up its pressure on shipping traffic in the strait.

"They are flying, launching missiles, should we just sit back and do nothing in response?" he said in an interview on state television.

With Washington under increasing pressure over rising oil prices, Brent crude, the international standard, remained over \$100 a barrel, up more than 40% since the war started.

U.S. President Donald Trump said he had demanded that roughly a half-dozen countries send warships to keep the Strait of Hormuz open. But his appeals brought no immediate commitments, with many saying they are hesitant to get involved in a war with no defined exit plan and skeptical that they could do more than the U.S. Navy.

UAE briefly closes airspace as Iran launches new attacks on Gulf neighbors

The UAE shut down its airspace early Tuesday as its military reported it was "responding to missile and drone threats from Iran." The closure was soon lifted, and not long after the sounds of explosions could be heard as the military worked to intercept incoming fire.

The snap announcement on its airspace showed the balancing act Emirati authorities face in trying to

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keep their long-haul carriers, Emirates and Etihad, flying as Iranian attacks continue to target the country.

Saudi Arabia's Defense Ministry reported intercepting a dozen drones Tuesday morning over the country's vast Eastern Province, home to oil infrastructure.

In Qatar, the sounds of explosions boomed over the capital early in the day as defenses worked to intercept incoming fire. Qatar's Defense Ministry said later that it had successfully thwarted a missile attack on the city, though a fire broke out in an industrial area from a downed projectile.

Attacks from Iran-linked proxy forces continued in Iraq, as the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad was hit with shrapnel from drones that had been intercepted.

The embassy's air defenses were able to shoot down all four drones targeting the facility, according to two Iraqi security officials, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence matters.

A separate strike targeted a house in the heavily fortified Presidential Compound in Baghdad's al-Jadriya area, the officials said. It wasn't clear who carried out either attack but Iran-allied militias have regularly been attacking American targets inside Iraq since the conflict began.

Israel launches new attacks on Tehran and steps up strikes on Beirut

The Israeli military early Tuesday said it had launched new attacks across Tehran in addition to the Lebanese capital targeting Hezbollah militants.

In Iran, it said it hit command centers, missile launch sites and air defense systems. There was no immediate confirmation from Iran, where little information has been coming out due to internet outages, round-the-clock airstrikes and tight restrictions on journalists.

Israel did not immediately release details of its attacks on Lebanon, but the Lebanese army said two of its soldiers were seriously wounded in an airstrike on the village of Kfar Sir.

More than 1,300 people have been killed in Iran since the start of the conflict, according to the Iranian Red Crescent.

Israel's strikes have also displaced more than 1 million Lebanese — or roughly 20% of the population — according to the Lebanese government, which says some 850 people have been killed.

Some Israeli troops have pushed into southern Lebanon, and there are fears Israel is preparing a large-scale invasion.

The military's chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Eyal Zamir, said Monday on a visit to the northern border that Israel's army is "determined to deepen the operation until all of our objectives are achieved" and that the military's Northern Command is being reinforced with additional soldiers.

Israel reported two Iranian salvos early Tuesday fired toward Tel Aviv and an area south of the Sea of Galilee. More launches from Lebanon were also reported.

In Israel, 12 people have been killed by Iranian missile fire. At least 13 U.S. military members have been killed.

Closure of Strait of Hormuz pressures oil shipping

The virtual shutdown of the Strait of Hormuz is unnerving the world economy, driving up energy prices, threatening food shortages in poor countries, destabilizing fragile states and complicating efforts by central banks to drive down prices for consumers.

There have been a handful of ships getting through, primarily Iranian but also from other countries including India and Turkey, and Iran has said it technically remains open — just not for the United States, Israel and its allies. Iraq said Tuesday it was in talks with Iran about allowing passage for its ships.

Underscoring the danger of even getting close to the strait, a tanker anchored off the eastern coast of the United Arab Emirates was hit by a projectile early Tuesday morning and sustained minor damage, according to the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center, run by the British military.

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## World shares are mixed and US futures slip as Brent hovers above \$100 a barrel

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

BANGKOK (AP) — Shares were mixed in Europe and Asia on Tuesday after a drop in oil prices helped send the U.S. stock market to its best day since the war in Iran began.

The reprieve in prices for crude was short-lived, with Brent crude climbing nearly 4% early Tuesday to \$104.13 a barrel. U.S. benchmark crude also climbed, to \$97.53 per barrel after dipping to about \$93 on Monday.

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

In Asian trading, Tokyo's Nikkei 225 gave up early gains to slip 0.1% to 53,700.39 and the Kospi in South Korea jumped 1.6% to 5,640.48.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng added 0.1% to 25,668.54, while the Shanghai Composite index dropped 0.9% to 4,049.91.

In Australia, the S&P/ASX 200 gained 0.4% to 8,614.30 after the central bank hiked its benchmark interest rate to 4.1%.

Citing higher fuel prices, the Reserve Bank of Australia on Tuesday lifted the cash rate from 3.85% which it set at its Feb. 3 meeting in response to surging inflation. That rise was Australia's first since November 2023.

Taiwan's Taiex rose 1.5% and India's Sensex picked up 0.6%.

On Monday, the S&P 500 climbed 1% for its biggest gain in five weeks. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 0.8% and the Nasdaq composite jumped 1.2%.

The driver for markets has been oil prices, which have spiked from roughly \$70 before the United States and Israel began their attacks on Iran. In response, Iran has nearly halted traffic through the narrow Strait of Hormuz, where a fifth of the world's oil typically sails from the Persian Gulf to customers worldwide. That has oil producers cutting production because their crude has nowhere to go.

The worry in financial markets is that if the strait remains closed for a long time, it could keep enough oil off the market to drive inflation up to a debilitating level for the global economy.

"The panic is still there, just dialled down a notch as crude slipped off the boil. Brent easing back toward \$100 flipped the tape from bunker mentality to opportunistic risk-taking in a heartbeat," Stephen Innes of SPI Asset Management said in a commentary.

President Donald Trump over the weekend demanded that other countries hurt by the closure of the Strait of Hormuz "take care of that passage" and said his country "will help - A LOT!"

The U.S. and Israel have kept pummeling what they describe as military targets in Iran's capital, and Israel stepped up its campaign against Iran-backed militants in Lebanon. More than 1 million people have been displaced in Lebanon — roughly 20% of the nation's population — as U.N. peacekeepers say Israel is massing ground troops along the border.

Uncertainty over the war's scope and duration have roiled financial markets since the war began just over two weeks ago, though markets have a track record of bouncing back relatively quickly from military conflicts. Many professional investors are expecting that to be the case again, if oil prices don't go too high for too long. That has helped keep U.S. stock prices near their record levels.

Higher prices are complicating the Federal Reserve's mission of balancing growth and inflation as President Donald Trump pushes the central bank to slash interest rates. Traders do not expect the Fed to cut rates at its policy meeting that wraps up on Wednesday.

Nvidia, whose chips are powering much of the world's move into artificial-intelligence technology rose 1.6% on Monday as its CEO, Jensen Huang, talked up AI's possibilities at a conference, saying he foresaw \$1 trillion in demand for AI chips through 2027. It was the strongest single force lifting the S&P 500.

In other dealings early Tuesday, the U.S. dollar rose to 159.18 Japanese yen from 159.05 yen. The euro slipped to \$1.1498 from \$1.1507.

## Iran war pushes countries into energy triage as they conserve power and curb soaring prices

By ANTON L. DELGADO and ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — The escalating war with Iran is pushing parts of the world into energy triage, forcing governments to choose where to cut demand or absorb costs, while prioritizing dwindling supplies.

Asia is the most exposed since it relies heavily on imported fuel, much of it shipped through the now-blocked Strait of Hormuz. The narrow passage offshore from Iran is the main route for shipping a fifth of global trade in crude oil and liquefied natural gas.

Governments in the region are scrambling to adjust — tallying oil reserves, conserving energy, competing for supplies and trying to blunt prices. That brings difficult trade-offs: saving power may slow business activity. Prioritizing cooking gas for households can hurt restaurants and other businesses.

“Even relatively modest constraints on energy use can create a drag on industrial activity,” said Linh Nguyen, with the consultancy Control Risks. She pointed to Vietnam’s energy-intensive export industries and warned that higher fuel costs or conservation measures could quickly raise production costs or slow factory output.

Analysts warn the same hard choices could soon spread beyond Asia to fuel-importing economies in Africa and elsewhere as countries compete for scarce supplies.

“The situation is common across the board,” said Putra Adhiguna of the Jakarta-based Energy Shift Institute. “There is no easy decision for the short term.”

Southeast Asia is rationing scarce energy

With oil prices surging despite releases of some reserves, Southeast Asia is stretching dwindling energy reserves by urging households, businesses and government agencies to slash power use.

In the Philippines, officials have switched to a four-day workweek to cut back on fuel consumption and reduce the government’s energy use by a fifth. Office have been told to switch off computers during lunch breaks and keep air conditioning no lower than 24°C (75°F). Vietnam has urged people to work from home. While in Thailand, the prime minister has even asked officials to take the stairs instead of elevators.

But this comes at a cost.

Dieu Linh, a vegetable seller in Hanoi, said even a 10% rise in fuel costs will eat into her thin margins. “If my costs go up by even a little, the profit is almost gone,” she said.

At the same time, countries in the region are competing for limited supplies at higher costs.

Vietnam has asked refineries and fuel distributors to keep fuel supplies high, while Thailand is stretching its roughly two-month oil reserve and seeking other domestic energy sources. Both are using price supports to shield households from rising costs.

Thailand halted exports to protect its limited reserves, contributing to shortages that have closed nearly a third of Cambodia’s roughly 6,000 gas stations.

East Asia searches for new energy suppliers and sources

More than 80% of the liquefied natural gas, or LNG, that passed the Strait of Hormuz in 2024 went to Asia, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, and much of it to Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.

Japan’s first line of defense is its vast strategic oil stockpile, amounting to around 254 days’ worth of supplies. This system was set up after the shocks from the 1970s Arab oil crisis.

Japan began releasing about 45 days’ worth of oil reserves this week to prevent fuel prices from surging as crude oil imports slow. It last released reserves after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

This will help keep Japan’s energy-intensive industries running, from automobiles to steel manufacturing and heavy machinery. Companies like Toyota, Mitsubishi and Nippon Steel depend on steady fuel supplies.

South Korea plans to release 22.46 million barrels from its reserves under the International Energy Agency’s largest-ever coordinated stock draw.

But analysts said that tapping reserves isn’t a longterm solution.

It will give refineries “some buffer” against disruptions. But this does not increase a country’s overall

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supply unless it can buy oil released by other nations, said Muyu Xu of the energy consultancy Kpler.

If the crisis drags on, crude oil shortages could return. The releases may keep refineries running for another few weeks, but companies may need to slow production if disruptions continue, she added.

"The fundamental difficulties will not be solved by this action," said Mika Ohbayashi of the Renewable Energy Institute in Japan, adding that renewable energy was a long-term solution but the Japanese government was uninterested.

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi is due to meet with U.S. President Donald Trump later this month and Japan's plans to buy more American LNG and restart nuclear power plants are likely to be on the agenda, analysts say.

Populous nations prioritize homes, but face price pinch

India is prioritizing household needs for its limited supply of liquefied petroleum gas or LPG, which is used for cooking and to power cars.

It has absorbed more than half of the increase driven by global market disruptions under a federal scheme to keep prices low for poor households, said Indian Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri.

But shortages are already seeping into restaurants and hotels in the world's second-largest LPG importer, as eateries shorten hours, close temporarily or trim long-simmered curries and deep-fried snacks from their menus.

The scale of demand in India, the world's most populous nation, limits how long it can cap prices to shield consumers. The situation could worsen within a week if government subsidies lapse, said Duttatreya Das of the think tank Ember, noting gas supplies were the most immediate concern.

"You can't store a lot of gas," Das said, adding that fertilizer factories and small industries will feel the pinch first.

Indonesia, a country of 287 million people and Southeast Asia's most populous nation, also faces hard choices.

While the government has promised to maintain fuel prices throughout Eid al-Fitr, the Muslim holiday marking the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, Adhiguna of the Energy Shift Institute said there is "no clarity about what will happen after that," adding that this implies fuel prices could increase.

Thailand is also caught in a dilemma. If it ends subsidies that keep prices low, living costs will jump and that could spark a panic if reserves fall further, said Areeporn Asawinpongphan of the Thailand Development Research Institute.

If the conflict continues, Indonesia will have to choose between keeping the subsidies that protect customers or cutting funding to keep to budgetary limits. However, this could fuel inflation. Given Indonesia's limited 20-day reserve, Adhiguna warned that price fluctuations in Indonesia's fuel market will be swift.

"It will eventually reach a breaking point," Adhiguna said.

Europe feels the squeeze, too

The European Union is doubling down on its long-term clean energy strategy to cut consumption and rein in prices across the 27-nation bloc that have risen sharply since the war's start. Officials met in Brussels this week, where they considered ways to improve the region's energy security.

"We are looking at how we can reduce people's energy bills," said European Commissioner for Energy Dan Jørgensen. "We are working on immediate measures to help businesses and our most vulnerable citizens."

## Rescue crews dig bodies out of the ruins of a Kabul hospital hit in an airstrike blamed on Pakistan

By ABDUL QAHAR AFGHAN, MUNIR AHMED and ELENA BECATOROS Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Rescue crews were still digging bodies out of the rubble of a drug rehabilitation hospital in the Afghan capital Tuesday morning, after officials there said an overnight Pakistani airstrike killed at least 400 people at the facility.

Pakistan has denied Afghanistan's accusation that it targeted a hospital, saying its strikes, which were also conducted in eastern Afghanistan on Monday, did not hit any civilian sites.

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The strikes late Monday night mark a dramatic escalation of a conflict that began between Afghanistan and Pakistan late last month and has seen repeated cross-border clashes as well as airstrikes inside Afghanistan. International calls for a ceasefire have gone unheeded.

In a late-night post on X, Afghanistan's deputy government spokesperson Hamdullah Fitrat said the airstrike had hit the Omid Addiction Treatment Hospital, a 2,000-bed facility in Kabul, at about 9 p.m. local time. He said large sections of the facility had been destroyed, and that the death toll had "so far" reached 400 people, while about 250 people had been reported injured. There was no updated official death toll early Tuesday morning.

Local television stations posted footage on X showing security forces using flashlights as they carried out casualties while firefighters struggled to extinguish flames among the ruins of a building.

## Cross-border fire

The strike came hours after Afghan officials said the two sides exchanged fire along their common border, killing four people in Afghanistan, as the deadliest fighting between the neighbors in years entered a third week.

Afghan government spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid condemned the strike on X, accusing Pakistan of "targeting hospitals and civilian sites to perpetrate horrors." He said those killed were "innocent civilians and addicts."

"We strongly condemn this crime and consider such an act to be against all accepted principles and a crime against humanity," he said in a separate post on X.

## Pakistan dismisses the allegations

Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's spokesperson, Mosharraf Zaidi, dismissed the allegations as baseless, saying no hospital was targeted in Kabul.

Pakistan's Information Minister Attaullah Tarar posted on X in the early hours Tuesday that the Pakistani military had "carried out precision airstrikes" targeting military installations in Kabul and the eastern province of Nangarhar. He said "technical support infrastructure and ammunition storage facilities" at two locations in Kabul were destroyed.

"All targeting has been done with precision only at those infrastructures which are being used by Afghan Taliban regime to support its multiple terror proxies," he wrote.

Pakistan's Ministry of Information said earlier that Mujahid's claim was "false and misleading" and aimed at stirring sentiment and cover what it described as "illegitimate support for cross-border terrorism." It said Pakistan's targeting was "precise and carefully undertaken to ensure no collateral damage is inflicted."

## UN calls on Afghanistan to combat militants

The strike came hours after the U.N. Security Council called on Afghanistan's Taliban rulers to immediately step up efforts to combat terrorism. Pakistan accuses Kabul of harboring militant groups, particularly the Pakistani Taliban, which it says carry out attacks inside Pakistan.

