

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Wednesday, March 18

Senior Menu: Ham, roasted potatoes, green beans, fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza.

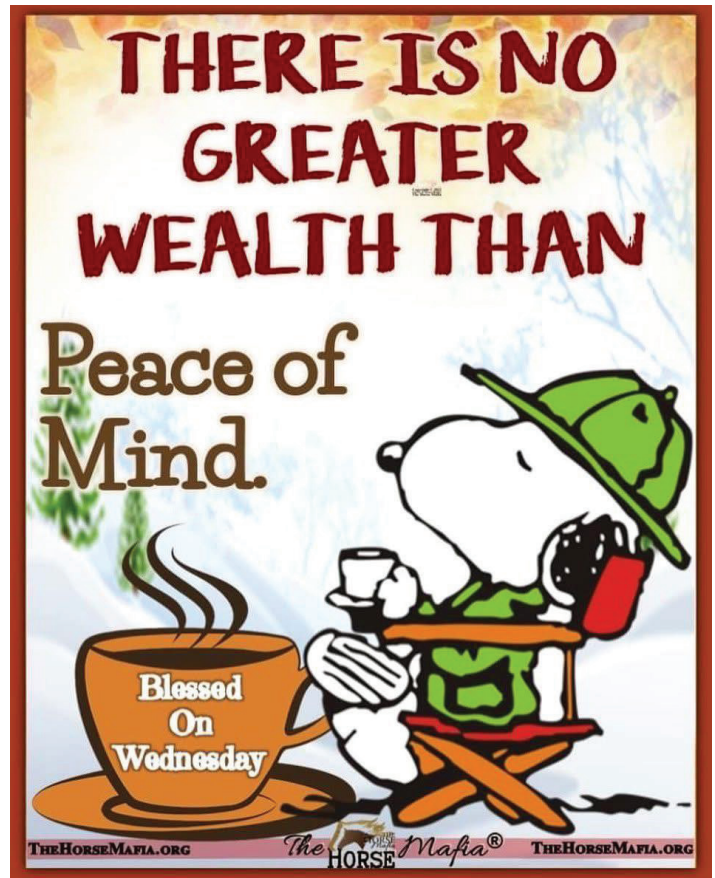
School Lunch: Pizza crunchers.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.; Soup Supper (League hosts), 6 p.m.; League, 6:30 p.m.; Lenten Service, 7 p.m.

## Groton Daily Independent

PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

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



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.

## Thursday, March 19

Senior Menu: Salisbury steak, mashed potatoes, carrots, fruit, whole wheat bread.

NO SCHOOL - Spring Break

State A Boys Basketball Tournament in Rapid City

Pickleball, 5:30 p.m., Elementary gym

## Friday, March 20

Senior Menu: Baked fish, baked potato, antigua blend, fruit, whole wheat bread.

NO SCHOOL - Spring Break

State A Boys Basketball Tournament in Rapid City

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

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# 1440

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

## Prairie State Primaries

Lt. Gov. Juliana Stratton (D) defeated Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi (D, IL-8) and Rep. Robin Kelly (D, IL-2) in yesterday's competitive Democratic primary to succeed retiring Sen. Dick Durbin, who has held the seat since 1997 and is the No. 2 Senate Democrat. Stratton, Illinois' first Black lieutenant governor and a key ally of Gov. JB Pritzker (D), will face former state Republican Party chair Don Tracy in November.

Stratton ran as a progressive, backing Medicare for All, a \$25 minimum wage, and expanding abortion rights, while also calling to abolish ICE. She also supports the John Lewis Voting Rights Act and tighter gun laws, framing the race as a fight against "Trump-style" politics. The contest likely determines who will hold the seat, since Illinois is a solidly Democratic state in federal races and has not elected a Republican statewide since 2014.

The race was one of several statewide contests that drew a record \$62M in combined spending, with over \$50M spent on TV ads.

## Afghanistan-Pakistan War

At least 400 people were killed and more than 250 wounded after an alleged Pakistani strike on a drug rehabilitation center in Afghanistan's capital, Kabul. Pakistan denied striking the civilian site; if confirmed, it would mark the deadliest incident since war broke out between the neighboring countries last month.

Pakistan launched airstrikes in Afghanistan's Kandahar and Kabul Feb. 26 after accusing Afghanistan's Taliban government of supporting militants that carried out attacks on its soil. That includes a Feb. 6 suicide bombing that killed more than 30 people. Earlier this month, Pakistan targeted Taliban operations at Bagram Air Base, formerly operated by the US.

Separately, the US' National Counterterrorism Center director, Joe Kent, said he would resign yesterday over the US' war with Iran, asserting Iran posed "no imminent threat" and blaming Israeli pressure for the conflict. Israel, meanwhile, said it has killed Iran's security chief, among other senior leaders.

## A Smashing Discovery

Physicists probing the fundamental nature of matter announced the discovery of a new proton-like particle, shedding light on the forces that hold the universe's smallest objects together. The newly made proton was observed after smashing particles together at nearly the speed of light at Europe's Large Hadron Collider.

Together with neutrons and electrons, protons are the constituent parts of atoms (the number of protons determines which element an atom is). Protons (and neutrons) can be further broken down into quarks—almost infinitesimally small particles that come in a wide variety of flavors. Regular protons are made of two "up" quarks and one "down" quark, while the new proton has its "up" quarks replaced by "charm" quarks. The result is a new proton four times heavier than its standard counterpart.

Measuring its short-lived behavior is expected to help scientists refine the strong nuclear force, responsible for holding subatomic particles together.

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## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

FIFA rejects Iran's request to move its World Cup games to Mexico amid ongoing war with the US. Two female Iranian soccer players who claimed asylum in Australia join training session with Brisbane Roar team.

Charli XCX, Lorde, Smashing Pumpkins will headline this year's Lollapalooza music festival in Chicago from July 30 to Aug. 2; tickets go on sale tomorrow.

Second set of First Four games for men's NCAA tournament begin tonight; No. 11 Miami (Ohio), which went undefeated in the regular season but was criticized for a weak schedule, takes on No. 11 SMU.

## Science & Technology

OpenAI releases ChatGPT-5.4 mini and nano, focused on coding tasks and AI agents to perform simple tasks.

Astrophysicists determine the solar dynamo—the flow of hot ionized gas within the sun that generates its magnetic fields—sits roughly 125,000 miles below the sun's surface.

Three common anesthetics have the same mechanism in the brain, study finds; results could lead to a universal approach to monitoring patients while unconscious during procedures.

## Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +0.3%, Dow +0.1%, Nasdaq +0.5%) ahead of today's Federal Reserve interest rate decision.

Prediction market Kalshi faces criminal charges as Arizona alleges the platform allows betting on political elections, is a de facto illegal gambling operation.

Tesla to purchase \$4.3B worth of battery cells from LG Energy; will be manufactured at a Michigan plant previously built for an LG-General Motors partnership.

## Politics & World Affairs

Senate votes to open debate on the SAVE America Act, which would require voters to provide photo ID to cast ballots and proof of citizenship to register for federal elections; debate is expected to last several days.

Suspected meteor falls over Cleveland, causing a sonic boom across northeast Ohio.

House Oversight Committee chair subpoenas Attorney General Pam Bondi over files related to deceased sex criminal Jeffrey Epstein.

Need a **Babysitter** or **House Cleaner?**

🧸 🍼 🧸 🧹 🧽 🧤 🧼

♥️ **Babysitting Available!**

**House Cleaning Offered!** 🧹

**Text Jeslyn Kosel at (605)-290-7821**

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

🏠 🚗

The advertisement features a colorful illustration of a yellow bucket filled with cleaning supplies (spray bottles, gloves, sponge, brush) and a teddy bear with a baby bottle and stacking toys. Below the main text are three banners: a red one for babysitting, a teal one for house cleaning, and an orange one with the contact number. At the bottom, a red car is shown driving on a road towards a house, with the text 'I'm in Groton but am willing to drive to nearby towns!' written in a cursive font.

## South Dakota's elderly and disabled individuals have until April 1 to apply for property tax relief

PIERRE, S.D. – Elderly and disabled South Dakotans have until April 1, 2026, to apply for property tax relief under South Dakota's Assessment Freeze for the Elderly and Disabled Program.

Under the program, a qualifying homeowner's property assessment is prevented from increasing for tax purposes. This means that if a home's value increases, the homeowner will continue to pay tax on the former (lower) value.

To be eligible for the Assessment Freeze for the Elderly and Disabled Program, individuals must meet the following qualifications:

Have an income of less than \$56,595 for a single-member household (Only one individual in the household) or less than \$66,885 for a multiple-member household.

Be 65 years of age or older or disabled (as defined by the Social Security Act)

Have been an owner of an owner-occupied single-family dwelling and a resident of South Dakota for five years, unless the assessment freeze was received in the previous year; and

Have resided in the home for at least 200 days in the previous calendar year.

A surviving spouse may still qualify if other eligibility requirements are satisfied. The valuation limit for the program is \$514,500 of full and true value, meaning that properties valued above the limit are not eligible unless the applicant has previously qualified.

Applications must be submitted to your local county treasurer's office by the April 1 deadline. Applications are available at your local county treasurer's office or can be printed from the Department of Revenue's website at <https://sddor.seamlessdocs.com/f/pt38>. For more information, please visit <https://dor.sd.gov/individuals/taxes/property-tax/relief-programs/#freeze> or call us at (800) 829-9188 option 2.



## Tastad, Larsen presented with Melvin Jones Fellowship Award

District Governor Lion Reid Christopherson of Garretson was a special guest at a recent Groton Lions Club meeting, where he helped recognize two outstanding members.

Christopherson presented Lion Alfred "Topper" Tastad and Lion Nancy Larsen with Melvin Jones Fellowship Awards, the highest form of recognition awarded by Lions Clubs International Foundation (LCIF). Named in honor of Lions Clubs International founder Melvin Jones, the award recognizes individuals who have demonstrated exceptional humanitarian service and dedication to the ideals of Lionism.

Lion Larsen first joined the Groton Lions Club on Oct. 1, 1987, serving until April 1, 2007. She later rejoined on June 1, 2013, and continues to serve the club and community today. Lion Tastad joined the Groton Lions Club on Aug. 8, 2013, and remains an active and dedicated member.

Christopherson is pictured with Tastad and Larsen following the presentation of their awards. (Photo by Susie Easthouse)

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**Groton Lions and members of HOSA filled an estimated 1200 Easter eggs on Thursday, March 12th. The Easter egg hunt will be Saturday, March 28th at 10am at the Groton City Park. Pictured around the table are Scott Hanlon, Reid Christopherson, Dave Pigors, Nancy Larson, Brenda McCarthy and Leeann Harrell. (Photo by Susie Easthouse)**



**The young ladies from HOSA that helped are pictured above, from left to right: Mya Feser, Kyleigh Kroll, Abby Fjeldheim, Kylie Rose, Makenna Krause, Brooklyn Spanier. (Photo by Susie Easthouse)**

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## GRADUATION CARDS DESIGNED & PRINTED WHILE YOU WAIT!

Have your graduation cards created at the  
**Groton  
Independent Office**

No ordering online.  
No waiting weeks.  
No shipping delays.

- ✓ Sit down.
- ✓ Help design it.
- ✓ Approve it on the spot.
- ✓ And walk out with your cards in your hands!

★ **ONLY \$50 FOR 100 CARDS** ★



Text Paul at **605-397-7460**  
to set up your appointment today!

*Celebrate your senior. Shop local. Get it done the easy way.*

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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 Insurance - JR Johnson, 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, Heartland Energy, 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, Ryan Likness Agency, S & S Lumber, Spanier Custom Harvesting, The MeatHouse, Thunder Seed - John Wheeting, Weber Landscaping, Weismantel Agency.**

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What can **\$20**  
get you?



for  
**SENIOR  
CITIZENS**

*Open 24/7*

**GDI Living**



**Fitness**

or anyone using physical therapy

15 N Main • Ste. 101

**BEST  
RATES  
AROUND!**

### ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP

Student: \$29.82 per month or \$255.60 per year  
Single: \$35.15 per month or \$319.50 per year  
2-Person: \$55.45 per month or \$575.10 per year  
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



Call or Text Paul at 605/397-7460  
Call or Text Tina at 605/397-7285

**Same rates for several years!**

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## Thunder at the Fair Truck and Tractor Pull Returns

HURON, S.D. – The South Dakota State Fair is excited to announce that Thunder at the Fair Truck and Tractor Pull, sponsored by American Bank & Trust, is returning. The Truck and Tractor pull will be held on Monday, September 7, 2026, at 1 P.M. CT.

Fans can expect an exciting afternoon featuring the 2026 Case IH Thunder in the Dirt Outlaw Pulling Series. The series will showcase five national classes: Super Farm Tractors, Light Pro Stock Tractors, Light Super Stocks, NA 2WD, and Light Limited Mod Tractors. Competitors from across the Midwest will go head-to-head for top honors and championship points.

“The energy and intensity of the truck and tractor pull are unmatched,” said Peggy Besch, South Dakota State Fairgrounds Manager. “We can’t wait to see those engines roar and the grandstand packed with fans enjoying every moment. It’s powerful, it’s exciting, and it’s the perfect way to wrap up the 2026 State Fair!”

Ticket presale for backrest signage holders and Friends of the Fair runs Monday, May 11, through Thursday, May 14. Tickets go on sale to the general public at 8:00 A.M. CT on Tuesday, May 19. Pricing and ticket information can be found at [www.sdstatefair.com](http://www.sdstatefair.com).

The backrest signage program is an advertising program allowing businesses or individuals to put signage on a backrest in the grandstand. Backrest holders can purchase State Fair grandstand tickets for their corresponding signage area before general ticket sales. Additional information and pricing can be found at [sdstatefair.com](http://sdstatefair.com).

Friends of the Fair is a program through the State Fair Foundation offering a variety of benefits, including early bird access to State Fair VIP table sales, presale access to grandstand reserved seating and standing room tickets for the State Fair, complimentary daily gate admission passes, and recognition on the State Fair website.

Thunder at the Fair Truck and Tractor Pull, sponsored by American Bank & Trust, joins previously announced Jake Owen welcomed by Legend Seeds, Red Wilk Construction Tuff Hedeman Bull Bash, and Nate Smith welcomed by Pioneer for the grandstand line-up.

The 2026 South Dakota State Fair kicks off on Channel Seeds Opening Day, Wednesday, September 2, and runs through Monday, September 7. For more information, contact the State Fair office at 800-529-0900, visit [www.sdstatefair.com](http://www.sdstatefair.com) or check it out on Facebook, Instagram, and X.

## 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.

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## State A Tournament in Rapid City



### #1 - The Monument Summit Arena

	1 Sioux Falls Christian	20-1	3/19 11:00 AM MT
	8 St. Thomas More	17-5	


### #2 - The Monument Summit Arena

	4 Hamlin	20-3	3/19 12:45 PM MT
	5 Groton Area	18-4	

### #3 - The Monument Summit Arena

	2 West Central	22-0	3/19 5:00 PM MT
	7 Cheyenne-Eagle Butte	20-3	

### #4 - The Monument Summit Arena

	3 Clark/Willow Lake	20-2	3/19 6:45 PM MT
	6 Stanley County	20-2	



Top team on bracket is home team and wears white uniforms



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### **Creating, sharing of deepfakes will be a felony under South Dakota bill now signed into law**

**Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden also signs bills on mandatory reporters, protection order records**

**BY: JOHN HULT**

South Dakota Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden signed a bill into law Monday that makes it a felony crime to create, possess or share computer-generated "deepfakes" of unwilling people in states of nudity or engaging in pornographic acts.

The bill was one of 11 public safety bills Rhoden signed Monday.

The bill on computer-generated pornography was proposed by Attorney General Marty Jackley. Two years ago, Jackley successfully pushed for a bill to make the creation, possession and distribution of computer-generated child pornography a felony crime. Both laws are a reflection of the rapidly expanding capabilities of generative artificial intelligence.

Billionaire Elon Musk faced blowback last year when users of his X social media platform asked its Grok AI tool to create nude photos of women and girls and post them in replies to the victims' own posts.

It's already a crime, punishable by up to a year in jail, to take or distribute photos of non-consenting adults in the nude or engaged in sexual activity. Under the terms of Senate Bill 41, the creation, possession or sharing of deepfakes of non-consenting adults would be a higher-level crime, punishable by up to two years in prison.

SB 41's provisions will be added to the state's existing law on non-consensual recording and photographing on July 1.

Also among the 11 bills signed on Monday, all of which take effect July 1:

**House Bill 1187:** This bill will require coaches of school activities to report concerns of child abuse or neglect, adding them to the state's existing list of mandatory abuse reporters that already includes teachers, doctors, counselors, nurses and police officers, among others. The bill's sponsor initially wanted to include all coaches, but concerns about pressure on volunteer coaches of non-sanctioned activities led lawmakers to limit the requirement to school activity coaches.

**Senate Bill 42:** In 2024, lawmakers voted to remove felony penalties for first- and second-offense ingestion of controlled substances like methamphetamine, cocaine or fentanyl. The law had been among the strictest in the U.S. SB 42 makes first- and second-offense ingestion a felony again, but only for inmates and people on parole. It also enhances penalties for the use or distribution of drugs in correctional institutions. The bill, proposed by Attorney General Jackley, came in part as a response to the eight overdose deaths that took place in South Dakota prisons in 2025.

**Senate Bill 44:** Another of Jackley's bills, this one makes it easier for investigators to get subpoenas to search electronic records in cases involving human trafficking or crimes against children. Under this law, police can ask a judge in Pierre to sign off on such investigations anywhere in South Dakota. The state's Internet Crimes Against Children task force is headquartered in Pierre.

**House Bill 1108:** This bill specifies that applications for protection orders will be sealed from public view if the protection order is dismissed without a hearing, or if a judge determines that the order was sought to harass another person and has no basis in fact. Protection order applications, which include the petitioner's unverified allegations against the person from whom they're seeking protection, are currently public records. The bill applies retroactively to all protection order applications dismissed without a hearing.

Senate Bill 137: This bill restricts legal actions commonly referred to as “Strategic Litigation against Public Participation,” or SLAPP lawsuits, designed to punish those who participate in public discourse. The South Dakota News Media Association’s director and two newspaper publishers testified in favor of the bill, noting that media organizations can be dragged into costly and frivolous disputes by deep-pocketed groups or individuals who dislike their coverage. The law makes it easier to get a case dismissed before the discovery process, which is the step in litigation during which parties demand information from the other side.

As of Monday afternoon, Rhoden had signed 173 bills into law and vetoed one. The 2026 legislative session ended Thursday, except for a day on March 30 to consider vetoes.

*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.*

## For Sunshine Week, five things to know about open government in South Dakota

by David Bordewyk

This is Sunshine Week, a national observance highlighting the importance of openness and transparency in government at all levels.

South Dakota NewsMedia Association and our partner members — the newspapers and digital news outlets across the state — have long been supporters of Sunshine Week. This week represents a nationwide nonpartisan collaboration among groups in journalism, civic, education, government and private sectors.

In South Dakota, here are five things to know about open government and freedom of information laws.

1. The South Dakota open meetings laws brochure is an excellent guide to understanding the laws that direct government boards and commissions on how to conduct their official meetings in public, when they can meet privately in executive session and how the public may participate in a public meeting. You can find a copy of the brochure on the South Dakota attorney general’s website ([atg.sd.gov](http://atg.sd.gov)). Under the “Legal Resources” tab, click on “Open Government.”

2. The South Dakota Open Meetings Commission was created in 2004 to provide a way for citizens’ complaints about alleged violations of the open meetings laws to be heard. Over the years, the commission has reviewed dozens of cases and has rendered decisions that have helped provide a better understanding of the open meetings laws as well as guidance for improving the laws legislatively. Learn more about the commission on the open government page of the attorney general’s website.

3. Open records laws help define what is publicly accessible and what is not with records, documents and files kept by government. Given the vast amount and types of information that the government has, as you can imagine, these laws are numerous and complex. Many of them can be found in one chapter of the state’s code of laws – Chapter 1-27. It’s important to know that the fundamental presumption is that all government information is open and accessible to everyone, unless otherwise expressly prohibited in statute (see SDCL 1-27-1.1).

4. Like the Open Meetings Commission, which hears complaints about open meetings laws, there is also a process for the public to appeal if their request for government information has been denied. You don’t need to hire an attorney to use the process, and from time to time it has led to records denials being overturned. To learn more about how you can make an open records appeal, click on the “public records” link found on the open government page of the attorney general’s website.

5. Finally, know this: South Dakota has a long way to go with robust and meaningful open government. Our open meetings and open records laws are weaker than those of other states. Beyond the laws themselves, there has long been a mindset in government in South Dakota to say no first when someone asks for government records, to go behind closed doors when discussing official business during official public meetings, and to otherwise pay lip service to these laws because the penalties provided are nothing more

than a slap on the wrist. I say this as someone who has worked over the years with many elected officials and others to improve our open government laws and have always appreciated their willingness to do so. We've made progress, but there is much more that needs to be done.

