

# Groton Daily Independent

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## 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

## Saturday, March 21

FIRST DAY OF SPRING

State A Boys Basketball Tournament in Rapid City  
Pickleball, 9:30 a.m., Elementary Gym

## 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

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

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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.**

## **New Radar Rules**

The Federal Aviation Administration issued new rules yesterday mandating air traffic controllers use radar technology to separate helicopters and airplanes. The guidelines impact more than 150 airports, and come after last year's deadly midair collision near Washington, DC.

Sixty-seven people were killed when an American Airlines jet and an Army Black Hawk helicopter collided near Ronald Reagan Airport in January 2025. It marked the US' deadliest plane crash since November 2001. The FAA found near misses are common, including as recently as this month, when a small aircraft was mistakenly cleared to land at Hollywood Burbank Airport in California, forcing a helicopter to swerve. (A similar incident happened in San Antonio, Texas, last month). The FAA says visual checks are insufficient to ensure a safe distance between aircraft.

Separately, the TSA administrator warned yesterday that at least 10% of agents have called out sick after missing paychecks amid the partial government shutdown.

## **Seated Skeleton Surfaced**

French children discovered another seated Gaul skeleton this week near their primary school playground in Dijon. Like some other Gallic remains, the figure's back was pressed against a wall facing westward, hands resting on its lap.

Scientists remain puzzled by the ancient burial practice. Four other Gallic skeletons were discovered in the same position in recent weeks, each at the bottom of a roughly three-foot pit. Gallic tombs in Dijon represent more than a quarter of all Gallic burial sites discovered, suggesting the city held special meaning for the Celtic people. It is unclear whether the seated position was a sign of respect or an indication of punishment—nor whether the deceased were buried alive. All skeletons discovered in Dijon were adult men, except for one child.

Gauls emerged in Western Europe roughly 2,500 years ago, spreading across modern-day France, Belgium, and the UK. They left behind no written records.

## **Chavez Abuse Allegations**

Cesar Chavez, cofounder of the United Farm Workers, has been accused of sexually abusing girls and women connected to the farmworker movement in the 1960s and 1970s. An investigation published yesterday described a pattern of misconduct that complicates Chavez's legacy as a US labor rights figure.

Dolores Huerta, UFW cofounder, said she experienced two sexual encounters with him in the 1960s. She described the first as manipulative and coercive and the second as forced, in an environment where she felt unable to escape. Both resulted in pregnancies. Huerta, now 95, said she previously stayed silent to protect the labor movement. She is known for coining the slogan "Si, se puede" ("yes, we can").

Chavez, who died in 1993, is credited with organizing farmworkers and advancing Latino civil rights, helping to secure better wages, safer working conditions, and legal protections. The revelations come ahead of the March 31 federal observance honoring Chavez's birthday.

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## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Men's NCAA Tournament first round begins today, starting with No. 8 Ohio State taking on No. 9 TCU; see full slate of games and bracket.

Women's NCAA Tournament First Four matchups conclude today, with the first round starting tomorrow. AI-rendered Val Kilmer to appear in upcoming film "As Deep as the Grave" after his estate grants permission for digital replication; Kilmer died of pneumonia in April.

Reality TV star Jessie Holmes wins the Iditarod dog sled race for second straight year.

## Science & Technology

The 2026 Turing Award, known as the Nobel Prize of computer science, given to Gilles Brassard and Charles Bennett for their foundational work in the field of quantum cryptography.

Scientists use CRISPR to produce CAR T-cells inside the body programmed to fight tumors; typical CAR T-cell immunotherapy requires extracting and engineering cells in a lab setting.

Researchers create the first 3D model of how mosquitoes fly in the presence of various sensory cues; could help improve mitigation and deterrence strategies.

## Business & Markets

US stock markets close down (S&P 500 -1.4%, Dow -1.6%, Nasdaq -1.5%) after Federal Reserve keeps interest rates in range between 3.5% and 3.75%.

Brent crude oil futures—an international benchmark—top \$108 per barrel after Iran threatens oil facilities in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, strikes facility in Qatar.

Disney CEO Bob Iger officially passes the baton to successor Josh D'Amaro during annual shareholders meeting.

## Politics & World Affairs

Israel kills Iran's intelligence minister Esmail Khatib.

Department of Homeland Security secretary nominee Sen. Markwayne Mullin (R-OK) testifies at confirmation hearing; see highlights.

... including exchange with Sen. Rand Paul (R-KY).

Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard testifies on Iran war.

Afghanistan, Pakistan agree to pause hostilities through Monday to mark the end of Ramadan.

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The advertisement features a colorful illustration of a teddy bear, a baby bottle, and a stack of colorful blocks on the left, and a yellow bucket with cleaning supplies on the right. Below the main text are three banners: a red one with a heart icon, a teal one with a broom icon, and an orange one with a torn paper effect. At the bottom, a red car is driving on a road that curves through a green landscape with a house in the background.

## Groton City Council appoints new member, grapples with sewer system improvement costs by Elizabeth Varin

The Groton City Council packed in a full agenda Tuesday night, blending big decisions with a few pauses along the way.

The council appointed Jordan Voss-Severson as Ward 3 councilwoman, following the resignation of Jason Wambach earlier this month.

Voss-Severson is a Groton-native, graduating from Groton High School in 2008 and Presentation College in 2012. She works at Sanford in Aberdeen as a nurse practitioner in cardiology.

Voss-Severson lives in Ward 3 in Groton with her husband Matt Severson and their two children 10-year-old Mavrik and 7-year-old Elleit.

The addition comes at a busy time, as the city continues to juggle projects, planning and preparations for the seasons ahead.

During the meeting, council members grappled with cost concerns about the upcoming sewer system improvement project.

Council members expressed concerns about whether portions of the project will have to be re-engineered as they were asked to sign a contract to have additional soil exploration done around a slough. A company had already bore 15 feet down, but IMEG, the company engineering the project, requested additional soil exploration down 50 feet.

While the cost to bore the ground in that area totaled less than \$7,000, council members asked if that additional work would impact the project design, thereby affecting the price of the project overall.

Ken Hier with IMEG said they don't know yet how that will impact the overall project. The request is based on questions posed by potential project contractors and suppliers.

"I just don't want to sign something that's a blank check," said Councilman Kevin Nehls.

After much discussion, the council approved the contract for further soil exploration.

"We should know what's down there," Mayor Scott Hanlon said.

The council pushed a few items to the council's next meeting.

Two special event alcoholic beverage licenses were tabled as public notices indicated those items wouldn't be heard until March 18.

The council also tabled a review of an estimate from H&M Custom Coating for exterior painting at City Hall. Councilman Brian Bahr, who was not at Tuesday's meeting, had been the person in contact with the company, and Councilman Nehls asked that the item be tabled until Bahr was back.



**Jordan Voss-Severson being sworn in by Mayor Scott Hanlon as the new councilman of Ward 3. Jason Wambach turned in his resignation from the council at the last meeting as his family is moving out of town. Pictured from left are Voss-Severson, Karyn Babcock, Attorney Chad Locken, Mayor Hanlon and Finance Officer Doug Heinrich.** (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

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The council discussed a proposal to have an individual transport the new baseball scoreboard from Daktronics's facility to Groton, but hesitated as the city would be liable should something happen on the trip. Instead, the council approved having Daktronics deliver the scoreboard for an estimated \$500.

The council approved hiring a few more summer recreation employees. Emma Kutter, Jace Johnson, Ryelle Gilbert, Emerlee Jones and Addison Hoffman were hired as lifeguards, Matt Locke was hired as 14U Legion Coach, and Aaron Severson was hired as Junior Legion Coach.

Rounding out the evening, the council held its annual equalization meeting, reviewing changes in assessed property values across the community as part of the city's standard process.



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## 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.

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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

## Groton Area Tigers Headed Back to State A, Kjellsen Reflects on Journey and Sets Sights on More

GROTON — The journey that began months ago in open gym sessions has once again led the Groton Area Tigers to familiar territory — the State A Boys Basketball Tournament in Rapid City.

For head coach Greg Kjellsen, the return trip marks more than just another postseason appearance. It's the result of months — and even years — of commitment from a group of players who have steadily built a winning culture.

"Well, it's been a long season," Kjellsen said. "These kids have worked extremely hard. It's been since November, and really before that with open gyms and everything they've done in the offseason."

That dedication has paid off in a historic way. The Tigers are headed to their third consecutive State A Tournament, something that has never been accomplished before in Groton Area boys basketball history.

"There is a reason they're going to their third straight state tournament," Kjellsen said. "It hasn't been done before here, and it's not something I take for granted — and I know they don't either. Nothing's given, you've got to earn it, and these guys have earned it."

The Tigers' success didn't just happen during the winter months. Kjellsen emphasized the countless hours spent in the offseason — from summer camps to individual skill work — as a key factor in the team's continued rise.

"This isn't just about what they've done during the season," he said. "It's what they've done all summer, going to team camps, working on their own. That's why we're here."

While qualifying for state was one of the team's primary goals, Kjellsen made it clear the Tigers are not satisfied just making the trip west.

"We do have a couple goals yet that we want to achieve," he said. "One was to get to the state tournament. The next one is to get out of the Sunshine Bracket."

Groton Area has made multiple appearances at state over the years, but advancing deep into the tournament has proven elusive.

"I think this is our 10th trip, and only one time we've made it out of there," Kjellsen noted. "So that's goal number one."

Beyond that, the Tigers have their sights set even higher.

"Goal number two is to win three games — three laps," Kjellsen said. "It won't be easy, but I have faith in these guys."

That faith is shared by a passionate Groton Area fan base that has followed the team all season — and made a noticeable impact during postseason play.

"Our game with Pine Ridge was loud," Kjellsen said with a smile. "Karson couldn't hear me 10 feet away down the stretch — and I can yell pretty loud."

Kjellsen credited the energy of the crowd, especially during the SoDak 16 win in Chamberlain, as a difference-maker.

"If we have the support that we had all season, especially down in Chamberlain, it helps," he said. "Hopefully as many people as possible can make it to Rapid City."

The veteran coach also took time to recognize the many people behind the scenes who contribute to the program's success.

"I'd like to thank the parents for the suppers and for lending me your young men for the last four months," Kjellsen said. "Our fans all season — it makes a difference. The cheerleaders, the junior high coaches who get these guys ready, and Coach Carson and Coach Tracy — you don't know how much they do for me."

And at the heart of it all is a group of players who have not only succeeded on the court, but represented their community with pride.

"When I took this job, part of it was because I knew they were going to be really good," Kjellsen said. "But probably even more important, I knew what kind of young men they are. You can be very proud of them — I know I am."

Now, with another trip to Rapid City on deck, the Tigers will look to turn years of hard work into something more — a breakthrough performance on the state's biggest stage.

And if Kjellsen's belief is any indication, Groton Area isn't going just to participate.

They're going to compete.



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### **SD Supreme Court weighs legality of mid-lease rule change at survival bunker community**

**BY: JOSHUA HAIAR AND JOHN HULT**

SIOUX FALLS — When he moved there, Daniel Sindorf was not expressly prohibited from brandishing a gun on the grounds of his survival bunker community near Edgemont. Then the community rules changed, and his landlord tried to evict him for allegedly pointing a firearm at a fellow resident.

The provisions of Sindorf's lease, he learned, allowed his landlords to change the rules at any time. But Sindorf, who disputes that he threatened another person with a weapon, argued in court that a lease whose provisions can change at the whim of the landlord is unenforceable, and he won – at least initially.

The landlords' appeal played out on Wednesday at Augustana University, where the South Dakota Supreme Court is hearing oral arguments during its spring traveling term.

The U.S. Army built the Black Hills Ordnance Depot in 1942 on about 21,000 remote acres south of Edgemont to store and handle munitions during World War II. The depot closed in 1967. The federal government transferred the land, with about 15,000 acres sold to the city of Edgemont in 1968, and the rest going to the U.S. Forest Service.

The land was abandoned for years, aside from ranchers grazing their cattle, until California-based Vivos XPoint Investment Group bought the property and refashioned its 575 decommissioned bunkers into what it calls "the largest survival community on Earth."

Sindorf signed a 99-year lease for a Vivos bunker in 2020, paying \$35,000 up front to cover the entirety of the lease's term.

The lease said that the community's rules are "a part of, and a material condition to all Vivos xPoint Lease agreements," and that failure to adhere to them could result in eviction. It also said that Vivos could change the rules at any time, with notice.

In 2023, Vivos accused Sindorf of pointing a gun at a female resident and moved to evict him. Sindorf would later argue that he'd pulled the pistol to protect himself from her dogs. Vivos said he'd violated a rule – added after he moved in – that prohibits the brandishing of firearms. Sindorf acknowledged he received timely notice of the rule change.

The company also said the violation entitled it to keep the entirety of his \$35,000 up-front fee, and that Sindorf would need to give up ownership of \$105,000 worth of improvements he'd made to the bunker property.

Sindorf had already left the premises by the time the eviction was filed, but he refused to grant the company access to the bunker, and still does.

Sindorf challenged the eviction, arguing that the lease's clause allowing Vivos to change the rules at any time rendered it "illusory." A circuit court judge agreed, saying the rule change was unilateral and gave Sindorf "no recourse."

Vivos appealed to the state Supreme Court.

On Wednesday, the justices spent much of their time probing whether the lease was, in fact, illusory, and what the implications might be if the circuit court judge was correct.

Vivos' lawyer, Eric Schlimgen, argued that the case should have focused on possession of the property and whether Sindorf violated the lease terms. Vivos is entitled to take back its property, he said.

But if the high court were to overturn and determine the lease to be valid, Justice Mark Salter asked, wouldn't Vivos first need to prove that Sindorf had violated the rules and brandished a firearm?

"Yes, there would have to be a trial as to that specific violation," Schlimgen said.

Sindorf's lawyer, Matthew Hays McCoy, argued that the lease was unenforceable from the start, so Vivos had no cause to evict him.

"The court cannot enforce an illegal lease," Hays McCoy argued.

But "you can't either," Salter said, "because it's not there."

Salter asked Hays McCoy what would give Sindorf the right to that property under a nonexistent contract. McCoy said in the event a lease is determined to be invalid and a lessee is already in possession of the property, South Dakota law would default to a month-to-month lease.

If Vivos wanted to evict Sindorf, he said, "they would need to restart" the eviction process and give him the opportunity to dispute it or renegotiate a new lease.

The trouble, Hays McCoy said, is that a lease that reserves the right to change the terms for eviction at any time removes his client's right to due process and to dispute his landlord's reasoning.

"He is at the whim of what they decide, whereas they aren't bound at all," Hays McCoy said

The Supreme Court will issue a decision at a later date.

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

*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.*

## Police officers who shot suspect ask SD Supreme Court to shield their names from public view

**Case seeks to clarify if redaction of victim names, initials, hinders defense**

**BY: MAKENZIE HUBER AND JOHN HULT**

SIoux FALLS — The South Dakota Supreme Court heard arguments for the first time Wednesday on whether a voter-backed amendment to the state constitution prevents the public disclosure of victims' names, including the names of police officers involved in altercations with members of the public.

Voters passed "Marsy's Law" in the 2016 general election. Among other provisions, it says crime victims can, upon request, prevent the release of "information or records that could be used to locate or harass the victim or the victim's family, or which could disclose confidential or privileged information about the victim."

Since its passage, law enforcement agencies in South Dakota have regularly used it to justify their refusal to release the names of the officers involved in shootings.

This week, during the South Dakota Supreme Court's traveling term at Augustana University, the justices were asked if the release of victim names alone constitutes a violation of Marsy's Law.

Last year, a judge in Sioux Falls said it does not.

The case stems from assault and attempted murder on law enforcement charges filed against a man named Samir Albaidhani, who's alleged to have shot at officers in April 2025 after a high-speed, multi-county chase that began in Sioux Falls. Officers shot and injured Albaidhani, and the state Division of Criminal Investigation ruled the shooting justified.

After the first few documents were filed in Albaidhani's case, the officers involved and their police union asked that the Minnehaha County State's Attorney and Second Judicial Circuit Clerk of Courts redact the officers' names from those documents. They also asked that any future documents that might list their names be filed under seal. They attempted to force the redaction and mandate the sealing of future documents through a writ of mandamus in civil court, which is meant to compel action by a government agency or official, and were granted a temporary order to seal documents containing their names.

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Judge Bobbi Rank dismissed the civil case, however, saying Marsy's Law gave the officers the opportunity to argue for privacy during regular court proceedings. She agreed to keep the names under seal as the officers made those arguments.

The Sioux Falls judge assigned to Albaidhani's criminal case would later rule that Marsy's Law doesn't explicitly shield victim names from disclosure. Instead, Judge Susan Sabers wrote, it prevents the release of information that could be used to locate or harass the victim. The name alone isn't enough to qualify, Sabers wrote.

"Marsy's Law does not provide a crime victim with a right of complete anonymity," Sabers wrote, who also noted that the U.S. Constitution grants people the right to confront their accusers in court.

Jeffrey Beck, a lawyer for the officers and their police union, spoke first on Wednesday, telling the justices his clients appealed Sabers' ruling to protect their constitutional rights as victims.

Publicizing the officers' names could lead to harassment, Beck told the justices, especially given the widespread availability of personal information online. He said he'd entered his name into a free search engine before attending the oral arguments, and that the results showed his full name, the names of his relatives and his birth month and year. The search also turned up his current and prior addresses, phone numbers and email addresses, among other information — enough information to locate and harass him.

Courts can manage requests from victims to opt in to Marsy's Law protections without infringing on a defendant's right to due process, he argued. The officers' names are known to the defense lawyers, he said, so Albaidhani's right to confront witnesses remains intact without their public disclosure.

Albaidhani's lawyer, Kylie Beck of the Minnehaha County Public Defender's Office, said public disclosure is important for defendants and their counsel. She and her co-counsel may have access to the law enforcement officers' names, she said, but shielding the names from public view restricts their ability to use them to mount "a complete defense."

"We can't send off subpoenas for information on these individuals because their names would be protected," she said.

As the case moves toward trial, she said, questions of when the names can and can't be used might further hamper her ability to defend her client. In their written arguments to the high court, she said, the officers' legal team said "that when it comes time to trial, whether or not the identities of the victims would become public would ultimately have to be litigated."

She's not confident her client's right to confront his accusers will be preserved, she said.

"Clearly, this is not a situation where this is all that's going to be requested," she said of the redactions and sealing of documents with the officers' names.

She conceded that a person's name constitutes "information" about a victim, but said a name alone isn't enough to qualify as information that could be used to "locate or harass" a victim under Marsy's Law.

When Jeffrey Beck returned to the lectern for his rebuttal, Justice Mark Salter asked him if there are implications for the public's right to know in instances where a victim invokes a right to privacy.

"It's not really in front of us" as an explicit argument from Albaidani's lawyers, Salter said, "but what do we do with that? Is that just not part of this case?"

"We would say that the public's right to know does not take away a constitutional protection," of Marsy's Law, the officers' lawyer said.

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

*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.*

## State legislators push to expand laws allowing guns on college campuses

**Debate simmers over self-defense versus a greater risk of gun violence**

**BY: AMANDA WATFORD**

In at least six statehouses this year, lawmakers are revisiting a long-running debate over whether guns should be allowed on college campuses.

Republican lawmakers in Florida, Louisiana, New Hampshire, South Dakota, Utah and Wyoming have introduced bills that would allow students, staff or visitors with concealed carry permits — and in some cases, without permits — to bring firearms onto public college campuses.

Supporters say the proposals would allow people to defend themselves during emergencies. Opponents argue they could make campuses less safe and increase the risk of accidental or impulsive violence.

The push comes amid another year of intense debate over gun policy in state legislatures, where lawmakers are advancing sharply different measures.

And it comes as college campuses continue to grapple with the threat of gun violence.

On March 12, a gunman opened fire inside a classroom at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia, killing one person and injuring two others before ROTC students fought back. One of the students stabbed the gunman, killing him, according to law enforcement officials.

Virginia law currently prohibits firearms on public college and university campuses. The FBI is investigating the attack as a possible act of terrorism.

The Old Dominion University attack was the most recent of 17 deadly shootings on college campuses nationwide since 1966, according to Stateline research.

More than half of the states prohibit firearms on public colleges and universities. In some states, individual institutions may decide whether to allow guns on campus.

At least 14 states currently allow firearms on public college campuses, though some restrict them to people who have a valid carry license.

Campus carry proposals are part of a broader push by gun rights advocates to dismantle gun-free zones or other designated "sensitive places," such as schools, hospitals, places of worship or government buildings. Advocates also are pushing for laws that allow people to carry guns without having to first get permits, which advocates call "constitutional carry."

"It's definitely in conjunction with the political fight to expand constitutional carry," said Chris Stone, the director of state and local affairs for Gun Owners of America, one of the country's largest gun advocacy groups.

Supporters often argue that gun-free zones may attract crime and make schools or other locations more likely targets for mass shootings. They also contend that disarming individuals limits their ability to defend themselves.

Some gun rights advocates cite research by economist John Lott, who leads the Crime Prevention Research Center, suggesting that about 82% of mass shootings occurred in gun-free zones between 1998 and 2025.

"All you do by creating a gun-free zone is creating a magnet — just read the diaries and manifestos. All you do is create a magnet for those who want to go and kill people," Lott, who also served as a senior adviser for research and statistics at the U.S. Department of Justice during the first Trump administration, told Stateline.

But some experts say the data on whether gun-free zones increase violent crime is inconclusive.

A 2024 study published in the peer-reviewed journal *The Lancet Regional Health* found that active shootings were 62.5% less likely to occur in gun-free establishments than in places that allow firearms, based on an analysis of 150 U.S. active-shooting locations and 150 similar control sites from 2014-2020.

Some Second Amendment experts say states retain wide flexibility to regulate guns on college campuses, yet the biggest unresolved legal questions involve the "where" of campus gun bans — how far gun-free

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school zones can stretch beyond classrooms into areas such as student housing, parking lots and other university-owned property.

"It's clear that there is a power to prohibit guns on school grounds, and the real question is just how broad that power is," said Joseph Blocher, a law professor at Duke University. Blocher is the co-founder and faculty director of Duke's Center for Firearms Law.

## Proposed measures

The campus carry proposals considered this year vary widely.

In Wyoming, lawmakers debated a measure that would have allowed anyone eligible under the state's permitless, or "constitutional carry," law to carry concealed firearms on college campuses. The proposal did not pass; under current law, only people with a state-issued concealed carry permit may carry on campuses.

