

Groton Daily Independent

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Friday, March 20

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

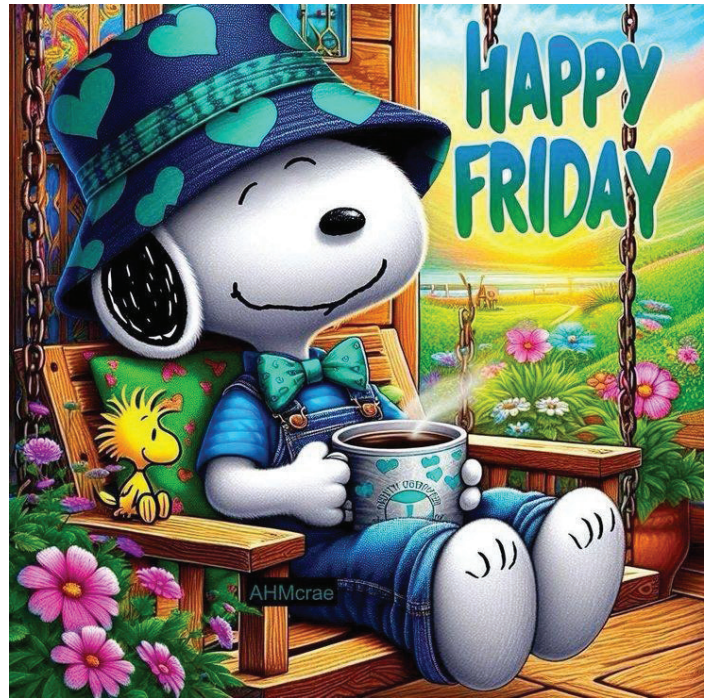
NO SCHOOL - Spring Break

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



Sunday, March 22

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6th grade BB Practice, 6 pm., Arena

Puzzle, Popcorn, Pop Challenge at Wage Memorial Library, 1 p.m.

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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.

Gulf Energy Strikes

Iran launched drones and missiles at energy infrastructure across the Gulf yesterday, targeting Qatar's liquefied natural gas complex and facilities in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. The strikes added further pressure to global energy markets, with Brent crude rising more than 60% since the Iran war began nearly three weeks ago.

The attacks caused extensive damage to Qatar's Ras Laffan terminal, one of the world's largest LNG export hubs, which supplied roughly a fifth of global output before production was halted. The attacks were in retaliation for an earlier Israeli strike on the South Pars gas field, accounting for roughly 70% to 75% of Iran's natural gas production.

US President Donald Trump warned the US could target South Pars if Iran attacks Qatar again. Separately, the Pentagon seeks roughly \$200B in additional funding from Congress to support operations tied to the war, on top of an annual defense budget currently exceeding \$800B.

Abel Prize Winner

Gerd Faltings will be awarded this year's Abel Prize—mathematics' equivalent of the Nobel Prize—the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters revealed yesterday. The 71-year-old German mathematician is known for his 1983 proof helping to define arithmetic geometry.

Faltings gave the first proof for the "Mordell conjecture," a 1922 theorem suggesting increasingly complex equations produce fewer rational solutions. The theorem was once considered unsolvable. However, Faltings found that if a curve's equation has a variable raised to a power higher than 3, it will contain a finite number of integer or fraction coordinates. He did so by combining number theory and geometry as opposed to relying on the more traditional effort known as the Diophantine approximation approach.

Rational points have fascinated mathematicians since the time of ancient Greece; to this day, researchers seek to better understand them. Weeks ago, Chinese scientists posited an equation for the first hard limit on rational points in a curve.

World's Happiest Country

Finland was named the world's happiest country for the ninth consecutive year, the latest World Happiness Report revealed. Nordic countries—including Denmark, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden—also ranked in the top 10.

Analysts attribute Finland's joy factor to its wealth, social safety network, and high life expectancy, among factors. Afghanistan maintained its place as the world's unhappiest country. The results were based on answers from roughly 100,000 people in 140 countries and territories. Respondents were asked to rank their life satisfaction on a scale of 0 to 10. Finnish respondents gave an average life satisfaction score of 7.7; Afghans answered 1.4. The US, in 23rd place, reported an average score of 6.8.

The report's authors cautioned this year that social media use is driving population-level drops in reported well-being among adolescents. Young English speakers and Western Europeans reported a nearly one-point drop on the happiness scale over the past decade.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Men's NCAA tournament Day 2 of first round tips off.

Women's NCAA tournament first round begins, starting with No. 3 Duke versus No. 14 College of Charleston.

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Actor Kevin Spacey settles trio of lawsuits in the UK with three men accusing him of sexual assault between 2000 and 2013.

ABC cancels "Bachelorette" season, set to debut Sunday, amid abuse allegations against Taylor Frankie Paul.

"Spiderman: Brand New Day" becomes most viewed movie trailer in history, reaching close to 720 million total views in 24 hours; film releases July 31, characters include the Hulk and Punisher.

Science & Technology

Waymo reports its fleet of self-driving taxis passed 170 million total miles driven as of the end of 2025; vehicles were involved in 92% fewer serious incidents than human drivers.

Schizophrenia study reveals a new biomarker for diagnosing the disorder; a form of the brain protein called Cacna2d1 is reduced in patients with the condition, which results in overstimulated neural circuitry.

Researchers develop new method to measure ability of certain stem cells to regrow cartilage; may help advance regenerative therapies for conditions like osteoarthritis.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close down (S&P 500 -0.3%, Dow -0.4%, Nasdaq -0.3%).

Uber to invest up to roughly \$1.3B in electric-vehicle maker Rivian as part of goal to deploy 50,000 robotaxis by 2031 and as Rivian prepares release of autonomous R2 model.

Crypto.com to reduce workforce by 12%, or roughly 180 employees, a decision attributed to an internal shift toward integrating artificial intelligence.

OpenAI to acquire startup Astral, which makes Python tools for developers.

Politics & World Affairs

Forty million Americans in the West are under heat alerts through the weekend, with daily record highs expected from California to Tennessee.

Chad vows retaliation after alleging a drone from Darfur killed 17 mourners in Chad's eastern town of Tine.

Thailand's parliament elects new prime minister whose party won on a nationalist, pro-military platform amid tensions with neighboring Cambodia.

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

♥ **Babysitting Available!**

House Cleaning Offered!

Text Jeslyn Kosel at (605)-290-7821

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

The advertisement features a colorful illustration of a 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 for babysitting, a teal one for house cleaning, and an orange one for contact information. At the bottom, a red car is shown driving on a road towards a house in a green landscape.

Chargers Use 3-Point Edge, Late Rebounds to Slip Past Groton Area in State A Opener

Hamlin 65, Groton Area 61



Keegen Tracy blocks this shot by Hamlin's Jacks Wadsworth. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Rapid City — A strong showing from Groton Area wasn't quite enough Thursday, as Hamlin used a decisive edge from beyond the arc and crucial second-chance plays in the final seconds to defeat the Tigers 65-61 in the opening round of the State A Boys Basketball Tournament.

The Chargers knocked down 10 three-pointers compared to five for Groton Area, a difference that loomed large in a game that was tight throughout.

Groton Area showed early control behind Karson Zak, who helped the Tigers build a 9-4 lead midway through the opening quarter. Gage Sippel added inside production as Groton looked sharp early.



Karson Zak drives to the basket. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

But Hamlin answered with a pivotal first-half surge.

The Chargers strung together a 10-0 run, turning that 9-4 deficit into a 14-9 lead and shifting momentum behind timely perimeter shooting and strong interior play.

Hamlin extended the lead to 17-11 in the second quarter, but Groton Area responded with one of its strongest stretches of the game.

Zak continued to find success inside, while Keegen Tracy and Sippel added key baskets in the paint. The Tigers reclaimed the lead at 21-20 on a Tracy basket, and Becker Bosma added a three-point play. Zak's late bucket helped Groton take a 26-24 advantage into halftime.

The third quarter featured more swings.

Hamlin opened the half with a 6-0 run to regain the lead, but Groton countered again behind Zak and Sippel. The Tigers stayed within striking distance despite Hamlin's outside shooting.

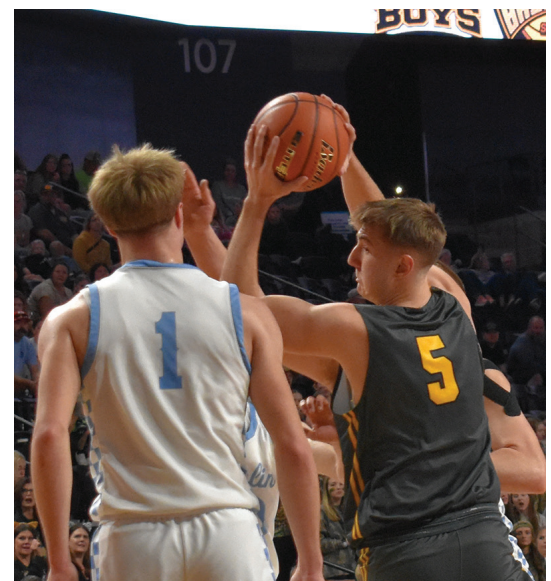
Late in the quarter, Groton delivered a big momentum swing. Zak buried a 3-pointer with under a minute to play, and Easton Weber followed with a clutch triple at the buzzer to give the Tigers a 43-41 lead heading into the fourth.

The final period turned into a shootout.

Hamlin regained the lead early in the fourth and continued to rely on its perimeter shooting. Groton answered repeatedly, as Ryder Johnson and Weber hit key 3-pointers, and Weber's third triple gave the Tigers a 55-54 lead with under three minutes to play.

But Hamlin had one final push.

Boden Stevenson knocked down a go-ahead 3-pointer, then



Becker Bosma tries to work his way inside in front of Hamlin's Bode Stevenson. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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Easton Weber tries to work get closer to the basket. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

added a second-chance 3-pointer with 34 seconds remaining to stretch the lead to 61-57.

Groton refused to go away, as Zak scored twice in the closing seconds to pull the Tigers within one.

From there, the game was decided at the free-throw line — and on the glass.

With under 10 seconds remaining, Stevenson missed a pair of free throws, but Hamlin secured the offensive rebound. After Groton was forced to foul again, Jackson Wadsworth split a pair at the line to make it 63-61 — and once again, the Chargers grabbed the rebound on the miss. Moments later, Stevenson returned to the line and converted both free throws to seal the win.

"That was the difference right there," Groton Area head coach Greg Kjellsen said. "A couple free throws at the end, we didn't box out and get rebounds... just little things."

Zak led Groton Area with an efficient 23 points on 10-of-12 shooting, while Sippel added 12 points and six rebounds. Weber contributed nine points, including three clutch 3-pointers.

Hamlin was powered by Stevenson, who finished with 27 points, while Wadsworth added 20. The Chargers shot 52.6 percent from three-point range (10-of-19) compared to Groton's 35.7 percent (5-of-14).

"We didn't hit many perimeter shots until later in the game," Kjellsen said. "We haven't been a great three-point shooting team all season,

and that showed a little bit. We hit some to keep us in it, but just came up short."

Despite the loss, Groton Area shot 54.5 percent from the field and stayed within a possession deep into the fourth quarter.

Kjellsen also pointed to a late-game substitution as something he wished he could have back.

"I was late getting Gage subbed back into the game, and that's my fault," he said. "Coaching blunder. Whether we get that rebound or not, I don't know, but that's on me."

Even in defeat, Kjellsen praised his team's effort against a familiar opponent.

"We knew they were a good team and we were a good



Gage Sippel goes for the dunk to tie the game at 30 with 5:08 left in the third quarter. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Ryder Johnson makes his move in front of Hamlin's Jack Stormo. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Ryder Johnson passes the ball off to teammate Keegen Tracy. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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Easton Weber, Keegen Tracy and Gage Sippel all collapse in on Hamlin's Bode Stevenson. Sippel was called for the foul. (Photo

by Paul Kosel)

team," he said. "It was just a good close game — they just came out on top and we didn't."

Now, the focus shifts to the consolation bracket.

"You can show what kind of heart and character you have," Kjellsen said. "We can pout and be sad, or we can get after it tomorrow. We still came here to win two games — now we just have to win the next two."

Groton Area will look to bounce back in consolation play taking on St. Thomas More at noon central time. Hamlin advances in the championship bracket taking on #1 Sioux Falls Christian at 6 p.m. central time.



The Groton Area cheerleaders face the Hamlin cheerleaders and cheer them on as they were introduced. The Groton cheer squad will be trying for a trifecta for the Spirit of Six Award. Groton Area has won it two years in a row - a feat that no other team has done in Class A. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Groton Area had by far the larger crowd - probably about twice as many as Hamlin's crowd.

(Photo by Paul Kosel)



The Groton Area cheerleaders during the introductions. (Photo

by Jeslyn Kosel)

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Groton Area Full Box Score

#	Player	PTS	FG	3FG	FT	OR	DR	REB	A	PF	TO	BL	ST	MIN
1*	TRACY, KEEGAN	7	3-9	0-3	1-2	0	0	0	1	3	0	1	0	31
3*	ZAK, KARSON	23	10-12	1-3	2-5	1	1	2	3	1	1	0	1	32
4*	JOHNSON, RYDER	5	2-11	1-4	0-0	1	3	4	2	3	2	0	1	29
5*	BOSMA, BECKER	3	1-2	0-1	1-1	0	4	4	1	4	0	1	1	26
30*	SIPPEL, GAGE	12	4-6	0-0	4-5	3	3	6	1	2	0	1	0	22
14	KROLL, ETHAN	2	1-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
22	WEBER, EASTON	9	3-3	3-3	0-0	1	2	3	2	5	1	1	0	18
TM	TEAM	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	5	5	0	0	0	0	0	
TOTALS		61	24-44	5-14	8-13	6	18	24	10	19	4	4	3	
GAME PCT			54.5	35.7	61.5									
THIS HALF		35	13-19	5-8	4-7	1	6	7	7	12	1	2	1	
HALF PCT			68.4	62.5	57.1									



Hamlin Full Box Score

#	Player	PTS	FG	3FG	FT	OR	DR	REB	A	PF	TO	BL	ST	MIN
1*	STEVENSON, BODE	27	9-14	4-5	5-11	1	2	3	4	3	3	1	1	32
10*	STORMO, JACK	8	3-7	2-5	0-0	0	2	2	5	0	1	0	1	32
20*	ABRAHAM, AIDEN	8	3-4	2-3	0-0	0	4	4	1	2	1	0	0	32
23*	WADSWORTH, JACKS	20	5-12	2-5	8-13	2	1	3	3	4	2	1	0	32
30*	HEINRICH, TRIG	2	1-2	0-1	0-0	2	6	8	1	1	0	1	0	32
4	OLSEN, JADEN	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
TM	TEAM	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	1	4	5	0	0	0	0	0	
TOTALS		65	21-39	10-19	13-24	6	19	25	14	10	7	3	2	
GAME PCT			53.8	52.6	54.2									
THIS HALF		41	13-20	7-11	8-17	4	8	12	7	4	1	2	1	
HALF PCT			65.0	63.6	47.1									

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State A Basketball Tournament Coverage Sponsored by

Avantara - Groton
Bary Keith at Harr Motors
BK Custom T's & More
Blocker Construction
Dacotah Bank
Doug Abeln Seed Company
Farmers Union Coop
Farmers Union Insurance- JR Johnson
Full Circle Ag
Greg Johnson Construction
Groton Ag Solutions
Groton Chamber
Groton Chiropractic Clinic
Groton Dairy Queen
Groton Legion
Hanlon Brothers
Harry Implement
Heartland Energy
John Sieh Agency
Jungle Lanes & Cafe
Ken's Food Fair
KR Body Shop
Kolker Law - Kari Bartling
Krueger Brothers
Locke Electric
Lori's Pharmacy
Malpert Insurance - Dylan Hanson
McGannon Plumbing, Heating & Cooling
Milbrandt Enterprises Inc
MJ's Sinclair
NVC
Poet
Professional Management Services
Ryan Likness Agency
S & S Lumber
Spanier Custom Harvesting
The MeatHouse
Thunder Seed - John Wheeting
Weber Landscaping
Weismantel Agency

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2026 SDHSAA State Boys Basketball, Quarterfinal Recap SDPB | By Nate Wek

The 2026 SDHSAA state boys basketball tournaments began Thursday, March 19, from Rapid City (AA and A) and Aberdeen (B). Here's a recap from all of the quarterfinal games, and the schedule for Friday.

Class AA

#1 Sioux Falls Lincoln 69 #9 Tea Area 44

Sioux Falls Lincoln defeated Tea Area 69-44 in Thursday's opening round. Sam DeGroot had a double-double performance for the Patriots. He scored 21 points and grabbed 15 rebounds in the win. Gavin Shawd led Tea Area with 12 points and nine rebounds.

#4 Harrisburg 65 #5 Watertown 61

Harrisburg won a tight one over Watertown, 65-61, on Thursday in Rapid City. Grayton Jibben led the Tigers with 19 points. Stellen Larson had a double-double performance, which included 16 points and 12 rebounds. Carter Buisker had a nice game for Watertown as he led the team with 23 points. Jack McClemons also contributed with 19 points, six rebounds, and three steals for the Arrows.

#2 Sioux Falls Roosevelt 58 #7 Brandon Valley 47

Sioux Falls Roosevelt defeated Brandon Valley 58-47 on Thursday night. The Rough Riders were led by Memphis Bylander, who finished with 14 points and a pair of rebounds. Capital Schmaus also notched 13 points and four assists in the win. Ayuel Deng, Lincoln McInerney, and Briggs Knutson all scored ten points in the loss for Brandon Valley.

#3 Huron 60 #6 O'Gorman 45

Huron defeated O'Gorman 60-45 in the quarterfinal round from Rapid City. The Tigers were led by Blake Ellwein, who led the team with 16 points, four blocks, and four steals. Myles Ellwein had a 15 point night as well. Anders Porisch finished with a double-double for Huron having 11 points and 12 rebounds. O'Gorman's top scorer was Mason Clark, who finished with 14 points in the loss.

Class A

#1 Sioux Falls Christian 82 #8 St. Thomas More 59

Sioux Falls Christian took care of business on Thursday to defeat St. Thomas More 82-59. Brant Wassenaar led the Chargers with 26 points on 11 of 16 shooting. He also led the squad in rebounds with seven and assists with six. Wyatt Gylten was the top performer for St. Thomas More in the game. He led the team with 21 points and nine rebounds.

#4 Hamlin 65 #5 Groton Area 61

Hamlin hung on late to defeat Groton Area 65-61 in the 'A' quarterfinals. Boden Stevenson led the way for the Chargers with 27 points. Jackson Wadsworth also had a nice 20 point game for Hamlin. Groton Area's Karson Zak scored 23 points and led the team with three assists in the loss.

#2 West Central 75 #7 Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 41

West Central defeated Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 75-41 on Thursday to advance to the semifinals. As a team, West Central shot nearly 52% for the game. Connor Mebius led the way for West Central scoring 25 points on 10 of 17 shooting. Will Kuhl also contributed 11 points and eight rebounds in the winning effort. Damien Clown was the top performer for Cheyenne-Eagle Butte. He finished with 15 points and four rebounds.

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#3 Clark/Willow Lake 66 #6 Stanley County 36

Clark/Willow Lake punched their ticket to the semifinals with a 66-36 win over Stanley County on Thursday night. The Cyclones were led by Chris Bevers, who scored 24 points and three steals. Emmerson Larson also had 18 points. Sullivan Felberg had a double-double performance for Clark/Willow Lake too, 12 points and 12 rebounds. Stanley County was led by Paxton Deal, who finished with 15 points, six rebounds, and four steals in the loss.

Class B

#8 Lyman 49 #1 Viborg-Hurley 44

Lyman upset top seeded Viborg-Hurley 49-44 in the opening game of the quarterfinal round. MJ Diehm led the offensive scoring with 15 points. He also had seven rebounds, three steals and a block in the win. Dawsen Volmer and Josiah Vaad each contributed ten points as well for the Raiders. Freeman was led by Jake Austin, who finished with 15 points and a pair of steals.

#5 Castlewood 53 #4 Aberdeen Christian 50

Castlewood won a close one against Aberdeen Christian on Thursday, 53-50. The Warriors were led by Kamden Keszler who scored 30 points on 50% shooting from the field. He also had four rebounds and three steals in the win. Aberdeen Central's top scorer was Luke Kaiser, who finished with 11 points. Brooks Jett also had ten points in the loss.

#2 Freeman 63 #7 Sully Buttes 55

Freeman defeated Sully Buttes 63-55 on Thursday in the quarterfinals. Tayde Kerrigan led the way with 17 points. David Walter also contributed with 15 points, seven rebounds, and four assists. For Sully Buttes, it was Wesley Wittler who led the way with 28 points and eight rebounds.

#6 Wall 60 #3 De Smet 57

Wall advanced to the semifinals for the first time in school history with a 60-57 win over De Smet. Tee-lan Kjerstad had 31 points in the winning effort. Emmet Dinger also contributed 10 points for the Eagles. Grant Wilkenson had a double-double performance for De Smet with 40 points and 19 rebounds.

Today's Schedule

Class AA

Consolation Semifinals

#9 Tea Area vs #5 Watertown – 11 am MT

#7 Brandon Valley vs #6 O'Gorman – 12:45 pm MT
Semifinals

#1 Sioux Falls Lincoln vs #4 Harrisburg – 5 pm MT

#2 Sioux Falls Roosevelt vs #3 Huron – 6:45 pm MT

Class A

Consolation Semifinals

#8 St. Thomas More vs #5 Groton Area – 11 am MT

#7 Cheyenne-Eagle Butte vs #6 Stanley County – 12:45 pm MT
Semifinals

#1 Sioux Falls Christian vs #4 Hamlin – 5 pm MT

#2 West Central vs #3 Clark/Willow Lake – 6:45 pm MT

Class B

Consolation Semifinals

#1 Viborg-Hurley vs #4 Aberdeen Christian –
11 am CT

#7 Sully Buttes vs #3 De Smet – 12:45 pm CT
Semifinals

#8 Lyman vs #5 Castlewood – 5 pm CT

#2 Freeman vs #6 Wall – 6:45 pm CT



Pictured in back, left to right, are Jacob Tewsbury, Keegan Harry, Dreston Dennert and Dylan McGannon; in front, left to right, are Drake Peterson and Walker Zoellner. (Courtesy Photo)

Groton students make flag display for Columbia Auxiliary by Dorene Nelson

The American flag display, made by Groton High School students under the direction of Don Donley, is incredible and amazing! It is huge, mounted on a wooden base, and has been skillfully and carefully planned!

Members of the Columbia American Legion Auxiliary contacted the Donleys about the shop class making a portable, permanent display object to be used for their club meetings and other official events. This large display is kept indoors in the Columbia American Legion when not being used.

S & S Lumber of Groton is to be thanked for donating all of the wood that was used to make the flag as well as the base the items are attached to. The army boots are from the Vietnam War, the rifle is from World War II, and the helmet is from the Korean War. Some of the items were donated by local veterans. The entire display is permanently mounted on a platform with wheels to be easily used and stored.

The following juniors and seniors spent many hours on its creation: Jacob Tewksbury, Drake Peterson, Keegan Harry, Dreston Dennert, Walker Zoellner, and Dylan McGannon.

The poppies are made out of discarded metal cans from the school kitchen. They were cut and shaped into flowers, mounted, painted, and attached to stems with green metal leaves that had also been cut, shaped, marked, and painted. The careful cutting and shaping creates the look of "real" flowers.

At the center of the gold star is a "Mother's Pin," also from World War II. These pins honor the mothers of soldiers who lost their lives while serving in the military. The three hand-carved wooden crosses represent all soldiers, especially those who lost their lives in the line of duty.

The base of the display is made from wood and measures 8' in length and 6'2" in height. The base is mounted on wheels so that it can be easily moved and stored. When not in use it is kept inside the Columbia Legion.

According to the young men who worked on this huge project, the most difficult part of this amazing display was creating the fifty stars. The star forms were created by using a stencil and carving the star shapes into the wood. Not only is the carving difficult but keeping them evenly spaced and straight complicated the project.

The flag display is used for all Auxiliary meetings, in public for parades and official Auxiliary business, and for display. The six members of this class, working an hour a day, started this project in December and completed it in March.

The large American Legion display benefitted from the hard work of many students and the guidance from Don and Joann Donley.

The Life of Maurice Nehls



The funeral service for Maurice Eugene Nehls will be at 11:00 a.m. Friday March 27th, 2026 at Evangelical Lutheran Church in Langford SD. Pastor Dan Cole and Diane Hoines will officiate the service. Burial will take place in the Groton Cemetery in Groton, SD.

Visitation will be 5:00-7:00 pm Thursday, March 26th, 2026 at Olson Funeral Chapel in Britton.