This election year is a good time to let candidates for public office know you want better, stronger open government laws in our state and that you want them to approach their duties, if elected, with a mindset that the public's right to know comes first. That would be a win for more sunshine in South Dakota.

*David Bordewyk is executive director of the South Dakota NewsMedia Association, which represents the state's newspapers and digital news outlets.*

## **After fights over social studies standards, activists come for math** **Model standards produced by right-leaning education advocates helped spark a battle in South Dakota that could spread to other states**

**BY: STEVEN YODER, THE HECHINGER REPORT**

Susan Gilkerson, a math teacher and school bus driver, stood before a South Dakota education board and issued a warning.

The proposed math standards the board was considering — just 36 pages, less than half the length of standards adopted in 2018 — were so scant that teachers won't know how to use them, Gilkerson said. The existing standards detail not just which math concepts should be taught but also the specific skills students need to demonstrate to show they understand them, said Gilkerson, who teaches in the rural Oldham-Ramona-Rutland district.

"When I talk to my students, I want them to understand it," she said of a concept like the Pythagorean theorem. But the new standards contain little guidance on how students can demonstrate they grasp that math concept or countless others, she said.

Joseph Graves, South Dakota's education secretary, countered: Teachers and parents don't understand the current standards because they're so complicated. "Our whole goal was to simplify, simplify, simplify," Graves said.

That exchange this past October marked the opening salvo in an escalating battle over South Dakota's math standards. One source the department consulted in creating its new draft — part of a review that happens every seven years — was a brand-new set of model math standards produced by the National Association of Scholars, a conservative group on the front lines of the education culture wars. The group's document, named the Archimedes Standards for the ancient Greek mathematician, urges states to do what South Dakota is trying with its standards rewrite: eliminate Common Core math.

Almost from the time of their introduction in 2009, the Common Core State Standards — intended to create a set of academic expectations for students across the country — have prompted backlash from those who disliked both the content and the idea that standards supported by the federal government were usurping a role traditionally left to states. Now, some of the same groups that have criticized schools and universities for diversity efforts and history instruction that embraces the contributions of people from marginalized groups are turning their attention to the math standards.

Math, with its black-and-white rules and rigid structure, might seem to be beyond politics. But the National Association of Scholars says the Common Core has injected too much confusion into math education and lacks rigor. The group aims to instead introduce more mental math and pare down the number of words used to describe the knowledge that students should be taught at each grade level.

Supporters of the current standards say that shortening them eliminates useful information that teachers can use to guide how they teach. And there's no proof that changing the standards in this way will actually move the needle on math achievement, they say.

"Simpler doesn't necessarily mean more rigorous," said Jon Star, an education professor at Harvard's Graduate School of Education.

All but five states initially adopted Common Core, a state-led initiative developed by a bipartisan group

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of policymakers, scholars and educators. But it soon faced pushback from conservatives and liberals alike.

Parents in blue states, troubled by what they saw as Common Core's excessive focus on testing, started opting out of core-aligned annual state tests. Red-state politicians and tea party activists protested that Common Core intruded on state control of education; the Obama administration's support for the standards intensified that opposition.

As Common Core was politicized, many states started revising, reviewing or pulling away from the standards altogether. In releasing the Archimedes Standards last June, the National Association of Scholars wants more to follow their lead.

The 39-year-old organization has focused in recent years on revising state standards, which it says are "the single most influential documents in America's education systems," affecting curriculum, teaching training, textbook content and more. It started in 2022 with social studies standards, releasing model standards that call liberty an "American birthright" and describe civics instruction advanced by mainstream groups like the National Council for the Social Studies as a "recruitment tool of the progressive left."

The National Association of Scholars then turned to science standards in 2024 and math standards last year. In 2026, it unveiled new model standards for English language arts.

In introducing the Archimedes math standards, the association says that while Common Core has "useful elements," it isn't demanding enough and "was rushed into public use without sufficient testing and evaluation." The group says that the Archimedes standards will improve students' ability to do math in their heads by requiring more memorization, contrasting them with the Common Core's "deemphasizing" of math facts. The standards ban the use of calculators before high school.

Their key goal, though, is "lucidity" — standards that are easier for teachers and parents to understand. In an introduction to the Archimedes standards, the association contrasts a Common Core second grade standard on addition and subtraction that takes 67 words to explain with Archimedes' 24-word version.

The standards were authored for the association by Jonathan Gregg, an assistant education professor at Hillsdale College, a small Christian liberal arts college in southern Michigan whose president chaired Donald Trump's 1776 Commission on "patriotic education" in 2020. Gregg said in an interview that his background — undergraduate degrees in math and English, a master's in humanities and a doctorate in math education — equipped him to write the draft standards in simple prose.

That simplicity gives teachers more freedom to tailor approaches for their classrooms, said Gregg. "You can't overprescribe. Teachers are the ones in the room, the ones facing the students," he said. Standards are flags that everyone — students, teachers, parents, policymakers and researchers — can get behind, he said. For that to happen, all those groups need to understand them, he said.

In South Dakota, that accessibility attracted Graves, the state education secretary. With the state's Common Core-aligned math standards, parents and teachers "are absolutely at sea," he said in an interview. "They have no idea what those standards mean." So last summer his department, using the Archimedes document and a few other state standards as examples, produced the dramatically slimmed-down rewrite.

The state's math standards dispute has been sharpened by Hillsdale and the National Association of Scholars' involvement in a contentious update of the state's social studies standards. During that review, in 2022, then-Gov. Kristi Noem purged members of the standards commission, replaced them with political allies, and appointed a retired Hillsdale College professor to facilitate a rewrite.

The state board of education approved the new version in 2023. South Dakota Native American groups said those left out essential topics related to the culture and history of the state's tribes. Teachers lambasted what they saw as a focus on memorization of historical facts over inquiry. But the National Association of Scholars wrote a letter praising South Dakota's rewrite for among other things, taking "a clear stand against both the discriminatory ideologies commonly referred to as Critical Race Theory and the subordination of social studies instruction to political activism."

The math standards have drawn similar fire from teachers and university education professors. An education department survey drew 44 comments on the rewrite, all but four of them critical.

Gilkerson, the teacher, pointed to the rewritten eighth grade requirement on scientific notation, which

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explains what's expected in 10 words versus 53 in the current standards. In an interview, Gilkerson, who has taught for 15 years, said she knows the specific skills students need to master that operation on the state test. But many new teachers won't, she said, and she fears test scores will suffer.

Sharon Vestal, president of the state's Council of Teachers of Mathematics, which represents math teachers, and a South Dakota State University associate professor of math and statistics, called on Graves at a November hearing to scrap the rewrite. "They're poorly written, and a lot of the math content has been lost by simplifying the language," she said of the revised standards.

But a few educators support the rewrite. "The simplicity is nice," said Susan Fairchild, a veteran math teacher at Watertown High School who served on a state committee that reviewed the new version. "As a new teacher, you don't have to try and figure out what all of these fancy words mean."

Monte Meyerink, another committee member and an assistant professor of math education at Northern State University, led a review of research on effective education standards to guide the department in preparing its revision. He said he doesn't know of research supporting the connection between standards' lucidity and student proficiency. But simplifying standards is a new trend, one whose effects on student outcomes won't be understood for another 15 or 20 years, he said.

Once the standards are finalized, the department will roll out an expanded or "unpacked" version that has more detail, he said. That doesn't comfort Vestal. "My concern is the quality of those unpacked standards because of the quality of the proposed standards," she said.

Similarly, some national math education researchers reject the Archimedes Standards' assumption that simpler standards mean better teaching. Ball State education researcher Michael Steele points to the Common Core standard for fourth grade fractions: "Explain why a fraction  $a/b$  is equivalent to a fraction  $(n \times a)/(n \times b)$  by using visual fraction models, with attention to how the number and size of the parts differ even though the two fractions themselves are the same size. Use this principle to recognize and generate equivalent fractions."

The Archimedes Standards version reads, "Find equivalent fractions and reduce fractions to their simplest form." Steele said that while the Common Core version takes a moment to understand, it reminds teachers of how they learned to use fractions and makes them better able to teach the concept.

"What this group calls lucidity in many cases, I might call an oversimplification of mathematics," he said. A final vote on South Dakota's rewrite will come after a May 4 public hearing.

The National Association of Scholars wants to get other states on board. Gregg, the author of the Archimedes standards, said he's helping to advise the Louisiana Department of Education on its math standards review, begun last year.

In those standards, "I think there are places where you'll see — probably not as directly as you'll see in South Dakota — some of the influence the Archimedes community has had," he said.

## Comparing standards

3rd grade standard for multiplication and division

Common Core: Determine the unknown whole number in a multiplication or division equation relating three whole numbers. For example, determine the unknown number that makes the equation true in each of the equations  $8 \times ? = 48$ ,  $5 = \_ \div 3$ ,  $6 \times 6 = ?$ .

Archimedes: Find unknown values in multiplication and division equations.

8th grade standard for scientific notation

Common Core: Perform operations with numbers expressed in scientific notation, including problems where both decimal and scientific notation are used. Use scientific notation and choose units of appropriate size for measurements of very large or very small quantities (e.g., use millimeters per year for seafloor spreading). Interpret scientific notation that has been generated by technology.

Archimedes: Convert numbers into and out of scientific notation.

Algebra I standard for quadratic equations

Common Core: Use the method of completing the square to transform any quadratic equation in  $x$  into

an equation of the form  $(x - p)^2 = q$  that has the same solutions. Derive the quadratic formula from this form.

Archimedes: Solve quadratic equations by completing the square.

*This story about math standards was produced by The Hechinger Report, a nonprofit, independent news organization focused on inequality and innovation in education.*

*Steven Yoder is a freelance journalist who covers education, criminal justice, business and more. He is based in Woodstock, New York. His work has appeared in The American Prospect, Salon, Reason, VICE and The Washington Post, as well as in The Hechinger Report.*

## US Senate Republicans launch debate on SAVE Act requiring photo ID to vote

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — U.S. Senate Republicans pressed forward Tuesday with a bill that would require proof of citizenship to register to vote and a photo ID to cast a ballot, despite long odds the legislation will ever become law amid bipartisan opposition.

The 51-48 vote to formally begin debate on the measure, which GOP lawmakers have named the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility Act, or the SAVE America Act, only starts the process. Senators are expected to vote on several amendments in the days, or possibly weeks, ahead.

But at least 60 lawmakers will be needed to end floor debate, a highly unlikely prospect with Democrats arguing the bill would disenfranchise millions of voters.

Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski was the only Republican to vote against starting debate. North Carolina GOP Sen. Thom Tillis didn't vote.

Murkowski wrote in a social media post last month the November midterm elections are "fast approaching" and that implementing "new federal requirements now, when states are deep into their preparations, would negatively impact election integrity by forcing election officials to scramble to adhere to new policies likely without the necessary resources.

"Ensuring public trust in our elections is at the core of our democracy, but federal overreach is not how we achieve this."

### Trump threatens retaliation

President Donald Trump has made enacting nationwide changes to voting his top legislative priority ahead of the midterm elections, although Republicans swept unified control of government less than two years ago.

He wrote in a social media post Tuesday morning that he plans to campaign against anyone who doesn't support the legislation, which the House passed last month.

"Only sick, demented, or deranged people in the House or Senate could vote against THE SAVE AMERICA ACT," he wrote. "If they do, each one of these points, separately, will be used against the user in his/her political campaign for office – A guaranteed loss!"

### Dems predict millions kicked off voting rolls

Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer, of New York, said during floor remarks the legislation would require Americans "to run through an obstacle course of red tape unlike anything we have ever seen in voter registration."

The bill becoming law, he said, would lead to millions of Americans being kicked off voter rolls due to a requirement that states run their list of registered voters through a "deeply flawed" Department of Homeland Security database.

"If you're kicked off the rolls, you may never be told," he said. "There's no requirement to let you know."

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Schumer argued the bill is less about ensuring only Americans vote in elections and more about Republican concerns they will lose at least one chamber of Congress later this year.

"It's funny. I don't remember MAGA Republicans screaming about stolen elections and voter fraud after the 2024 election that they won," he said. "Well, the same rules that governed the 2024 election are going to be the ones that govern the 2026 election. The only difference is that this time MAGA Republicans know they're in trouble politically. So now they're suddenly saying the system is compromised and broken and it needs to be changed. It's all lies."

## 77 instances of noncitizen voting

It is illegal for noncitizens to vote in federal elections and anyone found guilty could face fines and up to a year in prison. There are limited instances of people not eligible to vote actually casting a ballot, according to analysis from the Bipartisan Policy Center of data compiled by the Heritage Foundation, an especially conservative think tank.

BPC's examination "found only 77 instances of noncitizens voting between 1999 and 2023" and that "there is no evidence that noncitizen voting has ever been significant enough to impact an election's outcome."

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., reiterated a few hours before the procedural step that "the votes aren't there" to pass the bill via a talking filibuster, a path several of his members want him to take.

"So what we are doing is we are having a fulsome debate on the floor of the United States Senate, which is something that I think the Senate has done in the past, and probably should do a lot more of," he said. "But we'll have it up. Everybody will have their say. At some point, we'll have votes. And we'll see where the votes are."

A talking filibuster would require Democratic senators to give a series of floor speeches in order to delay or prevent final passage. That process could tie up the Senate floor for months.

Thune said he wasn't sure when votes on amendments would begin, but that he expects the process to last "for the foreseeable future."

"I think at least for right now, there'll be some flexibility to see where the road leads," he said.

## Mail-in voting, gender-affirming surgeries, sports

Trump has asked GOP senators to add several provisions to the legislation, including new restrictions on mail-in voting, a federal prohibition on gender-affirming surgeries for transgender youth and a new law barring transgender women from participating in women's sports.

West Virginia Republican Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, Policy Committee chair, said she doesn't believe the federal government should tell states how to manage mail-in ballots.

"A lot of states, red states and blue, have more than a majority of the votes that are mail-in ballots," she said. "So I think we've got to be careful there."

Wisconsin Sen. Ron Johnson said that once debate on the SAVE America Act has concluded, he wants GOP leaders to hold a floor vote on whether to keep the rule that requires at least 60 senators vote to limit debate on bills, known as the legislative filibuster.

"I think the days of the minority preventing legislation from passing is over. Because Democrat voters, they want their members to end it. Republican voters want us to end it," he said. "So in the end, it'll be that public pressure that I think will eventually end the filibuster. And I'd just rather beat them to the punch so we can pass things like SAVE America Act."

Thune said during an afternoon press conference he believes the 60-vote procedural hurdle should remain in place because "throughout history it's protected Republicans and conservative priorities and principles a lot more often than it's protected Democrats."

## Photo ID

The bill would require local election officials to ensure anyone registering to vote proves they are an American, likely by showing a passport or a birth certificate. Then, when people go to cast a ballot by mail,

during early voting, or on Election Day, they would need to show a valid photo ID, like a driver's license or military identification card.

The legislation would require state governments to submit their voter rolls to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security so its officials can run them through the Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements, or SAVE, system to check if anyone already registered isn't a U.S. citizen.

The legislation doesn't provide state or local governments with any extra money or time to implement the changes, if it were to become law.

The Bipartisan Policy Center writes in a brief about the legislation that the organization "recommends that policymakers avoid making major changes in an election year given the likelihood that they result in administrative errors and create confusion for voters."

The three BPC experts who analyzed the bill said it "prioritizes expediency over precision."

"The act becomes effective on the date of enactment, giving states no time to adjust processes," they wrote. "It also requires that the U.S. Election Assistance Commission offer implementation guidance to states within just 10 days of enactment."

## Lawsuits

The legislation would give private citizens the ability to sue election officials who register someone without evidence of U.S. citizenship.

Jeffrey Thorsby, legislative director at the National Association of Counties, wrote in a post about the legislation's impacts that the "liability provisions could discourage election workers and volunteers from serving at a time when many counties already face recruitment challenges."

"Currently, the onus on a non-citizen who registers or votes is on the illegal voter," he wrote. "SAVE America Act proposes a radical change in how we punish fraudulent voting."

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

## Elections officials decry costs heaped on states in SAVE America voting bill

BY: JACOB FISCHLER

The voting overhaul measure that the U.S. Senate began debating Tuesday would cause major headaches for underfunded state and local election officials, without meaningfully stopping fraud, according to a collection of voting rights advocates and elections officers.

The so-called SAVE America Act, which President Donald Trump is relentlessly pushing, would create chaos for state and local elections administrators by immediately imposing several new requirements without adding funding, former North Carolina elections chief Karen Brinson Bell said on a press call Tuesday organized by Washington U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell.

"I cannot emphasize enough the Herculean effort that the SAVE America Act would present for election officials across this country," Brinson Bell, who now advises election officials as a co-founder of the group Advance Elections, said. "Please do not set our country or these public servants up for failure. Bring us to the table. Develop this legislation properly and provide adequate funding and resources so we can all succeed."

## No new money

The bill would initially add \$35 million in costs for Washington state to administer this year's midterm elections, Clark County Auditor Greg Kimsey said. The measure would cost an estimated additional \$12 million annually in presidential election years for the state's elections administrators, he added.

But it would not provide federal funding for states and localities to meet the new costs.

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"When I looked at the SAVE America Act to understand how it would affect election administration, I did a control-F for the dollar sign, and I did not see a single dollar, much less the hundreds of millions needed to implement these changes," Brinson Bell said.

The bill, which Trump and other proponents say is necessary to stop immigrants from voting, would require proof of citizenship to register to vote. They would also have to provide a photo ID at polling places.

But the measure "is the very definition of a solution in search of a problem," Kimsey said on Tuesday's call. Noncitizens voting in federal elections is exceedingly rare.

## Barriers for voting by mail

Overall, the bill would make voting more difficult, especially for people who have changed their names, tribal citizens and people without photo ID, participants on the call said. That counters the goal of elections officials: to make voting easier.

"The problem isn't that the wrong people are voting," Kimsey said. "The problem is that not enough people are voting."

The bill would also create barriers for vote-by-mail, which Washington and other states have used for decades.

The system has increased voter participation and is widely popular across party lines.

"The state of Washington's vote-by-mail system is such a strong system," Cantwell said. "The whole country should be moving more towards that and not away from it."

## Voting integrity

The bill's backers, including most Republicans in Congress, say it would erect commonsense safeguards to protect U.S. elections.

In a Tuesday floor speech setting up debate on the measure, U.S. Senate Majority Leader John Thune called it "essential."

"If there's anything essential to the integrity of elections, it's ensuring that those who are registered to vote are eligible to vote – and that those who show up to vote at polling places are ... who they say they are," Thune, a South Dakota Republican, said.

The way to do that, he added, was to require proof of citizenship and photo identification.

Photo IDs, though, aren't as universal as commonly thought, League of Women Voters of Maine Executive Director Chrissy Hart said.

Eighteen percent of citizens older than 65 lack a photo ID, as well as 16% of Latino voters, 25% of Black voters and 15% of low-income Americans, Hart said.

## Election denial

Kimsey, who identified as a Republican during his first run for office in 1998 and became an independent after the pro-Trump mob stormed the U.S. Capitol following the 2020 election, was asked if the measure was a continuation of Trump's efforts to undermine U.S. elections.

He answered that what he deemed the "election denial movement" lost momentum after Trump's 2024 victory, but that it seemed to be reappearing ahead of the midterms.

"In my view, this is nothing more than a very clumsy — and I hope not effective — but a very clumsy attempt

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

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## Pain of soaring gas prices compounded by electricity rate increases across states

**Analysis shows 5% jump in South Dakota, costing an annual average of \$80 extra per household**

**BY: ASHLEY MURRAY**

WASHINGTON — Electricity rates “increased significantly” in nearly every U.S. state in 2025, with residents in a dozen states seeing at least a 10% jump, according to a congressional report released by Democrats Tuesday.

Minority members of the Joint Economic Committee released state-by-state figures from monthly utility bill data showing, on average, American households paid roughly \$110, or 6.4%, more for electricity in 2025, compared to 2024.

The analysis came amid other gloomy economic headlines, including a steep increase in gasoline prices since the U.S.-Israeli war in Iran began, and a lousy jobs report last month.

States that saw the highest spikes included New Jersey, 16.9%; Indiana, 16.3%; Illinois, 15.9%; Pennsylvania, 12.1%; Kentucky, 11.8%; Maryland, 11.6%; Tennessee, 11.6%; New York, 11.4%; Ohio, 11.1%; Missouri, 11%; Maine, 10.6%; and Washington state, 10.3%.

The District of Columbia topped the list with an increase of 23.5%, according to the two-page report. Rates dropped by 18% in Nevada, 3.1% in California, 2.4% in Hawaii and 1.6% in Arizona.

### Campaign pledge

Democrats on the committee pointed to President Donald Trump’s campaign promise to slash electricity costs, among other prices, by half.

Affordability is a key issue ahead of the 2026 midterm elections in November that will determine control of Congress. Trump has repeatedly referred to the issue of affordability as a “hoax.”