Lawmakers approved a separate measure, however, which was signed into law earlier this month by Republican Gov. Mark Gordon. The new law, which takes effect in July, lowers the minimum age for a concealed carry permit from 21 to 18 and removes the requirement that applicants under 21 obtain a discretionary recommendation from their local sheriff.

"When the good guys are armed, the bad guys don't like showing up," said Wyoming state Rep. Jeremy Haroldson, a Republican, who sponsored both measures.

In Louisiana, lawmakers are considering a proposal that would allow anyone 18 or older who is legally permitted to possess a firearm to carry one on campuses, including inside buildings. The measure would apply to students, faculty, staff, contractors and visitors. Since July 2024, the state has allowed anyone 18 or older to carry a concealed firearm without a permit in other locations.

"We can trust people with their rights and the ability to be responsible with them more than I think some people give them credit for," said Republican state Rep. Danny McCormick, the bill's sponsor. "I see it making campuses more safe."

The bill includes restrictions, such as prohibiting firearms in locations already restricted under federal law, during disciplinary or administrative hearings, in medical or mental health facilities and at events with security screenings. It would also prevent the state's higher education governing boards or individual institutions from imposing stricter rules than state law.

In New Hampshire, lawmakers are weighing legislation that would prohibit public colleges and universities from banning or regulating the possession or carrying of firearms and nonlethal weapons. The measure passed the House earlier this year and is now under consideration in the Senate.

In South Dakota, the House Education Committee rejected a proposal that would have removed the requirement that individuals hold an enhanced concealed carry permit to carry on public university and technical college campuses. Under current law, only people with enhanced permits may carry on those campuses.

In Utah, following the assassination of conservative activist Charlie Kirk at Utah Valley University last September, lawmakers passed a bill that would ban open carry while allowing eligible people to carry concealed without a permit.

The measure now awaits action from Republican Gov. Spencer Cox and would take effect May 6 if signed.

## Arming faculty and staff

Meanwhile, less than a year after a gunman opened fire on the campus of Florida State University, killing two people and injuring six others, state lawmakers approved legislation that would allow professors and other employees designated by university presidents to carry firearms on public college and university campuses. Both chambers of the legislature passed the bill, and it will soon make it to GOP Gov. Ron DeSantis for consideration.

The measure would expand the state's voluntary School Guardian Program — created for K-12 schools after the 2018 shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida — to higher educa-

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tion. Faculty and staff who volunteer and complete specialized training could be authorized to carry guns to respond to potential active shooter situations.

The program would provide 144 hours of training, compared with the 770 hours required for Florida law enforcement officers.

Some opponents say the required training falls short of law enforcement standards and that key policies — including use-of-force thresholds, weapon types and storage, and coordination with police — remain unclear. Critics also have raised concerns about liability, compensation for guardians, and how effective handguns would be on open campuses.

"If I could just ask one thing of lawmakers, it would be, 'Let's take a pause on this. Let's readdress what's in this bill,'" said Tom Hixon, who sits on the Everytown Veteran Advisory Council and previously served as a Marine. Everytown for Gun Safety advocates for stricter gun laws.

Tom's father, Chris Hixon, an athletic director and a Navy veteran, was killed while trying to stop the Parkland shooter. Florida's K-12 guardian program was renamed in his honor, alongside security guard Aaron Feis and teacher Scott Beigel.

"If we are dead set on passing this, let's make sure that we're passing it with all the proper inclusions, safeguards, accountability, training, safety," Hixon said.

The bill also would require colleges and universities to conduct threat assessments, establish threat-management teams, and provide training for faculty to identify behavioral warning signs.

"We wouldn't ask doctors to arm themselves in the event of a shooting at a hospital. We wouldn't ask fast-food employees to arm themselves in situations where a shooter might come through the drive-thru. But we're expecting our professors to be prepared to do something like that," said Andres Cubillos, a graduate student at Florida State University and volunteer with Students Demand Action, a gun control advocacy group.

## Campus carry movement

The modern push for campus carry laws began more than two decades ago. Utah became the first state to allow concealed firearms on public college campuses statewide in 2004.

Momentum grew in the following decade, particularly after high-profile school shootings and the expansion of permitless and concealed carry laws across the country.

"Those movements are all very intricately linked to one another in the process of restoring the Second Amendment," said Stone, of Gun Owners of America.

At least 29 states have expanded access to firearms by adopting permitless carry laws.

"It's absolutely true that rules about where guns can be carried intersect with rules about who gets to carry them," said Blocher, the Duke University law professor. "It is also the case that the states that are deregulating in one area tend to deregulate in the other as well."

## Legal debates

The U.S. Supreme Court has long suggested that governments can bar guns in certain locations — including schools and government buildings — but it has offered little guidance on how far those gun-free zones can stretch across today's sprawling college campuses.

"It's fair to say that states and universities still have broad authority to make decisions about guns on campus, to regulate them or to deregulate them," Blocher said.

The Supreme Court's 2022 decision in *New York State Rifle & Pistol Association v. Bruen* said that modern gun laws must align with the country's historical tradition of firearm regulation.

Bruen also limited the extent to which states can restrict who may carry guns in public, which has shifted some legal debates to focus on where guns can be carried.

Courts generally accept that schools fall within the category of "sensitive places," Blocher said, but the doctrine is still underdeveloped: Judges have said far less about how to treat off-campus housing, remote research sites or other university properties.

"It is the category that we kind of have the least guidance on — what locations are OK to restrict guns in, and why," he said.

*Amanda Watford (formerly Hernández) covers criminal justice for Stateline. She has reported for both national and local outlets, including ABC News, USA Today and NBC4 Washington.*

## US Senate displays sharp divisions over SAVE voting bill demanded by Trump

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — U.S. senators debated Wednesday whether the federal government should change how Americans register to vote and cast a ballot, with Republicans maintaining alterations are necessary to safeguard elections and Democrats arguing a new law would add unnecessary obstacles.

Tensions over the issue were on full display when Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said GOP lawmakers describing the bill as a simple voter identification requirement is "bullshit," shortly before Utah Republican Sen. Mike Lee contended it would be "a suicidal move" for his party's leaders not to find a way forward.

The legislation, dubbed the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility Act, or the SAVE America Act, is unlikely to become law without bipartisan backing from at least 60 senators, who would be needed to move past a procedural vote.

Democrats are not expected to help Republicans with that, especially after Schumer called the legislation "Jim Crow 2.0" and "evil" during a morning press conference with voting rights advocates.

Georgia Democratic Sen. Raphael Warnock said during that event GOP lawmakers are acting out of concern they will lose control of Congress following the November midterm elections, due to President Donald Trump's actions during his second term.

"The American people have had it with him and with his policies," Warnock said. "He ran as someone who was going to lower costs, who was going to stay out of endless wars in the Middle East and he is failing. But instead of changing his policies, he's trying to change the shape of the electorate."

### Problems with lack of birth certificate

New Mexico Democratic Sen. Ben Ray Luján said if the bill becomes law, it would create difficulties for anyone who doesn't have access to their birth certificate or a passport, to prove U.S. citizenship when they try to register to vote.

"What about my Native American brothers and sisters?" he said. "All my brothers and sisters from the First Nations that I'm proud to represent across New Mexico, who may have been born in their home generationally with other family members. They didn't have a birth certificate."

New Jersey Democratic Sen. Andy Kim said GOP lawmakers trying to change the voting process during an election year creates a pattern when combined with several Republican state legislatures redrawing U.S. House maps to benefit their candidates.

"We see this being about having politicians choose the voters instead of voters choosing the politicians," he said.

Several Democratic state legislatures have responded to GOP redistricting efforts by redrawing their maps as well.

Schumer, D-N.Y., said it's unacceptable that Republicans want every state in the country to submit a list of registered voters to the Department of Homeland Security to run through a database, which he believes is flawed.

"They're trying to dupe America. They say, 'Oh, this is just a voter ID law.' Bullshit. It is not a voter ID law," Schumer said. "It is a law that will kick millions of Americans off the voting rolls."

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'Debate this as long as it takes to get it done'

Utah's Lee said Republican leaders shouldn't schedule the procedural vote that requires at least 60 senators to end debate on the bill until they have found some way to move past that step.

"I think it would be a suicidal move for us as Senate Republicans, for Republicans in general, if we don't put everything we've got into this," he said. "I think we need to debate this as long as it takes to get it done. And if we're not there yet, we need to continue debating."

Lee contended that prolonged debate on the bill would give Republicans time to sway holdouts to their side.

"This is going to become popular enough that a lot of our colleagues who currently oppose it, I believe, will start to get on board," he said.

Every Senate Democrat, along with Alaska Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski, voted against formally beginning debate on Tuesday. North Carolina Republican Sen. Thom Tillis didn't vote.

## Trump wants national limits on voting by mail

Senate debate on the bill dragging out in the days or possibly weeks ahead won't be confined to what's currently in the legislation, which the House passed last month.

Trump has asked senators to make three alterations, which they will attempt to incorporate through amendments.

Missouri Republican Sen. Eric Schmitt said he plans to call for a vote to add nationwide restrictions on mail-in voting instead of leaving the issue to state governments.

"If you have a hardship because of a disability, or an illness, or because of travel, or you're a caregiver, or some other hardship the state can identify, you can vote by absentee," he said. "You have to request it. Then you can vote by absentee."

Schmitt said the carve-out would also include members of the military.

Tennessee Republican Sen. Marsha Blackburn said she plans to call up an amendment that could create a nationwide prohibition on gender-affirming surgeries for transgender youth.

Alabama Republican Sen. Tommy Tuberville, she said, would push for an amendment to block transgender women from competing in women's sports.

*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.*

## Protesters of Iran war spotlight children killed in school bombing

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — Against a backdrop of children's backpacks and shoes Wednesday, congressional Democrats protested President Donald Trump's war with Iran, specifically denouncing an early U.S. strike that killed more than 100 elementary school students in the country's southern city of Minab.

The lawmakers attended the installation organized by peace advocacy group Win Without War nearly 20 days into the U.S.-Israeli campaign in Iran that has claimed the lives of 13 U.S. service members, nearly 2,000 civilians and military personnel in Iran, just under 1,000 civilians in Lebanon, and dozens of civilians across the Persian Gulf nations and Israel, according to state officials and human rights organizations.

The conflict, which Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have vowed to continue unabated, is "illegal" and a "war of choice," the Democratic lawmakers said on the lawn just outside the U.S. House of Representatives.

Rep. Yassamin Ansari, D-Ariz., said Trump launched the war "without a clear case made to the American people and without any strategy or plan."

"And that lack of planning has had devastating consequences. One of the very first strikes of this illegal war hit a girls elementary school in Iran, killing at least 175 people, most of them children," said Ansari, who added she is the only Iranian-American member of Congress.

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News reports citing Iranian authorities and human rights organization Amnesty International say 168 children were killed when the U.S. struck the Shajareh Tayyebbeh Elementary School in Hormozgan province on Feb. 28, the first day of the war.

Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth told reporters on March 4 that the Pentagon is investigating the strike and that the U.S. does not target civilians.

Reporters then pressed Hegseth days after a March 11 News York Times report revealed an ongoing military investigation determined a U.S. Tomahawk missile had hit the school.

"We're not going to let reporting lead us or force our hand into indicating what happened in a particular situation, because the truth matters," Hegseth responded during a March 13 briefing. "So I can report that (U.S. Central Command) has designated an investigating officer to complete a command investigation."

Nearly every Senate Democrat demanded in a March 11 letter that the Pentagon swiftly reveal the investigation's findings.

## Hearings sought

Congressional Democrats are also urging Republican colleagues to hold open hearings where administration officials would be tasked with publicly testifying under oath.

"The administration refuses to send their decisionmakers up to Capitol Hill to explain why they dragged America into this war, and the reason they don't want to show up is they don't have good answers for the American people," Sen. Chris Van Hollen said at the Wednesday event.

"We have lost 13 of our service members (and) over 2000 civilians have been killed throughout the Middle East. And of course, those are the greatest losses, the loss of life, but it's also costing the American people \$1 billion a day," the Maryland Democrat continued.

The cost to the federal government of funding the war is substantial, reaching \$5.2 billion after just two days, according to one estimate. Other estimates have put the cost at closer to \$11.3 billion after two weeks.

Ansari, Van Hollen and several other Democratic members at the protest assured they would vote 'no' should the White House ask Congress for extra money to fund the war.

The majority of House and Senate Republicans, and a handful of Democrats, have so far blocked attempts to rein in Trump's executive war powers in Iran.

Senate Democrats are expected to force another War Powers Resolution vote as early as Wednesday evening.

## Gabbard testifies to Senate

Senators tasked with overseeing federal intelligence had the opportunity to question Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard and other top national security officials Wednesday at a previously scheduled annual hearing on the worldwide threat assessment.

Sen. Jon Ossoff, D-Ga., pressed Gabbard during the nearly three-hour hearing on Trump's reasoning for attacking Iran last month when the administration claimed Iran's nuclear weapons program had been "obliterated" in joint air strikes with Israel in June.

"Was it the intelligence community's assessment that, nevertheless, despite this obliteration, there was a quote 'imminent nuclear threat' posed by the Iranian regime? Yes or no?" Ossoff asked.

"It is not the intelligence community's responsibility to determine what is and is not an imminent threat," Gabbard responded. "That is up to the president based on a volume of information that he receives."

On Tuesday, Gabbard's deputy, Joe Kent, director of the National Counterterrorism Center, publicly resigned in a letter stating "Iran posed no imminent threat to our nation."

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

## Mullin confronted about 'anger issues' by Rand Paul in tense DHS confirmation hearing

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA

WASHINGTON — U.S. Sen. Markwayne Mullin of Oklahoma, the president's pick to lead the Department of Homeland Security, on Wednesday in his confirmation hearing was challenged with questions about his "anger issues" by the fellow Republican who heads the Senate committee that oversees the department.

Kentucky Republican Sen. Rand Paul, chair of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, at the outset of the hearing recalled how Mullin called him a "freaking snake" and expressed sympathy for a neighbor who assaulted Paul in a 2017 dispute, breaking six of his ribs and damaging a lung.

"You have never had the courage to look me in the eye and tell me that the assault was justified," Paul said to Mullin, nominated by President Donald Trump to replace Kristi Noem as secretary of the 260,000-employee agency. "Tell it to my face, if that's what you believe."

In a tense back-and-forth, Mullin defended himself and said he never "supported" that Paul was assaulted, but that he "understood" why the neighbor attacked Paul.

"I think everybody in this room knows that I'm very blunt," Mullin, a former MMA fighter who physically challenged a witness testifying before Congress in 2023, said.

Paul criticized him and "this machismo that you have" and raised concerns about how Mullin could lead a department and "why (the American public) should trust a man with anger issues to set the proper example for ICE and Border Patrol agents."

Noem was ousted from the job after a national uproar over the killing of two U.S. citizens in Minneapolis in January by immigration agents and public disapproval of aggressive enforcement tactics there and in Los Angeles and Chicago.

"I just wonder if someone who applauds violence against their political opponents is the right person to lead an agency that has struggled to accept limits to the proper use of force," Paul said.

Mullin did not apologize for his comments regarding Paul's assault, and said that leading DHS is "bigger than the political differences we have."

Mullin detailed his plans to senators, pledging to reverse several policies of his predecessor, including making sure "DHS isn't on the news every day."

Mullin also promised to get DHS fully funded and continue to carry out the president's mass deportation agenda.

If confirmed, he will have access to a special funding stream of \$175 billion for DHS included in 2025's "one big, beautiful" tax and spending cut package, which Mullin backed as a senator.

### Post-Noem era

Trump shifted Noem, the former governor of South Dakota, into another administration position earlier this month.

Her tenure drew bipartisan ire over her quick judgment to label the two U.S. citizens killed by immigration agents as domestic terrorists, her stalling of disaster relief grants for states, and the award of a \$220 million no-bid contract for an ad campaign to a firm owned by a subordinate's spouse.

Paul said the committee plans to vote Thursday on whether to advance Mullin's nomination to the Senate floor. Trump has said he wants Mullin on the job by the end of the month.

If the Senate confirms Mullin, he would be the first Native American to lead DHS. He is an enrolled member of the Cherokee Nation.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, Republican of South Dakota, told reporters Wednesday that he was confident Mullin could be confirmed as Homeland Security secretary.

"Rand and Markwayne have some personal history which they're going to have to work through," Thune said. "But this is about the job, and it's about who ought to fill that job. We all believe ... that Markwayne is the right guy for the job."

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## One Democrat already a yes

The junior senator from Oklahoma, who was elected to the Senate in a 2022 special election, does not need any Democratic support to be confirmed to lead the agency, since Republicans control the chamber with 53 seats.

And even without Paul's support, one Democrat, Sen. John Fetterman of Pennsylvania, who sits on the committee, has already pledged his vote.

Mullin, if confirmed, will take over a department shut down since early February, after Democrats refused to vote for fiscal year 2026 funding unless changes to immigration enforcement are made following the deaths of the two U.S. citizens in Minneapolis, Renee Good and Alex Pretti.

The top Democrat on Homeland Security, Gary Peters, pressed Mullin about his previous comments about Good and Pretti. Mullin joined top Trump officials in accusing both of being agitators.

Mullin admitted his mistake and said he was too quick to judge.

"I shouldn't have said that," Mullin said. "I went out there too fast. I was responding immediately without the facts. That's my fault. That won't happen as (Homeland Security) secretary."

Noem has never admitted she was wrong to label Good, a mother of three and poet, and Pretti, an intensive care unit nurse who specialized in care for veterans, as domestic terrorists. She was criticized by both Democrats and Republicans for her comments.

On Wednesday, Republicans on the panel largely praised Mullin, except for Paul, and criticized Democrats for not approving government funding for DHS.

House Democrats are trying to force a legislative procedure to bring a funding bill for DHS that does not include any appropriations for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Customs and Border Protection.

## ICE questions

Michigan Democratic Sen. Elissa Slotkin pressed Mullin on reforms he would make to ICE.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal, Democrat of Connecticut, asked Mullin about an arrest quota of 3,000 immigrants daily that White House senior advisor Stephen Miller, the main architect of the Trump administration's immigration policy, has set for ICE officers.

"I can't speak for Stephen Miller," Mullin said. "No quota has been set for me."

Blumenthal also pressed Mullin about concerns over violations of the 4th Amendment of the Constitution by federal immigration agents entering homes and businesses without a judicial warrant.

He asked Mullin if he would "commit that ICE will no longer instruct agents to break into people's homes without a judicial warrant?"

"Sir, you're using the word 'break into' people's houses loosely," Mullin said. "We will not enter a home or place of business without a judicial warrant unless we're pursuing an individual that runs into a business or resident."

Blumenthal also addressed Noem's award of the \$220 million no-bid contract, which she was grilled about by unhappy Republicans in a congressional hearing shortly before Trump removed her as secretary of DHS.

Mullin said that he would let the inspector general, an independent agency within DHS, continue with an investigation.

"I'll leave that to the (Inspector General)," Mullin said.

## Detention warehouse purchases

Democrats pressed Mullin if he would keep certain policies in place made by Noem, whose last day is March 31, and questioned recent moves by DHS to purchase warehouses across the country for mass detention of immigrants in the country without legal status.

New Jersey Sen. Andy Kim said a policy from Noem has led to a backlog in Federal Emergency Management Agency relief. Noem instituted a requirement that she had to personally sign off on any FEMA award

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totaling more than \$100,000.

Kim asked Mullin if he would consider getting rid of that policy.

"Absolutely," Mullin said. "That is micromanaging."

Kim also brought up a warehouse recently purchased by DHS in Roxbury, New Jersey, to detain up to 1,500 immigrants that has concerned local community leaders.

"Most municipalities don't have the capacity and their infrastructure for waste and water" to handle a warehouse that is meant to detain people, Kim said.

"This town has only 42 foot police officers, a volunteer fire department. Does that sound like the kind of town that has resources to take on a warehouse?" he asked Mullin.

Mullin did not say DHS would stop its warehouse initiative, but said he wanted to make sure that the local communities were on board, and pledged to personally visit that location with Kim to meet with leaders.

New Hampshire's Democratic Sen. Maggie Hassan also raised the issue of a warehouse location in her state. DHS initially planned to purchase a warehouse in Merrimack to retrofit the facility to detain immigrants, but backed off.

She asked Mullin if he would "ensure that the plan remains off the table?"

Mullin said he wasn't caught up on that specific facility, but that he would work to get the local community's input.

## More FEMA questions

Fellow Oklahoma Republican Sen. James Lankford asked Mullin how he sees the future of FEMA. The president has expressed his desire to dismantle the agency, and a FEMA review council was formed to issue a report on its findings.

Mullin said that FEMA should not be considered a first response agency, and that when natural disasters strike, it's the state response that is first.

"We can be more effective and be more direct and speed it up," he said.

Mullin added that he doesn't believe FEMA should be dismantled, but that it could be restructured.

## Mullin's overseas ventures

The top Republican and Democrat on the committee, Paul and Peters, grilled Mullin on his past comments on a 2016 international trip taken while he served in the House. During a Fox News interview, Mullin implied he had been on military missions and could "smell war." Mullin has not served in the military.

Mullin declined to discuss those comments, arguing that the travel was while he was on official duty and classified. He described those trips as for training purposes.

Peters asked why the trip wasn't included in his disclosure records to the committee, and Mullin argued that because it was considered official travel, he didn't need to disclose it.

Paul said he would consider postponing the committee's vote unless Mullin would agree to visit a secure facility where classified matters are discussed, known as a SCIF, to detail his international travel.

Mullin said he would go to a SCIF with lawmakers ahead of the committee vote Thursday.