Maurice E. Nehls (Moe) was born September 14th, 1926, near Groton, SD to Fred and Dora (Hoops) Nehls. He grew up and attended school in the Groton area. Before graduating he joined the United States Army during World War II serving in Germany guarding ammunition. Due to Moe's mischievous personality, he was assigned to KP duties, which included peeling hundreds of pounds of potatoes per day. This talent later became a useful skill making potato salad to give away to family and friends. In 1946, before leaving Germany, he traded his boots and a few packs of cigarettes for a diamond ring that he would later present to his future wife, LaVonne. Maurice and LaVonne were married on February 18th, 1949. They started their married life in the Groton area. They were blessed with three children: Marlene, Linda Ann and

Larry. Moe's job brought them to the Langford area where he worked for local farmers and later found his passion working for the Marshall County Highway Department running the road grader.

Moe was an avid hunter and fisherman. As a side hobby he started processing wild game and livestock for local residents (in the county shop). In retirement, Moe took pleasure in gardening, especially his tomatoes. He was known to pick them a little too early since he wanted to have the first tomato in town. If you didn't see Moe cruising Langford in his golf cart or giving kids rides, you could catch him driving his Cub Cadet lawn mower, which was his favorite past time, even if the grass didn't need mowing.

If you were looking for Moe in the morning or afternoon you could find him at the local coffee spot shaking dice, joking with staff and his buddies, and looking for his next free cup of coffee. Moe enjoyed spending time with his family playing games of 31, eating homemade ice cream, and fresh doughnuts. Moe's favorite holiday was his birthday and planning his annual party and cake one year in advance. In recent years, he proudly received his honorary high school diploma, went on the Honor Flight to Washington DC, and was the last surviving WWII veteran in Marshall County. He also enjoyed trips to Alaska and taking photos.

Maurice passed away Friday, March 13th, 2026 at Wheatcrest Hills in Britton at the age of 99.

He is survived by his daughter, Marlene (Steven) Price; grandchildren: David Price, Paul (Cari) Price, Michelle (Tim) Marlette, and Stephanie Jahnig; five great grandchildren; and three great-great grandchildren.

Preceding him in death were his parents; his wife, LaVonne; daughter, Linda Ann Price; son-in-law, Kenneth Price; son, Larry Nehls; and his siblings: Grace Blondo, Bernice Prunty, Mary Ann Fliehs, Howard Nehls, Carroll Nehls, and Dallas Nehls.

Condolences may be directed to Marlene and Steve Price - 41991 SD Hwy 27 - Langford, SD 57454.

An online guestbook and obituary are available at www.olsonfuneralchapel.com



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

South Dakota governor signs budget bills, including one to fund state Capitol restoration

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER

A sulfuric, rotten egg smell permeated the chamber of the South Dakota House of Representatives on March 10, delaying lawmakers' afternoon session at the state Capitol in Pierre.

At least one representative took shelter in the Senate chamber, where lawmakers were debating whether to create a Capitol restoration fund and seed it with \$1.1 million. Sen. Jim Mehlhaff, R-Pierre, used the incident to explain his support for the idea — and poke fun at representatives' potentially excessive flatulence.

"There's been a leak of gas over in the House chamber. I believe it's coming from the radiator system, or perhaps it's from some of their members," Mehlhaff said. "In any case, I think there is a need to take a look at the inner workings of this building and to start a fund to pay for those repairs."

The issue turned out to be a sewer line leak. There was a hole in an "aging steam pipe" used for the building's heating system, said Bureau of Human Resources and Administration's Leah Haugan. Steam escaping through the hole burned through a nearby plastic sewer line and caused the leak.

Plumbers and custodial staff were dispatched to clean up what Republican House Speaker Jon Hansen of Dell Rapids called a "pretty nasty mess."

The \$1.1 million will help pay for repairs and upgrades to the 116-year-old building, last restored nearly 40 years ago ahead of the state's 1989 centennial. The state has invested millions in recent years to fix plaster cracks, clear Capitol Lake of goose droppings and study the cost of a full restoration and renovation.

The state official in charge of maintaining the Capitol and its grounds guessed last year that the total would be between \$150 million and \$200 million. An earlier version of the bill creating the restoration fund sought to seed it with \$25 million. Lawmakers set aside \$3 million in 2025 to begin some repairs and study the extent of the Capitol's needs.

Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden signed the restoration fund bill on Thursday. He also signed bills setting the budget for the current and coming fiscal years, transferring \$101 million from the budget reserves for a range of special projects, and revising property tax levies for school districts. The last of those bills was part of a multi-pronged compromise package between Rhoden and lawmakers to provide property tax relief.

Rhoden has signed 190 bills from the 2026 legislative session into law and vetoed one.

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.

State commission replaces controversial wildlife predator bounty with new programs

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Commission has voted to narrow a controversial nest predator trapping program, but the state intends to pay as much for bounties as it did last year.

Instead of paying anyone who traps animals that prey on game birds, the state will dedicate \$200,000 of its \$500,000 Nest Predator Bounty Program budget to payments for youth trappers. The remaining funds will pay trappers of all ages for coyotes. It will be the first time the state will use program funds to

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pay bounties for coyotes.

The nest predator program is funded by hunting, fishing and trapping license fees. It currently pays trappers \$10 per tail for raccoons, skunks, badgers, opossums and red foxes collected during the nesting season for birds that are prized by hunters, such as pheasants. The program was designed to boost pheasant numbers by protecting more young birds from predators.

Since its 2019 inception during the Gov. Kristi Noem administration, critics have argued that the program leans on a scientifically unproven approach to raising pheasant numbers and is therefore a poor use of licensing funds. The program's operational data has done little to quell those initial concerns. In 2024, officials with Game, Fish and Parks told lawmakers that the end of previously annual pheasant counts made it impossible to quantify the bounty program's impact on pheasant populations.

Other critics have questioned the ethics of government bounties for wildlife trapping.

Game, Fish, and Parks leaders have defended nest predator removal, saying it's been successful in engaging youth in trapping. They've also said reinstating the pheasant count that ended in 2019 wouldn't be enough to show the program's direct impact, as too many other environmental factors influence wildlife to draw a direct line from bounty payments to game populations.

State Sen. Tim Reed, R-Brookings, sponsored a bill during the 2026 legislative session that would have barred state-funded bounties on animals taken for nest-predation control, which would have ended the program.

But the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee defeated Reed's bill, arguing the issue would be better addressed by the South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks Commission. Senators suggested refocusing the program on youth, as a means to increase participation in trapping and other outdoor activities, reduce spending and reallocate funds toward wildlife habitat improvements.

In total, the state has paid \$3,295,480 for 342,743 nest predators since the program's inception.

A March 3 letter drafted by staff for the Legislature's budget committee said its members wanted the program limited to children 17 and younger. They also wanted a cap of 25 tails per child, and to reduce the program budget from about \$500,000 to \$250,000.

However, the letter was never sent, given that the Game, Fish and Parks Commission acted before the budget committee reviewed its letter on March 12. The commission did not follow the budget committee's recommendations to the letter and did not move to cut its budget in half.

Game, Fish and Parks Secretary Kevin Robling argued that the department was already heavily prioritizing habitat and public access.

"For every \$1 of the bounty program that we spend, we spend \$50 on habitat and access," Robling told budgetary lawmakers.

The commission's March 5 resolution rescinds its 2023 reapproval of the Nest Predator Bounty Program through 2026. In its place, the commission decided, the state will run a "Youth Trapping Recruitment Program" from March 1 to July 1 for residents 17 and younger. It will pay \$10 per tail for raccoons, skunks, badgers, opossums and red foxes, with a cap of \$200,000. Adults will no longer be paid for trapping those predators.

The commission also created a Coyote Bounty Program for all residents from April 1 to July 1. It will pay \$30 per tail, capped at \$300,000. The Department of Game Fish and Parks said the change keeps the overall effort within the former budget for the nest predator program.

Reed called the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Commission's changes "a good start."

A critic of the nest predator program still has concerns.

George Vandell, vice president of the South Dakota Wildlife Federation and a retired state wildlife biologist, said the commission handled the change with too little transparency. He said the coyote bounty was presented as an informational item — rather than an administrative proposal — and approved as a resolution without meaningful public notice or public comment, despite involving \$500,000 in licensing funds.

Game, Fish and Parks' Director of Wildlife, Tom Kirschenmann, told the commission why that was done. He said the department did not use the traditional rulemaking process because the change was being

treated as new programs, rather than a rule change. He said that is in line with how other programs are managed.

Vandel said the commission, not the legislature, was the proper place to address the issue, but the changes don't assuage his broader concerns. He said bounty programs, whether for youth engagement or for coyotes exclusively, do not reduce predator numbers enough to meaningfully boost wildlife populations.

"Bounty programs can't work, never will work, and are basically a total waste of money," Vandel said.

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.

Education Department to transfer management of defaulted student loans to Treasury

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Treasury Department will take over the Department of Education's responsibility for collecting on defaulted federal student loan debt, President Donald Trump's administration announced Thursday.

It's the first step in a multi-phase process that will end with Treasury taking on the entire federal student loan portfolio. It's also the latest interagency agreement announced by the Education Department.

A senior Department of Education official cited the agency's "longstanding partnership" with Treasury in administering federal student aid programs and expressed confidence that the department was in a good position to increase its role.

The administration continues to take sweeping steps to do away with the 46-year-old Education Department, as Trump seeks to return education "back to the states." That effort comes despite much of the oversight and funding of schools already occurring at the state and local levels.

In the first phase, Treasury will also "provide operational support" to the Education Department's efforts to return borrowers to repayment, per the announcement.

The Education Department's student loan portfolio stands at roughly \$1.7 trillion. The agency says fewer than 40% of borrowers are in repayment and nearly a quarter are in default.

In later phases, Treasury is set to "work to provide operational support over non-defaulted Federal student loan debt, to the extent practicable and permitted by law, while also seeking opportunities to provide operational support to FSA's other functions."

The senior Education Department official said that borrowers currently making payments "should see no change" and can expect to see "better customer service."

Department forges multiple agreements

U.S. Education Secretary Linda McMahon said that "by leveraging Treasury's world-renowned expertise in finance and economic policy, we are confident that American students, borrowers, and taxpayers will finally have functioning programs after decades of mismanagement," in a statement Thursday.

The Education Department has announced nine other agreements with the departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Interior and State that transfer several of its responsibilities to those agencies.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Supreme Court in July 2025 temporarily greenlit mass layoffs and a plan to dramatically downsize the Education Department ordered earlier that year. Those layoffs inflicted a heavy hit on Federal Student Aid, among other units at the agency.

That plan was outlined in a March 2025 executive order that called on McMahon to "take all necessary steps to facilitate the closure" of her own department.

'Irresponsible, reckless'

Sen. Patty Murray of Washington state, the top Democrat on the Senate Appropriations Committee, said that "instead of helping student borrowers get the support they need, Secretary McMahon is focused on illegally hollowing out the department she leads and creating new, harmful bureaucracy while she's at it," in a statement Thursday.

"Despite all this administration's talk about creating efficiency, the fact is these agreements simply create pointless new red tape — while threatening basic services and support that students depend on every day," Murray added.

Rachel Gittleman, president of American Federation of Government Employees Local 252, which represents Education Department workers, lambasted the announcement Thursday.

Gittleman described it as "an insult to the nearly 43 million Americans with federal student loan debt and to the taxpayers who depend on federal oversight to prevent waste, fraud and abuse."

Gittleman noted that since McMahon took over, "the agency has fired or pushed out nearly half of Federal Student Aid's workforce, leading to the Government Accountability Office warning that the majority of federal student loan servicers running the government's \$1.7 trillion student loan portfolio have been repeatedly breaking the law without staff oversight."

The GAO report found that the staffing reductions affected the government's ability to determine how well student loan servicers are doing their jobs.

Aissa Canchola Bañez, policy director for the advocacy group Protect Borrowers, blasted the administration's move as "irresponsible, reckless, and bad news for our most vulnerable student loan borrowers."

She added that "in the midst of a growing affordability crisis where American families are already struggling to make ends meet, this risks driving millions of borrowers further into financial hardship."

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

Congress could soon be asked by Trump to come up with \$200 billion for his Iran war

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump on Thursday didn't rule out asking Congress for an additional \$200 billion to cover the cost of his war in Iran, a substantial sum that will likely be difficult to move through both chambers.

"It's a small price to pay to make sure that we stay tippy top," he said when asked about the number, first reported Wednesday evening by the Washington Post and since confirmed by several other news organizations.

The White House deferred questions from States Newsroom about a possible supplemental spending request to the Office of Management and Budget, which did not immediately respond to an email.

Trump, when asked specifically about the \$200 billion figure, didn't rebuff the reporter's question or say the number was incorrect. Earlier news reports expected the request to total about \$50 billion, a significantly smaller sum.

Trump also indicated he may need the additional money for other military operations. And while he didn't specifically mention Cuba, he has talked repeatedly about "taking" the island nation in recent days.

"We're asking for a lot of reasons beyond even what we're talking about in Iran," Trump said. "This is a very volatile world and the military equipment, the power of some of this weaponry is unthinkable. You don't even want to know about it. Oh, you could end this thing in two seconds if you wanted to. But we are being very judicious."

Any request for emergency funding would need to move through the House, where Republicans hold an especially thin majority, and the Senate, where the GOP has a majority but legislation cannot advance

past a 60-vote legislative hurdle without bipartisan support.

'Preposterous'

Democrats have been overwhelmingly opposed to Trump's war in Iran since it began and are unlikely to give Republicans the votes needed to move such a large emergency spending request through the upper chamber.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said shortly after Trump's remarks in a floor speech that such a request would be "preposterous."

"Even a fraction of that is unacceptable for a war without a plan, without a goal, without the support of the American people," he said. "Let's be very clear, if Trump wants \$200 billion, that means he believes we might be in a war with Iran for a very, very long time."

Schumer said that funding could instead be spent on lowering health care premiums, education, helping people afford the rising costs of groceries and improving infrastructure.

"It's an indefensible number, one of the most wasteful and unthought-out budget requests I have ever heard in my time in the Senate," he said.

Defense spending already provided

No path forward in Congress would leave the Trump administration with the spending lawmakers have already approved.

Congress approved \$838.7 billion for the Department of Defense in January as part of its annual government funding process. Republicans approved another \$150 billion for the Pentagon to spend on specific programs, like air and missile defense, as well as shipbuilding, in their "big, beautiful" law enacted in 2025.

The funding in the GOP tax and spending cuts package was intended to be spread out over the next few years.

Ashley Murray contributed to this report.

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.

Markwayne Mullin's nomination to lead Homeland Security advances to US Senate floor

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Thursday voted to move forward Oklahoma Sen. Markwayne Mullin's nomination to lead the Department of Homeland Security.

After the 8-7 vote, Mullin's nomination will head to the Senate floor.

Thursday's vote comes a day after Mullin, a Republican, appeared before the committee in a contentious nomination hearing in which the GOP chair, Sen. Rand Paul, questioned whether Mullin should lead the department given his "anger issues."

Paul, of Kentucky, voted against advancing Mullin's nomination, the only Republican on the panel to oppose a fellow senator.

But because Democratic Sen. John Fetterman of Pennsylvania voted with the rest of the Republicans, Mullin's nomination advanced.

In a statement, Fetterman said his vote to approve Mullin was "rooted in a strong, committed, constructive working relationship with Senator Mullin for our nation's security."

Paul at the Wednesday hearing took issue with Mullin referring to him as a "freaking snake" and expressing sympathy for a neighbor who assaulted Paul in 2017, breaking six ribs and injuring a lung.

Mullin told senators in the hearing that he aims to lead DHS differently than Homeland Security Secretary

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Kristi Noem, the former South Dakota governor whom the president removed from the post earlier this month and reassigned to another position within the administration.

Mullin said he would do away with several policies that Noem implemented, such as a requirement for disaster grants to be personally approved by the secretary of Homeland Security.

He added that he wants DHS to "not be in the news every day," referencing the aggressive enforcement tactics by immigration agents that have been caught on camera, including their involvement in the deaths of two Minneapolis residents.

Mullin will likely leave his Senate seat after he votes for his own nomination to lead DHS. It's similar to a move by Secretary of State Marco Rubio last year, when he left his U.S. Senate seat representing Florida after voting to confirm his nomination to lead the State Department.

The top Democrat on the committee, Sen. Gary Peters of Michigan, said Thursday that DHS "needs a leader who can restore the trust that DHS has broken with the American people," and that he did not have confidence that Mullin could tackle that challenge.

Peters, like Paul, raised concerns about Mullin's "temperament to lead this critical department."

"There will be no shortage of political disagreements facing the new DHS secretary," Peters said. "The department and the American people deserve a leader who is steady and proven under pressure, not just someone better than the very low bar set by his predecessor."

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.

US Senate again refuses to limit Trump's war in Iran

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — U.S. Senate Republicans and one Democrat blocked another War Powers Resolution Wednesday night to stop President Donald Trump from further military action in Iran without authorization from Congress.

The resolution failed to advance, 47-53. Sen. John Fetterman, D-Pa., broke with Democrats to join Republicans in opposing the measure. Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., voted in favor.

The vote came two weeks after a similar effort to rein in Trump's executive war powers failed in the Senate, and a day later in the U.S. House.

The vote also occurred hours after congressional Democrats, including Sen. Chris Van Hollen, D-Md., protested on the Capitol lawn against the war, calling attention to a U.S. strike on the war's first day that killed more than 100 elementary school children.

Booker leads opposition to war

Sen. Cory Booker, D-N.J., one of the resolution's lead sponsors, said "Americans are paying the price" for the U.S.-Israeli war in Iran.

Booker said Trump, whom he described as "cocky" about the conflict, should send Cabinet members before the Senate to testify under oath.

"Thousands of people have died in this war. In barely two weeks, 200 Americans have been injured in this war. Thirteen Americans have paid the ultimate price for a war that we have gone into on the decision made by one man. The American people at large are paying costs in the billions of dollars a week," Booker said on the floor ahead of the vote.

Booker was joined by Sens. Tim Kaine, D-Va., Adam Schiff, D-Calif., and Chris Murphy, D-Conn, in sponsoring the measure. One Republican, Paul, co-sponsored the previous War Powers Resolution aimed at curtailing Trump's actions in Iran.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said "there's no end in sight" to the war.

"No more senseless wars in the Middle East. No more gas prices shooting through the roof. No more US

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service members fighting and dying in endless wars," he said on the floor just before the vote.

Graham defends war

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., a vocal proponent of Trump's war in Iran, said he knows the economy is "tough" for Americans.

"I know the economy on the gas front is hurting, but I do believe this with every ounce of my being — if we had not done this, they would be on the path, the Iranian regime, to a nuclear capability, and they would use it. Eventually, they would use it or give it to somebody who would," Graham said.

Oil shot up to nearly \$111 a barrel on the global market Wednesday as Iran continues to block a major shipping route.

Sen. Jim Risch, R-Idaho, dismissed the Democrats' "dangerous, obstructive resolutions."

"Fellow senators, I urge you tonight to join me in defeating this resolution, as we have done over and over again," said Risch, Senate Foreign Relations Committee chair, on the floor ahead of the vote.

A War Powers Resolution to cut off Trump's military power in Venezuela narrowly failed in the Senate in January when Vice President JD Vance had to break a tie.

War Powers Resolutions require a simple majority to advance.

The 1973 War Powers Resolution law mandates the president report to Congress within 48 hours of deploying troops. If after 60 days from first notice Congress has not authorized a war or passed legislation related to the military action, the president's use of armed forces is automatically terminated.

Congress passed the act to rein in presidential war powers, despite a veto from President Richard Nixon amid the ongoing Vietnam War. Congress overrode the veto.

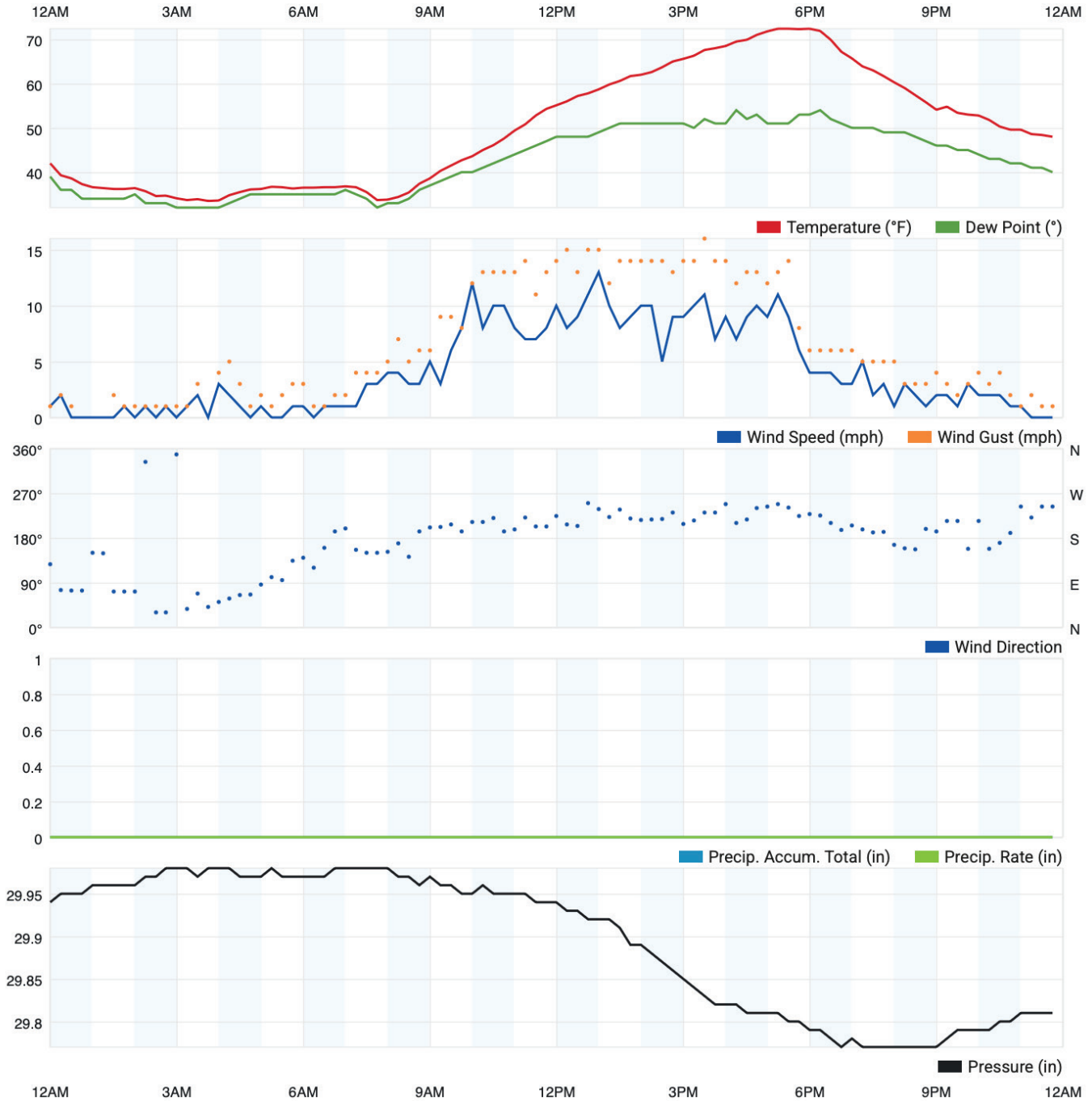
Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