“American families don’t need a report to tell them that the President has broken his campaign promise to slash energy costs; they already feel the impact of President Trump’s actions every single day. But this report is yet another indication that sky-high costs are continuing to rise — and are continuing to hurt American families,” the committee’s ranking member, Sen. Maggie Hassan, D-N.H., said in a statement.

The committee pulled the electricity bill data from the federal Energy Information Administration.

As of December, the majority, by far, of electricity in the United States is generated by natural gas. Next in generation are nuclear power and coal, followed by wind, conventional hydroelectric and solar, according to the Energy Information Administration.

Experts and economists challenged Trump’s campaign promise to cut domestic energy costs by expanding U.S. drilling, highlighting petroleum is priced on a global, not local, market, as noted in an October 2024 report by FactCheck.org.

Trump recently gathered tech CEOs in the Oval Office to sign a symbolic “ratepayer protection pledge” meant to combat rising energy costs due to AI data center demand.

“It’s a big deal; it’s going to have a tremendous impact on electricity costs... Under this new agreement, Big Tech companies are committing to fully cover the cost of increased electricity production required for AI data centers — and that would mean prices for American communities will not go up, but in many cases, will actually come down,” Trump said.

### Gasoline prices, too

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported a 4.8% increase in electricity costs over the past 12 months, according to the consumer price index for February. The report showed energy services overall rose 6.3% year over year as piped gas utility costs spiked 10.3% since February 2025.

Expenses overall rose 2.4% over the past year, according to the latest figures, continuing to exceed the Federal Reserve’s target of 2%.

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But nowhere has a price increase been more noticeable in recent days than at the gas pump.

Gas prices nationwide averaged just under \$3.72 Monday — that's up from \$2.93 one month ago, according to AAA.

Roughly one-fifth of the world's petroleum products have been choked off as Iran continues to effectively close the Strait of Hormuz with threats to shell any oil tankers passing through, except for a few negotiated trips.

The U.S.-Israeli war in Iran began Feb. 28.

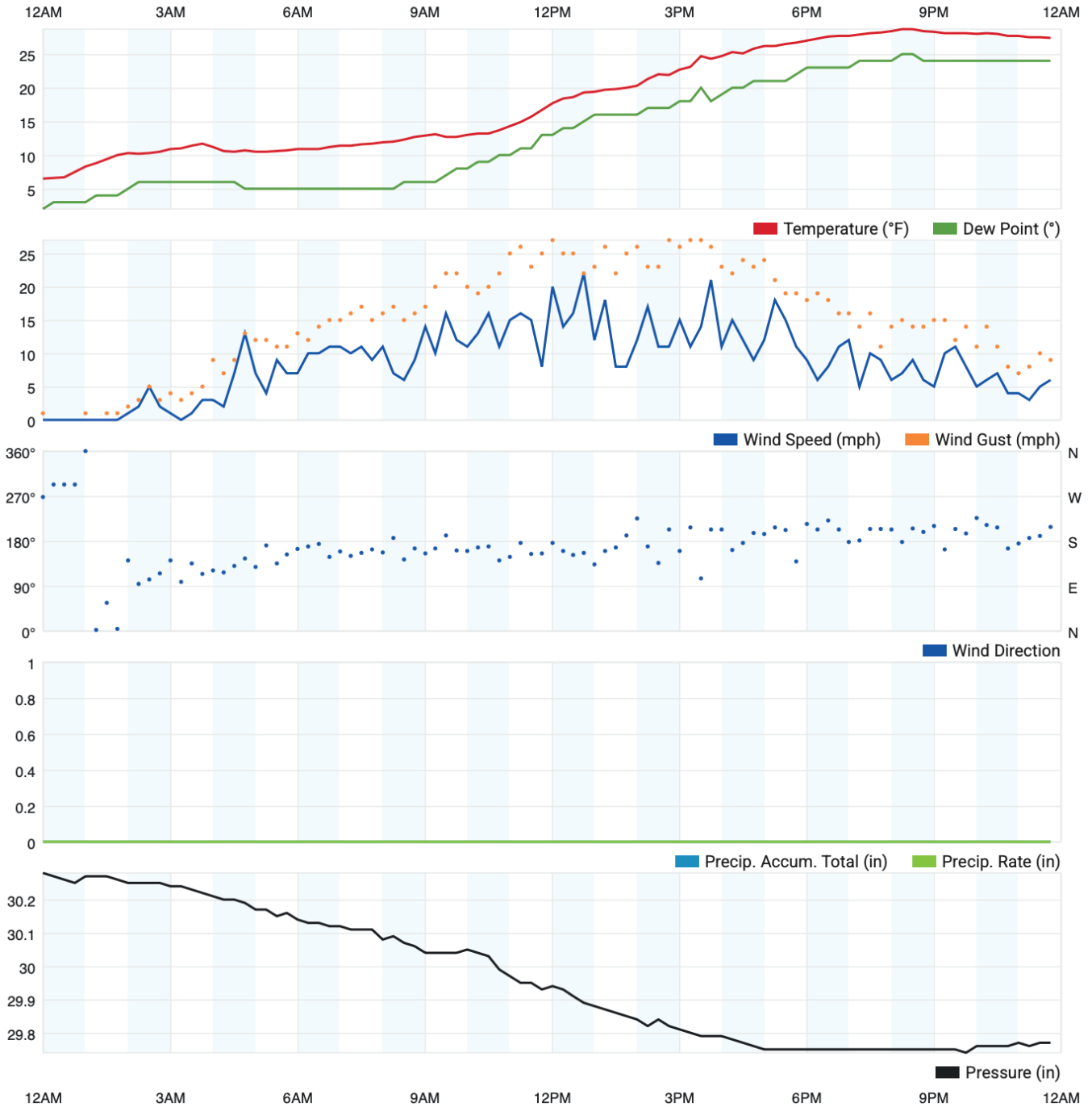
*Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.*

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

March 17, 2026



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Today



High: 49 °F

Mostly Sunny

Tonight



Low: 31 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Thursday



High: 60 °F

Patchy Fog  
then Mostly  
Sunny

Thursday  
Night



Low: 39 °F

Partly Cloudy

Friday



High: 69 °F

Mostly Sunny



## End of Week Warmup

Wednesday, Mar 18 - Sunday, Mar 22

	Wed 3/18	Thu 3/19	Fri 3/20	Sat 3/21	Sun 3/22
Aberdeen	49	56	67	65	43
Miller	57	64	72	76	49
Mobridge	61	67	72	68	45
Murdo	70	73	77	82	50
Ortonville	44	48	62	68	43
Pierre	65	70	76	75	49
Sisseton	49	54	65	63	43
Watertown	44	52	64	65	43

Max Temperature (°F)

### Information:

The table displays the weather element values based on model predictions from the National Blend of Models.

## Additional Details

### Warming Trend:

- Beginning Wednesday, South Dakota and western Minnesota will see temperatures well above normal.
- These abnormally warm temperatures are expected to last through Saturday.



### Near-Record Highs?:

- Highs will generally be in the 60s to 70s, which is 20-30 degrees above normal.
- Daily record highs may be in jeopardy, mainly on Friday and Saturday.

Valid: Wed 07 pm CDT - Sun 07 pm CDT

Issued: Tue, Mar 17, 2026, 1 pm CDT



Starting Wednesday, temperatures will begin to increase over the area, peaking on Friday and Saturday. Highs in the 60s and 70s will be 20-30 degrees above normal, and may threaten daily record highs. Temperatures will cool back closer to normal by Sunday.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 29 °F at 8:17 PM

Low Temp: 6 °F at 12:00 AM

Wind: 30 mph at 1:17 PM

Precip: : 0.00

## Today's Info

Record High: 85 in 2012

Record Low: -15 in 1923

Average High: 43

Average Low: 21

Average Precip in Mar.: 0.46

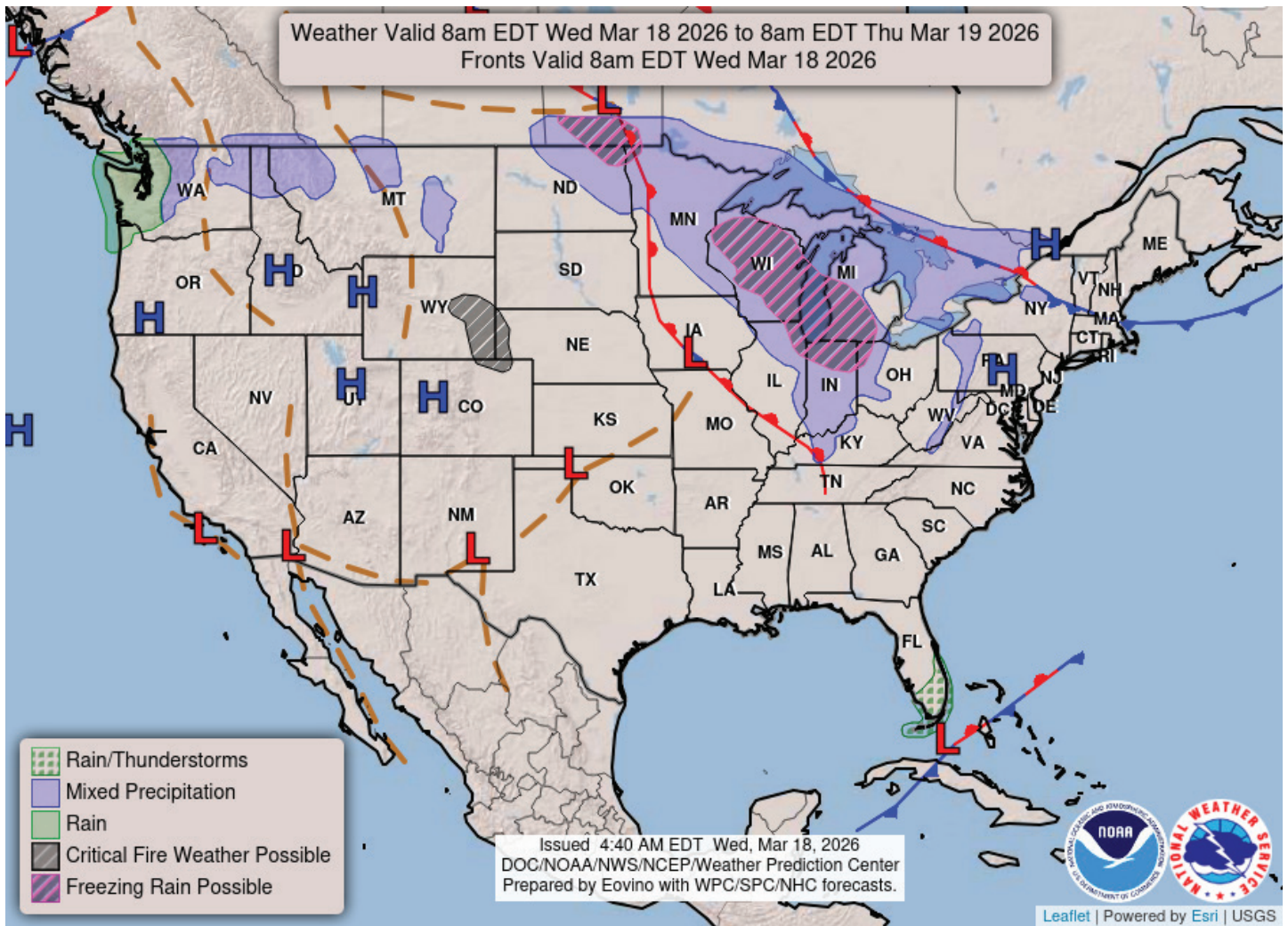
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.29

Average Precip to date: 1.63

Precip Year to Date: 1.62

Sunset Tonight: 7:41 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:37 am



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## Today in Weather History

March 18th, 1982: Strong winds swept through Northern Lawrence and Southwest Butte Counties during the afternoon. Winds gusting to 70mph in the Spearfish and Belle Fourche areas overturned a trailer house near Belle Fourche. No injuries were reported.

March 18th, 2013: An area of low pressure moving across the region brought widespread snowfall and powerful northwest winds to northeast South Dakota. Snowfall from 1 to 4 inches, with winds of 25 to 35 mph and gusts up to nearly 60 mph, caused widespread blizzard conditions. Travel was disrupted or halted. Some businesses and schools were also closed. Some snowfall amounts included 1 inch at Sisseton, 2 inches south of Bristol and Bowdle, 3 inches near Big Stone City, and 4 inches at Summit. The highest wind gust was 58 mph at Aberdeen and near Summit. The snowfall began between 5 and 7 pm on the 17th and ended between 5 and 9 pm on the 18th.

March 18th, 2014: A low-pressure surface area moving to the east brought heavy snow into far eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota. A narrow band of heavy snow set up across this area, bringing 6 to 11 inches of snow.

1925 — The great Tri-State Tornado occurred, the most deadly tornado in U.S. history. The tornado claimed 695 lives (including 234 at Murphysboro IL and 148 at West Frankfort IL), and caused seventeen million dollars property damage. It cut a swath of destruction 219 miles long and as much as a mile wide from east central Missouri to southern Indiana between 1 PM and 4 PM. The tornado leveled a school in West Frankfort IL, and picked up sixteen students setting them down unharmed 150 yards away. Seven other tornadoes claimed an additional 97 lives that day. (David Ludlum)

1971 — High winds accompanied a low pressure system from the Rocky Mountains to the Great Lakes. Winds gusted to 100 mph at Hastings NE, and reached 115 mph at Hays KS. High winds caused two million dollars damage in Kansas. Fire burned 50,000 forest acres in eastern Oklahoma. (17th-19th) (The Weather Channel)

1987 — A storm in the central U.S. produced up to 10 inches of snow in western Nebraska, and up to six inches of rain in eastern sections of the state. The heavy rains pushed the Elkhorn River out of its banks, submerging the streets of Inman under three feet of water. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — Light rain and snow prevailed east of the Mississippi River. Fair weather prevailed west of the Mississippi. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 — A storm in the western U.S. produced heavy rain in California, with heavy snow in the Sierra Nevada Range. Venado CA was drenched with 5.40 inches of rain in 24 hours. A dozen cities in the eastern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date, including Baltimore MD with a reading of 82 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 — Heavy rain caused extensive flooding of rivers and streams in Georgia, with total damage running well into the millions. Flooding also claimed six lives. Nearly seven inches of rain caused 2.5 million dollars damage around Columbus, and up to nine inches of rain was reported over the northern Kinchafoonee Basin in Georgia. (Storm Data)

## Developing a Sacred Conscience

**Maintain a healthy conscience by reading Scripture, praying, obeying God, and confessing sin promptly..**

1 Corinthians 2:10-16: 10 For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.

11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.

12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God,

13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

15 But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one.

16 For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.

The Lord has given you a conscience for your protection. To develop and trust this warning system, you must be committed to taking certain actions:

Apply the Word of God. As you put into practice "the perfect law that gives freedom" (James 1:25 NIV), your conscience will grow stronger because you know God's heart better.

Arrive at decisions through prayer. Instead of making a choice because it sounds good, bring every issue to God in prayer.

Agree to obey God. When you desire to function God's way, you'll consistently ask, What does He want me to do? This practice will enable you to discern and follow the Spirit's lead.

Acquire a sensitivity to the Spirit's conviction. As believers, we are no longer condemned, so we must recognize the difference between conviction and condemnation. The Spirit always shows us exactly what in our life requires repentance—He doesn't give us a sense of vague guilt.

Abandon yourself to God's will. Commit daily to be a "living sacrifice" and your conscience will steer you closer to the Lord. As you renew your thinking, you'll "test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Rom. 12:1-2 NIV).

*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:  
03.17.26

3 4 9 48 55 2

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

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 38 Mins 19 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:  
03.17.26

4 11 18 38 50 24

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$50,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 23 Mins 19 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: 16 Hrs 38 Mins 19 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
03.14.26

6 14 29 30 33

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

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 53 Mins 19 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
03.16.26

9 11 34 41 51 4

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

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 22 Mins 20 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: 17 Hrs 22 Mins 20 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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

### Iran lashes out with attacks on Israel and Gulf neighbors as Israel hits Beirut

By JON GAMBRELL, DAVID RISING and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran lashed out following the killing of one of its top officials in an airstrike with attacks on its Persian Gulf neighbors and Israel on Wednesday, using some of its latest missiles to evade air defenses and killing two people near Tel Aviv as the war in the Middle East showed no signs of slowing.

Israel kept up intense pressure on Lebanon with strikes it said targeted Iran-backed Hezbollah militants, hitting multiple apartment buildings in Beirut and killing at least a dozen people.

In Iran, the Bushehr nuclear power plant complex was hit by a projectile the night before but there were no injuries and the plant suffered no damage, the International Atomic Energy Agency said after receiving a report from Tehran. The IAEA chief Rafael Grossi reiterated his call "for maximum restraint during the conflict to prevent risk of a nuclear accident."

Since the United States and Israel attacked Iran to start the war on Feb. 28, Iran has been targeting the energy infrastructure of its Gulf Arab neighbors, as well as military bases, as part of a strategy to drive up oil prices and put pressure on Washington to back down.

Tehran also is keeping up its stranglehold on the Strait of Hormuz, the shipping lane through which a fifth of the world's oil transits, giving rise to growing concerns of a global energy crisis.

The price of Brent crude oil, the international standard, remained stubbornly over \$100 per barrel in early trading Wednesday, up more than 40% from the start of the war.

Iran executes man it says spied for Israel

Iran executed a man on charges of spying for Israel's Mossad intelligence agency, according to the judiciary's Mizan news agency. The report identified him as Kourosch Keyvani and alleged he "provided images and information on sensitive locations" to Israel.

Activists and rights groups have warned since Iran's nationwide protests in January that the Islamic Republic could begin conducting mass executions. Iran violently suppressed the protests through violence that killed thousands and saw tens of thousands detained.

Later Wednesday, Mizan said a judiciary complex in Larestan, a county in southern Fars province, was hit by an airstrike during working hours, blaming it on the U.S. and Israel. It said staff and civilians were killed and wounded but the "exact number is still unknown."

Iranian strikes Gulf countries

Iran on Wednesday attacked Saudi Arabia's vast Eastern Province, home to many of its oil fields, as well as Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said a projectile caused a small fire at its base in the UAE near Dubai but caused no injuries. Explosions were heard near Al Minhad Air Base, used by Western nations as a transit hub for the wider Mideast.

Missile alerts sounded again later in Dubai as interceptors exploded overhead across the city-state.

Saudi Arabia shot down a ballistic missile targeting the area of the Prince Sultan Air Base, which hosts American forces and aircraft, and two drones targeting Riyadh's diplomatic quarter, which houses the U.S. Embassy and other foreign missions.

Iran has vowed to continue to throttle shipping traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, which leads from the Persian Gulf to the open ocean. Since the war started, a few ships have gotten through — some Iranian, but also vessels from India, Turkey and elsewhere. Iran insists the waterway is open, just not to the U.S. or many of its allies.

U.S. Central Command said the U.S. military fired multiple 5,000-pound deep penetrator bombs Tuesday on Iranian missile sites along Iran's coastline near the strait.

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U.S. President Donald Trump, who has been growing increasingly frustrated that no allies have stepped forward after he asked others to send ships to help open the strait again, posted on social media Tuesday that "WE DON'T NEED THE HELP OF ANYONE!"

Iran launches multiple-warhead missiles at Israel

Responding to Israel's killing of Ali Larijani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council and one of the country's most powerful figures, the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard said Wednesday it had targeted central Israel with multiple-warhead missiles, which have an increased chance of evading missile defense systems and can overwhelm radar tracking systems.

Iran's Guard said the force launched the Khorramshahr-4 and Qadr multiple-warhead missiles to avenge Larijani's killing. Footage filmed by The Associated Press showed at least one missile releasing cluster munitions over Israel.

Israel said two people were killed in Ramat Gan, east of Tel Aviv.

Larijani, a former parliamentary speaker, was a senior policy adviser to the late Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei on strategy in nuclear talks with the Trump administration. Larijani was sanctioned by the U.S. Treasury in January for his role "coordinating" Iran's violent suppression of nationwide protests.

Gen. Gholam Reza Soleimani, the head of the Revolutionary Guard's Basij militia, was also killed in an Israeli strike on Tuesday. Soleimani was sanctioned by the U.S., the European Union and other nations, over his role in suppressing dissent for years through the Basij.

The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad also came under fire for the second day in a row early Wednesday, two Iraqi security officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to comment.

Pro-Iran militia groups have been regularly attacking American targets in Iraq since the war started. On Tuesday, a drone cashed inside the embassy compound in Baghdad.

Renewed Israeli strikes in Lebanon

Israel flattened an apartment building in central Beirut about an hour after issuing an evacuation notice — the fourth time the building was targeted. Israel's military claimed it was being used by Hezbollah to store "millions of dollars intended to finance its activities," without providing evidence.