*Jennifer Shutt contributed to this report.*

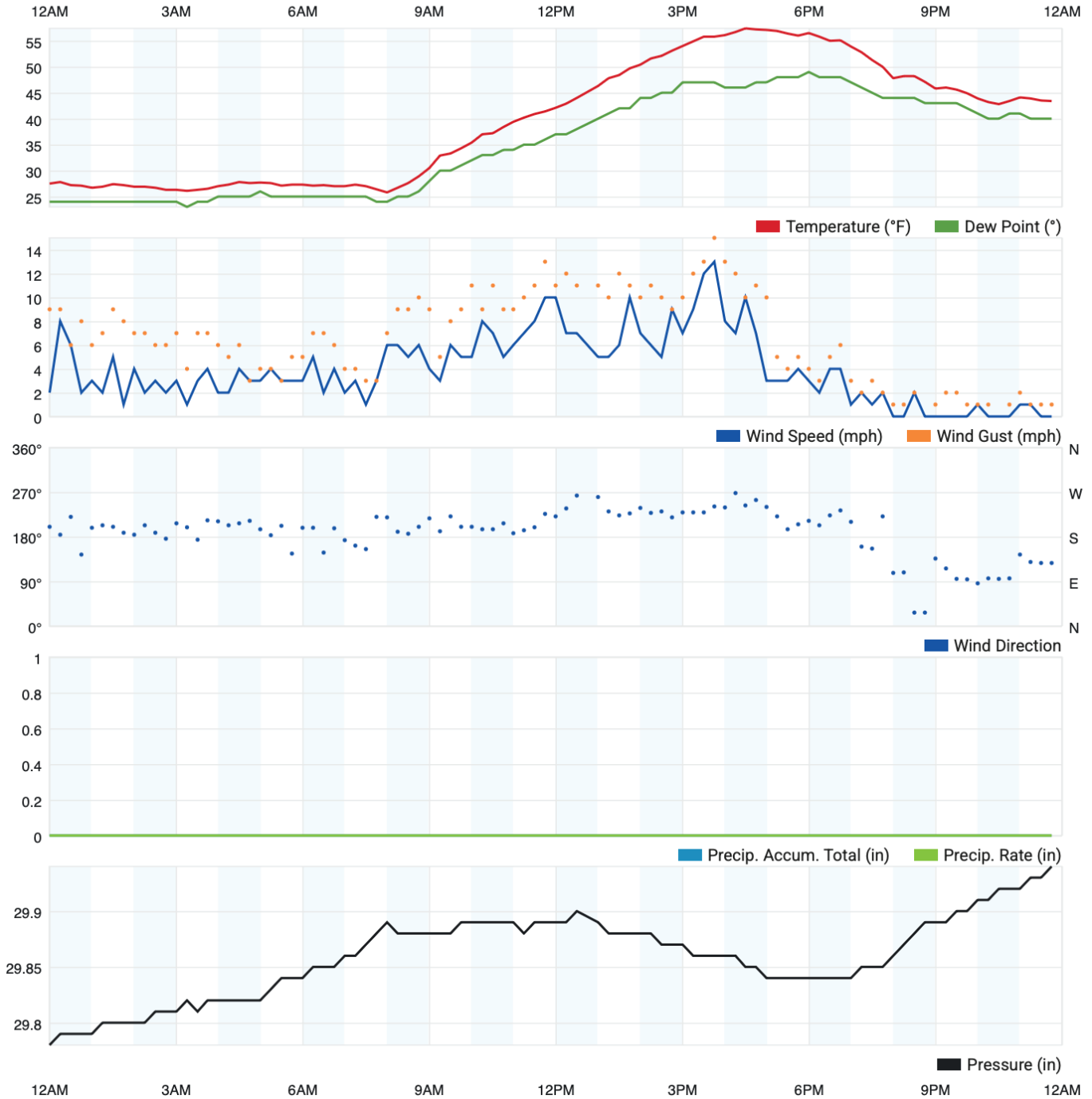
*Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include immigration, congressional policy and legal challenges with a focus on how those policies impact the lives of immigrants and migrants coming to the U.S.*

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

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Today

Tonight

Friday

Friday Night

Saturday



High: 62 °F

Patchy Fog  
then Mostly  
Sunny



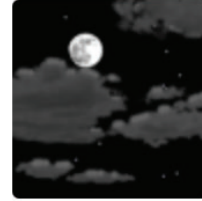
Low: 38 °F

Partly Cloudy



High: 67 °F

Mostly Sunny



Low: 40 °F

Partly Cloudy



High: 69 °F

Partly Sunny



## Next Few Days...Dry & Mild

March 19, 2026  
4:32 AM

*Thursday*



Fog

*Morning Fog*

Highs: 57°- 77°

15-25<sub>mph</sub>

*Friday*



Highs: 60°- 79°

15-25<sub>mph</sub>

*Saturday*



Highs: 65°- 85°

15-25<sub>mph</sub>



HIGH FIRE  
DANGER

Central SD

The region will continue to experience a mix of sun and clouds during the daytime hours the next few days along with dry conditions. Temperatures will be well above normal for this time of year, a good 15-30 degrees above average. Winds will generally remain southwest to northwest through the first half of the weekend and perhaps turn a bit breezy at times. The combination of very warm temperatures and low relative humidity values will lead to more widespread high grassland fire danger across central South Dakota on Saturday.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 58 °F at 4:33 PM

Low Temp: 26 °F at 7:59 AM

Wind: 16 mph at 3:47 PM

Precip: : 0.00

## Today's Info

Record High: 73 in 2012

Record Low: -11 in 1965

Average High: 43

Average Low: 21

Average Precip in Mar.: 0.49

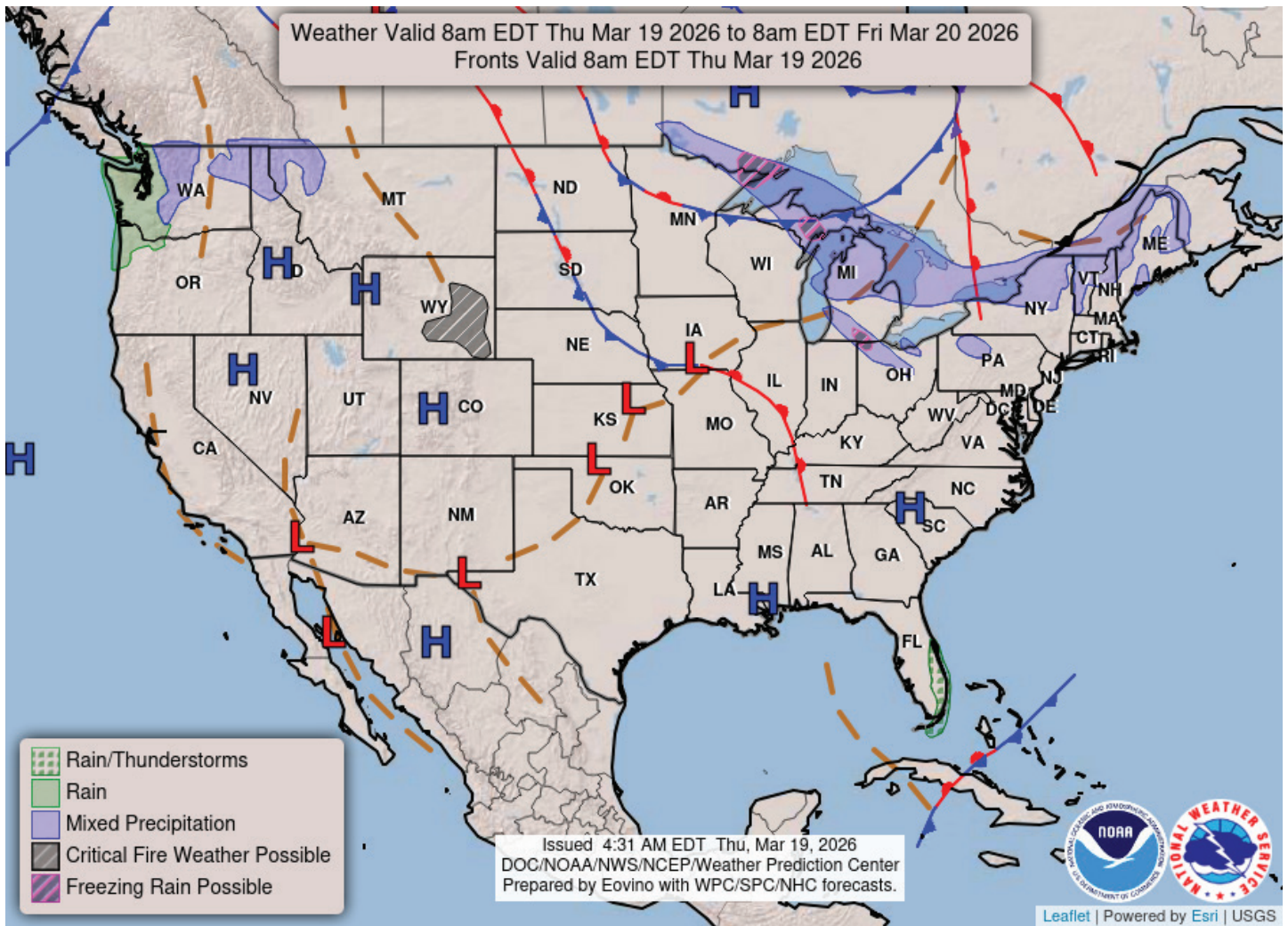
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.29

Average Precip to date: 1.66

Precip Year to Date: 1.62

Sunset Tonight: 7.42 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:35 am



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## Today in Weather History

March 19th, 1968: During a severe weather event, hail up to 1.75 inches in diameter fell 2 miles south of Brookings. Also, hail 1.00 inch in diameter fell 3 miles northeast of Sioux Falls.

March 19th, 2006: Heavy snow of 7 to as much as 20 inches fell on the afternoon of the 18th until around noon on the 20th. The South Dakota Department of Public Safety issued a travel advisory for any travel, especially for the State Basketball Tournament travelers. Interstate 90 was closed Sunday into Monday morning, with many people stranded. Many cars and trucks were stuck on the roads. Many schools and meetings were postponed or canceled. Snowfall amounts included 8 inches at Blunt, Onida, and Lake Sharpe, 9 inches at Mission Ridge, 10 inches at Pierre, 11 inches at Fort Pierre and near Stephan, 12 inches at Eagle Butte, 14 inches northwest of Presho, 16 inches at Murdo, and 20 inches near Iona.

1935 — Suffocating dust storms occurred frequently in southeastern Colorado between the 12th and the 25th of the month. Six people died, and many livestock starved or suffocated. Up to six feet of dust covered the ground. Schools were closed, and many rural homes were deserted by tenants. (The Weather Channel)

1950 — Timberline Lodge reported 246 inches of snow on the ground, a record for the state of Oregon. (The Weather Channel)

1956 — The second heavy snowstorm in just three days hit Boston. Nearby Blue Hill received 19.5 inches contributing to their snowiest March of record. (David Ludlum)

1987 — A storm in the western U.S. produced rain and snow from the northern and central Pacific coast to the northern and central Rockies. Heavier snowfall totals included 13 inches at Clear Creek UT, 12 inches at Snow Camp CA and Glacier Park MT, and 10 inches at Kayenta AZ. Wind gusts reached 54 mph at Winslow AZ. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — Seven cities in California and Nevada reported record high temperatures for the date as readings soared into the 80s and lower 90s. Los Angeles CA reported a record high of 89 degrees. Five cities in south central Texas reported record lows, including El Paso, with a reading of 22 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 — Six cities reported new record low temperatures for the date as cold arctic air settled into the Upper Midwest for Palm Sunday, including Marquette MI with a reading of 11 degrees below zero. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 — Rather wintry weather in the eastern U.S. replaced the 80 degree weather of the previous week. Freezing temperatures were reported in northern sections of the Gulf Coast States, and snow began to whiten the Northern and Central Appalachians. Up to eight inches of snow was reported in western Virginia. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

2003 — Denver digs out from the second-biggest snowstorm in the city's history. Almost two and a half feet of wet snow over 36 hours shuts down the city. The month ends as Denver's snowiest March on record.

## What Does It Mean to Be Saved?

**No matter what you have done, you can be forgiven—if you turn to Jesus..**

Psalms 25:12-18: 12 Who is the man who fears the LORD? He will instruct him in the way he should choose.

13 His soul will abide in prosperity, And his descendants will inherit the land.

14 The secret of the LORD is for those who fear Him, And He will make them know His covenant.

15 My eyes are continually toward the LORD, For He will pluck my feet out of the net.

16 Turn to me and be gracious to me, For I am lonely and afflicted.

17 The troubles of my heart are enlarged; Bring me out of my distresses.

18 Look upon my affliction and my trouble, And forgive all my sins.

How does a person become righteous in God's eyes? The path to redemption doesn't begin with a decision to live a better life or to stop doing something wrong. Rather, it starts with the realization that we cannot correct our sinful nature on our own. It's impossible to make ourselves righteous; we must depend on Jesus' work on the cross. God applies the benefit of the Lord's atoning sacrifice and adopts you into His family.

Your good works and righteous acts are a sign of a transformed heart, but they cannot earn salvation. Scripture tells us that being saved is "not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:9). When you stand before God, the only way you can be forgiven of your sins is through Jesus and His sacrificial, substitutionary atoning death at Calvary. The Savior came to give His life in order to rescue many (Mark 10:45). His actions show His immense love for mankind.

No matter what you have done, you can be cleansed of the stain left by sin. Confess any known transgressions to the Lord and turn from them. Then Jesus will forgive you and write your name in the Lamb's Book of Life (Revelation 21:27). By trusting in Him, you are assured of eternity in His presence.

*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:  
03.18.26

4 16 21 33 35 1

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

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 33 Mins 36 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:  
03.17.26

4 11 18 38 50 24

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

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 18 Mins 36 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:  
03.18.26

16 18 29 31 39 7

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$19,190,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 33 Mins 36 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
03.18.26

3 7 20 29 31

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$28,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 48 Mins 36 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
03.18.26

9 13 25 26 46 23

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

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 17 Mins 36 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:  
03.18.26

14 18 19 21 69 1

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$120,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 17 Mins 36 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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

### **Oil and natural gas prices soar as Iran attacks Gulf energy facilities. Brent crude nears \$114**

By ELAINE KURTENBACH and DAVID MCHUGH AP Business Writers

BANGKOK (AP) — Global oil and natural gas prices soared Thursday after Iran attacked a key natural gas facility in Qatar that can supply one-fifth of the world's gas as well as two oil refineries in Kuwait.

The attacks added to fears the energy crisis triggered by the closure of the Strait of Hormuz to tanker traffic may be longer and more extensive than feared, with lasting damage to oil and gas production.

Brent crude, the international benchmark, rose to \$116.38 per barrel, up from under \$73 per barrel on the eve of the war.

The European TTF benchmark for natural gas prices traded 24% higher on Thursday.

The Iranian attack hit the Ras Laffan terminal for shipping out liquefied natural gas in Qatar. Qatar normally supplies some 20% of the world's consumption of LNG, which can be carried by ship. The facility shut down after a drone attack. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz to most tanker traffic also left the gas with nowhere to go.

If the disruptions from Iran's attacks on its Gulf Arab neighbors' energy infrastructure keep oil and gas prices high for long, they could create a debilitating wave of inflation for the global economy.

U.S. benchmark crude oil gained 1.1% to \$96.45 a barrel early Thursday, while the Henry Hub future contract, the benchmark for U.S. natural gas, gained 5.1%.

As oil and gas prices spiked, world shares retreated and U.S. futures edged 0.2% lower.

Germany's DAX lost 2.1% to 23,015.40 and the CAC 40 in Paris fell 1.5% to 7,848.88. Britain's FTSE 100 shed 1.7% to 10,134.02.

In Asian share trading, Tokyo's Nikkei 225 fell 3.4% to 53,372.53 as the Bank of Japan opted to keep its benchmark interest rate on hold at 0.75%, citing the war with Iran as one factor.

In its monetary policy statement the BOJ said that "in the wake of increased tension in the Middle East, global financial and capital markets have been volatile and crude oil prices have risen significantly; future developments warrant attention."

Higher oil prices are a heavy burden for Japan, which like South Korea and Taiwan depends on imports of most raw materials for industries that rely heavily on oil and its derivatives.

The Kospi in Seoul lost 2.7% to 5,763.22.

In Hong Kong, the Hang Seng slipped 2% to 25,500.58, while the Shanghai Composite index shed 1.4% to 4,006.55.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 lost 1.7% to 8,497.80 and Taiwan's Taiex fell 1.9%. In India, which has also suffered from shocks to supplies of oil and gas, the Sensex lost 2.7%.

"The combination of higher oil, rising U.S. yields, and a stronger dollar is acting as a macro wrecking ball across Asian assets and currencies," Stephen Innes of SPI Asset Management said in a commentary.

On Wednesday, the S&P 500 fell 1.4%, flipping to a loss for the week so far. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 1.6% and the Nasdaq composite slid 1.5%.

The losses deepened after the Fed decided to keep its main interest rate steady, instead of resuming cuts meant to give the jobs market and economy a boost.

"We just don't know," Fed chair Jerome Powell said about what will happen with oil prices, along with how long President Donald Trump's tariffs will take to work their way fully through the system.

A report released Wednesday morning showed inflation pressures were already building before the war began. It said inflation at the U.S. wholesale level unexpectedly accelerated last month to 3.4%.

In other dealings early Thursday, The U.S. dollar fell to 159.10 Japanese yen from 159.88 yen. The euro rose to \$1.1463 from \$1.1453.

## BTS will stage a long-awaited comeback concert at a Seoul landmark

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — BTS will stage its long-awaited comeback concert on Saturday night at Seoul's Gwanghwamun Square, one of South Korea's most famous landmarks that represents its royal heritage and political and cultural life.

In a free concert expected to draw tens of thousands of fans, the K-pop juggernaut's seven members, all South Koreans, will perform songs from their first album in nearly four years, "ARIRANG," whose title is taken from the most beloved traditional folk tune on the Korean Peninsula.

"ARIRANG" is an album that embodies the origin and identity of BTS and carries the message that they want to convey now," Hybe Corp., the parent company of BTS' management agency, said in response to questions by The Associated Press. "Considering the symbolic significance of the word 'Arirang,' we've decided to hold a performance at Gwanghwamun, a place that represents Korea."

Gwanghwamun is a Seoul landmark

Gwanghwamun Square is named after the huge main gate of nearby Gyeongbokgung, a royal palace for Korea's Joseon dynasty, which ruled the peninsula for more than 500 years until its collapse in 1910.

Located in the heart of Seoul, the sprawling square is home to cultural and art events. It hosts giant statues of two of Korea's most respected figures — King Sejong, who invented the Korean script in 1443, and navy admiral Yi Sun-shin, who defeated the Japanese invasion in the 16th century.

The square is also a symbol of South Korea's young, resilient democracy, the site of massive rallies in times of political upheavals in recent years.

When then-President Yoon Suk Yeol's martial law imposition in late 2024 triggered the most severe crisis for the country's democracy in decades, protesters gathered in the square, calling for his ouster. Rallies blended politics and pop culture, with demonstrators waving colorful light sticks used at K-pop concerts and signing K-pop tracks such as Girls' Generation's "Into the New World."

Gwanghwamun concert will reaffirm BTS' roots

Observers say the hourlong Gwanghwamun concert, which will be livestreamed on Netflix globally, will reaffirm BTS' identity as a group that expanded from Korea to the world stage. BTS had been on hiatus because its members had to complete their mandatory military duties in South Korea.

Ha Jae-keun, a cultural critic, said that no matter where the BTS holds its comeback concert, it would be successful. But as the biggest stars of K-pop, BTS likely determined that appearing at a symbolic Korean site would be "most meaningful," he said.

Jung Dukhyun, a pop culture commentator, said the selection of Gwanghwamun likely reflected a view that Korean traditional culture and local elements can resonate on a global scale, as seen in the success of the Netflix sensation "KPop Demon Hunters," which won the Oscar for best animated feature and best song for "Golden" this week.

BTS concert to promote South Korea

Officials believe the concert will likely enhance South Korea's international cultural influence.

They also plan to take extensive safety steps to prevent crowd-related incidents.

In a message posted on X on Wednesday, South Korean President Lee Jae Myung called BTS "a proud artist of the Republic of Korea" and expressed hope that the concert will show "our beautiful cultural heritage and the charm of K-culture."

Besides about 20,000 ticketed fans at the square, about 240,000 others are expected to fill nearby areas to watch the concert on temporary screens. Authorities plan to block roads, have subway trains pass through some stations and close the Gyeongbokgung place.

Some residents criticized what they saw as preferential treatment given to BTS and potential inconvenience to the public. But many experts say the concert has a big public aspect.

"BTS is the nation's band. Now they intend to hold an open performance for the public free of charge. I think it would be very natural for the government to support it," Ha said.

## EU scrambles to contain energy costs from war in Middle East

By SAM McNEIL Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — Leaders from across the European Union are meeting Thursday to grapple with rising oil and gas prices caused by the war raging across key energy producers and shipping lanes in the Middle East.

Many of those leaders have deflected entreaties by U.S. President Donald Trump to send military assets to secure the Strait of Hormuz, a key waterway for the global flow of oil, gas and fertilizer. Rising energy prices because of the war and fears in Europe of a new refugee crisis have pushed leaders to make the Middle East a priority at the summit.

"We are very worried about the energy crisis," said Belgian Prime Minister Bart De Wever ahead of the European Council summit of 27 leaders of European Union nations. He said that energy prices were too high before the war, but that the conflict "created another spike."

"If that becomes structural, we're in deep trouble," he said. "At a European level, some measures can be taken to address the problem of the high energy prices."

The European Commission has told leaders it has a mix of financial instruments that member nations could deploy to lower energy prices, which will be up for discussion. No single policy will likely work to blunt the economic shocks from the war across the bloc's myriad markets from Romania to Ireland.

European leaders have struggled to take a firm stance on the fighting in Iran and Lebanon. While they have been critical of the Iranian government, they have not provided military support.

"This is a war that was started by the United States and Israel against Iran on reasons that I can understand because the Iranian regime is brutal not only for its own people, but also for the broader region and a security threat for Europe," said Dutch Prime Minister Rob Jetten.

"But it's not a war that we are part of," he said, calling for more sanctions on Iran and support for opposition groups.

## In Lebanon, war and displacement mar run-up to Eid al-Fitr holiday for many

By MALAK HARB and MARIAM FAM Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Normally, Lilian Jamaan would have been shopping for clothes for her daughter and buying meat and sweets in preparation for the Islamic holiday of Eid al-Fitr that marks the end of Ramadan.

But now, "there's no joy for Eid or for Ramadan or for anything," Jamaan said by phone from a school-turned-shelter in the Lebanese city of Sidon, where she's been displaced with her family.

"Everything is difficult," she said.

As the Islamic holy month of Ramadan draws to an end and Muslims worldwide prepare for the typically joyous holiday of Eid al-Fitr, Lebanon has crossed a grim milestone. Israel's strikes have displaced more than 1 million people in the country, according to the Lebanese government.

Lebanon's health ministry said 968 people were killed by the Israeli strikes in the country since the renewal of hostilities between Israel and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah.

The Iran-backed Hezbollah entered the wider Iran war by firing rockets at Israel. That led to the heavy Israeli bombardment of southern Lebanon and Beirut's southern suburbs, driving many from their homes.

