

Groton Daily Independent

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Wednesday, March 25

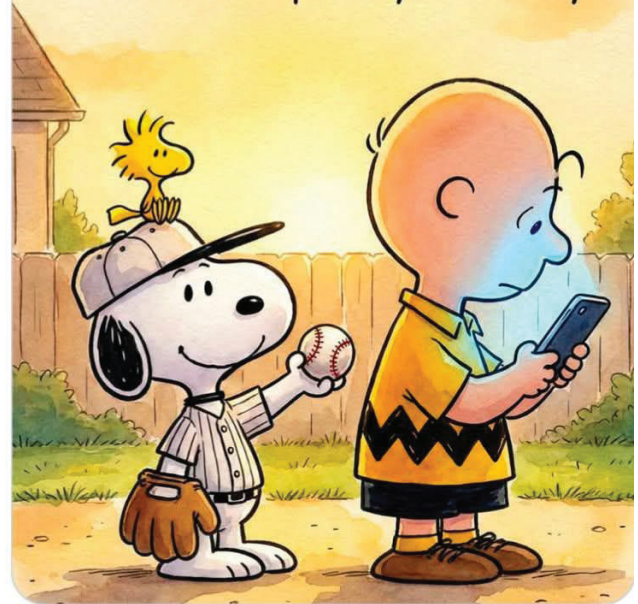
Senior Menu: Chicken broccoli bake, mashed potatoes, fruit, biscuit.
School Breakfast: Omelets.
School Lunch: Cheese quesadilla, refried beans.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.; Soup Supper (Sunday School hosts), 6 p.m.; Lenten Service, 7 p.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.; Lent Supper, 6 p.m.; Lent Service at St. John's, 7 p.m.
United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.
Pickleball, 5:30 p.m. Elementary Gym
6th Grade Boys Basketball, 6 p.m., HS Gym
Groton C&MA: Kid's Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study, 7 p.m.

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Thursday, March 26

Senior Menu: Roast beef, mashed potatoes, California blend, fruit, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Biscuits.
School Lunch: Lasagna bake, corn.
Pickleball, 5:30 p.m., Elementary gym
4th Grade BBB, 6 p.m., Arena
HS Baseball Practice, 6 p.m., GHS Gym

Friday, March 27

Senior Menu: Calico casserole, fruit, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Doughnuts.
School Lunch: Cheese breadstick, marinara sauce, green beans.
FFA Little International at SDSU, Brookings
School Musical, 7 p.m., GHS Gym

Saturday, March 28

Easter Egg Hunt, 10 a.m., City Park
Dueling Duo, 6 p.m., Groton Legion
Pickleball, 9:30 a.m., Elementary Gym
Softball at Clark/Willow Lake (Clark), Varsity at 1 p.m., JV at 2 p.m.

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1440

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

Baseball's Opening Day

The 2026 Major League Baseball season begins tonight with a special matchup between the New York Yankees and San Francisco Giants (8:05 pm ET, Netflix). Play continues with 11 games tomorrow and eight Friday.

After years of testing in the minor leagues and during spring training, MLB is introducing automated ball-strike challenges, or "robot umps," to the major leagues. Batters, catchers, and pitchers can now contest ball and strike calls by plate umpires. Reviews will be conducted using a network of cameras positioned around the field perimeter. When robot umps were used in the 2025 minor league season, just over 1% of pitches were challenged, with roughly half of those calls overturned.

The Los Angeles Dodgers, who face the Arizona Diamondbacks tomorrow, enter the season with a chance to become the first team to win three straight World Series titles since the Yankees (1998-2000).

Honk If You Like Antimatter

Scientists transported 92 antiprotons on a truck for the first time yesterday. The half-hour drive rehearses a process needed to move antimatter on an eight-hour drive from Geneva, Switzerland, to Düsseldorf, Germany.

Antimatter, including antiprotons, is the oppositely charged version of normal matter. It is extremely rare in the universe, and is produced at Geneva's European Organization for Nuclear Research. (The facility can produce 400 million antiprotons per hour.) If antimatter and matter come into contact, they annihilate each other. To avoid that, antiprotons were surrounded by a vacuumed box with magnets cooled to -452 degrees Fahrenheit. The trap allowed antiprotons to be suspended without touching the walls even in the event of an abrupt stop.

Researchers hope to move antimatter from CERN to Heinrich Heine University, which is opening an antimatter center as early as 2029. The move could help scientists continue their research without magnetic interference from CERN's other projects.

The Original Pinot Noir

Pinot noir grapes used today are genetically identical to those consumed about 600 years ago, according to findings released yesterday. The study sequenced the genomes of 54 grape seeds dating back roughly 4,000 years.

Researchers found a seed indistinguishable from modern pinot noir grape seeds in the toilet of a 15th-century hospital in northern France, around the time Joan of Arc was active during the Hundred Years' War. Researchers could not determine whether the grapes were eaten fresh or used to make wine. However, the study did find evidence of winegrowers using techniques like grafting to clone desirable grape varieties as early as the Iron Age, when the Greeks introduced wine to France.

Pinot noir grapes have earned the nickname "heartbreak grape" because their strong preference for cooler climates and thin skin make them difficult to cultivate. Some winemakers in Burgundy, the home of pinot noir, reported that warmer weather is changing the flavor profiles of their wines.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Soccer fans lodge formal complaint with the European Commission against FIFA over high World Cup ticket prices, accuse international soccer body of holding a monopoly over sales.

"Bridgerton" confirms Season 5 is now in production, will be the Netflix series' first season centered on a queer love story.

"Harry Potter" TV series trailer expected to be released today, slated for 2027 HBO premiere.

Olympic skier Mikaela Shiffrin wins record-setting ninth World Cup slalom event; she is poised to clinch the overall World Cup title if she finishes top 15 in today's giant slalom event.

Science & Technology

OpenAI shuts down Sora video platform as part of shift toward building productivity tools, killing \$1B licensing deal with Disney.

... and OpenAI raises additional \$10B, pushing its record-setting funding round over \$120B.

NASA to build \$20B base on moon's surface over the next seven years to support sustained lunar operations, repurposing components from a now-canceled space station originally intended for lunar orbit.

Snow flies survive in subfreezing temperatures by generating their own body heat like mammals and producing antifreeze proteins like arctic fish.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close down (S&P 500 -0.4%, Dow -0.2%, Nasdaq -0.8%), oil prices rise as investors' optimism around Iran peace talks wanes.

European Union and Australia sign sweeping free-trade pact after eight years of negotiations.

Meta must pay \$375M for violating New Mexico law in child exploitation case, jury finds; jury deliberations are underway in a separate Los Angeles case against Meta and Google's YouTube.

Epic Games lays off over 1,000 employees—roughly 20% of workforce—citing low Fortnite engagement.

Venture capital firm Kleiner Perkins to deploy \$3.5B into AI startups; the firm made early investments in Google and Amazon.

Politics & World Affairs

US military plans to send at least 1,000 troops to the Middle East as President Donald Trump claims Iran is eager to move peace talks forward, which Tehran refutes; Trump also claims negotiations are underway (More, w/live updates)

Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt (R) appoints energy executive Alan Armstrong to temporarily fill outgoing Sen. Markwayne Mullin's Senate seat following Mullin's confirmation to lead the Department of Homeland Security.

Afghanistan frees US citizen Dennis Coyle after over one year in detention amid US pressure; no charges were publicly shared.

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Traphagen wins 400m Dash at NSU Indoor Track Meet

ABERDEEN — Groton Area turned in a well-rounded performance Tuesday at an indoor track and field meet hosted at Northern State University, highlighted by multiple top-three finishes and a first-place effort in the girls division.

Lincoln Krause led the way for the Tigers in the boys sprints, placing second in the 55-meter dash with a time of 6.93 seconds and adding a fourth-place finish in the 200 meters at 25.48. Teammate Jordan Schwan also cracked the top 10 in both events, taking sixth in the 55 (7.12) and seventh in the 200 (25.56).

In the distance events, Jayden Schwan turned in a pair of runner-up finishes, clocking a 2:09.61 in the 800 meters and a 4:58.49 in the 1600. Riley Shellenberger added depth for Groton with a sixth-place finish in the 1600 (5:23.68) and ninth in the 800 (2:22.09), while Wesley Borg and Tate Johnson also competed in the 800.

On the girls side, Groton found success across nearly every event, led by Taryn Traphagen's victory in the 400 meters. Traphagen crossed the line in 1:04.87 to claim the lone first-place finish of the meet for the Tigers, while Rylee Dunker followed with a fourth-place effort in 1:10.06.

The sprint group also delivered strong results. McKenna Tietz placed second in the 200 meters (27.91) and added a first-place finish in the 55-meter hurdles with a winning time of 9.79. Makenna Krause took third in the 55 meters (7.80) and added another third-place finish in the long jump with a mark of 4.55, while Tietz was fifth in the 55 (7.83).

Groton's middle-distance and distance runners were equally productive. Ryelle Gilbert placed third in the 800 meters (2:41.02) and finished second in the 1600 (6:22.83). Ashlynn Warrington added a fifth-place finish in the 800 (2:44.82).

In the field events, Emerlee Jones turned in a third-place finish in the high jump, clearing 1.32 meters, and also placed fifth in the 55-meter hurdles (11.08). Teagan Hanten contributed across multiple events, placing ninth in the long jump (3.92), fifth in the triple jump (8.08), and 10th in the hurdles (11.95), while Ella Kettner finished seventh in the hurdles (11.35).

Groton also saw contributions in the shot put from Abby Fjeldheim, who placed 10th with a throw of 8.22 meters, and Avery Crank, who was 13th at 7.82.

Boy's Division

55 Meter: 2. Lincoln Krause, 6.93; 6. Jordan Schwan, 7.12

200 Meters: 4. Lincoln Krause, 25.48; 7. Jordan Schwan, 25.56

800 Meters: 2. Jayden Schwan, 2:09.61; 9. Riley Shellenberger, 2:22.09; 30. Wesley Borg, 2:44.33; 34. Tate Johnson, 2:48.70

1600 Meters: 2. Jayden Schwan, 4:58.49; 6. Riley Shellenberger, 5:23.68

Girl's Division

55 Meter: 3. Makenna Krause, 7.80; 5. McKenna Tietz, 7.83

200 Meters: 2. McKenna Tietz, 27.91; 41. Suri Jetto, 37.02

400 Meters: 1. Taryn Traphagen, 1:04.87; 4. Rylee Dunker, 1:10.06

800 Meters: 3. Ryelle Gilbert, 2:41.02; 5. Ashlynn Warrington, 2:44.82; 30. Suri Jetto, 3:31.96

1600 Meters: 2. Ryelle Gilbert, 6:22.83

55m Hurdles - 33": 1. McKenna Tietz, 9.79; 5. Emerlee Jones, 11.08; 7. Ella Kettner, 11.35; 10. Teagan Hanten, 11.95

Shot Put - 4kg: 10. Abby Fjeldeim, 8.22; 13. Avery Crank, 7.82

High Jump: 3. Emerlee Jones, 1.32

Long Jump: 3. Makenna Krause, 4.55; 9. Teagan Hanten, 3.92

Triple Jump: 5. Teagan Hanten, 8.08



Did tumbleweeds first appear in the US in South Dakota?

By Michael Klinski
South Dakota News Watch

Yes.

The common tumbleweed, a frequent symbol of the Old West in Hollywood movies and a bane of farmers and ranchers' existence, was first discovered in South Dakota in 1873 but originates in Europe and central Asia.

Tumbleweeds, or Russian thistle, first appeared in North America in Bon Homme County, after its seeds were mixed in with flaxseed and inadvertently planted. Tumbleweed thrives in loose soil that has been plowed for other crops, and as farmers in the late 1880s cleared land, the thistle bloomed.



Once the plant matures and becomes stiff, it can cause wounds to farmers and animals and lead to extensive crop losses.

Its growth can also be attributed to the fact that it was difficult to distinguish the thistle seeds from other grains, leading to further dispersal.

Control methods are being tested, but the variety of species makes targeting difficult.

Sources

Natural History Museum, Tumbleweeds: The fastest plant invasion in the USA's history

University of Colorado, Tumbleweeds, despised icons of the West

South Dakota News Watch partners with Gigafact to publish fact briefs that refute or confirm a claim with supporting information and additional evidence and context. Send questions or feedback to news@sdnewswatch.org. Submit a question for us to answer on the tipline.

South Dakota News Watch is an independent nonprofit. Read, donate and subscribe for free at sdnewswatch.org. Contact freelance reporter Michael Klinski: michael.klinski@sdnewswatch.org.

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Data center restrictions signed into South Dakota law after push for incentives failed

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

After lawmakers rejected proposals to incentivize the construction of large data centers in South Dakota, the governor signed a bill into law Tuesday that will place new limits on the industry.

The law applies to data centers with a peak electrical demand of 10 megawatts or greater. It will require data center companies to ensure their water use does not overburden local resources and to pay for the electrical infrastructure costs attributable to them. It also prohibits the state from overriding local ordinances limiting, prohibiting or otherwise regulating data centers.

Another bill Rhoden signed into law Tuesday allows the state Public Utilities Commission to assess data center companies the costs of regulatory reviews related to their projects.

The laws emerged from a broader fight about data centers during the recently concluded legislative session.

Economic developers and some lawmakers unsuccessfully supported incentives such as a 50-year sales tax exemption on the equipment and software purchases for data centers, or the expansion of an existing sales tax rebate program to accommodate data centers.

Another bill that failed would have exempted large backup generators that are not connected to the grid — such as those used by large data centers — from regulatory and siting review by the state Public Utilities Commission.

Backers of those bills said data centers could bring more jobs to the state and more property tax revenue to local governments. Opponents raised concerns about the amount of water used by data centers for cooling, and the potential effect of data centers' electrical demands on the rates of everyday electrical customers.

South Dakota's biggest data center consumes a maximum of 30 megawatts, and the state has none of the vastly larger data centers that have proliferated elsewhere in response to the growth of artificial intelligence, cryptocurrency and other data-intensive industries.

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.

Governor's approval opens South Dakota housing loan fund to big-city airport projects

BY: SETH TUPPER

A state loan fund intended to incentivize housing construction will soon be available for airport improvement and maintenance projects in Sioux Falls and Rapid City.