March 19, 2026



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Today



High: 71 °F

Mostly Sunny

Tonight



Low: 39 °F

Partly Cloudy

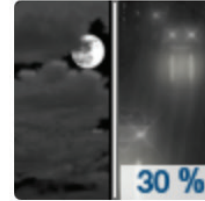
Saturday



High: 76 °F

Partly Sunny

Saturday Night



Low: 32 °F

Mostly Cloudy
then Chance
Rain

Sunday



High: 45 °F

Partly Sunny



A WARM DRY BREEZE OF A MARCH DAY

CONDITIONS BOXED
IN RED DENOTE
AREAS OF ELEVATED
FIRE WEATHER
CONCERN

RECORD OR NEAR
RECORD HIGHS STILL
POSSIBLE TODAY AND
SATURDAY

CLOSER TO AVERAGE
TEMPERATURES
SUNDAY AND
MONDAY

Maximum Temperature (°F) & Minimum RH (%) & Maximum Wind Gust (mph) Forecast

Location	Metric	3/20 Fri												3/20 Fri																					
		7am	8am	9am	10am	11am	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm	9pm	10pm	11pm	7am	8am	9am	10am	11am	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm	9pm	10pm	11pm
Murdo	Max Temp	44	44	49	57	64	69	74	77	80	81	81	81	77	70	65	61	57	38	37	41	48	55	61	67	70	73	75	74	69	63	58	53	51	
	RH	65	65	54	45	38	35	29	25	23	21	21	21	24	31	37	41	47	96	100	93	77	64	56	47	44	40	37	37	38	47	56	64	77	80
	WindGust	20*	20*	21*	22*	22*	23*	23*	23*	22*	21*	17*	14*	10*	10*	10*	12*	12*	5*	10*	12*	12*	14*	16*	18*	18*	18*	17*	15*	13*	10*	8*	10*	12*	13*
Eagle Butte	Max Temp	44	44	48	56	62	68	72	75	76	78	79	79	76	67	61	57	56	38	36	39	46	51	56	63	65	70	73	74	73	67	62	57	52	50
	RH	70	73	65	53	44	37	33	29	27	26	25	25	28	39	48	53	55	100	100	96	83	74	64	52	42	40	38	40	49	58	67	77	80	
	WindGust	23*	23*	23*	23*	24*	24*	25*	25*	25*	24*	22*	18*	16*	14*	14*	14*	14*	3*	3*	3*	3*	12*	14*	16*	16*	16*	16*	12*	10*	8*	10*	12*	12*	
Pierre	Max Temp	42	42	46	53	61	67	73	76	78	81	81	80	76	68	63	59	56	37	38	41	46	50	55	58	60	63	65	65	61	58	54	52	50	
	RH	76	76	71	61	50	42	34	32	29	26	26	28	33	42	50	53	59	100	100	93	83	80	69	64	62	56	52	52	52	62	67	74	77	83
	WindGust	12*	12*	12*	14*	15*	16*	18*	18*	18*	17*	15*	12*	8*	8*	8*	8*	8*	4*	4*	4*	10*	13*	16*	19*	19*	19*	17*	16*	13*	10*	10*	12*	12*	
McIntosh	Max Temp	42	43	48	53	59	64	70	71	74	77	77	76	73	66	62	58	57	37	37	40	43	47	52	58	60	63	64	63	60	56	52	49	48	
	RH	82	79	65	59	51	45	36	36	33	29	29	31	35	43	50	55	57	100	100	96	89	83	71	62	58	54	50	54	60	69	80	86	86	
	WindGust	22*	22*	23*	23*	23*	24*	25*	25*	26*	25*	23*	21*	17*	16*	15*	14*	15*	3*	3*	3*	3*	12*	14*	17*	17*	17*	17*	13*	12*	10*	10*	12*	13*	
Chamberlain	Max Temp	44	42	47	55	62	68	72	75	78	79	79	80	77	72	66	62	60	38	37	41	44	50	56	61	63	66	66	67	66	62	57	55	51	50
	RH	70	76	68	55	44	39	34	32	29	28	28	26	30	34	40	48	49	96	100	93	89	77	66	58	50	50	49	50	56	67	72	80	83	
	WindGust	10*	12*	12*	13*	14*	16*	18*	20*	20*	18*	16*	13*	8*	8*	8*	8*	8*	3*	3*	3*	3*	10*	13*	15*	16*	16*	17*	15*	13*	12*	10*	8*	10*	
Gettysburg	Max Temp	40	40	44	51	59	65	70	73	76	77	77	77	73	66	60	56	54	38	36	37	43	47	53	57	60	65	66	66	64	61	56	52	50	47
	RH	89	89	79	68	53	43	38	34	31	30	30	30	35	43	53	59	64	100	100	100	89	83	66	62	58	50	47	48	54	60	69	80	83	93
	WindGust	15*	16*	17*	18*	20*	21*	23*	23*	23*	22*	21*	17*	14*	13*	13*	12*	13*	4*	4*	4*	4*	12*	14*	15*	15*	13*	12*	10*	10*	10*	12*	13*		
Mobridge	Max Temp	39	40	44	49	57	64	70	73	75	78	78	77	71	64	59	53	53	38	38	39	44	48	54	58	61	64	67	65	64	60	54	51	47	46
	RH	89	85	76	68	55	45	38	34	32	29	29	30	36	45	53	66	64	100	100	100	86	77	64	60	56	52	45	50	60	71	77	89	89	
	WindGust	14*	15*	15*	16*	18*	20*	21*	20*	20*	20*	17*	15*	12*	12*	12*	12*	12*	3*	3*	3*	3*	10*	12*	12*	13*	12*	10*	8*	8*	8*	8*	10*		
Miller	Max Temp	42	42	46	52	60	65	71	73	76	77	77	76	71	63	57	54	52	40	38	39	43	47	53	58	59	63	65	66	65	60	53	52	49	46
	RH	82	85	76	69	58	48	41	40	34	32	33	33	41	50	62	66	71	100	100	100	93	86	74	64	64	56	52	52	62	80	80	80	83	93
	WindGust	15*	16*	16*	17*	20*	20*	22*	22*	22*	21*	17*	15*	12*	12*	12*	12*	14*	10*	10*	10*	10*	10*	10*	12*	12*	12*	10*	10*	8*	8*	8*	10*		
Eureka	Max Temp	37	38	41	48	54	60	65	69	71	73	74	73	70	62	59	53	52	36	36	37	40	44	48	51	54	55	58	59	59	55	52	49	46	44
	RH	100	96	93	77	66	55	46	42	38	35	34	37	41	52	57	71	74	100	100	100	92	82	77	71	69	66	62	60	60	69	77	83	93	96
	WindGust	12*	13*	14*	15*	18*	20*	22*	22*	21*	21*	17*	14*	12*	12*	12*	13*	14*	12*	12*	12*	12*	12*	12*	12*	10*	10*	10*	8*	8*	8*	8*	10*		

Max Temp >= 70 AND RH <= 35 AND WindGust >= 20

March 20, 2026 3:17 AM

The warmer than average temperatures will continue today and Saturday, with highs from near 60 to the mid 80s! And with that heat, things will continue to dry out, including afternoon relative humidity values throughout and west of the Missouri River valley. Winds should continue with some sort of westerly component to them, including gusts generally less than 25 mph. More record high temperatures may fall today, as well.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 73 °F at 5:18 PM (Tied record high)

Low Temp: 33 °F at 3:53 AM

Wind: 16 mph at 3:27 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 75 in 1910

Record Low: -6 in 1965

Average High: 44

Average Low: 21

Average Precip in Mar.: 0.52

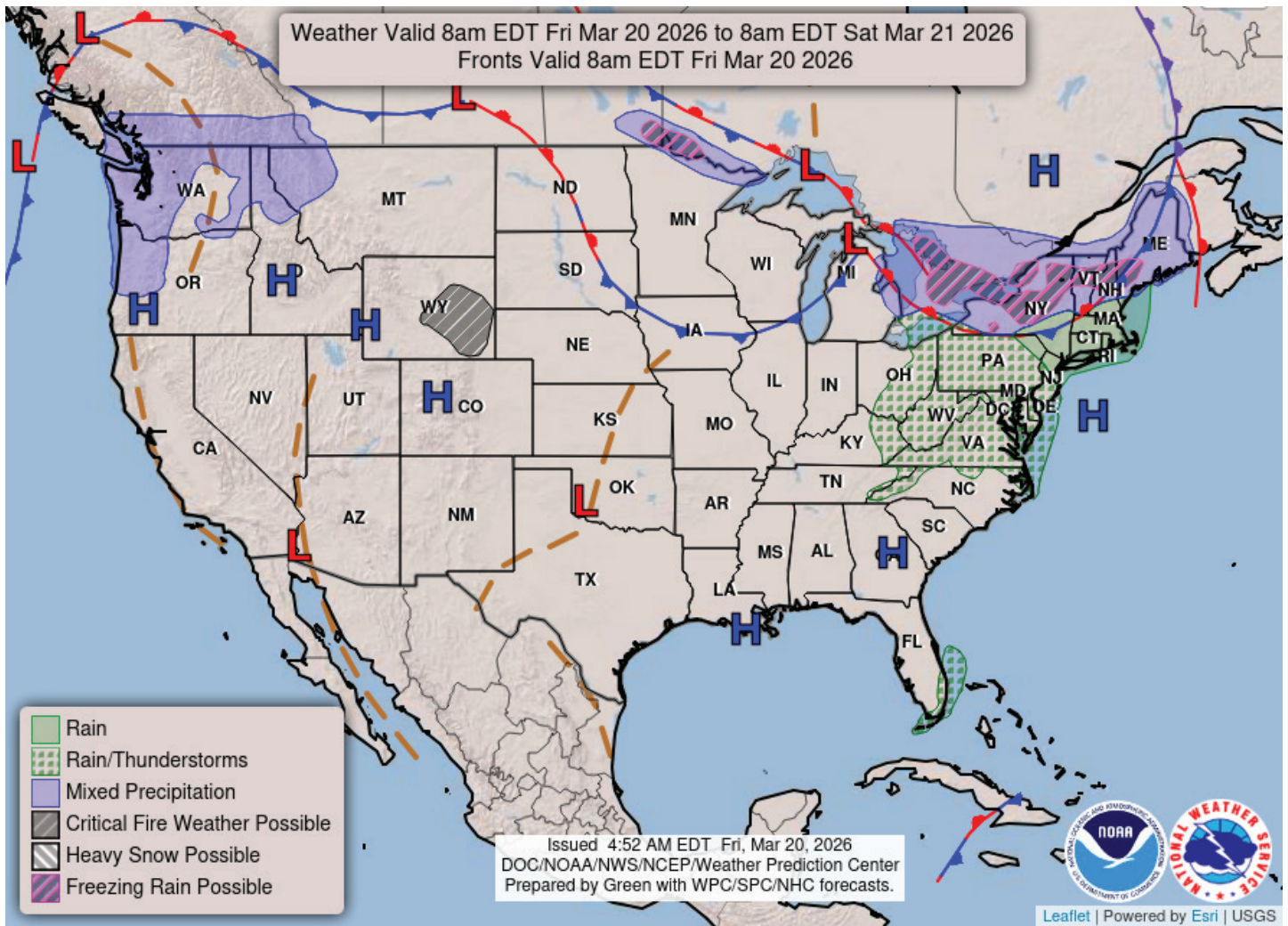
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.29

Average Precip to date: 1.69

Precip Year to Date: 1.62

Sunset Tonight: 7:44 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:33 am



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Today in Weather History

March 20th, 1982: A winter storm dropped 10-20 inches of heavy wet snow across the northern two-thirds of South Dakota. Five persons were killed and eight others injured in indirect accidents. Downed power lines caused isolated power outages. A half dozen newborn calves died of exposure near Lemmon in Perkins County. Also, 5% of the pheasant population in Brown, Edmunds, and Faulk Counties were killed. The weight of the snow collapsed a canopy of a grocery store in McLaughlin, Corson County, tearing out part of the brick front and breaking windows in the store.

March 20th, 2008: A storm system moving across the Central Plains brought widespread heavy snow from the late afternoon through the early morning hours to north-central and northeast South Dakota. Heavy snow of 6 to as much as 18 inches fell in this area, resulting in school delays, cancelations, and treacherous travel conditions. Some snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Bowdle, South Shore, and Bradley; 7 inches at Eureka, Chelsea, Bristol, and Pollock; 8 inches near Hosmer, Osaka, and Roscoe; 9 inches at Victor; 10 inches at Westport and Ipswich. Locations with a foot or more of snowfall included 12 inches at Columbia, Milbank, and Waubay; 13 inches at Sisseton and Webster; 14 inches at Big Stone City; 15 inches at Summit; 16 inches at Roy Lake; 18 inches at Wilmot and Pickerel Lake State Park.

1924 — A late winter storm in Oklahoma produced nearly a foot of snow at Oklahoma City and at Tulsa. (David Ludlum)

1948 — The city of Juneau received 31 inches of snow in 24 hours, a record for the Alaska capitol. (20th-21st) (David Ludlum)

1984 — A severe three day winter storm came to an end over the Central Plains. The storm produced up to twenty inches of snow in Colorado, Nebraska and Kansas, and left a thick coat of ice from eastern Kansas across northwestern Missouri into Iowa. (Storm Data)

1987 — A storm produced blizzard conditions in Wyoming and eastern Nebraska, and severe thunderstorms in central Nebraska. Snowfall totals ranged up to 12 inches at Glenrock WY and Chadron NE. Thunderstorms in central Nebraska produced wind gusts to 69 mph at Valentine, and wind gusts to 76 mph at Bartley. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 — Squalls in the Great Lakes Region left up to eight inches of new snow on the ground in time for the official start of spring. Unseasonably warm weather prevailed in the western U.S. Seven cities reported new record high temperatures for the date, including Tucson AZ with a reading of 89 degrees. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 — Snow and high winds created blizzard conditions in western Kansas to usher in the official start of the spring season. Thunderstorms produced severe weather from east Texas to Alabama and northwest Florida, with nearly fifty reports of large hail and damaging winds during the afternoon and evening hours. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 — The northeastern U.S. was in the midst of a snowstorm as spring officially began at 4 19 PM. Snowfall totals in the Green Mountains of Vermont ranged up to thirty inches, and up to 15 inches of snow was reported in the Catskills and Adirondacks of eastern New York State. Totals in eastern Pennsylvania ranged up to 12 inches at Armenia Mountain. The storm resulted in one death, and forty-nine injuries. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2005 — An F1 tornado hits South San Francisco. Trees are uprooted. At least twenty homes and twenty businesses are damaged, including the city's new fire station.

2006 — Grand Island, NE, receives 17.8 inches of snow in 24 hours, breaking the old local record for the most snowfall in a day by 4.8 inches. 29.7 inches in 48 hours also breaks a record.

Blessed to Bless Others

Sharing our blessings with others leads to more blessings—not deprivation..

2 Corinthians 9:6-15: 6 Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

7 Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed;

9 as it is written, ``HE SCATTERED ABROAD, HE GAVE TO THE POOR, HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDURES FOREVER.”

10 Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness;

11 you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.

12 For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God.

13 Because of the proof given by this ministry, they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all,

14 while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you.

15 Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

God’s blessings to us are not meant to end with us. He desires that they filter down to others. This principle applies in all areas of life, including our finances. Did you know that our heavenly Father has plans for our money?

The Lord graciously supplies us with income so we can provide for our needs and even some of our wants. But He also expects us to use our money to achieve His purposes. And one of those is to share our resources with others.

Look at His extravagant promise in 2 Corinthians 9: “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed” (v. 8). This encouraging verse is a good reminder that sharing blessings with others will not lead to deprivation. In fact, the Lord promises to increase the harvest of our righteousness and enrich us abundantly in response to our generosity (Luke 6:38). Simply put, we can never outgive God.

A hoarded blessing is never enjoyed as richly as a shared one. Using your gift to meet someone else’s need glorifies the Lord by demonstrating His grace at work in your life. So don’t allow His generous provisions to stop with you. Instead, pass them on to others and discover the joy of never-ending blessings.

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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The Groton Independent

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WINNING NUMBERS

MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.19.26

7 35 55 56 57 4

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

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 54 Mins 6 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.17.26

4 11 18 38 50 24

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$50,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 39 Mins 6 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: 1 Days 16 Hrs 54 Mins 6 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.18.26

3 7 20 29 31

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$28,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 9 Mins 6 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.18.26

9 13 25 26 46 23

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 38 Mins 6 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: 1 Days 17 Hrs 38 Mins 6 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the **AP** Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

SDHSAA State Playoffs=

Quarterfinal=

Class AA=

Harrisburg 65, Watertown 61

Huron 60, Sioux Falls O'Gorman 45

Sioux Falls Lincoln 69, Tea 44

Sioux Falls Roosevelt 58, Brandon Valley 47

Class A=

Clark-Willow Lake 66, Stanley County 36

Hamlin 65, Groton 61

Sioux Falls Christian 82, St Thomas More 59

West Central 75, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 41

Class B=

Castlewood 53, Aberdeen Christian 50

Freeman 63, Sully Buttes 55

Lyman 49, Viborg-Hurley 44

Wall 31, DeSmet 30

Some high school basketball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

TCU women again hosting March Madness and looking to extend their 42-game home winning streak

By STEPHEN HAWKINS AP Sports Writer

FORT WORTH, Texas (AP) — TCU's 42-game home winning streak started more than two years ago with a group known as the "Underfrogs" after that team had to forfeit two games. That extended through last year's breakout in Hailey Van Lith's lone season with the Horned Frogs, and now into another NCAA Tournament at home with Olivia Miles, their playmaking point guard.

"It's maybe one of the things I'm most proud of ... a 42-game winning streak that each team has contributed to," third-year TCU coach Mark Campbell said Thursday. "I absolutely love it."

Three distinctly different rosters for Campbell, all bolstered by experienced transfers, have been part of the streak that matches Texas for the nation's longest. Both teams are hosting NCAA regional games again. Third-seeded TCU takes on Big West tournament champion UC San Diego (24-8) on Friday, before sixth-seeded Washington (21-10) plays South Dakota State (27-6) in the other game in Fort Worth.

"Being able to play last year, make it to March and then continue that this year, I think (Campbell) has just done a great job putting together pieces of a puzzle and making sure that we all fit together, making sure that the culture is right, that our consistency as a team is put together well," junior guard Donovan Hunter said.

Hunter and senior guard Taylor Bigby are the only returners who played last season when the Horned Frogs made their first NCAA Sweet 16 after their first Big 12 regular-season title — which they defended this year with newcomers Miles, Marta Suarez and Clara Silva in the starting lineup. That record 34-win season last year included victories over Fairleigh Dickinson and Louisville when TCU hosted NCAA Tournament games for the first time.

There are no players left from Campbell's first TCU team in 2023-24, a roster with Sedona Prince that started 14-0 before the standout post player broke her finger, then top shooter Madison Conner got hurt.

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The Frogs were down to six scholarship players when they forfeited two games the week they were having open tryouts on campus. That squad started the streak at Schollmaeir Arena by winning its last two home games.

"It shows that we're able to win with the hand that we're dealt," Campbell said. "The 'Underfrog' story is so unique and amazing, and I love that they played a part in the winning streak. But to do it 42 games, if you told me that three years ago that you'd have the longest home winning streak in college basketball, men or women, I probably wouldn't believe you."

Old Huskies

Washington has a roster with four seniors who have stayed together for four seasons, while the team's leading scorer Sayvia Sellers (18.5 ppg) is a third-year junior.

The Huskies last season made the NCAA tourney for the first time since a Sweet 16 appearance in 2016-17. They lost a First Four game to Columbia, but now have another chance in March Madness.

"Coming back, obviously you have more confidence naturally. We've been here before, so just trying to continue to learn, stay in the moment," said guard Elle Ladine, one of the four-year seniors.

"When the senior class, especially our four seniors that have been here for four years, came into the program, we had a lot of growth ahead of us," coach Tina Langley said. "It's just been really neat to see them continue to help us grow each year."

Tritons 2 for 2

UC San Diego has made the NCAA Tournament in both seasons since gaining full Division I postseason eligibility, after losing a First Four game to Southern last year.

"Last year we were really excited to experience actually our first year that we were eligible in Division I," said Tritons coach Heidi VanDerveer, the sister of Hall of Famer and former Stanford coach Tara VanDerveer. "This team is totally different than last year's team. So I think the experience comes from three or four people of embracing a tremendous opportunity."

Even with some transfers, their leading scorer and rebounder is 6-foot-4 junior forward Erin Condron (15.7 ppg, 8.6 rpg), who is in her third season in the program.

"From when I first entered this program to now, there's been just insane growth" Condron said. "It drew me in, the culture that Heidi wanted to create and has continued to build."

Streaking Jackrabbits

South Dakota State brings a 10-game winning streak and its 15th consecutive 20-win season into the NCAA Tournament.

The 11th-seeded Jackrabbits from the Summit League have twice won as a double-digit seed, including over seventh-seeded Oklahoma State last March.

The only other programs with such a long streak of 20-win seasons are No. 1 overall seed UConn, Baylor, Louisville and South Carolina.

Iran hits Kuwaiti oil refinery and explosions boom over Tehran from Israeli attack

By JON GAMBRELL and DAVID RISING Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — A Kuwaiti oil refinery came under Iranian drone attack early Friday and sirens in Israel warned of incoming fire, while explosions boomed over Tehran from Israeli strikes as the country marked the Persian New Year.

The war that has rocked the global economy neared the end of its third week with Iran showing no signs of letting up on its attacks on Gulf region energy structure. Kuwait said two waves of drone strikes at its Mina Al-Ahmadi oil refinery sparked a fire and crews were working to control the blaze.

The refinery, which can process some 730,000 barrels of oil per day, was already damaged Thursday in another Iranian attack. It is one of three oil refineries in Kuwait, a small, oil-rich Gulf nation.

Iran stepped up its attacks on energy sites in Gulf Arab states after Israel on Wednesday bombed Iran's massive South Pars offshore natural gas field in the Persian Gulf.

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Loud explosions could also be heard in Jerusalem after the Israeli army warned of incoming Iranian missiles.

In a rare statement, the country's new Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei said Iran's enemies need to have their "security" taken away. Khamenei hasn't been seen since he succeeded his father, the 86-year-old Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who was killed in an Israeli airstrike on the first day of the war.

His remarks came in a statement issued on his behalf and sent to President Masoud Pezeshkian, after Israel killed Intelligence Minister Esmail Khatib earlier this week.

Explosions shake Dubai and warehouse in Bahrain set ablaze

Heavy explosions shook Dubai as air defenses intercepted early incoming fire over the city, where people were observing Eid al-Fitr, the end of the holy Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, and mosques made the day's first call to prayers.

Bahrain's Interior Ministry said a fire broke out after shrapnel from an intercepted projectile landed on a warehouse, and Saudi Arabia reported shooting down multiple drones targeting its oil-rich Eastern Province.

The renewed attacks came after an intense day that saw Iran hit energy infrastructure around the region and launch more than a dozen missile salvos at Israel following the attack on South Pars.

South Pars, the Iranian part of the world's largest gas field, is located offshore in the Persian Gulf and owned jointly with Qatar. With some 80% of power generated in Iran coming from natural gas, the attack posed a direct threat to the country's electricity supplies.

Fears grow of global energy crisis

Late Thursday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the country would hold off on any further attacks on the gas field at the request of U.S. President Donald Trump after the Iranian response sent oil prices skyrocketing.

The Israeli prime minister also claimed Iran's capability to produce ballistic missiles had been taken out, but the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard insisted in comments released Friday that they were still in production.

"We are producing missiles even during war conditions, which is amazing, and there is no particular problem in stockpiling," spokesman Gen. Ali Mohammad Naeini was quoted as saying in Iran's state-run IRAN newspaper.

Naeini, who was killed early Friday in an airstrike, according to Iranian state television, said Iran had no intention of seeking a quick end to the war.

"These people expect the war to continue until the enemy is completely exhausted," he said. "This war must end when the shadow of war is lifted from the country."

Beyond Iran's attacks on its Gulf Arab neighbors, its stranglehold on shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, a strategic waterway through which a fifth of the world's oil and other critical goods are transported, has caused rising concerns of a global energy crisis.

Brent crude oil, the international standard, which spiked to more than \$119 a barrel during Iran's attacks Thursday, was around \$107 in morning trading on Friday, up more than 47% since Israel and the United States attacked Iran on Feb. 28 to start the conflict.

Sirens in Israel and explosions in Tehran

In Israel, sirens early Friday warned of attacks on Jerusalem and on the north, sending people again scrambling to shelters. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

Not long after Israel announced that it had begun new strikes on Iran, the sound of explosions were heard in Tehran, as Iranians marked Nowruz, or the Persian New Year. Associated Press journalists in Tehran heard more airstrikes targeting the capital just before noon.

In addition to steadily striking Iran, Israel has regularly hit Lebanon, targeting Iran-backed Hezbollah.

On Friday, it broadened its attacks to Syria, saying it hit infrastructure there in response to attacks on the minority Druze population in southern Sweida province. Syria's state-run SANA news agency did not immediately acknowledge the attack.

Israel, which has a significant Druze population, previously has intervened in defense of the Druze in

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Syria, launching dozens of airstrikes on convoys of government fighters and even striking the Syrian Defense Ministry headquarters in central Damascus.

Israel's police and domestic security service announced Friday that they had arrested a reservist who worked with the country's Iron Dome missile defense system on allegations he had been selling sensitive security information to Iran. The agency said the soldier had been in contact with Iranian intelligence for several months.

More than 1,300 people in Iran have been killed during the war. Israeli strikes against the Hezbollah militant group in Lebanon have displaced more than 1 million people, according to the Lebanese government, which says more than 1,000 people have been killed. Israel says it has killed more than 500 Hezbollah militants.

In Israel, 15 people have been killed by Iranian missile fire. Four people were also killed in the occupied West Bank by an Iranian missile strike.

At least 13 U.S. military members have been killed.

UAE arrests five accused of attempting to undermine country's financial stability

The UAE said Friday it disrupted what it called "a terrorist network funded and operated by Lebanon's Hezbollah and Iran."

It arrested five men accused of laundering money, alleging they were "operating within the country under a fictitious commercial cover" that sought to carry out schemes that would threaten the country's financial stability.

It published images of five prisoners on its state-run WAM news agency, without identifying them.

Early Southwest heat is latest in parade of weather extremes as Earth warms

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The dangerous heat wave shattering March records all over the U.S. Southwest is more than just another extreme weather blip. It's the latest next-level weather wildness that is occurring ever more frequently as Earth's warming builds.