Children wishing to spend Eid at home

"A lot of the kids that I at least spoke to, their biggest wish was to just spend Eid at home," said Basma Alloush, a spokesperson for the International Rescue Committee. "Eid is a time where all families come together, people celebrate with their relatives, and it usually brings a lot of peace and joy to families. ... It could be that many of them just spend Eid in shelters, in displacement."

The suffering has played out during Ramadan with scenes of people forced to flee their homes, reduced to sleeping in tents on the streets or in their cars. Some secured coveted spots in schools and other locations turned into shelters or stayed with relatives; many others scrambled to find makeshift arrangements.

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Only about 130,000 are in shelters.

For Jamaan, the harsh conditions in displacement meant she could no longer observe many aspects of Ramadan — a time for fasting, increased worship and usually festive communal gatherings with loved ones.

At home, she said she would fast, pray and read the Quran, the Muslim holy book.

Now, she said, she's stopped her fast and would make up for missed days when she returns home. "Some people fast and some are unable to fast; there's psychological stress and we're not sleeping well. ... Food is the last thing on my mind, but the circumstances are difficult."

She said she and her daughter sleep with others in the school while her husband sleeps in the car. "There's no stability."

She misses her loved ones and her Ramadan routine. "We would break our fast, pray, make and drink coffee and I would go to the neighbors or they would come over after iftar," the fast-breaking meal, she recalled.

Asmahan Taleb, who's also displaced in Sidon, said the run-up to Eid has been marred by hardship.

"How can we celebrate Eid when we're displaced from our homes and our land? Where is the Eid? Where is the happiness?" she said. "It will be Eid when we can return to our homes."

Humanitarian fallout and enduring one crisis after another

Like many others, this is not Jamaan's first displacement. Her daughter, she said, was born during an earlier wave of displacement from a round of fighting that was halted with a tenuous ceasefire in November 2024. Israel continued to launch near-daily strikes in Lebanon after the ceasefire that it said aimed to stop Hezbollah from rebuilding.

"Lebanon for us is really now the epicenter of the more immediate humanitarian fallout of this broader regional crisis," said Carl Skau, deputy executive director and chief operating officer of the U.N. World Food Program. "People here have endured crisis after crisis. They've been displaced before. But that doesn't make it any easier."

He said people he met were exhausted and hadn't yet recovered from the last time.

"There was this real sense of uncertainty this time. How is this gonna end? When is it gonna end?"

And that's not all that's different now.

"My concern is that the funding is not coming forward like it did last time," he told The Associated Press. "We know there is less money available. We know there is also competing priorities. ... We will need to make an effort that really donors step up."

As part of its response, WFP has provided more than half million hot meals to displaced people in shelters across Lebanon since March 2.

Response efforts and varied needs

Online, many volunteers, organizations and businesses have been sharing various initiatives to make, package and distribute hot meals for iftar and donate essentials from blankets and clothes to formula milk and medications.

The needs are varied and ample.

"There is a dire need for shelter," Alloush said. "There was a massive thunderstorm. We're just thinking about the people that were sleeping outside, sleeping in tents that are not waterproof, sleeping on the mud."

She said IRC has been distributing mattresses, pillows and blankets as well as coloring books.

"People don't have enough clothes. Children fled with no toys or no activities to kind of get their minds off of the war."

Eman Abo Khadra, a hair salon owner in Sidon, said she tried to bring a bit of Eid cheer to some displaced children the way she knows best: giving them haircuts as a gift.

"It's a morale thing. What does a child know about war or no war. ... It's just about planting some joy in their hearts."

But despite her gesture, she felt the toll the tensions are taking on the young.

"I was telling them, 'Come on, clap; be happy; laugh,' but ... tensions are high," she said. "People are tired."

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Sheltering in Sidon, Alia Ismail said it's hard to properly observe Ramadan or tap into the Eid joy.

"We no longer can fast or buy anything for Ramadan," she said.

For Eid, her children tell her "We want clothes; we want to go out; we want sweets," she said. "I tell them, 'I can't get you that. There's no money.'"

In normal times, she said, she would have been cleaning her home, buying clothes, meat and sweets for Eid.

"Can you imagine that we are staying in a school corridor?" she said by phone, adding she puts clothes under her head when she sleeps as she has no pillows.

Striving to recapture a taste of Ramadan and Eid

In a Beirut school sheltering hundreds of people, some tried to recapture a taste of Ramadan's traditions and the lives they left behind. Hallways between classrooms were adorned with decorations. One family placed a small gas burner and some meal packages from charities on a few desks lined up together.

At the school, Shaker Araqa lamented how his extended family has been dispersed. "We used to gather. We were in one building. Now, everyone is at a different place."

Nabila Hijazi said her children wonder about Eid, adding she'll buy them clothes.

"They want to live their lives," she said. "We tell them 'God Willing, Eid comes and we return to our homes.'"

She said she's been able to observe Ramadan normally at the school and is conscious of how much better her situation is than many others.

Back in Sidon, Jamaan said she prays "for God to stop the war, for us to return to our homes and for there to be peace."

## **Overnight storm in Pakistan's largest city, Karachi, kills at least 15 people and injures several**

KARACHI, Pakistan (AP) — Heavy rains and strong winds lashed Pakistan's largest city overnight, killing at least 15 people and injuring several others as walls and roofs collapsed at multiple locations, emergency services and hospital officials said Thursday.

The storm that began Wednesday continued into the night in Karachi, the capital of southern Sindh province. Authorities advised residents to avoid unnecessary travel.

At least 15 bodies were brought to the city's main hospital. More than two dozen people were injured and treated at hospitals after weather-related incidents, police surgeon Summaiya Tariq and emergency officials said.

The storm also uprooted roadside trees and disrupted traffic, according to rescue officials and police.

The Pakistan Meteorological Department said winds of up to 90 kph (56 mph) lasted for hours. Karachi Mayor Murtaza Wahab urged residents to stay indoors and avoid unnecessary movement, warning that many trees had fallen and crews were working to clear roads.

Forecasters said more rain and thunderstorms with strong winds and possible isolated hailstorms could continue to affect Karachi and other parts of Sindh province as a westerly weather system moves across the region.

Rain and storms lashed many other areas across the country, emergency services reported.

## **World Happiness Report highlights social media's negative impact, ranks Finland as happiest country**

By KOSTYA MANENKOV and KIRSTEN GRIESHABER Associated Press

HELSINKI (AP) — Heavy social media use contributes to a stark decline in well-being among young people, with the effects particularly worrying in teenage girls in English-speaking countries and Western Europe, according to the World Happiness Report 2026 published Thursday.

The annual report, published by the Wellbeing Research Centre at the University of Oxford, also found

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that Finland is the happiest land in the world for the ninth year in a row, with other Nordic countries such as Iceland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway ranking among the top 10 countries.

It highlighted how life evaluations among under 25-year-olds in the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand have dropped significantly over the past decade, and suggested that long hours spent scrolling through social media is a key factor in that trend.

Costa Rica jumps to 4th place; Nordic countries stay on top

A new entry to the top five on the list is Costa Rica, which climbed to fourth place this year after rising through the ranks from 23rd place in 2023.

The report attributes that to well-being boosts from family bonds and other social connections.

"We think it's because of the quality of their social lives and the stability that they currently enjoy," said Jan-Emmanuel De Neve, an Oxford economics professor who directs the Wellbeing Research Centre and co-edits the World Happiness Report.

"Latin America more generally has strong family ties, strong social ties, a great level of social capital, as a sociologist would call it, more so than in other places," he added.

The report said Finland and the other Northern European countries' steady ranking on top is related to a combination of wealth, its equal distribution, having a welfare state that protects people from the risks of recessions, and a healthy life expectancy.

As in previous years, nations in or near zones of major conflict remain at the foot of the rankings. Afghanistan is ranked as the unhappiest country again, followed by Sierra Leone and Malawi in Africa.

Country rankings were based on answers given by around 100,000 people in 140 countries and territories who were asked to rate their own lives. The study was done in partnership with the analytics firm Gallup and the U.N. Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

In most countries, approximately 1,000 people are contacted by telephone or face-to-face each year.

Teenage girls especially vulnerable

Respondents were asked to evaluate their lives on a scale from 0 to 10. Among under-25s in English-speaking and Western European countries, that score dropped by almost one point over the past decade.

The report said the negative correlation between well-being and extensive social media use is particularly concerning among teenage girls. For example, it said that 15-year-old girls who use social media for five hours or more reported a drop in life satisfaction, compared to others who use it less.

Young people who use social media for less than one hour per day report the highest levels of well-being, researchers said, higher than those who do not use social media at all. But adolescents are spending an estimated average of 2.5 hours a day on social media.

"It is clear that we should look as much as possible to put the 'social' back into social media," De Neve said.

Algorithmic feeds and influencers seen as culprits

Researchers noted that in some parts of the world, such as the Middle East and South America, the links between social media use and well-being are more positive — and youth well-being has not fallen despite heavy social media use.

The report said this is due to many factors that differ between continents, but concluded that heavy social media use in some countries is an important contributing factor to the decline in youth well-being.

It said the most problematic platforms are those with algorithmic feeds, feature influencers and where the main material is visual, because they encourage social comparisons. Those who use platforms that mainly facilitate communication do better.

The 2026 rankings mark the second year in a row that none of the English-speaking countries appear in the top 10. The United States is at 23rd place, Canada is at 25th and Britain at 29th.

The report, with its focus on social media, comes at a time when more and more countries have banned or are considering bans of social media for minors.

## Joe Kent's resignation over Iran war reignites antisemitism fears and debate over Israeli influence

By THOMAS BEAUMONT and DAVID BAUDER Associated Press

It was no surprise when Joe Kent showed up on Tucker Carlson's podcast a day after quitting his counterterrorism job in President Donald Trump's administration. Here was a top official who resigned to protest the war with Iran turning to right-wing media's leading critic of the conflict.

"The Israelis drove the decision to take this action," Kent said in Wednesday's interview.

But before long, the conversation moved in a different direction as Kent nodded to conspiracy theories that pro-Israel forces were behind the assassination of conservative activist Charlie Kirk.

"I'm saying there are unanswered questions," Kent said.

The conversation encapsulated two schisms within the Republican Party and the right-wing media system, both of which have reached high into the national security establishment of the Trump administration.

There's a foreign policy debate over the wisdom of Trump's war with Iran and the future of United States' longstanding alliance with Israel.

But there also are fears that the focus on Israel is the leading edge of an antisemitic fringe that has gained ground by portraying Jews as shadowy manipulators, echoing some of history's most hateful tropes.

Tucker Carlson is playing a central role

At the center of both issues is Carlson, a former Fox News host who remains influential among conservatives. He was previously denounced for hosting Nick Fuentes, a white nationalist and antisemite, on his podcast last year. During the interview, Fuentes complained about "organized Jewry in America."

On Wednesday, Carlson was sharply critical about Israel, saying "its lobbying in the United States pressured the president."

Matt Brooks, president of the Republican Jewish Coalition, described Kent's appearance on Carlson's podcast as "part of an ongoing problem."

He noted that his group opposed Kent's nomination as director of the National Counterterrorism Center because of ties to right-wing extremism. Trump ignored those concerns even though, as he said after Kent's resignation, "I always thought he was weak on security" and "I didn't know him well."

Kent's resignation letter trafficked in antisemitic conspiracy theories while raising concerns about the war with Iran.

He blamed "high-ranking Israeli officials and influential members of the American media" for encouraging conflict. Indeed, Israeli leaders including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu encouraged Trump to join forces in an attack on Iran.

But Kent also went further, saying it's "the same tactic the Israelis used to draw us into the disastrous Iraq war." He also said his wife, a Navy cryptologist who was killed by a suicide bomber in Syria, died "in a war manufactured by Israel."

Sen. Mitch McConnell, a Kentucky Republican, described the letter as "virulent antisemitism." Rep. Josh Gottheimer, a New Jersey Democrat, said "scapegoating Israel isn't just a tired antisemitic trope — it's anti-American."

Kent has previously rejected all forms of "racism and bigotry."

Trump has said nothing about Kent's remarks on Israel. He's previously disputed the idea that Israel pushed him toward war, saying "I might have forced their hand."

Unified Republican support for Israel has fractured

Questions about Israeli influence are not unique to right-wing circles. Progressives have also faced accusations of antisemitism for their response to the war in Gaza, which began with an attack by Hamas on Oct. 7, 2023.

But it's been a widening fault line within the Republican Party, which has been a bedrock of support for Israel over the years. Conservatives are still reckoning with the fallout from Carlson's interview with Fuentes.

For example, board members and other staff resigned from the Heritage Foundation after the think tank's president defended Carlson.

Trump tried to sidestep the issue, declining to criticize Fuentes and praising Carlson for having "said good things about me over the years." The president previously dined with Fuentes at Mar-a-Lago in between his two terms, and Carlson has continued to visit the White House.

Mort Klein, president of the conservative Jewish Group Zionists for America, said Wednesday that he supports Trump but "I'd like him to do more" about antisemitism.

"I want him to be stronger on those issues," Klein said.

Carlson has said that he is not antisemitic. But he has said anti-Jewish hate is less pervasive in society than bias against white people, and that some Christian politicians who were fervent supporters of Israel, such as Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, were guilty of heresy.

Israel divide simmers in right-wing media

The Iran war is poised to continue fracturing right-wing media.

Ben Shapiro, co-founder of The Daily Wire, called Carlson's Fuentes interview "an act of moral imbecility" and accused the host of misleading his audience with falsehoods and conspiracy theories.

He's also feuded with Candace Owens, who has promoted antisemitic conspiracy theories. Dennis Prager, a conservative commentator, wrote in an open letter to Owens that "I cannot think of anyone in public life engendering as much suspicion of Jews, Zionism and Israel as you."

Megyn Kelly, like Carlson a former Fox News Channel anchor now helming her own independent media empire, said the war was sold to the American people by "Israel firsters, like Mark Levin." Levin, a radio and Fox personality, has been among Trump's most fervent supporters of the war.

Levin, for his part, called Kelly an "emotionally unhinged, lewd and petulant wreck."

It promises to continue.

Levin posted on social media an invitation to Kent to appear on his show in the coming days.

"Sure," Kent replied. "Let's go."

## Many work to reconcile César Chavez's labor rights activist legacy with sexual abuse allegations

By JACQUES BILLEAUD, FERNANDA FIGUEROA and HALLIE GOLDEN Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Mary Rose Wilcox and her husband marched and fasted alongside César Chavez. They helped him open a radio station in Phoenix and plastered their Mexican restaurant with photos and a mural of the widely admired Latino icon.

So when Wilcox's daughter called this week to inform them of sexual abuse allegations that were leveled against Chavez, she said it felt like a punch to the gut.

By Wednesday morning, the couple had taken down Chavez's photos from their restaurant walls and plan to cover the mural.

"We love César Chavez. But we cannot honor him and we cannot even love him anymore," said the former Phoenix City Council member.

Many like Wilcox are working to reconcile the legacy of a man who fought tirelessly for the rights of farmworkers with stunning allegations that he sexually abused girls and the co-founder of the United Farm Workers of America union, Dolores Huerta.

Latino leaders and community groups quickly called the alleged abuse by Chavez inexcusable, but they emphasized that the farmworker movement was never just about a single man. Chavez died in California in 1993 at age 66.

There were calls to alter memorials honoring the man who in the 1960s helped secure better wages and working conditions for farmworkers and has been long revered by many Democratic leaders in the U.S. The California Museum said it will be removing Chavez from the state's Hall of Fame - something it's never done with anyone before.

Some local and state leaders in both parties urged their communities not to observe Chavez's birthday on March 31 with the typical activities, and to rename buildings and city streets. Celebrations for Chavez in San Francisco, Texas and in his home state of Arizona already were canceled at the request of the Cesar

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Chavez Foundation.

Huerta, who is a labor rights legend in her own right, said in a statement released Wednesday, that she stayed silent for 60 years out of concern that her words would hurt the farmworker movement. She said she did not know that Chavez had hurt other women.

Huerta described two sexual encounters with Chavez, one where she was "manipulated and pressured" and another where she was "forced against my will." She said both led to pregnancies, which she kept secret, and that she arranged for the children to be raised by other families.

She joined Chavez in 1962 to co-found the National Farm Workers Association, which became the United Farm Workers of America. For many, they were akin to Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks because of their work advocating for racial equality and civil rights.

The New York Times first reported Wednesday that it found Chavez groomed and sexually abused young girls who worked in the movement. Huerta, too, revealed to the newspaper that she was a victim of the abuse in her 30s.

Chavez is known nationally for his early organizing in the fields, a hunger strike, a grape boycott and eventual victory in getting growers to negotiate with farmworkers for better wages and working conditions.

Streets, schools and parks across the Southwest bear Chavez's name. California became the first state to commemorate his birthday, and in 2014, then-President Barack Obama proclaimed March 31 as national César Chavez Day. President Joe Biden had a bronze bust of Chavez installed in the Oval Office when he moved into the White House.

Biden and Obama have not yet commented on the allegations, while California Gov. Gavin Newsom said he was still processing the news.

Chavez was full of contradictions even when he was the union leader, said Miriam Pawel, a veteran California journalist who wrote a biography of him. There was abusive behaviors within the union, but people didn't speak out because they believed the union was the best way to protect farmworkers, she said.

"For many, many years, for most of those people, even when they saw things that they found disturbing, they did not wanna talk about it," Pawel said.

Born in Yuma, Arizona, Chavez grew up in a Mexican American family that traveled around California picking lettuce, grapes, cotton and other seasonal crops.

Chavez's family said in a statement that they are devastated by news of the allegations.

"We wish peace and healing to the survivors and commend their courage to come forward. As a family steeped in the values of equity and justice, we honor the voices of those who feel unheard and who report sexual abuse," the family said.

The Cesar Chavez Foundation pledged unequivocal support for the labor leader's victims Wednesday and said — with the Chavez family's support -- the organization will figure out its identity going forward.

The United Farm Workers union quickly distanced itself from annual celebrations of its founder, calling the allegations troubling.

Wilcox said Chavez helped people understand that workers at all levels matter by organizing marches and helping enact laws and get contracts for workers.

She said it was heartbreaking to have to take down the pictures that visitors to their restaurant loved to take photos in front of.

"There's two things: Chavez the man and Chavez the man who we didn't know," she said. "And the one we knew, we knew the good things he did and the things we saw put in place. ... And the one we did not know is like a monster."

## European Union summit will focus on Iran war and a loan to Ukraine blocked by Hungary

By SAM McNEIL and LORNE COOK Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — European Union leaders are holding a summit in Brussels on Thursday for talks on the Iran war, energy prices, migration and an enormous loan for war-ravaged Ukraine being held up by Hungary.

Many of those leaders have deflected entreaties by U.S. President Donald Trump to send military assets to secure the Strait of Hormuz, a key waterway for the global flow of oil, gas and fertilizer. Rising energy prices because of the war and fears in Europe of a new refugee crisis have pushed leaders to make the Middle East one of the top priorities at the summit.

The European Commission, the EU's executive branch, has floated the idea of a "toolbox" of measures to lower energy prices for leaders to discuss because no single policy will work across the myriad markets in the 27-nation bloc to blunt economic shocks from the war, according to a senior European diplomat who wasn't authorized to be publicly named so spoke on condition of anonymity.

The summit will also focus on a long-brewing standoff between Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and most other EU nations.

The last EU summit was held in December at a Belgian castle, where the leaders including Orbán agreed to a 90 billion-euro (\$104 billion) loan for Ukraine for help overcoming a budget shortfall in the country as it grapples with a grinding war with Russia.

But a month later, Orbán backtracked after the Druzhba oil pipeline was disabled in January after what Ukrainian officials said was a Russian drone attack. The pro-Russia leader, who has held office in Hungary since 2010, is running an aggressive media campaign villainizing both Brussels and Kyiv as he seeks reelection next month.

"If there is no oil, there is no money," Orbán said in a social media post on Tuesday.

To get Ukraine the much-needed loan, EU leaders and diplomats will lobby Orbán and Slovakia's prime minister, Robert Fico, whose government has also taken pro-Russia stances.

On Tuesday, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen offered for the EU to pay to repair the Druzhba pipeline and the development of alternative fuel lines for Hungary and Slovakia.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that any obstruction to the loan is "absolutely unfair" and that there is "no alternative" for the embattled nation than those funds as it faces a severe budget crisis because of the war, which began on Feb. 24, 2022.

"There may be alternatives in terms of financing mechanisms, but there is simply no alternative to strengthening our army," Zelenksyy said on Wednesday.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz told lawmakers in Berlin on Wednesday that the EU must swiftly reach an agreement on the 20th package of sanctions against Russia and the loan.

He said that he would "advocate for that emphatically" in Brussels and that "we must not take into consideration a single country in the European Union that is currently setting up this blockade in Europe now for domestic political reasons and because of an election campaign that is being conducted there."

Merz said, in urging for more sanctions, that "the needs of the moment call for us to increase the pressure on Moscow together – the U.S. and the European partners together."

## Japan's Prime Minister Takaichi meets with Trump as he seeks help securing the Strait of Hormuz

By MICHELLE L. PRICE and DIDI TANG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The meeting that Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi will have at the White House on Thursday originally seemed like a prime opportunity to have President Donald Trump's ear before he embarked on a trip to China.

But now, the war in Iran and Trump's unsuccessful call for Japan and other nations to help protect the

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Strait of Hormuz means the China trip has been delayed and Takaichi may be likely to get an earful.

Trump has repeatedly complained on camera and online that U.S. allies, including Japan, have rejected his request to help safeguard the critical waterway for oil and gas transport.

"In fact, speaking as President of the United States of America, by far the Most Powerful Country Anywhere in the World, WE DO NOT NEED THE HELP OF ANYONE!" Trump exclaimed on Truth Social after his initial call for help was rebuffed.

The prime minister acknowledged before she left Japan that she expects her meeting with Trump will be "very difficult." She and her ministers have denied that Washington officially requested Japanese warships for the U.S.-Israeli operation.

Japan, a key U.S. ally in Asia, is one of the countries that Trump namechecked on Tuesday as he railed against the lack of help with the Strait of Hormuz before declaring the help wasn't needed.

Trump is expected to put "enormous pressure" on Takaichi, said Kurt Campbell, the former U.S. deputy secretary of state in the Biden administration who is now chair of The Asia Group.

Campbell said he's never seen a meeting between U.S. and Japanese leaders carrying such high stakes. In order to press for Japan's interests, he said, Takaichi will want to find a way to suggest that Japan is a part of the U.S. plan in the Middle East.