The change is in legislation that lawmakers approved earlier this month and South Dakota Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden signed into law Tuesday while visiting the Rapid City Regional Airport.

"More gates, more flights and more destinations means more visitors, more business and more opportunity," Rhoden said.

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The money for the loans is held by the state's Housing Infrastructure Financing Program. Legislators and then-Gov. Kristi Noem created the program three years ago. The money can be used for housing-related infrastructure such as streets, roads, sewer lines and water lines.

The fund has supported 85 projects across the state, helping create 7,421 single-family housing lots or units and 5,754 apartment or other multi-family units.

The program initially held a \$200 million mix of state and federal funds. The state Housing Authority issued half of the money as grants. The other half, for loans, had about \$65 million remaining as of late last year, which led the governor and lawmakers to propose tapping into the fund for airport projects.

The new law will take effect in July. It allows for loans from the fund to South Dakota airports in metropolitan statistical areas with populations of at least 125,000, which is a threshold that only the Sioux Falls and Rapid City areas currently meet. The loans will have 20-year terms at 2% annual interest.

Last year, lawmakers and Rhoden authorized a \$15 million, zero-interest loan from the housing fund to help with construction of a new elementary school in the Douglas School District, based in Box Elder. The district, which borders Ellsworth Air Force Base, is experiencing rapid growth related to the impending addition of B-21 bomber planes.

This year's bill is one of 210 that Rhoden has signed into law from the annual legislative session. Another bill Rhoden signed Tuesday will add "necessary site work" to the list of allowable uses for housing infrastructure money, and change the program's maximum loans from one-third to one-half of total project costs.

Lawmakers concluded most of their work March 12 but will return Monday to the Capitol in Pierre to consider the governor's vetoes. He has issued one veto so far against a ban on lab-grown meat, as part of his compromise support of a five-year moratorium that he approved.

More recent bill signings

Other bills signed recently by Gov. Larry Rhoden have included:

House Bill 1298, which makes it a felony crime to publish the home addresses, dates of birth or Social Security numbers of judges and law enforcement officers without their consent and with an intent to place them in fear of death or great bodily injury.

Senate Bill 49, which implements regulations intended to safeguard the integrity, privacy and security of genetic data and provides a civil penalty for violations.

SB 222, which appropriates \$10 million to the state Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources, with \$2 million funding state-approved wastewater and stormwater infrastructure projects and \$8 million funding the state's riparian buffer project, which helps keep polluted and sediment-heavy runoff out of rivers, lakes and streams.

SB 69, which appropriates \$5 million so the Highway Patrol can replace an old airplane with a newer one.

SB 79, which appropriates \$6 million in support of a new advanced manufacturing laboratory and classrooms at Southeast Technical College in Sioux Falls.

SB 136, which appropriates \$5 million for grants to volunteer fire departments for the purchase of personal protective equipment.

SB 107, which adds areas within 500 feet of a licensed and registered child care program to the definition of a community safety zone, which is an area where registered sex offenders are forbidden to live.

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

'There are moments where I break down,' says wife of deported Huron resident

Now-single mother shares story of sudden removal's impact on her family

BY: JOHN HULT

She's a single mother now.

The sole breadwinner. The primary source of support when her 2-year-old throws a fit. The one who has to make sure her 9-year-old makes it to his counseling appointments.

The fits are more frequent now, the counseling new. Both developments, she said, ripple from the loss of the children's father — her husband — from their Huron home nearly eight months ago.

They know where he is, she said: living with his parents in Guatemala, where he was deported last year. His U.S. family can hear his voice, but they can't hug him, hold his hand or rely on him for financial or emotional help.

He is in his mid-30s. He came to Huron as a teen without legal status 20 years ago, his wife said. They were married in 2014.

"There are moments where I break down, especially when my 9-year-old asks, 'Where's daddy?' and 'When is he coming back?' Those questions are the hardest to answer," she said.

South Dakota Searchlight confirmed details of the couple's story and granted them anonymity, due to their concerns about retaliation and about jeopardizing any future reunion.

The two have built a life in Huron with their children. He worked odd jobs, she said, since he lacked a work visa. She said U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement detained her husband outside their home in August. ICE confirmed to Searchlight that the man was later removed from the country.

Their family has explored ways for him to obtain legal status through multiple lawyers, she said, spending thousands of dollars along the way, and each time getting the same answer: It's not feasible under current law. They don't have a lawyer now.

Though she is a U.S. citizen, immigration law imposes requirements for its pathways to legal status for those who marry U.S. citizens, and few are available for those who entered the country without permission.

In the month that followed his arrest, he was transferred multiple times to different detention facilities, she said, "and then I lost contact with him completely."

The days between that moment and when she heard from him again after his return to Guatemala "were some of the darkest days of my life."

ICE says man deported in 2010, returned to U.S.

The Huron mother confirmed her first and last names and her husband's name to South Dakota Searchlight, as well as dates and details of her husband's deportation.

She wanted to share their story to counter the federal government's assertions that it is targeting violent criminals for removal. Her husband, she said, doesn't fit that description — he committed no violent crimes while living in the country. A South Dakota Searchlight check of criminal records in state and federal court returned two tickets for driving without a license a decade ago.

The Minnehaha County Jail detained her husband in August, only as a hold for ICE, Warden Mike Mattson said.

ICE told Searchlight in an email that the man was removed from the U.S. in 2010 and "committed a federal felony" by returning to the country without permission.

At least 295 arrested in South Dakota

The nonprofit Deportation Data Project lists 295 administrative arrests by ICE in South Dakota between Jan. 20, 2025 — the date President Trump took office — and Oct. 15, 2025, the most recent data available. The nonprofit builds its datasets from data posted by ICE or provided by ICE through federal Freedom of Information Act requests.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol began a series of saturation patrols during the summer called Opera-

tion Prairie Thunder, which have continued in cities across the state. The patrol signed an agreement that allows it to detain people on behalf of ICE, and Gov. Larry Rhoden said in his State of the State address in January that troopers had "handed over" 63 people to ICE in the course of the operation. The state's most recent press release on the operation put that figure at 71.

Taneeza Islam, the director of the immigration advocacy group South Dakota Voices for Peace, said she's concerned that South Dakotans see larger scale immigration enforcement operations in urban areas and conclude that ICE arrests aren't happening in their state.

"We are here to say that it is happening here," Islam said. "And it doesn't matter if it's one family or 5,000. The impact on that family, the impact on that community, is real."

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

Lawmakers spar over Homeland Security funding deal as shutdown strains airport security

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT AND SHAUNEEN MIRANDA

WASHINGTON — U.S. Senate Republicans on Tuesday were waiting to hear back from Democrats after they sent them a new offer to fund the Department of Homeland Security, which has been shut down since mid-February.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., said the proposal would fund many of the agencies within DHS, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Coast Guard, but wouldn't provide new spending for some immigration enforcement and deportation activities.

Those programs, mostly run by Immigration and Customs Enforcement, received tens of billions of dollars in Republicans' 2025 "big, beautiful" law, largely exempting those federal workers from the shutdowns.

Thune said the offer currently on the table would leave the door open to the House and Senate moving another budget reconciliation bill through that complicated process to provide additional funding for immigration and deportation programs.

The special legislative pathway would allow GOP leaders to move a bill through the Senate with a simple majority vote as long as they adhere to its rules. That would skirt the need for Democratic votes to get beyond the 60-vote legislative filibuster that applies to other bills.

Pressure for a bipartisan deal to fund DHS mounted in recent days after security lines at airports throughout the country ballooned into multi-hour waits, leading passengers to miss their flights and face expensive rebooking fees. Union leaders on Tuesday demanded lawmakers reach a deal to fund the Transportation Security Administration, which is part of DHS.

SAVE Act as well

A possible reconciliation package, Thune said, could include elements of the SAVE America Act, an elections bill backed by President Donald Trump that remains stalled in the Senate amid Democratic opposition.

"This is a really good outcome, where we've moved the Democrats a long way in our direction," Thune said. "And I think also an understanding that reconciliation could be a possibility in terms of additional funding and for perhaps addressing the SAVE America Act."

Thune said the DHS spending bill wouldn't include any of the overhauls to immigration enforcement that Democrats have advocated for since federal officers shot and killed two U.S. citizens in Minneapolis in January.

"What was pretty clear is that they didn't want funding," he said. "So if you're not going to have funding, I don't know how all of a sudden now you can demand reforms, because I think for them, that was the issue."

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Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said during an afternoon press conference Democrats would prepare a counteroffer that would include changes to how ICE functions.

"This does not have any reforms in ICE. But negotiations are ongoing and they've sent us an offer and we'll be sending them an offer back," the New York Democrat said. "And I can assure you it will contain significant reform in it."

Schumer outlined what he described as "common sense" changes to immigration enforcement activities in late January after two U.S. citizens were killed by federal immigration officers in Minneapolis.

Dems stick to immigration reforms

Senate Appropriations Committee ranking member Patty Murray, D-Wash., said she will continue to press for "modest reforms" to immigration activities during negotiations over the DHS spending bill.

"If we are talking about funding any part of ICE or CBP, we absolutely must take some key steps to rein them in. The current Republican offer in front of us does not do that," she said.

Murray later added that negotiators "have made some progress and the White House has already agreed to some steps" but that the entire point is that "reforms must make it into law."

Connecticut Sen. Chris Murphy, the top Democrat on the Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee, said the Trump administration has "created this problem in which it's really hard to address an immigration enforcement operation that's out of control because it is funded out of almost every part of the DHS budget."

Murphy said his sense is that Democrats are "still firm on our insistence that we're not going to fund an immigration enforcement operation without reform."

Republicans argue for deal

Oklahoma Republican Sen. James Lankford said the latest DHS funding offer represents what Democrats have "asked for multiple times" and that Trump has signed off on it.

Lankford said GOP senators "could" move additional spending on immigration enforcement through the reconciliation process, pointing to the funding they approved just last year in the "big, beautiful" law.

"We've had things like that, even in the last year, and then Democrats had things like that in the (Inflation Reduction Act) as well," he said.

North Dakota Republican Sen. John Hoeven said he believes Democrats "need to take" the deal on DHS funding.

"They keep telling us they'll go with us and now they need to do it," he said. "They can't keep trying to back up or change the deal. It's time to get it done."

Adding SAVE Act could be difficult

Republicans' plan to use the complex budget reconciliation process to pass additional funding for immigration and deportation programs as well as elements of their voter identification bill, dubbed the SAVE America Act, could face headwinds.

Any reconciliation bill would need the support of nearly every Republican in Congress, a complicated obstacle given the party's especially narrow majority in both chambers.

The reconciliation process is also arduous and filled with rules at nearly every turn, including that all of its elements must address federal revenue, spending, or debt. And those changes cannot be deemed "merely incidental" by the Senate parliamentarian.

Senate Appropriations Chairwoman Susan Collins, R-Maine, cast some doubt on using the reconciliation process to move elements of the SAVE America Act, saying, "I don't think that's a good approach."

West Virginia Sen. Shelley Moore Capito said Republicans "are at the beginning" of figuring out what, if any, elements of the SAVE America Act can move through the reconciliation process.

"It's going to be difficult because it's not a budgetary impact, it's a policy impact. But that doesn't mean some good things can't move forward that would help with the integrity of the vote," she said. "So we'll

just have to wait and see. I think reconciliation is probably something we're going to be strongly considering when we get back."

Citizenship proof

The legislation has several elements but generally would require Americans to prove their citizenship by showing a birth certificate or a passport when they register to vote. When voters try to cast a ballot they would need to show photo identification. And all states would be required to submit their voter rolls to a DHS database.

The bill will not be able to make it through the Senate's 60-vote legislative filibuster given strong opposition from Democrats.

South Dakota Republican Sen. Mike Rounds said one option for moving "items" in the SAVE America Act through reconciliation would be to provide funding for states to implement some of its provisions.

"I haven't seen the specific language on it. I just know that in most cases, what you're talking about is making money available," he said. "The policy would not be included, but the resources would be made available because you can't do policy in reconciliation, you do resources."

Ohio Sen. Bernie Moreno said GOP senators will "do whatever we can in reconciliation to get pieces and parts of" the SAVE America Act into law.

And while he wasn't entirely sure how Republicans would prove that those changes aren't "merely incidental" to the multi-trillion-dollar federal budget, he said there is "a whole team of really, really smart people that will answer that question."

Moreno said Republicans "don't have to get every single thing in every single way" on the SAVE America Act.

"You just keep the conversation going," he said. "Eventually, the American public is going to punish Democrats who aren't following up on 80-20 issues."

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.

Mullin pledges to 'protect everybody' as he takes over Department of Homeland Security

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump hailed his new Homeland Security head, former U.S. Sen. Markwayne Mullin, as "strong, professional and fair" during an Oval Office swearing-in ceremony Tuesday.

Mullin, who until Monday was one of Oklahoma's Republican senators, takes the reins at the Department of Homeland Security amid a weeklong partial shutdown in the aftermath of two high-profile fatal shootings of U.S. citizens by two departmental agencies.

Mullin, accompanied by family at the Oval Office ceremony, described his swearing-in as "surreal" and "humbling" during brief remarks after Attorney General Pam Bondi administered his oath of office.

"I made this very clear that I don't care what color your state is. I don't care if you're red or you're blue. At the end of the day, my job is to be secretary of Homeland and to protect everybody the same. And we will do that. I'll fight every single day," Mullin said.

The partial shutdown has snarled major airports nationwide as thousands of Transportation Security Administration personnel, part of DHS, have quit or skipped work in the absence of paychecks.

Mullin said he met with many DHS employees Tuesday, noting they had been working without pay for more than a month because of "politics."

Former fighter

Trump praised Mullin at Tuesday's ceremony.

"I have no doubt that as he takes the helm of DHS, Markwayne will fight for Homeland Security, the United States and securing the country and making it really strong and the way it should be," Trump said. "Our country's come a long way in the last year."

In rising to the role, Mullin became the first member of the Cherokee Nation to serve in the president's Cabinet, a fact Trump said he "didn't know."

Mullin, an award-winning wrestler and former professional mixed martial arts fighter, began his Senate term in 2023. Until being elected as senator, he represented Oklahoma's 2nd Congressional District starting in 2013.