The Security Council resolution, adopted unanimously, didn't refer specifically to attacks carried out in Pakistan but condemned "in the strongest terms all terrorist activity including terrorist attacks."

Pakistan's government accuses Afghanistan of providing safe haven to the Pakistani Taliban, which is designated as a terrorist organization by the United States, as well as to outlawed Baloch separatist groups and other militants who frequently target Pakistani security forces and civilians across the country. Kabul denies the charge.

## The latest conflict

The fighting — the most severe between the two neighbors — began in late February after Afghanistan launched cross-border attacks in response to Pakistani airstrikes inside Afghanistan that Kabul said killed civilians. The clashes disrupted a ceasefire brokered by Qatar in October after earlier fighting killed dozens of soldiers, civilians and suspected militants.

Pakistan has declared it is in "open war" with Afghanistan. The conflict has alarmed the international community, particularly as the area is one where other militant organizations, including al-Qaida and the Islamic State group, still have a presence and have been trying to resurface.

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On Saturday, Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari said Afghanistan's Taliban administration crossed a "red line" by deploying drones that injured several civilians in Pakistan last week.

## Islandwide blackout hits Cuba as it struggles with deepening energy crisis

By MILEXSY DURÁN and DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

HAVANA (AP) — Officials in Cuba reported an islandwide blackout Monday in the country of some 11 million people as its energy and economic crises deepen and its power grid continues to crumble.

The Ministry of Energy and Mines on X noted a "complete disconnection" of the country's electrical system and said it was investigating, noting there were no failures in the units that were operating when the grid collapsed.

Lázaro Guerra, the ministry's electricity director, told state media late Monday that crews were trying to restart several thermoelectric plants, which are key to restoring power.

"It must be done gradually to avoid setbacks," he said. "Because systems, when very weak, are more susceptible to failure."

As night fell, candles began to burn in some homes while the sounds of children playing and singing with their mother filled one dark house in Havana.

"We have to prepare a mattress for the girls here so that they can sleep here because we have no choice," said Yuneici Cecilia Riviaux, as she motioned to an open door. "I don't have a rechargeable fan or a generator."

It was the third major blackout in Cuba over the past four months.

Tomás David Velázquez Felipe, a 61-year-old resident of Havana, said the relentless outages make him think that Cubans who can should just pack up and leave the island. "What little we have to eat spoils," he said. "Our people are too old to keep suffering."

By Monday night, state-owned media reported that crews had restored power to 5% of Havana's residents, representing some 42,000 customers, as well as several hospitals across the island. Officials said they would prioritize the communications sector next, all while warning that the small circuits restored so far could fail again.

Cuba's aging grid has drastically eroded in recent years, leading to daily outages and an increase in islandwide blackouts. But the government also has blamed its woes on a U.S. energy blockade after U.S. President Donald Trump in January warned of tariffs on any country that sells or provides oil to Cuba. The Trump administration is demanding that Cuba release political prisoners and move toward political and economic liberalization in return for a lifting of sanctions. Trump also has raised the possibility of a "friendly takeover of Cuba."

On Monday, he said he believes he'll have the "honor of taking Cuba."

"I mean, whether I free it, take it. I think I could do anything I want with it," Trump said about Cuba, calling it a "very weakened nation."

The Trump administration is looking for Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel to leave power as the United States continues to negotiate with the Cuban government about the island nation's future, according to a U.S. official and a source with knowledge of talks between Washington and Havana.

Both spoke on condition of anonymity to describe the sensitive talks and did not offer any detail about who the administration might like to see come to power.

They confirmed the Trump administration's desire to see Díaz-Canel leave power days after the Cuban president publicly confirmed for the first time that his government has held talks with the Trump administration. The administration's push for the ouster of Díaz-Canel was first reported by The New York Times earlier Monday.

Grinding blackouts

William LeoGrande, a professor at American University who has tracked Cuba for years, said the country's energy grid hasn't been maintained properly and its infrastructure is "way past its normal useful life."

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"The technicians working on the grid are magicians to keep it running at all given the shape that it's in," LeoGrande said.

LeoGrande said that if the island drastically reduces consumption and expands renewables, it can struggle along for a while without oil shipments. "But it would be constant misery for the general population, and eventually, the economy could collapse just completely and then you would have social chaos and probably mass migration," he said.

To ramp up solar power even faster than Cuba did last year, LeoGrande said other countries, principally China, would have to be willing to double or more their provision of such equipment.

Díaz-Canel on Friday said the island had not received oil shipments in three months and was operating on solar power, natural gas and thermoelectric plants, and that the government has had to postpone surgeries for tens of thousands of people.

Yaimisel Sánchez Peña, 48, said she was upset that the food she buys with money that her son in the U.S. sends keeps spoiling, adding that the outages also affect her 72-year-old mother: "Every day, she suffers."

Mercedes Velázquez, a 71-year-old Cuban resident, lamented yet another blackout. "We're here waiting to see what happens," she said, adding that she recently gave away part of a soup she made while it was still fresh so as not to throw it out. "Everything goes bad."

'A perfect storm of collapse'

A massive outage over a week ago affected the island's west, leaving millions without power. Another major blackout affected western Cuba in early December.

Critical oil shipments from Venezuela were halted after the U.S. attacked the South American country in early January and arrested its then-president, Nicolás Maduro.

While Cuba produces 40% of its petroleum and has been generating its own power, it hasn't been sufficient to meet demand as its electric grid continues to crumble.

"And on top of all that, the Cuban government doesn't have the hard currency to import spare parts or upgrade the plant or grid itself. It's just a perfect storm of collapse," LeoGrande said.

He noted that the thermoelectric plants also have been using heavy oil, whose sulfur content is corroding the equipment.

The deputy prime minister of the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Foreign Investment, Óscar Pérez-Oliva Fraga, told reporters Monday that Cuba is open to trading with U.S. companies while noting the embargo's limitations.

He said he's also implementing new measures aimed at boosting the island's economy. Among those is the possibility of allowing Cubans residing abroad to be partners or owners of private companies in the country and to be involved in large-scale projects, including those related to infrastructure, according to state media.

He said those Cubans will be allowed to partner with Cuban private companies and establish ties with both state-owned and private Cuban entities.

Pérez-Oliva added that the government also will grant land under usufruct for the development of certain projects.

He said Cubans residing abroad also will be able to open foreign currency bank accounts in Cuban banks, which will facilitate transactions.

## **Hundreds of migrants are vanishing in the Mediterranean. Authorities are withholding information**

By RENATA BRITO and PAOLO SANTALUCIA Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Bodies washing ashore day after day. Phone calls from relatives going unanswered. Migrants' tents abandoned overnight.

Migrants trying to reach Europe are vanishing in droves in what are known as "invisible shipwrecks" but governments responsible for search and rescue are withholding information about what they know.

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The beginning of 2026 ranks as the deadliest start to any year for people trying to cross the Mediterranean — an unprecedented 682 confirmed missing as of March 16 — according to the United Nations' International Organization for Migration. But the real death toll is almost certainly much higher.

Human rights groups are increasingly struggling to verify tolls as Italy, Tunisia and Malta have quietly restricted information on migrant rescues and shipwrecks along the deadliest migration route in the world. The news barely makes headlines, in part because the lack of transparency prevents journalists from confirming reports.

"It's a strategy of silence," said Matteo Villa, a researcher focusing on migration and data at the Italian Institute for International Political Studies think tank.

The organization Refugees in Libya and other human rights groups have been sounding the alarm since late January, reporting more than 1,000 people missing after Cyclone Harry hit the region. But authorities have not confirmed, denied or corrected those reports.

In the weeks that followed the cyclone, more than 20 decomposing bodies washed ashore in Italy and Libya while other human remains were spotted floating in the middle of the sea.

For the families of missing migrants, not knowing their fate is excruciating.

"Europe should know that these people who got drowned in the sea have family members, have dreams, have passions," Josephus Thomas, a migrant from Sierra Leone and community leader in Tunisia's coastal town of El Amra, told AP.

Sparse information means fewer deaths recorded

Even the U.N.'s migration agency is increasingly unable to verify cases of migrants who die in what is known as "invisible shipwrecks" because of the growing lack of information.

Last year, at least 1,500 people were reported missing whose fates IOM could not confirm, said Julia Black, who leads the organization's Missing Migrants Project. The issue persists in 2026.

"We started a new secondary data set of what we are calling unverifiable cases because it's just become so many," Black said. For this year, they already have more than 400 missing they could not verify.

Many humanitarian organizations that previously filled some of the information gaps are no longer able to do so because of the global wave of funding cuts and government-imposed restrictions across the region.

"We've seen the restriction of access for humanitarian actors, which is not right. And now we're seeing even the restriction of information," Black said.

The Associated Press repeatedly asked authorities in Tunisia, Italy and Malta why they aren't sharing information related to migrant rescues at sea and what their policies are. Not one responded.

Countries quiet on reports of boats missing after cyclone

Over the years, authorities in the Mediterranean have gradually reduced information related to migrants. But their silence was even more pronounced in late January after Cyclone Harry unleashed heavy rainfall, winds of 100 kph (62 mph), and 9-meter-tall (30 feet) waves.

Hundreds of people had departed from Tunisia's coastal region of Sfax and disappeared, according to information the group Refugees in Libya gathered from migrants in Tunisia and their relatives abroad.

The group acknowledged it was difficult to be precise "because there is no central system recording departures, losses, or recoveries," but it warned that the death toll was likely even higher.

"We are looking at boats that never counted how many kids are inside," Refugees in Libya founder David Yambio told AP.

The AP sent five email requests to the Italian coast guard seeking information on the boats reported missing and search efforts but received no response. An officer who answered the phone said the coast guard did not have "any further verified and confirmed information regarding the circumstances." AP also filed a Freedom of Information request, which is pending.

The coast guard also declined to comment on an alert it issued on Jan. 24 asking vessels sailing between the Italian island of Lampedusa and Tunisia to be on the lookout for eight small boats in distress carrying some 380 people. The alert was made public by Italian journalist Sergio Scandura.

One survivor rescued from the boats

There is only one known survivor from the boats reported missing during Cyclone Harry. He was float-

ing in the water when a merchant vessel rescued him on Jan. 22. The man told crew members he had been traveling with another 50 people, some of whose bodies could be seen in the water in video of the rescue. Thanks to his testimony, their deaths were included in IOM's tally.

According to the captain, the survivor was evacuated to Malta. The Maltese Armed Forces did not respond to multiple requests about their involvement or reports that they recovered the man and the bodies.

The Tunisian Foreign Ministry and the Tunisian National Guard also have not responded to multiple requests for information by email and phone.

Frontex, a European Union agency that assists nations with border surveillance, told AP that it spotted eight boats carrying about 160 migrants between Jan. 14 and 24 when the cyclone hit. It said six boats were rescued by Italian authorities, but the fate of the other two remains unknown.

On Feb. 8, migrants prayed and cried during a memorial ceremony in the olive groves near Sfax, presuming their loved ones could not be alive after so many days without news.

"All of us here are in deep trauma, are in deep agony," Dr. Ibrahim Fofana, a migrant in Tunisia whose relatives have been missing since late January, said in a video shared by Refugees in Libya. He pleaded for authorities to identify the bodies that washed ashore in Italy.

Tighter information follows migration crackdown

Until mid-2024, Tunisian authorities regularly shared the number of migrants they were intercepting at sea, eager to show their European partners compliance with a 2023 deal to curb migration in exchange for financial aid. But the deal was also followed by a brutal crackdown against migrants on land that resulted in thousands being detained or dumped in the desert.

Nongovernmental organizations such as the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, known by its French acronym FTDES, which used to compile and share reports on migrant interceptions, were also caught in the crackdown.

In June 2024, Tunisia's Ministry of Interior stopped releasing any information on migrants, citing security reasons, said Romdhane Ben Amor, FTDES' spokesperson. But in his opinion, the motives were political. The numbers were incompatible with the narrative that Tunisia was not Europe's border guard, he said.

Italy's erosion of information on migrant rescues is even older than Tunisia's. The Italian coast guard used to provide detailed monthly data on migrants rescued. The monthly reports became quarterly before stopping completely in 2020, Villa said. In 2022, previous reports were also removed from the coast guard's website.

This year, the Italian coast guard did not share any migration-related press releases despite nearly 5,000 migrants disembarking on Italian shores, according to Italy's Interior Ministry statistics.

"It is very clearly a political strategy to repress as much information as possible from the public," Villa said.

## Some flight cancellations and delays continue after US storms dump snow in the Midwest and head east

By EMILIE MEGNIEN and RIO YAMAT Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Hundreds of flights were canceled or delayed Tuesday, one day after powerful storms swept across the eastern half of the country and upended air travel in a cross-section of cities. Travelers have been facing additional jams at airport security checkpoints as a partial government shutdown strains screener staffing.

The disruptions come at an already challenging time for air travel, in part because the shutdown that began Feb. 14 has pressured staffing at some security checkpoints. At the same time, airports are crowded with spring break travelers and fans heading to March Madness games, the annual NCAA men's and women's college basketball tournaments.

More than 550 flights scheduled to fly into, out of or within the U.S. have been called off as of early Tuesday, and over 460 were delayed, according to flight-tracking site FlightAware.

Flight delays and cancellations piled up Monday at some of the nation's largest airports, including those

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in New York, Chicago and Atlanta. The storm system that dumped heavy snow across the Midwest raced toward the East Coast with the potential for high winds and tornadoes, the National Weather Service warned Monday.

Kelly Price, who was trying to get home to Colorado after a family vacation in Orlando, Florida, said her Sunday night flight wasn't canceled until early Monday.

"By that time the only place for us to sleep was the airport floor. So we're all tired and frustrated," she said, adding that the soonest she and her family could book another flight doesn't leave until Tuesday afternoon.

## Impact to major airport hubs

The nationwide cancellations on Monday included about 600 in and out of Chicago O'Hare International, more than 470 at Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson International and over 450 at LaGuardia Airport in New York City, according to FlightAware.

Citing severe weather, the Federal Aviation Administration ordered ground stops at Hartsfield-Jackson and Charlotte Douglas International Airport and ground delays at JFK and Newark Liberty International Airport.

Danielle Cash found herself stranded in St. Louis on Sunday while trying to get home to Tampa, Florida, after a weekend girls' trip to Las Vegas. Now she's spending several hundred dollars more than planned on a hotel room in a snowy city she wasn't dressed for.

"It was 80 degrees in Tampa when I left and then going to Vegas," she said. "And it was 90 degrees in the desert."

Cash said she's now booked on a flight that will take her to Tennessee before finally returning to Tampa by Tuesday afternoon.

## TSA staffing strains some checkpoints

The storms unfolded just as airport security screeners missed their first full paycheck over the weekend. The current partial government shutdown affects only the Department of Homeland Security, which includes the Transportation Security Administration.

Democrats in Congress have said Homeland Security won't get funded until new restrictions are placed on federal immigration operations following the fatal shootings of Alex Pretti and Renee Good in Minneapolis earlier this year.

It is the third shutdown in less than a year to leave TSA workers temporarily without pay. Once the government reopens, employees will have to wait for back pay.

Some airports have reported longer security lines because of staffing shortages as more TSA workers take on second jobs, can't afford gas to get to work or leave the profession altogether. Homeland Security has said more than 300 TSA agents have quit since the start of the shutdown.

## Security wait times could worsen

TSA union leaders in Atlanta held a news conference Monday outside Hartsfield-Jackson, warning that air travelers could face increasingly long wait times as the shutdown continues. Even so, union leaders said, many officers are still reporting to work despite mounting financial strain.

Many TSA workers "are coping with eviction notices, vehicle repossessions, empty refrigerators and overdrawn bank accounts," said Aaron Barker, a local leader with the American Federation of Government Employees. Supporters behind him held signs reading, "We want a paycheck, not a rain check."

Travelers flying out of New Orleans on Sunday and Monday were advised to arrive at least three hours early "due to impacts from the federal government's partial shutdown," Louis Armstrong International Airport said on X. And the airport in Austin, Texas, shared a video on X taken at 5:30 a.m. local time showing the security line spilling out onto the sidewalk outside.