Experts said unprecedented and deadly weather extremes that sometimes strike at abnormal times and in unusual places are putting more people in danger. For example, the Southwest is used to coping with deadly heat, but not months ahead of schedule, including a 110-degree Fahrenheit (43.3 Celsius) reading in the Arizona desert on Thursday that smashed the highest March temperature recorded in the U.S.

On Thursday, sites in Arizona and southern California had preliminary readings of 109 F (about 43 C), which would be the hottest March day on record for the United States.

"This is what climate change looks like in real time: extremes pushing beyond the bounds we once thought possible," said University of Victoria climate scientist Andrew Weaver. "What used to be unprecedented events are now recurring features of a warming world."

March's heat would have been virtually impossible without human-caused climate change, according to a report Friday by World Weather Attribution, an international group of scientists who study the causes of extreme weather events.

More than a dozen scientists, meteorologists and disaster experts queried by The Associated Press put the March heat wave in a kind of ultra-extreme classification with such events as the 2021 Pacific Northwest heat wave, the 2022 Pakistan floods and killer hurricanes Helene, Harvey and Sandy.

The area of the U.S. being hit by extreme weather in the past five years has doubled from 20 years ago, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Climate Extremes Index, which includes various types of wild weather, such as heat and cold waves, downpours and drought.

The United States is breaking 77% more hot weather records now than in the 1970s and 19% more than the 2010s, according to an AP analysis of NOAA records. In the United States, the number and average cost of inflation-adjusted billion-dollar weather disasters in the last couple years is twice as high as just 10 years ago and nearly four times higher than 30 years ago, according to records kept by NOAA and Climate Central, a nonprofit group of scientists and communicators who research and report on climate change.

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Trying to keep up with extremes and failing

"It's really hard to even keep up with how extreme our extremes are becoming," said Climate Central Chief Meteorologist Bernadette Woods Placky. "It's changing our risk, it's change our relationship with weather, it's putting more people in risky situations and at times we're not used to. So yes, we are pushing extremes to new levels across all different types of weather."

For government officials who have to deal with disaster it's been a huge problem.

Craig Fugate, who directed the Federal Emergency Management Agency until 2017, said he saw extremes increasing.

"We were operating outside the historical playbook more and more. Flood maps, surge models, heat records — events kept showing up outside the envelope we built systems around. That's just what we saw," Fugate said via email.

He added: "We built communities on about 100 years of past weather and assumed that was a good guide going forward. That assumption is starting to break. And the clearest signal isn't the science debate. It's insurers walking away."

'Virtually impossible' without climate change

Climate scientists at World Weather Attribution did a flash analysis — which is not peer-reviewed yet — of whether climate change was a factor in this Southwest heat wave. They compared this week's expected temperatures to what's been observed in the area in March since 1900 and computer models of a world with climate change. They found that "events as warm as in March 2026 would have been virtually impossible without human-induced climate change."

That warming, from the burning of coal, oil and natural gas, added between 4.7 degrees to 7.2 degrees F (2.6 to 4 degrees C) to the temperatures being felt, the report found.

"What we can very confidently say is that human-caused warming has increased the temperatures that we're seeing as a result of this heat dome, and it's going to be pushing those temperatures from what would have been very uncomfortable into potentially dangerous," said report co-author Clair Barnes, an Imperial College of London attribution scientist.

Examples abound of high heat and extreme weather

The Southwest heat wave is solidly in the category of "giant events," with temperatures up to 30 degrees Fahrenheit (16.7 degrees Celsius) above normal, said Stanford University climate scientist Chris Field.

He listed five others in the last six years: a 2020 Siberia heat wave, the 2021 Pacific Northwest heat wave that had British Columbia warmer than Death Valley, the summer of 2022 in North America, China and Europe, a 2023 western Mediterranean heat wave and a 2023 South Asian heat wave with high humidity.

And that doesn't include the East Antarctica heat wave of 2022 when temperatures were 81 degrees (45 degrees Celsius) warmer than normal. That's the biggest anomaly recorded, said weather historian Chris Burt, author of the book "Extreme Weather."

Worsening wild weather influenced by climate change isn't just superhot days, but includes deadly hurricanes, droughts and downpours, scientists told AP.

Devastating floods hit West Africa in 2022 and again in 2024. Iran is in the midst of a six-year drought. And the deadly Typhoon Haiyan hitting the Philippines in 2013 shocked the world.

Superstorm Sandy, which in 2012 flooded New York City and neighbors, had tropical storm-force winds that covered an area nearly one-fifth the area of the contiguous United States. It spawned 12-foot seas over 1.4 million square miles, about half the size of the U.S., with energy equivalent to five Hiroshima-sized atomic bombs, said Yale Climate Connections meteorologist Jeff Masters.

And don't forget wildfires that are worsened by heat and drought, so recent extremes should include 2025's Palisades and Eaton wildfires, which were the costliest weather disaster in the United States last year, said Climate Central meteorologist and economist Adam Smith.

"This is due to climate change, that we see more extreme events, and more intense ones and have so many records being broken," said Friederike Otto, an Imperial College of London climate scientist who coordinates World Weather Attribution.

Oil prices ease and world shares are mixed as energy supply worries over Iran war remain

By CHAN HO-HIM AP Business Writer

HONG KONG (AP) — Oil prices on Friday pared earlier gains on the intensifying Iran war, falling back to around \$108 a barrel, as Iran strikes Gulf energy facilities, while world shares were mixed following Wall Street losses.

U.S. futures edged up 0.1%.

Oil prices had a roller-coaster day on Thursday with the Brent crude, the international standard, briefly surging to around \$119 per barrel as attacks by Iran on oil and gas facilities around the Gulf escalated after Israel's attack of Iran's key natural gas field.

In early Friday trading, Brent crude fell 0.1% to \$108.51 a barrel, following Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's remarks that he would hold off on further attacks on Iran's gas field at the request of U.S. President Donald Trump. Benchmark U.S. crude was down 0.2% to \$95.33 a barrel.

The Iran war, which is in its third week, has sent energy prices soaring and is fueling global inflation worries. Concerns are also growing over the supply of oil and gas with the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial waterway for the energy supply located between Iran and Oman, largely closed. U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent on Thursday floated the possibility of lifting its sanctions on Iranian oil at sea in a potential attempt to ease oil prices.

In early European trading, Britain's FTSE 100 was up 0.4% to 10,105.39. France's CAC 40 gained 0.7% to 7,864.67, while Germany's DAX rose 1.1% to 23,082.53.

Asian markets were mostly lower. Hong Kong's Hang Seng lost 0.9% to 25,277.32, while the Shanghai Composite index was down 1.2% to 3,957.05.

South Korea's Kospi gained 0.3% to 5,781.20. Japan's Nikkei 225 was closed on Friday on a holiday.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 was down 0.8% to 8,428.40.

Taiwan's Taiex was 0.4% lower, while India's Sensex was up 0.8%.

On Thursday, Wall Street reported modest losses. The S&P 500 was down 0.3% to 6,606.49. The Dow Jones Industrial Average lost 0.4% to 46,021.43, and the Nasdaq composite was 0.3% lower at 22,090.69.

Shares of U.S. memory chip maker Micron Technology were down 3.8% even though the company reported better-than-expected quarterly results. Its shares were still up roughly 330% over the past year on a worldwide memory shortage.

In other dealings early Friday, gold and silver prices gained. Gold fell below \$4,700 earlier, partly on inflation worries. On Friday, gold prices gained 2% to \$4,696.30 per ounce. Silver prices rose 2.7% to \$73.15 an ounce.

The U.S. dollar rose to 158.48 Japanese yen from 157.76 yen. The euro was trading at \$1.1567, down from \$1.1589.

Fire at South Korean auto parts factory injures at least 55

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — A fire at an auto parts factory in South Korea's central city of Daejeon injured at least 55 people on Friday, with officials warning the toll could rise.

The National Fire Agency said 24 were seriously hurt in a blaze likely caused by an explosion. Officials could not immediately confirm whether any of the injured were in life-threatening condition. Nam Deuk-woo, fire chief of the city's Daedeok district, said authorities were searching for at least 14 other people believed to have been inside the facility when the fire broke out.

Videos and photos from the scene showed thick gray smoke billowing from the complex and some workers jumping from a building.

The fire was reported at about 1:18 p.m. Nam said the cause was not immediately known, but the blaze

appeared to have spread rapidly, with witnesses reporting an explosion.

He said the fire destroyed a factory building that firefighters were unable to enter because of concerns it could collapse. Efforts focused on preventing the blaze from spreading to an adjacent facility and removing chemicals from the site. The agency said the facility contained about 200 kilograms (440 pounds) of highly reactive chemicals.

Some people were injured when they jumped from the building to escape, while others suffered from smoke inhalation, Nam said. Police were tracking mobile phone signals of the 14 people still unaccounted-for.

More than 500 firefighters, police and other emergency personnel were deployed, along with about 120 vehicles, evacuation aircraft and equipment, including an unmanned water cannon vehicle and two firefighting robots used in areas difficult for crews to access.

President Lee Jae Myung called for the full mobilization of personnel and equipment to contain the fire and support rescue operations.

Ukraine faces growing pressure because of the war in Iran as Russia readies a new offensive

By The Associated Press undefined

With U.S.-brokered Ukraine peace talks on hold due to the war in the Middle East, Russian President Vladimir Putin is expected to try to expand his military gains via new offensives against his southern neighbor that could put even more pressure on Kyiv.

Windfall revenues from surging global oil prices are filling Moscow's war coffers and U.S. air defense assets are being drained quickly by Iranian attacks across the Gulf, raising concerns that little will be left available for Ukraine in the fifth year of Russia's full-scale invasion.

Ukraine's European allies have promised to maintain their steadfast support, but bickering over a major 90 billion euro (\$106 billion) European Union loan to cover Kyiv's military and economic needs for two years has reflected the mounting challenges.

The refusal by NATO allies to commit naval assets to help restore tanker traffic through the Strait of Hormuz has drawn an angry rebuke from President Donald Trump, highlighting another emerging fault line that is fraught with potential repercussions for Ukraine.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has sought to hold Washington's attention by offering its expertise in defending against Iranian Shahed drones, sending over 200 military experts to the Gulf. Trump, however, has shrugged off Zelenskyy's offer of help, saying the U.S. doesn't need Kyiv's assistance.

As new signs of a rift emerge in Western alliances, Putin and his generals are pondering plans for the spring and summer campaign across more than the 1,200-kilometer (about 750-mile) front line.

A possible new push from Russia

The Russian military appears to be readying for a renewed push to claim the part of the eastern Donetsk region that remains under Ukraine's control, as well as possible offensives in several other sectors.

Analysts have observed that Moscow has been building up reserves and its operations are expected to gain tempo as the spring warmth dries the terrain.

The Washington-based Institute for the Study of War has noted that Russian troops have stepped up artillery barrage and drone attacks, seeking to weaken Ukrainian defenses before ground attacks.

Ukraine has sought to derail the Kremlin's plans by launching counterattacks in the Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhzhia regions, where Russian forces have sought to carve out bridgeheads with an aim to advance toward the regional capitals, which are key industrial hubs.

The ISW said in a recent battlefield assessment that Ukraine's successful retaliation in the Dnipropetrovsk region will likely continue to force Russia to "choose between defending against the Ukrainian counterattacks and allocating manpower and materiel for offensive operations elsewhere" on the front, possibly spoiling the anticipated Russian offensive.

It also noted that Ukrainian forces have stepped up their midrange strikes against Russian logistics, military equipment and manpower to try to derail the expected offensive

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Russian war bloggers warn that Moscow would need to bolster its forces drastically to conduct any major offensive, something that raises challenges for the Kremlin.

After the widely unpopular "partial mobilization" of 300,000 reservists early in the war that prompted hundreds of thousands to flee the country to avoid being drafted, the Russian military has changed tactics, relying on volunteers and recruiting foreign fighters attracted by reasonably high wages and other benefits.

Putin said Russia has about 700,000 troops fighting in Ukraine, about the same number that Ukraine reportedly has.

From heavy armor to drones and missiles

After quick maneuvers by large numbers of tanks and mechanized infantry early in Russia's 2022 invasion, the fighting has morphed into a war of attrition in which small groups of soldiers fight grinding, house-to-house battles in the ruined towns and villages of eastern Ukraine. The ubiquitous drones have restricted the concentration of troops for any big moves.

Russia also has relied on long-range missiles and drones to pummel Ukraine's energy facilities and other vital infrastructure.

For the past year, Russia has been able to infiltrate and undermine Ukrainian defensive positions due to the "growing lethality" of Moscow's attacks and Kyiv's dwindling troop strength, said analyst Jack Watling of the Royal United Services Institute.

"Russia is likely able to maintain its current rate of recruitment, despite the punishing rate of casualties" inflicted by Ukraine, he added.

As part of preparing for new offensives, Russia increasingly has sought to enlist students into its newly formed Drone Forces, offering relatively high pay and deployment at a safe distance from the front.

Tulsi Gabbard, the U.S. director of national intelligence, told the Senate Intelligence Committee on Wednesday that "Russia has maintained the upper hand in the war against Ukraine."

She said the U.S.-led talks between Ukraine and Russia "are ongoing. Until such an agreement is met, Moscow is likely to continue fighting a slow war of attrition until they view their objectives have been achieved."

Both sides have entrenched positions

Several rounds of negotiations have produced no visible breakthrough as the parties remain sharply divided on key issues.

Putin wants Ukraine to withdraw its forces from the four regions that Russia has illegally annexed but never fully captured, renounce its bid to join NATO, sharply cut its army and drop restrictions against Russian language and the Moscow-affiliated Orthodox Church — demands Zelenskyy has rejected.

Zelenskyy has called for a ceasefire, U.S.-backed security guarantees to prevent Moscow invading again and has rejected claims over Ukrainian territory.

Kyiv's European allies accuse Moscow of dragging out the talks in hopes of making more gains and insisted that Europe must be present at the negotiations. Russia has rejected their participation.

Moscow says it won't allow any European troops to monitor a prospective ceasefire and will view them as legitimate targets.

"There have been signals from the Europeans indicating that they would like to take a place at the negotiating table regarding the Ukrainian settlement," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said this week, but added that "we don't consider it necessary or expedient."

Sam Greene, a professor at King's College London, said in a commentary that Moscow's strategy was obvious — "engaging with Washington just enough to prevent Ukraine from getting what it needed to shift the balance on the ground, and just enough to keep the Europeans at bay, but not enough to make real progress."

Trump takes aim at Zelenskyy

The U.S. has granted Moscow a temporary waiver from oil sanctions, allowing sales of Russian crude already at sea — to the dismay of Kyiv and the Europeans.

In addition, Trump has cast Zelenskyy as an obstacle to peace. "He has to get on the ball, and he has to get a deal done," Trump said of the Ukrainian leader earlier this month.

He said in an interview with NBC News that while Putin was ready for a deal, "it's much harder to reach a deal with Zelenskyy."

Trump also rebuffed Zelenskyy's proposal to help protect the U.S. forces and their allies in the Gulf from Iranian drones. "No, we don't need their help on drone defense," Trump told Fox News Radio.

Zelenskyy, who has taken a more practical public stance with Trump after their contentious White House meeting in February 2025, has expressed a growing concern that the Iran war could hurt Ukraine.

He told the BBC this week that he had a "very bad feeling" about the impact of the Middle East conflict on the war in Ukraine, noting that peace negotiations are being "constantly postponed" while Russia was profiting from high oil prices and Ukraine could face a deficit of U.S.-made Patriot missiles.

Dozens of boys and young men are dying in South Africa's traditional circumcision rites

By MOGOMOTSI MAGOME and ALFONSO NQUNJANA Associated Press

PHUTHADITJHABA, South Africa (AP) — The 22-year-old Lamkelo Mtyho had no known health issues when he joined his peers, wrapped in blankets and smeared in clay, for the most important ritual of his young life: the highly secretive process of traditional circumcision. His family in South Africa expected him to return triumphant, full of cultural knowledge and officially a man.

Three weeks later, they learned that he was dead.

He was one of at least 48 boys and young men who died during the latest round of initiation ceremonies in South Africa.

It is rare to hear the story of an initiate who died.

Because of participants' silence around the ritual, families and authorities have struggled to understand and police a deeply traditional but often abused practice. At least a half-dozen former initiates would not speak to The Associated Press. Meanwhile, hundreds of illegal initiation schools attract people who can't afford registered ones.

Police and government officials usually announce deaths only when a significant number occur. There are few court cases or autopsies.

Traditional circumcisions can carry fatal risks including poorly trained practitioners and cutting tools that are unsanitary or used more than once. Dehydration and badly managed septic wounds are among the main causes of death, and the remote settings mean help is usually far away.

"Imagine this number: 476 young people died in a five-year period and yet they were well before going into initiation. These deaths are unacceptable and should never have happened," former health minister Zwelini Mkhize told parliament last year.

But these are risks that hundreds of thousands of South Africans are ready to take.

The next season begins in June. They happen twice a year.

'He started losing strength and collapsed'

Mtyho attended a registered initiation school outside Ngqeleni village in Eastern Cape province, with his parents' blessing. Most schools take place in mud huts or shacks shared by dozens of young men, away from public glare.

His grandmother, Nozinzile, recounted what came next. A relative who worked as a guard at the school arrived with the news.

"They were walking to the river to go and bathe, and along the way he started losing strength and collapsed. That is what we were told," she said. "It is said that it was an emergency situation, that the others ran to get water and tried to resuscitate him. When other people arrived there to help, it was too late."

She spoke between long pauses. She sat outside the hut where Mtyho used to help with chores like carrying wood. She refused to blame anyone, and there was no attempt to verify the cause of death.

Initiation is not an easy thing, she said, but the thought of him dying had never crossed her mind. Mtyho was her eldest grandchild. He had planned to find a job in town so he could be "the man of the house."

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While announcing the latest initiation deaths in December, South Africa's Traditional Affairs Minister Velenkosini Hlabisa said some of the unproven advice often given to participants is to avoid drinking water in order to heal faster.

Initiates are a source of community pride

For families in South Africa, a successful initiation concludes with the participants' return. They present themselves to the community with traditional hymns and the recital of their clan names. Villagers join in with songs, chanting and dance.

A boy or young man who completes an initiation enjoys the benefits of higher status for marriage and the right to participate in certain cultural activities, important considerations for many of South Africa's ethnic groups.

They could have been medically circumcised at an early age, but cultural pressures mean that many prefer the traditional way.

"Initiation is a culture left behind to us by our elders. We grew up practicing it, as it teaches a young man to respect everyone, including those who are not initiates in society," said traditional leader Morena Mpmbe, who oversees a registered school in Phuthaditjhaba in Free State province.

The spread of illegal schools

High unemployment and economic inequality in South Africa mean that fees for government-regulated initiation schools can be out of reach. That is where illegal schools come in.

Some boys slip away to illegal schools long before they are 16, the age that South African law now requires, in their eagerness to "become men."

"It is very difficult for the government to monitor initiation schools which are not registered. They are not known until there is a tragedy of some sort," said Mluleki Ngomane, an official with the Gauteng provincial body overseeing the schools there.

A 2022 visit by lawmakers to the Eastern Cape found more illegal schools than legal ones, 68 to 66, in the OR Tambo municipality alone.

Government and independent investigations over the years have found abuse of participants, violence between initiates, drug and alcohol abuse at illegal schools — even the kidnapping of boys for participation.

"We are seeing a rise in gangs because they want to grow their initiation schools, and we see that as a wrong way of practicing initiation," said Motlalepule Mantsha, a leader at an initiation school in Phuthaditjhaba.

"This is damaging the initiation's image."

Dozens of arrests have occurred

South African law since 2021 requires initiation schools to meet strict health and safety standards to be registered, and boys 16 and above are admitted with parental consent. Over 5,000 such schools exist.

Requirements for schools include being registered three months before each initiation season starts, having enough surgical tools so they are not used for more than one circumcision and training for traditional "surgeons" and "nurses" in hygiene, infection prevention, wound care and HIV awareness.

In January and February, at least 46 people were arrested for links to illegal schools. They included 16 traditional surgeons, 28 traditional nurses and two parents, who were accused of colluding with surgeons and nurses to falsify ages of younger boys.

Separately in February, after a rare conviction, a 26-year-old man was sentenced to two years in prison for unlawfully circumcising two boys, aged 17 and 18, last year.

An investigation by the Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Rights Commission, a public watchdog that reports to Parliament, said in 2017 that "due to the principles of sacredness and secrecy of this practice, also compounded by the inaccessibility of rural locations," it is difficult to monitor the schools, and there was "clear confusion" about what role local authorities should have.

By the time a circumcision has complications, the report said, it is too late for medical treatment. It said other deaths are due to initiates' preexisting illnesses, and suggested that boys and young men get medical exams first.

A mother of two initiates, Makhanya Vangile, said she regards initiations as an important part of the culture

that should be safeguarded, but she is concerned about the reports of what happens at illegal schools. "Here, we have guardsmen from our chief who go and check up on how the boys are being fed, their living conditions and safety," she said. "They are able to stop things like boys bringing harmful stuff like alcohol, knives and guns instead of traditional sticks."

Drone video from inside a Fukushima reactor shows a hole in pressure vessel, likely fuel debris

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — A video taken by tiny drones sent into one of three damaged reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant showed a gaping hole in the thick-walled steel container of the core, with lumps of likely melted fuel debris hanging from it, in a first sighting of a pressure vessel bottom since the meltdown 15 years ago.

The rare footage was taken by micro-drones — measuring 12 by 13 centimeters (4.7 by 5.1 inches) and weighing only 95 grams (3.3 ounces) each — deployed for a two-week mission to collect visual, radiation and other data from inside the Unit 3 reactor. It was released late Thursday.

The March 11, 2011 massive quake and tsunami destroyed cooling systems at the Fukushima Daiichi plant, causing meltdowns at reactors No. 1, 2 and 3.

The three reactors contain at least 880 tons of melted fuel debris with radiation levels still dangerously high. Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings, which manages the plant, successfully took tiny melted fuel samples from the Unit 2 reactor last year, but internal details remain little known.

TEPCO plans more remote-controlled probes and sampling to analyze melted fuel and to develop robots for future fuel debris removal that experts say could take decades more.

Sending drones as close as possible to the pressure vessel's bottom was an important goal of the latest probe, according to the plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings.

During multiple flight missions in the probe that began March 5, remote-controlled micro-drones, one at a time, carefully flew around debris, broken equipment and other obstacles to take footage inside the primary containment chamber, including around the bottom of the pressure vessel.

The footage showed tubes with ruptures and other damaged structures that used to be inside the pressure vessel, which originally was enclosed. It also showed brown and gray objects hanging like giant icicles.

TEPCO spokesperson Masaki Kuwajima said officials confirmed there was a hole at the bottom of the vessel and that those hanging objects, lumps and deposits are believed to be melted fuel debris.

The drones also collected radiation measurements and data to produce a detailed three-dimensional map of the inside of the Unit 3 reactor, Kuwajima said. "We have obtained valuable data that can be used for our future internal investigations and to develop melted fuel debris removal strategy."

The latest drone mission came nearly a decade after an earlier underwater robot probe provided a less clear picture of the inside of the Unit 3 reactor.

They were under siege by a Mexican cartel. Now these civilians fight back with AK-47s and grenades

By MEGAN JANETSKY Associated Press

GUAJES DE AYALA, Mexico (AP) — Jesús Domínguez pushes through thick brush lining a rugged mountainside with an AK-47 slung over his shoulder and a grenade fastened to his leather belt.

He marches alongside a pack of camouflage-clad men patrolling the rural stretches of Mexico against one of the country's most powerful drug cartels.

Armed with military-grade weapons smuggled from the U.S., the 50-man force is one of dozens of "auto-defensa," or "self-defense," groups that have emerged over the past decade in Mexico to fight increasingly sophisticated cartels in areas far out of the reach of security forces.

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"The government doesn't care about us, and it's impossible for our arms to compete with (the cartel's)," said Domínguez, 34, from a watch post overlooking the mountains of Guerrero state. "They come at you with a ton of force, so you need to respond with force...If you don't, they'll overwhelm you."

The vigilantes in Guajes de Ayala join a volatile landscape of warring armed groups – from cartels with tentacles across Latin America to local mafias – in regions like Guerrero ravaged by splintering cartels for decades. It's a tangle Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum will have to unravel under pressure from the Trump administration and fears of more violence following the killing of Mexico's most powerful drug lord.

'We don't want to be slaves'

The vigilante group was formed in 2020 when the cartel La Nueva Familia Michoacana tried to take control of seven communities buried deep in the mountains along a strategic throughway connecting cartels to the port city of Acapulco, where drugs and other illegal goods flow.

Residents said the cartel, designated a foreign terrorist organization last year by the Trump administration, started illegally logging in their lands and tried to force residents to join fights against rival gangs.

In the absence of Mexican military and police forces, locals armed themselves. Sporadic fire fights stretched on for nearly a year. Residents fled on foot, walking hours through far-off mountains with little more than the clothes on their backs. Communities of 1,600 people dwindled to just 400.