Mullin resigned from the U.S. Senate Monday evening following the body's confirmation of his appointment in a 54-45 vote.

The former senator, who will be tasked with leading a department of 260,000 employees, has not sat on a committee that handles policy for Homeland Security.

Alan Armstrong, a Tulsa businessman, was sworn in Tuesday to replace Mullin in the Senate.

Department in turmoil

Mullin replaces former Secretary Kristi Noem who, since Trump's second term began, oversaw the president's mass deportation crackdown and publicly flaunted her role in ad campaigns and public appearances — including being photographed while touring a notorious mega-prison in El Salvador where the U.S. deported hundreds of migrants against a judge's order.

Noem notably immediately defended two fatal shootings by department personnel in Minneapolis when Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents killed 37-year-old Renee Good on Jan. 7, and Customs and Border Patrol agents killed Alex Pretti, also 37, on Jan. 24.

Democrats have refused to fully fund DHS unless Republicans agreed to new policies for immigration enforcement — including banning face coverings on agents, mandating body camera usage and requiring judicial warrants.

"The department that Markwayne takes over today is currently shut down by radical left Democrat thugs in Congress who have blocked all funding for DHS because they're trying to shield illegal aliens, criminals and gang members," Trump said, incorrectly stating that all DHS funding has been blocked.

While a significant number of DHS employees, like TSA officers, have been working for weeks without pay, both ICE and Customs and Border Protection are fully funded under a new influx of cash Republicans approved in July as part of the massive tax and spending package.

Speaking to reporters following Mullin's swearing-in, Trump declined to talk in detail about negotiations with the Senate to end the partial shutdown.

"They're working on all of that," he said.

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

Supreme Court majority seems to back Trump policy turning away asylum-seekers at US border

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA

WASHINGTON — U.S. Supreme Court justices seemed split Tuesday on whether the Trump administration should be allowed to turn away asylum-seekers who present themselves at ports of entry at the U.S.-Mexico border.

The question presented to the justices was whether migrants have to fully cross into the United States in order to have the right to apply for asylum and be processed, or if they can apply for asylum when they

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appear at a port of entry while on Mexico's side of the border.

The policy requiring a full crossing, known as metering, is defunct, but the Trump administration is asking the high court to make a determination in order to potentially revive the practice for future use at the southern border.

"This is an important tool in the government's toolbox for dealing with border surges when they occur," Vivek Suri, assistant to the U.S. solicitor general, told the court during oral arguments on the asylum case. "I can't predict when the next border surge occurs, but I can say that when it does occur, this is a tool that (the Department of Homeland Security) would want in its toolbox. It's not something the court should leave to future uncertainty."

The six conservative justices seemed to agree with the Trump administration's position, and questioned the definition of when a migrant "arrives" in the United States and can therefore seek asylum — legal protection granted to those fleeing danger or persecution in their home country.

The three liberals of the Supreme Court — Justices Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan and Ketanji Brown Jackson — asked whether the policy violated federal law protecting refugees.

Lower and appeals courts have repeatedly blocked the metering policy, finding it violated U.S. asylum and refugee law for those escaping persecution after the first Trump administration expanded its use in 2017. The Biden administration rescinded the policy in 2021.

A 2020 investigation by the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Inspector General found that up to 680 migrants per day were turned around as a result of the metering policy.

The 'magic thing'

Conservative Justice Amy Coney Barrett asked Kelsi Corkran, an attorney who argued on behalf of the immigrant legal aid and humanitarian group Al Otro Lado, how close an asylum seeker has to be to qualify as "arriving" in the U.S.

The immigration advocacy group originally brought the challenge in 2017 after asylum seekers were turned away by border officials at U.S. ports of entry.

"What is the magic thing, or the dispositive thing, that we're looking for, where we say, 'Ah, now that person we can say arrives in the United States?'" Barrett asked.

Corkran said someone arrives in the U.S. at a port of entry "when they are at the threshold of the port's entrance, about to step over."

"I think that's consistent with ordinary meaning," she said. "I arrive at my house, or I arrive in my yard, when I'm going through the gate. Now that process of arriving is interrupted by the border officer physically blocking them from completing the arrival."

Barrett also asked Suri if the Trump administration plans to reinstate the metering policy.

Suri said the Trump administration would like to, "when border conditions justify."

Jackson noted the policy, in practice, would require an asylum seeker to violate U.S. immigration law by entering into the country without authorization, based on the Trump administration's argument that a migrant has to be on U.S. soil before making an asylum claim.

That would be considered entering the U.S. unlawfully.

"So imagine a polite asylum seeker who wants to do everything by the book, he approaches the border but does not cross precisely because the law says you are not supposed to enter the United States without authority," Jackson said. "If we're trying to think about what 'arriving in' means, surely Congress was contemplating that a person would be coming to the United States, would be doing so with an intent to comply with the law that says you're not supposed to enter, and thereby asking for entry."

Justice Brett Kavanaugh also questioned Suri about how the policy seems to give preference to migrants to enter the U.S. without authorization, rather than those who are seeking to make an asylum claim.

Suri said the metering policy doesn't prevent a migrant from seeking asylum.

"It's saying 'our port (of entry) is at capacity today, try again some other day,' and that time when that person comes in, that person could come in legally," he said.

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Refugee laws

Sotomayor questioned Suri how the metering policy didn't violate the United Nations Refugee Convention of 1951. That act, which the U.S. signed in 1967, was created after the M.S. St. Louis ship, carrying more than 900 Jewish refugees during World War II, was prevented entry to the U.S. and turned back to Europe.

Some passengers were able to find refuge in other countries, but 254 died in the Holocaust.

Suri said the metering policy doesn't send people back to their home country.

"No, you're just telling them to walk back," Sotomayor said, adding that if the turn-back policy were applied to the Jewish refugees on the St. Louis, it would be the same as telling them to swim back.

"They happened to be on a boat, but that's what we did," she said. "We didn't let them dock. We didn't consider whether they were being persecuted. And the majority of those people were shipped back or had to go back from where they came and were killed. That's what we're doing here, isn't it?"

Suri said that he does "not deny the moral weight of claims made by refugees, but that is not the question before the court."

He said the issue is whether Congress imposed the obligation "in the asylum and inspection statutes, and those refer only to aliens who arrive in the United States."

Sotomayor pushed back and noted that if someone were to fly into LaGuardia Airport in New York, they "may not have put their foot on U.S. land, but they've arrived in the United States. They're knocking on the door."

The justices are likely to make a decision on the case by late June.

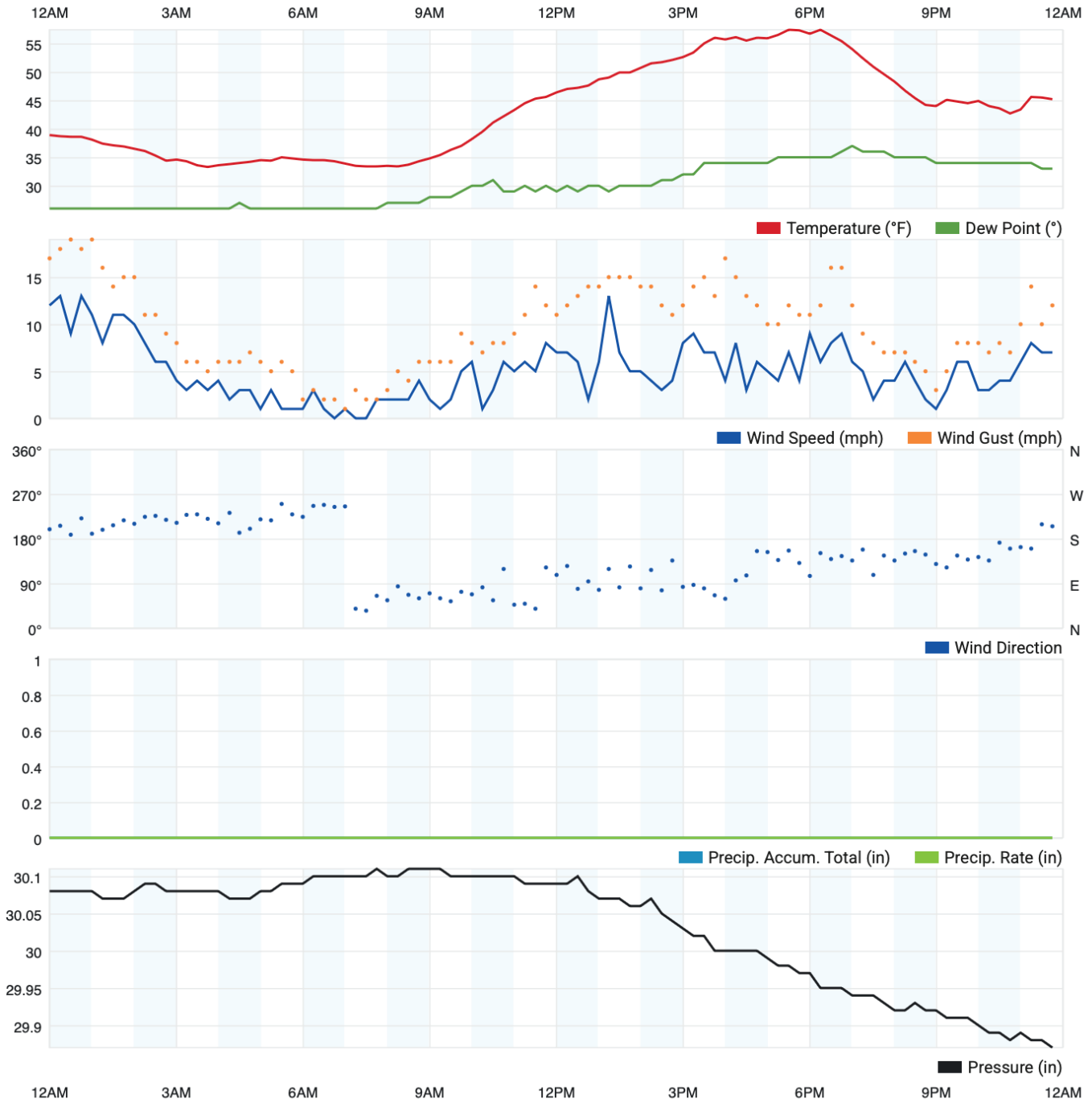
Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include immigration, congressional policy and legal challenges with a focus on how those policies impact the lives of immigrants and migrants coming to the U.S.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

March 24, 2026



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Today



High: 72 °F

Mostly Sunny

Tonight



Low: 32 °F

Chance Rain and Breezy

Thursday



High: 40 °F

Chance Sprinkles/Snow and Breezy

Thursday Night



Low: 19 °F

Partly Cloudy

Friday



High: 43 °F

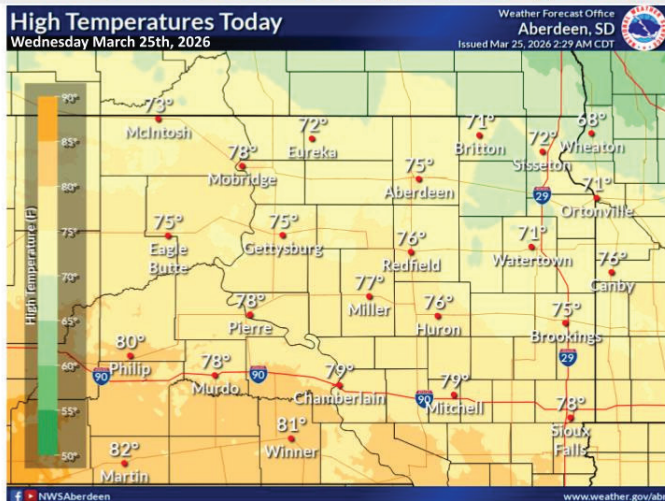
Sunny



Turning Colder After Today

March 25, 2026
3:09 AM

20 to 45% chance of light rain tonight into Thursday, mainly north of U.S. Highway 12



	3/25					3/26				
	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	
Aberdeen	Temp 58	49	43	37	32	32	33	43	36	
	RH 53	71	82	79	75	56	39	42	55	
	WindGust 13#	25#	32#	15#	17#	35#	32#	24#	20#	
Miller	Temp 60	53	48	41	41	44	47	47	34	
	RH 47	59	74	69	60	45	34	32	49	
	WindGust 12#	23#	32#	33#	36#	36#	33#	25#	21#	
Mobridge	Temp 59	51	44	38	33	32	40	41	31	
	RH 49	63	76	85	75	56	39	41	56	
	WindGust 15#	26#	29#	30#	31#	29#	26#	22#	17#	
Murdo	Temp 66	58	52	45	44	50	50	48	40	
	RH 37	44	59	70	58	48	40	40	44	
	WindGust 18#	29#	35#	31#	36#	36#	35#	26#	21#	
Ortonville	Temp 57	48	44	40	34	37	39	38	30	
	RH 55	77	80	70	67	54	46	46	55	
	WindGust 10#	18#	29#	31#	32#	32#	32#	25#	23#	
Pierre	Temp 64	54	48	42	39	48	49	50	40	
	RH 43	57	71	82	58	47	36	34	44	
	WindGust 10#	23#	28#	26#	31#	31#	30#	23#	17#	
Sisseton	Temp 58	51	46	40	31	29	36	35	28	
	RH 53	66	79	70	78	61	44	47	55	
	WindGust 13#	24#	29#	33#	33#	33#	33#	26#	22#	
Watertown	Temp 57	49	45	39	42	38	39	37	28	
	RH 55	71	82	73	67	54	50	50	63	
	WindGust 9#	18#	31#	33#	35#	33#	32#	25#	21#	

Today: Highs mostly in the 70s to near 80, **which is 20 to 30 degrees above average.** **Moderate** to **high** grassland fire danger, with afternoon humidity at 20 to 30% over central and south-central SD.

Thursday: **High** to **very high** grassland fire danger. Strong northerly winds, with gusts of 30 to 45 mph, will develop tonight and persist into Thursday before diminishing in the afternoon/evening.