"She's going to want to come out of that as a partner in this case and realize that if she can do that, that she can translate that potentially into the president listening more to Japanese concerns about Taiwan or other issues," Campbell said.

The constraints on Japan's involvement in Iran include a provision in its post-World War II constitution that bans the use of force except to defend its territory. The country's military is called the Self-Defense Force.

Christopher Johnstone, a partner and chair of the defense and national security practice at The Asia Group, said Japan could help with mine-sweeping, and has had "a small naval presence" in the region as part of an anti-piracy mission for at least a decade. But to join the U.S. mission would require Takaichi to clear "an exceptionally high bar politically to invoke collective self-defense" that has never been done before.

Takaichi wanted to focus on trade and security in the Indo-Pacific region

Takaichi, who had her first meeting with Trump in October in Tokyo, is Japan's first female prime minister and a protégé of former leader Shinzo Abe, who developed a close relationship with Trump.

She is also a hardline conservative and longtime supporter of Taiwan whose comments about Japan's willingness to provide military support to the island have heightened tensions with China.

Ahead of her meeting with Trump, Takaichi had sought to focus on trade, strengthening the U.S.-Japan relationship and security concerns. Japanese officials said the two sides would work to deepen cooperation in regional security, critical minerals, energy and dealing with China.

China views self-governed Taiwan, which the U.S. relies on for its production of computer chips, as its sovereign territory and has said it would take it by force if needed.

But beyond questions about helping with the Strait of Hormuz, the global implications of the Iran war have also put the Japanese leader in a tougher spot with Trump as she seeks to ensure U.S. commitment to the Indo-Pacific region.

Japan considers China a growing security threat and has pushed a military buildup on southwestern islands near the East China Sea. But the U.S. has shifted some troops stationed in Japan to the Middle East, removing a check against China's power.

Takaichi is expected to raise concerns about troop shifts with Trump because they are coming at the same time China is launching a large number of exercises around Taiwan.

"This raises the prospect that — once again — the United States will be distracted and bogged down in the Middle East at a time when the deterrence problem in East Asia has never been greater," Johnstone said.

## State Department cut jobs with deep expertise in Middle East as Iran crisis escalates

By BYRON TAU Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In the escalating war in Iran, the State Department's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs would ordinarily be at the center of the geopolitical fray.

Typically led by a veteran diplomat, the bureau's role would be to coordinate U.S. foreign policy across an 18-country region, much of which has become a chaotic battlefield scarred by drone and missile strikes as the U.S. and Israel remain locked in conflict with Iran.

The Trump administration for a time put Mora Namdar, a lawyer of Iranian descent with limited management experience, in charge before later moving her to a different post. One of her credentials was her contribution to Project 2025, a conservative think tank's blueprint for the second Trump administration. Namdar's last Senate-confirmed predecessor was a longtime Middle East expert who had been with the department since 1984 and had served as the U.S. ambassador to the United Arab Emirates.

Now that bureau is also working with far fewer resources. The administration's most recent budget proposed a 40% cut to the bureau, though Congress eventually enacted less dramatic cuts. The administration also eliminated the dedicated Iran office, merging it with the Iraq office.

Staff reductions and management choices hamper emergency response

These kinds of personnel and management choices — coupled with President Donald Trump's moves to shrink government and confine decision-making to a tight circle — are limiting the ability of the United States to handle a global emergency, according to interviews with more than a dozen current and former U.S. officials, many of whom recently left government.

In divisions of the State Department that typically would handle the Iran response, numerous veteran diplomats with decades of collective experience were fired, retired or were reassigned — replaced by more junior officials or political appointees. The administration cut more than 80 staffers in Near Eastern Affairs, according to numbers compiled by a State Department employee who was terminated last year based on surveys of colleagues. (The department does not release official figures on Foreign Service officer staffing levels but did not dispute the number.)

The Trump administration has left the assistant secretary position in charge of Near Eastern Affairs vacant, along with key ambassadorships in the Middle East. Four of the five supervisors in the bureau have temporary titles.

The current and former officials, some of whom asked for anonymity to discuss sensitive internal matters during an active conflict, paint a portrait of an understaffed government workforce struggling to execute the president's agenda. Those who remain tell colleagues that their analysis, recommendations and advice go unheeded.

The State Department vigorously disputed those assessments.

"As far as we can tell, AP's entire 'report' on the evacuations does not include any conversations with people actually involved. Instead, it relies on 'outside' or 'former official' sources that have no idea what they are talking about. We walked AP through specific inaccuracy after specific inaccuracy — indeed how the whole premise was wrong," State Department spokesman Tommy Pigott said.

More than 3,800 State Dept. employees departed since Trump took office

The State Department saw a departure of more than 3,800 employees since Trump took office through a combination of reductions in force, staffers taking the Fork in the Road deferred resignation plan and ordinary retirements. According to estimates by the American Foreign Service Association, the labor union that represents foreign service officers, senior foreign service ranks were disproportionately represented in the layoffs compared to their share of the overall workforce.

"He's making choices without the larger expertise of the United States government that would flag issues of consequence," said Max Stier, CEO of the nonpartisan Partnership for Public Service, a nonprofit group that studies federal workforce issues. "Sometimes government is slow-moving because there are a lot of different factors that need to be balanced against each other."

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For instance, the administration appears to have been caught off guard by what would happen once the U.S. struck Iran — something Trump himself acknowledged this week when he expressed surprise that Tehran retaliated with strikes on American allies in the region. “Nobody expected that. We were shocked. They fought back,” Trump told reporters this week.

Pigott said staffing reductions “are not having any negative impact on our ability to respond to this operation, our ability to plan, and our ability to execute in service to Americans.” He added that the department “rejects the premise that key decisions were made without meaningful input from experienced professionals.”

But Iranian retaliation on U.S. allies was predictable, according to former officials, as well as previous wargames and conflict models run by both the U.S. military and private organizations. The National Security Council, which Trump has pared, typically would have presented the president with analysis from experts within the bureaucracy.

Instead, decisions are made by a small group of officials close to the president without the planning or coordination of the larger machinery of government, including Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who also serves as the president’s national security adviser.

“In the Trump Administration, decisions are made by President Trump and senior administration officials and not by no-name bureaucrat leakers who whine to the press about not being consulted about highly classified operations,” White House spokesperson Dylan Johnson said.

Advice from career officials often went unheeded

“In the time that I was there, there was no policy process to speak of,” said Chris Backemeyer, who served in Near Eastern Affairs as a deputy assistant secretary of state before resigning last year. Backemeyer was a major proponent of the Iran deal that Trump abandoned. He recently left government to run for Congress as a Democrat in Nebraska.

“They did not want to hear any advice from career people,” said Backemeyer.

Namdar was later moved to be the head of consular affairs, the part of the department responsible for providing assistance to American citizens overseas and issuing visas to foreign visitors.

When the U.S. made the decision to strike Iran, Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee offered embassy staff in Jerusalem the opportunity to evacuate — a sign that he knew strikes were coming. But some other embassies in the region did not make similar arrangements — leaving nonessential personnel and their families stranded in a war zone.

The department said it has been issuing travel warnings since January and was fully staffed to handle the crisis the moment the strikes were launched.

Evacuation planning was chaotic

Still, little planning appears to have gone into how to evacuate the Americans who were living, working, visiting or studying in many of the countries that became engulfed in the conflict — in part because the White House seems to have underestimated the possibility of the strikes expanding into a prolonged multi-country war, as evidenced by Trump’s own remarks.

After Iranian attacks on allies like Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, the State Department began calling for Americans to leave the region. But numerous former Consular Affairs staffers say such planning should have begun long before U.S. strikes started.

In a statement posted to social media, Namdar only told Americans to evacuate several days into the conflict, when airspace was largely closed and many commercial flights were unavailable.

“The messaging that went out to American citizens — after the U.S. struck Iran — was woefully late and, initially, confusing,” said Yael Lempert, who served as U.S. ambassador to Jordan until 2025. Lempert is one of five former ambassadors expected to speak about the department’s failures at an event Thursday at the American Academy of Diplomacy in Washington.

Other poorly executed evacuations, such the Biden administration’s withdrawal from Afghanistan, have drawn criticism.

But this time they’re compounded by the loss of experienced people, officials say. Consular Affairs has lost

more than 150 jobs in the Trump administration due to a combination of reductions in force, dismissals of probationary employees and retirements, according to a U.S. official who asked for anonymity — though other parts of the department were hit much harder.

The department notes that it has offered assistance to nearly 50,000 Americans impacted by the conflict, with more than 60 flights evacuating citizens from the region. In total, the department says more than 70,000 Americans have been able to return home since the outbreak of hostilities on Feb. 28.

Democrat says personnel reduction imperiled safety

“The loss of experienced personnel through these RIFs has clearly undermined the Bureau of Consular Affairs’ ability to fulfill its most important mission, to protect Americans abroad,” Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, the top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said in a statement.

Language skills at the department are also atrophying. Thirteen Arabic speakers and four Farsi speakers, all trained at taxpayer expense, were among employees let go, according to a draft letter being circulated by former foreign service officers.

It can cost \$200,000 to train a foreign service officer in a language. The letter estimates that the total number of people fired by the State Department in the name of efficiency received more than \$35 million in taxpayer-funded language training and more than \$100 million in total training and other career development.

The State Department has set up two temporary task forces to deal with the crisis in the Middle East. One aims to bolster the capacities of Near East Affairs and another is aimed at helping Consular Affairs evacuate Americans.

A group of more than 250 Foreign Service officers were part of the administration’s reduction-in-force last year but still remain on the State Department’s payroll. Many have volunteered to return to the department to work on either a task force or do any other job that needs to be done with the outbreak of a global crisis.

“I haven’t been given any separation paperwork. I still have an active clearance. I could go back to the department tomorrow, either to backfill or staff a task force,” said one foreign service officer who asked for anonymity because they are still technically on the department’s payroll and are not authorized to speak to the press. “I will do the scutwork jobs.”

The department hasn’t responded to their offer but said in a statement that the task force is “fully staffed.”

## **César Chavez and Dolores Huerta led a movement that won better wages and conditions for farmworkers**

By AUDREY McAVOY Associated Press

Dolores Huerta and the late César Chavez are both labor rights icons credited with leading a movement that pushed growers to negotiate for better wages and working conditions for farmworkers.

Their legacies are getting new attention after allegations emerged that Chavez, who died in 1993, sexually abused Huerta and other women and girls. Several celebrations honoring Chavez planned around the country for later this month have been canceled.

Chavez and Huerta co-founded the National Farm Workers Association in 1962, which became the United Farm Workers of America a few years later when it merged with the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee.

The rise of the movement is one of the most important events in U.S. history and is the most important event in U.S. Latino history, said Paul Ortiz, a Cornell University labor history professor. United Farm Workers made the most important sustained changes in the working conditions of agricultural workers in the nation’s history, he said.

Agricultural workers “from Hawaii to Florida to New York to Southern California had tried to organize to improve their wages and working conditions, literally for centuries, going back to slavery times,” Ortiz said. “And almost every effort failed, some catastrophically.”

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Chavez and Huerta are credited with efforts that prompted California to pass the first state law recognizing farmworkers' right to collective bargaining.

Both have streets and schools named after them. Several states have designated March 31, Chavez's birthday, as a day to commemorate him, and former President Barack Obama declared it a federal commemorative holiday in 2014.

Here's a look at their lives and legacies:

César Chavez

Chavez is known for his early organizing in the fields, a hunger strike, a grape boycott and eventual victory in getting growers to negotiate with farmworkers for better wages and working conditions.

Born in Yuma, Arizona, Chavez grew up in a Mexican American family that traveled around California picking lettuce, grapes, cotton and other seasonal crops.

Chavez protested poor pay and often-miserable working conditions. There were no toilets in the fields for workers and they had to weed fields with short-handled hoes that forced them to bend over for hours at a time.

The farmworker movement lifted worker wages, banned short-handled hoes and established state-mandated clean drinking water and restrooms in the fields, according to a National Park Service document supporting the creation of a national monument in Chavez's honor.

In 1966, he led a march that started with a few activists in Delano, California, and ended in Sacramento with 10,000 people, according to Obama's 2014 proclamation. Some 17 million people joined a boycott of grapes, which forced growers to accept some of the first farmworker contracts in history, the proclamation said.

Chavez began the first credit union for farmworkers, health clinics, daycare centers and job-training programs, the Cesar Chavez Foundation said on its website.

"He was, for his own people, a Moses figure," then-President Bill Clinton said in 1994 when posthumously awarding Chavez the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Chavez died the year before in California at age 66.

Dolores Huerta

The labor and civil rights leader secured higher wages, health benefits, pensions and pesticide protections for farmworkers during her decades of organizing and advocacy on their behalf.

Now 95, Huerta helped organize the 1965 Delano strike of 5,000 grape workers and was the lead negotiator in the workers contract that followed, according to the National Women's History Museum.

A single mother, Huerta gave up a stable teaching career to organize. She was jailed over 20 times for protests and seriously injured in 1988 while demonstrating. She later championed women's rights, encouraged Latinas to run for office and founded the Dolores Huerta Foundation to combat discrimination, poverty and inequality.

She coined the iconic slogan "Sí, se puede" — meaning "Yes, we can" -- in 1972 while rallying Arizona farmworkers against a law banning boycotts and strikes. She defied claims it was impossible to organize there.

Huerta received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2012 and in 1993 became the first Latina inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame.

## California community ties all-time March temperature record in the US

NORTH SHORE, Calif. (AP) — A tiny desert community in Southern California reached 108 degrees on Wednesday, tying the highest March temperature ever recorded in the U.S.

It came amid a record-breaking winter heat wave in the Southwest that will stretch into the weekend and could produce even higher temperatures.

The record — first reached by Rio Grande City, Texas in 1954 and now shared by North Shore, California — could be broken in a number of cities and towns by week's end. The aptly named Thermal, California,

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was forecast to hit 110 degrees on Friday.

Triple-digit temperatures also came earlier than ever before in Phoenix when the Arizona capital hit 101 degrees Wednesday, according to the National Weather Service. The previous record was set almost 40 years ago, on March 26, 1988, the only other time Phoenix temperatures have climbed into the hundreds during the month of March, according to the NWS.

Bryan Lewis, a meteorologist with the NWS, said this has been one of the most significant March heat-waves in recorded history.

"We've broken so many records yesterday and even today we've broken quite a few so far," he said.

Several cities on Wednesday experienced their hottest March day in almost 40 years, according to the NWS.

Las Vegas hit 99 degrees, smashing its hottest March day on record, which was 93 degrees in 2022.

Downtown Los Angeles reached 94 degrees, beating its previous daily high of 87 degrees in 1997.

And the desert destination of Palm Springs, California, was 104 degrees, tying its hottest March day on record from 1966.

It will continue to be 20 to 30 degrees above normal March temperatures for the rest of the week in the Southwest before dropping slightly over the weekend. Many other cities in the region are expected to see their earliest 100-plus degree day on record, according to the NWS.

## Strikes hit world's largest natural gas field in Iran, and Tehran retaliates with more attacks

By JON GAMBRELL, SAM METZ and JULIE WATSON Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran broadened its strikes on major energy facilities in the Middle East, eliciting strong warnings Thursday from Gulf Arab states that called it a dangerous escalation that threatened to draw them into direct combat with Tehran.

The strikes come after Israel killed Iran's intelligence minister and reportedly attacked the world's largest natural gas field in Iran as the war escalated pressure on the region's economic lifeblood: energy.

Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates all denounced the Iranian attacks targeting their natural gas fields, with Saudi Arabia's top diplomat saying assaults on the kingdom meant "what little trust there was before has completely been shattered."

It remains unclear what steps the Gulf Arab states might take militarily as they've sought not to enter combat alongside the United States and Israel in the war, now in its third week. While Israel did not claim the South Pars gas field attack, Defense Minister Israel Katz promised more "surprises" after saying it killed Iran's intelligence minister, Esmail Khatib, in an earlier airstrike as it works to decapitate the leadership of Tehran's theocracy.

Iran condemned the strike on South Pars, with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian warning of "uncontrollable consequences" that "could engulf the entire world."

In Washington, President Donald Trump said that Israel would not attack South Pars again, but warned on social media that if Iran continued striking Qatar's energy infrastructure, the U.S. would retaliate and "massively blow up the entirety" of the field.

"I do not want to authorize this level of violence and destruction because of the long term implications that it will have on the future of Iran," Trump said on social media.

Oil prices surges amid attacks on major energy supplies

The United States was informed about Israel's plans to strike Iran's massive South Pars natural gas field, but did not take part in it, according to a person familiar with the matter. The person, who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity, would not say if the Trump administration agreed with the Israeli decision to attack the gas field — part of the world's largest such resource and a pillar of Iran's energy supplies.

Iran escalated strikes on its Persian Gulf neighbors' energy facilities, hitting gas facilities in Qatar after Israel launched the attack against the South Pars offshore natural gas field it shares with Doha. Qatar in

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response ordered Iranian Embassy officials to leave the country within 24 hours.

Tehran also struck the Habshan gas facility and Bab field in the United Arab Emirates, which the government there called a "dangerous escalation" in the Islamic Republic's war against Israel and the United States. Authorities in Abu Dhabi say the gas operations had been shut down after interceptions over the sites.

The attacks on Qatar and the United Arab Emirates are ratcheting up pressure on the Gulf Arab states, which have been defending against Iranian attacks since the war began on Feb. 28 but haven't taken any offensive action against Iran as their military bases, civilian sites and energy operations have come under attack.

The price of oil surged another 5% to over \$108 a barrel on international markets as Iran continued to squeeze the Strait of Hormuz shipping channel — through which one-fifth of the world's oil travels.

As the Trump administration looks for ways to boost oil supplies, the Treasury Department eased sanctions on Venezuela Wednesday, saying U.S. companies will be allowed to do business with the country's state-owned oil and gas company.

A day earlier, Israel killed top Iranian security official Ali Larijani and the head of the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard's Basij force, Gen. Gholam Reza Soleimani.

Iran retaliated by unleashing missile strikes against Israel. Israel said an Iranian missile hit the occupied West Bank, marking the territory's first fatalities during the Iran war, though missile debris has damaged homes and businesses.

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

First fatalities reported in West Bank during Iran war

The Palestinian Red Crescent said at least three people were killed in the occupied West Bank town of Beit Awa as Iran fired missiles toward Israel. At least 13 others were injured. Earlier authorities said at least four people had died, but they adjusted the number as crew assessed the scene.

The Israeli military told The Associated Press an Iranian missile — not shrapnel from an interception — hit in the West Bank. Officials described it as a cluster munition that got past Israel's air defense system.

Gulf countries' oil facilities take more hits

Qatar Energy said on X that a missile hit its massive Ras Laffan liquefied natural gas facility, sparking a fire that caused "extensive" damage before it was extinguished. The company had already halted production there because of Iranian attacks.

The company warned Thursday that additional Iranian missile attacks damaged more liquefied natural gas sites in the energy-rich nation, "causing sizable fires and extensive further damage" but no injuries and crews were battling the blazes.

An attack set a ship ablaze early Thursday off the coast of the United Arab Emirates, authorities said. The British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center said that "a vessel has been hit by an unknown projectile, which has resulted in a fire onboard."

It said the vessel was just off the coast of Khor Fakkan in the UAE, near the mouth of the Strait of Hormuz. Over 20 vessels have been attacked during the Iran war so far as Tehran tries to effectively close the waterway, which leads from the Persian Gulf to the open ocean. Iran insists the waterway is open, just not to the U.S. or its allies.

Iran launches more multiple-warhead missiles at Israel

Responding to the killing of Larijani, the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard said Wednesday it had attacked central Israel with multiple-warhead missiles that have a better chance of evading defense systems.

Larijani a senior policy adviser to the late Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei was sanctioned by the U.S. Treasury in January for his role "coordinating" Iran's violent suppression of nationwide protests.

Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei expressed condolences for the slaying of Larijani, saying in a statement published in Iranian media that his killing "shows the extent of his importance and the hatred of the enemies of Islam towards him."

The younger Khamenei has not made a public appearance since his father was killed in the war's open-

ing salvos, during which he reportedly was also wounded.

More than 1,300 people in Iran have been killed during the war. Israeli strikes have displaced more than 1 million Lebanese — roughly 20% of the population — according to the Lebanese government, which says 968 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.

## **César Chavez accused of sexually abusing labor rights leader Dolores Huerta and others**

By FERNANDA FIGUEROA Associated Press

Labor rights activist Dolores Huerta revealed she was among women and girls who say they were sexually abused by César Chavez, the widely admired Latino icon who brought to light the struggles of farmhands while leading the United Farm Workers union.

The stunning allegations against Chavez, who died more than three decades ago, drew immediate calls to alter memorials honoring the man who in the 1960s helped secure better wages and working conditions for farmworkers and has been long revered by many Democratic leaders in the U.S.

In a statement released Wednesday, Huerta said she stayed silent for 60 years out of concern that her words would hurt the farmworker movement.

Huerta described two sexual encounters with Chavez, one where she was “manipulated and pressured” and another where she was “forced against my will.”

“I carried this secret for as long as I did because building the movement and securing farmworker rights was life’s work. The formation of a union was the only vehicle to accomplish and secure those rights and I wasn’t going to let César or anyone else get in the way,” she said.

Huerta, who is a labor rights legend in her own right, joined Chavez in 1962 to co-found the National Farm Workers Association, which became the United Farm Workers of America.

For many, they were akin to Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks because of their work advocating for racial equality and civil rights.

The New York Times first reported Wednesday that it found Chavez groomed and sexually abused young girls who worked in the movement. Huerta, too, revealed to the newspaper that she was a victim of the abuse in her 30s.

Huerta later said both sexual encounters with Chavez led to pregnancies, which she kept secret, and that she arranged for the children to be raised by other families. “No one knew the full truth about how they were conceived until just a few weeks ago,” she said in her statement.

Huerta said she did not know that Chavez hurt other women and condemned his actions but emphasized that the farmworker movement is bigger than one person.

“César’s actions do not diminish the permanent improvements achieved for farmworkers with the help of thousands of people,” Huerta said in her statement. “We must continue to engage and support our community, which needs advocacy and activism now more than ever.”

Chavez’s family said in a statement that they are devastated by the news and “wish peace and healing to the survivors and commend their courage to come forward.”

“We carry our own memories of the person we knew. Someone whose life included work and contributions that matter deeply to many people,” the statement said.

Leaders reconsider celebrations honoring Chavez

Streets, schools and parks across the Southwest bear Chavez’s name. California became the first state to commemorate his birthday, and in 2014, then-President Barack Obama proclaimed March 31 as national César Chavez Day.