Back in Atlanta, Mel Stewart and his wife arrived four hours earlier than usual for their flight out of Hartsfield-Jackson to make up for longer TSA lines.

"I think it's being politicized way too much — way too much," Stewart said Monday of the shutdown. "And these people are working. They work hard, and for TSA people not to get paid, that's silly."

## What's in the voting bill that Republicans are pushing to the Senate floor

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Legislation that would require proof of U.S. citizenship for new voters has become a rallying cry for President Donald Trump, who claims that passage of the bill will “guarantee the midterms” for his Republican Party in November.

The bill, which the Senate will take up as early as Tuesday, would require voters to provide proof of citizenship when they register and to present approved identification when they go to the polls, among other new rules that Trump and his most loyal supporters are pushing as part of an effort to assert more federal control over elections.

Federal law already requires that voters in national elections be U.S. citizens. But the legislation would lay out strict new requirements for voters to prove their status.

Democrats are uniformly opposed to the legislation and expected to block its passage through the Senate. They say the legislation would disenfranchise millions of American voters who don't have birth certificates or other documents readily available — both Republicans and Democrats who would be newly registering to vote.

Despite the long odds of success, Trump has been pushing Senate Majority Leader John Thune to move ahead with the bill and suggested Republicans eliminate the filibuster or find another workaround to pass it. Thune has repeatedly said there isn't enough support in the Senate to do that.

Instead, Republicans plan to hold an extended debate on the bill for a week or more, an effort to try and appease Trump and make Democrats defend their position.

The bill would “require Americans to demonstrate that they're eligible to vote,” Thune said last week. “And that they are who they say they are.”

Proof of citizenship would be needed for new voters

The Safeguard American Voter Eligibility, or SAVE America Act, would force Americans to prove they are citizens when they register to vote, mostly through a valid U.S. passport or birth certificate.

Driver's licenses in many states would not be enough. The legislation says that the identification must be compliant with new REAL ID rules and also indicate that the applicant is a citizen of the United States — which few state licenses do.

A person registering to vote could also present a passport or a birth certificate. U.S. military members could present a military ID along with a record of service that shows where they were born.

Most people registering to vote would have to present the documents in person at an elections office, including people who vote by mail. Advocacy groups that oppose the legislation say that the bill would crush voter registration efforts ahead of this year's elections.

The bill would create new penalties for election officials who register applicants who have not presented documentary proof of citizenship. Opponents say that provision could potentially scare workers into turning away valid applicants while also discouraging people from working or volunteering at polling locations. It would also allow private individuals to sue election officials in some circumstances.

Voter identification expansion would include mail-in ballots

While federal law requires that voters are U.S. citizens, there is not currently a nationwide requirement that voters must show identification when they go to vote. Currently, 36 states have voter identification laws in place, some stricter than others, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

The bill would require voters in all states to present valid identification, and those voting by mail would have to send a photocopy. Overseas military and some qualified disabled individuals would be exempt from those rules.

Republican supporters most frequently highlight this section of the bill when pushing for its passage. Thune said last week that if you have to show an ID to get a library card, “it's not too much to ask voters to show ID to vote in federal elections.”

States would be required to share their voter rolls

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The legislation would require states to share voters' information with the Department of Homeland Security as a way to verify the citizenship of the names on the voter rolls — giving the federal government unprecedented access to state voter data. Many states are already embroiled in legal fights with the Trump administration over demands that they provide voter information.

Supporters of the state-federal sharing say that it would enable DHS to compare the state information with their own databases that are used to verify immigration status.

But Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer predicted that handing over names to the federal government would allow DHS to "purge tens of millions of people from the voter rolls."

Trump pushes for Republicans to add his other priorities

Senate Republicans are expected to offer amendments on the floor as part of their talkathon in support of the bill. Trump has said he wants more provisions added, including a ban on mail-in ballots, which are used by many states.

Trump has long criticized mail-in ballots and used it as a central argument in his false claims of fraud in the 2020 election he lost to Democrat Joe Biden. But voting groups — and many lawmakers in both parties — have long championed the practice as helping to make it easier for Americans to vote.

The president also wants to add two unrelated provisions around transgender rights issues — one that would ban those born as men from playing in women's sports and another to block sex reassignment surgeries on some minors.

Many requirements would begin right away

If the SAVE America Act were enacted, the new rules for voter registration and voter identification at the polls would take effect immediately. Trump says it's necessary for Republicans to win in the midterm elections — even though they won both chambers of Congress and the White House without the law in 2024.

With primary elections getting underway next month, critics say it would be difficult and costly for state election officials to implement, and could confuse voters.

Marc Elias, a Democratic elections attorney, said he isn't "aware of any state that currently requires what this would require."

"If it's passed tomorrow, the day after states would need to implement this," Elias said.

## Trump team applying pressure to media: Tell the war's story the way we see it

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

Through lectures, scoldings and outright threats, President Donald Trump and his aides are ratcheting up the pressure on journalists to cover the war in the Middle East the way the administration wants.

The president has fumed on social media about stories he doesn't like and berated a reporter on Air Force One. The government's top media regulator has warned that broadcasters risk losing their licenses if they don't stay away from "fake news." Trump and his defense secretary, Pete Hegseth, have both questioned the patriotism of news outlets because of their reporting.

Trump has complained about war coverage in both specific and general ways. In a social media post, he said news reports exaggerated the damage to planes that were attacked by Iran at an airport in Saudi Arabia. He attacked "Corrupt Media Outlets" for falling for AI-generated false reports created by Iran and said the media "hates to report" how well the U.S. military has performed.

All presidential administrations tangle with the press; it's the natural byproduct of journalists' watchdog roles in a democratic society. But the incidents of the past few days speak to a hostility toward the very idea of being questioned — in a way that, some say, scratches up against the First Amendment itself.

A contentious gaggle on Air Force One

Meeting with reporters on Air Force One while returning to the White House from Florida late Sunday, the president objected to a question from ABC News' Mariam Khan about a fundraising message that used a photo taken at last week's dignified transfer ceremony of the remains of U.S. service members.

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Khan was working as the pool reporter on the plane, but when she told Trump she was with ABC, he said: "I think it's maybe the most corrupt news organization on the planet. I think they're terrible."

Federal Communications Commission Chairman Brendan Carr cited Trump's Truth Social message about the planes struck in Saudi Arabia in warning news outlets to be careful about what they report.

"Broadcasters that are running hoaxes and news distortions — also known as fake news — have a chance now to correct course before their license renewals come up," Carr wrote on X over the weekend. "The law is clear. Broadcasters must operate in the public interest, and they will lose their license if they do not."

Decades of court decisions have generally sided with the press over government attempts to regulate the content it produces. But Carr said making changes is in the best interest of legacy media outlets because so many people don't trust them.

His ability to make changes, however, is limited.

The FCC does not regulate networks like CBS, NBC and ABC — although it does have the authority to reject the licenses of individual affiliates of those networks when they come up for renewal. Cable news networks CNN, Fox News Channel and MS NOW are not under the FCC's purview. The Trump message that Carr retweeted mentioned only The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal specifically, and the FCC has no authority over newspapers.

Punishing a television affiliate for war coverage that Carr objects to is likely to run afoul of the law, noted First Amendment attorney Floyd Abrams in an interview Monday.

"The broadcast media is always at risk of a sort that newspapers are not. But at its core, they are protected by the First Amendment," Abrams said, "and these statements by the chairman seem to me are directly threatening First Amendment interests and First Amendment principles."

Abrams said he'd argue that robust war reporting is just the sort of public interest work that television stations should be doing to justify their licenses.

Intimidation may be Carr's motive. And that doesn't have to mean intimidating a news outlet to pull its punches, said Barbara Starr, a former CNN Pentagon correspondent. "The risk is the climate they create," she said. "Are people going to be afraid to talk to reporters? Some of them will be, and that's a serious matter."

What kind of reporting is expected from 'patriotic' news outlets?

Trump said on social media that he was thrilled to see Carr looking at the licenses of the "highly corrupt and highly unpatriotic 'News' organizations." Their efforts were endorsed Monday by hosts of the influential "Fox & Friends" morning show on Fox News Channel.

"The president has said enough with this coverage, from other networks that are not telling you the truth, that are so negative about what is going on," said Fox's Ainsley Earhardt, without specifying the outlets she was referring to. "This is a pro-America fight, and every network needs to get on board with that."

Hegseth, in his most recent Pentagon war briefing, specifically attacked CNN. Under his administration, most legacy news outlets have been thrown out of their regular spaces in the Pentagon press room because they would not agree to his new rules that he said restricted their work. Some reporters from exiled outlets are allowed back for briefings, although Hegseth seldom takes their questions. Without an explanation, still photographers have been banned from briefings.

Hegseth said a CNN story about the administration being unprepared for Iranian attacks on the world's oil supply was ridiculous. He offered his own edits of headlines that a "patriotic press" should use onscreen.

"The sooner that David Ellison takes over that network, the better," Hegseth said, in reference to the Paramount Global chief, whose company is expected to take over ownership of CNN. The administration is hoping that will result in more Trump-friendly coverage.

Mark Thompson, CNN's chief executive, said the network stands behind its work. "Politicians have an obvious motive for claiming that journalism which raises questions about their decisions is false," he said. "At CNN, our only interest is telling the truth to our audiences in the U.S. and around the world, and no amount of political insults and threats is going to change that."

Starr, now retired from Pentagon reporting, said she sees journalists consistently breaking stories despite the limited access and hostility toward their work under the current administration.

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"That has always been the case," she said. "The level of intimidation has definitely ramped up and, in response to that, the commitment to the First Amendment and quality journalism has ramped up even further."

## **Winds, blizzards and triple-digit heat put over half of the US in the path of extreme weather**

By SETH BORENSTEIN, SARAH BRUMFIELD and JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — From a surprising heatwave in California to blizzards burying parts of the Midwest and storms rolling into the East Coast, chaotic weather on Monday put more than half the nation's population in the path of extreme conditions.

Airport delays and cancellations piled up in some of the nation's largest airports, with more than 4,700 canceled across the U.S., and many schools closed early in the mid-Atlantic states, where high winds were in the forecast.

Torrential rains flooded homes and washed out roads in Hawaii while dry and windy conditions were charging the largest wildfire in Nebraska's history.

In Washington, the House and Senate postponed votes, and federal agencies told workers to go home early. But by late afternoon, the expected rough weather had failed to develop and a tornado watch expired.

The private weather service AccuWeather calculated that more than 200 million people were under threat Monday of some kind of dangerous weather.

Those range from extreme heat and wildfire advisories to flood and freeze watches from the National Weather Service.

Forecasters warn about line of storms, tornadoes

The storm system that dropped snow by the foot in the Midwest, causing whiteout conditions in some areas, barreled toward the East Coast, dropping heavy rain, threatening high winds and prompting multiple tornado warnings.

The biggest threat for severe weather stretched from New Jersey to Virginia.

In New York City, officials warned of the potential for swift wind gusts overnight that could knock down tree limbs.

Four people, including a child, died Monday afternoon in New York City after a fire in a three-story apartment building spread during heavy winds.

The National Weather Service confirmed four tornadoes in Missouri on Sunday that caused roof and tree damage. No injuries were reported.

Big snows in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan

Blizzard conditions continued in the Upper Midwest and Great Lakes on Monday after the storm walloped parts of Wisconsin and Michigan with several feet of snow.

Since Saturday, nearly 3 feet (61 centimeters) had fallen in the northern Wisconsin town of Mountain.

Another round of snow and gusts on Monday could bring another foot of snow across Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

Temperatures will soar into triple digits in the West

A heat dome over the Southwest will push temperatures well into the triple digits in Arizona most of the week, much earlier than normal.

California is starting to feel like summer too. The San Francisco Bay Area and Sacramento will see temperatures pushing toward 90 F (32 C) by midweek.

"This is technically still winter," LA Mayor Karen Bass said Monday. "This is not normal for March, obviously, but it is a sign of how climate change is impacting our city."

While temperatures are expected to reach 100 F (37.8 C), the threat of wildfires around Los Angeles is relatively low because winds will be light.

Phoenix is expected to have five straight days of triple digit temperatures this week — only once before, in 1988, has the city recorded a 100 F day in March, DePodwin said.

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"This is a heat wave that we have not seen before in recorded history in the Southwest," said AccuWeather meteorologist Dan DePodwin.

Dry and windy conditions were charging the largest wildfire in Nebraska's history. Three fires in the state have consumed more than 1,140 square miles (about 2,953 square kilometers) of mostly grassland.

"Mother Nature is throwing a doozy at us," Gov. Jim Pillen said Monday.

Landslides, rescues, collapsed home on Maui

Unrelenting rains triggered landslides, washed away roads and flooded homes and farmland in Hawaii over the weekend.

All of Hawaii's islands had spots with more than 15 inches (38 centimeters) of rain while parts of Maui were overwhelmed with double that amount, the weather service said.

While the worst of the storm has passed, more heavy rain is expected later this week. Maui Mayor Richard Bissen said there were no reports of injuries or deaths and crews were assessing damage.

Storm will bring cold into the East Coast

Forecasters said the East Coast storms were expected to leave sharply colder weather in its wake.

The storm will stick around parts of the Northeast until Tuesday morning. By then, wind chills below freezing were expected to reach the Gulf Coast and the Florida Panhandle with warnings in effect across the Southeast and in part of Arkansas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Texas, forecasters warned.

To the north, rain was expected to change over to snow behind the cold front with heavy snow possible in the central Appalachians of West Virginia.

## United Arab Emirates briefly closes airspace as Israel strikes Lebanon and Tehran

By JON GAMBRELL, RUSS BYNUM and BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Explosions sounded over Dubai early Tuesday as the United Arab Emirates' military worked to intercept incoming Iranian fire that caused the country to briefly close its airspace as Israel launched new strikes in war in the Middle East.

The Israeli military said early Tuesday it had begun a "wide-scale wave of strikes" across Iran's capital and was also stepping up strikes on Iran-backed Hezbollah militants in Lebanon. It announced the new strikes as Israel reported two incoming salvos from Iran.

Fears of a global energy crisis loomed even as a small number of ships passed through the Strait of Hormuz, a vital waterway through which a fifth of the world's oil normally travels.

Iranian strikes on commercial ships in and around the strait have slowed shipping to a trickle, dramatically increasing oil prices and pressuring Washington to do something to ease the pain for consumers and the global economy.

Brent crude, the international standard, remained over \$100 a barrel. U.S. President Donald Trump said he had demanded that roughly a half-dozen countries send warships to keep the Strait of Hormuz open. But his appeals brought no immediate commitments.

Speaking of the strait, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said: "From our perspective it is open" — just not for the United States, Israel and its allies. Araghchi also rejected as "delusional" claims that Iran was looking for a negotiated end to the war.

Since the United States and Israel attacked Iran more than two weeks ago, Tehran has regularly fired drones and missiles at Israel, American bases in the region and Gulf Arab countries' energy infrastructure.

UAE briefly closes airspace

The UAE shut down its airspace early Tuesday as its military reported it was "responding to missile and drone threats from Iran." The closure was soon lifted, the state-run WAM news agency quoted the UAE's General Civil Aviation Authority as saying.

Authorities said "the situation stabilized," allowing flights to resume.

Shortly after, authorities sent a missile warning alert to people in Dubai. The sound of explosions could be heard in Dubai as the military worked to intercept the incoming fire.

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The state-run WAM news agency said a drone attack again sparked a fire in an oil tank farm in Fujairah, a UAE emirate that repeatedly has been targeted on the country's east coast with the Gulf of Oman. It said no one had been injured in the blast.

The snap announcement on its airspace showed the balancing act Emirati authorities face in trying to keep their long-haul carriers, Emirates and Etihad, flying as Iranian attacks continue to target the country. On Monday, an Iranian drone attack set a fuel tank ablaze at Dubai International Airport, the world's busiest for international travel.