Temperatures will be about 20 to 30 degrees above average today with readings topping out mostly in the 70s to near 80 degrees. The Grassland Fire Danger Index today will be moderate to high, and high to very high on Thursday across the region. A strong cold front's passage tonight will bring an increase in northerly winds and the possibility of light precipitation. Expect much cooler conditions to settle into the region Thursday and Friday behind this cold front.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 58 °F at 5:36 PM

Low Temp: 33 °F at 3:49 AM

Wind: 20 mph at 12:54 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 81 in 1925

Record Low: -10 in 1894

Average High: 47

Average Low: 23

Average Precip in Mar.: 0.67

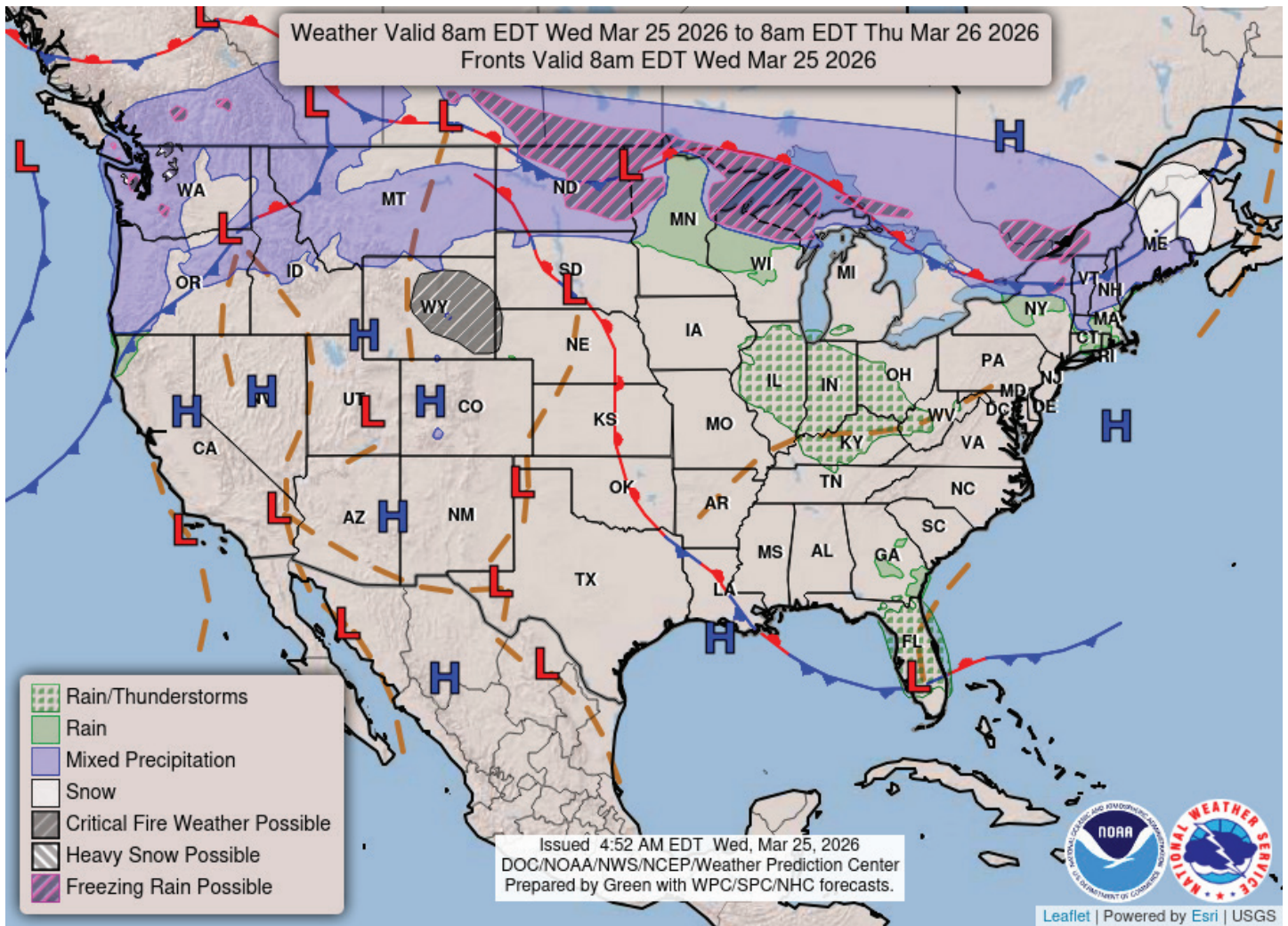
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.29

Average Precip to date: 1.84

Precip Year to Date: 1.62

Sunset Tonight: 7.50 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:23 am



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Today in Weather History

March 25th, 2009: Rapid snowmelt and ice jamming caused the Elm River near Westport to rise -above flood stage on March 20th. The Elm River reached an all-time record level of 22.69 feet on March 25th, almost 9 feet above flood stage. The previous record was 22.11 feet, set on April 10th, 1969. The flood stage for the Elm River at Westport is 14 feet. The city of Westport was evacuated, and the flood waters caused damage to many homes and roads in and around Westport. Also, many other highways and agricultural and pastureland along the river were flooded. The Elm River slowly receded and fell below flood stage on March 30th. The flood waters from the Elm River flowed south and into the northern portion of Moccasin Creek. Subsequently, the Moccasin Creek rose as the water flowed south into Aberdeen. Flooding became a concern for Aberdeen and areas along the creek north of Aberdeen. The Governor signed an emergency declaration that allowed the state to help with flood response efforts, including sending 50,000 sandbags to the area. Also, the National Guard was activated to move various heavy equipment. Some sandbagging and a falling Elm River kept the Moccasin Creek from causing any significant flooding in and north of Aberdeen. The creek flooded some township and county roads. Click [HERE](#) for pictures of the Elm and Maple Rivers.

1843 — A second great snowstorm hit the northeastern U.S. The storm produced snow from Maine all the way to the Gulf of Mexico. Natchez MS received three inches of snow, and up to 15 inches buried eastern Tennessee. Coastal Maine received 204 inches of snow that winter. (David Ludlum)

1914 — Society Hill, SC, was buried under 18 inches of snow, establishing a state record. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1934 — A spring storm produced 21 inches of snow at Amarillo TX in 24 hours. However, much of the snow melted as it fell, and as a result, the snow cover was never any deeper than 4.5 inches. (David Ludlum)

1948 — For the second time in less than a week airplanes were destroyed by a tornado at Tinker AFB in Oklahoma City OK. A March 20th tornado destroyed fifty planes at Tinker AFB causing more than ten million dollars damage, and the March 25th tornado destroyed another thirty-five planes causing six million dollars damage. The first tornado struck without warning, and caused more damage than any previous tornado in the state of Oklahoma. The second tornado was predicted by Fawbush and Miller of the United States Air Force, and their accurate tornado forecast ushered in the modern era of severe weather forecasting. (The Weather Channel) (Storm Data) (The National Severe Storms Forecast Center)

1975 — The town of Sandberg reported a wind gust to 101 mph, a record for the state of California. (The Weather Channel)

1987 — Heavy rain left rivers and streams swollen in Kansas and Nebraska, causing considerable crop damage due to flooding of agricultural areas. The Saline River near Wilson Reservoir in central Kansas reached its highest level since 1951. March rainfall at Grand Island NE exceeded their previous record of 5.57 inches. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — An early season heat wave prevailed in the southwestern U.S. The high of 93 degrees at Tucson, AZ, was a new record for March. Windy conditions prevailed across the central and eastern U.S. Winds gusted to 60 mph at Minneapolis MN, and reached 120 mph atop Rendezvous Peak WY. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 — A Pacific storm brought wet weather to much of the western third of the country, with heavy snow in some of the higher elevations. La Porte CA was drenched with 3.56 inches of rain in 24 hours. Up to 24 inches of snow blanketed the Sierra Nevada Range. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 — Temperatures dipped below zero in the Northern Rocky Mountain Region. Hardin MT was the cold spot in the nation with a morning low of 10 degrees below zero. Freezing drizzle was reported in the Southern Plains Region, with afternoon highs only in the 30s from the Southern High Plains to Missouri and Arkansas. (The National Weather Summary)

In Search of Wholeness

Jesus offers living water that quenches the thirst in our soul.

John 6:32-35: 32 Jesus then said to them, ``Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven.

33 ``For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world.”

34 Then they said to Him, ``Lord, always give us this bread.”

35 Jesus said to them, ``I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.

God created us to be comfortable in our own skin. In spiritual terms, humans are designed to experience peace, joy, and contentment. But many people go through life feeling fragmented and empty.

In John 4:7-30, Jesus talked with a Samaritan woman who was clearly feeling incomplete and disillusioned with the way her life had turned out. Attempting to fill her soul with human love, she'd experienced many heartbreaking relationships and was presently involved in a sinful one. This woman had dipped her "bucket" repeatedly into the well of human love to get the acceptance that she hoped would make her whole. But each experience left her thirsty. Standing before Jesus, she was a broken soul and social outcast.

People throughout history have been drinking from false wells. The truth is that only a relationship with Jesus can make a person whole. From Him comes living water that quenches our thirst forever (John 7:37-38). This means He meets our every need in this life. In a world marred by sin, we will not have a perfect existence, but through Christ, we can expect to live with a sense of deep and lasting satisfaction.

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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.24.26

15 19 43 54 56 4

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

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 35 Mins 21 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.24.26

4 13 52 53 69 10

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$70,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 20 Mins 21 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.23.26

3 6 10 32 34 9

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$19,710,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 35 Mins 21 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.21.26

3 14 18 25 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$31,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 50 Mins 21 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.23.26

1 2 7 30 64 19

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 19 Mins 21 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.23.26

12 18 47 56 63 1

Power Play: 10x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$147,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 19 Mins 21 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Russia says it shot down almost 400 Ukrainian drones as Moscow and Kyiv escalate aerial barrages

By The Associated Press undefined

Russian air defenses downed 389 incoming Ukrainian drones, Russia's Defense Ministry said Wednesday, in what was the largest reported overnight attack on Russian regions and Crimea since Moscow's forces invaded Ukraine more than four years ago.

The drones were stopped over 13 Russian regions as well as the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia illegally annexed from Ukraine in 2014.

The attack underlined the growing capability of Ukraine's domestically developed and manufactured long-range drones.

It came a day after Russia fired almost 1,000 drones and 34 missiles at civilian areas of Ukraine in the space of 24 hours, extending its usual nighttime barrage into daylight hours in one of its biggest aerial attacks of the war. At least 6 people were killed and around 50 people were injured, Ukrainian authorities said.

Alexander Drozdenko, governor of the Leningrad region north of Moscow, said 56 drones were shot down there, and a fire broke out in the Baltic Sea port of Ust-Luga as the result of Ukraine's attack.

Ukrainian forces also carried out a missile strike on the Belgorod region on the border with Ukraine overnight, damaging energy infrastructure, its Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said. Power, water and heating supplies were disrupted, he said.

On Tuesday, Russia fired 948 drones of various types at Ukraine.

Iran received a ceasefire plan from the US but Tehran dismisses idea of negotiating with Washington

By JON GAMBRELL, DAVID RISING, MUNIR AHMED and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran has received an American 15-point plan for a ceasefire for the Iran war through intermediaries from Pakistan, officials in Islamabad said Wednesday. The proposal was sent even as Washington began to move paratroopers to the Middle East to back up a contingent of Marines already heading there.

Iran's military scoffed at the diplomatic efforts and launched more attacks Wednesday on Israel and the Persian Gulf region, including an assault that sparked a huge fire at Kuwait International Airport, sending black smoke billowing into the sky.

The Pakistani officials, speaking on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to release details, described the 15-point plan broadly as touching on sanctions relief, civilian nuclear cooperation, a rollback of Iran's nuclear program, monitoring by the International Atomic Energy Agency, missile limits and access for shipping through the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran's attacks on regional energy infrastructure and its chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz, a strategic waterway through which a fifth of the world's oil is shipped, has sent oil prices skyrocketing and rocked world markets over fears of a global energy crisis.

More US troops on the way even as diplomacy continues

At least 1,000 troops from the 82nd Airborne Division will be sent to the Mideast in the coming days, three people with knowledge of the plans told The Associated Press. They spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive military plans.

The Pentagon is also in the process of deploying two Marine units that will add about 5,000 Marines and thousands of sailors to the region.

U.S. President Donald Trump has said that American officials are in negotiations with Iran, though he hasn't said who they are in contact with. Iran's Khatam Al-Anbiya Central Headquarters, which commands

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both the regular military and the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, suggested there are no talks.

"Have your internal conflicts reached the point where you are negotiating with yourselves?" said Lt. Col. Ebrahim Zolfaghari, a spokesman for the headquarters.

"Our first and last word has been the same from day one, and it will stay that way: Someone like us will never come to terms with someone like you," Zolfaghari said in the video statement aired on state television. "Not now, not ever."

Israeli officials, who have been advocating for Trump to continue the war against Iran, were surprised by the submission of a ceasefire plan, according to an official briefed on the proposal who spoke on condition of anonymity because the official was not authorized to speak publicly about it.

The White House did not respond to requests for comment.

Israel launches new wide-scale strikes on Iran

The Israeli military announced it had begun new wide-scale attacks early Wednesday on Iran targeting government infrastructure, and witnesses reported airstrikes in the northwestern city of Qazvin.

Missile alert sirens sounded multiple times in Israel as Iran launched its own attacks, which have been a daily occurrence since Israel and the U.S. attacked Iran on Feb. 28 to start the war.

Iran also kept up the pressure on its Gulf Arab neighbors, with Saudi Arabia's Defense Ministry saying it had destroyed at least eight drones in the kingdom's oil-rich Eastern Province, and missile alert sirens sounding in Bahrain.

Kuwait said it shot down multiple drones but one hit a fuel tank at Kuwait International Airport, sparking a fire, the General Civil Aviation Authority said. Firefighters were working to contain the blaze.

Brent crude oil, the international standard, has neared US\$120 a barrel during the conflict but was trading at around \$100 in morning trading as talks of a possible ceasefire helped calm prices. That's still up nearly 40% from the start of the war.

Iran has allowed a small number of ships through the Strait of Hormuz, which leads from the Persian Gulf to the open ocean, but none from the U.S., Israel or countries seen as linked with them.

Asked in an interview with India Today on Tuesday whether Iran was charging ships for passage, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei said "absolutely," but did not elaborate.