Overall, 10 people were killed in Israeli airstrikes in central Beirut, according to Lebanon's Health Ministry. Another two people were killed in an airstrike in Lebanon's western Bekaa valley, it said.

The Israeli army also said it had launched a wave of strikes targeting Hezbollah in southern Lebanon "in response to firing into Israeli territory." There were no immediate reports of damage or casualties.

Israeli strikes have displaced more than 1 million Lebanese — roughly 20% of the population — according to the Lebanese government, which says 912 people have been killed and 2,221 wounded. In Israel, 14 people have been killed by Iranian missile fire. At least 13 U.S. military members have been killed.

More than 1,300 people have been killed in Iran since the conflict started Feb. 28, according to the Iranian Red Crescent.

## World shares advance and oil slips back despite a barrage of attacks by Iran

By CHAN HO-HIM AP Business Writer

HONG KONG (AP) — Shares advanced Wednesday in Europe and Asia as oil prices fell back slightly despite a barrage of attacks by Iran on its Gulf neighbors.

U.S. futures rose 0.5% after a session of moderate gains on Wall Street ahead of the Federal Reserve's decision on interest rates later in the day. With higher oil prices feeding into other inflation, the Fed is widely expected to keep rates on hold.

Worries over global oil and gas supplies and rising prices are still clouding global markets, though Brent crude, the international standard, fell slightly to \$103.14 per barrel, down from above \$106 on Monday.

U.S. benchmark crude fell 1.6% to \$94.67 per barrel.

Iran lashed out Wednesday with multiple attacks on its Gulf neighbors and Israel following the killing of one of its top leaders in an airstrike, using some of its latest missiles to evade air defenses and killing

two near Tel Aviv.

But markets seem to have taken the latest escalations in stride.

Germany's DAX rose 0.7% to 23,899.71 and the CAC 40 in Paris picked up 0.9% to 8,045.19. Britain's FTSE 100 edged 0.2% higher to 10,427.12.

During Asian trading, Tokyo's Nikkei 225 gained 2.9% to 55,239.40 after the government reported exports were higher than expected in February.

In South Korea, the Kospi jumped 5% to 5,925.03.

Lower oil prices are a boon for big oil importers like Japan and South Korea.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng reversed early losses, surging 0.6% to 26,025.42, while the Shanghai Composite index also rebounded, gaining 0.3% to 4,062.98.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 climbed 0.3% to 8,640.60.

Taiwan's Taiex added 1.5% and India's Sensex advanced 1%.

Global oil flows remain largely constrained, ING Bank analysts Warren Patterson and Ewa Manthey wrote in a research note on Wednesday, even as hopes were growing that Iran might be allowing more vessels through the Strait of Hormuz, a key waterway for global oil and gas transport.

Roughly a fifth of the world's crude oil passes through the strait, which has been largely closed as Iran blocks ships linked to the U.S., Israel and their allies.

On Tuesday, U.S. stocks held steadier as the S&P 500 rose 0.3% and the Dow Jones Industrial Average edged 0.1% higher. The Nasdaq composite added 0.5%.

In other dealings early Wednesday, the U.S. dollar fell to 158.96 Japanese yen from 159.01 yen. The euro fell to \$1.1536 from \$1.1542.

## What to know about Iran's Bushehr nuclear power plant after report of projectile hitting its complex

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran and Russia both allege a projectile struck the grounds of the Bushehr nuclear power plant in the Islamic Republic, raising the specter of a radiological incident as Tehran's war with Israel and the United States rages.

Neither Iran nor Russia say there was any release of nuclear material in the incident on Tuesday evening, but it again underlines a longtime worry of Iran's neighbors — that the power plant on the shores of the Persian Gulf could be hit by either an attack or an earthquake.

Here's what to know about the incident, the plant itself and Iran's wider nuclear program, which remains a reason U.S. President Donald Trump points to for starting the war alongside Israel against Iran on Feb. 28.

Reports of a projectile striking there

Russia's state-run Tass news agency quoted Rosatom CEO Alexey Likhachev late Tuesday as claiming "a strike hit the area adjacent to the metrology service building located at the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant site, in close proximity to the operating power unit." Russian technicians from Rosatom operate the plant, using Russian-made, low-enriched uranium.

"There were no casualties among Rosatom State Corporation personnel," Likhachev said. "The radiation situation at the site is normal."

About 480 Russian nationals remain at the plant, Likhachev said, and authorities are preparing for another round of evacuations from there.

The Atomic Energy Organization of Iran later issued a statement saying "no financial, technical, or human damage occurred and no part of the plant was harmed."

The International Atomic Energy Agency, which has had its inspections of Iran restricted over years of tensions over Tehran's program after Trump unilaterally withdrew America from the 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, issued a carefully worded statement early Wednesday.

"The IAEA has been informed by Iran that a projectile hit the premises of the Bushehr NPP on Tuesday evening," the United Nations agency said, using an acronym for nuclear power plant. "No damage to the

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plant or injuries to staff reported.”

No other independent expert has seen the damage. Neither Iran nor Russia published images of the damage. Moscow has made claims about nuclear sites during its war on Ukraine that turned out not to be true, while Iran has been trying to use both force and coercive diplomacy to pressure its neighbors to in turn push the U.S. to halt the war.

It remains unclear what the “projectile” that hit the complex was. The U.S. military’s Central Command, which is in charge of forces launching airstrikes across southern Iran, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Shrapnel from missile interceptions and other air defense fire also have caused damage in the region since the war started. Bushehr, some 750 kilometers (465 miles) south of Iran’s capital, Tehran, is home to an Iranian navy base and a dual-use, civilian-military airport with air defense systems protecting the area.

Bushehr a long sought project by Iran

Iran’s Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi announced plans in the 1970s to build 23 nuclear reactors while also having full control of the nuclear fuel cycle — opening the door to being able to build atomic weapons. That rattled U.S. officials, who imposed limits on American companies from selling to Iran. German firm Kraftwerk Union began construction of the Bushehr plant in 1975 as part of \$4.8 billion deal for four reactors.

But the 1979 Islamic Revolution halted the project. Iraq repeatedly bombed the site during its eight-year war with Iran in the 1980s, seeking to stop Tehran’s program.

Russia ultimately signed onto the project, which saw the power plant connected to the Iranian grid in 2011, running a pressurized-water reactor that generates up to 1,000 megawatts of electricity, which can power hundreds of thousands of homes and other businesses and industries. But it contributes only 1% to 2% of Iran’s power.

Iran has been trying to expand Bushehr to multiple reactors. In 2019, it began a project that ultimately plans to add two additional reactors to the site, each adding another 1,000 megawatts apiece. A satellite image from December from Planet Labs PBC showed the construction still ongoing at the site, with cranes over both sites.

The reactor currently running at Bushehr uses uranium from Russia enriched to 4.5%, a low level needed for power generation in such plants.

Bushehr was untouched in 12-day war in June

Bushehr, as a running, civilian nuclear power plant, was left untouched during the 12-day war in June between Israel and Iran. During that war, the U.S. bombed three Iranian nuclear enrichment sites, destroying centrifuges and likely trapping Tehran’s stockpile of highly enriched, 60% uranium underground. In the time since, Iran has blocked IAEA inspectors from visit those sites.

A possible strike on a nuclear power plant could see a leak of radiation into the environment. That’s been a major concern in the years after Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Nuclear plants in Ukraine, built when the country was part of the Soviet Union, have come under attack and found themselves on the front lines of that war.

Such a leak into the Persian Gulf would be an existential crisis for the Gulf Arab states, which rely on desalination plants on the gulf for their water supplies.

## Man arrested after climbing into pygmy hippo Moo Deng’s enclosure at Thai zoo

BANGKOK (AP) — A man has been arrested after he was caught climbing into an enclosure of Moo Deng, the adorable pygmy hippo who became a social media sensation, zoo officials said.

The Thai man allegedly entered the enclosure on Tuesday evening while a keeper was away and no other visitors were around, the Khao Kheow Open Zoo’s Director Narongwit Chodchoy told The Associated Press.

Security footage widely shared online shows a man wearing a black beanie, sunglasses, a green tank top, and brown shorts approaching Moo Deng and her mother Jona while holding a tablet, apparently

recording or taking photos.

The man remained inside the enclosure for a minute or two before staff noticed him, Narongwit said, adding that he did not attempt to flee while the zoo called for police.

Moo Deng soared to stardom shortly after she was born in 2024, largely thanks to a keeper who shared adorable pictures and videos of the baby hippo on social media. Since then, she has drawn large crowds from Thailand and abroad who want to witness her charm in person and shoot photos and videos of her cute moments for themselves.

Police have initially charged the man with trespassing, but investigation is still ongoing and Narongwit said the zoo intends to pursue all available legal action. Police did not identify the suspect.

The man has now been released on bail, Narongwit said. He said Moo Deng and Jona were safe as the man did not try to touch them.

In a statement posted Tuesday on the zoo's official Facebook page, it said both animals appeared slightly startled by the encounter and would be monitored closely by a veterinarian.

The zoo also urged visitors to "strictly follow all rules and instructions from staff for the safety of both themselves and the wildlife."

The Khao Kheow Open Zoo, which is about 100 kilometers (60 miles) southeast of Bangkok, sits on 800 hectares (almost 2,000 acres) of land and is home to more than 2,000 animals.

## **About 90 ships cross the Strait of Hormuz as Iran exports millions of barrels of oil despite the war**

By CHAN HO-HIM and SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — About 90 ships including oil tankers have crossed the Strait of Hormuz since the outset of the war with Iran and it is still exporting millions of barrels of oil at a time when the waterway has been effectively closed, according to maritime and trade data platforms.

Many of the vessels that passed through the strait were so-called "dark" transits evading Western government sanctions and oversight that likely have ties to Iran, maritime data firm Lloyd's List Intelligence said. More recently, vessels with ties to India and Pakistan have also successfully crossed the strait as governments stepped up negotiations.

As crude prices spiked above \$100 a barrel, U.S. President Donald Trump pressured allies and trade partners to send warships and reopen the strait, hoping to bring oil prices lower.

Most shipping traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, a waterway for global oil and gas transport that supplies roughly one-fifth of the world's crude oil, has been halted since early March, after the war started. About 20 vessels have been attacked in the area.

However, Iran has still managed to export well above 16 million barrels of oil since the beginning of March, trade data and analytics platform Kpler estimated. Due to Western sanctions and associated risks, China has been the biggest buyer of Iranian oil.

There has been "continued resilience" in Iran's oil export volumes, said Kpler trade risk analyst Ana Subasic.

Iran has managed to profit from oil sales and also "preserve its own export artery" by using control over the chokepoint, said Kun Cao, client director at consulting firm Reddal.

Iran's oil export data estimates are largely aligned with maritime traffic data.

At least 89 ships crossed the Strait of Hormuz between March 1 and 15 – including 16 oil tankers, according to Lloyd's List Intelligence, down from roughly 100 to 135 vessel passages per day before the war. More than one-fifth of the 89 vessels were believed to be Iran-affiliated, while Chinese and Greece affiliated ships are among the rest, it said.

Other vessels also have been getting through.

The Pakistan-flagged crude oil tanker Karachi, controlled by the Pakistan National Shipping Corp., passed through the strait on Sunday, Lloyd's List Intelligence said.

Shariq Amin, a spokesman at the Pakistan Port Trust, refused to confirm or deny which route the MT

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Karachi had used but he said the ship would soon safely reach Pakistan.

The India-flagged liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) carriers Shivalik and Nanda Devi, both owned by state-owned Shipping Corp. of India, also traveled through the strait around March 13 or 14, according to Lloyd's List Intelligence. LPG is used as a primary cooking fuel by millions of Indian households.

India's foreign minister, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, told the Financial Times the two vessels' were able to pass following talks with Iran. Iraq was also in talks with Iran to allow Iraqi oil tankers through the Strait of Hormuz, its state-run news agency reported.

Vessels may be transiting "with at least some level of diplomatic intervention," said Richard Meade, editor-in-chief of Lloyd's List. So, Iran may have "effectively created a safe corridor" with some ships passing close to the Iranian coast.

Some vessels near or in the strait were found to have declared themselves as China-linked or with all Chinese crew to reduce risks of being attacked, based on an earlier analysis on ship tracking platform MarineTraffic. Analysts believe they were taking advantage of China's closer ties with Iran.

Oil prices have jumped more than 40% to above \$100 per barrel since the Iran war began, and Iran has threatened it won't allow "even a single liter of oil" destined for the U.S., and Israel and their allies to pass through.

To try to stabilize oil prices, the U.S. said it was allowing Iranian oil tankers to cross the strait. "The Iranian ships have been getting out already, and we've let that happen to supply the rest of the world," Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said in an interview with CNBC on Monday.

The U.S. bombed military sites on Kharg Island off the Iranian coast, which is key for Iran's oil network and exports, but President Donald Trump said he had left its oil infrastructure alone for now.

The latest passages through the Strait of Hormuz show the strait was not simply "closed," Cao said. "It is better understood as closed selectively against some traffic, while still functioning for Iranian exports and a narrow set of tolerated non-Iranian movements," he said.

However, if Iran's plan is to "inflict pain through higher energy prices, the number of tankers it allows through the Strait of Hormuz may be very limited," Dutch bank ING's strategists Warren Patterson and Ewa Manthey wrote in a research note.

## Illinois Lt. Gov. Juliana Stratton wins Democratic primary for US Senate

By SOPHIA TAREEN Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Illinois Lt. Gov. Juliana Stratton won Tuesday's Democratic primary for U.S. Senate, edging out two sitting members of the U.S. House to advance to a November general election against Republican nominee Don Tracy, the former state party chair.

The retirement of U.S. Sen Dick Durbin, the Senate's longtime No. 2 Democrat, triggered a competitive campaign on the Democratic side, drawing as candidates Stratton and U.S. Reps. Raja Krishnamoorthi and Robin Kelly, among others. Furious fundraising and sharp elbows marked the race, which tested the influence of Democratic Gov. JB Pritzker. The governor, whose name has been floated as a 2028 presidential contender, backed Stratton.

The races were testing grounds for some of the biggest issues facing the Democratic Party, from support for Israel to immigration enforcement and the cryptocurrency and AI industries, as super PACs poured millions of dollars into the hotly contested primaries.

Most primary winners in the Democratic stronghold are expected to win in November, shaping a new generation of leadership in the state's congressional delegation.

Stratton victorious

Stratton lagged in fundraising but had the powerful backing of Pritzker, who campaigned with her around the state.

He introduced her Tuesday night before her victory speech, in which she pledged to push for Medicare for all and higher wages, abolish U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and "bring this fight straight

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to Donald Trump's door."

"We are ready to take our democracy back into our own hands," Stratton told supporters gathered in Chicago.

The race featuring 10 Democrats was expensive. Krishnamoorthi dominated fundraising and was the first on television with ads in July. He started 2026 with over \$15 million on hand compared with Stratton's \$1 million, according to campaign finance records. Late last year, Pritzker put \$5 million into a super PAC aimed at electing her.

Stratton lit into Krishnamoorthi at debates, particularly on the five-term Democrat's voting record and donations from an ICE contractor.

Krishnamoorthi, who has called to dismantle the agency, said he donated the money to immigrant rights groups. In a concession speech Tuesday, he brought up his roots as an immigrant who born in India and raised in central Illinois.

"Only in this country can a kid like me serve in the halls of Congress," he said. "And now we must come together as Democrats and as Americans to make sure that we return to the principles that made us a beacon of freedom and opportunity for the world."

Rochelle Brockenborough, 64, said she voted for Stratton at the Dr. Martin Luther King Community Service Center in Chicago.

"I wanted to make sure there was no AIPAC money. That's important to me," she said, adding that U.S. tax dollars shouldn't be used to support Israel.

Candidates touted ties to iconic Chicagoans including former President Barack Obama and the late Rev. Jesse Jackson, who died last month. However, an endorsement touted posthumously by Stratton caused a snag as Jackson's family withdrew it Monday, saying the draft was not meant for public release.

In the GOP primary, Tracy, an attorney who led the Illinois Republican Party from 2021 to 2024, bested five other candidates. The state last had a Republican in the Senate a decade ago, when Mark Kirk was defeated by current Democratic Sen. Tammy Duckworth.

Election officials hoped to see busy polls after statewide turnout in the 2024 primary was 19%, the lowest in more than five decades. Initial turnout estimates in Chicago were around 25%, according to the Chicago Board of Elections.

### Crowded US House primaries

Dozens of candidates ran for five open seats in the Chicago area.

In Kelly's 2nd district, which spans parts of the South Side and suburbs and dips into the central Illinois farmlands, Cook County Commissioner Donna Miller emerged as the winner of a crowded Democratic field that included former U.S. Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr., son of the late civil rights leader. Miller will face off in November against Republican Michael Noack, who was unopposed.

Miller was backed by AIPAC, and that support prompted retiring U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, of the 9th District, to withdraw her endorsement of Miller.

The open seat in Krishnamoorthi's suburban 8th District attracted eight Democrats and four Republicans. Former U.S. Rep. Melissa Bean won the Democratic nomination and advances to face Republican Jennifer Davis.

"People are ready for change, they want to see a functional Congress," Bean told The Associated Press. "We haven't had one in quite some time."

Two other House members are retiring after long careers.

The 7th District of Rep. Danny Davis, who was first elected in 1996, covers parts of downtown, the West Side and suburbs. The candidate he endorsed, state Rep. La Shawn Ford won the nomination over a pool of candidates that included Chicago City Treasurer Melissa Conyears-Ervin. Chad Koppie won for the GOP.

The primary for Schakowsky's 9th District seat was the most crowded. Among the 15 Democrats, Evanston Mayor Daniel Biss edged out digital creator Kat Abughazaleh and state Sen. Laura Fine, who was also backed by AIPAC. Republican John Elleson won the party's nomination.

Speaking to supporters, Biss called Schakowsky, who endorsed him, his "political hero" and said the

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contest to replace her raised fundamental questions about Democratic Party priorities.

"Are we going to double down on our progressive values, or are we going to shrink away from protecting the most vulnerable?" Biss said. "We are going to stand up, we are going to fight."

Another open Chicago area seat was that of Rep. Jesus "Chuy" Garcia, who announced that he would not seek reelection citing health and personal reasons. The Democratic primary for the 4th District was uncontested after Garcia quietly schemed to place his chief of staff, Patty Garcia, on the ballot without any Democratic competition.

Patty Garcia, who is not related to the congressman, will face Republican Lupe Castillo, who also ran unopposed, in November.

Pritzker seeks a third term as governor

Pritzker, an heir to the Hyatt Hotel fortune who was unopposed in his primary, is the first governor to seek a third term since the 1980s.

One of President Donald Trump's most vocal critics, Pritzker used his victory speech to tout his efforts to oppose the aggressive federal immigration crackdown in Chicago last year. He criticized Republicans' agenda, called Trump's presidency an "unmitigated disaster" and vowed to help Democrats across Illinois win in November.

"This is the fight of our lives," he told supporters at a downtown Chicago hotel. "Everything we care about is under siege from Washington."

Pritzker also made digs at Republican candidate Darren Bailey, a former state senator whom he handily defeated in 2022.

Bailey, who bested three other Republicans vying for the nomination, said he did things differently this time, including focusing more on Chicago voters.

On the campaign trail and in his victory speech, Bailey criticized Pritzker's leadership, including blaming him for rising costs. Heading into November, he vowed to include Democrats "who felt left behind."

"I want to work together to make Illinois government work again at all levels," he said.

## Top US intelligence officials set to testify about Iran war, threats confronting the homeland

By ERIC TUCKER, DAVID KLEPPER and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Top Trump administration national security officials facing back-to-back congressional hearings starting Wednesday are expected to be pressed on the war in Iran, including a deadly strike on a school, as well as the FBI's capacity to prevent terror attacks inside the United States.

The annual worldwide threats hearings involving the government's senior-most intelligence officials are taking place at a time of scrutiny over the U.S. military campaign in the Middle East and heightened concerns about terrorism in the homeland following recent attacks at a Michigan synagogue and Virginia university.

The testimony before the House and Senate intelligence committees is expected to center on the war and in particular the revelation that outdated intelligence likely led to the U.S. firing a missile that hit an elementary school in Iran and killed over 165 people. The outdated targeting data was reported to have come from the Defense Intelligence Agency, whose director, Lt. Gen. James H. Adams, is among those set to testify. The White House says the strike is still under investigation.

The hearings, which begin Wednesday in the Senate and continue Thursday in the House, are also likely to delve into internal administration debate over the war given the resignation this week of Joe Kent as director of the National Counterterrorism Center. Kent said Tuesday that he could not "in good conscience" back the Trump administration's war and that he did not agree that Iran posed an imminent threat to the U.S.

Hours later, Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard, whose office oversaw Kent's work and who is expected at the hearings this week, wrote in a carefully worded social media post that it was up to Trump to decide whether Iran posed a threat. She did not mention her own views of the strikes.