Israel launches new attacks on Tehran, steps up strikes on Beirut

The Israeli military early Tuesday said it had launched new attacks across Tehran in addition to the Lebanese capital targeting Hezbollah militants. Hezbollah began firing rockets into northern Israel after U.S.-Israeli attacks on Iran began Feb. 28.

Israel's strikes have displaced more than 1 million Lebanese — or roughly 20% of the population, — according to the Lebanese government, which says some 850 people have been killed. Some Israeli troops have pushed into southern Lebanon, and there are fears Israel is preparing a large-scale invasion.

In Israel, an intercepted Iranian missile attack sprayed shrapnel through Jerusalem's Old City, hitting the rooftop of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, just meters (yards) from the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, built on what is revered by many Christians as the site of Jesus' crucifixion, burial and resurrection.

Shrapnel also fell near the Western Wall, the holiest site where Jews can pray, and within the Al Aqsa Mosque compound, the third-holiest site in Islam. Missile strikes on Jerusalem have been rare in the past.

Israel also reported two Iranian salvos early Tuesday fired toward Tel Aviv and an area south of the Sea of Galilee. No injuries were reported.

More than 1,300 people have been killed in Iran, according to the Iranian Red Crescent.

Israel has carried out some 7,600 strikes on Iran, knocking out 85% of its air defenses and 70% of Iran's missile launchers, Israeli military spokesman Lt. Col. Nadav Shoshani said.

In Israel, 12 people have been killed by Iranian missile fire. At least 13 U.S. military members have been killed.

Trump seeks allies' help to police the Strait of Hormuz

The virtual shutdown of the Strait of Hormuz is unnerving the world economy, driving up energy prices, threatening food shortages in poor countries, destabilizing fragile states and complicating efforts by central banks to drive down prices for consumers.

On Monday, Trump said "numerous countries" have told him "they're on the way" to help police the Strait of Hormuz. But he also suggested some countries' reluctance showed a lack of reciprocity in defense agreements with the United States.

Europeans have been critical of the U.S. and Israel for failing to provide clarity on their objectives in the war.

"The level of enthusiasm matters to me," Trump said. He didn't specify the countries, but has previously appealed to China, France, Japan, South Korea and Britain.

Brent crude fell to \$100.21 per barrel Monday, but remained up roughly 40% since the war began.

Officials have been scrambling to ease prices. Fatih Birol, head of the International Energy Agency, said its 32 member countries still have additional reserves of 1.4 billion barrels on top of the record 400 million they agreed to release last week to address supply constraints.

Adm. Brad Cooper, the top U.S. military commander in the Middle East, said in a video posted on X that American forces are zeroing in on Iran's threats to freighters carrying oil and natural gas.

Ahead of a meeting in Brussels, the European Union's foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said the bloc would discuss possibly extending a naval mission that protects ships in the Red Sea to the Strait of Hormuz, without giving any details.

Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani told reporters in Brussels that his country favors strengthening anti-piracy and defensive missions in the Red Sea, but not expanding their role in the Strait of Hormuz.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer of Britain, which is not an EU member, told reporters that Britain and allies were working on a plan to reopen the strait. Starmer said Britain might deploy mine-hunting U.K. drones

already in the region, but insisted it "will not be drawn into the wider war."

Japan and Australia said Monday they had not been asked to help protect the strait and had no current plans to do so.

A person was killed in the capital of the United Arab Emirates when an Iranian missile hit a vehicle, the Abu Dhabi media office said. Authorities said drone strikes Monday caused fires at two UAE oil facilities, in Abu Dhabi and Fujairah.

## **A Utah woman who wrote a book on grief after husband's death found guilty of murdering him**

By HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

PARK CITY, Utah (AP) — A Utah woman was convicted Monday of aggravated murder after poisoning her husband with fentanyl and self-publishing a children's book about coping with grief.

Prosecutors said Kouri Richins slipped five times the lethal dose of the synthetic opioid into a cocktail that her husband Eric Richins drank in March 2022 at their home outside the affluent ski town of Park City. They said she was \$4.5 million in debt and falsely believed that when her husband died, she would inherit his estate worth more than \$4 million.

"She wanted to leave Eric Richins but did not want to leave his money," Summit County prosecutor Brad Bloodworth said.

Richins, 35, stared at the floor and took deep breaths as the judge read the verdict.

She was also convicted of other felonies, including attempted murder for trying to poison her husband weeks earlier on Valentine's Day with a fentanyl-laced sandwich that made him black out. Jurors also found Richins guilty of forgery and fraudulently claiming insurance benefits after his death.

The jury deliberated for just under three hours. Afterward, family members on both sides of the case left the courtroom hugging and crying.

"Honestly I feel like we're all in shock. It's been a long time coming," said Eric Richins' sister, Amy Richins, adding that the family can now focus on honoring her brother and supporting his sons. "Just very happy that we got justice for my brother."

Relatives of Kouri Richins left the courthouse without speaking to media.

Sentencing was scheduled for May 13, the day her husband would have turned 44. The aggravated murder charge alone carries a sentence of 25 years to life in prison.

What was scheduled to be a five-week trial was cut short when the defendant waived her right to testify, and her legal team abruptly rested its case without calling any witnesses. Her attorneys said they were confident that prosecutors did not produce enough evidence over the past three weeks to convict her of murder.

'A wife becoming a black widow'

The prosecution said Richins, a real estate agent focused on flipping houses, was deep in debt and planning a future with another man. She had opened numerous life insurance policies on her husband without his knowledge, with benefits totaling about \$2 million, prosecutors said.

Richins also faces 26 other money-related criminal charges in a separate case that has not yet gone to trial.

Earlier Monday, prosecutors showed the jury text messages between Richins and Robert Josh Grossman, the man with whom she was allegedly having an affair, in which she fantasized about leaving her husband, gaining millions in a divorce and marrying Grossman.

The internet search history from Richins' phone included "what is a lethal.dose.of.fetanayl," "luxury prisons for the rich America" and "if someone is poisoned what does it go down on the death certificate as," a digital forensic analyst testified.

Bloodworth replayed for the jury a clip of Richins' 911 call from the night of her husband's death. That's "not `the sound of a wife becoming a widow,'" he said, quoting the defense's opening statement. "It's the sound of a wife becoming a black widow."

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Defense attorney Wendy Lewis responded that the prosecution "looks at facts one way and sees a witch, but if you look at those facts another way, you see a widow."

'Give us the details that will ensure Kouri gets convicted'

The defense focused on trying to discredit the prosecution's star witness, Carmen Lauber, a housekeeper for the family who claimed to have sold Richins fentanyl on multiple occasions.

Lewis argued Lauber did not deal fentanyl and was motivated to lie for legal protection. Lauber said in early interviews that she never dealt the synthetic opioid, but later said she did after investigators informed her that Eric Richins died of a fentanyl overdose, the defense noted.

Richins had asked Lauber for "the Michael Jackson stuff," which Bloodworth said likely refers to the drug combination that killed the singer.

"She knows she wants it because it is lethal," he argued.

The housekeeper was already in a drug court program as an alternative to incarceration on other charges when authorities arrested her in connection with the Richins case, investigators said. She had also violated some conditions of drug court.

The defense showed a video of law enforcement warning Lauber that they could pull her drug court deal and that she could face a lengthy prison sentence.

"Give us the details that will ensure Kouri gets convicted of murder," a man in the video said.

Lauber was granted immunity for her cooperation in the case. She testified that she felt a need to "step up and take accountability of my part in this."

Children's book becomes a tool for prosecutors

Shortly before her arrest in May 2023, Richins self-published the children's book "Are You with Me?" about coping with the loss of a parent. She promoted it on local TV and radio stations, which prosecutors pointed to in arguing that Richins planned the killing and tried to cover it up.

Summit County Sheriff's detective Jeff O'Driscoll, the lead investigator on the case, testified that Richins paid a ghostwriting company to write the book for her.

O'Driscoll said shortly after Richins' arrest, her mother sent the book to the sheriff's office in an anonymous package with a note saying it exemplified the "true Kouri, a devoted wife and adoring mother."

Prosecutors also showed the jury excerpts of a letter found in Richins' jail cell that they said appeared to outline testimony for her mother and brother. In the six-page letter, Richins instructed her brother to tell her former attorney that Eric Richins confided in him about getting fentanyl from Mexico and "gets high every night."

Defense attorneys said the letter contained a fictional story their client was working on. They argued that Eric Richins was addicted to painkillers and asked his wife to procure opioids for him.

However, Richins told police on the night of her husband's death that he had no history of illicit drug use, according to body camera footage shown in court.

## Afghanistan says 400 people killed in Pakistan strike on Kabul hospital

By ABDUL QAHAR AFGHAN, MUNIR AHMED and ELENA BECATOROS Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Afghanistan accused Pakistan of killing at least 400 people in an airstrike on a drug rehabilitation hospital in the Afghan capital late Monday. It marked a dramatic escalation of a conflict that began late last month and has seen repeated cross-border clashes as well as airstrikes inside Afghanistan. International calls for a ceasefire have gone unheeded.

Pakistan dismissed the accusation that it had hit a hospital, saying its strikes, which were also conducted in eastern Afghanistan, did not hit any civilian sites.

Afghanistan's deputy government spokesperson Hamdullah Fitrat, in a post on X, said the airstrike had hit the hospital in Kabul at about 9 p.m. local time, destroying large sections of the 2,000-bed facility. He said the death toll had "so far" reached 400 people, while about 250 people had been reported injured.

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Local television stations posted footage on X showing security forces using flashlights as they carried out casualties while firefighters struggled to extinguish flames among the ruins of a building. Fitrat said rescue teams were working to control the fire and recover the bodies.

The strike came hours after Afghan officials said the two sides exchanged fire along their common border, killing four people in Afghanistan, as the deadliest fighting between the neighbors in years entered a third week.

Afghan government spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid condemned the strike on X, accusing Pakistan of "targeting hospitals and civilian sites to perpetrate horrors." In a post before the death toll rose into the hundreds, he said those killed and injured were patients at the hospital.

"We strongly condemn this crime and consider such an act to be against all accepted principles and a crime against humanity," he posted.

#### Pakistan dismisses the allegations

Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's spokesperson, Mosharraf Zaidi, dismissed the allegations as baseless, saying no hospital was targeted in Kabul.

Pakistan's Information Minister Attaullah Tarar posted on X in the early hours Tuesday that the Pakistani military had "carried out precision airstrikes" targeting military installations in Kabul and the eastern province of Nangarhar. He said "technical support infrastructure and ammunition storage facilities" at two locations in Kabul were destroyed.

"All targeting has been done with precision only at those infrastructures which are being used by Afghan Taliban regime to support its multiple terror proxies," he wrote.

Pakistan's Ministry of Information said earlier that Mujahid's claim was "false and misleading" and aimed at stirring sentiment and cover what it described as "illegitimate support for cross-border terrorism." It said Pakistan's targeting was "precise and carefully undertaken to ensure no collateral damage is inflicted."

#### UN calls on Afghanistan to combat militants

The strike came hours after the U.N. Security Council called on Afghanistan's Taliban rulers to immediately step up efforts to combat terrorism. Pakistan accuses Kabul of harboring militant groups, particularly the Pakistani Taliban, which it says carry out attacks inside Pakistan.

The Security Council resolution, adopted unanimously, didn't refer specifically to attacks carried out in Pakistan but condemns "in the strongest terms all terrorist activity including terrorist attacks." The resolution also extends the U.N. political mission in Afghanistan, UNAMA, for three months.

Pakistan's government accuses Afghanistan of providing safe haven to the Pakistani Taliban, which is designated as a terrorist organization by the United States, as well as to outlawed Baloch separatist groups and other militants who frequently target Pakistani security forces and civilians across the country. Kabul denies the charge.

#### The latest conflict

The fighting — the most severe between the two neighbors — began in late February after Afghanistan launched cross-border attacks in response to Pakistani airstrikes inside Afghanistan that Kabul said killed civilians. The clashes disrupted a ceasefire brokered by Qatar in October after earlier fighting killed dozens of soldiers, civilians and suspected militants.

Pakistan has declared it is in "open war" with Afghanistan. The conflict has alarmed the international community, particularly as the area is one where other militant organizations, including al-Qaida and the Islamic State group, still have a presence and have been trying to resurface.

On Sunday, Tarar said the military has killed 684 Afghan Taliban forces, a claim rejected by Afghanistan, which says casualties are far lower. Afghanistan's Defense Ministry and other officials have said Afghanistan has killed more than 100 Pakistani soldiers.

Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari said Afghanistan's Taliban administration crossed a "red line" by deploying drones that injured several civilians in Pakistan last week.

Responding to those attacks, Pakistan's air force over the weekend struck equipment storage sites and "technical support infrastructure" in Afghanistan's southern Kandahar Province, saying it was being used

for attacks inside Pakistan. Kabul said Pakistan hit two locations, including an empty security site and a drug rehabilitation center that sustained minor damage.

In Kabul, Afghanistan's administrative Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Salam Hanafi said defending sovereignty is the duty of all citizens. Speaking during a meeting with political analysts and media figures, Hanafi expressed regret over civilian casualties in recent Pakistani attacks, saying the war was imposed on Afghanistan.

## **Last protester in immigration detention after Trump's campus crackdown has been released**

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ and KENDRIA LaFLEUR Associated Press

ALVARADO, Texas (AP) — A Palestinian woman who was the last person still in immigration detention after the Trump administration's 2025 crackdown on pro-Palestinian activism on college campuses was freed Monday after a year in custody.

Leqaa Kordia, a 33-year-old from the West Bank who has lived in New Jersey since 2016, had been held in a U.S. immigration detention center in Texas since last March. Her detention was linked, in part, to her participation in a protest outside Columbia University in 2024.

"I don't know what to say. I'm free! I'm free! Finally, after one year," Kordia, with a beaming smile, told reporters after emerging from the detention center.

An immigration judge had ordered her released on bond three times. The government challenged the first two rulings, but Kordia was freed Monday on \$100,000 bond after it did not challenge the third.

Kordia said she was looking forward to going home and hugging her mother "so hard." But she also said she would keep fighting on behalf of people still being held at the detention center.

"There is a lot of injustice in this place," she said. "There is a lot of people that shouldn't be here the first place."

Kordia was among a number of people arrested last year after the Trump administration began using its immigration enforcement powers on noncitizens who had criticized or protested Israel's military actions in Gaza, many students and scholars at American universities.

Among them was Mahmoud Khalil, a former Columbia University graduate student involved in campus protests. He spent three months detained in a Louisiana immigration jail before being freed. Rümeyssa Öztürk, a Tufts University student who co-authored an op-ed criticizing her university's response to Israel and the war, was detained for six weeks.

Others did not fight to stay — one Columbia doctoral student fled the U.S. after her visa was revoked and immigration agents showed up at her university apartment.

Arrests of activists like Khalil drew condemnation from elected officials and advocates. But Kordia was not a student or part of a group that might have provided support, so her case remained largely out of the public eye while her detention carried on.

Kordia said she joined a 2024 demonstration outside Columbia University after Israel killed scores of her relatives in Gaza, where she maintains deep personal ties. She was around 100 people arrested by city police at that protest, but the charges against her were dismissed and sealed. Information about her arrest was later given to the Trump administration by the New York City Police Department, which said it was told the records were needed as part of a money laundering investigation.

Kordia was arrested during a March 13, 2025, check-in with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in New Jersey. She was detained immediately and flown to Prairieland Detention Center, south of Dallas.

Federal officials have accused Kordia of overstaying her visa, while scrutinizing payments she sent to relatives in the Middle East. Kordia said the money was meant to help family members suffering during the war.

Tricia McLaughlin, a spokesperson for the Department of Homeland Security, had previously criticized Kordia for what she said was "providing financial support to individuals living in nations hostile to the U.S."

The department said in an email Monday night, "The facts of this case have not changed: Leqaa Kordia

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is in the country illegally after violating the terms of her visa.”