Diplomatic efforts calm energy prices but face huge hurdles

The 15-point plan now in Iranian hands is, in essence, "a comprehensive deal" to reach a ceasefire in the war, according to an Egyptian official involved in the mediation efforts.

In addition to proposing to fully open the Strait of Hormuz, it also includes restrictions on Iran's missile program and its arming of armed groups, and is being treated as the basis for further negotiations between the nations, according to the official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the yet-publicized details of the proposal

Any talks between the U.S. and Iran would face monumental challenges. Many of Washington's shifting objectives, particularly over Iran's ballistic missile and nuclear programs, remain difficult to achieve.

Also, it's not clear who in Iran's government has the authority to negotiate — or would be willing to, as Israel has vowed to continue killing the country's leaders.

Mediators are pushing for a possible in-person talks between the Iranians and the Americans, perhaps as soon as Friday in Pakistan, the Egyptian official and the two Pakistani officials said.

However, that would require the Americans to immediately start traveling from the U.S. to be there in time. Meanwhile, Iranian officials likely remain worried about the Israelis, whose airstrikes in the war have killed many official, including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Iran is also highly suspicious of the United States, which twice under the Trump administration has attacked during high-level diplomatic talks, including with the strikes that started the current war.

"We have a very catastrophic experience with U.S. diplomacy," Baghaei told India Today, adding that Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi had been in contact with Pakistani and other regional diplomats but that "there are no talks or negotiations between Iran and the United States."

Zolfaghari said that the U.S. was in no position to negotiate.

"The strategic power you used to talk about has turned into a strategic failure," he said. "The one claim-

ing to be a global superpower would have already gotten out of this mess if it could.”

Trump has said that special envoy Steve Witkoff, his son-in-law Jared Kushner, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Vice President JD Vance are already involved in negotiations.

Authorities say Israeli strikes have killed more than 1,000 people in Lebanon and displaced more than 1 million.

Iran’s death toll has surpassed 1,500, its Health Ministry has said. In Israel, 16 people have been killed. At least 13 U.S. military members have been killed, along with more than a dozen civilians in the occupied West Bank and Gulf Arab states.

UK police arrest 2 men over arson attack on ambulances belonging to a Jewish charity

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British police arrested two men on Wednesday in connection with an arson attack on four ambulances belonging to a Jewish charity, which authorities are investigating as an antisemitic hate crime.

The Metropolitan Police said the two men, aged 45 and 47, were arrested in London on suspicion of arson with intent to endanger life and both men have been taken to a police station in the city for questioning.

Commander Helen Flanagan, head of Counter Terrorism Policing London, said the arrests marked “an important breakthrough in the investigation.” But she noted that surveillance camera footage of the incident suggests three people were involved.

Police have not declared the incident to be a terror attack, but are investigating a claim of responsibility by a group with potential links to Iran.

The blaze early on Monday morning in Golders Green, a London neighborhood with a large Jewish population, consumed four ambulances belonging to the volunteer organization Hatzola Northwest. Oxygen cylinders on the vehicles exploded, breaking windows in an adjacent apartment block.

Also shattered was the community’s shaky sense of security, already strained by wars in the Middle East and what many say is soaring hatred of Jews.

The U.K. has accused Iran of using criminal proxies to conduct attacks on European soil targeting opposition media outlets and the Jewish community. Britain’s MI5 domestic intelligence service says more than 20 “potentially lethal” Iran-backed plots were disrupted in the year to October.

Police are probing a claim of responsibility posted on social media by a group calling itself Harakat Ashab al-Yamin al-Islamia, which translates as the Islamic Movement of the Companions of the Right.

Israel’s government has described it as a recently founded group with suspected links to pro-Iran networks that has also claimed responsibility for synagogue attacks in Belgium and the Netherlands.

Metropolitan Police chief Mark Rowley said detectives are investigating the claim but it is too early to attribute the attack to the Iranian state.

New Mexico jury says Meta harms children’s mental health and safety, violating state law

By MORGAN LEE Associated Press

SANTA FE, N.M. (AP) — A New Mexico jury determined Tuesday that Meta knowingly harmed children’s mental health and concealed what it knew about child sexual exploitation on its social media platforms, a verdict that signals a changing tide against tech companies and the government’s willingness to crack down.

The landmark decision comes after a nearly seven-week trial, and as jurors in a federal court in California have been sequestered in deliberations for more than a week about whether Meta and YouTube should be liable in a similar case.

New Mexico jurors sided with state prosecutors who argued that Meta — which owns Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp — prioritized profits over safety, and violated parts of the state’s Unfair Practices Act.

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The jury agreed with allegations that Meta made false or misleading statements and also agreed that Meta engaged in "unconscionable" trade practices that unfairly took advantage of the vulnerabilities of and inexperience of children.

How much Meta owes

Jurors found there were thousands of violations, each counting separately toward a penalty of \$375 million. That's less than one-fifth of what prosecutors were seeking.

Meta is valued at about \$1.5 trillion and the company's stock was up 5% in early after-hours trading following the verdict, a signal that shareholders were shrugging off the news.

Juror Linda Payton, 38, said the jury reached a compromise on the estimated number of teenagers affected by Meta's platforms, while opting for the maximum penalty per violation. With a maximum \$5,000 penalty for each violation, she said she thought each child was worth the maximum amount.

What will change on Meta's platforms

The social media conglomerate won't be forced to change its practices right away. It will be up to a judge — not a jury — to determine whether Meta's social media platforms created a public nuisance and whether the company should pay for public programs to address the harms. That second phase of the trial will happen in May.

A Meta spokesperson said the company disagrees with the verdict and will appeal.

"We work hard to keep people safe on our platforms and are clear about the challenges of identifying and removing bad actors or harmful content," the spokesperson said. "We will continue to defend ourselves vigorously, and we remain confident in our record of protecting teens online."

Attorneys for Meta said the company discloses risks and makes efforts to weed out harmful content and experiences, while acknowledging that some bad material gets through its safety net.

Other lawsuits against Meta

New Mexico's case was among the first to reach trial in a wave of litigation involving social media platforms and their impacts on children.

More than 40 state attorneys general have filed lawsuits against Meta, claiming it's contributing to a mental health crisis among young people by deliberately designing Instagram and Facebook features that are addictive.

"Meta's house of cards is beginning to fall," said Sacha Haworth, executive director of watchdog group The Tech Oversight Project. "For years, it's been glaringly obvious that Meta has failed to stop sexual predators from turning online interactions into real world harm."

Haworth pointed to whistleblowers like Arturo Béjar, as well as unsealed documents and other evidence, saying it painted a damning picture.

New Mexico's case relied on an undercover investigation where agents created social media accounts posing as children to document sexual solicitations and Meta's response.

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

"Evidence shows not only that Meta invests in safety because it's the right thing to do but because it is good for business," Meta attorney Kevin Huff told jurors in closing arguments. "Meta designs its apps to help people connect with friends and family, not to try to connect predators."

Tech companies have been protected from liability for content 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.

New Mexico prosecutors say Meta still should be responsible for its role in pushing out that content through complex algorithms that proliferate material that is harmful for children.

"We know the output is meant to be engagement and time spent for kids," prosecution attorney Linda Singer said. "That choice that Meta made has profound negative impacts on kids."

What the New Mexico jury reviewed

The New Mexico trial examined a raft of Meta's internal correspondence and reports related to child safety. Jurors also heard testimony from Meta executives, platform engineers, whistleblowers who left the company, psychiatric experts and tech safety consultants.

The jury also heard testimony from local public school educators who struggled with disruptions linked to social media, including sextortion schemes targeting children.

In reaching a verdict, the jury considered whether social media users were misled by specific statements about platform safety by Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg, Instagram head Adam Mosseri and Meta global head of safety Antigone Davis.

Jurors also considered Meta's failure to enforce its ban on users under 13, the role of its algorithms in prioritizing sensational or harmful content, and the prevalence of social media content about teen suicide.

ParentsSOS, a coalition of families who have lost children to harm caused by social media, called the verdict a "watershed moment."

"We parents who have experienced the unimaginable — the death of a child because of social media harms — applaud this rare and momentous milestone in the years-long fight to hold Big Tech accountable for the dangers their products pose to our kids," the group said in a statement.

Cancer nurse turned archbishop celebrates election as first woman to lead Church of England

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — A former cancer nurse who became a priest at the age of 40 will be installed as archbishop of Canterbury on Wednesday, publicly celebrating her election as the first woman to lead the Church of England.

Although Sarah Mullally, 63, formally became the archbishop of Canterbury in January, Wednesday's event marks the beginning of her public ministry as both the head of the Church of England and spiritual leader of the worldwide Anglican Communion. The communion is an association of independent churches, including the Episcopal Church in the U.S., that together have more than 100 million members.

"I intend to be a shepherd who enables everyone's ministry and vocation to flourish, whatever our tradition," Mullally said when named last year. "Today I give thanks for all the women and men ... who have paved the way for this moment. And to all the women that have gone before me, thank you for your support and your inspiration."

The ceremony will be attended by Prince William, Princess Catherine, U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer and representatives from many of the communion's 42 member churches. Representatives from the Vatican and the Orthodox church will also attend.

In a nod to Mullally's historic appointment, the service is taking place on the Feast of the Annunciation, which marks the moment Mary was told she had been chosen to be the mother of Jesus. It is a day on which the church says it celebrates "one of the great women of the Bible and thinks about how we can respond to God's call."

The celebration marks a major milestone for the Church of England, which traces its roots to the year 597, when the pope sent St. Augustine to Britain to convert the population to Christianity. He is now recognized as the first archbishop of Canterbury. The English church broke away from the Roman Catholic Church in the 1530s, during the reign of King Henry VIII.

The church ordained its first female priests in 1994 and its first female bishop in 2015.

Mullally begins her tenure as archbishop at a difficult time for the Church of England and the Anglican Communion.

Her appointment may deepen rifts within the Anglican Communion, whose members are deeply divided over issues such as the role of women and the treatment of LGBTQ+ people.

She will also have to confront concerns that the church has failed to stamp out the sexual abuse scandals

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that have dogged it and caused strife for more than a decade.

Mullally replaces former Archbishop Justin Welby, who announced his resignation in November 2024, after he was criticized for failing to act decisively and tell police about allegations of physical and sexual abuse by a volunteer at a church-affiliated summer camp.

Born in Woking, southwest of London in 1962, Mullally attended local schools and worked as a nurse in Britain's National Health Service until she was named chief nursing officer for England at the age of 37, the youngest person ever to hold the post.

While still working in that job, she began training for the ministry.

She was named a bishop in 2015, becoming the fourth woman in the Church of England to reach that rank. Three years later, she was named bishop of London, one of the most prominent positions in the church.

But on Wednesday she will also remember her life before the church, securing her ceremonial cloak with a clasp decorated by the buckle from the belt she wore as a nurse.

The service will also acknowledge the Anglican Communion's worldwide reach, with Archbishop Albert Chama of Zambia offering a prayer in the Bemba language and Bishop Alba Sally Sue Hernández García of Mexico providing a Bible reading in Spanish. The Kyrie prayer will be sung in Urdu.

George Gross, an expert on theology and the monarchy at King's College London, said Mullally's appointment instantly makes her one of the most recognized Christian figures in the world, alongside the pope.

"I think it's huge, absolutely massive," he told The Associated Press. "But it matters because, as we've talked before, the stained glass ceiling is smashed. And that, in the world we're in, when we talk of equality, (it's) hard to have that if you have unattainable positions."

Oil falls more than 4% and Asian shares gain over Trump's talk of negotiations with Iran

By CHAN HO-HIM AP Business Writer

HONG KONG (AP) — Oil prices fell more than 4% and Asian shares gained on Wednesday over possibilities of a de-escalation of the Iran war and negotiations between the United States and Iran.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 was up 3% to 53,806.15. South Korea's Kospi gained 1.6% to 5,643.09.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng rose 0.7% to 25,227.73, while the Shanghai Composite index was 1.1% higher at 3,925.27. Labubu doll maker Pop Mart's Hong Kong-listed shares fell more than 15%, after it announced annual revenue for last year that was largely in line with analysts' estimates.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 climbed 1.9%. Taiwan's Taiex was up 2.5%.

Trump's claims of progress being made from talks with Iran this week and his postponement on Monday of a deadline to "obliterate" Iran's power plants over the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz have also fueled optimism that an end to the Iran war could come soon.

The administration of U.S. President Donald Trump is said to have offered a 15-point ceasefire plan to Iran, but an Iranian military spokesperson mocked the U.S.' attempt at a ceasefire deal Wednesday.

With the Strait of Hormuz being a key waterway for crude oil and liquefied natural gas transport, oil and gas prices have spiked and fluctuated in recent days.

Oil prices fell again on rising hopes for a de-escalation. Brent crude, the international standard, fell 4.2% to \$96.07 per barrel. It was around \$104 on Tuesday.

Benchmark U.S. crude was down 3.8% early Wednesday to \$88.89 a barrel.

While Iran has denied negotiations were taking place, and attacks in the Middle East continued, Pakistan has offered to host talks between Washington and Tehran. And as Trump raised optimism of a de-escalation of the war, at least 1,000 more American troops from the 82nd Airborne Division are said to be deployed to the Middle East in the coming days.

U.S. futures were up more than 0.7% on Wednesday.

On Tuesday, U.S. stocks closed lower. The S&P 500 lost 0.4% to 6,556.37. The Dow Jones Industrial Average edged down 0.2% to 46,124.06, while the Nasdaq composite was 0.8% lower to 21,761.89.

Shares of Estee Lauder sank more than 9%, following confirmation that the U.S.-listed company is in

merger talks with Spanish beauty and perfume group Puig.

In other dealings early Wednesday, gold prices resumed its rise after falling earlier. It dropped in part because of rising U.S. Treasury yields over dimming expectations of a Federal Reserve rate cut after the spike in oil prices threatened to fuel global inflation.

The price of gold was up 3.6% early Wednesday to \$4,557.30 per ounce. It was above \$5,000 earlier this month.

The U.S. dollar was at 158.98 Japanese yen, up from 158.69. The euro was trading at \$1.1591, down from \$1.1608.

As New Mexico jury finds Meta platforms harm children, social media firms await more legal decisions

By BARBARA ORTUTAY and KAITLYN HUAMANI AP Technology Writers

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — The first jury verdict in a series of social media child safety trials this year is in — and it's not looking good for Meta. A jury in New Mexico found on Tuesday that the social media giant's platforms are harmful to children's mental health and imposed a \$375 million penalty.