Gabbard and CIA Director John Ratcliffe may also be questioned over recent intelligence assessments

about Iran, including one that showed U.S. strikes are unlikely to result in a regime change in Tehran, and another that cast doubt on claims Iran was preparing to strike first.

The hearings are also likely to focus on Kash Patel's leadership of the FBI. It will be his first public appearance on Capitol Hill since video surfaced last month showing him partying with members of the U.S. men's hockey team following their gold medal win at the Winter Olympics.

He has fired dozens of agents in his first year on the job, raising concerns about an exodus of national security experience at a time when the U.S. is confronting an elevated terrorism threat.

This month alone, a gunman wearing clothes with an Iranian flag design and the words "Property of Allah" killed two people at a Texas bar; two men who authorities say were inspired by the Islamic State were arrested on charges of bringing homemade powerful explosives to a protest outside the New York City mayoral mansion; a man with a past terrorism conviction opened fire inside an Old Dominion University classroom in Virginia; and a Lebanese-born man in Michigan drove his car into a synagogue.

The FBI has said that it is working around the clock to protect the country.

## **Trump's tariffs were supposed to help manufacturers. But instead, they're hurting**

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Jay Allen is a fan of President Donald Trump, and voted for him on the belief that the Republican would cut taxes and trim regulations, helping his manufacturing business in northeast Arkansas.

But the tariffs at the core of Trump's economic agenda have wreaked havoc on his company, Allen Engineering Corp., which makes industrial equipment used to install, finish and pave concrete. The import taxes have raised the costs of engines, steel, gearboxes and clutches made abroad that Allen needs to build power trowels that can sell for up to \$100,000 each.

Allen's experience embodies a growing body of evidence that the tariffs that Trump said would help American factories are, in fact, squashing many of them. The problem could get worse as the administration scrambles to craft new tariffs to replace the emergency import taxes that the Supreme Court ruled illegal in February.

Allen said he ran his company at a loss in 2025 because of tariffs. His payroll has fallen to 140 workers from a peak of 205. To get by this year, he has hiked prices by 8% to 10%, even though that might mean fewer sales.

"What's really sad is the unintended consequences of his tariffs are hurting manufacturing in our country," said Allen. "Unfortunately, the working-class people are getting squeezed."

Manufacturing jobs have declined during Trump's first year back

Trump's core rationale for tariffs has been that they would force more factories to open in the U.S. and would generate enough revenue to close federal budget deficits. But that hasn't materialized so far.

Factories continue to shed workers, with 98,000 manufacturing jobs lost during Trump's first full 12 months back in the White House. American companies that foot the bill for tariffs are now suing the Trump administration for more than \$130 billion in tariff refunds. Meanwhile, the federal deficit is projected to climb over the next decade.

The White House maintains that construction spending is high, more workers are being hired to build factories, new investments are being made and labor productivity in manufacturing is increasing — which could eventually fuel a factory revival.

"It takes time to get production online, and therefore it will be some more time before we fully materialize the benefits of the president's policies," Pierre Yared, the acting chairman of the White House Council of Economic Advisers, said in an email.

Construction is up — but that's due to Biden's bill

Some of the bright spots in construction cited by the White House appear to be the result of programs

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launched by Joe Biden.

Factory construction spending began to accelerate in 2022 with the anticipation of government support from Biden's CHIPS and Science Act, which included big subsidies for computer chip plants. The law was a primary contributor to a historic surge in the annualized rate of construction spending on manufacturing facilities, said Skanda Amarnath, executive director of the economic policy group Employ America.

Construction spending on factories has slipped during Trump's presidency, but the pace remains relatively high largely because of continuing work on Biden-era projects in Arizona, Texas and Idaho, Amarnath said.

Amarnath has also gone through the interviews regional Federal Reserve banks have held with businesses. Those comments show some companies might expand by taking advantage of Trump's tax breaks on investments in equipment and new buildings.

But while the pharmaceutical drug sector might be expanding, the comments show no overall uptick in manufacturing because of Trump's tariffs.

"You don't get the sense that there is this new manufacturing renaissance under way," Amarnath said.

Uncertainty in tariffs has deterred investments

Based on orders, proclamations and other statements, Trump has taken more than 50 actions on tariffs so far — and that tally doesn't include the tariffs threats he regularly makes on social media or in conversations with reporters, but hasn't formally put in place.

The flurry of announcements, reversals, exemptions and legal challenges — as well as Trump's decision to bypass Congress to impose tariffs — has made it difficult for smaller manufacturing companies to plan.

For example, Allen Engineering imports its 75-horsepower diesel engines from Germany. Building them in the United States would require a \$20 million investment — a huge risk if the status of the tariffs are unclear.

Are engine-makers "going to spend that kind of money to move production from Germany to the U.S. when they don't know what the landscape is going to be in three years?" Allen said. "I don't know who is going to be in the White House, and what the stance is going to be on these tariffs."

Joseph Steinberg, an economist at the University of Toronto, said research shows that under the best-case scenario "it would take a decade for manufacturing employment to rise above where it was before tariffs were enacted."

But Steinberg said "the current situation is nothing like the 'best case,'" since U.S. trade policy is unsettled and that leaves companies reluctant to expand.

Equipment makers have been hit hard by rising steel costs

About 98% of U.S. manufacturing establishments have fewer than 200 workers, according to Census Bureau data, and don't have the kind of name-brand recognition or lobbying heft to minimize the damage from tariffs that big players like Apple, General Motors and Ford possess.

The Association of Equipment Manufacturers in February reported that America's share of global manufacturing severely lags China's. The group has urged tax credits to offset the expense of tariffs, and specifically called for tariff relief on raw materials, parts and components that cannot be acquired domestically at scale.

Steel tariffs have been a particular concern. Trump imposed them last March and hiked them to 50% in June. They were not affected by the Supreme Court decision.

Trump has credited the tariffs with restoring profits at American steel mills. But they have hurt companies that use that steel, like Calder Brothers in South Carolina, which makes equipment to pave asphalt.

"The steel tariffs were the first thing that got my attention," said Glen Calder, the company's president. "My steel pricing jumped 25% two weeks before the tariffs went into effect for domestic steel. The market price just jumped. It has stayed elevated."

Meanwhile, China's trade surplus has grown

Part of Trump's push to expand manufacturing was to help American companies compete against China — a country he plans to visit this spring for talks with its leader, Xi Jinping.

But the U.S. manufacturing trade imbalance rose last year under Trump instead of narrowing. Meanwhile, China's trade surplus with the world climbed to a record \$1.2 trillion.

This trend exposes one of the big problems with Trump's tariff strategy, said Lori Wallach, director of

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the Rethink Trade program at American Economic Liberties Project. She noted that he largely bypassed Congress and failed to address gaps in the World Trade Organization's rules for the trade frameworks that he negotiated with other countries.

Instead of working with partners to ensure there were penalties for foreign manufacturers with abusive labor practices and unfair subsidies, Trump chose against rallying partners to counter China as a unified group. American manufacturers are at a disadvantage, Wallach argued, because there is not a coalition of nations that can impose penalties for currency manipulation, subsidies and schemes to evade tariffs.

"The general revulsion of this administration to international cooperation means they're trying to do it alone," Wallach said.

## Federal Reserve could signal no interest rate cuts this year in wake of Iran war

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — A key question hangs over the Federal Reserve's two-day meeting that ends Wednesday: Will central bank policymakers still reduce short-term interest rates this year, now that the Iran war has sent oil prices higher and gas prices spiking? Or will they have to stand pat for months to see how the conflict plays out?

Fed Chair Jerome Powell is almost certain to announce Wednesday that the central bank has kept its key rate unchanged for the second straight meeting at about 3.6%. But the Fed will also release a set of quarterly projections, and they could alter their forecast of one rate cut this year to zero. While such a change might seem minor, it would be a major course correction after 18 months of on-again, off-again rate cuts.

Wherever the Fed comes down, it is a particularly difficult time for policymakers to issue economic projections. The Iran war that the Trump administration launched Feb. 28 has already sent gas prices soaring and will push up inflation for at least the next month or two. The Fed will have to raise the inflation forecast it issues Wednesday from where it stood in December, when Fed officials projected inflation would fall to 2.6% by the end of this year.

Many economists expect the Fed will forecast that inflation will remain as high as 3% even by late 2026. An increase of that magnitude could be hard to square with more interest-rate cuts.

At the same time, the jump in gas prices — if it is high enough and lasts long enough — could slow the economy, as more consumer spending is eaten up at the pump, leaving less money to be spent on other goods and services. As a result, unemployment could move higher later this year.

On Tuesday, gas prices averaged \$3.79 a gallon nationwide, according to AAA, up 88 cents from a month ago.

Those two outcomes — higher inflation and higher unemployment — typically lead the Fed in opposite directions. The central bank keeps its key rate unchanged — or even increases it — to fight inflation, while it cuts rates to boost spending and hiring. A combination of rising prices and higher unemployment is generally the worst-case scenario for central bankers.

At the same time, this week's meeting will be among the last with Powell as chair. His term ends May 15 and President Donald Trump has nominated a former top Fed official, Kevin Warsh, to replace him. Yet Warsh's nomination has been delayed in the Senate because key Republican senators have objected to a Justice Department investigation of Powell over his testimony about a building renovation.

Last Friday, a judge threw out a pair of subpoenas that the Justice Department had issued to the Fed, dealing a blow to the investigation. But U.S. Attorney Jeannine Pirro has said she will appeal the ruling.

This week's meeting will be Powell's second-to-last, unless Warsh isn't confirmed by May 15, at which point Powell could remain chair of the Fed's rate-setting committee until a replacement is named.

Even before the Iran war, problems had cropped up in both the inflation and jobs data, putting the Fed in a tight spot. Prices rose more quickly in January than in recent months, according to the Fed's preferred

measure, with inflation excluding food and energy reaching 3.1% compared with a year earlier. That is little changed from where it was two years ago, a sign that prices are still rising at a stubbornly elevated pace.

Yet hiring has also stumbled. Businesses and other employers shed 92,000 jobs in February, the government reported earlier this month, an unexpectedly weak showing that followed an encouraging gain of 130,000 in January. The unemployment rate ticked higher to a still-low 4.4% from 4.3%.

## Iran launches barrage of missiles after Israel kills 2 of its top officials

By JON GAMBRELL, JULIE WATSON and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Israel killed two senior Iranian security officials in a major blow to the Islamic Republic's leadership as it faces its greatest test in decades, and Iran responded Wednesday with renewed missile and drone attacks on its Gulf Arab neighbors and Israel.

Ali Larijani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, was considered one of the most powerful figures in the country since Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was killed in an airstrike on the first day of the war. Gen. Gholam Reza Soleimani was the head of the Revolutionary Guard's all-volunteer Basij.

Iran confirmed the killings of the men, who were key to Iran's violent crackdown on protests in January that challenged the theocracy's 47-year rule.

In response, Iran launched a barrage of what it said were multiple-warhead missiles Wednesday at central Israel to avenge Larijani's death. Israel's medical service said two people were killed in Ramat Gan, east of Tel Aviv.

Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and other Arab states also faced barrages of Iranian-fired missiles and drones Wednesday that were intercepted by air defense systems.

With concerns growing about a global energy crisis, an Iranian official said Tehran had no intention of relinquishing its tight grip on shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial waterway for oil.

U.S. Central Command said the U.S. military fired multiple 5,000-pound deep penetrator bombs Tuesday on Iranian missile sites along Iran's coastline near the Strait of Hormuz.

It announced the bombings hours after President Donald Trump said that NATO and most other allies had rejected Trump's calls to help secure the strait.

Iran launches multiple-warhead missiles at Israel

Iran acknowledged launching multiple-warhead missiles at Israel early Wednesday, the latest use of a weapon designed to spread maximum damage and evade Israel's multiple layers of air defenses.

Footage filmed by The Associated Press showed the release of the cluster munition from at least one missile over Israel. A statement from the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard said the force launched the Khorramshahr-4 and Qadr multiple-warhead missiles to avenge Larijani's killing.

Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz said Tuesday that Larijani and Soleimani "were eliminated" in strikes overnight. The Israeli military said it also struck more than 10 Basij posts across Tehran.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the killings were aimed at "undermining this regime to give the Iranian people the opportunity to remove it." But there have been no signs of anti-government protests since the war began, as many Iranians shelter from the American and Israeli strikes.

The Iranian judiciary's news agency, Mizan, quoted the Revolutionary Guard as confirming the killing of Soleimani. Other Iranian state media confirmed Larijani's death.

Larijani, a former parliamentary speaker, was a senior policy adviser to the late Khamenei on strategy in nuclear talks with the Trump administration. He was sanctioned by the U.S. Treasury in January for his role "coordinating" Iran's violent suppression of nationwide protests.

Soleimani was also sanctioned by the U.S., the European Union and other nations, over his role in suppressing dissent for years through the Basij.

The killings of the top officials came on the eve of "Chaharshanbe Souri," or the Festival of Fire, shortly before the Persian new year. Authorities have sent threatening text messages telling the public not to turn out for the festival, warning the celebrations could be used by "rioters."

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Iran continues strikes on neighboring countries

In Iraq, a strike hit inside the U.S. Embassy compound in Baghdad early Wednesday, two Iraqi security officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to comment. No further details were immediately available. There was no immediate statement from the State Department. A day earlier, a drone crashed inside the compound.

Saudi Arabia's Defense Ministry shot down a ballistic missile targeting the area around Prince Sultan Air Base, which hosts American forces and aircraft.

In the United Arab Emirates, an Iranian projectile struck near an Australian military base Wednesday, sparking a small fire but causing no injuries, Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said. His comments appeared to correspond with explosions heard by AP journalists in Dubai near Al Minhad Air Base, which is used by Western nations as a transshipment point across the wider Mideast.

Iran's grip on the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's oil is transported, is sparking concerns about tightening energy supplies — unnerving the world economy.

A few ships have crossed through the strait, and Iran has said the waterway technically remains open — just not for the United States, Israel and their allies. About 20 vessels have been struck.

With oil prices rising, Trump has demanded that roughly a half-dozen countries send warships to ensure ships can pass through the strait but said he has not gotten any support.

The European Union's top diplomat said the 27-nation bloc does not want to be dragged into the conflict with Iran. "This is not Europe's war," Kaja Kallas told EU lawmakers Tuesday. "We were not consulted."

Meanwhile, the International Atomic Energy Agency said Wednesday it received a report from Iran that its Bushehr nuclear power plant complex had been hit by a projectile but there were no injuries and the plant suffered no damage. It reiterated the call by IAEA's leader, Rafael Mariano Grossi, "for maximum restraint during the conflict to prevent risk of a nuclear accident."

Renewed Israeli strikes in Lebanon

The Israeli military continued its strikes on Iran-backed Hezbollah militants in Lebanon.

Israeli strikes hit apartment buildings in central Beirut early Wednesday, killing at least 6 people and wounding 24 others, the Lebanese health ministry said.

Another strike in the Nabatiyeh district killed three people and wounded another, Lebanon's health ministry said Wednesday. Rescue teams were searching for eight missing people, it said.

Israel's strikes have displaced more than 1 million Lebanese — roughly 20% of the population — according to the Lebanese government, which says more than 900 people have been killed. In Israel, 14 people have been killed by Iranian missile fire. At least 13 U.S. military members have been killed.

More than 1,300 people have been killed in Iran since the conflict started Feb. 28, according to the Iranian Red Crescent.

## Gunman killed and employee hospitalized after a shooting at a Georgia VA clinic, police say

By EMILIE MEGNIEN and JEFF MARTIN Associated Press

JASPER, Ga. (AP) — There was a shooting Tuesday at a Department of Veterans Affairs clinic in a small town at the foot of the Blue Ridge mountains in Georgia, and the gunman was shot and killed, police said.

A Veterans Affairs employee was taken by helicopter to a hospital after the gunfire Tuesday afternoon, VA spokesman Peter Kasperowicz said.

Jasper police responded to the scene around 1:30 p.m. Tuesday, the city said in a statement. Outside the VA clinic, the officers confronted the gunman, who was shot and killed, authorities said.

The gunman was from the Jasper area, Jasper Police Chief Matt Dawkins told reporters at the scene. But details about him were not immediately released.

"We don't know what led up to it," Dawkins said.

Jimmy Mooney was shopping at a nearby Goodwill store when he heard gunfire.

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"We heard the gunshots going off," he said. "There was probably 17 of us inside the Goodwill that was shopping, and, they had come and told us to get in the back of the store and during that time we could see the officers running down the hill. Gunshots started going off."

The Jasper police chief said the Federal Bureau of Investigation will be investigating the shooting along with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation.

When asked about the suspect's background, a Pickens County sheriff's spokesman said he did not know whether he had a military background.

The clinic will remain closed for the rest of the week, Kasperowicz said.

"VA is rescheduling appointments as necessary and ensuring Veterans and staff have access to counseling and chaplain services in the wake of this tragic event," he said in an email.

The VA's Office of Inspector General will assist local authorities in the investigation, he added.

The outpatient clinic in Jasper offers services that include primary care and specialty health services, including laboratory, telehealth and mental health care, according to its website.

Jasper, a town of about 5,000 people, is roughly 60 miles (97 km) north of downtown Atlanta. Signs on a highway through the town call it Georgia's "First Mountain City" as the Blue Ridge Mountains come into view as motorists from Atlanta head north.

Photos from the local newspaper, the Pickens Progress, showed more than a half-dozen law enforcement officers responding to the scene, wearing tactical vests near a strip mall in the town.

The clinic opened in the summer of 2020, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs said in a news release announcing its grand opening.

"The new Pickens County VA Clinic will increase access and ensure that our Veterans continue to receive the high-quality health care that they have earned and deserve closer to their home," officials said in the release.

## 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) — Travel disruptions continued Tuesday in the U.S. as airlines worked to recover from a powerful storm system that had already snarled flight schedules a day earlier while the partial government shutdown continued to fuel long lines at security checkpoints.

Carriers canceled more than 1,100 U.S. flights on Tuesday and delayed about 7,300 others, according to flight-tracking site FlightAware. Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport had over 230 flights canceled and roughly 770 delayed.

The disruptions follow a chaotic Monday for air travel, triggered by powerful storms that dumped snow by the foot in the Midwest and swept through the eastern half of the country, leading to thousands of cancellations at major hubs, including in New York, Chicago and Atlanta. Gusts approached 50 mph (80 kph) in parts of New York, the National Weather Service said.

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 flight she and her family could book doesn't leave until Tuesday afternoon.

Storms come while TSA workers aren't getting paid

Air travel was already under pressure before the storms. A partial government shutdown that began Feb. 14 has thinned staffing at some security checkpoints, at times leading to longer lines. And airports are crowded with spring break travelers and fans heading to March Madness, the annual NCAA men's and women's college basketball tournaments.

On Monday alone, more than 4,800 U.S. flights were canceled. Delays topped 12,800. They included about 600 canceled flights at Chicago O'Hare International Airport, more than 500 at Atlanta's Hartsfield-

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Jackson and roughly 450 at New York's LaGuardia Airport, according to FlightAware. The Federal Aviation Administration also issued ground stops and delays at several major airports as conditions worsened.

The storms also unfolded just as airport security screeners missed their first full paycheck over the weekend. The ongoing 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.

Long lines at security checkpoints

Some airports have reported longer security lines due to 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 shutdown began.

A shutdown-induced staffing shortage prompted TSA to temporarily close multiple security checkpoints at Philadelphia's airport starting Wednesday. Staff will guide travelers to alternate checkpoints, the airport said in a post on the social platform X. It recommended that passengers arrive 2.5 hours early for domestic flights and 3.5 hours early for international flights.

TSA didn't immediately respond to a query about the reason for the closures, but Heather Redfern, a spokesperson for the city's aviation department, said the staffing constraints were the cause. TSA closed some Philadelphia checkpoints during a previous government shutdown last year.

Smaller airports may need to close if the rate of TSA employees not reporting to work continues to rise, Adam Stahl, the agency's acting deputy administrator, said on the TV program "Fox & Friends."

In Atlanta, Mel Stewart and his wife arrived four hours earlier than usual on Monday 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 of the shutdown. "And these people are working. They work hard, and for TSA people not to get paid, that's silly."

Outside the Atlanta airport, TSA union leaders held a news conference Monday warning that air travelers could face increasingly long wait times as the shutdown continues. Supporters held signs reading, "We want a paycheck, not a rain check."

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. Even so, he said, many officers continue reporting to work despite mounting financial strain.

## A prolonged and unusual March heat wave is gripping cities across the West

By JANIE HAR and HAVEN DALEY Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — San Franciscans bared an unusual amount of skin for this time of year Tuesday, as a city better known for its chilly summers, drizzle and fog experienced its hottest March in at least two decades, part of a rare winter heat wave baking the U.S. West.

While the Bay Area flirts with nearly 90 degree (32.2 C) highs, Phoenix is expected to top 100 F (37.7 C) this week — something it usually does in early May and has never done before March 26. Las Vegas could see its hottest March stretch ever recorded. Records were also falling in Los Angeles and across Southern California.