President Joe Biden had a bronze bust of Chavez installed in the Oval Office when he moved into the White House. Neither Biden nor Obama have yet commented on the allegations.

But otherwise, reactions Wednesday were swift from many in both parties.

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Days before the allegations were revealed publicly, several César Chavez celebrations in San Francisco, Texas and in his home state of Arizona were canceled at the request of the César Chavez Foundation. Organizers of canceled events did not immediately respond to requests for comment from The Associated Press.

Republican Texas Gov. Greg Abbott said the state will not observe the César Chavez Day holiday and that he will urge the state Legislature to remove it altogether.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom said he was still processing the news. The Democratic governor wouldn't commit to making any changes to the state holiday, saying the farmworker movement was much more than Chavez. "It's about labor. It's about social justice, economic justice, racial justice."

A spokesperson for Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs said she has declined to recognize March 31 as César Chavez Day as she has in the two prior years. César Chavez Day isn't a state holiday in Arizona.

Next week, the Phoenix City Council is set to vote on whether to rename the March 31 holiday, as well as buildings and city streets that bear Chavez's name. The mayor and two city council members want the holiday to be renamed Farmworkers Day.

Albuquerque Mayor Tim Keller ordered a review of how Chavez is recognized across the city. And U.S. Sen. Ben Ray Luján, a New Mexico Democrat, said: "His name should be removed from landmarks, institutions and honors."

Born in Yuma, Arizona, Chavez grew up in a Mexican American family that traveled around California picking lettuce, grapes, cotton and other seasonal crops. He died in California in 1993 at age 66.

Chavez is known nationally for his early organizing in the fields, a hunger strike, a grape boycott and eventual victory in getting growers to negotiate with farmworkers for better wages and working conditions.

The César Chavez Foundation pledged unequivocal support for the labor leader's victims on Wednesday and said that -- with the Chavez family's support -- the organization will figure out its identity going forward.

"We are committed to restorative justice and healing for those who have been harmed, and to ensure our organization reflects the dignity and safety every person deserves," the foundation said in a statement.

Latino civil rights leaders weigh allegations

Latino leaders and community groups are now weighing the impact of Chavez's actions on the labor rights movement while emphasizing that the farmworker movement was led by thousands who came together to fight for justice.

The League of United Latin American Citizens, a civil rights organization, released a statement condemning any form of sexual violence, stating that "no individual, regardless of statue or legacy is above accountability." Similarly, leaders from the nonprofit Voto Latino said in a statement that no matter his legacy or historical framing Chavez's actions are inexcusable. But, they said, the news does not erase the work done by others.

"The women who organized, marched, and sacrificed alongside farmworkers carried this movement on their backs," Voto Latino said.

U.S. Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernández, chair of the Democratic Women's Caucus, issued a statement saying she was heartbroken and deeply disturbed by the stories of women who say they were abused.

The United Farm Workers union quickly distanced itself from annual celebrations of its founder, calling the allegations troubling.

In a statement Tuesday, the union said allegations of "abuse of young women or minors" were concerning enough to urge people around the country to participate in immigration justice events or acts of service instead of the typical events in March to commemorate Chavez's legacy.

## Democrats storm out of Justice Department leaders' briefing on the Epstein files

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democratic lawmakers on Wednesday stormed out of a closed-door briefing on the Jeffrey Epstein files by Justice Department leaders, and said they would push to force Attorney General

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Pam Bondi to answer questions under oath about the case that has plagued the Trump administration.

Bondi and Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche went to Capitol Hill to try to quell bipartisan frustration over the Justice Department's handling of millions of files related to Epstein's sex trafficking investigation.

But less than an hour into the briefing, Democrats walked out in protest of the arrangement and said they would press to enforce a subpoena for Bondi to appear for a sworn deposition next month.

"We want her under oath because we do not trust her," said Democratic Rep. Maxwell Frost.

Asked by reporters after the briefing whether she would comply with the subpoena, Bondi said, "I made it crystal clear I will follow the law." She also defended the department's handling of the Epstein files, saying officials are proud of their work to release millions of documents to the public.

The committee's Republican chairman, Rep. James Comer, accused Democrats of political grandstanding.

"This for us, for the Republicans, it's about getting answers," Comer said after the briefing. "For the Democrats, it's a political game, and they just demonstrated that today. There's no reason for them to walk out and clutch their pearls and act like they were offended and outraged."

Justice Department leaders had hoped the release of documents tied to the disgraced financier would put an end to a political saga that has dogged the president's second term, but the agency remains consumed by questions and criticism over Epstein's case and its management of the files. Bondi has accused Democrats of using the furor over the documents to distract from Trump's political successes, even though some of the most vocal criticism has come from members of the president's own party.

Five Republicans on the committee voted with Democrats to support the subpoena for Bondi to appear for a deposition on April 14. Lawmakers have accused the Justice Department of withholding too many files and criticized the agency for haphazard redactions that exposed intimate details about victims.

The Justice Department has called the subpoena "completely unnecessary," noting that members of Congress have been invited to view unredacted files at the Justice Department and that department leaders have made themselves available to answer questions from lawmakers.

The department has sought to assure lawmakers and the public that there has been no effort to shield President Donald Trump, who says he cut ties with Epstein years ago after an earlier friendship, or any other high-profile figures close to Epstein from potential embarrassment. Justice Department leaders have also rejected suggestions that they have ignored victims and insist that while there is no evidence in the files to prosecute anyone else, they remain committed to investigating should new information come forward.

"I'm not trying to defend Epstein — I'm not," Blanche said in an interview this week with Katie Miller, who is married to top Trump adviser Stephen Miller. "I do defend the work that this department is doing today, right now, which is going after every single perpetrator anyway, and if there is a narrative that exists that we are ignoring Epstein victims, that is false."

The documents were disclosed under the Epstein Files Transparency Act, the law enacted after months of public and political pressure that requires the government to open its files on the late financier and his confidant and onetime girlfriend, Ghislaine Maxwell. Criminal investigations into the financier have long animated online sleuths, conspiracy theorists and others who have suspected government cover-ups and clamored for a full accounting.

After missing a Dec. 19 deadline set by Congress to release all the files, the Justice Department said it tasked hundreds of lawyers with reviewing the records to determine what needed to be redacted, or blacked out. The Justice Department in January said it was releasing more than 3 million pages of documents along with more than 2,000 videos and 180,000 images.

## Gov. JB Pritzker criticizes AIPAC after pro-Israel group spent heavily in Illinois primary

By SOPHIA TAREEN Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker on Wednesday condemned special interest money that poured into the state ahead of this week's primary, including from a pro-Israel political group that the billionaire

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and potential 2028 presidential contender once supported.

Pritzker, a Jewish Democrat who also spent money to influence races Tuesday, was a donor to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee before he walked away more than a decade ago. He told The Associated Press on Wednesday that AIPAC, which lobbies for U.S. support for Israel and is a top donor to political campaigns, lost its way as a bipartisan group focused on Middle East peace.

"It became an organization that was supporting Donald Trump and people who follow Donald Trump," Pritzker said. "AIPAC really is not an organization that I think today I would want any part of."

Outside groups, including AIPAC, funneled roughly \$70 million into six open U.S. House and Senate races in Illinois on Tuesday. Pritzker, an heir to the Hyatt Hotel fortune, called it "interference."

A message left Wednesday for an AIPAC spokesperson wasn't immediately returned.

Outside groups influence campaign issues

The open contests in Illinois — largely due to retirements — were a proving ground for some of the biggest issues before Democrats in 2026, from support for Israel to the cryptocurrency and AI industries, as super PACs poured millions into the races. Questions about U.S. involvement in the Israel-Hamas war, and in recent days the Iran war, permeated several contests.

AIPAC's involvement sparked some of the primary's harshest attacks, but the group's success was mixed. In a 10-candidate primary for a U.S. House district that includes parts of Chicago's South Side, AIPAC backed Cook County Commissioner Donna Miller, who won the Democratic nod Tuesday. The group's preferred Democratic candidate in a heavily Jewish district north of Chicago, however, lost to Evanston Mayor Daniel Biss.

While unopposed in his own primary, Pritzker was a strong presence in several campaigns, contributing millions to support his lieutenant governor, Juliana Stratton, in her successful bid for the Democratic U.S. Senate nomination.

The move, and Pritzker's possible 2028 presidential bid, put a fresh spotlight on his global policy views amid growing unrest over the Democratic Party's relationship to Israel.

A supporter of Israel, Pritzker has also rejected the leadership of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. He has called for two-state solution with "safe havens" needed both for Jews in Israel and Palestinians in Gaza.

"I do not know why the United States has walked away from that, except, of course, that Donald Trump doesn't seem to understand how to create Middle East peace and instead wants to go to war, as he has now done in Iran, simply following Netanyahu into that war," Pritzker said.

"Are we going to now take military adventures across the world to take out leaders, who we think are bad for their countries?" he said. "If so, we're going to be involved in a whole lot of wars going forward."

Millions into races from Pritzker, outside groups

Pritzker himself put at least \$5 million into helping Stratton get elected. She won the Democratic Senate nomination over U.S. Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi, who dominated in fundraising.

Outside groups also spent more than \$16 million to support Stratton's campaign, while also spending \$11 million in opposition.

Pritzker said Stratton won because she was strong on issues, not because of his influence.

"She stood on her own two feet, and people saw that she's real and she's going to be a fighter for us in Washington," Pritzker said.

Some voters disagreed.

Matthew Crain, 54, who is from downstate Chatham, said Pritzker's endorsement influenced him to change his vote from Krishnamoorthi to Stratton.

Crain, a state worker, said that given the potential of Pritzker running for president, "I thought having one of his allies in would be a good thing."

Brooke Morgan, 39, from Springfield, said she became familiar with Stratton's politics over her last seven years as lieutenant governor.

"The governor is doing a pretty good job in Illinois, and I think that his backing, his support of her certainly gave me some confidence as well," said Morgan, a museum curator.

Eyes on November

In November, Pritzker faces Republican Darren Bailey, a former state lawmaker who backs Trump's agenda. It will be a rematch after Pritzker handily defeated Bailey in 2022.

In a campaign speech to supporters Tuesday, Bailey, who received Trump's endorsement four years ago, said he doesn't agree with the president on everything and vowed to include Democrats who feel left out.

Meanwhile in a campaign ad posted Wednesday, Pritzker's team characterized Bailey as "still too extreme for Illinois."

When asked about his own ambitions for higher office, Pritzker said he is not planning anything beyond his 2026 bid for a third term.

"That is not something I'm thinking," he said.

## **Fed keeps key rate unchanged as Powell vows to stay until DOJ investigation is finished**

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Federal Reserve kept its key interest rate unchanged Wednesday and Chair Jerome Powell highlighted the increasingly uncertain outlook for the U.S. economy and inflation in the wake of the Iran war, suggesting the Fed could stand pat for an extended period.

Fed policymakers maintained their forecast for an additional rate cut this year, but in a news conference, Powell suggested that the central bank remains concerned about inflation that was still stubbornly elevated even before the conflict's impact on gas prices.

"The thing I really want to emphasize is, nobody knows," Powell said, referring to the impact of the Iran war. "The economic effects could be bigger, they could be smaller, they could be much smaller, they could be much bigger. We just don't know."

Powell said the central bank would need to see further progress in the price of goods declining as the impact of tariffs fades before cutting rates further. The Fed reduced its short-term rate three times last year to 3.6%, before pausing in January and on Wednesday.

"The rate forecast is conditional on the performance of the economy, so if we don't see that progress then you won't see the rate cut," Powell said.

Investors were discouraged by such comments, sending share prices sharply lower. The broad S&P 500 index dropped 1.4%.

Fed officials "are aware they've missed their inflation target for five years, and they do not want to continue to miss it indefinitely," said Nathan Sheets, chief economist at Citi and a former top economist at the Fed. Inflation, according to the Fed's preferred measure, was 2.8% in January, up from 2.3% nearly a year ago. It's also above the Fed's target of 2%.

At the press conference, Powell did clarify a key question about the Fed's future: He said he has "no intention" of leaving the central bank until an investigation into his congressional testimony about the Fed's building renovation is dropped.

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.

Powell's term as Fed chair is scheduled to end on May 15, and President Donald Trump has nominated a former top Fed official, Kevin Warsh, as his replacement. Warsh's confirmation has been delayed because key Republican senators are opposed to the DOJ probe.

Once the investigation is resolved and even after Warsh is confirmed, Powell could elect to stay on the board to finish his term as a Fed governor, which lasts until January 2028. But he told reporters he had not yet decided whether to do so.

Powell also maintained a largely optimistic outlook for the economy, pointing out that in recent years it has been hit with numerous shocks — tariffs, the Fed's own rate hikes in 2022 and 2023, the aftermath of the pandemic — and has avoided recession all along.

"The U.S. economy has been doing really well through a lot of challenges," Powell said. "It's been amaz-

ing to see.”

In the Fed’s quarterly economic projections, also released Wednesday, officials only modestly raised their forecasts for inflation, and now expect it will end this year at 2.7%, up from their December forecast but slightly below the 2.8% it reached in January. They expect core inflation, which excludes the volatile food and energy categories, to also finish the year at 2.7%.

Fed officials slightly boosted their outlook for growth this year and expected unemployment to stay unchanged at 4.4%.

Tim Duy, chief economist at SGH Macro, said the forecasts were essentially “stale” as policymakers avoided fully taking into account the impacts of the Iran war on the economy.

The Fed considers core prices a better measure of longer-run inflation. Consumer prices will spike higher in the coming months as gas prices have soared, but those increases could unwind by the end of the year, particularly if the conflict ends soon.

One Fed official, governor Stephen Miran, dissented in favor of a quarter-point cut. Miran was appointed by President Donald Trump last September.

Gas prices jumped Wednesday to a nationwide average of \$3.84 a gallon, according to AAA, up 92 cents from a month ago. The increase will push inflation much higher in March, but core inflation, since it excludes gas, could be much less affected.

Typically, the Fed would look past a supply shock like the disruption in oil supplies from the Middle East and its impact on inflation. Once it ends, any inflation it produces may fall back, without the Fed having to raise rates. As a result, the Fed could leave rates unchanged — or even cut them to boost weak hiring.

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%.

## **Mullin makes his case as a steady hand for DHS but faces Senate pushback over his temperament**

By REBECCA SANTANA, LISA MASCARO and MEG KINNARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Markwayne Mullin, the White House pick for homeland security secretary, made a case to fellow senators Wednesday that he would be a steady hand for a department roiled by controversy under Kristi Noem, but signaled he would follow President Donald Trump’s hard-line immigration priorities and pushed back on concerns over his temperament for the Cabinet post.

The Oklahoma Republican faced questions from members of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee about his vision for a department tasked with carrying out the Republican administration’s push for mass deportations. Democrats have halted routine funds for the Department of Homeland Security in a weeklong standoff as they demand restraints on immigration officers after the death of at least three American citizens at the hands of federal agents.

Throughout his confirmation hearing, Mullin struck a soft tone on some of the administration’s most contentious policies, and he retracted his description of a Minneapolis man killed by federal officers as “deranged.” But his combative style, seen in a heated exchange with the committee chair, and loyalty to the president meant questions remained over how he might revamp a troubled department that is central to Trump’s deportation agenda.

“I can have different opinions with everybody in this room, but as secretary of homeland I’ll be protecting everybody,” Mullin said. “My goal in six months is that we’re not in the lead story every single day.”

Mullin became emotional at some moments during the hearing and fought back at others, as he spoke of his family’s relationship with Trump and his own commitment to the president’s agenda.

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The hearing was Mullin's first opportunity since being nominated to present his plans in public for the government's third-largest department. Noem was fired this month following mounting criticism of her leadership.

Mullin sheds light on his immigration views

Trump's immigration agenda and Mullin's plan to implement it are key issues for Democrats. Trump's policy of mass deportations is at a crossroads, and Mullin will be under pressure to achieve Trump's goals when the public mood has soured over aggressive immigration enforcement operations.

On whether DHS should meet a 3,000-a-day quota for the number of immigration arrests it makes, Mullin said none had been set for him.

He retracted comments he made about Alex Pretti, the Minneapolis man shot by federal immigration officers and whom Mullin had called "deranged."

"I shouldn't have said that and as secretary, I wouldn't," he said.

Mullin said officers would only use a warrant signed by a judge to forcibly enter homes to make arrests, except in limited circumstances. Federal officers have used administrative warrants to do so, raising concerns that constitutional protections are being skirted.

In his opening remarks and in answers to senators' questions, Mullin called for the routine DHS funding to be restored.

"We have to get DHS funded," Mullin told senators. "We have to realize that we're putting our homeland and the peace of mind at risk for the American people."

Committee chair says Mullin 'applauds violence'

The first part of the hearing was marked by a fiery opening statement by Republican committee chair Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky.

Paul challenged Mullin's fitness for the role, pointing to comments Mullin made after a funding fight, when he called Paul a "freaking snake" and said he understood why a neighbor had tackled Paul in a lawn care dispute. That incident happened several years ago, and Paul suffered multiple broken ribs and later underwent surgeries he linked to the attack.

"I just wonder if someone who applauds violence against their political opponents is the right person to lead an agency that has struggled to accept limits to the proper use of force?" Paul said.

Mullin refused to back down to Paul, in a display that Trump is likely to expect and appreciate.

"For you to say I'm a liar, sir, that's not accurate," Mullin said.

Paul later said he would not vote for Mullin's confirmation.

Separately, Michigan Sen. Gary Peters scrutinized past remarks he attributed to Mullin that suggested he'd been "involved in special security forces or combat operations overseas."

Mullin said he was involved in an official trip but he couldn't discuss details.

"It's classified, sir," Mullin replied, saying he had never revealed details about "the dates, location and mission."

Peters said the FBI, which conducts background checks on executive nominees, said it has no record of his trip.

Ultimately, Mullin agreed to discuss the matter after the hearing in a private, classified setting.

Mullin, the Trump ally

Mullin is a former mixed martial arts fighter who ran a plumbing business in Oklahoma before running for Congress. If confirmed, he is expected to be a faithful ally for Trump's agenda.

"Whether it be protecting the homeland from bad actors, stopping dangerous drugs from flowing into American communities, or removing the worst-of-the-worst criminal illegal aliens, Senator Mullin will work tirelessly to implement the President's agenda," White House spokeswoman Abigail Jackson said in an emailed statement.

Peters said Democrats were asking for "straightforward" changes at DHS in line with rules and that police departments follow.

Peters underlined the challenges that Homeland Security is facing, from threats from Iran to criminal

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hackers, and said the department needed someone with a "steady hand." But Peters said he had reservations about whether Mullin was ready for the job.

As the latest partial government shutdown drags on, there have been long security lines at a growing number of U.S. airports as security screeners go into another month without pay. Republicans have charged that Democrats are risking the nation's security by blocking funding to the department.

DHS endured turmoil under Noem

Under Noem, intense enforcement operations were launched in places including Los Angeles, Chicago and Minneapolis, where immigrants were rounded up in arrest sweeps and protesters clashed with federal officers.

Activists and politicians accused DHS officers of smashing car windows, roughing up bystanders who tried to record their activities and detaining immigrants in squalid conditions. The shooting deaths contributed to the growing criticism of Trump's immigration agenda.

DHS has said that its officers are responding with force only when necessary and it has blamed activists and politicians, who they say are dialing up the rhetoric against federal officers.

Mullin also faced questions about the future of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA, which is in the middle of tumultuous changes after Trump said he wanted to overhaul the agency, if not eliminate it.

Mullin said he would look to "restructure" FEMA and not abolish it.

Under Noem's leadership, all contracts above \$100,000 had to wait for her approval. That led to long delays for states desperate for reimbursements for money they had spent on things such as storm debris removal.

Asked about that policy, Mullin said he would revoke it.

## US stocks slump on worries about higher oil prices, inflation and interest rates

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. stocks slumped Wednesday after a report said inflation was primed to worsen even before the war with Iran caused oil prices to spike. That and comments from the head of the Federal Reserve pushed Wall Street to see less chance of getting the lower interest rates that it loves.

The S&P 500 fell 1.4% and flipped to a loss for the week so far. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 768 points, or 1.6%, and the Nasdaq composite slid 1.5%.

The losses deepened after the Fed decided to keep its main interest rate steady, instead of resuming cuts meant to give the job market and economy a boost. Fed officials are still penciling in one more cut by the end of 2026, but Chair Jerome Powell suggested those projections may be worth less than usual because of how much more uncertainty exists about inflation and the economy.

"We just don't know," Powell said about what will happen with oil prices, along with how long President Donald Trump's tariffs will take to work their way fully through the system.

For oil, the price for a barrel of Brent crude has jumped from roughly \$70 before the war to \$107.38 on Wednesday, up 3.8% from the day before. The price for a barrel of benchmark U.S. crude got to nearly \$99 before settling at \$96.32.

Oil prices have soared because the war has disrupted the Persian Gulf's energy industry. Iran's state television said Wednesday that the Islamic Republic would be attacking oil and gas infrastructure in Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates after an attack on facilities associated with its offshore South Pars natural gas field.

If the disruptions keep oil and gas prices high for long, they could create a debilitating wave of inflation for the global economy.

A report released Wednesday morning showed inflation pressures were already building before the war began. It said inflation at the U.S. wholesale level unexpectedly accelerated last month to 3.4%.

Such numbers were likely factors in keeping the Fed on hold Wednesday. A cut to rates would give the

economy and investment prices a boost, and Trump has been angrily calling for them. But lower interest rates would also worsen inflation.

Only one Fed voter wanted to lower rates this time around, and the tally was 11-1 to keep rates steady.

Powell said the rule of thumb has been for the Fed to look through jumps in oil prices, which could prove to be only temporary, but he said that works only if expectations for upcoming inflation don't spike themselves. He also noted that several Fed officials downgraded their forecasts for rate cuts this year to one from two, even though the overall median Fed official is still calling for one.

That pushed traders to downgrade their own expectations for a single rate cut by the Fed this year. They're now betting on less than a coin flip's chance of that, 49%, down from the 95% probability they saw a month ago, according to data from CME Group.

That sent Treasury yields upward in the bond market, along with the higher-than-expected update on inflation at the wholesale level. The yield on the 10-year Treasury climbed to 4.26% from 4.20% late Tuesday and from just 3.97% before the war with Iran started.

Higher Treasury yields grind down on prices for all kinds of investments, from stocks to crypto to gold.