While the fine is a tiny fraction of Meta's \$201 billion revenue in 2025, the verdict illustrates a growing shift in the public's perception of social media companies and their responsibilities in keeping young people safe on their platforms.

For years, social media companies have disputed allegations that they harm children's mental health through deliberate design choices that addict kids to their platforms and fail to protect them from sexual predators and dangerous content. This year, several state and federal court cases are heading to trial, and while the details may vary, they all seek to hold companies responsible for what happens on their platforms.

The lawsuits have come from school districts, local, state and the federal government as well as thousands of families. The courtroom showdowns are the culmination of years of scrutiny of the platforms over child safety, and whether deliberate design choices make them addictive and serve up content that leads to depression, eating disorders or suicide.

The outcomes could challenge the companies' First Amendment shield and Section 230 of the 1996 Communications Decency Act, which protects tech companies from liability for material posted on their platforms. They could also be costly in the form of legal fees and settlements. And they could force the companies to change how they operate, potentially losing users and advertising dollars.

Here's a look at the major social media harms cases in the United States.

New Mexico jury fines Meta \$375 million

A team led by New Mexico Attorney General Raúl Torrez, who sued Meta in 2023, built their case by posing as children on social media, then documenting sexual solicitations they received as well as Meta's response.

Torrez wants Meta to implement more effective age verification and do more to remove bad actors from its platforms.

On Tuesday, a jury found Meta to be in violation of state consumer protection law. It found thousands of violations, each counting separately toward a penalty of \$375 million.

The landmark decision came after a nearly seven-week trial. Jurors sided with state prosecutors who argued that Meta — which owns Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp — prioritized profits over safety. The jury determined Meta violated parts of the state's Unfair Practices Act on accusations the company hid what it knew about about the dangers of child sexual exploitation on its platforms and impacts on child mental health.

The jury agreed with allegations that Meta made false or misleading statements and also agreed that Meta engaged in "unconscionable" trade practices that unfairly took advantage of the vulnerabilities of and inexperience of children.

Meta said it disagrees with the verdict and will appeal.

"We work hard to keep people safe on our platforms and are clear about the challenges of identifying

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and removing bad actors or harmful content. We will continue to defend ourselves vigorously, and we remain confident in our record of protecting teens online," the company said in a statement.

The trial kicked off in early February. In his opening statement, prosecuting attorney Donald Migliori said Meta has misrepresented the safety of its platforms, choosing to engineer its algorithms to keep young people online while knowing that children are at risk of sexual exploitation.

The Los Angeles case centers on addiction

Jurors are still deliberating in a landmark social media case that seeks to hold tech companies responsible for harms to children. The plaintiff has argued the platform design features of the two remaining defendants, Meta and YouTube, were designed to be addictive, especially for young users. TikTok and Snap each settled before the trial began.

At the core of the Los Angeles case is a 20-year-old identified by the initials "KGM," whose case could determine how thousands of similar lawsuits will play out. KGM, or Kaley, as her lawyers have called her, and a handful of other plaintiffs have been selected for bellwether trials — essentially test cases for both sides to see how their arguments play out before a jury.

"This is a monumental inflection point in social media," said Matthew Bergman of the Seattle-based Social Media Victims Law Center, which represents more than 1,000 plaintiffs in lawsuits against social media companies. "When we started doing this four years ago, no one said we'd ever get to trial. And here we are trying our case in front of a fair and impartial jury."

School districts head to trial

A trial scheduled for this summer pits school districts against social media companies before U.S. District Judge Yvonne Gonzalez Rogers in Oakland, California. Called a multidistrict litigation, it names six public school districts from around the country as the bellwethers.

Jayne Conroy, a lawyer on plaintiffs' trial team, was also an attorney for plaintiffs seeking to hold pharmaceutical companies responsible for the opioid epidemic. She said the cornerstone of both cases is the same: addiction.

"With the social media case, we're focused primarily on children and their developing brains and how addiction is such a threat to their well-being and ... the harms that are caused to children — how much they're watching and what kind of targeting is being done," she said.

The medical science, she added, "is not really all that different, surprisingly, from an opioid or a heroin addiction. We are all talking about the dopamine reaction."

Both the social media and the opioid cases claim negligence on the part of the defendants.

"What we were able to prove in the opioid cases is the manufacturers, the distributors, the pharmacies, they knew about the risks, they downplayed them, they oversupplied, and people died," Conroy said. "Here, it is very much the same thing. These companies knew about the risks, they have disregarded the risks, they doubled down to get profits from advertisers over the safety of kids. And kids were harmed and kids died."

Resolution could take years amid dueling narratives

Social media companies have disputed that their products are addictive. During questioning by the plaintiff's lawyer during the Los Angeles trial, Zuckerberg said he still agrees with a previous statement he made that the existing body of scientific work has not proven that social media causes mental health harms.

Some researchers do indeed question whether addiction is the appropriate term to describe heavy use of social media. Social media addiction is not recognized as an official disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, the authority within the psychiatric community.

But the companies face increasing pushback on the issue of social media's effects on children's mental health, not only among academics but also parents, schools and lawmakers.

"While Meta has doubled down in this area to address mounting concerns by rolling out safety features, several recent reports suggest that the company continues to aggressively prioritize teens as a user base and doesn't always adhere to its own rules," said Emarketer analyst Minda Smiley.

With appeals and any settlement discussions, the cases against social media companies could take years to resolve. And unlike in Europe and Australia, tech regulation in the United States is moving at a glacial pace.

A woman prosecutors say fired shots at Rihanna's home in attempt to kill her set to appear in court

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A woman charged with trying to murder Rihanna and more than a dozen other felonies is set to appear in court to enter a plea Wednesday.

Prosecutors allege the singing superstar, her hip-hop star partner A\$AP Rocky, their three young children and many others were at their home in the Beverly Hills area when Ivanna Lisette Ortiz, 35, of Orlando, Florida, opened fire on the property on March 8.

Ortiz is charged with 10 counts of assault with a semiautomatic firearm and three counts of shooting at an occupied vehicle or dwelling.

At her first appearance in Los Angeles Superior Court on March 11, Ortiz's lawyer entered a plea of not guilty on her behalf, but then withdrew it in favor of postponing the arraignment.

Public records show Ortiz has been a licensed speech pathologist for more than a decade. Now jailed on \$1.8 million bail, she could get life in prison if convicted on all charges.

The Public Defender's Office said only that "we will work to ensure that our client receives the full protections guaranteed under the Constitution."

District Attorney Nathan Hochman said when Ortiz was charged that Rihanna and Rocky were together in an Airstream trailer at the time of the shooting, while her mother, their children and staffers were in the main house.

The three counts of firing at a dwelling were for Rihanna's house, her trailer, and a neighbor's house, prosecutors said. The 10 assault counts were for Rihanna and family, two staffers and two people in the neighboring house.

Hochman would not say where any of the bullets landed, discuss a motive or describe any connection between Ortiz and Rihanna, saying all were under investigation.

A nine-time Grammy Award winner, Rihanna has 14 No. 1 hits on the Billboard Hot 100, including "We Found Love," "Work," "Umbrella" and "Disturbia." She founded the makeup brand Fenty Beauty in 2017.

She and A\$AP Rocky announced the birth of their third child, a girl named Rocki Irish Mayers, in September.

Danish election produces inconclusive result that leaves prime minister's future unclear

By KOSTYA MANENKOV, GEIR MOULSON and JAMES BROOKS Associated Press

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — Denmark's election Tuesday ended in an inconclusive result that left the prime minister's future unclear, after a campaign that focused on bread-and-butter issues rather than her handling of the crisis over U.S. President Donald Trump's ambitions toward Greenland.

Official results showed that Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen's center-left Social Democrats lost ground compared with the last election in 2022, as did her two partners in the outgoing government.

Neither left-leaning nor right-leaning blocs won a majority in parliament. That left experienced Foreign Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen, a former prime minister, in the role of kingmaker.

His centrist Moderate party, with 14 lawmakers in the 179-seat parliament, is in a position to determine whether Frederiksen can serve a third term at the helm of the European Union and NATO country.

Frederiksen said that she is ready to stay on as prime minister. "The world is unsettled. There are strong winds around us," she said. "Denmark needs a stable government, a competent government. We are ready to take the lead."

Kingmaker calls on rivals to 'come and play with us'

Løkke Rasmussen called on rivals on the left and right to climb down from some of the positions they staked out in the campaign, and "come and play with us."

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Denmark "is a small country of 6 million people in a world of 8 billion, which is in upheaval — and there is war in Iran, and there is war in Ukraine," he said. He argued that "We are one tribe. We must come together. We must not be divided."

But Defense Minister Troels Lund Poulsen, the best-placed center-right challenger to Frederiksen, made clear that he and his Liberal party don't intend to go into government with her Social Democrats again.

The Social Democrats remained the biggest single party by some distance, but with 21.9% of the vote — well below the 27.5% they took in the 2022 election.

The 48-year-old Frederiksen is known for strong support of Ukraine in its defense against Russia's invasion and for a restrictive approach to migration — continuing what has become a tradition in Danish politics.

Frederiksen called the election early

Frederiksen called the election in February, several months before she had to. She apparently hoped that her resolute image in the standoff over Trump's push for control of Greenland, rallying European allies behind Denmark, would help her with voters.

Her support had previously waned as the cost of living rose, something that, along with pensions and a potential wealth tax, has been a prominent campaign issue.

No single party had been expected to come anywhere near winning a majority. Denmark's system of proportional representation typically produces coalition governments, traditionally made up of several parties from either the "red bloc" on the left or the "blue bloc" on the right, after weeks of negotiations.

Frederiksen's outgoing administration was the first in decades to straddle the left-right divide.

Social Democrat lawmaker Morten Klessen said the outgoing government had performed well, but that "there's been a lot of trouble in Europe and I think our government has had a lot of focus about Ukraine and I think we have lost a little bit in domestic votes for that." He argued that "we need Mette Frederiksen in Europe for solidarity."

Frederiksen herself said she had hoped for a better result, but it was normal for a party seeking a third term to lose ground. She compared Tuesday's result with the 25.9% of the vote her party took in 2019, when she became prime minister.

"I have been in charge of this wonderful country for nearly seven years," she said. "We have weathered the pandemic; we have had to deal with war. We have been threatened by the American president, and in those nearly seven years, we have seen a four percent decline."

Greenland wasn't a big issue in the campaign

Greenland, which took up much of the government's energy in recent months, wasn't a significant issue in the campaign because there is broad agreement on its place in the kingdom.

Frederiksen warned in January that an American takeover of Greenland would amount to the end of NATO. But the crisis has simmered down, at least for now.

After Trump backed down on threats to impose tariffs on Denmark and other European countries that opposed the U.S. taking control of the vast Arctic island, the U.S., Denmark and Greenland started technical talks on an Arctic security deal.

Denmark's single-chamber parliament, the Folketing, is elected for a four-year term. Lawmakers from Denmark hold 175 of its seats, while two each go to representatives from thinly populated Greenland and the kingdom's other semiautonomous territory, the Faroe Islands.

More than 4.3 million people were eligible to vote.

What we know and don't know about the Iran war negotiations

By JON GAMBRELL, LEE KEATH and MUNIR AHMED Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — U.S. President Donald Trump's surprising claim this week that talks with Iran were yielding great progress has only raised more confusion over a war whose goals were already unclear. The most basic question: What talks?

A 15-point plan from the Trump administration offering a potential pathway to an exit was offered late Tuesday to Iran through Pakistan, according to a person briefed on the contours of the plan but who was

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not authorized to speak publicly about it.

Iran has so far denied any negotiations were taking place, pledging to fight "until complete victory." Pakistan, Egypt and Gulf Arab nations are trying behind the scenes to piece together talks, but their efforts still seem preliminary. Israel is vowing to keep up its attacks.

If anything, the war appears to only be escalating. Barrages were fired into Iran, Israel and across the Mideast on Tuesday. Meanwhile, thousands more U.S. Marines were on their way to the Gulf, and the Army was preparing to deploy at least 1,000 troops from the 82nd Airborne Division to the Middle East in the coming days.

Here is a look at what's known and not known about possible talks to wind down the war.

Push for negotiations

Since launching the war alongside Israel on Feb. 28, Trump has given shifting and often vague objectives, and those mixed messages were on display in recent days. He has talked of degrading or destroying Iran's missile capabilities, and its ability to threaten neighbors — goals that he has some flexibility in declaring accomplished. A much tougher goal is ensuring Iran can never build a nuclear weapon, and Trump has insisted that will be part of any deal.

A reopening of the Strait of Hormuz — a vital waterway for oil shipments that Iran made virtually impassable when the war began — is now also a priority, for Trump and the global economy.

As Trump talks of engaging with leaders in Iran, he has backed off promoting the Islamic Republic's collapse. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, however, continues to say the war aims to help Iranians overthrow the theocracy.

Trump claimed that U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner held talks Sunday with an Iranian leader. He did not say who that was.

Reports focused on Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf as a possible interlocutor. But Qalibaf quickly denied talks were taking place in a post on X.

The U.S. agreed "in principle" to join talks in Pakistan, according to three Pakistani officials, one Egyptian official and a Gulf diplomat, while mediators were still working to convince Iran. The officials all spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to provide the details to the media.

The Egyptian official said efforts are centered on "trust-building" between the U.S. and Iran, aiming to reach a pause in fighting and a "mechanism" to reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

A 15-point peace plan delivered to Iran

A 15-point plan from the Trump administration has been delivered to Iran by intermediaries from Pakistan, who have offered to host renewed negotiations, according to a person briefed on the contours of the plan but who was not authorized to speak publicly about it.

Israeli officials, who have been advocating for Trump to continue prosecution the war against Iran, were taken by surprise by the U.S. administration's submission of a ceasefire plan, the person said.

But with the U.S. taking steps to send additional soldiers and Marines to the Mideast, the move is being framed as Trump maneuvering to give himself "max flexibility" on what he'll do next, the person added.

The White House did not respond to requests for comment on the administration submitting the 15-point plan.

Who speaks for Iran in any talks?