It's a stark contrast to the Midwest and eastern half of the country, which are digging out after powerful snow storms that led to thousands of flight cancellations this week.

Dogs and sunbathers flocked to Crissy Field's shoreline on the north end of San Francisco, as the Golden Gate Bridge shimmered nearby. It's unusual for San Francisco to get this hot this early, said Roger Gass, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in the Bay Area.

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It last happened in 2005, when downtown hit a record 87 F (30.5 C) on March 11, part of a two-day heat wave and its record high for the month. In March 2004, the city saw a nearly weeklong heat wave with temperatures around 80 F (26.7 C).

On Tuesday temperatures in the city looked to tie the record.

"It feels like summer already in March. That's crazy, but I love it," said dog walker Justyce Roliz.

But resident Jessica Ling noted one challenge for San Franciscans: Most don't have air conditioning.

"We have our fans going, our windows open, but we try to be outside as much as we can," she said.

Some tourists are enjoying the warm weather

Elsewhere, cities that are more accustomed to sweltering weather were hitting their own unusually high spring temps. In Las Vegas, there's a chance temperatures could reach 100 F (37.7 C) Saturday, said meteorologist Brian Planz at the city's National Weather Service forecast office. That would be the earliest Las Vegas has reached triple digits. Even if temps stay in the double digits, the city is poised to break its March all-time high of 93 F (33.8 C), set back in 2022, he said.

"If people are visiting Vegas this weekend, they just need to prepare for the heat, make sure they're hydrating," he said. "This is going to be unusual for this time of year."

Mark Reeves was heeding the advice, drinking plenty of water, staying in the shade and occasionally dipping into the many air-conditioned casinos. The visitor from New Zealand, who was standing in front of the famous Fountains of Bellagio, said he didn't think it would be this hot.

But the heat hasn't dampened his trip.

"For me, this is the trip of a lifetime," he said. "I've never been to the USA before and I may never get here again."

Johnnie and Darien Anderson were happy to exchange the cold weather in Little Rock, Arkansas, for the dry heat in Las Vegas to celebrate their wedding anniversary. They noted it is less humid than Arkansas in the summer.

Meanwhile, some Western national parks that were preparing for spring break crowds urged people to check the forecast before heading out. High temperatures at White Sands National Park in New Mexico could reach the mid 90s F (around 35 C). Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona was under an extreme heat warning, with temperatures possibly hitting 104 F (40 C) in some places. The message from park officials: Avoid strenuous hiking during the hottest part of the day, which they identify as 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Some cities warn against water waste

Denver hasn't seen three consecutive March days above 80 F (26.6 Celsius) since 1907, but it could happen again this week, the National Weather Service said.

The heat wave comes at the end of an unusually warm winter that has led to a lack of snow in Colorado's mountains, which provides the water for millions of people. Water providers in the Denver area have already enacted or are considering limits on the number of days people can water their lawns. They're urging people not to be tempted to turn on their sprinklers this month.

Shonnie Cline, a spokesperson for Aurora Water, which provides water to 400,000 people in suburban Denver, said it's possible temperatures could still drop below freezing later, causing any water left in sprinkler systems to freeze and break the lines.

"The sooner you wake it up, it's not necessarily better," she said of lawns.

## **In his words: How Gregory Bovino became a face of Trump's mass deportations and ended his career**

By ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

Gregory Bovino, who became a face of the Trump administration's aggressive immigration enforcement tactics in large cities, confirmed to The Associated Press on Tuesday that he plans to retire from the Border Patrol in the coming weeks.

Bovino, 55, joined the Border Patrol in 1996 and steadily rose through the ranks. But he wasn't well-known outside the agency until last June, when he became commander of the administration's crackdown

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in Los Angeles, which resulted in thousands of arrests, most notably near Home Depots and at car washes. Agents smashed car windows, blew open a door to a house and patrolled the fabled MacArthur Park. on horseback.

Bovino, who often appeared in tactical gear, took his act to Chicago, patrolling down the Chicago River, in the Michigan Avenue tourist district and in neighborhoods across the city and suburbs. He led a helicopter raid at a large apartment building and used chemical agents to face demonstrators.

After short stops in Charlotte, North Carolina, and New Orleans, Bovino was a near-daily presence as Minnesota's Twin Cities turned into a battleground between demonstrators and immigration authorities that led to the deaths of U.S. citizens Renee Good and Alex Pretti. Bovino left Minnesota shortly after Pretti was killed on Jan. 24 and was replaced by White House border czar Tom Homan.

Bovino retires as chief of the Border Patrol's El Centro, California, sector, a position he held since 2020.

Bovino takes a key role in Trump's mass deportation campaign

"We're not going to hit one location. We're going to hit as many as we can. All over — all over — the Los Angeles region, we're going to turn and burn to that next target and the next and the next and the next, and we're not going to stop. We're not going to stop until there's not a problem here."

Bovino in an Aug. 25 interview with the AP describing his "turn and burn" approach to racking up immigration arrests.

"What happens at the border, even 100 years ago, didn't stay at the border, and it still doesn't. That's why we're here in Los Angeles."

Bovino, in AP interview, explaining the Border Patrol's increasing presence away from the border.

Bovino raises his profile as commander of Chicago operation

"We use the least amount of force necessary to effect the arrest, we do that. If I had more CS gas, I would have deployed it."

Bovino, in a Nov. 3 interview with the AP, on throwing a canister of gas at a crowd in Chicago's Little Village neighborhood. The Department of Homeland Security said Bovino was hit with a rock. Bystanders rejected that claim and said agents deployed gas without warning. A federal judge later said Bovino lied about the encounter.

"My role is not to tell you that you can or cannot enforce validly passed laws by Congress. ... My role is simply to see that in the enforcement of those laws, the agents are acting in a manner that is consistent with the Constitution."

U.S. District Judge Sara Ellis ordering Bovino on Oct. 28 to provide daily briefings on how his agents are enforcing the law in Chicago.

Bovino is reassigned from Minnesota

"This looks like a situation where an individual wanted to do maximum damage and massacre law enforcement."

Bovino at a Jan. 24 news conference on the fatal shooting of 37-year-old nurse Alex Pretti by federal authorities. His version of events was immediately called into question by eyewitness videos.

"I don't think it's a pullback, it's a little bit of a change. Everybody in this room that has a business, you know you make little changes. You know Bovino's very good, but he's a pretty out there kind of a guy, and in some cases, that's good, maybe it wasn't good here."

President Donald Trump, on Bovino's reassignment from Minnesota in a Jan. 27 interview with Fox News Channel.

"She is the best Secretary I ever worked for, period. The others weren't even close. Noem is the ultimate patriot."

Bovino commenting March 5 on Trump firing Kristi Noem as secretary of homeland security.

## Trump, Rubio call for new Cuban leaders as latest blackout underscores deepening economic crisis

By MILEXSY DURÁN Associated Press

HAVANA (AP) — U.S. President Donald Trump on Tuesday pledged imminent action against Cuba's socialist government as his moves against the island bring the U.S.' longtime opponent deeper into crisis.

A day after Trump's sanctions on Venezuela, including a stop to vital oil exports to Cuba, contributed to Cuba's latest nationwide blackout, Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio both said that the administration sees the island nation as the next country where the U.S. can expand its influence.

"Cuba right now is in very bad shape," Trump said.

"And we'll be doing something with Cuba very soon," he added.

Until recently, Trump's comments on change in Cuba might have been considered remarkable. But they come after his administration's military raid that captured then-President Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela and the launch of U.S. military strikes against Iran.

The Trump administration is looking for President Miguel Díaz-Canel to leave as the U.S. continues negotiating with the Cuban government, according to a U.S. official and a source with knowledge of talks between Washington and Havana. No detail has been offered about who the administration might like to see come to power.

Many Cubans do not believe that Díaz-Canel holds much power in Cuba, anyway, as opposed to revolutionary founding father Raúl Castro and his family.

With little reliable information trickling out of Havana or Washington, experts are watching closely for clues about what's in the works.

"Some pieces of this story as they're trickling out, don't add up to me," said Michael Bustamante, a Cuba expert and associate professor of history at the University of Miami. "I can't quite figure out what the end game is here for either side."

Rubio says Cuba's economy doesn't work and its government can't fix it

Electricity was slowly being restored to hospitals and some homes Tuesday afternoon, but officials warned that the crumbling power network could fail again.

The government blames its woes on a U.S. energy blockade after Trump in January warned of tariffs on any country that sells or provides oil to Cuba.

Rubio, who is of Cuban heritage, said the island "has an economy that doesn't work in a political and governmental system. They can't fix it."

A Cuban official said Monday that Cuba is open to trading with U.S. companies, but such promises have been made before.

"So they have to change dramatically," Rubio said. "What they announced yesterday is not dramatic enough. It's not going to fix it."

Trump has raised the possibility of a 'friendly takeover'

The Trump administration is also demanding that Cuba release political prisoners and move toward political and economic liberalization in return for a lifting of sanctions. Trump has also raised the possibility of a "friendly takeover of Cuba."

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

Cuba's Ministry of Energy and Mines said on X that the island had restored the electrical system in the western town of Pinar del Rio and the southeastern province of Holguin and that some "microsystems" were beginning to operate in various territories.

State-owned media reported that by late Monday power had been restored to 5% of residents in the capital, Havana, representing some 42,000 customers.

Without power, food spoils as Cubans experience widespread misery

U.S. sanctions and economic pressure have exasperated the misery many Cubans are experiencing.

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Pedro Ramos, a 75-year-old retired mechanic who shares a modest apartment in Old Havana with his wife, was boiling three pieces of chicken in an attempt to save them from spoiling with the power out.

"I want to see if we can rescue some food," he said. "Two people older than 70 live here. ... This is terrible."

"The power outages are driving me crazy," said 48-year-old Dalba Obiedo. "Last night I fell down a 27-step staircase. Now I have to have surgery on my jaw. I fell because the lights went out."

Havana resident Tomás David Velázquez Felipe, 61, 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."

## Oil prices resume their rise, but US stocks hold steadier this time around

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Oil prices resumed their rise on Tuesday because of the war with Iran, but U.S. stocks held steadier this time around.

The S&P 500 rose 0.2% to add to its gain from the day before, which was its biggest since the war began. The Dow Jones Industrial Average climbed 46 points, or 0.1%, and the Nasdaq composite rose 0.5%.

It's a break, for now at least, from the usual playbook since the start of the war, where stock prices have tended to go in the opposite direction of oil prices. The fear in financial markets has been that a long-term disruption to the global flow of oil could send prices so high for so long that it damages the global economy. Not only would higher gasoline prices sap households' budgets, it could also push companies to pass on their own higher transportation costs to customers.

On Tuesday, the price for a barrel of benchmark U.S. crude rose 2.9% to settle at \$96.21. Brent crude, the international standard, climbed 3.2% to \$103.42. But they pared even bigger gains from earlier in the morning, and they're either roughly where they were at the end of last week or below.

Delta Air Lines offered an encouraging signal about the strength of the economy after raising its forecast for revenue for the first three months of 2026. It said it's seen demand to fly accelerate into March from both businesses and households.

And that looks to be enough to offset higher prices for jet fuel because of the spike in oil prices. Delta said it still expects to report a profit for the start of 2026 that's in line with its earlier forecast.

Delta's stock flew 6.6% higher, and it helped other airline stocks trim their own sharp losses for the year so far. United Airlines climbed 3.2%, and Southwest Airlines rose 2.2%.

American Airlines gained 3.5% after saying it's also likely to report stronger revenue growth for the start of this year than it had forecast earlier.

Another big winner was Uber Technologies, which drove 4.2% higher after announcing an expansion of its partnership with Nvidia. They plan to launch a fleet of autonomous vehicles using Nvidia's technology, beginning with Los Angeles and San Francisco in the first half of next year.

Some beaten-down stocks in the financial industry, meanwhile, recovered losses from earlier in the year. That includes several that got swept up in worries about whether software businesses and others potentially under threat by AI-powered competitors will pay back all their loans. Blue Owl Capital gained 4.5%, and Ares Management rose 6.6%.

They helped offset a 3.2% drop for Cencora after the pharmaceutical sourcing and distribution services company said it's looking for a new chief financial officer. Its current CFO, James Cleary, will retire at the end of June.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 16.71 points to 6,716.09. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 46.85 to 46,993.26, and the Nasdaq composite gained 105.35 to 22,479.53.

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.

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

That's even as Treasury yields have climbed on expectations that higher oil prices will prevent the Federal Reserve from cutting interest rates for a while. Higher yields push downward on prices for stocks and all kinds of investments.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury eased to 4.20% from 4.23% late Monday, but it remains well above the 3.97% level it was at before the war with Iran began.

The Fed will make its next announcement on interest rates Wednesday afternoon, and traders see virtually no chance of a cut, according to data from CME Group.

Cuts to interest rates by the Fed would give the economy and job market a boost, and President Donald Trump has angrily been calling for them. But reductions would also worsen inflation.

In Australia, the central bank is actually raising interest rates. Citing higher fuel prices, the Reserve Bank of Australia made its first hike since November 2023.

In stock markets abroad, European indexes rose following a mixed finish in Asia. Indexes climbed 0.8% in London and fell 0.9% in Shanghai for two of the world's bigger moves.

## What to know about the deepening economic and political turmoil in Cuba

By JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

Cuba's widening economic turmoil along with its growing political tensions with U.S. President Donald Trump have paralyzed much of the island and raised uncertainty about what's next.

The country was plunged into darkness this week by a blackout — the third big failure of its power grid since December — opening the door for Trump to suggest that he might 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 on Monday.

Cuba is struggling under the weight of an U.S. energy blockade that has halted oil shipments to the island over the past three months.

Many of the nation's 11 million residents struggle to keep food from spoiling. Hospitals have canceled surgeries. The leading university has reduced classes due to the power outages and transportation shut-downs.

Here's what to know about Cuba's persistent blackouts and deepening crisis.

US leaders say power outages signal need for change

The U.S. State Department said Tuesday that the ongoing blackouts are a symptom of the Cuban government's failure to provide the most basic needs for its people.

When asked about Cuba at an unrelated White House event on Tuesday, Trump turned to his Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, who is the son of Cuban immigrants.

Rubio said Cuba's current political system and government can't fix the country's problems. "So they have to change dramatically," Rubio said.

Cuba's economic troubles are part of pressure campaign

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 has for months suggested Cuba's government is on the verge of collapse and said after the U.S. ousted former Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro that the increased economic pressure on the island meant the U.S. could have a "friendly takeover" there — though he has not clarified what that means.

Talks between the US and Cuba have been ongoing

Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel confirmed last week that there have been discussions with Washington.

While he wouldn't provide any specifics about the talks, he did say they were aimed at finding solutions to the "bilateral differences between our two nations."

Trump has suggested that top Cuban leaders would be smart to avoid the fate of Maduro, who was ar-

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rested in a U.S. military operation in January.

The Trump administration is looking for Díaz-Canel to leave power, according to a U.S. official and a source with knowledge of talks between Washington and Havana, who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe the sensitive talks and did not offer any details about who the administration might like to see as a replacement.

Fuel is in short supply

Cuba has struggled with dwindling oil after the U.S. removed Venezuela's leader, halting critical petroleum shipments from the nation. Trump then threatened tariffs on any country selling or supplying Cuba with oil.

The island is relying on its own natural gas, solar power and its own oil to run thermoelectric plants, but that hasn't been enough to meet demand.

The impact has been crippling. Buses have cut routes, gas is strictly rationed and a Cuban official said the health care system is teetering.

That's on top of what was already a shortage of basic necessities, including food and medicine.

Power outages now are a daily occurrence in Cuba

Cuba's aging grid has deteriorated in recent years to the point of being unreliable. There are daily outages and more frequent major blackouts.

Its thermoelectric plants are in poor shape too, seeing little maintenance. U.S. sanctions have prevented the government from buying new equipment and specialized parts, officials have said.

Shortages of fuel oil and diesel also have limited power production.

## **Broncos get star wide receiver Jaylen Waddle from Dolphins in a blockbuster trade, AP sources say**

By ROB MAADDI and ARNIE STAPLETON AP Pro Football Writers

The Denver Broncos' offseason is no longer muted.

The Broncos are acquiring standout wide receiver Jaylen Waddle in a blockbuster deal that sends three draft picks to the Miami Dolphins, including a first-rounder, two people with knowledge of the deal told The Associated Press on Tuesday.

Both spoke on condition of anonymity because the deal hasn't been announced. The Dolphins will receive the 30th-overall pick in next month's NFL draft along with picks in the third and fourth rounds. Denver will get Miami's fourth-rounder along with Waddle.

The Broncos were the only team not to sign a free agent outside of retaining their own players before making this deal.

Waddle gives Bo Nix another main playmaker along with Courtland Sutton, boosting a passing offense that finished 11th in the NFL last season.

Waddle's arrival will give the Broncos a bona fide top wide receiving duo for the first time since the late Demaryius Thomas and Emmanuel Sanders, who helped propel Denver to a Super Bowl championship a decade ago.

The Broncos were the AFC's No. 1 seed last season but lost to New England in the snowy AFC championship game without Nix, who broke his ankle in a game against Buffalo in the divisional round.

Denver's defense was one of the league's best and produced an NFL-high and franchise-record 68 sacks, led by Nik Bonitto's 14. The Broncos' offense was another story, often sputtering until Nix's fourth-quarter heroics. Denver won a dozen one-score games in 2025 and had 10 comebacks during an 11-game winning streak.

Nix has gone 25-11 in his two seasons, including the playoffs. But he's done it largely without a true No. 1 receiver or top-tier tight end. Denver's offense also lacked a playmaker in the backfield after J.K. Dobbins suffered what turned out to be a season-ending foot injury in mid-November.

Waddle, a first-round pick in 2021, had three straight 1,000-yard receiving seasons to begin his career but hasn't reached that total since 2023.

The 27-year-old Waddle has averaged 81 receptions, 1,098 yards receiving and six touchdowns over his

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five-year career. He had a career-high 104 catches as a rookie and had 1,356 yards receiving in 2022, when he led the NFL with 18.1 yards per catch.

Overall, Waddle has 373 receptions for 5,039 yards and 26 TDs.

The rebuilding Dolphins previously released five-time All-Pro wideout Tyreek Hill and quarterback Tua Tagovailoa. They fired coach Mike McDaniel after going 7-10 last season and hired Jeff Hafley to replace him.

Miami invested \$45 million guaranteed in Malik Willis to replace Tagovailoa.

## Republicans are launching a voting bill debate that could last days or even weeks

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans launched an unprecedented effort on Tuesday to hold the Senate floor and talk for days about a bill that they know won't pass — an attempt to capture public attention on legislation requiring stricter voter registration rules as President Donald Trump pressures Congress to act before November's midterm elections.

The talkathon could last a week or longer, potentially through the weekend, as Senate Majority Leader John Thune tries to navigate Trump's insistence on the issue and Democrats' united opposition. Trump has urged Thune to scrap the legislative filibuster, which triggers a 60-vote threshold in the 100-member Senate, or find another workaround to pass the bill, but Thune has repeatedly said he doesn't have the votes to do that.

Instead, Republicans intend to make a long, noisy show of support for the legislation, which would require Americans to prove they are U.S. citizens before they register to vote and to show identification at the polls, among other things. It's a risky strategy, with no guarantee it will be enough for Trump, who has said he won't sign other bills until the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility Act — also known as the SAVE America Act or the SAVE Act — is passed.

The floor debate is expected to eventually end with a failed vote. Republicans need 60 votes to advance the bill to a final vote, but they hold 53 seats, and all 45 Democrats and both independents, who caucus with the Democrats, oppose it.

The debate will "put Democrats on the record," Thune said. He added that "how it ends remains to be seen."

The Senate voted 51-48 Tuesday to begin the debate, with Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski the only Republican voting against moving forward on the bill.

In a social media post on Tuesday morning, Trump issued a warning to any Republican who doesn't support the bill: "I WILL NEVER (EVER!) ENDORSE ANYONE WHO VOTES AGAINST 'SAVE AMERICA!!!"

Creating strict voter registration rules

Trump says, without evidence, that Democrats can only win in the midterms if they cheat and explicitly said Republicans need the SAVE America Act to win in November. The House passed the legislation earlier this year, but the Senate turned to other issues as it became clear that Republicans didn't have the votes to pass it.

But Trump made clear he wasn't satisfied and pushed the Senate to act. The Republican president has said he won't sign other legislation, including a bipartisan housing bill backed by the White House, until the voting bill passes.

The bill contains a slew of provisions that Trump and his most loyal supporters have pushed as part of a broad effort to assert federal control over elections. It would require voters nationwide to provide proof of citizenship when they register and to show accepted voter identification when casting a ballot.

It would also create new penalties for election workers who register voters without proof of citizenship and require states to hand voter data over to the Department of Homeland Security so federal officials could screen for voters who are in the country illegally.

Trump also wants new provisions added to the bill, including a ban on most mail-in ballots.