“The Trump administration is committed to restoring the rule of law and common sense to our immigration system, and will continue to fight for the arrest, detention, and removal of aliens who have no right to be in this country,” read the statement.

An immigration judge found “overwhelming evidence” that Kordia was telling the truth about the payments. Kordia was recently hospitalized for three days following a seizure after fainting and hitting her head at the privately run detention facility.

At a hearing Friday, Kordia’s attorneys said she had a neurological condition that had worsened while in custody, putting her at an elevated risk of seizure. They reiterated that she could stay with U.S. citizen family members and did not pose a flight risk.

The immigration judge, Tara Naslow, agreed.

“I’ve heard testimony. I’ve seen thousands of pages of evidence presented by the respondent, and very little evidence presented by the government in any of this,” Naslow said.

New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani said on X that he asked for her release when he met with President Donald Trump last month

“I am grateful that Leqaa has been released this evening from ICE custody after more than a year in detention for speaking up for Palestinian rights,” Mamdani said.

## Storms cancel more US flights as TSA remains under pressure from partial government shutdown

By EMILIE MEGNIEN and RIO YAMAT Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Thousands of flights across the U.S. were canceled or delayed Monday as powerful storms swept across the eastern half of the country and a partial government shutdown affecting airport security screeners dragged into a second month.

The disruptions come at an already challenging time for air travel, in part because the shutdown that began Feb. 14 has strained staffing at some security checkpoints. At the same time, airports are crowded with spring break travelers and fans heading to March Madness games, the annual NCAA men’s and women’s college basketball tournaments.

Flight delays and cancellations piled up Monday at some of the nation’s largest airports, including those in New York, Chicago and Atlanta. The storm system that dumped heavy snow across the Midwest raced toward the East Coast with the potential for high winds and tornadoes, the National Weather Service warned Monday.

More than 4,400 flights scheduled to fly into, out of or within the U.S. on Monday have been called off, and roughly 10,400 other U.S. flights were delayed, according to flight-tracking site FlightAware. Nearly 290 flights in the U.S. scheduled for Tuesday have been canceled.

Kelly Price, who was trying to get home to Colorado after a family vacation in Orlando, Florida, said her Sunday night flight wasn’t canceled until early Monday.

“By that time the only place for us to sleep was the airport floor. So we’re all tired and frustrated,” she said, adding that the soonest she and her family could book another flight doesn’t leave until Tuesday afternoon.

Impact to major airport hubs

The nationwide cancellations included about 570 in and out of Chicago O’Hare International, more than 430 at Atlanta’s Hartsfield-Jackson International and over 270 at John F. Kennedy International Airport, according to FlightAware.

Earlier Monday, citing severe weather, the Federal Aviation Administration ordered ground stops at Hartsfield-Jackson and Charlotte Douglas International Airport, along with ground delays at JFK and Newark Liberty International Airport.

Danielle Cash found herself stranded in St. Louis on Sunday while trying to get home to Tampa, Florida, after a weekend girls’ trip to Las Vegas. Now she’s spending several hundred dollars more than planned

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on a hotel room in a snowy city she wasn't dressed for.

"It was 80 degrees in Tampa when I left and then going to Vegas," she said. "And it was 90 degrees in the desert."

Cash said she's now booked on a flight that will take her to Tennessee before finally returning to Tampa by Tuesday afternoon.

TSA staffing strains some checkpoints

The storms are also unfolding just as airport security screeners missed their first full paycheck over the weekend. The current partial government shutdown affects only the Department of Homeland Security, which includes the Transportation Security Administration.

Democrats in Congress have said Homeland Security won't get funded until new restrictions are placed on federal immigration operations following the fatal shootings of Alex Pretti and Renee Good in Minneapolis earlier this year.

It is the third shutdown in less than a year to leave TSA workers temporarily without pay. Once the government reopens, employees will have to wait for back pay.

Some airports have reported longer security lines because of staffing shortages as more TSA workers take on second jobs, can't afford gas to get to work or leave the profession altogether. Homeland Security has said more than 300 TSA agents have quit since the start of the shutdown.

Security wait times could worsen

TSA union leaders in Atlanta held a news conference Monday outside Hartsfield-Jackson, warning that air travelers could face increasingly long wait times as the shutdown continues. Even so, union leaders said, many officers are still reporting to work despite mounting financial strain.

Many TSA workers "are coping with eviction notices, vehicle repossessions, empty refrigerators and overdrawn bank accounts," said Aaron Barker, a local leader with the American Federation of Government Employees. Supporters behind him held signs reading, "We want a paycheck, not a rain check."

Travelers flying out of New Orleans on Sunday and Monday were advised to arrive at least three hours early "due to impacts from the federal government's partial shutdown," Louis Armstrong International Airport said on X. And the airport in Austin, Texas, shared a video on X taken at 5:30 a.m. local time showing the security line spilling out onto the sidewalk outside.

Back in Atlanta, Mel Stewart and his wife arrived four hours earlier than usual for their flight out of Hartsfield-Jackson to make up for longer TSA lines.

"I think it's being politicized way too much — way too much," Stewart said Monday of the shutdown. "And these people are working. They work hard, and for TSA people not to get paid, that's silly."

## Judge blocks US government from slimming down vaccine recommendations

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

A federal judge on Monday temporarily blocked federal health officials from cutting the number of vaccines recommended for every child, and said U.S. Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. likely violated federal procedures in revamping a key vaccine advisory committee.

The decision halted an order by Kennedy — announced in January — to end broad recommendations for all children to be vaccinated against flu, rotavirus, hepatitis A, hepatitis B, some forms of meningitis and RSV.

It also stopped a meeting of a Kennedy-appointed vaccine advisory committee, which was set to convene this week in Atlanta.

The judge's order, however, is not the final word. The blocks are temporary, pending either a trial or a decision for summary judgment.

Federal health officials indicated they planned to appeal.

"HHS looks forward to this judge's decision being overturned just like his other attempts to keep the Trump administration from governing," said Department of Health and Human Services spokesman Andrew Nixon.

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The order issued Monday is the latest development in a lawsuit filed last July by the American Academy of Pediatrics and some other medical groups. The lawsuit in federal court in Boston originally focused on Kennedy's decision to stop recommending COVID-19 vaccinations for most children and pregnant women.

The lawsuit was updated as Kennedy took more steps that alarmed medical societies, causing the plaintiffs to ask Judge Brian E. Murphy to take steps to address those policy changes too.

For example, the plaintiffs amended the lawsuit to stop the scaling back of the nation's childhood vaccination schedule. They also asked the court to look at Kennedy's actions concerning the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, which advises public health officials on what vaccines to recommend to doctors and patients.

Kennedy, a leading anti-vaccine activist before becoming the nation's top health official, fired the entire 17-member panel last year and replaced it with a group that includes several anti-vaccine voices.

Murphy, who was nominated to the bench by President Joe Biden, said Kennedy's reconstitution of ACIP likely violated federal law. He ordered the appointments — and all decisions made by the reformed committee — put on hold.

The ACIP was scheduled to meet this week to discuss COVID-19 vaccine safety, among other issues, but that gathering was postponed, officials said.

"ACIP as currently constituted cannot meet," said Richard Hughes IV, an attorney representing the AAP. "How can a committee meet without nearly the entirety of its membership?"

Jason Schwartz, a Yale University vaccine policy expert who has studied the committee, called the halting of an ACIP meeting for legal reasons "unprecedented" in its 62-year existence.

Hughes called the judge's order "a momentous step toward restoring science-based vaccine policy," and he was echoed by leaders of several doctors' groups and public health organizations.

When Trump administration officials overhauled the childhood vaccine schedule, they said it wouldn't result in families losing access to them or cause insurers to stop covering them. But it left many Americans confused, as doctors' groups, public health organizations and many states continued to recommend licensed vaccines, said Dr. Andrew Racine, president of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Several doctors' groups said the changes were not based on good evidence, and advised doctors and patients to follow guidance that was previously in place. Health officials in 30 states have rejected at least some of the new recommendations.

The judge's order should bring clarity, Racine said.

"If anyone has any questions about what's the appropriate vaccine schedule for their children, the best thing to do is to talk to their pediatricians," he said.

Schwartz said he expected federal health officials to keep expressing "their deep skepticism regarding the importance of vaccination" and to keep embracing "unsupported vaccine safety allegations."

After the ruling, one of Kennedy's appointees to the committee, Dr. Robert Malone, urged the Trump administration to keep pursuing Kennedy's vaccine policy changes.

"A district court order is a delay, not a defeat," he wrote Monday on Substack.

## **Bombs explode in northeastern Nigeria, leaving scores killed and injured, authorities say**

By HARUNA UMAR Associated Press

MAIDUGURI, Nigeria (AP) — Bombs exploded in at least three locations in northeastern Nigeria's Borno state Monday night, killing and injuring scores of people, the emergency services told The Associated Press, citing possible suicide bombings.

Explosions were heard in Maiduguri, the Borno state capital, where Nigeria's homegrown jihadi Boko Haram extremists have waged an insurgency for more than a decade.

The blasts occurred at the entrance of the University of Maiduguri Teaching Hospital and two local markets, known as Post Office and the Monday Market, according to Sirajo Abdullahi, head of operations at Nigeria's National Emergency Management Agency, or NEMA, in Maiduguri.

"There are casualties and they are still managing the casualties at the hospital," Abdullahi said. "We can't give the actual figure until we count."

No group has yet claimed responsibility for the suspected bombings.

The Nigerian military said in a statement earlier it had repelled attacks by suspected Islamic militants in the early hours of Monday on the outskirts of Maiduguri.

For years, Nigeria has been battling a complex security crisis from different armed groups, especially in the northern part of the country.

Jihadi extremist groups, including Boko Haram and one of its factions, have been blamed for intensified attacks targeting Nigeria's military bases in the northeast of the country this month. But attacks in Maiduguri in Borno state, which is the epicenter of Nigeria's 17-year struggle with extremist armed groups, have been rare in recent years after military operations.

Bagoni Alkali, an eyewitness to the blast, told The Associated Press he brought wounded people to the hospital for emergency treatment.

"Right now, over 200 people have been injured and are receiving care in the accident and emergency department," Alkali said.

"While I could tell you so many people have died, to be honest, many lost their lives at the scene immediately after the bomb exploded. It's disheartening," he added.

Mohammed Hassan, a member of a volunteer group that often assists the security forces in the conflict against armed extremists, said he evacuated 10 bodies from the Post Office and Monday Markets.

"Many victims were rushed to the emergency ward, but some died at the hospital. We're in dire need of blood," he said. "This attack's been one of the deadliest in Maiduguri in years."

Borno's Governor Babagana Umara Zulum said in a statement Monday he condemned in the strongest terms the explosions.

"My thoughts and prayers are with the families of the victims and those injured as a result of the blast. The act is utterly condemnable, barbaric and inhumane," Zulum said.

He called on residents to remain calm, go about their usual activities and report any suspicious movement or activity to security agencies.

## Supreme Court to hear arguments over push to end legal protections for migrants from Haiti, Syria

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court will hear arguments over the Trump administration's push to end legal protections for people fleeing war and natural disaster from countries around the world, including Haiti and Syria.

The court declined, though, to immediately lift the protections for hundreds of thousands of people Monday, allowing them to live and work in the U.S. legally amid the administration's wider crackdown on immigration.

The case will be heard in April, a fast schedule for the nation's highest court, with a decision expected weeks or months later.

The conservative-majority court has sided with the Trump administration on the issue before and allowed the end of temporary legal status for a total of 600,000 people from Venezuela while lawsuits play out, exposing them to potential deportation. The court did not explain its legal reasoning, as is common on its emergency docket.

The Trump administration filed emergency appeals after lower courts stopped the immediate end of the program for 350,000 people from Haiti and 6,000 people from Syria.

The administration asked the court to lift those decisions, hear arguments and issue a broad ruling that would block courts from intervening when Homeland Security decides to end protections.

The Justice Department argued that the Department of Homeland Security has sole power over the program, which was designed to be temporary.

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"Lower courts are again attempting to block major executive-branch policy initiatives in ways that inflict specific harms to the national interest and foreign relations," Solicitor General D. John Sauer wrote in court documents.

But immigration attorneys argued that both countries are still largely in crisis and people can't return safely. "Without a functioning government, Haiti is a nation in turmoil. Rape, kidnapping, and murder are rampant, while food, housing, and medical care are scarce," attorneys wrote, pointing to reports that four Haitian women were recently found dead months after they were deported from the U.S.

Lupe Aguirre, director of the International Refugee Assistance Project, said Syrians are relieved they will stay protected for now, but disappointed the court agreed to hear the case before it has fully worked its way through lower courts.

Courts in New York and Washington, D.C., have agreed to delay the end of protections, with one finding that "hostility to nonwhite immigrants" likely played a role in the decision to end protections for Haitians. During his presidential campaign, Trump amplified false rumors that Haitian immigrants were abducting and eating dogs and cats.

Appeals courts left the decisions in place.

A total of about 1.3 million people fleeing armed conflict, natural disasters and political instability in countries around the world have been granted temporary protected status. Federal authorities have said conditions in the affected countries have improved and denied racial animus played any role.

The protections for Haitians were first granted in 2010 after a catastrophic earthquake and have been extended multiple times amid ongoing gang violence that has displaced more than a million people, according to court documents.

Protections for Syrians were first granted protected status in 2012, during a civil war that lasted for more than a decade before the fall of President Bashar Assad's government in late 2024.

Congress created TPS in 1990 to prevent deportations to countries suffering from natural disasters, civil strife or other dangerous conditions. The designation is granted in 18-month increments by the Homeland Security secretary.

It allows people to legally live and work in the U.S., though it does not provide a path to citizenship. DHS has moved to terminate the program for people from multiple countries since Republican Donald Trump returned to the White House.

## US stocks climb to their best day since the Iran war began after oil prices ease

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — A drop in oil prices on Monday helped send the U.S. stock market to its best day since the war in Iran began.

The S&P 500 climbed 1% for its biggest gain in five weeks. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 387 points, or 0.8%, and the Nasdaq composite jumped 1.2%.

The driver for markets once again was the price of oil. A barrel of benchmark U.S. crude fell 5.3% to settle at \$93.50, easing some pressure off the economy after topping \$102 earlier in the morning. Brent crude, the international standard, fell 2.8% to \$100.21 per barrel after earlier getting as high as \$106.50.

It's a reprieve, for now at least, after oil prices spiked from roughly \$70 before the United States and Israel began their attacks on Iran. In response, Iran has nearly halted traffic through the narrow Strait of Hormuz, where a fifth of the world's oil typically sails from the Persian Gulf to customers worldwide. That has oil producers cutting production because their crude has nowhere to go.

The worry in financial markets is that if the strait remains closed for a long time, it could keep enough oil off the market to drive inflation up to a debilitating level for the global economy.

President Donald Trump over the weekend demanded that other countries hurt by the closure of the Strait of Hormuz "take care of that passage" and said his country "will help - A LOT!"

European countries, meanwhile, want to know more about Trump's plans for the war on Iran and when

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the conflict might end as they weighed his demand.

The U.S. stock market has a track record of bouncing back relatively quickly from military conflicts in the Middle East and elsewhere, as long as oil prices don't stay too high for too long. Many professional investors are expecting that to be the case again, which has helped keep U.S. stock prices near their record levels.

For all its dramatic swings over the last couple weeks, including several that struck hour to hour, the S&P 500 is only 4% below its all-time high.

Escalations have been mounting quickly in the war, to be sure, but that could suggest "both sides are facing growing constraints that may prevent a long conflict," according to Paul Christopher, head of global investment strategy at Wells Fargo Investment Institute.

On Wall Street, stocks of companies with big fuel bills helped lead the market thanks to falling oil prices. Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings steamed 5.1% higher, while United Airlines climbed 4.2% to trim their big losses for the year so far.

National Storage Affiliates leaped 30% after Public Storage said it would buy its 69 million rentable square feet in an all-stock deal valued at \$10.5 billion. Public Storage fell 1.7%.

Dollar Tree rose 6.4% after reporting a stronger profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected, even as fewer shoppers visited its stores.