Gold dropped back below \$5,000 per ounce after falling 2.2% to settle at \$4,896.20. It's lower than it was at the start of the war, despite its reputation as a safe haven during uncertain times. Because it pays its owners nothing, gold begins to look less attractive to investors when Treasury bonds are paying more in interest.

On Wall Street, Macy's jumped 4.7% after reporting stronger profit and revenue for the latest quarter than analysts expected. The retailer behind Bloomingdale's and Bluemercury is in the midst of a turnaround plan to drive growth under CEO Tony Spring.

But General Mills fell 3% after the company behind the Pillsbury, Progresso and Wheaties brands reported a weaker profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected. CEO Jeff Harmening is investing in its brands in hopes of driving growth, and it's sticking with its forecast for profit over the full fiscal year.

All told, the S&P 500 fell 91.39 points to 6,624.70. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 768.11 to 46,225.15, and the Nasdaq composite sank 327.11 to 22,152.42.

In stock markets abroad, indexes fell in Europe following a stronger finish in Asia.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 rallied 2.9% after the government reported exports in February were higher than expected. South Korea's Kospi leaped 5%.

## **Trump pays his respects in Delaware to 6 US service members killed in the Middle East**

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

DOVER AIR FORCE BASE, Del. (AP) — President Donald Trump paid his respects on Wednesday at a Delaware military base where the remains of six U.S. service members killed in the crash of a refueling aircraft were returned to their families.

It was the second time since launching the war with Iran on Feb. 28 that the Republican president attended the solemn military ritual known as a dignified transfer, which he once described as the "toughest thing" he has had to do as commander in chief.

Accompanying Trump were Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, House Speaker Mike Johnson, Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and lawmakers including Sens. Tommy Tuberville and Katie Britt, both Alabama Republicans.

All six crew members of a KC-135 Air Force refueling aircraft were killed last week in a plane crash over friendly territory in western Iraq while supporting operations against Iran. They were from Alabama, Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio and Washington state.

"Every person on that aircraft carried a weight most Americans will never see, and they carried it with professionalism, courage, and a level of quiet excellence that deserves to be recognized," retired Lt. Col Ernesto Nisperos, a friend of one of those killed, said in a text message Wednesday.

The crash brought the U.S. death toll in Operation Epic Fury to at least 13 service members. About 200

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U.S. service members have been injured, including 10 severely, the Pentagon has said.

Wednesday's dignified transfer was closed to news media coverage at the request of the families in accordance with military policy. Trump spent just under two hours on the ground and didn't speak to reporters leaving Air Force One or returning to it.

Trump last traveled to Dover Air Force Base on March 7 for the dignified transfer of six U.S. service members who were killed by a drone strike at a command center in Kuwait. He saluted as flag-draped transfer cases containing the remains of the fallen service members were carried from military aircraft to vehicles waiting to take them to the base's mortuary facility to prepare them for their final resting place.

"It's the bad part of war," he told reporters afterward. Asked then if he worried about having to make multiple trips to the base for additional dignified transfers as the war continued, he said, "I'm sure. I hate to do it, but it's a part of war, isn't it?"

U.S. Central Command, which oversees military operations in the Middle East, said that the crash followed an unspecified incident involving two aircraft in "friendly airspace" over Iraq but that the loss of the aircraft during a combat mission was "not due to hostile or friendly fire." The circumstances were under investigation. The other plane landed safely.

The crash killed three people assigned to the 6th Air Refueling Wing at MacDill Air Force Base in Florida: Maj. John A. "Alex" Klinner, 33, who served in Birmingham, Alabama; Capt. Ariana Linse Savino, 31, of Covington, Washington; and Tech. Sgt. Ashley Pruitt, 34, of Bardstown, Kentucky.

Klinner, who left behind a wife, a 2-year-old son and 7-month-old twins, was known for his steady command and goofy nature, as well as a willingness to help others. Pruitt's husband described her as a "radiant" woman who lit up the room. Savino was a friend, mentee and "source of positive energy" who was proud of her Puerto Rican heritage and inspired young Latinas, said Nisperos, who is serving as spokesman for her family.

"She had had this warmth that made you feel seen, a strength that showed up in everything she touched, and a spark — that spice — that made her unforgettable," Nisperos said. "If you knew her, even for a moment, you knew you were in the presence of someone who was going to change the world."

The three others were assigned to the 121st Air Refueling Wing at Rickenbacker Air National Guard Base in Columbus, Ohio: Capt. Seth Koval, 38, a resident of Stoutsville, Ohio, who was from Mooresville, Indiana; Capt. Curtis Angst, 30, who lived in Columbus; and Master Sgt. Tyler Simmons, 28, of Columbus.

Koval grew up dreaming of becoming a pilot, according to his wife, who described him as a loving, generous "fixer of all things." Angst's family said his life was defined by service, generosity and "a genuine love for people." Simmons loved confiding in his 85-year-old grandmother and working out with her, Sen. Jon Husted said Tuesday, when he and Sen. Bernie Moreno honored the Ohio airmen on the Senate floor.

"To the mom and dad of these three young soldiers, I can't even process what you're going through. I can't even imagine the emotions that you're feeling," Moreno said. "Just know that America is grateful beyond words for the sacrifice that your heroic young sons made."

## US eases Venezuela oil sanctions as Trump seeks to boost world oil supply during Iran war

By FATIMA HUSSEIN and REGINA GARCIA CANO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. companies will be allowed to do business with Venezuela's state-owned oil and gas company after the Treasury Department eased sanctions, with some limitations, on Wednesday as the Trump administration looks for ways to boost global oil supplies during the Iran war.

The Treasury issued a broad authorization allowing Petr leos de Venezuela S.A., or PDVSA, to directly sell Venezuelan oil to U.S. companies and on global markets, a massive shift after Washington for years had largely blocked dealings with Venezuela's government and its oil sector.

Separately, the White House said President Donald Trump would waive, for 60 days, Jones Act requirements for goods shipped between U.S. ports to be moved on U.S.-flagged vessels. The 1920s law, designed to protect the American shipbuilding sector, is often blamed for making gas more expensive.

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The moves highlight the increased pressure that the Republican administration is under to ease soaring oil prices as the United States, along with Israel, wages war with Iran. Global oil prices have since spiked as Iran halted traffic through the narrow Strait of Hormuz, through which one-fifth of the world's oil typically passes.

Drivers in the United States are paying the highest pump prices in about 2 1/2 years. The national average for a gallon of regular gasoline topped \$3.84 on Wednesday, according to AAA, compared with \$2.98 before the war began on Feb. 28.

Even before that, voters were worried about higher living costs, and fuel prices are now adding to concerns for Republicans heading into the election season with their control of Congress at stake in November.

"Gas prices are up and we know they're up. And we know that people are hurting because of it. And we're doing everything that we can to ensure that they stay lower," Vice President JD Vance said at an event in Auburn Hills, Michigan. "This is a temporary blip."

Easing sanctions could spur US investment in Venezuela

The Treasury's license is designed to incentivize investment in Venezuela's energy sector and is intended to benefit both the U.S. and Venezuela, while increasing the global oil supply, a Treasury official told The Associated Press. The official was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Since the ouster and arrest of Nicolás Maduro as Venezuela's president during a U.S. military operation in January, Trump has said the U.S. would effectively "run" Venezuela and sell its oil.

The U.S. license provides targeted relief from sanctions, but does not lift the penalties altogether. The license allows companies that existed before Jan. 29, 2025, to buy Venezuelan oil and engage in transactions that would normally be banned under American sanctions.

But in the short term, there is not likely to be much impact on U.S. gas prices, said Geoff Ramsey, an expert on Latin America at the Atlantic Council think tank.

"We're talking about 12 to 18 months before we see dramatic changes in Venezuelan output," Ramsey said in an interview.

Easing sanctions and waiving Jones Act requirements normally would have significant impacts on gas prices, said Claudio Galimberti, Rystad Energy's chief economist. "But we are in the most abnormal market I can remember," Galimberti said in an interview.

He said he expects hostilities between the U.S., Israel and Iran to last at least two or three more weeks, and said prices are likely to be high and volatile until oil and gas traffic resumes through the Strait of Hormuz. "As long as the strait remains shut, we're going to have a crisis," Galimberti said.

Closer to home, Trump is waiving shipping restrictions

Gas prices in some parts of the country, such as the mid-Atlantic region, may see some relief from Trump's waiver of the Jones Act, which will allow larger ships to move between U.S. ports, said Ramanan Krishnamoorti, vice president for energy and innovation at the University of Houston.

"Places like Texas and Chicago are unlikely to feel any change in the price of gasoline and diesel because of the Jones Act waiver," Krishnamoorti said. He said some American shippers may now face more competition from the relaxation of shipping rules, which could mean higher costs for them.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said the Jones Act waiver would help "mitigate the short-term disruptions to the oil market" during the Iran war and would "allow vital resources like oil, natural gas, fertilizer, and coal to flow freely to U.S. ports."

Last week, Trump announced that he would tap the strategic petroleum reserve, part of a wider agreement with many of the world's wealthiest countries to draw oil from emergency stockpiles.

The administration also eased sanctions on certain Russian oil shipments for 30 days. Next week, Vance and other administration officials are expected to meet with the main oil industry group, the American Petroleum Institute, to discuss energy markets and production, the group's spokesperson Andrea Woods said.

The waiver of the Jones Act rules might only save consumers three or four cents per gallon, said David Goldwyn, a former Obama-era State Department special envoy focused on energy

"We're talking about pennies, Goldwyn said.

All told, the administration's market tweaks will create some "buffers" for price hikes, at least until late May, Goldwyn said. The big risk for consumers is if the Hormuz Strait remains closed beyond that point. "Then the shortfall will increase significantly," he said.

Critics are worried about the impact of easing Venezuela sanctions

The Treasury license is expected to give a massive boost to Venezuela's oil-dependent economy and help encourage companies that have been apprehensive to invest. There are some limits. Payments cannot go directly to sanctioned Venezuelan entities such as PDVSA, but must be sent instead to a special U.S.-controlled account. In other words, the U.S. will allow the oil trade but will control the cash flow.

Additionally, deals involving Russia, Iran, North Korea, Cuba and some Chinese entities will not be allowed. Transactions involving Venezuelan debt or bonds will not be allowed. The new license does not allow payments in gold or cryptocurrency, including the petro, which was a crypto token issued by the Venezuelan government in 2018.

Venezuela sits atop the world's largest oil reserves and used them to power what was once Latin America's strongest economy. But corruption, mismanagement and U.S. economic sanctions saw production steadily decline from the 3.5 million barrels per day pumped in 1999, when Maduro's mentor, Hugo Chávez, took power, to less than 400,000 barrels per day in 2020.

A year earlier, the Treasury Department under the first Trump administration locked Venezuela out of world oil markets when it sanctioned PDVSA as part of a policy punishing Maduro's government for corruption. That forced the government to sell its remaining oil output at a discount — about 40% below market prices — to buyers such as China. Venezuela even started accepting payments in Russian rubles, bartered goods or cryptocurrency.

Critics of the acting Venezuelan government argue that the move rewards Maduro loyalists, while repression, corruption and human rights abuses continue.

Many public sector workers survive on roughly \$160 per month, while the average private sector employee earned about \$237 last year, when the annual inflation rate soared to 475%, according to Venezuela's central bank, and sent the cost of food beyond what many can afford.

## **A landmark WNBA labor deal nears reality, paving the way for the first million dollar players**

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — A landmark new WNBA collective bargaining agreement was reached in principle early Wednesday morning that will give the league its first million dollar players.

There's still a lot of work to do between now and the start of the regular season on May 8, however.

Lawyers on both sides are finalizing the term sheet for players and the league's Board of Governors to approve, which should be done in the next day or so. The union will have informational sessions with its players to walk them through key terms, answer questions and make sure they understand what the deal means for them. It will then get put to a vote with a majority needed to ratify the CBA. The league's Board of Governors will then need to approve the deal before it becomes official.

Then the sprint to the start of the season begins.

Expansion draft

First up will be the expansion draft for the two new teams — Toronto and Portland. Rules regarding who the current teams will be able to protect and how the draft will work are still being figured out. The draft is expected to take place right around the Final Four.

The league had an expansion draft last year for the Golden State Valkyries, but that was just one team and most of the players weren't free agents.

The 13 other teams will submit a list of players they are protecting to the Tempo and Fire, who will then figure out who they will choose.

Free agency and college draft

More than 80% of the league are free agents this year as players had signed deals that were going to

expire last year. There are only two veteran players that aren't under rookie contracts who are signed for this season.

The teams will need to understand the new CBA in realtime to figure out deals. Usually teams have a few weeks to court free agents to join their franchise and that time will be most likely cut in half. The front offices of teams will have only days to decide which restricted free agents to extend offers to and which one to give a franchise tag.

There's a chance that many players may just re-sign with their current teams for a year and then revisit free agency a year later. They also could go after the money and accept a bigger contract from a team they might not know as much about.

The college draft is scheduled for April 13 in New York. Franchises have been doing their due diligence on draft eligible college players over the last few months. With so much turnover in rosters potentially with free agency movement, players could rise or fall on the draft board based on franchises having different needs.

#### Training camps open

Teams will start training camp on April 19 and will have little time to get prepared for the regular season. There are five new coaches in the league who will be implementing their own systems as well as the potentially large movement of free agents. There also could be major roster turnover so players will have to get accustomed to each other. There's a marquee game on April 25 in New York with Caitlin Clark and the Indiana Fever facing the Liberty.

#### League business

Off the court, the WNBA has a lot to do before the season tips off. The league is celebrating it's 30th anniversary with a whole host of activities. There's also new sponsorship deals to announce and broadcast schedules to put out.

## What to know about the meningitis outbreak in England causing angst among university students

By PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — A meningitis outbreak in southeast England has led to the deaths of a university student and a pupil from a nearby school, prompting public health officials to quickly roll out medical interventions.

The outbreak in the county of Kent was described Wednesday as unprecedented by U.K. Health Secretary Wes Streeting, owing to the high number of cases appearing in such a short space of time. The first case was confirmed on Friday, and they had risen to 20 by Wednesday.

Most of them were linked to the University of Kent in the historic cathedral city of Canterbury. Students, many of whom have gone home for an end of term break, are being offered antibiotics as well as a vaccination against the strain identified as the source of the outbreak.

With public health officials highly visible, and students jittery, here is what to know:

#### Definition of meningitis

Meningitis is an infection of the membranes around the brain and spinal cord and can be caused by either viruses or bacteria.

Contracting meningitis can lead to a severe blood infection that is called meningococcal sepsis, which often manifests itself as a rash. It can be life-threatening if not treated rapidly.

Meningitis can also lead to limb amputations. The most dangerous outbreaks are usually a result of bacteria. The majority of the cases in Canterbury have been confirmed as stemming from a bacterial infection, or meningitis B.

#### Possible super-spreader event

Meningitis is a rare disease in the U.K. — around 350 a year — but it can spread in tight communities, such as university dormitories.

Students are seen as particularly vulnerable as the bacteria is often lying dormant in the nose or throat of individuals and can spread through coughing, kissing or sharing drinks and vapes.

Experts said many of those affected in the outbreak went to a nightclub in Canterbury from March 5-7. Doctors across the country have been told to prescribe antibiotics to anyone who visited Club Chemistry during those dates in addition to students at the University of Kent.

"This is so that anyone who has traveled home, or away from Kent, can easily access this important preventative treatment close to them," it said.

What can be done

Given the recent memory of the COVID-19 pandemic, people in Kent have started donning masks and keeping their distance from each other.

On the medical front, antibiotics are considered the most effective treatment to limit the spread.

So far, more than 2,500 doses have been given, including to some of those who visited Club Chemistry. A vaccination against the meningitis B strain is also being offered. The vaccine only became part of the U.K.'s childhood immunization program since 2015, so students at the University of Kent wouldn't have been vaccinated, though some may have taken it privately.

The U.K. Health Security Agency, or UKHSA, said there are enough supplies of the two-dose vaccine course, though some pharmacies have reported struggling to obtain stocks for people who want to pay privately.

The outlook

The number of cases is expected to rise because the infection's incubation period can be up to 14 days.

Scientists have said it's too soon to assess whether the strain in Kent is more virulent than others. The strain is undergoing whole genome sequencing to assess any potential differences.

The UKHSA issued an alert for the state-run National Health Service across England to look out for signs and symptoms of meningitis. However, this does not signal that the outbreak is spreading nationwide. The alert said the illness has been "severe with rapid deterioration" and urged clinical staff to take infection control measures.

Streeting said he wasn't concerned that the outbreak could spread as students go home for the Easter break.

"This is not currently a national incident," he said.

## **Pakistan and Afghanistan announce temporary pause in fighting, 2 days after deadly Kabul strike**

By ABDUL QA HAR AFGHAN and MUNIR AHMED Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Pakistan and Afghanistan on Wednesday declared a temporary pause in escalating fighting, two days after Kabul blamed Islamabad for a deadly airstrike in the Afghan capital that it said killed hundreds of people at a drug rehabilitation hospital.

Both said they were suspending fighting before Muslim holiday Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, and at the request of Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar. The three countries have been trying to mediate a cessation of hostilities since Afghanistan and Pakistan renewed cross-border fighting in February, and had also been involved in helping broker a ceasefire between the two in October.

The announcements came shortly after Afghan authorities held a mass funeral in Kabul for some of the victims killed in Monday's strike.

Pakistani Information Minister Attaullah Tarar said that the suspension of strikes on Afghanistan would take effect at midnight Wednesday and remain in place until midnight Monday.

"Pakistan offers this gesture in good faith and in keeping with the Islamic norms," Tarar said in a statement. However, he said that "in case of any cross-border attack, drone attack or any terrorist incident inside Pakistan," the operations will immediately resume with renewed intensity.

Afghanistan's government spokesman, Zabiullah Mujahid, didn't specify a time frame for the pause on the Afghan side. But he said that his country "will respond courageously to any aggression in the event of a threat."

Military installations targeted, Pakistan says

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Pakistan has rejected Afghanistan's accusation that it targeted the Omid Addiction Treatment Hospital, insisting its strikes in Kabul and eastern Afghanistan Monday had been against military facilities. It has dismissed Afghan claims of hundreds of people killed as propaganda.

Monday's attack in Kabul was the deadliest in a conflict that has been escalating between the two neighbors since late February. Afghan officials have put the death toll at 408 people, with 265 wounded. The toll couldn't be independently verified.

The fighting has seen repeated cross-border clashes as well as airstrikes inside Afghanistan, including several in the capital, 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, which took over Afghanistan in 2021 in the wake of the chaotic withdrawal of U.S.-led troops. Kabul denies the charge.

Mass funeral in Kabul

Bulldozers dug pits in a Kabul cemetery before Wednesday's mass funeral, which Health Ministry spokesman Sharafat Zaman said was for more than 50 people whose remains couldn't be identified.

Light rain fell as ambulances lined up outside the cemetery and began unloading dozens of plain wooden caskets. Some contained the remains of more than one person, Zaman said.

The 2,000-bed Omid hospital was hit at around 9 p.m. on Monday. It had been renamed and expanded in size roughly a year ago from a previously existing treatment facility as part of the Taliban government's efforts to stamp out a significant drug addiction problem in the country.

Afghanistan's vast poppy fields have been the source of much of the world's heroin, which in combination with decades of conflict and widespread poverty has fueled drug addiction that the country's government has vowed to combat.

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. It wasn't immediately clear what was now housed at the site.

The strike caused an intense fire at the hospital, with footage from local television showing rescue crews combing through the wreckage with flashlights late into the night as firefighters struggled to extinguish the blaze.

Pakistan warns Afghanistan to make a choice

In an interview with The Associated Press in Islamabad earlier Wednesday before he announced the pause in fighting, Tarar said Pakistan had "only targeted terrorist infrastructure."

"We have just gone after the Afghan Taliban regime, their military setups, their terrorist infrastructure, and all the setups which are supporting or promoting terrorists," Tarar said.

He told the AP that Pakistan's strikes "have been very precise and these strikes were carried out in an ammunition depot in Kabul. In the aftermath of which, we saw fumes and flames in the atmosphere in Kabul."

He said the subsequent loss of life, which he did not quantify, occurred "because there was ammunition, there were technical equipment, there were arms there in that depot."

Tarar said Pakistan has given a clear choice to Afghanistan's government: "Either you are with Pakistan or you are with the terrorists. So, they will have to make a choice, and they will have to make the choice very soon," he said.

Bodies were still being pulled from the smoldering remains of the hospital on Tuesday morning.

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

Latest conflict began in February

The fighting, the most severe between the two neighbors, began after Afghanistan launched cross-border attacks in response to Pakistani airstrikes about three weeks ago. The clashes disrupted a ceasefire brokered by Qatar in October, after earlier fighting killed dozens of soldiers, civilians and suspected militants.

Pakistan declared last month that 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.

## How common are fireballs streaking across the sky?

By The Associated Press undefined

The Earth is under assault. Space rocks are constantly hurtling toward us, slamming into the atmosphere and often exploding into fireballs that both delight and alarm.

Thankfully, the vast majority cause no damage because they are pulverized into dust or small chunks by the journey to Earth.

A fireball streaked across the sky near Cleveland this week, caused by what was thought to be a space rock nearly 6 feet (1.8 meters) across and weighing 7 tons. It was seen from Wisconsin to Maryland, according to the American Meteor Society.

It traveled more than 34 miles (55 kilometers) through the upper atmosphere before breaking apart, according to NASA. No fragments have been found yet.

As dramatic as it was, it was also incredibly common. Here's what to know:

What's the difference between a meteor and an asteroid?

An asteroid is a chunk of rock, ice or metal that's left over from the solar system's formation 4.6 billion years ago. A meteoroid is a fragment of a larger space rock such as an asteroid or comet. A meteor is the light emitted from a meteoroid or asteroid as it burns up through the atmosphere. If a meteor is brighter than the planet Venus in the morning or evening sky, it is called a fireball. If a chunk of it makes it to land, it's called a meteorite.

How common are meteors?

Flashes of light from meteoroids are incredibly common, and there are times — called meteor showers — when they can be seen every few minutes in the night sky, weather permitting. The Perseids meteor shower, which happens in mid-August every year, is considered the best, according to NASA.

How common are fireballs?

There are "several thousand" meteors that would qualify as fireballs in the Earth's atmosphere every day, according to the meteor society. The problem is that most occur over oceans or other places where people don't live, or the sun is too bright to notice them.

Still, plenty are seen by people. And if you see one, the American Meteor Society and the International Meteor Organization want you to tell them so they can check it out. So far in 2026, 10 fireballs have drawn more than 100 reports, which averages nearly one per week.

Why do meteoroids break up before they land?