"It'll guarantee the midterms," Trump said of the bill last week. "If you don't get it, big trouble."

Democratic opposition to the bill is firm

Democrats and many groups that champion voter access say there is little evidence of noncitizens voting and say the bill would disenfranchise millions of voters — including Republicans — by creating new burdens to prove citizenship.

It is already illegal to vote if you are not a U.S. citizen, but the bill would lay out strict new rules for paperwork that most people would have to present in person to register to vote. Opponents of the measure say those documents are not always readily available for many people and argue that it would kill voter registration efforts and unfairly penalize young people who are registering to vote for the first time, married women who change their name and people who cannot travel to present their documents, among other groups.

While Republicans have focused on the bill's new requirements to show identification when they show up to vote, Democrats say they are most concerned that the legislation would allow the federal government to take voters off the rolls.

Schumer said that Democrats are not opposed to voter identification but "this is about purging the voter rolls in a massive way, so you never even get the chance to show a voter ID when you showed up to vote."

Expect a show on the Senate floor

Trump, backed by Republican Sen. Mike Lee of Utah, has pushed for a talking filibuster, which would force Democrats to talk for days or weeks to delay passage of the bill. But Thune and the larger GOP conference rejected that idea, arguing that it would end in failure after giving Democrats a stage and the opportunity to offer endless amendments, potentially adding their priorities to the bill.

Republicans are instead taking over the floor with their own speeches, proceeding under regular order but operating outside the normal time limits that are customary when debating legislation. Democrats are expected to answer with their own procedural hijinks, potentially forcing Republicans to come to the floor at all hours for votes, meaning they will need to stay close to the Senate for the duration.

Lee said last week that it's unclear how it will all play out. He said he thinks Trump "understands that we need to put in an aggressive effort here."

"And a lot of that," he said, "is going to have to be determined in real time as we go about it."

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

On Monday night, Lee was rallying Trump's base voters on X.

"Once we're on this bill," he wrote, "we must stay on it until it's passed into law."

## **Top counterterrorism official Kent resigns over Trump's Iran war, says Iran posed no imminent threat**

By SEUNG MIN KIM and DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Joe Kent, the director of the National Counterterrorism Center, announced his resignation on Tuesday, citing his concerns about the justification for military strikes in Iran and saying he "cannot in good conscience" back the Trump administration's war.

"Iran posed no imminent threat to our nation, and it is clear that we started this war due to pressure from Israel and its powerful American lobby," Kent said in a statement posted on social media, making claims President Donald Trump has denied.

Kent, a former Green Beret and political candidate with connections to right-wing extremists, was confirmed last July on a 52-44 vote. As head of the National Counterterrorism Center, he was in charge of an agency tasked with analyzing and detecting terrorist threats.

His resignation demonstrates that the unease about the war within Trump's base extends to at least one senior member of his Republican administration.

The leadership change comes at a time of heightened concern about terrorism following several recent violent attacks in the U.S.

Justification for Iran strikes at heart of resignation

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Kent's decision came down to the reasoning behind the strikes on Iran, he wrote in his resignation letter. Trump has offered shifting reasons for the strikes and has pushed back on claims that Israel forced the U.S. to act. House Speaker Mike Johnson has suggested the White House believed Israel was determined to strike on its own, leaving the Republican president with a "very difficult decision."

Speaking with reporters in the Oval Office on Tuesday, Trump said he always thought Kent was "weak on security" and if someone in his administration did not believe Iran was a threat, "we don't want those people."

"They're not smart people, or they're not savvy people," Trump said. "Iran was a tremendous threat."

A year ago, in nominating Kent, Trump praised him as a man who had "hunted down terrorists and criminals his entire adult life."

Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard, whose office oversaw Kent's work, wrote in a social media post Tuesday that it was up to Trump to decide whether Iran posed a threat.

"After carefully reviewing all the information before him, President Trump concluded that the terrorist Islamist regime in Iran posed an imminent threat and he took action based on that conclusion," Gabbard wrote in the post. She did not mention her own views of the strikes.

Democrats strongly opposed Kent's confirmation because of his past ties to far-right figures and conspiracy theories. But following his resignation, Sen. Mark Warner of Virginia, the top Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee, said Kent's concerns about the war in Iran were justified.

"I strongly disagree with many of the positions he has espoused over the years, particularly those that risk politicizing our intelligence community," Warner said. "But on this point, he is right: There was no credible evidence of an imminent threat from Iran that would justify rushing the United States into another war of choice in the Middle East."

Johnson, though, pushed back on Kent's claims at a press conference on Tuesday.

"I got all the briefings. We all understood that there was clearly an imminent threat that Iran was very close to the enrichment of nuclear capability and they were building missiles at a pace no one in the region could keep up with," Johnson said.

Johnson said he is convinced that if Trump had waited "we would have mass casualties of Americans, service members and others, and our installation would have been dramatically damaged."

Departure follows three recent acts of violence

In New York City, two men who federal authorities say were inspired by the Islamic State group took powerful homemade bombs to a far-right protest outside the mayoral mansion.

In Michigan, a naturalized citizen from Lebanon rammed his vehicle into a synagogue, where he was shot at by security before he fatally shot himself.

And in Virginia, a man previously imprisoned on a terrorism conviction opened fire in a university classroom. Officials said the attack ended when he was killed by students.

Gabbard, CIA Director John Ratcliffe and FBI Director Kash Patel are scheduled to testify before lawmakers this week about threats facing the U.S., an annual hearing likely to be dominated this year by questions about the Iran war and the revelation that outdated intelligence likely led to the U.S. firing a missile that hit an elementary school in Iran and killed more than 165 people.

A veteran and former congresswoman from Hawaii, Gabbard has previously criticized talk of military strikes in Iran. Six years ago she said that "an all out war with Iran would make the wars that we've seen in Iraq and Afghanistan look like a picnic. It will be far more costly in lives, American lives, and American taxpayer dollars — and all towards accomplishing what goal? What objective?"

A spokesperson for Gabbard declined to answer questions about Gabbard's views on the current strikes.

A popular figure among Trump supporters

Kent's military background and his personal story of sacrifice made him a compelling figure among Trump supporters.

Before joining Trump's administration, Kent ran two unsuccessful campaigns for Congress in Washington state. As a Green Beret, he saw combat in 11 deployments before retiring to join the CIA. He also endured

tragedy: His wife, a Navy cryptologist, was killed by a suicide bomber in 2019 in Syria, leaving him with two young sons. Kent, 45, has since remarried.

During the United States' chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, Kent criticized what he said was a misguided desire for nation building by some in Washington, D.C.

"It speaks to our hubris," Kent told reporters while campaigning for Congress. "For us not to have learned from all this just shows that there are people making money and making their careers at the other end of it. They've been doing it on the backs and dead bodies of U.S. soldiers."

During his 2022 congressional campaign, Kent paid Graham Jorgensen, a member of the far-right military group the Proud Boys, for consulting work. He also worked closely with Joey Gibson, the founder of the Christian nationalist group Patriot Prayer, and attracted support from a variety of far-right figures.

Early during his first campaign, Kent acknowledged that a political consultant set up a call intended to broaden his social media reach that was joined by Nick Fuentes, a popular right-wing influencer who has said that Jews are holding the U.S. "hostage" and once proclaimed that "Hitler was awesome, Hitler was right."

Kent later disavowed those ties and stated that he rejected all "racism and bigotry."

During his Senate confirmation hearing, Kent refused to distance himself from a conspiracy theory that federal agents instigated the Jan. 6, 2021, attack at the Capitol, as well as false claims that Trump won the 2020 election over Democrat Joe Biden.

Republicans praised Kent's counterterrorism qualifications, pointing to his military and intelligence experience.

Sen. Tom Cotton, the GOP chair of the Intelligence Committee, said in a floor speech that Kent had "dedicated his career to fighting terrorism and keeping Americans safe."

## **Attorney General Pam Bondi subpoenaed to answer questions from Congress about the Epstein files**

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Attorney General Pam Bondi was subpoenaed Tuesday to answer questions from Congress about the Justice Department's sex trafficking investigation of Jeffrey Epstein and the agency's handling of millions of files related to the disgraced financier.

Bondi was ordered to appear for a deposition on April 14 by the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform after a vote earlier this month that was supported by five Republicans.

The Justice Department's failure to fend off the subpoena from the Republican-led committee underscores widespread discontent among President Donald Trump's own base over Bondi's management of the review and release of a trove of documents from the criminal investigation into Epstein.

"The Committee has questions regarding the Department of Justice's handling of the investigation into Jeffrey Epstein and his associates and its compliance with the Epstein Files Transparency Act," Rep. James Comer, the Republican chairman, said in a letter to Bondi.

"As Attorney General, you are directly responsible for overseeing the Department's collection, review, and determinations regarding the release of files pursuant to the Epstein Files Transparency Act, and the Committee therefore believes that you possess valuable insight into these efforts," he wrote.

The department on Tuesday called the subpoena "completely unnecessary." Bondi and Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche were expected to provide a private briefing Wednesday to members of the committee.

"Lawmakers have been invited to view the unredacted files for themselves at the Department of Justice, and the Attorney General has always made herself available to speak directly with members of Congress," the department said in a statement. The agency said it looks forward to "continuing to provide policymakers with the facts."

The Trump administration has faced constant political headaches since the rollout of the files began in December, with critics accusing the department of hiding certain documents and over-redacting files. In other cases, victims have slammed the department for sloppy redactions that revealed their sensitive

information.

The Justice Department has fiercely defended its handling of the Epstein files, saying it worked as quickly and diligently as possible to review and release millions of documents required under the law. The department has denied any accusations that it used redactions to protect certain people or improperly withheld certain materials. And it has said it immediately worked to fix any redaction errors raised by victims.

## **Vatican appeals court declares mistrial in the 'trial of the century' against a cardinal**

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — The Vatican appeals tribunal declared a mistrial Tuesday in the Holy See's big "trial of the century," a stunning blow to both Pope Francis' legacy and Vatican prosecutors who had put a cardinal and several other people on trial over alleged financial crimes.

In a 16-page ruling, the appeals court ruled that Francis and Vatican prosecutors both made procedural errors that nullified the original indictment against Cardinal Angelo Becciu and the others and required a new trial. The court set a June 22 as the date for the new trial to begin.

Defense lawyers said such a ruling was significant if not historic, since it amounted to a Vatican court declaring that an act of the pope had no effect.

The ruling was a win for the defense and a huge setback to Vatican prosecutors, who have been scrambling to salvage their case. The prosecution and 2023 convictions against Becciu and others had been held up by the Vatican and late pope as evidence of his willingness to crack down on financial misconduct in the Holy See.

A case that began with a London investment and grew

Becciu's lawyers said the ruling showed they were right in arguing that the defense was put at an unfair disadvantage from the start.

"It shows that from the first moment, we were right to raise the violation of the right to defense and to request that the law be respected to have a fair trial," Becciu's lawyers Fabio Viglione and Maria Concetta Marzo said in a statement.

The case had as its main focus the Vatican's investment of 350 million euros (\$413 million) in a London property. Prosecutors alleged brokers and Vatican Monsignors fleeced the Holy See of tens of millions of euros in fees and commissions to acquire the property, and then extorted the Holy See for 15 million euros (\$16.5 million) to cede control of it.

The original investigation spawned two main tangents involving Becciu, once a leading Vatican cardinal and future papal contender. He was convicted of embezzlement and sentenced to 5½ years in prison. The tribunal convicted eight other defendants of embezzlement, abuse of office, fraud and other charges and imposed tens of millions of euros (dollars) in restitution to the Holy See.

All defendants maintained their innocence and appealed after a two-year trial that opened a Pandora's box of unwanted revelations about papal ransom payments to Islamic militants, Vatican vendettas, espionage and other dirty laundry of the Holy See.

During the initial trial, Becciu's lawyers in particular had complained that prosecutors hadn't turned over all the evidence to the defense, violating their right to a fair trial. Prosecutors had redacted some documents, withheld the cellphone records of a key prosecution witness and redacted texts among the players, arguing that such omissions were necessary to protect the secrecy of other investigations.

Defense lawyers also alleged that four secret decrees Francis signed giving prosecutors wide-ranging powers to investigate violated the defendants' right to a fair trial. They only learned about the decrees just before the trial began, since the decrees were never published.

The appeals court sides with the defense

The appeals court agreed with the defense arguments.

In the ruling, the appeals court ruled that one of Francis' decrees — which allowed prosecutors to proceed without a preliminary judge overseeing their work — amounted to a law that should have been published.

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The failure to publish it, or to at least let the suspects know about it, made it ineffective, the court ruled. The court also decreed that Vatican prosecutors' failure to turn over to the defense all their evidence nullified their original indictment.

The finding against Francis' decree could have wide-ranging implications for any new trial, since it throws into question prosecutors' actions derived from the powers Francis granted them. Chief among them was the June 2020 arrest of broker Gianluigi Torzi, who was held in the Vatican barracks for 10 days of questioning without charge or a judge's warrant, and had his cellphones and laptop seized.

Defense lawyers were pleased by the ruling.

"The historic decision by the Court of Appeals—which, for the first time in Vatican history, ruled that a papal rescript was invalid and void due to failure to publish it—in our view results in the complete nullity of the entire investigation and trial," attorneys Massimo Bassi and Cataldo Intrieri, who represent former Vatican official Fabrizio Tirabassi, said in a statement.

The tribunal, headed by Archbishop Alejandro Arellano Cedillo, ordered prosecutors to deposit all the documentation, "in their original form," by April 30. It gave the defense until June 15 to prepare their motions before the June 22 start of the new trial.

The court stressed that it was not declaring the complete nullity of every act of the original trial, maintaining for example the status of the civil parties and the original acquittals. Defense lawyers said it remains to be seen how the appeals court decides what elements of the original trial can remain and what must be redone.

It was the second major blow to prosecutors since the appeals phase opened last year.

In January, the Vatican's highest Court of Cassation upheld the lower court's decision to throw out the prosecutor's appeal of the first trial entirely because prosecutor Alessandro Diddi committed an embarrassing rookie procedural error.

On the same day as the Cassation ruling, Diddi also dropped months of objections and abruptly resigned from the case, rather than face the possibility that the Cassation court would order him removed.

Leo speaks about justice, unity and credibility

Tuesday's decision was issued just days after Pope Leo XIV opened the Vatican's judicial year. Leo, a canon lawyer, met Saturday with the judges and prosecutors who oversee the judicial apparatus of the Vatican City State, which follows its own peculiar legal code that is inspired by a century-old Italian code and the church's in-house canon law.

In his remarks, Leo spoke of justice as a means of fostering unity in the church and credibility within an institution. His remarks were interpreted by some as a reference to how the Becciu trial had in some ways damaged the Holy See's reputation because of its many anomalies.

"The observance of procedural safeguards, the impartiality of the judge, the effectiveness of the right of defence and the reasonable duration of proceedings are not merely technical instruments of the judicial process," Leo said. "They constitute the conditions through which the exercise of the judicial function acquires particular authority and contributes to institutional stability."

## Satellite images begin to show damage wrought by Iran war

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Satellite images are beginning to be released giving a glimpse into the toll of the Iran war, with ships ablaze in an Iranian port and destroyed buildings at an American base.

Information has so far been scarce about the damage being done across the Middle East, particularly when it's inside closed military facilities, since the start of the war on Feb. 28.

The images come from Planet Labs PBC, a San Francisco-based firm used by media outlets, including The Associated Press. Planet Labs has put a two-week delay on its imagery becoming public citing concerns its imagery could be used by "adversarial actors."

High-resolution images also have been published by competing firms. Other providers, like the U.S. Geological Survey, have been publishing lower-resolution imagery as well that's been useful.

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The U.S. and Israel have been striking a wide variety of targets, including leadership figures, military bases, missile and air defense sites and positions of the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard and its volunteer force, the Basij. Iran has responded with drone and missile fire targeting Israel and nearby Gulf Arab nations.

Here's a look at what's visible in a selection of Planet Labs' pictures, as well as others.

Burning ships in Bandar Abbas, Iran

Some of the most dramatic images from Planet Labs so far have been in Bandar Abbas, home to a major Iranian military port next to the crucial Strait of Hormuz connecting the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Sea.

Images taken on March 2 show ships ablaze at the port. The U.S. military's Central Command has been targeting Iran's naval assets and says it has sank or damaged more than 100 Iranian vessels so far in the war.

Major impact at 5th Fleet headquarters in Bahrain

The island kingdom of Bahrain, home of the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet, has seen heavy Iranian fire targeting both military bases and oil installations. A March 1 image shot by Planet Labs shows a major building at the base destroyed, as well as two radomes — geodesic domes covering radar antennas — likely by Iranian missile and drone fire.

The Navy has not offered a clear breakdown in the damage done so far at the base, but Iran has repeatedly claimed to have attacked it. Online videos have also shown incoming fire targeting the base. During the 12-day war in June, Iran attacked and destroyed a similar radome at Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar used for secure communications.

French naval base hit in Abu Dhabi

In Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, there's damage seen at France's Camp de la Paix naval base. Satellite images from March 3 show damage to two large hangar-like buildings at the facility. The base is near Zayed Port, in Abu Dhabi, and close to its Cultural District that includes the Louvre Abu Dhabi and other major museums both open and still under construction.

Fires seen burning

The U.S. Geological Survey's Landsat satellites also have been key in spotting major fires. Imagery from Landsat taken on Monday showed a fire at Dubai International Airport after an Iranian drone strike set a fuel tanker ablaze at the world's busiest airport for international travel, causing a plume of noxious black smoke.

Another fire was also seen on Monday at Oman's southern port in Salalah, which came under attack from suspected Iranian drones on March 11, though Tehran has denied it launched them in its campaign targeting Gulf Arab states. The fire apparently has been burning since then.

## Trump postpones his China trip to focus on the war in Iran

By COLLIN BINKLEY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is delaying a diplomatic trip to China that had been planned for months but began to unravel as he pressured Beijing and other world powers to use their military might to protect the Strait of Hormuz.

Trump said Tuesday while meeting with Irish Prime Minister Micheál Martin in the Oval Office that he would be going to China in five or six weeks' time instead of at the end of the month. He said he would be "resetting" his visit with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

"We're working with China — they were fine with it," Trump said. "I look forward to seeing President Xi. He looks forward to seeing me, I think."

Trump's visit to China is seen as an opportunity to build on a fragile trade truce between the two superpowers, but it has become tangled in his effort to find an endgame to the war in Iran. Soon after pressing China and other nations to send warships to secure access to Middle Eastern oil over the weekend, Trump indicated his travel plans depended on Beijing's response, though he added Tuesday that the U.S. didn't need help from the allies who rebuffed his request.

In a Sunday interview with the Financial Times, Trump said he wanted to know whether Beijing would

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help secure the strait before he departed for the late-March summit. On Monday, he told reporters that he had requested a delay of about a month because of the demands of the war.

"I think it's important that I be here," Trump said. "And so it could be that we delay a little bit. Not much."

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, who met with Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng in Paris this week for a new round of talks meant to pave the way for Trump's trip, said any changes to the schedule would be because of logistics, not because Trump was trying to pressure Beijing.

Trump is urging other nations that rely on Middle Eastern oil to help police the Strait of Hormuz, a waterway through which about one-fifth of the world's traded oil usually flows. He has singled out China, noting that it gets much of its oil from the strait while the U.S. gets a minimal amount. He also made appeals to Japan, South Korea, Britain and France. There have been no takers so far, and China has been noncommittal.

"We strongly encourage other nations whose economies depend on the strait far more than ours," Trump said at the White House on Monday. "We want them to come and help us with the strait."

Trump is framing the war as a favor to the world being carried out by the U.S. and Israel, saying it's now time for others to do their share to protect the strait. Some world leaders have directly rebuffed the notion and objected to the U.S.' military approach.

Trump's trip to China carries major geopolitical consequences as the two nations seek stability in the wake of a trade war that led to soaring tariffs before both sides eased off. Trump and Xi agreed to a one-year trade truce last fall, and Trump later agreed to a state visit to Beijing. He also went to China in 2017, during his first term.

China's foreign minister said last week that the country looks forward to a "landmark year" in its relationship with the U.S. He added that China's attitude "has always been positive and open, and the key is for the U.S. side to meet us halfway."

Trump's priorities have shifted as the war sends oil prices skyrocketing during a tough midterm year in which affordability was already a chief concern for American voters. In addition to postponing his China trip, he has given Russia a boost by lifting sanctions on its oil, and he tapped into the nation's oil reserves, something he previously objected to doing.

## How many rate cuts? Iran war upends Federal Reserve's next steps

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Iran war has scrambled the Federal Reserve's outlook on inflation and unemployment and will likely further delay interest rate cuts this year, putting off any relief for consumers struggling with high borrowing costs for home and car purchases.