After a pause in the conflict, the vigilantes rearmed in October when the Nueva Familia Michoacana began to again push into their territory, setting up fentanyl labs and monitoring them with drones, said the group's leader, Javier Hernández.

Now, the men guard their towns from mountain watch posts and surveil 100 cartel gunmen camped out a few miles (kilometers) away using their own drones.

"We don't want to be part of their ranks and we don't want to leave our lands," Hernández said. "We don't want to be slaves to any cartel."

'They corner you'

Conflict is more entrenched in Guerrero than in most Mexican states, with a history of militancy dating back to guerrilla movements in the 1960s. The landscape has grown increasingly complex as cartels have fractured into rival factions creating a much different situation than in the past when one cartel held monolithic control over a region. According to a 2025 DEA report, five cartels operate here. So do various local gangs and vigilante groups, many of which are allied with the larger cartels.

"You have a kaleidoscope of armed groups," said Mónica Serrano, a professor at the Colegio de Mexico studying violence in Guerrero. "It's one of the most vexing challenges facing the country and is at the root of the violence."

Self-defense forces took off in Michoacan and Guerrero around 2013. Like the group in Guajes de Ayala, they were formed as a desperate attempt to avoid being caught in the crossfire of warring cartels.

But in places where criminal groups are more present than law enforcement, nearly every vigilante movement that has emerged in recent history has either been coopted by rival cartels or massacred. Mexico's government has been split about whether it should talk to vigilantes or treat them as criminals.

In some cases, groups became cartel paramilitary forces themselves, flush with money and terrorizing the communities they claimed to protect. In others, cartels armed local citizens to help fight off rival gangs.

"They corner you and you can't do anything," Domínguez said. "That's how what's been created – which began as autonomy – is corrupted. People end up joining criminal groups just to survive."

Made in USA

The Guajes de Ayala community said it remains independent, but forces wield equipment far beyond the means of local farmers, including drone detection systems and tapped radio frequencies, and DJI drones worth thousands of dollars to spy on cartel gunmen.

They carry AK-47s and AR-15s stamped with "MADE IN USA" and names of gun makers in Florida, South Carolina and even Poland. Because Mexico has strict gun control laws, the vast majority of arms in Mexico are smuggled from the U.S. by cartels.

One gunman confirmed the vigilantes purchase guns from cartels, but would not say from which group.

Another said he was once part of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, or CJNG, and was paid to join the

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vigilantes. Another wore a hat reading "El Señor de los Gallos," a nickname for Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes, the powerful CJNG leader slain by Mexico's military in February.

Two local criminal gangs fighting with the Nueva Familia Michoacana allow Guajes de Ayala residents to transit their territories to not be closed in on all sides like in the past.

At the same time, Hernández said he feeds intelligence of the rival cartel to law enforcement, and that his group turned down alliance offers from other vigilante groups known for preying on civilians.

The proliferation of armed groups across Mexico is a test for Sheinbaum as she seeks to offset Trump administration threats of U.S. military intervention.

Under Sheinbaum, security forces have come down on criminal groups with a heavier hand than her predecessors. Homicides sharply dipped since she took office to the lowest levels in a decade, government figures show.

But Hernández said, for them, things are worse than before.

"It's a lie. They say the government is doing wonders, but it's nothing but propaganda," he said.

The killing of Oseguera Cervantes, or "El Mencho" was a major blow to Mexico's most powerful criminal enterprise. But experts and some in communities like Guajes de Ayala worry it could fuel more violence if other criminal groups make violent power grabs or if rival factions of CJNG war for control.

One Marine captain in Guerrero, who spoke on condition of anonymity out of security concerns, said his forces were "preparing for a possible reorganization of these groups." He added Mexican forces haven't abandoned communities like Guajes de Ayala, and respond to calls for help from rural areas.

'A place of silence'

The villages in Guajes de Ayala have become ghost towns filled with vacant homes of people too scared to return.

Marisela Mojica, Domínguez's mother, sent six of her children and grandchildren away after her daughter was kidnapped by people claiming to be the Nueva Familia Michoacana.

"If they come to kill us all, I want one of us to still be alive," she said.

Mojica said she hasn't seen her family in six years or met two grandchildren born after the family fled. She doesn't know if she ever will.

Teachers too scared to cross from one criminal group's territory to another stopped coming to classes in October, leaving schools abandoned. Government medical clinics have shuttered.

Hernández counts the abandoned homes left in ruins as he and his gunmen drive out to patrol the rolling peaks and valleys enveloping them.

"These mountains are a place of silence," he said. "You have no voice, and no one hears you."

High Point's upset starts run of 4 wins by double-digit seeds, busting March Madness brackets

By The Associated Press undefined

Well, the dream was fun while it lasted — all two-ish hours of it.

The bid for a perfect NCAA Tournament bracket disappeared for more than 25 million people by mid-afternoon on Thursday, fueled by 12th-seeded High Point's first-round stunner over fifth-seeded Wisconsin.

That was just the start. By the end of the first day of March Madness, fewer than one of every 2,400 entries in the ESPN bracket challenge were blemish-free.

High Point was one of four double-digit seeds to win. Following the Panthers were No. 11 seeds VCU and Texas and 10th-seeded Texas A&M.

Some of those upsets weren't that surprising.

North Carolina didn't have freshman sensation and leading scorer Caleb Wilson (broken thumb) in its 82-78 overtime loss to VCU. Of course, that was no excuse for the Tar Heels blowing a 19-point lead in the second half.

BYU never really recovered from losing star Richie Saunders (torn ACL) two months ago, having lost five

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of nine entering the tournament, and it couldn't make it all the way back from a 17-point deficit before losing 79-71 to the Longhorns.

Saint Mary's leading scorer Paulius Murauskas didn't start because of an illness and was limited to four points in 23 minutes of a 63-50 loss to Texas A&M.

After the conclusion of the tournament's first day, ESPN reported that just over 10,000 of its 26.5 million brackets — 0.04% — remained perfect.

Just think how many more would have been busted if 16th-seeded Siena could have held on to its double-digit lead against top-seeded Duke.

The odds of going 67 for 67 (or 63 for 63 if you don't pick the First Four) in the bracket are longer than one of those 3-pointers hoisted up by High Point's Chase Johnston. Way longer.

The NCAA estimates the chances of ending the tournament with a zero in the loss column range anywhere from one in 9.2 quintillion (if you flip a coin for every game). The odds drop a little if you make educated guesses — all the way to one in 120 billion.

The NCAA's own bracket challenge looked almost exactly like ESPN's, with 0.04% of entries still having a shot at perfection after a dozen games.

But hey, maybe things are going better for you in the office pool. The NCAA estimates there are anywhere between 60 and 100 million brackets filled out each year, only a portion of which are done in online challenges.

Kuwait says its Mina Al-Ahmadi refinery again hit in Iranian drone attacks, starting fire

Kuwait said Friday its Mina Al-Ahmadi oil refinery again came under attack by Iranian drones, which sparked a fire at several of its units.

The refinery had been hit Thursday, sparking fires.

Kuwait said firefighters on Friday were trying to control the blazes and there were no immediate injuries from the attack.

The Iranian attack came as Kuwait marked Eid al-Fitr, the celebration marking the end of the holy Muslim fasting month of Ramadan.

The attack Friday comes as Iran increasingly targets energy sites in Gulf Arab states after Israel on Wednesday bombed Iran's massive South Pars offshore natural gas field in the Persian Gulf.

Israel hits Tehran with airstrikes on Persian New Year as war jolts energy markets

By JON GAMBRELL, JULIE WATSON, and NATALIE MELZER Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Israel pounded Tehran with airstrikes Friday as Iranians marked Nowruz, or the Persian New Year, in the midst of a war that has sent shock waves through the global economy and risked drawing Iran's Arab neighbors directly into the conflict.

Activists reported hearing strikes around Iran's capital. The attacks came a day after Israel pledged to refrain from more strikes on a key Iranian gas field and Iran intensified attacks on oil and natural gas facilities around the Gulf.

Heavy explosions shook Dubai early Friday as air defenses intercepted incoming fire over the city, where people were observing Eid al-Fitr, the end of the holy Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, and mosques made the day's first call to prayers.

Iran kept up its wave of attacks launched at Israel that have sent millions of people to shelters, with sirens sounding across a wide swath of the north, from Haifa to the Galilee to the border with Lebanon. It came after an intense day that saw more than a dozen missile launches on Thursday alone, according to Israel's military.

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Global fuel supplies have been under intense pressure because of Iran's stranglehold on the Strait of Hormuz, a strategic waterway through which a fifth of the world's oil is transported.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said late Thursday that, at the request of President Donald Trump, Israel will hold off any further attacks on Iran's offshore South Pars gas field. Iranian strikes in retaliation have led to already elevated global energy prices further surging and spurred Gulf allies to call for Trump to rein in Netanyahu.

Since the U.S. and Israel launched the war on Feb. 28, Iran's top leaders have been killed and the country's military capabilities have been severely degraded. Netanyahu said in a televised address that Iran no longer has the ability to enrich uranium or make ballistic missiles, although he did not provide evidence.

Still, Iran — now led by the son of the supreme leader killed in the war's opening salvo — remains capable of missile and drone attacks.

Brent crude oil, the international standard, briefly surged above \$119 a barrel, up more than 60% since the war started. The European benchmark for natural gas prices also rose sharply and has roughly doubled in the past month.

U.N. Security Council meets over Iran's attacks on Gulf states

The United Nations Security Council held an urgent closed meeting Thursday during which Gulf countries stressed the need for Iran to halt attacks on them, said Bahrain's U.N. Ambassador Jamal Alrowaiei, the Arab representative on the U.N.'s most powerful body.

But Iran has showed no signs of backing down. Saudi Arabia said its SAMREF refinery in the Red Sea port city of Yanbu was hit. Saudi Arabia had begun pumping large volumes of oil west toward the Red Sea to avoid the Strait of Hormuz.

Qatar, a key source of natural gas for world markets, said Iranian missiles that caused extensive damage to the Ras Laffan liquefied natural gas facility, reduced its exports by about 17 percent and will cost about \$20 billion in lost revenue a year. The damage will take up to five years to repair, even though production at the facility had already been halted after earlier attacks.

Two oil refineries in Kuwait and gas operations in Abu Dhabi also were targeted by Iran, authorities said.

Underscoring the danger to ships in the region, a vessel was set ablaze Thursday off the United Arab Emirates' coast and another was damaged off Qatar. Efforts to bypass the strait were also under pressure: An Iranian drone hit a Saudi refinery on the Red Sea, which the country had hoped to use as an alternative route.

Meanwhile, the UAE said Friday it disrupted what it called "a terrorist network funded and operated by Lebanon's Hezbollah and Iran," arresting its operatives. It accused the men of laundering money while "operating within the country under a fictitious commercial cover" that sought to carry out schemes that would threaten the country's financial stability.

It published images of five prisoners on its state-run WAM news agency, without identifying the men.

Netanyahu says Iran's military has been severely hit

At Thursday's news conference, Netanyahu said: "Iran's air defenses have been rendered useless, their navy is lying at the bottom of the sea. ... Their air force is nearly destroyed."

He said he hopes the Iranian people will rise up against the Islamic Republic that has ruled for nearly a half-century. There's been no sign of any organized opposition since the war began, after Iranian authorities crushed mass protests in January.

The prime minister's comments to foreign journalists came amid difficult days for Trump and Netanyahu, with a top U.S. intelligence official resigning and claiming Israel pushed Trump into the war, and Israel's attacks on South Pars, which led to Iran's retaliatory strikes on the region's oil and gas fields.

"I misled no one," Netanyahu said. "And I didn't have to convince President Trump about the need to prevent Iran from developing its nuclear program."

Iran long has insisted its program was peaceful, although it was enriching uranium up to 60% purity, a short, technical step from weapons-grade levels. That stockpile of highly enriched uranium still remains in Iran.

Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that U.S. forces were attacking deeper into

Iranian territory, with warplanes hunting Iranian boats in the strait and dropping 5,000-pound bombs on underground weapons-storage facilities.

Trump says he is not deploying troops to Iran

Iran condemned Israel's attack on South Pars, the Iranian part of the world's largest gas field, located offshore in the Persian Gulf and owned jointly with Qatar.

With some 80% of power generated in Iran coming from natural gas, according to the International Energy Agency, the attack threatens the country's electricity supplies.

After Trump requested Israel not attack South Pars, he also warned on social media that if Iran continued striking Qatar, the U.S. would "massively blow up the entirety" of the field.

Asked later about the possibility of U.S. ground troops being deployed to Iran, Trump responded: "No. I'm not putting troops anywhere."

Death toll climbs in third week of war

More than 1,300 people in Iran have been killed during the war. Israeli strikes against the Iranian-backed Hezbollah militant group in Lebanon have displaced more than 1 million people, according to the Lebanese government, which says more than 1,000 people have been killed. Israel says it has killed more than 500 Hezbollah militants.

In Israel, 15 people have been killed by Iranian missile fire. Four people were also killed in the occupied West Bank by an Iranian missile strike.

At least 13 U.S. military members have been killed.

Energy fallout from Iran war signals a global wake-up call for renewable energy

By ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL, ANTON L. DELGADO and ALLAN OLINGO Associated Press

HANOI, Vietnam (AP) — The war in Iran is exposing the world's reliance on fragile fossil fuel routes, lending urgency to calls for hastening the shift to renewable energy.

Fighting has all but halted oil exports through the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow waterway that carries about a fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas, or LNG. The disruption has jolted energy markets, pushing up prices and straining import-dependent economies.

Asia, where most of the oil was headed, has been hit hardest, but the disruptions also are a strain for Europe, where policymakers are looking for ways to cut energy demand, and for Africa, which is bracing for rising fuel costs and inflation.

Unlike during previous oil shocks, renewable power is now competitive with fossil fuels in many places. More than 90% of new renewable power projects worldwide in 2024 were cheaper than fossil-fuel alternatives, according to the International Renewable Energy Agency.

Oil is used in many industries beyond generating electricity, such as fertilizer and plastics production. So most countries are feeling the impact, while those with more renewable power are more insulated since renewables rely on domestic resources like sun and wind, not imported fuels.

"These crises regularly occur," said James Bowen of the Australia-based consultancy, ReMap Research. "They are a feature, not a bug, of a fossil fuel-based energy system."

China and India built renewable buffers, but China's is larger

China and India, the world's two most populous countries, face the same challenge of generating enough electricity to power growth for over a billion people. Both have expanded renewable energy, but China did so on a far larger scale despite its continued reliance on coal-fired power.

Today China leads the world in renewables. About one in 10 cars in China are electric, found the International Energy Agency. It's still the world's largest importer of crude oil and the biggest buyer of Iranian oil. But electrifying parts of its economy with renewables has reduced its reliance on imports.

Without that shift, China would be "far more vulnerable to supply and price shocks," said Lauri Myllyvirta of the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air. China also can rely on reserves built when prices were low and shift between using coal and oil as fuel in factories, he said.

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India also has expanded its use of clean energy, especially solar power, but more slowly and with less government support for manufacturing renewable energy equipment and connecting solar to its power grid.

After Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, India prioritized energy security by buying discounted Russian oil and boosting coal production. It also ramped up solar and wind, helping to cushion supply disruptions but not avoid them entirely, said Duttatreya Das of the think tank Ember.

"Everyone cannot be China," Das said.

India is now facing a shortage of cooking gas. That's driving a rush to buy induction cooktops and raising fears of restaurant shutdowns. Fertilizers and ceramics industries may also be hit.

Rich countries fallback on fossil fuels

The energy shock is familiar to wealthy countries in Europe and East Asia.

In 2022, some European governments tried to cut dependence on fossil fuels. But many soon focused on finding new fossil fuel suppliers instead, said Pauline Heinrichs, who studies climate and energy at King's College London.

Germany rushed to build LNG terminals to replace Russian gas with mostly American fuel while the energy transition, including efforts to cut demand, slowed, she said.

Europe's excess spending on fossil fuels since the Russia-Ukraine War amounted to about 40% of the investment needed to transition its power system to clean energy, according to a 2023 study.

"In Europe, we learned the wrong lesson," Heinrichs said.

In import-dependent Japan, policy responses to past shocks have focused on diversifying fossil fuel imports rather than investing in domestic renewables, said Ayumi Fukakusa of Friends of the Earth Japan.

Solar and wind make up just 11% of Japan's energy production, on a par with India but behind China's 18%, according to Ember. Japan's energy use is much lower than both nations.

The Iran war led the agenda during Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's meeting this week with U.S. President Donald Trump. Trump, who has long urged Japan to buy more American LNG, recently called on allied nations like Japan to "step up" in assisting secure The Strait of Hormuz.

South Korean President Lee Jae-myung said the crisis could be "a good opportunity" to shift faster to renewable energy.

Poor countries are the most exposed

Poorer nations in Asia and Africa are competing with wealthy European and Asian countries and big buyers like India and China for limited gas supplies, pushing up prices.

Import-dependent economies — such as Benin and Zambia in Africa and Bangladesh and Thailand in Asia — could face some of the biggest shocks. Costly fuel makes transport and food more expensive, and many countries have limited foreign-exchange reserves, restricting their ability to pay for imports if prices stay high.

Africa may be especially exposed because many countries rely on imported oil to run their transport and supply chains.

It makes strategic sense for African countries to build their long-term energy security by investing in cleaner energy, said Kennedy Mbeva, a research associate at the Centre for the Study of Existential Risk at the University of Cambridge.

But not all are opting for renewables: South Africa is considering building an LNG import terminal and new gas-fired power plants.

Others, like Ethiopia which banned gasoline and diesel fueled cars in 2024 to promote electric vehicles, are doubling down on renewables.

The real challenge is not just to withstand the next shock, but to ensure it doesn't "derail the country's development trajectory," said Hanan Hassen, an analyst at Ethiopia's government-linked think tank, the Institute of Foreign Affairs.

Renewables provide a cushion for some

Increased use of renewable energy has helped shield some Asian countries from the energy shock.

Pakistan's solar boom has preempted more than \$12 billion in fossil fuel imports since 2020 and could

save another \$6.3 billion in 2026 at current prices, according to think tanks Renewables First and the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air.

Vietnam's current solar generation will help the country save hundreds of millions of dollars in potential coal and gas imports in the coming year, based on current high prices, according to the research group, Zero Carbon Analytics.

Other countries are stretching tight supplies.

Bangladesh has closed universities to save electricity. It has limited storage capacity to absorb supply shocks, so the government started rationing fuel after a flurry of panic buying at filling stations, said Khondaker Golam Moazzem, an economist with the Centre for Policy Dialogue in Dhaka.

For now, governments must just manage shortages and control prices. Thailand has suspended petroleum exports, boosted its gas production and begun drawing on reserves.

If the conflict bleeds into April, Thailand's finite reserves and limited budget for subsidies mean prices will shoot higher, warned Areeporn Asawinpongphan, a research fellow with the Thailand Development Research Institute.

"The time for promoting domestic renewables should have happened a long time ago," Asawinpongphan said.

Clergy seek court order to allow pastoral access to immigrants held at Minneapolis ICE facility

By STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Protestant and Catholic clergy are asking a federal judge to order that they be allowed to minister to immigrants in a holding facility at the headquarters of the Trump administration's enforcement surge in Minnesota.

U.S. District Judge Jerry Blackwell will hear Friday from attorneys for Minnesota branches of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the United Church of Christ, and a Catholic priest. They're suing for an injunction requiring Department of Homeland Security officials to allow prompt in-person pastoral visits to all detainees at the Bishop Henry Whipple Federal Building in Minneapolis, the site of frequent protests over roughly the 3,000 federal officers who had surged into the state at the height of the crackdown.

The Minnesota lawsuit alleges the Whipple building, named for Minnesota's first Episcopal bishop, a 19th-century advocate for human rights, "now stands in stark contrast to its namesake's legacy." It says the building has "become the epicenter of systematic deprivation of fundamental constitutional and legal rights by the federal government."

Government attorneys plan to argue the request is at least partly moot because Operation Metro Surge officially ended on Feb. 12. They also say the number of new detentions has since subsided, so temporary restrictions on visitors have been eased, and clergy visits have been allowed for over two weeks. In a recent filing, they said staff members weren't in a good position previously to allow visitation because the Whipple building had been "both a hub of heightened ICE operations and the symbolic center of community unrest."

Catholic and Episcopal bishops in Minnesota, other Christian and Jewish clergy, and the Minnesota Council of Churches are also supporting the request.

Clergy across the country have been pushing for more access to immigration detention facilities, especially during the holy seasons of Lent and Ramadan. It's a longstanding practice for faith leaders to minister to detainees. but it has become far more contentious amid the current immigration crackdown.

It took a similar lawsuit for two Catholic priests and a nun to gain entry into an ICE facility in the Chicago suburb of Broadview on Ash Wednesday last month. And Muslim and Christian clergy in Texas have struggled to get into large Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention facilities there.

The Minnesota lawsuit alleges that ICE unconstitutionally obstructed faith leaders "from offering prayer, pastoral guidance, sacramental ministry, and spiritual comfort to detainees in moments of profound fear, isolation, and despair."

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Case filings list several instances in which clergy went to Whipple to minister to detainees but were refused access, including on Ash Wednesday, a solemn day in many Christian traditions in which clergy place ashes on worshippers' foreheads in the sign of the cross.

The lawsuit called the restrictions in place at Whipple a violation of both the constitutional freedom of religion of clergy who feel compelled by their faith to serve detainees and the 1993 Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

ICE's stated policy is that facilities that hold detainees for more than 72 hours are required to have a chaplain or "religious services coordinator," as well as dedicated spaces for services. ICE says its policy also requires advance notice and background checks for clergy and faith volunteers.

But government attorneys and ICE officials contend the Whipple building is just a short-term holding facility, and that most held there are moved to other ICE facilities within 24 hours.

Tauria Rich, a senior local ICE official who oversees the facility, said in a filing this week that visitors are rare, and that any clergy requests would be back to being handled on a case-by-case basis. She said one clergy member had attempted to visit in early March, but left because no detainees were present. The visit would have been allowed if any detainees had been there, she said.

It's not just clergy who've struggled to get in. Three members of Congress from Minnesota were turned away when they tried to inspect the facility. Once they did get in, they reported poor conditions.

Access has also been an issue for attorneys. Homeland Security was ordered by a different federal judge last month to give new detainees at Whipple immediate access to counsel before they're taken elsewhere.

Democrats aim to turn Trump's tariffs against GOP in campaigns for governor

By STEVEN SLOAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Less than a week after the Supreme Court struck down President Donald Trump's global tariffs, New York Gov. Kathy Hochul listened as one of the plaintiffs in the case recounted the financial toll of the levies on his wine importing business.

"This is a heavy tax and you have to pay it up front," Victor Schwartz, the owner of VOS Selections, told Hochul as they walked alongside bottles of wine he imports from 16 countries.

As Hochul seeks reelection this year, she says the impact of Trump's tariffs is a "centerpiece" of her message. She has pressed the administration to issue a \$13.5 billion tariff refund to New Yorkers following the Supreme Court decision. And she released an ad this week criticizing her Republican challenger, Bruce Blakeman, for supporting the levies and attending the White House event where Trump unveiled them with a massive board listing the rate for each country.

"This is a lethal issue for Republicans this November," Hochul said in an interview. "You can be sure we're going to make sure people know who did this to them."

She's not alone. Democrats running for governor across the country are making tariffs central to their pitch to voters. They're betting that in an election year dominated by issues ranging from immigration to the war in Iran, rising costs connected to the tariffs will be a motivating issue for many voters.

"That picture of (Trump) with the tariff board is going to be front and center in every single one of our campaigns," Gov. Andy Beshear of Kentucky, who is leading the Democratic Governors Association this year, said in an interview.

White House spokesman Kush Desai countered that "what Democrats are really running against are President Trump's Most-Favored-Nations deals to slash prescription drug prices by up to 90 percent, trillions in investments to bring manufacturing back to America, and new trade deals that level the playing field for American workers."

"All of these historic victories were possible because of tariffs."

This is a challenging election year for the GOP

Republicans are entering a challenging election year as they contend with voter anxiety around spiking prices — an issue Trump pledged to fix during his 2024 campaign — and the record of a president's party

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losing ground during the midterms.

Much of the focus has been on Congress, where Democrats are just a few seats shy of taking the House majority. But the party is also aiming to regain ground outside Washington as they hope to hold onto governorships in Arizona, Michigan and Wisconsin and eye GOP-held seats in Nevada, Georgia and Iowa.

In interviews this week, Democrats running in some of those states said tariffs and the broader issue of affordability will be at the forefront of their agenda.

In Nevada, state Attorney General Aaron Ford sued the administration over its initial round of tariffs and is suing again as Trump seeks to revive them. As he seeks the Democratic nomination to take on Republican incumbent Gov. Joe Lombardo, Ford called the tariffs "illegal" and blamed them for restaurant closures and fewer visitors to his tourism-dependent state.

"Tariffs are at the very top of the conversation because Nevadans every single day are feeling the impacts," Ford said.