Nebius Group, a Dutch AI cloud company, saw its stock that trades in the United States leap 15% after announcing a five-year infrastructure contract with Meta Platforms that could be worth up to \$27 billion.

Nvidia, whose chips are powering much of the world's move into artificial-intelligence technology rose 1.6% as its CEO, Jensen Huang, talked up the tech's possibilities at an AI conference and said he foresaw \$1 trillion in demand for AI chips through 2027. It was the strongest single force lifting the S&P 500.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 67.19 points to 6,699.38. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 387.94 to 46,946.41, and the Nasdaq composite climbed 268.82 to 22,374.18.

In stock markets abroad, indexes rose modestly in Europe, including a 0.5% return for Germany's DAX, following a mixed finish in Asia.

Stocks jumped 1.4% in Hong Kong but slipped 0.3% in Shanghai.

In the bond market, Treasury yields eased as falling oil prices took some pressure off inflation worries. A report showing a weakening of manufacturing activity in New York state also weighed on yields.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury fell to 4.22% from 4.28% late Friday.

Yields, though, are still higher than they were before the war, when the 10-year Treasury yield was at just 3.97%. Traders have pushed back their expectations for when the Federal Reserve could resume its cuts to interest rates because of the spike in oil prices caused by the war.

Such cuts would give the economy and job market a boost, and they're something Trump has angrily been calling for, but they would worsen inflation. Traders see virtually no chance of the Fed announcing a cut to rates after its next meeting concludes on Wednesday, according to data from CME Group.

## **Trump side-stepped diplomacy on his way to war in Iran. Now, he's asking China and others for help**

By SEUNG MIN KIM, WILL WEISSERT and BILL BARROW Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump relied on his gut and largely side-stepped diplomatic coordination as he made the decision to launch strikes on Iran with Israel. But now with the war's economic and geopolitical consequences unfurling rapidly, he's cajoling allies and other global powers to help mop up the mess.

Trump says he's asked roughly a half-dozen other countries to send warships to reopen the vital Strait of Hormuz, a consequential waterway through which one-fifth of the world's traded oil flows. So far, none has committed. Trump even indicated he would use his long-planned trip to China to pressure Beijing to help with a new coalition meant to get oil tanker traffic moving through the strait — a notion that his treasury secretary later downplayed.

"We strongly encourage other nations whose economies depend on the strait far more than ours ... we

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want them to come and help us with the strait," Trump said at the White House on Monday, listing Japan, China, South Korea and several countries in Europe as examples. Trump has argued that the shipping channel is not something the United States needs because of its own access to oil.

It's the type of bullying to action that has secured key foreign policy wins for the Republican president in his second term, like prompting nearly all NATO countries to up their defense spending last year after he spent years accusing allies of freeloading off American largess, and using tariffs to extract investments and concessions from trade partners.

But with oil prices soaring and the Middle East rattled by violence, there's little inclination from other countries to heed Trump's call.

China is noncommittal. France is a maybe on escorting ships, when "circumstances permit." Britain is unlikely to dispatch a warship.

In Trump's view, this lack of appetite for helping to secure the strait confirms his suspicions about the benefits of working with other countries, because "if we ever needed help, they won't be there for us."

"I've always felt that was a weakness of NATO," Trump said Monday. "We were going to protect them, but I always said when in need, they won't protect us."

Yet not long after, Trump insisted the U.S. didn't need help from anybody because "we're the strongest nation in the world."

White House: Trump 'right' to demand help with Strait of Hormuz

Nonetheless, the pressure campaign from the White House is continuing.

Trump's top spokeswoman, when asked why other nations that were neither consulted nor involved should put their troops in danger to secure the Strait of Hormuz, argued that other countries were benefiting directly from Trump's attempt to disarm the Iranian regime.

"This is something not just the United States but the entire Western world has agreed with for many, many years," White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters on Monday.

Separately, Trump signaled in a Sunday interview with the Financial Times that "we'd like to know" before he leaves for a late-March summit in Beijing whether China will help secure the strait because of its reliance on Middle Eastern oil, adding: "We may delay."

In an afternoon event in the Oval Office, Trump revealed that he has asked China to delay the trip "a month or so."

"We're speaking to China. I'd love to, but because of the war ... I have to be here, I feel," Trump said.

Yet calling off the face-to-face visit with Chinese President Xi Jinping could have its own major economic consequences as the relations between the world's two biggest economies remain fraught over tariffs and other issues. In a CNBC interview Monday, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said any delay would not be due to disputes over the strait and explicitly urged investors not to react negatively should Trump put off his trip.

"If the meeting for some reason is rescheduled, it would be rescheduled because of logistics," Bessent said from Paris, where he was meeting with Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng for a new round of trade talks that were meant to pave the way for the trip.

A Foreign Ministry spokesperson in Beijing, Lin Jian, 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.

No takers so far on Trump's call for a coalition to secure Hormuz

In the early days of the Iran conflict, Trump had said U.S. Navy vessels would escort oil tankers through the strait, which connects the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman, 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.

Trump told reporters that he has asked about seven countries to participate in a coalition that would help oil tankers navigate the Strait of Hormuz, which Iran says is only cut off for the United States, Israel and their allies.

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In addition to China, Japan and South Korea, Trump has made appeals for help to Britain and France. Prime Minister Keir Starmer said Monday that Britain is working with allies on a plan to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, but "will not be drawn into the wider war."

Britain is discussing with the U.S. and allies in Europe and the Gulf the possibility of using mine-hunting drones that the U.K. has in the region, Starmer said. But he signaled the U.K. is unlikely to dispatch a warship.

Other countries have similarly been resistant to get involved.

Australia's Transport Minister Catherine King told Australian Broadcasting Corp. on Monday that "we won't be sending a ship to the Strait of Hormuz," although she wasn't aware of such a request from the U.S.

Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani told reporters in Brussels on Monday that while Italy backs reinforcing EU naval missions in the Red Sea, "I don't think these missions can be expanded to include the Strait of Hormuz."

Trump administration downplays oil price spikes

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.

Bessent downplayed the war's impact on oil prices and accused the media of "trying to make it into some crisis that it's not." Echoing Trump, the secretary insisted prices would come down after the conflict ends.

"I don't know how many weeks it will be, but on the other side of this, the world will be safer, and we will be better supplied," Bessent said on CNBC.

China, which faces its own economic pressures, 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.

At the White House on Monday, Trump was asked what his aides have told him about how long gas prices will remain high.

Trump dismissed the question, showing once again that he ultimately relies on his own instincts.

"I don't need advisers to tell me that," he said. "I know what it is."

## Is spring really — finally — here?

By The Associated Press undefined

It's far from clear if the weather is planning to cooperate, but spring arrives — technically, at least — Friday.

The vernal equinox arrives on Friday, marking the start of the spring season for the Northern Hemisphere and the fall in the Southern Hemisphere. On the equator, the sun will be directly overhead at noon. Equinoxes are the only times when both the North and South poles are lit by sunshine at the same time.

Equinoxes have been marked and celebrated around the world for centuries. In Japan, for example, Vernal Equinox Day is a public holiday. At the Mayan site Chichen Itza in Mexico, people gather during the equinox to watch the sun create a shadow pattern that resembles a serpent descending a pyramid called El Castillo.

But what is happening in the heavens? Here's what to know about the Earth's orbit.

What is the equinox?

As the Earth travels around the sun, it does so at an angle, making the sun's warmth and light fall unequally on the northern and southern halves of the planet for most of the year.

But during the equinox, the Earth's tilt is neither toward the sun nor away from the sun, so both the northern and southern hemispheres get an equal amount of sunlight. The sun rises almost exactly due east and it sets almost exactly due west.

The word equinox comes from two Latin words meaning equal and night. That's because on the equinox, day and night last almost the same amount of time — though one may get a few extra minutes, depending on where you are on the planet.

The Northern Hemisphere's fall — or autumnal — equinox can land between Sept. 21 and 24, depending on the year. Its spring — or vernal — equinox can land between March 19 and 21.

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The exact time of the equinox is the moment the sun is directly overhead at the equator. For 2026, it's Friday, March 20, at 10:46 a.m. EST. From there, days will get a little longer every day in the Northern Hemisphere — and shorter in the Southern Hemisphere — until the solstice in June.

What is the solstice?

The solstices mark the times when the Earth's tilt is tipped most extremely either toward or away from the sun. This means the hemispheres are getting very different amounts of sunlight, and days and nights are at their most unequal.

At the Northern Hemisphere's summer solstice, the Earth's upper half is leaning toward the sun, creating the longest day and shortest night of the year. The summer solstice falls between June 20 and 22. This year it's the 21st.

The opposite happens at the Northern Hemisphere winter solstice: the Earth's upper half leans the furthest away from the sun, leading to the shortest day and longest night of the year. The winter solstice falls between Dec. 20 and 23.

What's the difference between meteorological and astronomical seasons?

These are just two different ways to carve up the year.

While astronomical seasons depend on how the Earth moves around the sun, meteorological seasons are defined by the weather. Meteorologists break down the year into three-month seasons based on annual temperature cycles. By that calendar, spring starts on March 1, summer on June 1, fall on Sept. 1 and winter on Dec. 1.

## Trump faces new pressure on mass deportations as Republicans weigh Homeland Security nominee

By LISA MASCARO, REBECCA SANTANA and JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Department of Homeland Security will soon be under new management, an opportunity to reset President Donald Trump's immigration agenda or to double down on his signature campaign promise to conduct the largest deportation operation in American history.

The White House's political director recently encouraged party lawmakers during a retreat at the Republican president's golf club in Florida to focus on immigration enforcement against criminals, a pivot from the mass deportation agenda he ran on. House Speaker Mike Johnson said the aggressive operations have created a "hiccup" for the party, which is now embarking on a "course correction."

Yet all indications are that Trump's mass deportation operation is not stalling out but intensifying, with billions of dollars being spent to hire Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers, build warehouse detention sites and meet the administration's goal of rounding up and removing some 1 million immigrants from the U.S. this year.

"We are at an interesting moment where it has been an inflection point — the public has finally seen what mass detention and mass deportation mean," said Sarah Mehta, who tracks the issue at the American Civil Liberties Union.

"This is not an agency that's slowing down," she said. "They're really going forward with some of the cruelest policies."

White House spokeswoman Abigail Jackson said the president's policies have sent immigrants out of the U.S., either through forced deportations or on their own, and sealed up the U.S.-Mexico border.

"Nobody is changing the administration's immigration enforcement agenda," she said.

Senators ready to grill Trump's DHS nominee over deportations

The questions put Homeland Security at a crossroads. Secretary Kristi Noem is on her way out, and Trump's nominee to replace her, Sen. Markwayne Mullin of Oklahoma, appears this week for Senate confirmation hearings.

After the intense deportation sweeps in Minneapolis and other cities — and the deaths of at least three U.S. citizens at the hands of officers — Democratic lawmakers are refusing to provide routine funding unless the department changes its policies.

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At the same time, those who believe Trump won the White House with his mass deportation agenda are disappointed the administration did not achieve its goals last year and insist he must do better.

"There has been a lot of talk in Congress and now in the White House about kind of backing away from President Trump's, candidate Trump's, mass deportation promise," said Rosemary Jenks, co-founder of the Immigration Accountability Project, which argues for deportations.

"We believe that now is an opportunity," she said. "We've got to get the deportation numbers up."

A nation of immigrants no longer?

The debate is playing out as the United States, celebrating its 250th year, squares its founding as a nation of immigrants with images of masked federal agents breaking car windows and detaining people suspected of being in the U.S. without proper legal standing.

The Congress, controlled by Republicans, provided some \$170 billion in last year's tax cuts bill to fuel the effort, more than tripling the budget of ICE.

GOP Sen. Eric Schmitt of Missouri, in a fiery speech, fought back against the Democrats' proposed restraints. "This question about deporting illegal immigrants was on the ballot. President Trump was not bashful," he said. "And the American people supported the idea that we are going to deport people."

Yet there are signs of cracks in the Trump coalition. Some Republicans prefer what one called a more humane approach and are sharing their views with Mullin.

Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Wis., considered a stalwart against illegal immigration, said in his state it's immigrants who milk most of the dairy cows, and he's heard from restaurant groups that rely on immigrants to fill jobs.

"Can we just turn back the clock and have these all these people who came in here illegally, just be back home?" he asked.

"In terms of actually implementing that, it's a lot tougher — particularly, in fact, when you realize a lot of these people, most of them, came here to seek opportunity, wanting freedom," he said. "They're working, supporting their family, contributing to organizations and community."

Mass deportation group wants more

The Mass Deportation Coalition, a group of conservative organizations including the Heritage Foundation and Erik Prince, founder of the security firm Blackwater, was formed recently to keep the administration on track.

It calls last year's focus on removing violent criminal immigrants "phase one" and says "phase two" should focus this year on deporting immigrants beyond those with violent criminal histories.

Mark Morgan, who served as acting head of ICE and Customs and Border Protection during Trump's first term and is part of the coalition, said that doesn't mean roving patrols through Home Depot parking lots. It's about strategic enforcement focused on immigrants at worksites, those who have overstayed visas and who a judge has already ordered removed, he said.

But they're facing opposition from within the Republican Party, Morgan said, particularly from those who want to narrow deportation to mainly criminals and from business groups that want to ease up on worksite enforcement.

"The Republicans that are saying that their definition of targeted enforcement is only criminal, they're wrong. They're on the wrong side of this," he said.

"That's why you see some of the base that's really becoming apoplectic because they're like, 'Wait a minute. You're talking about only removing criminals now?' That's not what you promised," Morgan said.

What's coming next

The deportation advocates as well as those working to protect the rights of immigrants see that the Trump administration's best chance at reaching its goals is creating an environment so unwelcoming for immigrants that they just leave — what's often called self-deportation.

Mehta, at the ACLU, expects the administration will step up efforts to end temporary permissions that allow immigrants to remain in the U.S. — particularly refugees and asylum-seekers — while their cases are making their way through the system. She called it a "deliberate attempt to make people undocumented — to take away lawful status — and then to be able to enforce against them."

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Sen. Alex Padilla, D-Calif., said he fears more nonviolent immigrants will be rounded up to fill the new warehouses being equipped as the Trump administration tries to reach its deportation goals.

That's unacceptable, he said, and among "the key questions that Senator Mullin will have to answer at his confirmation hearing."

## Kennedy Center votes to shut down operations for 2 years and names a new president

By STEVEN SLOAN, HILLEL ITALIE and DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Kennedy Center's board of directors voted on Monday to shut down operations for two years following this summer's July 4 celebrations. The widely expected decision comes in the wake of numerous resignations and cancellations during President Donald Trump's second term, although Trump himself has cited the need for repairs as a reason for the closure.

"We're going to ensure it remains the finest performing arts facility of its kind anywhere in the world," Trump told reporters at the White House before the board met Monday.

The board also voted to install Matt Flocas as CEO and executive director, replacing Trump ally Richard Grenell, who oversaw far-reaching changes at the venue that prompted an outcry from many artists and exacerbated the operation's financial challenges. Trump praised Grenell on Monday, saying he had been a longtime friend, and wished Flocas "good luck with everything."

The Kennedy Center said the vote was unanimous, though Rep. Joyce Beatty didn't cast a vote. The Ohio Democrat is an ex officio member of the board and sued to preclude the Trump administration from excluding her from Monday's meeting. Over the weekend, a federal judge ruled she was entitled to participate in the meeting but didn't require that the board allow her to vote.

Trump hosted the board meeting at the White House in a reminder of the influence he has held over the Kennedy Center during his second term. Shortly after returning to office last year, Trump ousted the center's previous leadership and replaced it with a hand-picked board of trustees that named him chairman. He also brought in Grenell, who served in a variety of capacities during Trump's first term, when the president mostly ignored the Kennedy Center.

The center's lineup has since included more Trump-friendly programming, including serving as the venue for the premiere of first lady Melania Trump's documentary, "Melania." The board also announced it had renamed the facility the Trump Kennedy Center, a change scholars and lawmakers say must be initiated by Congress, and physically added the president's name to the building's facade.