Iran's leadership appears to have remained relatively cohesive, despite weeks of heavy bombardment and the killing of its supreme leader and many top-ranking military figures.

But who actually is in charge is not known. The new supreme leader, Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, hasn't been seen or directly heard from since he was named to replace his slain father, Ali Khamenei.

Within the Islamic Republic are other centers of power, including the military and the powerful paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, as well as political figures like Qalibaf, Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and President Masoud Pezeshkian.

It's not certain anyone entering talks with the U.S. would have backing from the military or Guard. In the ongoing war, Iran's military has conducted strikes based on orders of local commanders, rather than

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from any political leadership, Araghchi has said.

The spokesman of Iran's top military command, Maj. Gen. Ali Abdollahi Aliabadi, vowed on Tuesday that the fighting "will continue until complete victory." It was a message of defiance to Trump's claim that Iran was petitioning for peace, but possibly also a warning to anyone within the Iranian leadership not to back down in talks.

Was Trump just trying to buy time?

Trump's sudden declaration of progress in talks on Monday came just as the deadline was about to run out on an ultimatum he had made over the weekend threatening to "obliterate" Iran's power plants unless the country releases its stranglehold on the Strait of Hormuz. Iran threatened to retaliate against power, water and oil infrastructure across the Gulf.

Trump on Monday pushed the deadline back five days and said there's a "very good chance" a deal could be reached this week. That was a relief to global oil and stock markets.

Trump's move could signal he's wary of the war's possible long-term damage to the U.S. and global economy, though his administration has insisted that any pain from spiking oil prices will quickly be reversed once the war is over.

"Trump could be actively seeking an offramp," the Soufan Center, a New York-based think tank, wrote in an analysis.

On the other hand, the Soufan Center noted, Trump could be buying time for thousands of Marines heading to the region to arrive.

The Marine deployment could be a tactic to pressure Iran on negotiations. But it has also raised speculation that the U.S. may try to seize Kharg Island in the Persian Gulf, which is vital to Iran's oil network, or carry out an operation to remove enriched uranium from inside Iran. Either would mean a greater escalation and a longer war.

Trump has said he has no plans to send ground forces into Iran but has not ruled it out. Israel has suggested ground forces could participate in the war.

What is there to talk about?

Nuclear negotiations were already taking place when the U.S. and Israel launched their surprise attack on Feb. 28, killing the elder Khamenei in the opening salvos of the bombing campaign.

That only deepened Iranian mistrust of Americans in negotiations, especially after Trump's unilateral withdrawal in 2018 from a landmark nuclear agreement reached with the United States three years earlier. Iran and the U.S. held negotiations in early 2025, and when a two-month deadline set by Trump ran out, Israel hit Iran in a surprise attack that the U.S. joined in a 12-day war, striking Iranian nuclear facilities and military positions.

Trump said Monday that any deal to end the war will entail the U.S. removing Iran's enriched uranium, which is critical to its disputed nuclear program. Iran refused that demand in the past, insisting it has the right to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes.

A less ambitious goal for talks could be to reach a ceasefire and the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz.

But Araghchi seemed to reject any partial deal in an interview with Al Jazeera last Wednesday. "We don't believe in ceasefire. We believe in the end of war ... the end of war in all fronts," Araghchi said, emphasizing the need for solutions to conflicts throughout the region.

What about Israel?

Notably, Israel is not involved in the move for negotiations.

Israel has depicted itself as following Trump's lead, and it seems unlikely to continue with its strikes on Iran if the U.S. declared an end to the war. Still, it has pursued its own war aims beyond the Americans'. Its bombing last week of Iran's offshore South Pars natural gas field triggered intensified Iranian attacks on the Gulf Arab states, and Trump told Israel to halt such attacks.

In a statement late Monday, Netanyahu acknowledged Trump's diplomatic efforts but said Israel would continue to strike its enemies for the time being.

Also, an end to the war on Iran does not mean an end to Israel's bombing campaign in Lebanon. There, Israel has seized a new opportunity to try to crush Hezbollah after the militants fired rockets in support of Iran.

Trump administration offers 15-point ceasefire plan to Iran

By AAMER MADHANI, JON GAMBRELL, DAVID RISING and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press
DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The Trump administration offered a 15-point ceasefire plan to Iran, a person briefed on the contours of the proposal said late Tuesday, even as the U.S. military prepared to send at least 1,000 more troops to supplement some 50,000 troops already in the Mideast.

The plan was submitted to Iran by intermediaries from Pakistan, who have offered to host renewed negotiations between Washington and Tehran, according to the person, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly.

The New York Times was the first to report that the plan had been delivered to Iranian officials.

The Pentagon is also in the process of deploying two Marine units that will add about 5,000 Marines and thousands of sailors to the region. The moves are being framed as Trump maneuvering to give himself “max flexibility” on what he will do next, the person added.

Israeli officials, who have been advocating for President Donald Trump to continue the war against Iran, were surprised by the submission of a ceasefire plan, the person said.

The White House did not respond to requests for comment.

Earlier in the day, Trump said the U.S. was in talks with Iran to end the war as diplomatic efforts picked up and Iran issued a newly defiant statement. Meanwhile, airstrikes battered the Islamic Republic while Iranian missiles and drones targeted Israel and sites across the region.

Iran has denied that any negotiations are taking place, and Trump delayed his self-imposed deadline for Iran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz. Tehran’s chokehold on the crucial waterway has snarled international shipping, sent fuel prices skyrocketing and threatened the world economy.

Talks would face big challenges

Any talks between the U.S. and Iran would face monumental challenges. Many of Washington’s shifting objectives, particularly over Iran’s ballistic missile and nuclear programs, remain difficult to achieve.

It’s not clear who in Iran’s government has the authority to negotiate — or would be willing to, as Israel has vowed to continue killing the country’s leaders.

Iran remains highly suspicious of the United States, which twice under the Trump administration has attacked during high-level diplomatic talks, including with the Feb. 28 strikes that started the current war.

More troops to be sent to Mideast

At least 1,000 troops from the 82nd Airborne Division will be sent to the Mideast in the coming days, three people with knowledge of the plans told The Associated Press.

The 82nd Airborne is considered the Army’s emergency response force and can typically be deployed on short notice. It’s the latest addition of American troops after U.S. officials last week said thousands of Marines aboard several Navy ships will be heading to the region.

While the Marine units are trained in missions that include supporting U.S. embassies, evacuating civilians and disaster relief, the soldiers of 82nd Airborne are trained to parachute into hostile or contested territory to secure key territory and airfields.

The Marine deployment to the region has raised speculation that the U.S. may try to seize Kharg Island, which is vital to Iran’s oil network. The U.S. bombed the Persian Gulf island more than a week ago, hitting its defenses but saying it had left oil infrastructure intact.

Iran has threatened to mine the gulf if the U.S. appears to be on the verge of landing troops.

Trump said he would hold off on a threat to bomb Iran’s power stations while talks unfold — a delay that could be aimed at buying time for the Marines to arrive, the New York-based Soufan Center think tank wrote in an analysis.

However, the center also noted that “Trump could be actively seeking an offramp.”

Pakistan says it is ready to host talks

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif wrote on X that Pakistan is ready to “facilitate meaningful and conclusive talks” to end the Iran war.

The U.S. has agreed in principle to join talks in Pakistan, according to three Pakistani officials, one Egyp-

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tian official and a Gulf diplomat, while mediators were still working to convince Iran.

One diplomat from the region said the talks could happen by early next week, and that special envoy Steve Witkoff and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner are expected to represent the U.S. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to provide details to the media.

US and Iran issue conflicting statements on status of talks

Speaking Tuesday at the White House, the president said the U.S. is "in negotiations right now" and that the participants included Witkoff, Kushner, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Vice President JD Vance.

"We have a number of people doing it," Trump said. "And the other side, I can tell you, they'd like to make a deal."

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi's office said he has been discussing the war this week with several counterparts. But Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, the speaker of Iran's parliament, denied Trump's claim of direct talks, and an Iranian military spokesperson declared that the fighting would go on.

"Iran's powerful armed forces are proud, victorious and steadfast in defending Iran's integrity, and this path will continue until complete victory," Iranian state television quoted Maj. Gen. Ali Abdollahi Aliabadi as saying Tuesday.

The Egyptian official said efforts are centered on "trust-building" between the U.S. and Iran, with the aim of bringing about a pause in fighting. Israel is not involved.

The official, who is involved in the efforts, said the priority is to prevent attacks on regional energy infrastructure and that they were working on a "mechanism" for Iran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

Talk of negotiations briefly drove down oil prices and boosted stocks. But that respite was short-lived, with the price of Brent crude, the international standard, nudging back over \$100 a barrel Tuesday, up nearly 40% since the war started.

Iran hits Israel and Gulf neighbors while Israel attacks Beirut

Israel said it carried out an extensive series of strikes on Iranian "production sites," without providing more information. In Tehran, a massive blast was heard in northern neighborhoods and another in the city center.

Iran also fired at least a dozen waves of missiles at Israel, and first responders said three people were wounded in southern Israel, and four others suffered minor wounds in Tel Aviv.

A Moroccan civilian contractor with the United Arab Emirates' armed forces was killed in Bahrain in an Iranian attack, the UAE Defense Ministry said. In Kuwait, power lines were hit by air defense shrapnel, causing partial electricity outages for several hours. Saudi Arabia said it destroyed Iranian drones targeting its oil-rich Eastern Province.

Israel pounded Beirut's southern suburbs, saying that it was targeting infrastructure used by the Iran-linked Hezbollah militant group.

A strike on a residential apartment southeast of the Lebanese capital killed at least three people, including a 3-year-old girl, according to the Lebanese Health Ministry. Another five people were killed in the south.

In northern Israel, a woman was killed by shrapnel during an attack from Lebanon.

Meanwhile, Lebanon declared Iran's ambassador persona non grata and ordered him to leave by Sunday.

Iranian flights have been banned from landing in Lebanon, out of fear that they would carry weapons or funding for Hezbollah, and some top Lebanese government officials have accused Iran of dragging Lebanon into another war with Israel.

TSA officers describe tears, tough choices and dwindling savings from working without pay

By PHILIP MARCELO, OBED LAMY and RIO YAMAT Associated Press

A woman in Indiana who put off dental surgery because she doesn't know if she can afford the copay. A Florida couple with young children who are depleting their savings. A grandmother in Idaho who plans to sell her car to pay the rent.

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They are among the tens of thousands Transportation Security Administration officers set to receive another \$0 paycheck this week. A dispute in Congress over funding the Department of Homeland Security has held up their salaries since mid-February. With monthly bills coming due, many of these federal employees, who screen passengers and luggage at airports across the U.S., are making difficult choices about how to make ends meet.

High absentee rates at some major airports have produced long lines and frustrated passengers at understaffed security checkpoints. Union leaders and federal officials say empty gas tanks, childcare expenses and the threat of eviction keep more screeners from showing up the longer the shutdown continues. At last count, more than 455 had quit instead of weathering the ongoing uncertainty, according to DHS.

"Stop asking me about the long lines. Ask me if somebody's gonna eat today," Hydrick Thomas, president of the national American Federation of Government Employees union council that represents TSA employees, told reporters Tuesday.

Indiana TSA agent turns to food pantry for groceries

Before starting her shift at Indianapolis International Airport on Monday, Taylor Desert stopped at a food bank for meat, eggs, vegetables and dairy products.

"I never thought I would be in a position where, working for the federal government, I would need to go to a food bank to supplement my groceries," she said as she loaded bags into her car.

Desert, who has been a TSA officer for seven years, said her last full paycheck came on Feb. 14, the day the shutdown started.

She had some savings to draw on despite a record 43-day shutdown last fall but put some personal plans on pause.

For example, Desert needs to get her wisdom teeth removed but says the TSA isn't approving time off during the shutdown. She also worries about costs from the surgery not covered by insurance.

Wednesday was the 39th day of the DHS funding lapse. If it goes another 21 days, Desert said she would seek another job.

"I don't want to have to spend my entire savings just to afford to keep living," she said.

Florida TSA couple worry about their young children

Oksana Kelly, 38, and her husband, Deron, 37, both work as TSA agents at Orlando International Airport. They have two young children and don't know how they will keep supporting their family without any income coming in.

Kelly said they're dipping into savings for now, but it's running dry. If the shutdown persists, they will ask relatives for help or take out a loan, which she worries would put them deeper in debt.

Her husband has worked as a DoorDash delivery driver in his spare time since the shutdown in October and November. He's considered resigning from the TSA to put the couple on more stable financial footing.

"It's very mentally exhausting," said Kelly, who is an organizer for the labor union representing TSA workers across central and northern Florida. "How do we even decide between being able to feed our kids or come to work?"

Kelly said strangers might criticize the couple for "putting all eggs in one basket" since both choose to work for the TSA for the past decade.

"All we want is to pay our bills and get the pay we deserve," she said.

A veteran officer in Idaho fears homelessness

Rebecca Wolf cries every day. She tries to hide it from her grandchildren, ages 11 and 6.

"They don't understand why grandma's crying," Wolf said. "I try not to cry in front of them, but sometimes it's just too much."

The 53-year-old TSA officer and union leader in Boise, Idaho, joined the agency soon after its creation in the wake of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. She was homeless at the time but turned her situation around with steady work and the benefits of federal employment.

Now, Wolf can't help but dwell on where she was 24 years ago. "I don't want to be in that position again," she said.

Her Feb. 28 paycheck amounted to \$13.53, sending her "into a spiral right away."

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With no savings to fall back on, she is preparing to sell her car to cover her rent due in a week. She calls nonprofits daily seeking rental assistance, but hasn't had any luck.

Supporting six family members — four children and two grandchildren — has always been challenging, but the repeated shutdowns have made it nearly unsustainable.

Wolf, who serves as president of AFGE TSA Local 1127, is hesitant to walk away from both the job that turned her life around and her role advocating for fellow officers.

"I worked hard to get to where I am now, and the thought I might lose it all scares me," she said, her voice breaking as she tried to stifle the sound of weeping.

Massachusetts agent digs into savings to get by

Mike Gayzagian, a TSA officer at Boston's Logan International Airport, says long stretches without pay have become enough of a "new normal" that he's prepared for them.

The 56-year-old says he has a financial cushion of about six months to tap but that his situation is "an exception to the rule."