In Arizona, Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs is seeking reelection in a state Trump won by more than 5 percentage points in 2024 with a focus on costs. She criticized GOP Reps. Andy Biggs and David Schweikert, who are vying for the nomination to challenge her, for "cheering on these reckless tariffs." Both lawmakers voted against a measure last month to end the national emergency Trump declared to impose tariffs on Canada.

Hobbs said the cost concern was about more than tariffs, noting Medicaid cuts, rising health costs and a spike in gas prices in the wake of the war in Iran.

"They're being hit everywhere," she said.

Republicans try to turn affordability concerns back on Democrats

Republicans largely reject the tariff criticism and are trying to turn the anxiety about affordability back on Democrats, especially in high-cost states where they already govern. Blakeman, for instance, said in a statement that Hochul is "solely responsible for the affordability crisis in New York, with crushing electric bills, soaring insurance rates and the highest taxes in America."

In an interview, Schweikert argued that "it was only a few years ago in a previous administration that the Democrats actually liked tariffs. So this seems to be if Trump's for it, they're against it."

Trump, for his part, hasn't given up on the tariffs. After calling the Supreme Court's decision "unfortunate," his administration is scrambling to find ways to revive the levies. The president has already announced a 10% tariff using a different mechanism, a move that's facing legal challenges, and wants to further raise tariffs to 15%.

But Trump's prediction of a manufacturing renaissance that would result from companies making more products in the U.S. to avoid tariffs has not materialized. During the first year of his second term, 98,000 manufacturing jobs were lost. Revenue from tariffs is doing little to reduce the federal deficit, which is projected to climb over the next decade.

Polling suggests unease about the dramatic way Trump has imposed the levies. In January, before the Supreme Court's ruling, about 6 in 10 U.S. adults said Trump went too far in imposing new tariffs and using presidential power, an AP-NORC poll found.

A balancing act for the GOP

Now Republicans are trying to balance acknowledging the public's concern without antagonizing Trump, who remains popular among the GOP base.

Lombardo's response to a question about tariffs last year in a local television interview has given Democrats persistent fodder. The governor said, "We need to maybe feel a little pain in the short term and hopefully in the long term it's a huge benefit for us."

"We're feeling it," Ford said of the pain, "and Nevadans are ready for new leadership."

In a statement, Drew Galang, Lombardo's communications director, said that "while the governor cannot control federal trade policy, he has prioritized policies to drive growth in Nevada — diversifying the state's economy, cutting red tape, and attracting billions of dollars of business investments."

The competing pressure on Lombardo was on display in a letter he sent to Trump last year, urging the

president to lift tariffs on lithium. He argued that since “domestic processing is not yet a viable option, the current environment poses a serious risk to jobs in Nevada and across the country.”

But he didn’t reject Trump’s overall tariff push, expressing “sincere appreciation for your efforts to return manufacturing jobs back to United States soil.”

Teenagers sue Musk’s xAI claiming image-generator made sexually explicit images of them as minors

By TRAVIS LOLLER Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Three teenagers in Tennessee sued Elon Musk’s xAI this week, claiming the company’s image-generation tools were used to morph real photos of them into explicitly sexual images.

The high school students, who are seeking to proceed under pseudonyms, filed the lawsuit in California, where xAI — Musk’s artificial intelligence company — has its headquarters. They are seeking class-action status in order to represent what the lawsuit says are thousands of victims like themselves who either are minors or were minors when sexually explicit images of them were created.

According to the lawsuit, Jane Doe 1 was alerted anonymously in December that someone was distributing sexually explicit images of her on a social media website.

“At least five of these files, one video and four images, depicted her actual face and body in settings with which she was familiar, but morphed into sexually explicit poses,” the lawsuit states. It claims the person distributing the images knew Doe and used xAI’s image generation tools to turn real photos of her into sexually abusive ones. One of the images was taken from a homecoming photo. Another was taken from a high school yearbook.

The person distributing the images also created explicit images of at least 18 other girls, two of whom are co-plaintiffs in the lawsuit. In late December, local police arrested the perpetrator and confiscated his phone. They found that he had uploaded the images to several platforms where he traded them for sexually explicit images of other minors.

Other AI companies have prohibited their image-generators from producing any sexually explicit content, even of adults. Musk saw this as a business opportunity and promoted the ability of xAI’s Grok chatbot to create “spicy” content, the lawsuit claims. However, there is currently no way to prevent the generation of explicit images of adults while completely blocking the generation of images of children, the lawsuit claims. It also claims that xAI knew Grok would be able to produce sexually explicit images of children but released it anyway.

The lawsuit claims the person who distributed images of the plaintiffs used an application that licensed the xAI technology or “otherwise purchased its access to Grok, and was used as a cut-out or middleman.”

xAI did not respond to an email from The Associated Press seeking comment. But a Jan. 14 post about the controversy on the social media platform X said: “We remain committed to making X a safe platform for everyone and continue to have zero tolerance for any forms of child sexual exploitation, non-consensual nudity, and unwanted sexual content.

“We take action to remove high-priority violative content, including Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) and non-consensual nudity, taking appropriate action against accounts that violate our X Rules. We also report accounts seeking Child Sexual Exploitation materials to law enforcement authorities as necessary.”

Meanwhile, the students in the lawsuit said they worry that the images created of them will live forever on the internet. They fear stalking because their real first names and the name of their school are attached to the files. They worry that their friends and classmates have seen the photos and videos, which appear to be real, and they worry about who will see them in the future.

Jane Doe 1 said she has suffered from anxiety, depression, stress. “She has difficulty eating and sleeping and suffers from recurring nightmares,” the lawsuit states. Jane Doe 2 “has begun self-isolating and avoiding being on her school campus, and even dreads attending her own graduation.” Jane Doe 3 suffers from constant fear and anxiety that someone will see the AI-generated images and recognize her face, according to the lawsuit.

Jurors wade through daunting evidence in high-stakes Meta trial about social media risks to children

By MORGAN LEE Associated Press

SANTA FE, N.M. (AP) — A daunting stream of testimony and evidence has been presented in a New Mexico case that explores what social media conglomerate Meta knew about the effects of its platforms on children.

State prosecutors allege Meta failed to disclose the risks that its platforms pose for children, including mental health problems and sexual exploitation. Meta's attorneys have said the company has built-in protections for teenagers and weeds out harmful content but acknowledged some dangerous content gets past its safety nets.

The trial is approaching its seventh week. Jurors aren't deliberating yet. But if they find that Meta — which owns Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp — violated New Mexico's consumer protection laws, prosecutors say sanctions could add up to billions of dollars. Meta, however, says it would seek a different calculation.

The trial that started Feb. 9. is one of the first in a torrent of lawsuits against Meta and comes as school districts and legislators want more restrictions on the use of smartphones in classrooms.

A slated second phase of the trial, possibly in May before a judge with no jury, would determine whether Meta created a public nuisance with its social media platforms and should pay for public programs to fix matters.

Here's what to know about the possible outcomes of the trial:

A reckoning in courts for social media platforms

Meta is confronting three counts of violating the New Mexico Unfair Trade Practices Act that protects consumers from deceptive or predatory business practices.

After closing arguments, jurors will weigh whether Meta knowingly misrepresented the risks on its platforms — by omission or active concealment at the least.

The case could sidestep or challenge immunity provisions that protect tech companies from liability for material posted on their social media platforms under Section 230, a 30-year-old provision of the U.S. Communications Decency Act, as well as a First Amendment shield.

In California, a jury already is sequestered in deliberations on whether social media companies should be liable for harms caused to children using their platforms, in one of three bellwether court cases that could set the course for thousands of similar lawsuits.

New Mexico's case is built on a different foundation — including a state undercover investigation where agents created social media accounts posing as children to document sexual solicitations and the response from Meta.

The lawsuit, filed in 2023 by New Mexico Attorney General Raúl Torrez, also says the dangers of addiction to social media haven't been fully disclosed or addressed by Meta. Meta hasn't agreed that social media addiction exists, but executives acknowledge "problematic use" and say they want people to feel good about the time they spend on Meta's platforms.

Among thousands of pages of documents, the New Mexico trial examines a raft of internal Meta documents and communications. Jurors also heard testimony from Meta executives, platform engineers, whistleblowers who left the company, psychiatric experts and tech-safety consultants.

The jury also may be influenced by testimony from local public school educators who have struggled with disruptions linked to social media, including the exchange of violent and sexually explicit images, along with sextortion schemes targeting children in New Mexico.

Questions of unconscionable and willful conduct

The two additional counts of consumer protection violations allege that Meta engaged in "unconscionable" trade practices that were grossly unfair.

In opening statements, prosecution attorney Donald Migliori emphasized accusations that Meta targeted social media engagement with children in an unconscionable way as a source of long-term profit while

knowing children were at risk of sexual exploitation on social media. Meta disputes that argument by highlighting platform safety features and content filters for teenagers, who are seen by Meta as trendsetters with limited purchasing power to satisfy advertisers.

The jury would decide whether the conduct was “willful” and merits civil penalties of up to \$5,000 per violation, and may help calculate the number of violations.

Torrez says those penalties could add up, given the number of people in New Mexico using Meta’s platforms. Meta, however, has asked to cap those sanctions at one penalty per misleading statement or fair-trade violation — and not the number of social media views or users.

Nuisance allegations to be decided by judge

State District Judge Bryan Biedscheid is overseeing both phases of the trial. He would decide nuisance allegations as the case advances — and whether the company is on the hook financially to repair damage.

Prosecutors have accused Meta of carelessly creating a marketplace and “breeding ground” for predators who target children for sexual exploitation. They allege Meta’s platforms also undermine the mental health of teenagers in a variety of ways — from sleep deprivation and depression to self-harm.

Attorneys for Meta accuse prosecutors of cherry-picking evidence as well as shoddy investigative work that may have made matters worse.

At trial, Meta executives described robust systems for detecting child sexual abuse material on its platforms and notifying law enforcement — but said the company also cautions users that its enforcement isn’t flawless.

“We believe it’s important to disclose the risks, but to do so in a consistent and rigorous way,” Instagram head Adam Mosseri said, describing a philosophy that extends to blog posts, service agreements and more.

In a video deposition played at trial, Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg said that “safety is extremely important for the service and having it be something that people trust and want to use over time.” He said Meta in 2017 stopped linking business performance goals directly to the extended amount of time users spend on its platforms.

Torrez says he will request court-ordered relief to make Meta change the way it does business and remedy the harm to children from social media.

“We’re going to have meaningful investments in targeted strategic programming around how you use the internet and how you use social media in ways that are responsible and healthy,” he said on the opening day of the trial.

Japan’s Takaichi tries to reaffirm alliance with Trump as he seeks help securing Strait of Hormuz

By MICHELLE L. PRICE and DIDI TANG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi sought to reaffirm her alliance with President Donald Trump on Thursday after the president this week seemed to complain that Japan was among the nations that did not quickly join his call to help protect the Strait of Hormuz.

Takaichi, who met with Trump at the White House, told the Republican president that Japan has opposed Iran’s development of its nuclear program and appealed to his desire to be seen as a peacemaker, despite his launching a war of choice with Iran. She told the U.S. president through an interpreter that in the Middle East and around the world now, there was “a very severe security environment,” but said, “Even against that backdrop, I firmly believe that it is only you, Donald, who can achieve peace across the world.”

The two leaders had warm words for each other, including Trump calling the prime minister a “popular, powerful woman,” but there appeared to be some tension as they faced repeated questions from reporters about Japan’s support for the Iran war.

As Trump fielded questions during the roughly 30-minute public appearance with the prime minister in the Oval Office before their closed-door meeting, Taikaichi could be seen checking her watch. And then Trump made a particularly uncomfortable remark — invoking Japan’s 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor — when he was asked why the U.S. didn’t notify allies like Japan ahead of the strikes on Iran.

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"We didn't tell anybody about it because we wanted surprise. Who knows better about surprise than Japan? Why didn't you tell me about Pearl Harbor, OK?" Trump joked.

As Trump said that, Takaichi's slight smile appeared to drop, and she raised her eyebrows.

But the pair were all smiles in the evening, as Trump hosted a dinner in the prime minister's office. "This is a spectacular woman, and it's an honor to have you at the White House," Trump said. Taikaichi referred to the leaders through an interpreter as "best buddies" before declaring, in English, "Japan is back."

Earlier Thursday, the leaders of five European countries and Japan issued a joint statement demanding that Iran stop attacks on the Strait of Hormuz that block commercial shipping, and said they are ready to contribute to "appropriate efforts" to ensure ships can pass safely through the strait, though it is not clear what that entails.

Trump told reporters that he and Takaichi would be discussing in their meeting Japan's level of support for the U.S. in the Iran war, saying, "They are really stepping up to the plate." He did not offer details.

The president later said that much of the oil Japan relies on passes through the Strait of Hormuz and said, "so that's a big reason to step up. He also mentioned U.S. spending in Japan and the number of troops it has stationed there.

"I expect Japan to step up, you know, because we have that kind of relationship," Trump said.

After her meeting with Trump, Takaichi told reporters that they agreed that ensuring the safety of the Strait of Hormuz was of the utmost importance, but she gave Trump a detailed explanation of the actions Japan can and cannot take under its law.

A nuclear reactor deal is signed

Taikaichi's White House visit was supposed to give Japan's new prime minister a prime opportunity to have Trump's ear before he embarked on a trip to China.

But now, the war in Iran and Trump's call for Japan and other nations to help protect the vital Strait of Hormuz means the China trip has been delayed. Trump had repeatedly complained on camera and online this week that U.S. allies, including Japan, did not heed his request to help safeguard the critical waterway for oil and gas transport. He later declared the help wasn't needed, but made other comments indicating he still expected help.

The prime minister acknowledged before she left Japan that she expected her meeting with Trump would be "very difficult."

Beyond facing questions about Iran, Takaichi and Trump on Thursday signed a \$40 billion nuclear reactor deal, the White House said.

Under it, U.S.-based GE Vernova Inc. and Japan-based Hitachi Ltd. are set to build advanced small modular reactors in Tennessee and Alabama. The deal aims to help stabilize electricity prices and expand power generation in the U.S.

The meeting carried high stakes

Kurt Campbell, the former U.S. deputy secretary of state in the Biden administration and now chair of The Asia Group, said that to press for Japan's interests, Takaichi needed to find a way to suggest that Japan is 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 minesweeping 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

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and a protégé of former leader Shinzo Abe, who developed a close relationship with Trump.

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

Takaichi said between her Oval Office meeting and the dinner that she and Trump discussed deepening U.S.-Japanese 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 the Strait of Hormuz aside, 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.

Those troop shifts came 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.

ABC cancels 'Bachelorette' season with Taylor Frankie Paul, citing 2023 video

By ANDREW DALTON and ALICIA RANCILIO Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — ABC has scrubbed the upcoming season of "The Bachelorette," starring Taylor Frankie Paul, three days before its planned premiere, citing a newly released video from 2023 in which she appears to punch, kick and throw chairs at her former partner as her young daughter watched and cried.

Thursday's cancellation of the already filmed 22nd season of the reality show is unprecedented. While ABC parent company Disney cited the older video, the move comes amid a current domestic violence investigation involving Paul and Dakota Mortensen, father to a son who is the youngest of her three children.

"In light of the newly released video just surfaced today, we have made the decision to not move forward with the new season of 'The Bachelorette' at this time, and our focus is on supporting the family," a statement from Disney Entertainment Television said.

A Paul representative responded that she has been abused for years while remaining silent about it.

Before her "Bachelorette" casting, Paul had already become a reality star through "The Secret Lives of Mormon Wives," whose production is paused.

In 2023 video published by TMZ Thursday, Mortensen is apparently trying to stave off Paul with one hand while he shoots phone video. She is shown punching him, kicking him then throwing three chairs at him while repeatedly screaming "You did this!"

"The only thing you know how to do is hurt me," Mortensen says, while repeatedly pleading with Paul and reminding her that her daughter was watching. A child can be heard sobbing, screaming and shouting "mommy!" Paul's daughter would have been about 5 at the time.

The video was consistent with Paul's arrest in 2023, when she was charged with aggravated assault and other offenses, including domestic violence in the presence of a child. She pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor assault charge; the other counts were dismissed.

A spokesman for Paul said in a statement Thursday that she is "very grateful for ABC's support as she prioritizes her family's safety and security. After years of silently suffering extensive mental and physical abuse as well as threats of retaliation, Taylor is finally gaining the strength to face her accuser and taking steps to ensure that she and her children are protected from any further harm."

The statement said "Taylor has remained silent out of fear of further abuse, retaliation, and public shaming" and that she is now "exploring all of her options, seeking support, and preparing to own and share her story."

Mortensen denied wrongdoing.

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"As anyone who has seen the video will understand, this is a deeply upsetting situation. I am, unfortunately, used to these baseless claims about me and our relationship, which I categorically deny. I am focusing on our son and his safety, and hope that Taylor will do the same," his statement said.

A police spokesperson in Draper City, Utah, told People magazine earlier this week that there was an open domestic violence investigation of Paul and Mortensen, and that both have made allegations.

Mortensen's representatives didn't immediately answer requests for comment.

ABC will air an "American Idol" rerun Sunday instead.

Paul was promoting "The Bachelorette" as recently as Wednesday on "Good Morning America" and on the red carpet before Sunday's Oscars.

She was an unusual choice to helm "The Bachelorette," the reality TV institution that started in 2003. Most leads are cast from previous runners-up from "The Bachelor."

Her selection instead offered synergy with "The Secret Lives of Mormon Wives" on Hulu, also owned by Disney. In a statement confirming her "Bachelorette" casting in October, ABC credited Paul with "igniting 'MomTok' and going viral for pulling back the curtain on Salt Lake's soft-swinging scene."

Paul became known as an influencer in the #MomTok community, a group of women from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints sharing their lives on TikTok. She made news when she announced, in 2022, that she had "stepped out" of an agreement with her husband on relationships with other couples and they were getting divorced.

Season 4 of "The Secret Lives of Mormon Wives" was released last week. Filming of Season 5 has been put on pause.

"It was a decision that all of us girls came up with," Paul's co-star Mikayla Matthews said Wednesday on Instagram. "We didn't feel comfortable filming with everything that was happening."

Paul posted on Instagram in December that filming had wrapped on "The Bachelorette."

Her casting was essentially an experiment gone wrong, said Kate Casey, a former crisis communications specialist who has covered unscripted television in more than 1,500 episodes of her podcast "Reality Life with Kate Casey."

"I think they were trying to shake things up, and it makes sense because the ecosystem is saturated with dating shows like 'F-Boy Island' and 'Love Island' that push the boundaries and 'The Bachelor' and 'The Bachelorette' historically have been saccharine," said Casey.

Casey says network executives probably believed casting Paul would also tap into her 6.1 million-strong TikTok following.

"The thinking was probably, 'We're going to get a new audience' and the new audience is really the most coveted in all of entertainment," she said.

Student loans to go to Treasury Department as Trump continues to dismantle Education Department

By COLLIN BINKLEY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. Education Department is handing off a portion of its student loan portfolio to the Treasury Department, a first step toward shedding management of all student loans as Trump administration officials dismantle the federal education agency.

Under an agreement announced Thursday, the Treasury Department will take over management of student loans whose borrowers are in default, meaning they are months behind on payments. Those loans add up to about \$180 billion, or 11% of the government's \$1.7 trillion student loan portfolio.

Eventually, the Treasury Department is to take responsibility for all student loans, according to the agreement. A second phase with no timeframe says Treasury will "assume operational responsibility" over non-defaulted loans, "to the extent practicable."

Breaking off the student loan operation would mark the biggest step yet in closing the department, which President Donald Trump ordered to be dismantled almost exactly a year ago. Many Americans know the department mostly for its role doling out grants and loans for college, and those streams of funding are

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by far the agency's largest.

Borrowers do not need to do anything as the change goes through, the administration says. They will continue to work with the same loan servicer and repay their loans the same way.

The 17-page agreement outlines a stunning realignment of the nation's federal student loan programs, which have been overseen by the Education Department since it was created more than 40 years ago.

The agreement "marks an intentional and historic step toward breaking up the Federal education bureaucracy and dramatically improving the administration of Federal student aid programs," Education Secretary Linda McMahon said in a statement.

In justifying the change, Trump officials said the Education Department is "ill-equipped" to handle such a big loan portfolio. They blamed the Biden administration for focusing on efforts to cancel student loans rather than help borrowers get back on track with payments. Officials cited recent data showing that fewer than half of all borrowers are currently making payments on their loans, with almost a quarter in default.

Opponents raise concerns about borrower confusion

The agreement is likely to invite legal challenges. Some opponents note that federal law requires student loans to be overseen by the Education Department. Trump officials believe they've found a workaround by framing it as a partnership, with some components, including the policies underpinning student loans, remaining at the Education Department.

Student loan advocates condemned the move, saying it only adds to confusion as the Trump administration overhauls student loan programs.

"The Department of Education has issued a dizzying series of rule changes that make it harder for borrowers to figure out what their options are on their federal student loans," said Kyra Taylor, an attorney at the National Consumer Law Center. She warned that any errors in loan collection would have "devastating effects on families."

The move is part of Trump's campaign to shutter the Education Department, an agency he says was overrun by liberal thinking. Only Congress has authority to close the department, but Trump officials are picking it apart through a series of inter-government agreements that relocate the department's operations to other federal offices.

The future of the government's enormous student loan portfolio has been one of the biggest unanswered questions. At her Senate confirmation hearing, Education Secretary Linda McMahon called Treasury a "natural" place for student loans. Trump later said they would be overseen by the Small Business Administration.

Conservatives have tried previously to move student loans

During Trump's first term, his education chief talked about setting up a semi-private bank to manage student debt. The conservative Heritage Foundation promoted something similar in its Project 2025 plan, calling for a new "government corporation with professional governance and management."

The Treasury Department often has been discussed as an option, yet student loans are seen as a particularly complex form of debt and some question whether the agency has the right technical expertise. In a 2015 pilot, Treasury tried to collect payments from a sample of thousands of borrowers in default. Its success rate was lower than that of the private collection agencies contracted by the Education Department.

Federal student loan borrowers are typically considered in default if they haven't made a payment in more than 270 days. About 9.2 million Americans are in default on student loans, according to Education Department data released this month. Going into default can bring a heavy hit to credit scores, and the government can withhold pay and Social Security benefits.

The latest deal from the administration indicates a willingness to open up the hood of student loan operations at a perilous moment. About 12 million Americans are behind on federal student loan payments in some way, and the industry is bracing for a potentially historic surge in loan defaults as pandemic-era protections come to an end.

Earlier this year, Trump officials postponed their plans to restart involuntary collections on defaulted loans, which could have meant withheld earnings for millions of Americans. It's seen as a politically volatile issue during a tough midterm year where affordability is already on voters' minds.

The body of an American student who went missing in Barcelona has been found, police in Spain say

By JOSEPH WILSON, JOHN O'CONNOR, and SARAH RAZA Associated Press

BARCELONA, Spain (AP) — The body of James "Jimmy" Gracey, a college student from Illinois who went missing while in Spain on spring break, was found Thursday in the water off a Barcelona beach, police said.

Gracey's body was found by police divers and positively identified, the press office for Catalonia's regional police in Barcelona told The Associated Press. The University of Alabama student's body was found near where he was last seen outside a nightclub with his friends early Tuesday. He was visiting friends in Barcelona for spring break.

Catalan police say that their investigation continues into the cause of death.

Gracey, 20, was last seen outside the Shoko nightclub in Barcelona but separated from friends around 3 a.m. on Tuesday. Gracey never returned to the room he was renting with friends, according to family members who live in the suburb of Elmhurst, about 19 miles (31 kilometers) west of Chicago. They realized something was wrong when police contacted them, saying they had recovered his phone.

In a statement released late Thursday, the Gracey family asked for prayers and privacy.

"Our family is heartbroken as we confirm that Jimmy's body has been recovered in Barcelona. Jimmy was a deeply loved son, grandson, brother, nephew, cousin, and friend, and our family is struggling to come to terms with this unimaginable loss," the statement said.

"We are profoundly grateful for the outpouring of love, support, and prayers from people around the world. ... As we navigate this painful time, we kindly ask for privacy so that we may grieve together and begin to process this loss as a family."

In an interview conducted before police confirmation of his death, Gracey's aunt told The Associated Press that he was "just a great kid, a good Catholic boy from the Midwest."

"Very good student, honors program at University of Alabama, chaplain in his fraternity, you know, just an amazing older brother and role model to his cousins," Beth Marren O'Reilly said.

O'Reilly said her nephew left Alabama on Thursday and spent the weekend in Amsterdam before arriving Monday in Barcelona. Gracey's family did not immediately know how police came into possession of his phone. Gracey's father, Taras, is in Barcelona and has been working with police, O'Reilly said.

Barcelona is a popular tourist destination that brings in millions of foreign visitors each year. It is generally safe, especially compared with major U.S. cities, where tourists' biggest worry are normally pickpockets.