The fallout from the arts community was swift and intense. Actor Issa Rae, musician Bela Fleck and author Louise Penny were among the numerous artists who withdrew from appearances, while consultants such as musician Ben Folds and singer Renée Fleming resigned. Earlier this month, the executive director of the National Symphony Orchestra, Jean Davidson, left to head the Los Angeles-based Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts.

Without mentioning the abandoned performances, Trump said in February he would close the Kennedy Center to fix what he has described as a dilapidated building.

Ahead of the closure, Grenell warned staff about impending cuts that will leave "skeletal teams."

Flocas, Grenell's successor, had been serving as vice president of operations. According to his LinkedIn page, he joined the Kennedy Center in January 2024, during the Biden administration.

A center press release from the time describes him as "an experienced facilities management professional with a construction management background and an appreciation for whole building design principles."

Previous experience for Flocas listed on LinkedIn includes a handful of positions with the District of Columbia government, among them associate director of sustainability and energy and director of facilities management. He graduated from Louisiana State University in 2009 with a Bachelor of Science degree in construction management.

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## Duke heads into March Madness ranked No. 1 in AP Top 25, Purdue, St. John's back in top 10

By JOHN MARSHALL AP Sports Writer

Duke is the No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament and No. 1 in the final AP Top 25 of the regular season. The Blue Devils received 50 first-place votes from a 57-person media panel in The Associated Press men's basketball poll released Monday, a day after they were named the top overall seed in the NCAA Tournament.

No. 2 Arizona received seven first-place votes, with Michigan, Florida and Houston rounding out the top five. The Wolverines, the betting favorite to win the national championship, did not receive a first-place vote in the poll. The final rankings will be released April 7, a day after the national championship game.

No. 8 Purdue jumped 10 spots back into the top 10 after beating Michigan 80-72 in the Big Ten tournament title game.

No. 9 Virginia moved up a spots for its highest ranking since reaching No. 2 in 2022-23. No. 10 St. John's also returned to the top 10 after blowing out UConn in the Big East title game.

Duke maintained the top spot after adding a second straight Atlantic Coast Conference tournament title to its regular-season title. The Blue Devils were No. 1 over the final four weeks of the regular season, extending their all-time record to 151 weeks at No. 1.

Miami (Ohio)'s run in the AP Top 25 came to an end after its 87-83 loss to UMass in the Mid-American Conference Tournament. The RedHawks still made the NCAA Tournament and will play SMU in the First Four Wednesday in Dayton, Ohio, about an hour's drive from their Oxford campus.

Rising and falling

After the Boilermakers' big jump, No. 16 Vanderbilt climbed six places after reaching the SEC tournament title game.

No. 13 Illinois, No. 15 Nebraska and No. 20 Texas Tech had the biggest drops, each losing four places.

The Illini fell after blowing a 15-point lead in a 91-88 overtime loss to Wisconsin in the Big Ten Tournament. The Red Raiders dropped after being blown out by Iowa State in the Big 12 Tournament. The Cornhuskers lost by 16 to Purdue.

In and out

Miami (Ohio) was the only team to drop out of this week's poll.

The other Miami, the one in Florida, moved into the poll at No. 23 after reaching the ACC tournament semifinals. The Hurricanes are a No. 7 seed in the NCAA Tournament West Region, but got a tough draw, facing No. 10 Missouri in St. Louis, about 90 minutes from the Tigers' campus.

Conference watch

The Big Ten has six ranked teams while the Big 12, SEC and ACC have five apiece. The Big 12 has three of the top six.

The Big East and West Coast have two ranked teams each.

## Key Oscar moments: Paul Thomas Anderson and Amy Madigan wins, outstanding songs and sad goodbyes

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

This Oscar cycle's heavyweight battle is finally over. The politically charged action comedy "One Battle After Another" just managed to outmuscle Ryan Coogler's musically driven vampire thriller "Sinners."

It was a 3-hour and 40-minute whirl through cinema and celebration, with Michael B. Jordan winning best actor for "Sinners" and Jessie Buckley winning for "Hamnet," making her the first Irish performer to ever win in the category.

There was electricity when Autumn Durald Arkapaw became the first woman and Black person to win the cinematography award for "Sinners," asking all the women in the Dolby Theatre to stand up because moments like this don't happen without women "standing up for you and advocating for you."

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Here were some other show highlights:

The battle is over for one filmmaker

Paul Thomas Anderson, one of the most respected filmmakers of his generation, finally won an Oscar. Then he won another. Then he won for best picture.

He first won best adapted screenplay for "One Battle After Another" and then was crowned best director. "You make a guy work hard for this," he said. Anderson was back onstage for the night's final award — best picture.

"Let's have a martini. This is amazing," he said.

Anderson had been nominated 14 times previously, including five times for screenplays and three times for best director. His films include "Boogie Nights," "There Will Be Blood" and "Magnolia."

"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," Anderson said onstage after winning for his screenplay. "But also with the encouragement that they will be the generation that hopefully brings us some common sense and decency."

Even Cassandra Kulukundis, who served as the casting director on past Anderson films, hoped he would win an award himself while accepting the first new complete Oscar category in over two decades for "One Battle After Another."

She beat him to a win by just minutes.

Another long wait for Oscar hardware

Amy Madigan, the night's first winner, had to wait a long time to celebrate an Oscar win. The gap between her first-ever Oscar nomination and first win was 40 years — handing her the record wait for a best supporting actress.

Madigan's first Oscar nomination was for 1985's "Twice in a Lifetime," losing to Anjelica Huston. She won Sunday for playing an unrecognizable and utterly mesmerizing oddball aunt in "Weapons," a supernatural thriller about missing children. Madigan had earlier picked up wins at the Critics Choice and Actor Awards.

Aunt Gladys' smeared, heavy makeup, strange hair and large glasses became a popular internet meme and was even played up by Oscars host Conan O'Brien in his opening skit, looking like Gladys as he raced through appearances in other nominated movies chased by children.

On hearing her name, Madigan collapsed into the arms of her husband, actor Ed Harris. Onstage, she thanked film writer-director Zach Cregger for giving her a part in "Weapons" she could "grab by the throat." She last thanked "my beloved Ed," adding: "None of this would mean anything if he wasn't by my side."

A heavy goodbye to the Reiners

A stage of stars bid farewell to Rob Reiner, led by a longtime friend and colleague, Billy Crystal.

Crystal kicked off the in memoriam section by saying he met Reiner while cast as a best friend of Reiner's on "All in the Family" in 1975.

Reiner's movies included "This Is Spinal Tap," "Stand By Me," "When Harry Met Sally ...," "Misery," "A Few Good Men" and "The Princess Bride."

"My friend Rob's movies will last for lifetimes because they were about what makes us laugh and cry and what we aspire to be: Far better in his eyes, far kinder, far funnier and far more human," Crystal said.

Reiner was killed along with his wife, Michele Singer Reiner, in December. Their son, Nick Reiner, has been charged with two counts of murder.

After Crystal's speech, he revealed a stage filled with stars who shone in Reiner's films, including Meg Ryan, Christopher Guest, Michael McKean, Kathy Bates, Kiefer Sutherland, Demi Moore, Jerry O'Connell, Annette Bening, Mandy Patinkin, Fred Savage and Cary Elwes.

In memoriam and Redford

The in memoriam section then highlighted those lost during 2025, like Catherine O'Hara, Diane Keaton, Gene Hackman, Robert Duvall, Brigitte Bardot, Michael Madsen, Terence Stamp, Diane Ladd, Sally Kirkland, Tom Stoppard, Malcolm-Jamal Warner and Val Kilmer.

Barbra Streisand then stepped up to honor her co-star in "The Way We Were," Robert Redford.

"He was thoughtful and bold. I called him an intellectual cowboy who blazed his own trail, and won the

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Academy Award for best director, and I miss him now more than ever, even though he loved teasing me," Streisand said.

She then sang a snippet of "The Way We Were," which she last performed during the 2013 ceremony, when she sang it as an homage to the late composer Marvin Hamlisch.

Two stunning song performances

The Oscars had only two musical numbers, but they were Grammy-worthy.

Singer-actor Miles Caton and songwriter Raphael Saadiq performed the deeply bluesy, slinky song "I Lied to You" from "Sinners," joined by an ensemble that included Misty Copeland, Eric Gales, Buddy Guy, Brittany Howard, Christone "Kingfish" Ingram, Jayme Lawson, Li Jun Li, Bobby Rush, Shaboozey and Alice Smith in a tribute to the film's visual and musical style.

The camera swept in and among the writhing bodies in a rollicking, kinetic performance.

"KPop Demon Hunters" later celebrated its win as best animated feature by opening its performance of "Golden" with a fusion of traditional Korean instrumentalists and dance, with dancers in gold waving golden fabric flags. Then Ejae, Audrey Nuna and Rei Ami — the singing voices behind HUNTR/X in the film — belted out "Golden" as members of the audience waved light sticks.

Then "Golden" won the Oscar for best original song, a first for K-pop.

The coolest part was seeing dancers from each song appear in the other's, a kind of communication between Delta blues and Asian pop.

'Bridesmaids' give us a bouquet

Melissa McCarthy, Maya Rudolph, Rose Byrne, Kristen Wiig and Ellie Kemper celebrated 15 years after "Bridesmaids" hit theaters by showing everyone their funny bones haven't aged.

"Now, we are not good with numbers, but we figured out backstage that means we shot this movie in 1883," Wiig joked.

The group — presenting best original score and best sound — had fun at the expense of Stellan Skarsgård, Leonardo DiCaprio and Jacobi Jupe of "Hamnet."

They pretended to read messages from the crowd, including one from DiCaprio that accused Byrne of staring at him. "I have been staring at you," Byrne replied. "I thought you were somebody else."

Rudolph leaned into her dimwit persona when she wondered: "Earlier today, when I was counting my money, I asked myself, 'What is sound?'"

There was also a mini-"Avengers" reunion with Chris Evans and Robert Downey Jr. presenting best adapted screenplay. And a "Moulin Rouge!" reunion with Nicole Kidman and Ewan McGregor. And there was a Pullman family reunion when Bill teamed up with son, Jack.

Second time's a charm, Conan

Conan O'Brien hit almost every note on Sunday — savage, playful, heartfelt and dumb.

The second-time host predicted he'd be the last human Oscar MC. "Next year, it will be a Waymo with a tux," he joked.

He also had a jab at Timothée Chalamet, who got into hot water when he seemed to call ballet and opera dying art forms. "They're just mad you left out jazz," O'Brien quipped.

He reached for a Jeffrey Epstein joke when he noted that it was the first time since 2012 that there were no British actors nominated. "A British spokesperson said, 'Yeah, well, at least we arrest our pedophiles.'"

But he also got poetic and sweet when he noted that 31 countries across six continents were represented at the Oscars.

"Every film we salute is a product of thousands of people speaking different language, working hard to make something of beauty," O'Brien said. "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."

Of course, sometimes his bits fell flat, like the time he used a leaf blower onstage and a gag about memes with Leonardo DiCaprio.

## **NBA owners will work on expansion again next week with Vegas and Seattle the targets, AP sources say**

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

The NBA may move a step closer to adding teams in Seattle and Las Vegas next week when expansion — which has been a topic for some time — will again be discussed by the league's board of governors, two people with knowledge of the matter told The Associated Press on Monday.

A vote is planned on whether to go forward with those two cities as the sole expansion targets at this point, the people said.

The people spoke on condition of anonymity because those details were not released publicly.

It would take a three-fourths majority of governors to go forward, meaning 23 of the 30 teams would have to approve the motion. Owners are also expected to get an update next week on where the NBA and FIBA stand on plans for a new league in Europe, one of the people said.

ESPN first reported that the vote was planned.

Expansion being on the agenda is not a surprise: the board gathers for only a few meetings each year, and NBA Commissioner Adam Silver has said on multiple occasions that a decision will be made by the end of 2026 on whether the 30-team league will add one or two new franchises in the coming years.

"Not a secret, we're looking at this market in Las Vegas. We are looking at Seattle," Silver said in December, while in Las Vegas for the NBA Cup final. "We've looked at other markets as well. I'd say I want to be sensitive there about this notion that we're somehow teasing these markets, because I know we've been talking about it for a while."

There have been countless factors to consider, including what the expansion fee for a new franchise will be — it will be in the billions, with some in the league thinking a number exceeding \$6 billion is not out of the question — and what adding two more teams will mean for the on-court product.

Silver said last July that the league's owners wanted an "in-depth analysis" of what expansion would look like, including what it would mean for the dilution of talent and the potential effects — good and bad — of selling equity in the league.

If both Las Vegas and Seattle were added, it's also long been believed that an existing team would need to be moved from the current Western Conference list into the Eastern Conference to create two 16-team sides of the league. Geographically, Minnesota, Memphis and New Orleans would be the most logical candidates to go from West to East.

Seattle had a team until the SuperSonics were moved to Oklahoma City in 2008. Las Vegas has wanted a team for some time; Basketball Hall of Famer Magic Johnson is among the names most often mentioned as part of potential ownership if a team gets awarded there.

## **Oldest known whale recording could unlock mysteries of the ocean**

By PATRICK WHITTLE Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — A haunting whale song discovered on decades-old audio equipment could open up a new understanding of how the huge animals communicate, according to researchers who say it's the oldest such recording known.

The song is that of a humpback whale, a marine giant beloved by whale watchers for its docile nature and spectacular leaps from the water, and was recorded by scientists in March 1949 in Bermuda, said researchers at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in Falmouth, Massachusetts.

Just as significant is the sound of the surrounding ocean itself, said Peter Tyack, a marine bioacoustician and emeritus research scholar at Woods Hole. The ocean of the late 1940s was much quieter than the ocean of today, providing a different backdrop than scientists are used to hearing for whale song, he said.

The recovered recordings "not only allow us to follow whale sounds, but they also tell us what the ocean soundscape was like in the late 1940s," Tyack said. "That's very difficult to reconstruct otherwise."

A preserved recording from the 1940s can also help scientists better understand how new human-made sounds, such as increased shipping noise, affect the way whales communicate, Tyack said. Research pub-

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lished by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration states that whales can vary their calling behavior depending on noises in their environment.

The recording predates scientist Roger Payne's discovery of whale song by nearly 20 years. Woods Hole scientists on a research vessel at the time were testing sonar systems and performing acoustic experiments along with the U.S. Office of Naval Research when they captured the sound, said Ashley Jester, director of research data and library services at Woods Hole.

The scientists didn't know what they were hearing, but they decided to record and save the sounds anyway, Jester said.

"And they were curious. And so they kept this recorder running, and they even made time to make recordings where they weren't making any noise from their ships on purpose just to hear as much as they could," said Jester. "And they kept these recordings."

Woods Hole scientists discovered the song while digitizing old audio recordings last year. The recording was on a well-preserved disc created by a Gray Audograph, a kind of dictation machine used in the 1940s. Jester located the disc.

While the early underwater recording equipment used to capture the sound would be considered crude by today's standards, it was cutting-edge at the time, Jester said. And the fact that the sound is recorded on a plastic disc is significant because most recordings of the time were on tape, which has long since deteriorated, she said.

Whales' sound-making ability is critical to their survival and key to how they socialize and communicate. The sounds come in the form of clicks, whistles and calls, according to NOAA scientists who study them.

The sounds also allow the whales to find food, navigate, locate each other and understand their surroundings in the vast ocean, scientists say. Several species make repetitive sounds that resemble songs. Humpback whales, which can weigh more than 55,000 pounds (24,947 kilograms), are the ocean's most renowned singers, capable of complex vocalizations that can sound ethereal or even mournful.

The discovery of long-lost whale song from a quieter ocean could be a jumping-off point to better understanding the sounds the animals make today, said Hansen Johnson, a research scientist at the Anderson Cabot Center for Ocean Life at the New England Aquarium.