The spike in oil and gas prices presents already-divided Fed officials with a worst-case scenario as they conclude a key meeting Wednesday: Costlier gas will raise inflation in the short run, which typically causes the central bank to raise borrowing costs — or at least leave them unchanged — to combat higher prices. Yet if the spike is high enough or lasts long enough, it could hammer the economy and push up unemployment, which the Fed would typically respond to by moving in the opposite direction, and cutting its key rate.

For now, the clearest way forward for the 12-member rate-setting committee, led by Chair Jerome Powell, is to stand pat and wait to see which way the economy goes. The Fed is expected to keep rates unchanged Wednesday, and may remain on pause at their meetings in late April and June. Many economists now see the first rate cut this year not taking place until September or later.

"With Iran and the oil shock, I think the committee's room for maneuver here is pretty limited," said Nathan Sheets, chief global economist at Citi and a former senior economist at the Fed. "I think they've got to wait and see how this plays through."

Yet the Fed also has to release a set of quarterly economic projections that will create its own set of pitfalls. In December, the committee forecast that inflation would cool to 2.6% by the end of this year,

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with core inflation excluding food and energy falling to 2.5%. But those figures were already rising before the Iran war, with core prices rising 3.1% in January from a year earlier, the biggest increase in more than two years.

The Fed had also forecast in December that it would cut rates once this year, but that will be harder to maintain if the committee also raises its inflation outlook. The Fed cut three times last year before pausing in January.

Tim Duy, chief economist at SGH Macro, argues that the Fed should raise its forecast for core inflation, using the metric it prefers, to at least 2.8% by the end of this year. An increase of that amount would argue against any cuts this year.

"Any reasonable forecast for inflation now should not have a cut" in the Fed's projections, Duy said. "And it's almost ludicrous that it might."

Whether the Fed will continue to forecast a single rate cut this year, or pull back and project no cuts, is seen as a close call by most economists. Many leading members of the Fed — including governors Chris Waller, Stephen Miran, Michelle Bowman, and possibly Powell — are reluctant to give up on the idea of reducing rates. Waller, for example, has said in a television interview that inflation is heading back to the Fed's 2% target, with the Iran war likely only a temporary disruption.

Yet another group of Fed officials — including Beth Hammack, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland, and Austan Goolsbee, president of the Chicago Fed — were already worried about the stubborn persistence of inflation even before the Iran war. The prospect of higher gas prices will likely only intensify their concerns.

Mortgage rates have already risen in the wake of the conflict, likely because markets expect higher inflation will prevent the Fed from cutting anytime soon. The average 30-year mortgage rate jumped to 6.1% last week from 6%, though it is still down from nearly 6.7% a year ago.

On top of all the economic disruptions, the Fed is nearing a major leadership transition. Powell's term as chair ends May 15 and President Donald Trump has nominated a former top Fed official, Kevin Warsh, to replace him. Yet Warsh's nomination has been delayed in the Senate because key Republican senators have objected to a Justice Department investigation of Powell over his testimony about a building renovation.

Last Friday, a judge threw out a pair of subpoenas that the Justice Department had issued to the Fed, dealing a blow to the investigation, but U.S. Attorney Jeannine Pirro has said she will appeal the ruling.

Also hanging over the Fed is the inflation spike from the pandemic. Typically, the Fed would essentially look past a supply shock like the disruption in oil supplies from the Middle East. Once it ends, any inflation it produces will likely fall back, without the Fed having to raise rates. As a result, it could leave rates unchanged — or even cut them to boost weak hiring.

Yet as the economy emerged from the pandemic in 2021, inflation jumped as Americans sharply raised their spending, aided by stimulus checks and pandemic-era savings. Powell initially said that inflation would be "transitory" and would fade as the economy returned to normal. Instead it spiked to a four-decade high in June 2022.

With inflation still elevated, many Fed officials are wary of repeating the mistake, making any cuts less likely as long as inflation is elevated.

"I think they are a little scarred from the blowback they got from the word 'transitory,'" said Derek Tang, an economist at Macro Policy Analytics, a consulting firm.

## **Afghanistan says more than 400 dead in Pakistan airstrike on Kabul hospital**

By ABDUL QAHAR AFGHAN, MUNIR AHMED and ELENA BECATOROS Associated Press  
KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Rescuers recovered more bodies from the rubble of a drug rehabilitation hospital in Kabul on Tuesday after officials said an overnight airstrike killed more than 400 people in a dramatic escalation of a conflict between Pakistan and Afghanistan that is now in its third week.

Pakistan rejected Afghanistan's accusation that it targeted the Omid Addiction Treatment Hospital, in-

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sisting its strikes across eastern Afghanistan on Monday were against military facilities. It also dismissed Afghan claims of hundreds of casualties as propaganda.

The casualties were taken to several hospitals in the area, where crowds gathered to search for their loved ones among the injured and the dead. It was not possible to independently confirm the reported death toll.

The conflict between Afghanistan and Pakistan has seen repeated cross-border clashes as well as air-strikes inside Afghanistan, despite international calls for a ceasefire.

Pakistan accuses Afghanistan of providing a safe haven for militants who carry out attacks inside Pakistan, especially for the Pakistani Taliban. The group is separate but closely allied with the Afghan Taliban who took over Afghanistan in 2021 in the wake of the chaotic withdrawal of U.S.-led troops. Kabul denies the charge.

'Precisely targeted'

Afghanistan's deputy government spokesperson Hamdullah Fitrat posted on X that the airstrike hit the Omid hospital, a 2,000-bed facility in Kabul, at about 9 p.m. local time and that large sections of the facility had been destroyed.

Interior Ministry spokesman Abdul Mateen Qani said 408 people had been killed and 265 injured.

Local television footage on Tuesday showed security forces using flashlights as they carried casualties from the site while firefighters struggled to extinguish the flames.

The Omid hospital was renamed and expanded in size roughly a year ago from the Ibn Sina Drug Addiction Treatment Hospital as part of government plans to stamp out drug addiction in Afghanistan.

The site, near Kabul's international airport, is adjacent to a former NATO military base, Camp Phoenix, where U.S. forces used to train the Afghan National Army. The base was taken over by Afghanistan's new authorities after the Taliban seized power. It wasn't immediately clear what was now housed at the site.

A reporter for The Associated Press in an area near the site at the time of the strike said he heard a military jet fly overhead followed by a very powerful explosion.

Pakistan's Information Ministry said in an X post that the Pakistani military had "precisely targeted" Camp Phoenix, which it said was now a "military terrorist ammunition and equipment storage site." However, it said that the hospital was "multiple kilometers" away from the former camp and accused Afghan officials of lying. Google Maps shows another location, east of Kabul city, also labeled as Camp Phoenix.

"Another important question also lingers, as to why would an alleged drug rehabilitation facility be colocated with lethal ammunition storage site in a military camp? This also remains unanswered," the Information Ministry wrote.

Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, speaking during a meeting with foreign ambassadors in Kabul, insisted his country wanted stability.

"The whole nation does not favor war," he said in a statement released by the ministry. "However, if war is imposed upon it, then with great courage it will prove its right to self defense and will defend its land and its beliefs."

Rescuers use a crane to move debris

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

Rescue team worker Allah Mohammad Farooq said hundreds had been killed.

"When we arrived here, everyone was buried under the rubble," he said. "We then used a crane to pull them out. Most of the people were dead, and many are still trapped under the debris."

A man sitting outside the site broke down in tears as he recounted hearing about the bombing. Haji Najibullah said his son and other relatives had been patients in the facility.

"We have no information about who is alive and who is buried under the rubble," he said. "Only God knows who may have survived and who may be injured."

To ease the crowds of desperate relatives searching local hospitals for loved ones, Afghan authorities published a list of 500 people they said had been at the treatment center and were safe.

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UN calls for ceasefire

The United Nation's mission in Afghanistan called for an immediate ceasefire.

In a statement, it expressed its "deepest condolences to the families of those killed" in what it said was "an airstrike carried out by Pakistan military forces (that) impacted the Omid Addiction Treatment Hospital, a health care facility for the treatment of drug-addicted individuals, dozens of whom were reportedly killed and injured."

Thameen Al-Kheetan, a spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, called for an investigation into the strike and said those responsible must be "held to account in line with international standards."

Speaking in Geneva, Al-Kheetan said that since Afghanistan and Pakistan began fighting in late February, 289 Afghan civilians, including 104 children, had been killed or injured and tens of thousands displaced.

'Yet another falsehood'

In Islamabad, Information Minister Attaullah Tarar rejected Afghanistan's accusations that Pakistan had targeted a hospital as "entirely baseless."

Tarar said Pakistan had targeted facilities "being directly or indirectly used to plan, facilitate, shelter, train or abet terrorist attacks inside Pakistan." Strikes in Kabul and in the eastern Afghan province of Nangarhar were "precise, deliberate and professional," he said, adding: "No hospital, no drug rehabilitation center, and no civilian facility was targeted."

The fighting, the most severe between the two neighbors, began in late February after Afghanistan launched cross-border attacks in response to Pakistani airstrikes. 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's 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.

## 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 liquified 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

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reduce the government's energy use by a fifth. Offices 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 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."

## **23 killed, 108 wounded in suspected suicide bombings in northeast Nigeria**

By HARUNA UMAR Associated Press

MAIDUGURI, Nigeria (AP) — Three suspected suicide bombings have killed at least 23 people and wounded 108 others in northeastern Nigeria, police said Tuesday. It was one of the deadliest attacks targeting the city of Maiduguri in recent history.

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

The wounded "sustained varying degrees of injuries," Borno police spokesperson Nahum Kenneth Daso said in a statement, which blamed the attacks on suspected suicide bombers.

President Bola Tinubu, who left the country on Tuesday for a two-day state visit to the United Kingdom, expressed his condolences for the victims and directed security chiefs to "take charge of the situation" in Maiduguri.

"The Monday attacks were desperate acts of the evil-minded terrorist groups," Tinubu said. "Our gallant military and civilian task forces will curtail and put them down."

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, or Islamic law.

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.

Near simultaneous blasts

The first explosion was recorded at about 7:30 p.m. at the entrance of the teaching hospital, while the second and third blasts followed a few minutes later at the popular Monday Market and nearby Post Office business hub, both located about 4 kilometers (2½ miles) from the hospital.

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

Caleb Jonah, a survivor of the explosion at the hospital entrance, told the AP that he sustained injuries to his legs and hands.

"I was coming to the hospital to check (in on) a patient when I saw two men struggling with the security men at the gate," Jonah said. "Before I could process what was going on I heard the deafening blast and

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I passed out.”

Another resident, Mamman Usman, 52, said that his younger brother who worked at the Monday Market was about to close his stall when the blast occurred.

“He was badly injured and rushed to the hospital unconscious,” Usman said.

Mohammed Hassan, a member of a volunteer group assisting security forces in fighting extremists said the attack was one of the deadliest in Maiduguri in years and that hospitals were “in dire need of blood” to treat victims.

Heavy security deployed

Maiduguri has been at the heart of deadly violence in Nigeria in the past, but has experienced relative peace in recent years, 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 a heavy security deployment in the affected locations and along major roads in the city. 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.

Jihadi attacks intensifying

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 attackers often targeting troops and villages on the outskirts of the city.

Last year, an apparent suicide attack killed five at a mosque on Christmas Eve in the city 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.

## Len Deighton, author of bestselling spy thrillers, dead at 97

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Len Deighton, a prolific writer whose tough, stylish spy thrillers featured on bestseller lists for decades, has died. He was 97.

Deighton’s literary agent, Tim Bates, said he died Sunday. No cause of death was given.

Deighton’s first novel, “The IPCRESS File,” helped set the tone of cool and gritty 1960s thrillers and was made into a film starring Michael Caine that helped launch both author and actor to long and stellar careers.

“Len was a Titan,” Bates said Tuesday. “He was not only one of the greatest spy and thriller writers of the 20th century but also one of our greatest writers in any genre.”

Born to a working-class family in a wealthy part of London in 1929 — his father was a chauffeur and his mother a part-time cook — Deighton grew up with a keen eye for the intricacies and absurdities of Britain’s class system.

He served in the Royal Air Force as part of Britain’s then-mandatory national service, studied art and worked as a waiter, pastry chef and flight attendant before having success as a book and magazine illustrator. His designs included the first U.K. edition of Jack Kerouac’s “On the Road” in 1958.

He wrote “The IPCRESS File” to amuse himself during a vacation. The story of a secret agent confronted with duplicity and bureaucracy from his own side while investigating a Soviet kidnap ring, it was published in 1962 and went on to sell millions of copies.

The novel was adapted into a 1965 film, with Caine in a star-making performance as Deighton’s protagonist, a sardonic working-class sophisticate with a love of gourmet food. The character is unnamed in the book, though Caine’s character was given the name Harry Palmer.

Deighton’s depiction of espionage as a grubby, error-strewn business was a contrast to the glamour of Ian Fleming’s James Bond novels.

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"I had never read a James Bond book," Deighton said in a 1997 BBC interview, but by chance "The IP-CRESS File" was published the month the first 007 movie, "Dr. No," was released.

His book's gritty mood, like the murky spy world of John le Carré's fiction, chimed with the times, and Deighton said he benefited from a backlash against Bond's huge success. He recalled a friend telling him that "You're a blunt instrument that the critics have used to smash Ian Fleming over the head."

Subsequent thrillers "Horse Under Water," "Funeral in Berlin," "Billion-Dollar Brain" and "An Expensive Place to Die" all featured the same hero. "Funeral in Berlin" and "Billion-Dollar Brain" were both also filmed with Caine in the starring role.

"Berlin Game," published in 1983, was the first of 10 novels featuring the smart, cynical MI6 officer Bernard Samson. Along with "Mexico Set" and "London Match" it was adapted into the 1988 TV series "Game, Set and Match."

Deighton set several novels around World War II, including "Bomber" (1970), which depicted the conflict in the air war from both British and German viewpoints, and "SS-GB" (1978), an alternative-history novel set in a Nazi-occupied Britain. It was made into a TV series in 2017.

Deighton wrote more than two dozen novels in all. The last book in his final trilogy, "Faith," "Hope" and "Charity," was published in 1996.

He also wrote historical nonfiction, including a book about the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, and "Fighter: The True Story of the Battle of Britain."

Another passion was food. Deighton was food correspondent for The Observer newspaper in the 1960s and wrote several cookbooks aimed at men — a then-novel idea — including "Len Deighton's Action Cook Book" (1965), with recipes illustrated like comic strips.

Deighton's first marriage, to illustrator Shirley Thompson, ended in divorce. He later married Ysabele de Ranitz. They had two sons.

## France's far right makes gains in first-round municipal elections as major cities head to runoff

By SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — France's far right has made gains in the first round of municipal elections in the southeast, while control of most major cities, including Paris, remains undecided ahead of the upcoming runoff. The vote is widely seen as a test before next year's presidential election.

Voters cast ballots in about 35,000 villages, towns and cities, with roughly 93% selecting their mayor in the first round, where mostly one or two candidates, not associated with any party, competed.

Turnout reached just over 57%, higher than in the 2020 vote held during the COVID-19 pandemic but significantly lower than in 2014, according to the Ministry of Interior.

Here's what to know ahead of the second round on March 22:

Far right gains ground

Sunday's first round showed the far-right National Rally of Marine Le Pen continuing to gain ground locally, particularly in southeastern France.

The party's No. 2 figure, Louis Aliot, won by a landslide in his stronghold of Perpignan.

In Marseille, France's second-largest city, incumbent left-wing mayor Benoît Payan finished the first round neck and neck with National Rally contender Franck Allisio.

In Nice on the French Riviera, Eric Ciotti, a former conservative who launched his own far-right party in 2024 and has allied with the National Rally, emerged as the favorite for the second round.

The far right also appears well-placed in the southern cities of Nîmes and the port of Toulon, a major naval base on the Mediterranean.

Alliances to weigh on outcome

Thousands of municipal councils remain to be elected, including in the French capital, Paris, and other major cities.

In places where three or more candidates qualified for the runoff, negotiations to merge lists, possibly

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giving them a better chance at winning, were to end before 6 p.m. on Tuesday.

Alliances have been highly debated between the traditional left and the hard-left France Unbowed, led by veteran firebrand Jean-Luc Mélenchon, which showed strong results in several big cities.

France Unbowed once used to ally with the Socialists, Greens and Communists. But the alliance collapsed as political rivals accused France Unbowed politicians of tolerating antisemitic rhetoric. Some critics also blamed the hard left for fueling tensions after a far-right militant was beaten to death in Lyon last month.

Still, some electoral pacts have been made on a case-by-case basis.

In Lyon, France's third-largest city, incumbent mayor Grégory Doucet, a Green, joined forces with France Unbowed in a tight race against right-wing contender Jean-Michel Aulas, a business owner and former football club president.

Anti-racism group SOS Racisme called on mainstream parties to unite to block the far right. "No alliance should be ruled out if it helps prevent this party from taking control of new municipalities," the group's president, Dominique Sopo, said in a statement.

Le Pen's party remains weak in several major urban centers, with limited support in cities such as Paris and Lyon.

Paris mayoral runoff tightens

The race for Paris mayor has seen left-wing candidate Emmanuel Grégoire emerge as the front-runner after the first round, but the contest is expected to tighten in the runoff against conservative rival Rachida Dati.

Dati, a prominent figure who until recently served as France's culture minister, hopes to end 25 years of left-wing leadership at the City Hall. But her political career has also faced controversy. Dati is scheduled to stand trial in September on charges of corruption and influence peddling.

Grégoire, a former deputy to outgoing mayor Anne Hidalgo, heads a coalition including Socialists, Greens and Communists. Grégoire said he would not form a pact with France Unbowed, whose candidate also qualified for the second round, making the result highly unpredictable.

Outgoing Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo, elected in 2014 and reelected in 2020, chose not to seek a third term after leading the city through the 2015 extremist attacks and the 2024 Paris Olympics.

Looking toward the presidential race

All eyes are already turning to the 2027 presidential race, because municipal elections are the last nationwide vote before the campaign for France's top job and an occasion for all parties to enhance local grassroots. President Emmanuel Macron can't seek a third consecutive term under France's constitution.

In the northern port city of Le Havre, incumbent mayor Édouard Philippe, who came out first Sunday, seeks a runoff victory that could strengthen his political standing as a potential presidential contender. Philippe, a center-right politician, was Macron's prime minister for three years.

On the far right, the National Rally counts on key mayor jobs to demonstrate the party's ability to be at the helm.

Marine Le Pen had long been considered a leading candidate for the presidency. But she was convicted last year of embezzlement and barred from holding public office for five years. She is appealing the ruling, with a key court decision expected July 7. If she's barred from running, her protégé Jordan Bardella will replace her as the party's candidate.

Several other top politicians on the left and the right have expressed presidential ambitions, but none has emerged so far as a clear front-runner.

## 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

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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."

"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.

## **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,

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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."

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 any-

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mous 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.

## Today in History: March 18, deadliest US tornado strikes Midwest

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Wednesday, March 18, the 77th day of 2026. There are 288 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On March 18, 1925, nearly 700 people died when the Tri-State Tornado struck southeastern Missouri, southern Illinois and southwestern Indiana; it remains the deadliest single tornado in U.S. history.

Also on this date:

In 1922, Mohandas K. Gandhi was sentenced in India to six years’ imprisonment for civil disobedience. (He was released after serving two years.)

In 1937, in America’s worst school disaster, nearly 300 people — most of them children — were killed in a natural gas explosion at the New London Consolidated School in Rusk County, Texas.

In 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed an executive order authorizing the War Relocation Authority, which forced Japanese Americans into internment camps during World War II.

In 1963, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Gideon v. Wainwright*, ruled unanimously that state courts were required to provide legal counsel to criminal defendants who could not afford to hire an attorney on their own.

In 1965, the first spacewalk took place as Soviet cosmonaut Alexei Leonov went outside his Voskhod 2 capsule, secured by a tether.

In 1990, two thieves posing as police officers subdued security guards at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum of Art in Boston and stole 13 works of art valued at over \$500 million in the biggest art heist in history; the works have not been recovered.

In 2014, Russia under President Vladimir Putin illegally annexed the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine, a bold land grab that set the stage for Russia’s eventual full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

In 2018, a self-driving Uber SUV struck and killed a pedestrian in Tempe, Arizona, in the first death involving a fully autonomous test vehicle.

In 2025, NASA astronauts Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams returned to Earth on a SpaceX capsule after spending more than nine months aboard the International Space Station; their mission was supposed to last about a week but was prolonged, in large part, by problems with the Boeing Starliner capsule that delivered them to the station.

Today’s Birthdays: Composer John Kander is 99. Actor Brad Dourif is 76. Jazz musician Bill Frisell is 75. Filmmaker Luc Besson is 67. TV personality Mike Rowe is 64. Singer-actor Vanessa L. Williams is 63. Olympic speed skating gold medalist Bonnie Blair is 62. Rapper-actor Queen Latifah is 56. Actor-comedian Dane Cook is 54. Singer Adam Levine (Maroon 5) is 47. Actor Lily Collins is 37. Actor Ciara Bravo is 29.