Barcelona's beaches, located in walking distance of its center, are a main draw especially for young visitors. The area where Gracey went out is a stretch of beach with several restaurants and nightclubs that are frequented by locals and foreigners.

The University of Alabama said in a statement that the school community "is heartbroken to learn of the death of Jimmy Gracey. Jimmy's loss is deeply felt across our campus. Our condolences are with the Gracey family during this devastating time."

Gracey was a member of the Theta Chi fraternity at the school, and the international organization said that in addition to serving as chaplain for the school's chapter, he was a philanthropy chairperson.

César Chavez's name, once an honor, now carries a stain that officials want to scrub

By MATTHEW BROWN and TERRY TANG Associated Press

Within hours of explosive sexual abuse allegations against labor leader César Chavez, officials at a California university took swift action: First, a black cloth over a campus statue of Chavez, followed by a plywood box hiding it from public view. Soon, officials said, it will be taken down.

The statue at California State University, Fresno, is one of scores of monuments, city streets and elementary schools across the nation that honor Chavez's name and his labor movement legacy. The Associated

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Press identified more than 130 locations or objects in at least 19 states named after Chavez, including libraries, boulevards, community centers and public parks.

Overnight, the name has become more of a stain. Some of the institutions and local governments overseeing sites bearing Chavez's name have already started the process of erasing it. In Denver, city workers took down a bronze bust of Chavez in a park named after him. The city's mayor said the park would be renamed.

Officials there and elsewhere also moved to rename César Chavez Day, a federally proclaimed holiday on March 31, his birthday. Many planned celebrations this month have been canceled.

The allegations that Chavez sexually abused girls and women, including fellow movement leader Dolores Huerta, "call for our full attention and moral reckoning by removing his statue from our campus," said Saúl Jiménez-Sandoval, president of California State University, Fresno. It's not clear how long that will take.

It's also not clear what will happen to the César E. Chavez National Monument in Keene, California. It's where Chavez and his wife, Helen, are buried. It includes the office where some of the reported abuse took place.

Brian Hughes, of Vancouver, Canada, was among the monument's visitors Thursday morning. The stop was planned for the trip weeks ago.

"Now it's difficult reconciling the inspirational side of his life and the stories with these revelations," Hughes said.

A push for honoring Huerta instead

At the Cesar Chavez Student Center at San Francisco State University on Thursday, student Luca Broggi Hendryx recalled hearing stories as a child about Chavez and idolizing him. Now he says the school needs to separate itself from Chavez by changing the student center's name.

"When I first started coming here it made total sense: He was seen as an icon for the Latino civil rights movement," Hendryx said. "So it was almost a proud thing to have a building named after Cesar Chavez. But now it feels the opposite."

In cities including Phoenix, Los Angeles, Portland, and Albuquerque officials said they would look at renaming landmarks such as buildings, streets and schools.

"We have a duty to honor the dignity of the survivors and move forward in a way that reflects our values," Phoenix Mayor Kate Gallego said in a statement. She urged renaming César Chavez Day as Farmworkers Day.

Denver for now will celebrate the holiday as Sí, Se Puede Day, which translates into the farmworkers movement rallying cry — Yes We Can.

Mayor Mike Johnston said Denver would "not let the sins of one man set back the commitment of a community who has fought for decades to deliver on the fundamental belief that everyone is entitled to justice."

Some called for Chavez's namesake places to be renamed for Huerta. The sign at Denver's Cesar Chavez park was covered with a tarp Thursday, and someone had placed a handmade sign over it that said, "Dolores Huerta Park".

The New York Times first reported Wednesday that it found credible evidence that Chavez groomed and sexually abused young girls who worked in the movement. One of his victims, in fact, partly felt compelled to come forward after a recent proposal to name a street near her home for Chavez.

Huerta, who was a labor legend in her own right and co-founded in 1962 with Chavez the National Farm Workers Association — which became the United Farm Workers of America — revealed to the newspaper that she was a victim of abuse by him in her 30s.

When it comes to changing names of sites or events honoring Chavez, Teresa Romero, United Farm Workers president, said, "Everybody's going to have to make their own decisions. I respect the victims, I respect the thousands of people who worked with the union throughout the years as volunteers, and that is not going to change."

Dozens of schools and a Navy cargo ship

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Among the locations and objects bearing Chavez's name is a U.S. Navy cargo ship commemorating his service during World War II and the national monument established in 2012 by then-President Barack Obama on a 187-acre site in Central California where Chavez once lived and worked.

Most of the locations are in California but they include sites in at least 19 states, from New York and Maryland to Oklahoma, the Great Lakes Region and Washington state.

About half are schools, primarily in California. In Pueblo, Colorado, Chavez shares the name of a school with Huerta.

Republican Rep. Tim Burchett of Tennessee on Thursday said he would ask the Pentagon to remove Chavez's name from the Navy ship. "We are on it, Congressman" Pentagon spokesperson Sam Parnell said in a social media post.

Altering a national monument, such as changing a name, needs an act of Congress or action by the president.

There have been previous efforts to change names for government sites and institutions on a broad scale.

During the civil rights backlash that followed the 2020 killing of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis, Congress ordered a nationwide review of military assets named after Confederate leaders. Nine Army bases were renamed, only to have the original names restored under President Donald Trump's administration last year after the army found other people with the same names to honor.

Under former Interior Secretary Deb Haaland federal officials renamed hundreds of peaks, lakes, streams and other geographical features with racist and misogynistic terms. It capped a yearlong process to remove the offensive word "squaw" from geographic names across the country.

Artist Paula Castillo, who created a sculpture in Albuquerque in 2010 as a tribute to Chavez, questioned whether people should think more about monuments to shared values.

"The public work in Albuquerque is intended to make collective labor and lived experience visible in civic space, rather than isolate a single figure," she said. "This allows it to continue holding meaning for communities even as new information forces a more honest reckoning with the past."

Trade with Cuba collapses as Trump escalates pressure on Communist Party leadership

By JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — The Cuban Communist Party has shown an astonishing resilience over six decades in power. Whether it's the United States trade embargo to counter Fidel Castro's 1959 revolution, or the widespread starvation of the "special period" that followed the breakup of its Cold War patron, the Soviet Union, both U.S. hostilities and calamities of its own making have proven no match for the country's leadership.

But perhaps none of those crises pose as grave a threat as the one triggered by an all-but-declared naval siege by the Trump administration as it seeks to force regime change in the wake of its successful ousting of Cuba's longtime ally Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

Even as he fights a war with Iran, President Donald Trump this week said he believes he'll have "the honor of taking Cuba" soon. While it wasn't clear exactly what he meant, the U.S. is looking for President Miguel Díaz-Canel to leave power as part of ongoing talks with Havana that could avert some kind of U.S. military intervention.

Without declaring a formal blockade, Trump and his administration have already crippled trade with the island.

In March, supplies of oil, food and other goods to the island collapsed, with no foreign-originating tankers arriving to Cuba, according to shipping data analyzed by Windward, a maritime intelligence firm. The volume of port calls, which includes tankers moving from one Cuban port to another, averaged around 50 per month in 2025 but fell to just 11 in March - all of them arriving from domestic ports. It was the lowest since 2017. Moreover, little relief is in sight: with no tankers and only three container ships — originating in China, India and the Netherlands — listing Cuba as their intended harbor. On Thursday, The Associated Press reported that two vessels, one of them sanctioned by the U.S., could arrive in the coming days car-

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rying Russian fuel.

The stranglehold is disrupting the lives of Cuba's 11 million residents, who are enduring massive blackouts and a breakdown in medical care due to a lack of fuel to power ambulances and hospital generators. The country, one of the most heavily reliant in the world on oil to generate electricity, produces barely 40% of the oil needed to cover its energy needs.

Ian Ralby, head of I.R. Consilium, a U.S.-based consultancy focused on maritime security, said the United States' aggressiveness will not endear Trump to Cubans long eager for change.

"Every Cuban resident is suffering the acute inaccessibility to fuel and all the knock-on consequences in terms of access to food, hospitals and free movement," he said.

The sudden halt in trade has taken place without the White House reapplying restrictions on exports to Cuba that were last loosened during the Biden administration. Indeed, shipments of U.S.-produced poultry, pork and other foodstuffs to Cuba — which account for the vast majority of U.S. exports to the country — last year soared to \$490 million, the most since 2009. Non-agricultural exports and humanitarian donations, much of it to Cuba's emerging private sector, more than doubled.

But emboldened by the U.S. capture of Maduro, Trump has gradually escalated his rhetoric on Cuba, first suggesting he would pursue "a friendly takeover" of the country and more recently telling conservative allies from Latin America that he would "take care" of Cuba once the war with Iran winds down.

While neither he nor the administration has articulated what exactly the pledge means, the continued presence in the Caribbean of U.S. warships used in the strike against Maduro has led companies and countries that do business with Cuba to self-police.

"Nobody wants to be on the radar of Trump's Truth Social account," said John Kavulich, president of the New York-based U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council.

In the run-up to the U.S. military's ousting of Maduro during a nighttime raid on Jan. 3, Trump declared that the U.S. would block all Venezuelan oil shipments to Cuba and even seized a few tankers to enforce what it called a "quarantine," borrowing a term used by President John F. Kennedy during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. Later in the month, Trump signed an executive order threatening tariffs on any country that supplies oil to Cuba. The warning alarmed officials in Mexico, who have long opposed U.S. policy toward Cuba and where state-run oil company Pemex emerged as a valuable lifeline last year as Venezuelan oil exports declined.

Cuba has upped its rhetoric against what it calls a "fuel blockade" by the U.S. But the Trump administration has disputed that characterization, no doubt aware that according to international law any naval operation seen as punishing civilians is considered an illegal act of aggression outside wartime.

"Cuba is a free, independent and sovereign state — nobody dictates what we do," Díaz-Canel said in a social media post in January. "Cuba does not attack; we are the victims of U.S. attacks for 66 years and we will prepare ourselves to defend the homeland with our last drop of blood."

Amid mounting criticism that U.S. actions are starving Cuba, Secretary of State Marco Rubio has started to walk back some of the administration's threats. In January, the State Department sent \$3 million in food kits, water purification tablets and other humanitarian assistance items to the island. Then last month, the White House said it would allow U.S. companies to send fuel — including Venezuelan oil — to private businesses in Cuba.

The goal, said Rubio, is to encourage the development of the nation's small private sector.

"The reason why those industries have not flourished in Cuba is because the regime has not allowed them to flourish," Rubio said when announcing the private sales.

But it's unclear if any companies have started fuel shipments and critics say the strategy is unrealistic as most Cuban companies lack capital and the Cuban government has a monopoly on gasoline distribution.

John Felder, owner of Premier Automotive Export, a Maryland-based business that has been selling electric cars and scooters to Cuba since 2012, said most Cubans, even in their current anguish, are fearful of what lies ahead.

"U.S. policies have created the most resilient people in the world and yet all they want to do is buy things in Miami like you and me," said Felder, who just returned from a four-day business trip to Havana

and says he's never seen conditions worse. "They want change but they don't want to be controlled by the United States."

Mullin's DHS nomination advances to full Senate despite opposition from Republican Rand Paul

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sen. Markwayne Mullin moved a step closer to becoming President Donald Trump's next homeland security secretary after a Senate committee Thursday narrowly advanced his nomination.

The 8-7 vote came after a contentious hearing Wednesday and sent the Cabinet nomination to the full Senate, which could act to confirm the Oklahoma Republican next week.

That vote included a "no" from the Republican chairman, Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky, and a "yes" from a Democrat, Sen. John Fetterman of Pennsylvania. The approval comes as the parties are fighting bitterly over the policies of the Department of Homeland Security, leading to a funding lapse that is now in its 34th day.

During his testimony before the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee, Mullin tried to make the case that he would be a steady hand after the tumultuous tenure of Kristi Noem, Trump's first DHS secretary. Mullin also signaled support for Trump's immigration priorities, which are central to the funding standoff after the death of at least three American citizens at the hands of federal agents.

Mullin's hearing was unusually combative and came close to going off the rails as he engaged in heated exchanges with some Democrats as well as Paul.

In addition to a lengthy exchange over Mullin's failure to disclose what he characterized as a "classified" congressional trip while a House member, Paul opened the hearing with a fiery statement challenging Mullin's fitness to lead DHS.

Paul pointed 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 had 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.

"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.

Fetterman, who has frequently challenged his own party, said his vote was "rooted in a strong committed, constructive working relationship with Senator Mullin for our nation's security."

Pentagon seeks \$200 billion in additional funds for the Iran war, AP source says

By LISA MASCARO and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Pentagon is seeking \$200 billion in additional funds for the Iran war, a sizable amount that is certain to be met with questions from Congress, which would need to approve any new money.

The department sent the request to the White House, according to a senior administration official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the private information. Asked about the figure at a press conference Thursday, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth did not directly confirm the amount, saying it could change.

"It takes money to kill bad guys," Hegseth said.

But he said "we're going back to Congress and our folks there to ensure that we're properly funded."

Big price tag faces scrutiny over war

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It's an extraordinarily high number and comes on top of extra funding the Defense Department already received last year in President Donald Trump's big tax cuts bill. Such a request would need to be approved by Congress, and it is not at all clear such spending would have political support. The nation's debt has surged past a record \$39 trillion.

Congress has been bracing for a new spending request but it is not clear the White House has transmitted the request for consideration. Lawmakers have not authorized the war, and Congress is showing growing unease with the military operation's scope and strategy.

The new funding request was first reported by The Washington Post.

Trump said the administration is asking for the money for other reasons beyond Iran.

"This is a very volatile world," the president said from the Oval Office. He said the emergency spending would be a "very small price to pay" to ensure the nation's military stays in top shape.

While the House and Senate are controlled by the president's Republican Party many of the more conservative lawmakers are also fiscal hawks, with little political appetite for big spending, on military operations or other matters. Most Democrats are likely to reject such a request and demand more detailed plans from the Trump administration about the U.S. military goals and objectives.

Rep. Ken Calvert, the Republican chair of the House subcommittee with oversight over defense spending, said he was already advocating for a supplemental spending bill to allow the Pentagon to replenish munitions.

"That was going to happen, and now we have this conflict with some additional costs. So, that's where we're at," Calvert of California said Thursday.

"I know there are peripheral issues out there that people are concerned about, but right now, this is about our national security and it's important that we get this done," he said.

But Rep. Betty McCollum of Minnesota, the ranking Democrat on the House subcommittee with oversight over defense spending, said the president has taken the U.S. into a war without coming to Congress and she's demanding more details.

"This is not going to be a rubber stamp for the president of the United States," McCollum said.

She said Congress is still waiting for the administration to explain where it would be spending the additional \$150 billion funding that went to the Pentagon through Trump's tax and spending cut bill. It's also waiting on the president's budget request for this year.

"I'm not writing blank checks to the Department of Defense," McCollum said.

Negotiations ahead on a final package

It all points to a monumental battle ahead in Congress over any new Pentagon spending that would almost certainly need support from Republicans and Democrats in a bipartisan package to push past objections toward approval.

The requested amount would be a hefty boost to the Pentagon's annual budget, which Congress approved at more than \$800 billion for the current fiscal year.

That's on top of some \$150 billion that Congress gave the Defense Department in last year's tax cuts bill, much of it for specific projects and overall upgrades to the Pentagon's operations.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office has projected that the federal government will run a \$1.9 trillion annual deficit this year, and that's before adding any spending done through a supplemental bill.

House Speaker Mike Johnson said it's a "dangerous time" and "we have to adequately fund defense."

Asked whether he supported the amount, Johnson said he has not seen the details, but "I support what's needed to ensure that the American people remain safe."

While some of the military's biggest champions on Capitol Hill have welcomed new spending as a way to replenish munitions stockpiles and upgrade the U.S. defense capabilities in the face of emerging threats, others will certainly point to health care and other domestic needs that they view as more important priorities.

Rep. Rosa DeLauro, the ranking Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee, said of the \$200 billion price tag: "It's outrageous."

To muscle a package to passage, Republican leaders could either try to go it alone through an arduous budget process, or cut deals with Democrats on other priorities that would likely balloon the overall price tag.

House Majority Leader Steve Scalise, R-La., signaled the negotiations ahead.

"Ultimately we're going to have negotiations with the White House on an exact amount," Scalise said. "We're not at that point yet."

Brent crude briefly tops \$119 per barrel, before receding, and shakes stock markets worldwide

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — A roller-coaster day for oil prices showed how they're dictating where financial markets and maybe even the global economy are heading. Stocks tumbled in Europe and Asia when oil prices shot higher early on Thursday, but U.S. stocks pared their sharp losses as the day progressed and oil prices fell back.

The morning began with the shock of Brent crude, the international standard, briefly rising above \$119 per barrel, up from roughly \$70 before the war with Iran began.

The jump followed intensified attacks by Iran on oil and gas facilities around the Persian Gulf in response to an Israeli attack on an important Iranian natural gas field. They worsened fears that the war could knock out oil and gas production in the Middle East for a long time, which would mean high prices could last a while and cause inflation to rip higher around the world.

Stock indexes dropped 3.4% in Japan, 2.8% in Germany and 2.7% in South Korea. But oil prices pared their big gains as the day progressed, the latest in their hour-to-hour swings since the war began.

Brent oil settled at \$108.65, up only 1.2% from the day before, and then eased further as trading continued. After briefly topping \$101, a barrel of benchmark U.S. crude settled at \$96.14 and then fell toward \$94.

That helped stocks on Wall Street pare their own losses, which were already more modest than in Europe and Asia because U.S. companies are less reliant on oil from the Middle East.

The S&P 500 finished with a dip of 0.3% after coming back from an early loss of 1%. It even briefly turned higher in the last hour of trading. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 203 points, or 0.4%, and the Nasdaq composite fell 0.3%.

President Donald Trump and countries around the world have made moves to stem the spike in oil prices. But they're mostly short-term fixes, and markets want to see less risk for oil and gas fields around the Gulf and a clearance of the Strait of Hormuz off Iran's coast, where a fifth of the world's oil typically sails.

Late on Thursday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said his country will hold off on any further attacks on the Iranian gas field, at Trump's request.

Uncertainty about what will happen in the war has led to manic back-and-forth swings in the oil and stock markets since the war began nearly three weeks ago. The yo-yo movements also hit the bond market Thursday, as Treasury yields jumped in the morning with the price of oil and then eased back.

The two-year Treasury yield got as high as 3.96% before receding to 3.79%, which is a major move for the bond market. The two-year yield tends to follow expectations for what the Federal Reserve will do with short-term interest rates.

Oil prices have gotten so high that traders are nixing bets that the Federal Reserve will cut interest rates even once this year. It's a dramatic turnaround from before the war, when traders were betting heavily that the Fed would cut rates multiple times.

Cuts to rates would give the economy and prices for investments a boost, and they're something Trump has angrily been calling for, but they would risk worsening inflation. The Fed on Wednesday decided to hold off on cutting interest rates at its latest meeting, and traders found comments from Chair Jerome Powell discouraging about the possibility for cuts in 2026.

Now, traders are betting on a 73% chance that the Fed will hold rates steady this year or maybe even

raise them, according to data from CME Group. Just a month ago, those same traders were betting on a 74% probability that the Fed would cut rates at least twice.

Earlier in the day, the Bank of Japan, the European Central Bank and the Bank of England held their own interest rates steady.

The 10-year U.S. Treasury yield held at 4.26%, where it was late Wednesday. But it's still well above its 3.97% level from before the war with Iran started.

Higher Treasury yields have already sent rates for mortgages and other kinds of loans upward, and a report on Thursday showed sales of new U.S. homes unexpectedly weakened in January.

Higher Treasury yields also grind down on prices for all kinds of investments, from stocks to crypto to gold. Gold sank 5.9% to settle at \$4,605.70 per ounce. Silver fell even more and dropped 8.2%.

Stocks of companies that mine such metals fell to some of Wall Street's sharpest losses. Newmont slumped 6.9%, and Freeport-McMoRan fell 3.3%.

Micron Technology fell 3.8% even though it reported a blowout quarter of much higher profit and revenue than analysts expected. It gave back some of its big gain for the year so far, which came into the day at nearly 62% because of a worldwide shortage for computer memory.

Helping to limit Wall Street's losses was Rivian Automotive, which rose 3.8%. It announced a partnership where Uber will invest up to \$1.25 billion in the company and expects to buy 10,000 autonomous robotaxis. Uber Technologies fell 1.7%.

All told, the S&P 500 fell 18.21 points to 6,606.49. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 203.72 to 46,021.43, and the Nasdaq composite sank 61.73 to 22,090.69.

California's Gov. Newsom supports move to rename César Chavez Day over alleged sexual abuse

By TRÂN NGUYỄN, HAVEN DALEY and JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California Gov. Gavin Newsom said he supports a proposal to rename César Chavez Day as Farmworkers Day following stunning allegations of abuse against the revered labor leader.

Political leaders in states and cities are considering similar moves after the allegations became public, accusing Chavez of sexually abusing girls and the co-founder of the United Farm Workers of America union, Dolores Huerta, decades ago.

There also have been calls to alter memorials honoring the man who in the 1960s helped secure better wages and working conditions for farmworkers and had been admired by many Democratic leaders.

Washington Gov. Bob Ferguson's office said Thursday that he won't issue a proclamation honoring César Chavez Day this year while Denver officials plan to rename their annual celebration. Events in Texas and in his home state of Arizona have been canceled at the request of the César Chavez Foundation.

In 2000, California became the first state to designate Chavez's birthday as a holiday. Schools were required to teach students about his involvement in the labor movement in California. Chavez died in California in 1993 at age 66.

Assembly Speaker Robert Rivas and Senate President pro Tempore Monique Limón, the leaders of the California Legislature, said Thursday they would pass a bill renaming the holiday before the end of the month. The legislation would need Newsom's approval.

Advocates grapple with Chavez's legacy

Latino leaders and community groups quickly condemned the alleged abuse by Chavez but emphasized that the farmworker movement was never about one person.

Mary Rose Wilcox and her husband marched alongside Chavez, helped him open a radio station in Phoenix and plastered their Mexican restaurant with his photos and a mural.

By Wednesday morning, they had taken down Chavez's photos and were making plans 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.

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Visitors to the Chavez National Monument in central California, where the labor leader is buried, were also contemplating how he should be remembered.

"I don't think you want to erase everything he did," Nell O'Malley, from Corvallis, Oregon, said Thursday. "But I don't think you want to honor him the same way knowing what we know now."

Dolores Huerta stamped her own legacy on the fight for justice

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

Huerta described two sexual encounters with Chavez; one in which she was "manipulated and pressured" and another when 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.

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

She joined Chavez in 1962 to co-found the National Farm Workers Association, which became the United Farm Workers of America.

Huerta's resolve and dedication to women's rights and social justice won wide admiration. Some, including a group of Democrats in Texas, are calling for Huerta's name to replace Chavez's on places that bear his name.

Some knew about Chavez's abusive behavior, biographer says

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.

His place in history grew after his death. Schools, streets and parks pay tribute to him not only in the Southwest and California but also in places far away where he remained an inspiration.

In Milwaukee, there's a statue of Chavez near a street bearing his name while a colorful mural of his likeness adorns a building in a Toledo, Ohio.

In 2014, President Barack Obama proclaimed March 31 César Chavez Day. President Joe Biden had a bronze bust of Chavez installed in the Oval Office when he moved into the White House.

But Chavez was full of contradictions even as a union leader, said Miriam Pawel, a 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.

Chavez's family and foundation voice support for the victims

Born in Yuma, Arizona, Chavez grew up in a Mexican American family that traveled around California picking produce.

His family said in a statement that they are devastated by 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 César Chavez Foundation pledged support for the labor leader's victims, saying — 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.

Its president, Teresa Romero, said Thursday that the many people who have dedicated years to fighting for workers' rights should know their work is recognized.

"We have in one hand César Chavez, the man who committed horrible acts that we're not going to justify, that we don't condone," she told The Associated Press. "On the other hand, we have César Chavez, the organizer who brought thousands and thousands of people together to be able to work for farm workers, and improve their lives and working conditions."

Belarus releases 250 political prisoners in a deal with the US to lift some sanctions

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — Belarus' authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko on Thursday ordered the release of 250 political prisoners as part of a deal with Washington that lifted some U.S. sanctions, the latest step in the isolated leader's effort to improve ties with the West.

Lukashenko pardoned the prisoners after meeting with U.S. President Donald Trump's special envoy for Belarus, John Coale, in the Belarus capital of Minsk. Coale hailed the release as a "significant humanitarian milestone" and a testament to Trump's "commitment to direct, hard-nosed diplomacy." It marked the largest one-time release of political prisoners in the country.

Coale told reporters that the U.S. will lift sanctions from two Belarusian state banks and the country's Finance Ministry, and that the top Belarusian potash producers have been removed from a sanctions list.

Belarus' opposition leader-in-exile, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, hailed the prisoners' release as "a moment of great relief and hope."

"After years of isolation, people are now free and can finally embrace their loved ones," Tsikhanouskaya told The Associated Press. "There is nothing more powerful than seeing someone who endured unjust imprisonment reunited with their family."