"And, you know, it's just beautiful to listen to and has really inspired a lot of people to be curious about the ocean, and care about ocean life in general," said Johnson, who was not involved in the research. "It's pretty special."

## Why France is bolstering military presence in the Middle East, as Macron prepares for postwar talks

By SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — France's government is bolstering the country's military presence in the Middle East, dispatching its aircraft carrier and other warships, while President Emmanuel Macron engages with key players in the conflict, including Iran, in a bid to position Paris for future diplomatic talks.

Macron said that France's military involvement is strictly "defensive" and aims to avoid making the country a party to the war. He reaffirmed that position after one French soldier was killed Thursday in a drone attack in Iraq.

"We are not at war with anyone," Macron said.

Still, the large-scale deployment of the French navy — which he described as "unprecedented" — has made France the European nation with the most prominent presence in the region.

Visiting the Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier last week, Macron said that its presence in the Mediterranean demonstrates "France's strength: a balancing power, a force for peace."

Here's what to know about Macron's strategy.

France's large naval deployment

Macron announced the deployment to the eastern Mediterranean and the wider Middle East of eight warships, two helicopter carriers and the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle with its 20

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Rafale fighter jets.

The French frigate Languedoc arrived off Cyprus, a fellow European Union member, to bolster anti-drone and anti-missile defenses. Cyprus and France signed a new strategic partnership in December. Macron also said that two French frigates have been dispatched to the Red Sea to help ensure maritime security and freedom of navigation.

Macron said that the warship deployment is intended to allow France "to respond to emergency situations" and evacuate French nationals if necessary.

France has more than 400,000 citizens in the Middle East — more than any other European country — including more than half in Israel and over 60,000 in the United Arab Emirates.

Other European nations, including Spain, Italy, the Netherlands and Greece, have deployed frigates in the region.

The French navy's swift deployment contrasts with the United Kingdom's delay in sending the HMS Dragon destroyer, which left Portsmouth, England, on March 10.

U.K. opposition parties have accused Prime Minister Keir Starmer's government of moving too slowly to protect British bases in Cyprus and allies in the Middle East.

The U.K. government also has sent Typhoon and F-35 fighter jets, helicopters and air defense systems to help intercept Iranian missiles and drones and protect British troops across the region, especially in Cyprus and Qatar and the country's partners in the Middle-East.

Defending Gulf allies

France has key defense agreements with several countries in the region, including Qatar, Kuwait and the UAE, where it maintains a permanent base in Abu Dhabi. France's military, which has air and naval forces there, doubled the number of Rafale fighter jets stationed on site to 12.

French authorities acknowledged that Rafale jets intercepted drones targeting the UAE since the beginning of the war.

"We stand by the side of our allies and our friends," Macron said during his visit to the Charles de Gaulle. "There have been some interceptions that have continued in recent days."

"We do so within the framework of our partnerships," he said, without providing further details.

French forces are also deployed in Jordan and Iraq.

On Thursday, one French soldier was killed and several others injured in a drone attack in the region of Irbil, in northern Iraq. They were training Iraqi units as part of a multinational counterterrorism mission in the country.

Former President François Hollande, who led France from 2012 to 2017, said that it was important for France to show it can protect its nationals and reassure its partners, but warned of the risks.

"We must be careful — it's always a risky operation — to make sure our warships are not targeted," Hollande said. "Because if they are attacked, we have to fire back."

Historic ties with Lebanon

Macron is leading a diplomatic effort to try to halt the conflict in Lebanon, where at least 850 people have been killed and hundreds of thousands displaced as the Hezbollah militant group entered a new round of fighting with Israel. Macron urged Hezbollah to stop fighting and called on Israel to renounce any ground offensive.

France supports the Lebanese military as authorities have pledged to "take control" of positions held by Hezbollah and assume full responsibility for security in the country, Macron said. Hezbollah's arsenal notably includes exploding drones, similar to the ones used by Iran.

France has traditionally been a key supporter of Lebanon, a former French protectorate, and maintains 800 troops in the U.N. peacekeeping force there. The French government provided the country with armored vehicles and operational military support.

France sent 60 tons of emergency aid to Lebanon last week on a humanitarian flight to Beirut, authorities said. The shipment included medicines, medical equipment, a mobile health unit, shelter materials, basic necessities and infant formula.

Maintaining contact with Iran

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Macron was the first Western leader to speak with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian since the war began.

He said he urged Iran to halt strikes against countries in the region. Since the phone call on March 8, this appeal had gone unanswered.

Macron stressed that "a diplomatic solution" is needed to end the escalation and said that he and Pezeshkian agreed to remain in contact.

Macron also spoke with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and U.S. President Donald Trump, though there were no signs of de-escalation.

France hopes diplomatic efforts could bear fruit once the most intense phase of the conflict subsides, which could take weeks or months.

Macron is also promoting an international effort to secure the Strait of Hormuz, a key energy corridor, so oil, gas and goods can flow freely again "when circumstances permit." He has suggested countries could use warships to escort tankers and container ships once fighting eases.

Political analyst Bertrand Badie, an international relations professor at Sciences Po Paris, said Macron has long sought to assert France's role on the global stage.

With low approval ratings at home and about a year left in his term, Macron may have the most to gain among European leaders by pursuing diplomacy, Badie said.

"At this point, we are forced to scale back our expectations — drastically," he said. "From a diplomatic standpoint, what leverage does France really have?"

"My assessment is that this crisis cannot be resolved by French remedies," Badie said. "There is no point in having any illusions."

## **UConn, UCLA, Texas and South Carolina, all No. 1 seeds, top final AP Top 25 before March Madness**

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

UConn, UCLA, Texas and South Carolina were the top four teams in the final regular-season Associated Press women's basketball Top 25 released Monday, matching the No. 1 seeds in the NCAA Tournament that begins this week.

The No. 1 Huskies were the overall top seed in the NCAA bracket announced Sunday night. The team that was No. 1 in the poll heading into March Madness has won the NCAA championship 17 times out of 43 early March polls dating to 1982, the first year of the women's tournament.

The AP has done a final poll after the NCAA Tournament the past two seasons so there is one more poll this season on April 6.

The No. 2 Bruins picked up one more first place vote this week, giving them three from the 31-member national media panel. UConn received the other 28. With so few games last week that involved ranked teams — only UConn and Princeton played and both won — the Top 25 didn't change much from the week before.

LSU, Vanderbilt, Iowa and Duke followed No. 3 Texas and No. 4 South Carolina. Michigan and West Virginia rounded out the top 10 teams. All will host NCAA Tournament games this weekend. West Virginia flipped places with Ohio State, moving up to No. 11.

Conference supremacy

The SEC has the most teams in the Top 25 with eight. The Big Ten is next with seven. The Big 12 and ACC each have four. The Ivy League and Big East each have one.

Games of the week

The NCAA Tournament opens with First Four games taking place on Wednesday and Thursday.

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## China warns Trump's latest tariff moves could damage trade ties

By KEN MORITSUGU and JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — China warned Monday that U.S. President Donald Trump's latest tariff moves could harm the countries' trade relationship, at the end of high-level talks in Paris.

Li Chenggang, China's international trade representative, said the Chinese side had expressed serious concern about trade investigations into manufacturing in foreign countries that the Trump administration launched after the U.S. Supreme Court struck down its earlier tariffs.

"We are concerned that the possible results of such investigations may interfere with or damage the hard-won and stable China-U.S. economic and trade relations," Li told journalists. He said they discussed the possible extension of tariffs and non-tariff measures on both sides, and that China expressed concern over likely uncertainty as the U.S. adjusts its measures. He said both sides agreed to make efforts to keep the tariffs stable.

The meeting was meant to prepare for Trump's planned trip to China in about two weeks, though the president has warned that it could be delayed. Li did not address that, and did not take questions.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, who led the U.S. delegation in Paris, said the talks "were constructive and they show the stability in the relationship," and noted: "The purpose of these meetings is to prevent any retaliation."

Trump's visit to China would be the first for a U.S. president since he went in his first term in 2017. It would come five months after he met President Xi Jinping in the South Korean city of Busan.

The Iran war has emerged as a potential stumbling block as the U.S. and China were patching up relations following a tariff war in which import taxes soared to triple digits. The two sides later agreed to a one-year truce.

Trump has suggested he may delay the much-anticipated China visit as he seeks Beijing's help to reopen the Strait of Hormuz and calm oil prices that have soared during the Iran war.

But Bessent said any postponement wouldn't be to pressure China on that issue.

"If the president's visit is postponed, it would have nothing to do with the Chinese making a commitment to the Straits of Hormuz," he told journalists.

"It would obviously be in their interest to do so, but a postponement would not be as a result of any asks from the president not being met," Bessent added. "The postponement, if it happens, would be because the commander in chief of the United States military believes that he should stay in the United States while this war is being prosecuted."

U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer, accompanying Bessent, said the talks sketched out "the general terms of a work plan" for a Trump-Xi meeting so that it could produce "potential deliverables."

He said they also covered the trade investigations that concern China.

"We started these talks, really, by giving them a preview of what we're doing on U.S. trade policy as we adjust to the Supreme Court," Greer said. "Remember: The president's trade policy hasn't changed. Our tools may change, and we're conducting these investigations. We don't want to prejudge them, and we had a good conversation with our counterparts about that process."

## Aaron Judge hails World Baseball Classic crowds as 'bigger and better than the World Series'

By RONALD BLUM AP Baseball Writer

MIAMI (AP) — On a night when All-Stars and future Hall of Famers thrilled fans and each other until the final out, Aaron Judge proclaimed the World Baseball Classic had grown into the sport's biggest event.

"The World Series I was in, the crowd here, the crowd we had when we played against Mexico, it's bigger and better than the World Series," the U.S. captain said after a 2-1 semifinal win over the Dominican Republic that came down to Sunday night's final pitch. "The passion that these fans have, representing their country, representing some of their favorite players, there's nothing like it."

American tradition emphasizing understatement on a team led by Judge and Bryce Harper was show-

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cased against Latin flair on a side featuring Juan Soto and Vladimir Guerrero Jr. When Junior Caminero homered against Paul Skenes to put the Dominicans ahead in the second inning, he celebrated with an overhand bat flip.

In the sixth tournament of an event that started in 2006, the game featured starting lineups featuring 17 All-Stars totaling 56 selections among the 20 starters. They had won five MVP awards, one Cy Young, five Rookies of the Year and three batting titles.

Before a crowd of 36,337 at IoanDepot park, the U.S. overcame the deficit on fourth-inning home runs by Gunnar Henderson off Luis Severino and Roman Anthony against Gregory Soto.

Anthony, at 21 the youngest American player, had bought a ticket for the 2023 WBC final in Miami and watched from the seats as Japan beat the U.S. 3-2.

"Coming to the WBC here, you dream of representing this country and being here the next time around," Anthony said.

American relievers allowed two hits over 4 2/3 scoreless innings, capped by Mason Miller topping 100 mph with 13 of 22 pitches. Miller's last appeared to be low for ball four to Geraldo Perdomo but plate umpire Cory Blaser emphatically signaled strike three.

"Just a game we'll remember forever, right?" U.S. manager Mark DeRosa said. "We understood this was going to be a talked-about game, probably one of the most watched games of all time."

Dynamic defense was commonplace.

With the U.S. trailing by a run in the third, Judge threw a 95.7 mph strike from right field to third base to cut down Fernando Tatis Jr. for the inning's final out. Judge then made a diving backland catch to rob Soto, his former New York Yankees teammate, in the fourth.

Julio Rodríguez denied Judge a home run with a leaping catch at the center-field wall in the fifth, 407 feet from the plate.

"I was like, OK, maybe we got a shot here," Judge recalled. "But hit it to a guy like J-Rod, who's one of the best if not the best center fielder in the game, he's going to make exciting plays like that in big moments."

Shortstop Bobby Witt ranged to the right field side of the infield to snag Soto's slow bouncer in the fifth, scrambled to back to touch second base and made an off-balance throw to first for an inning-ending double play. One inning later, Witt threw out Manny Machado at first from the outfield grass.

Pitching moments were memorable, too.

Dominican starter Luis Severino stranded runners at second and third in the third inning when he struck out Judge and Kyle Schwarber, and Skenes escaped a bases-loaded jam in the fourth when Austin Wells flied out.

Wells doubled with one out in the seventh and the relatively slow-footed catcher was held at third on Perdomo's single to Crow-Armstrong in center. David Bednar then struck out Tatis Jr. and Ketel Marte on breaking balls below the strike zone.

Before Miller got the strike three call in the ninth, Perdomo had fouled off a pair of full-count pitches.

"The whole world saw in two teams some of the best players in the game," said Dominican manager Albert Pujols, a likely future Hall of Famer.

Rosters included 18 of the 41 players who received MVP votes last year.

Judge gave a postgame speech to teammates, looking ahead to Tuesday's championship against Venezuela or Italy. He had perceived a special night Sunday from the start.

"You get chills standing there on the line, hearing them announce all the names," he said. "It was like an All-Star team they got over there."

## Iranian women's team leaves Malaysia for Oman after asylum reversal

By EILEEN NG and ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP) — The Iranian women's soccer team left Malaysia on Monday night for Oman, ending days of uncertainty after five 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 squad spent several hours at the airport checking in and waiting for their flight. They declined to speak to reporters. Some chatted while others used their mobile phones. A lone player knelt several times and prayed on a mat before boarding the plane. Iran embassy staff at the airport also refused to comment.

The Asian Football Confederation general secretary, Windsor John, earlier told The Associated Press the team's departure 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 the confederation is satisfied that the women will be safe back in Iran, Windsor said 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, which allow those who arrived on a valid visa and want to seek asylum in Australia to stay in the country permanently.

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.

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.

The two players 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

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sportspeople 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.

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

## 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 of 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

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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 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 Iranian Red Crescent 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.

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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.

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

## Today in History: March 17

### White South Africans vote to end apartheid

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Tuesday, March 17, the 76th day of 2026. There are 289 days left in the year. This is St. Patrick's Day.

Today in history:

On March 17, 1992, white South Africans voted 68.7% to 31.3% to end over 40 years of apartheid in a national referendum. (Voters of all races were allowed to vote two years later in the general election that resulted in Nelson Mandela becoming president.)

Also on this date:

In 1762, New York held its first St. Patrick's Day parade.

In 1776, the Revolutionary War Siege of Boston ended as British forces evacuated the city.

In 1950, scientists at the University of California, Berkeley, announced that they had created a new radioactive element they named "californium."

In 1959, the nuclear-powered USS Skate became the first submarine to break through the ice and to surface at the North Pole.

In 1969, Golda Meir took office as prime minister in Israel, beginning a term that would last through five crucial years in the nation's history.

In 1992, a truck bomb destroyed the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires, Argentina, killing 29 people and injuring more than 200; the Islamic Jihad Organization claimed responsibility.

In 2003, edging to the brink of war, U.S. President George W. Bush gave Iraqi President Saddam Hussein 48 hours to leave his country. Iraq rejected Bush's ultimatum, saying a U.S. attack to force Saddam from power would be "a grave mistake."

In 2010, Michael Jordan became the first ex-player to become a majority owner in the NBA as the league's Board of Governors unanimously approved his \$275 million bid to buy the Charlotte Bobcats from Bob Johnson.

In 2016, SeaWorld Entertainment said it would stop breeding killer whales and making them perform crowd-pleasing tricks, bowing to years of public pressure.

Today's Birthdays: Civil rights activist Myrlie Evers-Williams is 93. Singer-songwriter John Sebastian (The Lovin' Spoonful) is 82. Author William Gibson is 78. Actor Patrick Duffy is 77. Actor Kurt Russell is 75. Actor Gary Sinise is 71. NBA executive Danny Ainge is 67. Actor Rob Lowe is 62. Rock musician Billy Corgan (Smashing Pumpkins) is 59. Olympic soccer gold medalist Mia Hamm is 54. Singer-TV personality Tamar Braxton is 49. Singer-songwriter Hozier is 36. Actor John Boyega is 34. Olympic swimming gold medalist Katie Ledecky is 29.