Meteoroids travel through empty space at extraordinarily high speeds — from 25,000 mph (40,233 kph) to as high as 160,000 mph (257,495 kph). When they suddenly hit the gases that blanket Earth, they undergo incredible stress as they compress the air in front of them, which heats the object to the point it starts to melt and break apart.

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

By SETH BORENSTEIN, SARAH BRUMFIELD and JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

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

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

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

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

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

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

Forecasters warn about line of storms, tornadoes

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

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

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

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

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

Big snows in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan

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

Since Saturday, nearly 3 feet (91 centimeters) had fallen in the northern Wisconsin town of Mountain.

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

Temperatures will soar into triple digits in the West

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Landslides, rescues, collapsed home on Maui

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

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

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

Storm will bring cold into the East Coast

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

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

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

## UConn teammates Sarah Strong and Azzi Fudd headline AP All-America first team

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

Sarah Strong and Azzi Fudd helped UConn to an undefeated season heading into March Madness. The pair became the first teammates in six years to make The Associated Press All-America team.

It's the 10th time that teammates have made the first team, seven of those involving UConn players. The last pair to achieve the feat was Oregon's Sabrina Ionescu and Ruthy Hebard in 2020.

Strong and Fudd were joined by Vanderbilt's Mikayla Blakes, UCLA's Lauren Betts and Texas' Madison Booker.

Strong was a unanimous choice from the 31-member national media panel that chooses the AP Top 25 each week. Blakes and Betts received all but two first-place votes.

Strong, who set numerous records as a freshmen for the Huskies, raised her game in her sophomore season, helping the No. 1 Huskies to a perfect record heading into the NCAA Tournament. She averaged 18.5 points and 7.6 rebounds a game and shot 60.1% from the field. Fudd was right behind her, with 17.7 points and 4.2 rebounds while shooting 43.6% from the 3-point line.

"I'm thrilled for Azzi and Sarah. They worked really hard this season and they're great teammates," UConn coach Geno Auriemma said. "It's been a long time coming for Azzi. She's worked through so many hardships in her time at UConn, and it's great to see all her perseverance pay off.

"Sarah picked up where she left off last season and has been so consistently good and reliable for us. I'm happy for them individually, but I know it means a lot for them to get this accomplishment together as well.

Blakes has had a sensational sophomore season, leading the country in scoring with 27 points a game. She also averaged 4.4 assists and shot 45.8% from the field.

"Mikayla has cemented herself as one of the best players in the country as she continues to bring our team and program to new heights while staying laser-focused on winning," Vanderbilt coach Shea Ralph said. "She continues to do everything our team needs to put us in position to be successful and has elevated her play all season long against the toughest competition in the country."

Vanderbilt had one of the best seasons in school history behind Blakes, who became only the second first-team All-American ever for the Commodores, joining Chantelle Anderson in 2002.

"Mikayla has changed the trajectory of our program by making everyone around her better and by betting on herself to create a legacy here at Vanderbilt," Ralph said. "She is both deserving and has earned being named first-team All-American, and we are so proud to be on this journey with her and so happy for her recognition!"

Betts averaged 18.5 points and 7.6 rebounds and shot 60.1% from the field for UCLA. It's the second straight season the senior post player has earned first-team All-America honors. Last year she became the first Bruins player ever to receive that accolade.

"Lauren Betts is a generational player; she's had incredible impact on the game. I'm not surprised for this honor, but I'm also thrilled for her and so excited for what she's earned," UCLA coach Cori Close said. "She's been not only impactful on a on-court and individual level, but also on a team and program level. This is well deserved for Lauren."

Booker earned first-team All-America honors for the second consecutive season. She averaged 18.9 points and 6.5 rebounds and shot 51.6% from the field. The junior wing helped the Longhorns win the SEC Tournament with a victory over South Carolina in the title game.

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"She has the vision and passing skills of a point guard. She enjoys the pass and the assist as much as the bucket," Texas coach Vic Schaefer said. "She can score at all three levels, but her ability to rise above the defense, create space and get her shot off is what sets her apart from everyone else. Her work ethic and investment in her game is elite. She sees the game and understands the game like a 15-year pro."

Strong, Betts, Booker, Hannah Hidalgo and Ta'Niya Latson were all on the preseason All-America team. Second team

The AP second team was headlined by Notre Dame's Hannah Hidalgo, a member of the first team in her first two seasons. She was joined by South Carolina's Joyce Edwards, TCU's Olivia Miles, Iowa State's Audi Crooks and Ohio State's Jalon Cambridge.

Third team

The AP third team was LSU's Flau'Jae Johnson, Michigan's Olivia Olson, UCLA's Kiki Rice, Duke's Toby Fournier and South Carolina's Raven Johnson.

Honorable mention

Clara Strack of Kentucky, Rori Harmon of Texas and Cotie McMahon of Mississippi were the leading vote getters among players who didn't make the three All-America teams. Players earned honorable-mention status if they appeared on one of the ballots.

## Trump's failed strong-arming of allies on Iran shows that pressure is losing its effect

By JOHN LEICESTER and EMMA BURROWS Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — We've long had your back, now it's our turn. That is how the famously transactional U.S. President Donald Trump is framing his demands that allies help him with the Iran war. He wants to call in IOUs for decades of U.S. security guarantees.

The string of refusals indicates his stock of European goodwill is low. He has put allies through the wringer since returning to the White House, bullying them over tariffs, Greenland and other issues, and disparaging the sacrifices their soldiers made alongside U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

Now he's demanding — not just requesting — that they send warships to help the U.S. unblock the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's traded oil passes — essentially mop up behind the conflagration that he and Israel ignited in the Middle East.

The reply has been a "global raspberry."

That's how a veteran French defense analyst, François Heisbourg, described allied responses.

No close ally has come forward with immediate help. Britain is flat-out refusing to be drawn into the war. France says the fighting would have to die down first. Others are non-committal. China, which is not an ally but was also asked to help, is ignoring Trump's call.

"This is not Europe's war. We didn't start the war. We were not consulted," European Union foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said Tuesday.

Trump's frustration with the 'Rolls-Royce of allies'

Trump has singled out the refusal from the United Kingdom. Prime Minister Keir Starmer cultivated ties with Trump and reached an early trade deal with the administration, but is now among allies who refuse to join a regional war with no clear endgame.

The U.K. "was sort of considered the Rolls-Royce of allies," Trump said Monday, adding that he'd asked for British minesweeping ships.

"I was not happy with the U.K.," Trump said. "They should be involved enthusiastically. We've been protecting these countries for years."

Starmer said Britain "will not be drawn into the wider war" and that British troops require the backing of international law and "a proper thought-through plan" — suggesting those were not in place.

He initially refused to let U.S. bombers attack Iran from British bases before accepting their use for strikes on Iran's ballistic missile program.

Retired Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges, former commanding general of the U.S. Army in Europe, said allies are

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"looking at the United States in a way that they never have before. And this is bad for the United States."

Having previously appeased Trump, some European leaders are "starting to realize that there's no benefit or value in using flattery," he said.

European leaders say it's not their war

Going to war without consulting allies was in keeping with Trump's America-first outlook.

"My attitude is: We don't need anybody. We're the strongest nation in the world," he said Monday.

But failing to get an international mandate, as the U.S. did before intervening in the 1990 Gulf War, is boomeranging.

"It is not our war; we did not start it," German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius said. "We want diplomatic solutions and a swift end to the conflict. Sending more warships to the region will certainly not contribute to that."

French President Emmanuel Macron envisions possible naval escorts in the Strait of Hormuz — but only once fighting has died down.

"France didn't choose this war. We're not taking part," he said.

After bruising tariff battles with Trump last year, the first months of 2026 have further strained alliances. Trump's renewed pressure for U.S. control of Greenland, including a tariff threat against eight European nations, and his false assertion that allied troops avoided front-line fighting in the Afghanistan War, upset partners in the NATO military alliance.

"Allies, or at least the Europeans, aren't willing to be at the beck and call of a demand from Donald Trump," said Sylvie Bermann, a French former ambassador to China, the U.K. and Russia.

"And even in asking for a helping hand, he is doing so in a brutal manner, saying: 'You're useless, we're the strongest, we don't need you, but come,'" she said.

A dangerous mission

Retired naval officers say that unblocking the Strait of Hormuz with military escorts while the war rages and without Iran's consent would be dangerous.

France, which has rushed its Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier to the Mediterranean, is working with other countries to prepare such a mission once the air war has subsided. French military spokesman Col. Guillaume Vernet said any escorting would be conditional on talks with Iran, and Macron has publicized two calls in eight days with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian.

That has won points with Trump.

"On a scale of zero to 10, I'd say he's been an eight," Trump said Monday. "Not perfect, but it's France. We don't expect perfect."

But he's fuming at other allies.

"We will protect them, but they will do nothing for us, in particular, in a time of need," Trump said Tuesday.

Trump has leverage, including in Ukraine

Allies in Europe and Asia need oil, gas and other products from the Middle East to flow again. That gives Trump some leverage.

Allies also know from experience that resisting Trump carries risks of retaliation.

"It really could be anything. Are the Europeans prepared for that?" asked Ed Arnold, a former British army officer and now a researcher at the Royal United Services Institute, a London think tank.

European allies need Trump's continued blessing for U.S. weaponry, intelligence, and other support for Ukraine, as well as financial pressure on Russia. The U.S. has started to chip away at some sanctions on Moscow by temporarily allowing shipments of Russian oil to ease shortages stemming from the Iran war. Allies also want him to reengage in talks to end the war.

"That was what kept European leaders quiet for a lot of last year in the face of the rhetoric and actions," said Amanda Sloat, a former U.S. national security adviser who now teaches at Spain's IE University.

"It is also the thing that is making them a little bit nervous now."

## French bulldog frenzy may be cooling in US, but dachshunds are riding high

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Americans still dig French bulldogs, retrievers and German shepherds. But dachshunds are increasingly hot dogs.

For the first time in over two decades, the sausage-shaped hounds were among the top five most prevalent dog breeds, according to American Kennel Club rankings released Wednesday. The standings cover 202 breeds and are based on puppies and older purebreds that were added last year to the AKC's registry, the nation's oldest. Registration is voluntary.

It's not a complete picture of the U.S. canine population, which the American Veterinary Medical Association estimates at over 87 million. The kennel club's rankings don't include mixed-breed dogs or trendy hybrids such as goldendoodles and Pomsies.

Still, the annual list can be a source of pride, or concern, among purebred fans.

It's also a wellspring of criticism from animal rights groups such as PETA, which is suing the AKC over the physical ideals it promulgates for Frenchies, dachshunds and other breeds.

Here's a look at the standings:

The top 10:

— French bulldogs. The leaders since 2023, but for how much longer? The AKC's registry added about 54,000 Frenchies last year, half as many as in 2023. The breed is known for being self-assured, apartment-friendly and endlessly funny, but it's also at the center of increasing public conversation about the health of flat-faced dogs, and even some fans lament the Frenchie craze. AKC spokesperson Brandi Hunter Munden offers other explanations for the falloff: Breed booms come and go, particularly in the social media era, and some breeders may choose not to engage with the club.

— Labrador retrievers. They set a record by owning the top spot for 31 years. Could they reclaim it? Stay tuned.

— Golden retrievers. Everyone loves them.

— German shepherds. Everyone respects them.

— Dachshunds. Everyone on social media wants to see them in a Halloween costume. More on dachshunds below.

— Poodles. Holding their own, though not what they were — No. 1 — in the pre-doodle 1960s and 1970s.

— Beagles. The only breed to make the top 10 for every decade since the AKC was founded in 1884. They were No. 1 in the late 1950s.

— Rottweilers. Hovering in the top 10 for almost 15 years.

— German shorthaired pointers. They've made big gains in the last quarter-century.

— Bulldogs. Easing off after hitting No. 4 a decade ago.

Over the years:

— 25 years ago: Yorkshire terriers were No. 6, and Frenchies were No. 64.

— 50 years ago: Saint Bernards were the seventh most prevalent breed. Last year, they were 63rd.

— 100 years ago: In the 1920s, the top 10 included three breeds that are still there today: German shepherds, beagles and bulldogs.

The lowdown on dachshunds

— The pluses: "They're amusing to look at. They're also very expressive dogs — they let you know what they're thinking," said Trudy Kawami, who has owned, bred, done dog sports and occasionally hunted rats with dachshunds since the 1980s. "They make you laugh every day."

— The caveats: Research has found the short-legged, long-backed breed has an elevated risk of a spinal disease. Originally bred to roust badgers, the driven, determined dogs can be very vocal, and if they can't exercise their instincts through hunting or sports, they might find unsuitable substitutes.

— The misconceptions: "The proliferation of cute images on social media now is kind of a pain — because that cute little fluffy, cream-colored, long-haired dog can turn around and kill your pet gerbil really fast,"

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Kawami said. She's glad to see more people appreciate the quirky hounds, but she rues that "the minute a breed becomes popular...the whole market-supply-and-demand mechanism kicks in."

Up-and-coming newcomers

The AKC has added more than 50 types of dog to its roster of "recognized" breeds since 2000. Some have quickly become familiar faces, especially the cane corso, now the 11th most prevalent breed.

Keep an eye out for the coton de tulear, which spurted from 92nd in 2024 to 79th last year. The American hairless terrier moved up from No. 125 to No. 108.

Rare breeds

The rarest breeds also are relative newcomers: the grand basset griffon Vendéen, the sloughi and the Norwegian lundehund. All three joined the AKC pack in the last 15 years. But just ahead of them is the harrier, recognized since 1885.

Pushback from PETA

PETA contends that breeding lessens needy dogs' chance of adoption and perpetuates unhealthy traits. The activist group filed a lawsuit last year that accuses the AKC of promoting "the breeding of deformed, unhealthy dogs." The kennel club responded that it's committed to canine health and called the suit frivolous.

In anticipation of this year's popular-breeds list, PETA produced videos in which comedian-actor-writer Carol Leifer highlights the breathing problems that can beset short-snouted dogs and implores people not to buy them.

"Breeders cash in on the look, and the dogs and their guardians pay for it," she says in one clip.

The AKC's Hunter Munden said the rankings are intended just to satisfy public curiosity, not "as an encouragement to buy any type of dog."

"No matter how you acquire your dog, do your research and make sure that a dog fits in your lifestyle," said the spokesperson, who has two mixed-breed dogs and a West Highland white terrier.

## Venezuela beats US 3-2 on Suárez's 9th-inning double to win first World Baseball Classic title

By RONALD BLUM AP Baseball Writer

MIAMI (AP) — Eugenio Suárez and his Venezuelan teammates stood on the stage behind second base with shiny medals draped over their proud chests, belting out their national anthem accompanied by tens of thousands of fans who remained in the ballpark a half-hour after the final out.

Back home, people were singing their praises, too.

Venezuela won the World Baseball Classic for the first time Tuesday night, beating the United States 3-2 in the championship game on Suárez's tiebreaking double in the top of the ninth inning.

"They were with us here in our hearts," Venezuela captain Salvador Perez said of his countrymen. "The World Series, as you all know, is one of the most important championships in the major leagues, but when you fight for your country, that goes beyond. That feeling, the country where you were born and raised, the sacrifices made by our parents, those people that helped us, that's why this means a lot to me and to Venezuela."

Bryce Harper's two-run homer with two outs in the eighth tied the score for the U.S., but Suárez hit a go-ahead double in the ninth and Daniel Palencia pitched a perfect bottom half.

"Baseball wanted us to fail, to fall down," Venezuela manager Omar López said. "You put aside your individuality and you are going to achieve those results."

Venezuela acting President Delcy Rodríguez declared Wednesday a National Day of Joy and made it a non-working holiday except for essential workers.

"My country needs that championship," star outfielder Ronald Acuña Jr. said, wiping tears from his eyes. "I just want to make my people proud. That's what I did today."

In the capital of Caracas, thousands also sang the anthem as they gathered in the Plaza de la Juventud (Plaza of Youth) to the racket of honking horns from cars and motorcycles.

"I'm overjoyed. It's too much for me!" high school student Yorleiny Mestra said. "The United States is a

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superpower, and the fact that we beat them makes me very proud of Venezuela.”

Maikel Garcia’s third-inning sacrifice fly and Wilyer Abreu’s fifth-inning homer off rookie Nolan McLean built a 2-0 lead before a roaring, pro-Latin America sellout crowd of 36,190 at loanDepot park. Left-hander Eduardo Rodríguez and a string of lights-out relievers limited the Americans to two hits through the seventh.

“We were feeling at home. There were more Venezuelan fans than American fans,” Garcia said.

Bobby Witt Jr. walked with two outs in the eighth and Harper drove the second straight changeup from Andrés Machado over the center-field fence.

Boston’s Garrett Whitlock started the ninth instead of San Diego’s Mason Miller, perhaps baseball’s best reliever, because U.S. manager Mark DeRosa promised the Padres he would use Miller only in a save situation.

Luis Arraez walked, and pinch-runner Javier Sanoja stole second just ahead of catcher Will Smith’s one-hop throw. Sanoja came home when Suárez doubled to the left-center gap on a full-count changeup. Suárez spread his arms wide and pointed to the sky at second base while teammates streamed from the dugout to greet Sanoja at the plate.

“We’re warriors,” Abreu said. “We’re going to fight for that game to win it.”

López awoke Tuesday to three text messages denying him use of pitchers but said he successfully negotiated to lift the restrictions.

Pitching for the third time in four days, Palencia struck out two to finish a three-hitter for his third save of the WBC, ending the game by getting Roman Anthony to swing under a 99.7 mph fastball.

As Venezuelans ran onto the infield to celebrate, the dismayed Americans stared while leaning on their dugout railing.

“Nobody believed in Venezuela but now we win the championship,” Suárez said. “This is a celebration for all the Venezuelan country.”

While the U.S., Japan and the Dominican Republic got much of the attention ahead of the sixth edition of the 20-nation event, Venezuela’s success was not that surprising. Sixty-three players born in Venezuela appeared on Major League Baseball opening-day rosters last year, second-most from outside the U.S. behind the Dominican Republic’s 100.

Garcia was selected the tournament MVP after hitting .385 with a WBC-high 10 hits and seven RBIs.

“They underestimated Venezuela because we had never won anything, but we are powerful,” Garcia said. “We won today, and I expect that in the new ranking, we are No. 1 and Japan is No. 2.”

Despite a heralded roster of stars led by Aaron Judge, Harper and Paul Skenes, the U.S. remained without a title since 2017. DeRosa also led the 2023 American team that lost the final 3-2 to Japan and would come back for 2029 if offered another chance.

“Ultimately, it’s who gets hot at the right time, who gets a big swing,” he said. “It just seemed like we couldn’t get the offense going the entire tournament.”

Rodríguez (4 1/3 innings) was followed by Eduard Bazarzo (two outs), José Buttó (three), Angel Zerpa (two), Machado (four) and Palencia.

Judge was 0 for 4 with three strikeouts and hit .222 with five RBIs in the tournament, while Harper improved to .214 with three RBIs with two hits against Venezuela. Alex Bregman batted .143 with four RBIs. The U.S. scored nine runs in the three knockout-round games while batting .188.

After the final out, Harper walked over to Venezuelan players to shake their hands.

“I understand what it takes to win games,” he said. “They had a great tournament, and I just wanted to let them know: congratulations. They’re the best team in the world.”

Ahead of a matchup with political overtones, players and coaches avoided discussing the government turmoil between the nations, heightened when the U.S. military captured Venezuela President Nicolás Maduro in January.

Venezuela became the second Latin American nation to win the WBC, after the Dominican Republic in 2013. The U.S. has just one title, in 2017.

Repeatedly during the tournament, Venezuelan players described the team as a family, and brothers Willson and William Contreras went on the podium together to receive their medals and sing the Venezu-

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elan anthem, "Gloria al Bravo Pueblo (Glory to the Brave People)."

"We play with passion, with love, because we feel the jersey," Suárez said.

U.S. players had arrived at loanDepot park in game-worn U.S. Olympic hockey jerseys coordinated by outfielder Pete Crow-Armstrong and Jack Hughes, who scored the gold medal-winning goal against Canada last month.

In a darkened ballpark filled by fans wearing wristbands with festive blinking lights, Judge and Arraez led the teams down the foul lines for the introductions while carrying their nation's flags.

After the game, many American players mingled with their families on the field while Venezuelans celebrated in their clubhouse.

"Disappointed," Judge said. "We came here, all of us put on this uniform, signed up to go out there and get a gold medal."

## Today in History: March 19, Bush announces Iraq invasion

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, March 19, the 78th day of 2026. There are 287 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On March 19, 2003, President George W. Bush announced in a televised address that coalition forces had begun an invasion of Iraq. (Bush would declare victory just over five weeks later in his "Mission Accomplished" speech, though the main U.S. troop withdrawal would not be completed until 2011.)

Also on this date:

In 1931, Nevada Gov. Fred B. Balzar signed a measure that made the state the first to legalize gambling.

In 1945, during World War II, more than 800 service members were killed when a Japanese dive bomber attacked the carrier USS Franklin near Japan.

In 1953, the 25th Academy Awards ceremony was the first to be televised; "The Greatest Show on Earth" would win the Oscar for Best Picture.

In 1965, archaeologist E. Lee Spence discovered the wreckage of the SS Georgiana, a Confederate ship that had sunk near Charleston, South Carolina, exactly 102 years earlier.

In 1966, Texas Western (now the University of Texas at El Paso) became the first team to start five Black players in the NCAA basketball tournament's championship game; they defeated top-ranked Kentucky in the final, 72-65.

In 1987, televangelist Jim Bakker resigned as chairman of his PTL ministry organization amid a sex and money scandal involving Jessica Hahn, a former church secretary.

In 1995, 17 months after announcing his retirement from basketball, Michael Jordan returned to play in the NBA with his former team, the Chicago Bulls. (He would go on to win three more NBA championships alongside the three he and the Bulls had already won.)

In 2013, Pope Francis officially began his stewardship of the Catholic Church, greeting tens of thousands of people thronging a celebration outside St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. The Argentine native and first pope from Latin America vowed to care for the poor and most disadvantaged, days after his election to the papacy.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Ursula Andress is 90. Singer Ruth Pointer (The Pointer Sisters) is 80. Actor Glenn Close is 79. Retired actor Bruce Willis is 71. NFL coach Andy Reid is 68. Actor Ebon Moss-Bachrach is 49. Comedian-podcaster Theo Von is 46. Facebook co-founder Eduardo Saverin is 44. MLB pitcher Clayton Kershaw is 38. Actor Ajay Friese is 28.