She thanked Trump and his officials for their "tireless efforts to secure the release of political prisoners," adding that "these humanitarian efforts are saving lives."

The last time U.S. officials met with Lukashenko, in December, Washington announced the easing of sanctions on Belarus' potash sector, a key source of export revenue, and 123 prisoners were released and sent to Ukraine and Lithuania.

A close ally of Russia, Minsk has faced isolation for years. Lukashenko has ruled the nation of 9.5 million with an iron fist for more than three decades, and the country has been sanctioned repeatedly by Western countries — both for its crackdown on human rights and for allowing Moscow to use its territory in the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Lukashenko's rule was challenged after a 2020 presidential election, when tens of thousands poured into the streets to protest a vote they viewed as rigged. They were the largest demonstrations since Belarus became independent following the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union.

In an ensuing crackdown, tens of thousands were detained, with many beaten by police. Prominent opposition figures either fled the country or were imprisoned.

Five years after the mass demonstrations, Lukashenko won a seventh term last year in an election that the opposition called a farce.

More recently, Belarus has freed some political prisoners to try to win favor with the West. Since Trump returned to the White House last year, Lukashenko has released dozens of prisoners, including Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ales Bialiatski and key dissident figures Siarhei Tsikhanouski, Viktor Babaryka and Maria Kolesnikova.

Trump spoke to Lukashenko by phone in August 2025 after one such release and even suggested a face-to-face meeting in what would be a big victory for the Belarusian leader, who has been dubbed "Europe's Last Dictator."

Dzianis Kuchynski, an adviser to Tsikhanouskaya, said that 15 of the 250 prisoners arrived in Lithuania following their release.

They included Valiantsin Stefanovich and Marfa Rabkova of the prominent Belarus human rights group Viasna. Stefanovich was serving a nine-year sentence on charges of smuggling money to finance activities violating the public order after his arrest in 2023. Rabkova was sentenced to 14 years and nine months following her 2020 arrest and conviction on charges of organizing riots and inciting hatred, accusations widely seen as a punishment for documenting human rights abuses.

Nasta Loika, 37, an activist with the international rights group Human Constanta, was also released. She was sentenced to seven years in prison after her arrest in 2022 on charges of organizing mass unrest and

inciting hatred - charges widely seen as retaliation for her activism.

Also freed was Katsiaryna Bakhvalava, 32, who also goes by the last name of Andreyeva, a journalist of the Polish-funded Belsat TV channel who was arrested in 2020 while covering mass anti-government protests in Minsk. She was sentenced to more than eight years in prison on convictions for violating public order and treason.

Eduard Palchys, a 35-year-old opposition blogger, was also among those pardoned by Lukashenko. He was convicted of causing harm to Belarus' national security and organizing mass unrest over his role in coordinating the demonstrations in 2020. and sentenced to 13 years in prison.

Like previously released prisoners, they were all sent to Lithuania without passports or other identity papers. Kuchynski denounced it as a "mockery" by Belarusian authorities seeking to make the lives of the released prisoners more abroad more difficult.

Just before the latest announcement of releases, the Viasna group had estimated that there were more than 1,100 political prisoners in the country.

Tsikhanouskaya emphasized that "many people are still behind bars" and "our goal remains unchanged — to free them all and to put a final end to repression, so that every Belarusian can live freely in their own country."

What Americans are giving up to afford ACA health insurance, according to a new poll

By ALI SWENSON Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Lately, Priscilla Brown has had to choose between properly managing her Type 2 diabetes and affording other necessities, like gas in her car. Some days, she takes half or a third of her prescribed insulin dose — just to stretch it out longer.

"Sometimes I don't even take my medicine," said the 48-year-old truck dispatcher in Orlando, Florida. "It's so much with insurance, it's crazy."

About 8 in 10 Americans, like Brown, who re-enrolled in Affordable Care Act marketplace coverage say their health care costs are higher this year, including about half who say their costs are "a lot" higher, according to a new survey from the health care research nonprofit KFF. A main reason for increased costs was the Dec. 31 expiration of enhanced tax credits that had offset premiums for most enrollees.

For Brown and others, those spiking costs are having real impacts on daily life. Of the 1,117 Americans surveyed who had ACA marketplace coverage in 2025, including those who dropped coverage or changed plans, about 55% said they're planning to deal with health care costs by cutting spending on food and other basic household needs.

Democrats in Congress last year had fought to keep the COVID-era subsidies but faced pushback from Republican leadership. In January, momentum toward a bipartisan compromise fell apart — leaving some 23 million ACA enrollees without relief as they faced higher premiums or made tough decisions to disenroll or downgrade plans.

The new poll, which was conducted in February and March and followed up with respondents from a survey conducted last year to learn how they're grappling with health insurance now, offers a glimpse at how Congress' unresolved fight continues to strain regular Americans — even as many federal lawmakers have, at least for the moment, turned to other priorities.

Many ACA enrollees are anxious about medical costs

Last year, Brown paid zero dollars toward her health insurance premiums. This year, her new plan costs \$17 a month — and has a higher deductible.

Brown said she learned this week that her new refill of medicine was going to cost more than \$150 and "almost passed out." She filled her car with only half the gas she needed, knowing she'd need money for the medications.

Anxieties about unexpected medical costs are acute, the poll shows. About three-quarters of people who had ACA insurance last year now say they are "very" or "somewhat" worried about paying for emergency

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care or hospitalization, while about half said the same about routine medical visits or prescription drugs.

Some enrollees switch to lower-tier plans, while others drop coverage entirely

Most of last year's enrollees, about 7 in 10, stayed on ACA health insurance — but that includes about 3 in 10 who changed plans within the marketplace. Meanwhile, about 2 in 10 became eligible for coverage through their employer, Medicare or Medicaid or purchased insurance outside of the ACA marketplace, which tends to be less comprehensive.

About 1 in 10 of last year's enrollees said they dropped coverage altogether and are now uninsured, the poll shows.

Eric LeVasseur, a 63-year-old software developer in Seal Beach, California, was part of that group. He said when he saw his mid-tier, silver-level plan was going to nearly triple to \$1,200 per month, "it was not something my budget could absorb."

Many enrollees blame health insurance companies and politicians

About 7 in 10 returning ACA enrollees facing higher costs say they blame health insurance companies "a lot," while just over half put "a lot" of blame on Republican lawmakers, President Donald Trump and pharmaceutical companies. About one-third blamed Democrats in Congress or hospitals "a lot," while about 1 in 10 placed this level of blame on doctors or employers.

Respondents who identified with a political party and saw costs rise overwhelmingly blamed the opposing party's lawmakers "a lot."

James Mako, an engineer in Boca Raton, Florida, and a political independent, said he blames the Republican Party. His \$500-per-month premiums were poised to double this year for his silver-level ACA health plan. So, he downgraded to a bronze-level plan with a higher deductible.

Mako said he's not convinced by the ideas Republicans have floated to fix the problem, like funneling money into health savings accounts.

"I think they're just sales gimmicks," he said. "The subsidies should be back."

Trump faces his most difficult Iran war decision: Will he deploy US troops to seize uranium?

By AAMER MADHANI and SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is facing perhaps the most daunting question of the war with Iran, one that could define his time in office: Will he put U.S. troops on the ground in Iran to secure some 970 pounds of enriched uranium that Tehran could potentially use to build nuclear weapons?

Trump has offered shifting reasons for launching the war, but he has been consistent in articulating that a primary objective in joining Israel in the military action is ensuring that Iran will "never have a nuclear weapon."

The president has been more circumspect about how far he's willing to go to follow through on his pledge to destroy Iran's weapons program once and for all, including seizing or destroying the near-bomb-grade nuclear material that Iran possesses.

Much of it is believed to be buried under the rubble of a mountain facility pummeled in U.S. bombings Trump ordered last June that he had claimed "obliterated" Tehran's nuclear program.

It's a risky, complicated project that many nuclear experts say cannot be done without a sizable deployment of U.S. troops into Iran, a dangerous and politically fraught operation for the Republican president, who has vowed not to entangle the U.S. in the sort of extended and bloody Middle East conflicts that still loom large on America's psyche.

At the same time, lawmakers and experts remain concerned that if Iran hard-liners emerge from the fighting, they'll be more motivated than ever to build nuclear weapons as they look to deter the U.S. and Israel from future military action, a dynamic that makes taking control of Iran's enriched uranium even more critical. That stockpile could allow Iran to build as many as 10 nuclear bombs, should it decide to weaponize its program.

Some lawmakers, like Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., say they remain deeply fearful that the presi-

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dent has put the nation on a path that will require putting troops inside Iran for what he called Trump's confused and chaotic objectives.

"Some of the objectives that he continues to espouse simply cannot be achieved without a physical presence there -- securing the uranium cannot be done without a physical presence," said Blumenthal, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Meanwhile, Republican allies of Trump stress that there are plans in place to deal with the enriched uranium. Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman James Risch, R-Idaho, on Wednesday cited "a number of plans that have been put on the table." He declined to elaborate.

Others acknowledged the complications of deploying troops into Iran.

"No one has given me a briefing on how you would do it without boots on the ground," said Sen. Rick Scott, R-Fla., a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee. "It doesn't mean you can't. But no one's ever briefed me about it."

Scott added it's not tenable to allow the stockpile to remain: "I think it would be helpful to get rid of it."

Trump and advisers are nontransparent about deliberations over uranium

Nearly three weeks into a conflict that's left hundreds of people dead, tested long-standing alliances and brought pain to the global economy, Trump and his top advisers have been nontransparent about their deliberations over Iran's uranium stockpile.

"I'm not going to talk about that," Trump said last week when asked about the enriched uranium. "But we have hit them harder than virtually any country in history has been hit, and we're not finished yet."

Later that day, during an appearance in Kentucky, Trump appeared to claim the strikes had already neutralized the threat. "They don't have nuclear potential," he said.

Meanwhile, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth told reporters earlier this week that the administration sees no point in telegraphing "what we're willing to do or how far we're willing to go" while asserting "we have options, for sure."

Experts say it's doable but won't be easy

Richard Goldberg, who served as director for countering Iranian weapons of mass destruction for the National Security Council during Trump's first term, said that seizing or destroying the enriched uranium is certainly doable, if the president decides to go that route.

The U.S. and Israeli forces have been making strides toward creating the conditions — namely, establishing total air superiority — that would allow for special operations forces operators, who are trained in blowing up centrifuges and dealing with nuclear material, to conduct such an operation.

To be certain, a troops-on-the-ground effort is expected to be far more complicated than other recent high-profile, lightning-strike insertion operations, such as the January capture of Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro or the May 2011 killing of Osama bin Laden, Goldberg said. And the likely need to remove rubble to get to the canisters of enriched uranium adds another layer of complexity, because it would require heavy construction equipment.

"But if you actually own the airspace and you can have close air support and drones and everything else up in the sky for pretty wide perimeter, presumably you could do a lot," said Goldberg, who is now a senior adviser at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a hawkish Washington think tank.

International Atomic Energy Agency chief Rafael Grossi told reporters in Washington this week that the assumption is much of the enriched uranium remains in the trio of Iranian nuclear sites bombarded last year by the U.S.

"The impression we have ... is that it hasn't been moved," said Grossi, adding that a bulk of the material is beneath the rubble at Iran's Isfahan facility while lesser amounts are at the Natanz and Fordow facilities that were destroyed in last year's American strikes.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said in a Sunday appearance on CBS' "Face the Nation" that Iran offered to dilute the enriched uranium stockpile during his talks with Trump's negotiators, Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, that failed to produce a deal shortly before the U.S. and Israel began the bombardment.

Testifying before a Senate committee on Wednesday, Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard in her prepared remarks said that the U.S. attacks on Iran had "obliterated" Iran's nuclear enrichment

program and buried underground facilities.

Gabbard said the U.S. has been monitoring whether Iran's leaders will try to restart its nuclear program but said that they have not tried to rebuild their nuclear enrichment capability. She added that the clerical authority overseeing Iranian government has been degraded in Israel's strikes on its leadership but remains intact.

Brandan Buck, a senior foreign policy fellow at the Cato Institute, said that an effort to extract or dilute the enriched material would likely take more than 1,000 troops at each Iranian site and would take time to complete.

On the other hand, not acting to secure the enriched uranium also comes with risk. Should Iran's hard-liners remain in power, and with enriched material, they will now have greater motivation to build a nuclear weapon.

"Trump has put himself between a rock and a hard place," Buck said. "Throughout this, he has had maximalist aims, but he's wanted to maintain minimal effort in order to keep the costs low."

Dolores Huerta ends her silence, champions decades of advocacy for marginalized groups

By SUSAN MONTROYA BRYAN Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — It was Dolores Huerta who coined the slogan "Sí, se puede" in 1972 when bringing together farmworkers in Arizona to fight a law that prohibited boycotts and strikes.

Told it would be impossible to organize in the Southwestern state, her three-word Spanish-language response — which translates as "Yes, it can be done" — was simple, defiant and emblematic. Huerta's resolve cemented her place in history as one of the nation's most influential labor leaders, civil rights icons and feminist activists.

Former President Barack Obama would later credit her for the phrase that was a rallying cry in his 2008 campaign in a slightly modified translation, "Yes, we can."

As co-founder of what eventually became the United Farm Workers union, Huerta has been the face of a movement that for decades aimed to empower the lives of workers through higher wages, health benefits, pensions and improved safety.

At nearly 96, she still uses her platform to advocate for marginalized groups and fight discrimination.

So it shocked the world Wednesday when Huerta revealed that she was sexually abused by the movement's co-founder, César Chavez, leading to the birth of two children, a secret she kept for 60 years.

Now some are calling for Huerta's name to replace Chavez's on the plethora of government buildings, schools, monuments and streets that bear his name across the country.

Activist roots

The details of Huerta's life and rise to activism have been told again and again over the decades through interviews and documentaries, during award ceremonies and on historic markers in her honor.

She was born Dolores Clara Fernandez in 1930 in Dawson, New Mexico. Her father was a miner, union activist and state lawmaker. After her parents divorced, her mother took Huerta and her two brothers to California.

The farm-rich San Joaquin Valley where Huerta grew up was a melting pot of Mexican, Filipino, African American, Japanese and Chinese working families. Her mother encouraged the cultural diversity, while her independence, entrepreneurial spirit and activism further helped form Huerta's own aspirations.

Huerta was a young, energetic elementary school teacher when she decided to answer a calling that would set her on an incredible path. Frustrated by her students' poor living conditions, she thought she could do more by organizing farmworkers than trying to teach their hungry children.

She met Chavez in the 1950s through her early work with a Latino civil rights group in Stockton, south of Sacramento. Wanting to focus more on the plight of farmworkers, in 1962 they started the National Farm Workers Association, which became United Farm Workers a few years later. She was a key leader and negotiator for the union.

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Chavez, who died in 1993, once described her as fearless, acknowledging her commitment to the cause and toughness when it came to negotiations.

Huerta reaffirmed that commitment in a statement Wednesday, saying she told no one about Chavez's abuse for decades in order to protect the movement she had dedicated her life to.

"I channeled everything I had into advocating on behalf of millions of farm workers and others who were suffering and deserved equal rights," she said.

A long legacy

Huerta has never been afraid of going toe-to-toe with lobbyists or growers. Nor was she afraid of law enforcement — she was jailed more than 20 times for demonstrating and was even seriously injured while protesting in 1988.

After a long recovery, Huerta shifted focus and hit the road to campaign for women's rights and encourage Latinas to run for office.

She continues marching and speaking in cities across the country on race, poverty and women's issues on behalf of her California-based Dolores Huerta Foundation. She campaigned for Democratic Presidents Bill Clinton, Obama and Joe Biden, and California Gov. Gavin Newsom has said he considers her a close friend.

Huerta's work over the decades earned her a number of accolades including the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor. When Obama presented the award in 2012, he praised her as a tenacious leader and joked that he had stolen her slogan for his campaign.

Huerta also has a spot in the National Women's Hall of Fame, having been the first Latina to be inducted, and has received nine honorary doctorates from U.S. universities.

Schools are named in her honor in California, Texas and Colorado. Her image graces many murals, and there are also Dolores Huerta streets — including an avenue in Albuquerque where part is named for her and part for Chavez.

People on social media already are calling for the entire road to be named for Huerta, as members of Congress and state officials commend her and the other women for coming forward. They say no one should have to suffer in silence to protect a man or a movement.

"I cannot imagine the pain and suffering they've endured over decades," said U.S. Sen. Martin Heinrich, a Democrat from New Mexico. "Thank you for showing us what real strength is."

RFK Jr. makes food sound like a miracle drug. Researchers say he often overstates the science

By ALI SWENSON and JONEL ALECCIA Associated Press

In the Trump administration's campaign to promote healthy eating, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has not stopped at his slogan urging people to "eat real food" to prevent disease.

In recent speeches and podcast appearances, the nation's health secretary also has claimed that diet can "cure" schizophrenia and diabetes and allow people to rid themselves of bipolar disorder diagnoses. Researchers say the comments overstate current evidence about the real and promising role that food can play in managing illness.

"Food is medicine, and you can heal yourself with a good diet," Kennedy said on comedian Theo Von's "This Past Weekend" podcast in February.

The talking point aligns with an idea from Kennedy's "Make America Healthy Again" allies that has gotten some bipartisan support: The role of food in health deserves more attention.

Scientists agree that diet can contribute to some diseases and also can be valuable in treating them. But public health advocates say Kennedy's exaggerations are part of a pattern in which he cherry-picks and misrepresents scientific research, a tendency that he has regularly applied to vaccine science, enraging doctors.

It is the latest example of Kennedy being "incredibly careless and irresponsible" in talking about health issues, said Kayla Hancock, director of a public health project at the advocacy group Protect Our Care.

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Dr. Theresa Miskimen Rivera, president of the American Psychiatric Association, fears the language could drive patients to self-medicate with food alone.

"The concern always is that people can have hope and they might interpret that as, 'Well, I don't need medication. I do not need treatment. I just need to follow the diet,'" Rivera said.

Kennedy oversteps the evidence on diet and psychiatric disorders

In an early February speech at the Tennessee Capitol, Kennedy cited the work of Dr. Christopher Palmer, a Harvard Medical School researcher who in 2019 wrote about two patients with schizophrenia who experienced remission of their symptoms following a high-fat, low-carbohydrate ketogenic diet.

Kennedy said that Palmer had "cured schizophrenia using keto diets."

Palmer has called that inaccurate. He told The Associated Press that "as much as I wish we had cures for mental illness or other chronic diseases, it is important that we use more precise language." Palmer prefers the word "remission."

During the same speech, and later on Joe Rogan's podcast, Kennedy referred to studies "where people lose their bipolar diagnosis by changing their diet." He said "there's a big paper about to come out" showing results.

Kennedy spokesman Andrew Nixon said those comments referred to a "growing body of research" on the issue, including a University of California, Los Angeles, study investigating the effect of a keto diet on teenagers with bipolar disorder.

That study is still recruiting patients and will not be completed until March 2027, according to a posting on a federal website. Any publication would come months after that.

Rivera, of the American Psychiatric Association, said Kennedy's claims exaggerate the evidence. Studies testing the role of the ketogenic diet on mental health conditions have been small, anecdotal or pilot studies, she said. Many did not include a control group of patients following a regular diet.

"At this point, it's premature. We cannot draw definitive conclusions," Rivera said. "There is not enough evidence to recommend a specific diet or as a standalone, without medication such as antipsychotics or mood stabilizers."

It is true that research into the effects of ketogenic and other diets on psychiatric disorders is accelerating, Palmer said. He said 20 controlled clinical trials using the keto diet for severe mental illness are underway, with results of two trials set for publication within the next year.

Palmer said he is "very enthusiastic" about diet as a promising therapy for serious psychiatric disorders, but that patients with mental illness should still talk with their doctors.

"I want to implore patients: Please do not stop your medications on your own," he said. "Please do not even try a ketogenic diet on your own as a treatment for schizophrenia or bipolar disorder."

Diabetes experts are split on the impact of Kennedy's words

Kennedy's comments on Von's podcast that "most diabetes can be cured through diet" also have been scrutinized. Some experts say the health secretary overstated the role of diet.

Type 1 diabetes, an autoimmune disorder, cannot be cured by diet alone, said Dr. Willa Hsueh, an Ohio State University endocrinologist and researcher. A healthy diet and exercise are keys to managing Type 2 diabetes, but it can be difficult to use those tools alone to reverse the disorder, she said.

"The secretary is not wrong that it can work," Hsueh said. "But it's not common for people to cure themselves ... by diet alone."

Others defended Kennedy's claims about the disease that affects 40 million people in the United States.

Dr. Dariush Mozaffarian, a cardiologist and director of the Food is Medicine Institute at Tufts University, said a healthy diet could help "most individuals" with Type 2 diabetes lower their blood sugar levels, reverse symptoms and allow them to stop taking medications for the condition.

"Whether you consider that a cure or remission, that's medical speak, right?" Mozaffarian said.

He acknowledged that Kennedy is not "always perfectly precise in the terminology and there could be risks to that." But he welcomed the high-level focus on the role of diet in improving chronic disease.

"I'd rather exaggerate and get some attention and action than keep doing what we're doing, which is have millions of Americans suffering from diet-related diseases," Mozaffarian said.

MAHA supporters want to see more focus on food

Mark Gorton, president of the Kennedy-aligned MAHA Institute, said he was not familiar with the studies Kennedy referenced, but that nutrition has been "an incredibly overlooked area in our medical system for decades."

"I think to the extent that it is possible, we should be prioritizing focusing on diet and getting back to living healthy rather than taking sick people and medicating them forever, which is the current way our system works," Gorton said.

Kody Green, a mental health advocate with schizophrenia, said that he supports healthy eating, but that he needed psychiatric medications. He worries that Kennedy's comments could deter schizophrenia patients from trying drugs that are already stigmatized.

"For some people, maybe food can help with the issues they have, but schizophrenia is a very serious mental illness," Green said. "Until further research is done, making claims like that can be really dangerous to people in my community."

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 the 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."

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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 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 members 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 his Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Florida, between his two terms, and Carlson has continued to visit the White House.

Mort Klein, president of the conservative Jewish group the Zionist Organization of 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 that anti-Jewish hate is less pervasive in society than bias against white people and that some Christian politicians who were fervent supporters of Israel 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."

Today in History: March 20, sarin gas attack in Tokyo subway

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, March 20, the 79th day of 2026. There are 286 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On March 20, 1995, in Tokyo, packages containing the deadly chemical sarin were opened and dispersed on five separate subway trains in a terror attack by members of the Aum Shinrikyo cult, causing 14 deaths and injuring more than 1,000.

Also on this date:

In 1815, Napoleon Bonaparte returned to Paris after escaping his exile on Elba, beginning his "Hundred Days" rule.

In 1852, Harriet Beecher Stowe's influential novel about slavery, "Uncle Tom's Cabin," was first published

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in book form after being serialized in the abolitionist newspaper The National Era; it would become the bestselling novel of the 19th century.

In 1854, the Republican Party of the United States was founded by opponents of slavery at a schoolhouse in Ripon, Wisconsin.

In 1976, kidnapped newspaper heiress Patricia Hearst was convicted of armed robbery for her part in a San Francisco bank holdup carried out by the Symbionese Liberation Army. (Hearst was sentenced to seven years in prison; she was released after serving 22 months and was pardoned in 2001 by President Bill Clinton.)

In 1987, azidothymidine (AZT) became the first medication approved by the Food and Drug Administration to treat HIV/AIDS.

In 1996, a jury in Los Angeles convicted Erik and Lyle Menendez of first-degree murder in the shotgun slayings of their wealthy parents. (They were sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.)

In 2014, President Barack Obama ordered economic sanctions against nearly two dozen members of Russian President Vladimir Putin's inner circle and a major bank that provided them support, raising the stakes in an East-West showdown over Ukraine.

In 2016, President Barack Obama began a three-day visit to communist Cuba during which he met with President Raul Castro and delivered a speech carried on Cuban state television. The visit marked the first to Cuba by a U.S. president in nearly 90 years during efforts to normalize relations between the Cold War-era foes.

In 2023, Russian President Vladimir Putin warmly welcomed Chinese leader Xi Jinping to the Kremlin, sending a powerful message to Western leaders that their efforts to isolate Moscow over the fighting in Ukraine had fallen short.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Hal Linden is 96. Basketball Hall of Fame coach Pat Riley is 81. Hockey Hall of Famer Bobby Orr is 78. Guitarist Jimmie Vaughan is 75. Film director Spike Lee is 69. Actor Holly Hunter is 68. Model-entrepreneur Kathy Ireland is 63. Actor David Thewlis is 63. Actor Michael Rapaport is 56. MMA commentator and former champion Daniel Cormier is 47. Actor-singer Christy Carlson Romano is 42. Tennis player Sloane Stephens is 33. Professional hockey player Trevor Zegras is 25. NFL running back Jahmyr Gibbs is 24. Barron Trump, son of Donald and Melania Trump, is 20.