"The majority live paycheck to paycheck and don't have those kinds of reserves available," said Gayzagian, who is president of his local TSA union chapter.

It shouldn't be this way for federal workers, he said.

"The financial situation adds an additional burden to what is already a stressful job," Gayzagian said. "I didn't go into public service to make a lot of money. I went into public service because it has a certain stability and reliability and predictability that other jobs don't have."

A father in Utah leaves TSA

Robert Echeverria quit his job as a TSA agent at Utah's Salt Lake City International Airport about two weeks into the current shutdown.

The 45-year-old, who has a wife and three children, counted five government shutdowns in the nine years he worked for the agency. The toughest was last year's record shutdown that ended in mid-November around the start of the holiday season.

Echeverria said his family skipped Christmas and took months to recover financially. He began looking for a new job in February when it became clear Congress was headed for another budget battle.

"Emotionally I was already distraught," Echeverria said last week. "We were barely recovering from the last shutdown."

He now works for the department that manages the airports in Utah's capital. Leaving federal service "was a hard decision for me," Echeverria said.

"I really believed in the mission of the TSA," he said. "We took an oath, and it was a way for me to give back to the country that gave me so much."

He's still based at Salt Lake City International, where his 20-year-old daughter works as a TSA agent, and says that seeing his former colleagues struggling is difficult.

"They all feel betrayed by their government because they're showing up to work," Echeverria said. "They're there, but they feel that the government doesn't care for them," he said.

Conservatives gather for CPAC with the right openly divided over the Iran war

By THOMAS BEAUMONT and MIKE CATALINI Associated Press

GRAPEVINE, Texas (AP) — Conservatives are holding one of their largest annual gatherings at a perilous political moment for President Donald Trump and with open division on the right over the war he launched in Iran.

While Trump maintains broad support among conservatives, the war in Iran is more than a wrinkle for activists drawn to his "America First" campaign pledge against getting involved in foreign conflicts. The debate will be a subtext — and likely flare publicly — as thousands of activists, influencers and Republican lawmakers gather at the Conservative Political Action Conference that begins Wednesday outside Dallas.

The gathering will be a contrast to the celebratory meeting one year ago where Trump, newly returned

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to office, vowed to “forge a new and lasting political majority” and Elon Musk wielded a chainsaw to symbolize how the administration was slashing the government workforce and red tape.

This year, neither Trump nor Vice President JD Vance has been publicly announced as speaking to the gathering. But among those who are slated to speak are big names in the MAGA movement who have voiced conflicting views on the Iran war.

“This is obviously going to be a hot topic,” said John Gizzi, a CPAC veteran and columnist for the conservative media outlet Newsmax, who noted the possibility of greater U.S. involvement over an uncertain length of time.

Some featured speakers are divided over Iran, Israel

Among the featured speakers scheduled at the four-day event is longtime Trump ally Steve Bannon. Bannon said during his War Room podcast this month that should the war become “a hard slog,” it could cost the GOP conservative voters ahead of the midterms.

“We are going to bleed support,” Bannon said.

Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, who supports the war, also is on the agenda at the Gaylord Texan Resort and Convention Center.

“I think President Trump was exactly right to act to protect Americans,” Cruz said last week in a CBS News interview.

Former Florida Rep. Matt Gaetz’s scheduled speaking slot is a reminder of the disagreement among some conservatives about the U.S. military alliance with Israel against Iran.

Gaetz, host of a show on the conservative One America News Network, has said the U.S. has been too cozy with Israel as popular conservative personalities such as Tucker Carlson have challenged conservatives’ longtime bond with the country, prompting criticism from GOP groups, including pro-Israel Republicans, of antisemitism.

Others scheduled to speak include Trump border czar Tom Homan and former Republican National Committee Chairman Michael Whatley, who is running for the U.S. Senate in North Carolina.

Trump’s standing is strong among base

A year after Trump presided over the group’s jubilant conference upon his return to office, he is in a much different place.

At war while worries about jobs and household costs linger, his approval is down. His signature domestic policy, aimed at tightening voting rules ahead of November’s midterm elections, has stalled in a Congress his party controls, while the House Republican majority is in jeopardy and the party’s hold on the Senate is less certain than a year ago.

Despite the dividing lines, Trump enjoys enduring approval from his party’s right flank. Eighty-six percent of conservatives said they approved of the president’s job performance in a February AP-NORC poll.

And while Trump’s supporters remain devoted, some within the most conservative circles say division over Iran could signal trouble for Republicans in November.

Texas Rep. Steve Toth, who plans to attend CPAC, suggested Trump’s support remains robust among conservatives, but that Republican messaging on the war could be stronger.

“From MAGA people, for the most part, I don’t hear frustration with the president,” said Toth, who beat incumbent Republican Rep. Dan Crenshaw in Texas’ March 3 primary. “I don’t know that we’re doing a great job at communicating the full ramifications.”

Texas’ GOP Senate primary is a lingering issue

Another stark reminder of the contrast with last year is Texas’s unresolved Senate primary, a particular political headache for Trump.

Texas Attorney Gen. Ken Paxton, who is challenging four-term GOP Sen. John Cornyn, not only is attending the event, but has one of the event’s premier speaking roles, the Ronald Reagan Dinner on Friday evening. Cornyn is not attending the Texas conference.

Trump said three weeks ago he would soon endorse one of them after Paxton finished narrowly behind Cornyn in the March 3 primary, though neither received a majority to avoid a May 26 runoff.

Trump implored whoever didn't get the endorsement to drop out, writing in a social media post that the bitter contest "cannot, for the good of the Party, and our Country, itself, be allowed to go on any longer."

The deadline for candidates to remove their names from the May 26 runoff ballot passed last week, as Paxton and Cornyn were launching stepped-up attack ads targeting one another.

Perfect homework, blank stares: Why colleges are turning to oral exams to combat AI

By JOCELYN GECKER AP Education Writer

The assignment involves no laptop, no chatbot and no technology of any kind. In fact, there's no pen or paper, either.

Instead, students in Chris Schaffer's biomedical engineering class at Cornell University are required to speak directly to an instructor in what he calls an "oral defense."

It's a testing method as old as Socrates and making a comeback in the AI age. A growing number of college professors say they are turning to oral exams, and combining a variety of old-fashioned and cutting-edge techniques, to help address a crisis in higher education.

"You won't be able to AI your way through an oral exam," says Schaffer, who introduced the oral defense last semester.

Educators are no longer naively wondering if students will use generative AI to do their homework for them. A big question now is how to determine what students are actually learning.

College instructors across the U.S. are noticing troubling new trends as generative artificial intelligence becomes more sophisticated. Take-home essays and other written assignments are coming back perfect. But when students are asked to explain their work, they can't. The long-term impact of AI use on critical thinking remains to be seen, but educators worry students increasingly see the hard work of thinking as optional.

Some colleges shift toward in-person tests

At the University of Pennsylvania, Emily Hammer, an associate professor of Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures, now pairs oral exams with written papers in her seminar classes.

"It comes across as if we're trying to prevent cheating," Hammer says. "That's not why we're doing this. We're doing this because students are actually losing skills, losing cognitive capacity and creativity."

Hammer forbids AI use on all writing assignments but tells her class she knows she can't enforce that. However, if they haven't written their papers themselves, defending the material face-to-face will likely be "a very stressful situation."

Hammer's class is part of "a massive shift toward in-person assessments," both written and oral, at Penn, says Bruce Lenthall, executive director of the school's Center for Teaching and Learning. The Ivy League school is one of a small but growing number of universities that have started running faculty workshops on oral exams.

Oral exams are not traditionally part of the modern American undergraduate system, unlike certain European universities. For instance, in the Oxbridge tutorial system in England, students meet faculty for weekly discussions. Some U.S. colleges saw a move toward oral exams during the COVID-19 pandemic to address concerns about online cheating, and interest has intensified since the launch of ChatGPT in 2022.

During the pandemic, engineering professor Huihui Qi launched a three-year study at the University of California, San Diego on how to scale oral exams. Several universities have since invited her to provide faculty workshops or discuss her research.

Harnessing AI to fight 'fire with fire'

At New York University, several types of oral assessments are on the rise. More faculty are requiring office hours, assigning presentations and cold-calling on students in class. Instructors are saying, "I need to look my students in the eye and ask, 'Do you know this material?'" says Clay Shirky, vice provost for AI and technology in education.

One NYU professor has put a modern spin on the traditional oral test.

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Panos Ipeirotis, a professor at NYU's Stern School of Business, unveiled an AI-powered oral exam last semester for the final exam in a class on AI product management. He calls it "fighting fire with fire."

Students log in from home, at any time that fits their schedule. A voice cloned from a business school professor greets them.

"Hi there," says the voice on their screen. It asks for the student's name and school ID number and then says, "I'm ready to conduct your exam today."

The chatbot starts with questions about a final group project and drills into details based on each student's answers. If the student stumbles, the AI agent gives them clues, along with criticism and positive feedback. Ipeirotis grades the exams separately, also with the help of AI.

"We wanted to check: Do you know what your team did? Were you a free rider? Did you outsource everything to AI?" says Ipeirotis, who designed the tool with ElevenLabs, a company that develops generative AI voice agents to conduct job interviews.

Students in the class this semester are redesigning the AI agent to smooth out some kinks, and Ipeirotis plans to use it in all his future classes.

"I want oral exams everywhere now. I want to pair it with every single written assignment," says Ipeirotis. "I don't trust written assignments anymore to be the result of actual thinking."

Feedback from students last semester was mixed.

Business major Andrea Liu found the chatbot's voice to be surprisingly human, but the conversation felt choppy with odd pauses. It asked multiple questions at once, which was confusing. And it was jarring to hear a voice but not see a person.

"It felt kind of awkward to be talking to what was pretty much a blank screen," says Liu, 21.

But, she agreed with worried educators: "There is no perfect world where AI exists and kids are not abusing it."

Schools see benefits even for shy students

Across the humanities and STEM disciplines, like computer science, educators worry that students who skip the mental struggle that is necessary for problem solving won't develop the skills they need to advance in upper-level classes and careers.

That's why Schaffer, the Cornell professor, introduced the oral defense in his biomedical engineering class. He requires students to sign up for 20-minute sessions of Socratic-style questioning after submitting written problem sets, which are assigned several times each semester.

With a class of 70 students, Schaffer splits the job with his teaching assistants. They no longer grade the written problem sets, just the oral defenses. He calls it "incentivizing" his students to do the work, or at least understand it enough to explain.

Schaffer's class is highlighted in a new "Oral Assessment Workshop" offered by Cornell's Center for Teaching Innovation.

Other examples at Cornell: a religious studies professor who now holds 30-minute "final conversations" with students instead of a final exam; and another engineering course where the professor gives four-minute mock interviews to each student in a 180-person class.

Skeptics point out oral exams can be unsettling for students who are shy or have serious anxiety, but clarifying the format ahead of time and starting with softball questions can help, says Carolyn Aslan, who leads Cornell's oral exam training.

"Sometimes it's actually good to get that quiet student one-on-one, and you finally get to hear from them. Sometimes that is the breakthrough," Aslan says.

Several of Schaffer's students say they felt nervous at first but ended up preferring the oral exam.

"I honestly liked it a lot," says Cornell junior Olivia Piserchia, a biomedical engineering major. She initially found the oral defense nerve-racking but came to value the one-on-one time with instructors. It kept her from feeling lost in a large class and helped her build the skill of articulating her technical knowledge, as she would need to in a job.

"Having that live check-in holds you accountable," says Piserchia. "It's a lot harder to look people in the eyes and say out loud, 'I don't know this.' And, that makes you realize, 'I should study this.'"

At least 1,000 US troops from 82nd Airborne set to deploy to Mideast, AP sources say

By KONSTANTIN TOROPIN and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. military is preparing to deploy at least 1,000 troops from the 82nd Airborne Division to the Middle East in the coming days, according to three people with knowledge of the plans.

The unit is considered the Army's emergency response force and can typically be deployed on short notice. The force would include a battalion of the 1st Brigade Combat Team as well as Maj. Gen. Brandon Tegtmeier, the division's commander, and division staff, according to the people, who spoke Tuesday on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive military plans or private conversations.

It's the latest addition of American troops to the Iran war effort after U.S. officials recently said thousands of Marines aboard several Navy ships will be heading to the region.

While the Marine units are trained in missions that include supporting U.S. embassies, evacuating civilians and disaster relief, the soldiers of the 82nd Airborne, based at Fort Bragg in North Carolina, are trained to parachute into hostile or contested territory to secure key territory and airfields.

When asked about the deployment, White House spokeswoman Anna Kelly deferred to the Pentagon but noted that "President Trump always has all military options at his disposal."

Members of the Senate Armed Services Committee are scheduled to receive a classified briefing from Pentagon officials Wednesday on Capitol Hill where the potential deployment is expected to be discussed, according to a U.S. official who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The New York Times earlier reported the possible deployment of the 82nd Airborne to the Middle East.

U.S. officials previously have said the Japan-based USS Tripoli and the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit had been ordered to the Middle East — shifting them from exercises near Taiwan.

They also confirmed that the Navy has rushed to deploy a set of ships carrying a rapid-response Marine force to the Middle East from their home post of San Diego.

The pair of Marine Expeditionary Units will add about 5,000 Marines and thousands of sailors to the region, where the U.S. already has about 50,000 troops.

The troops are being added just as the Trump administration says it has begun negotiations with Iran to end the war. Pakistan offered to host diplomatic talks, but Iran has denied that any negotiations are taking place.

While speaking Tuesday at the White House, Trump said the U.S. is "in negotiations right now" and his envoy Steve Witkoff and son-in-law Jared Kushner are involved in the talks, along with Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Vice President JD Vance.

"We have a number of people doing it," Trump said. "And the other side, I can tell you, they'd like to make a deal."

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi's office said he has been discussing the war this week with several counterparts. But Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, the speaker of Iran's parliament, denied Trump's claim of direct talks, and an Iranian military spokesman issued a newly defiant statement vowing to fight "until complete victory."

A timeline of the deadly collision at LaGuardia Airport

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — It took less than a minute for a routine landing to spiral into a deadly crash Sunday at New York's LaGuardia Airport. But the collision between an Air Canada flight and a fire truck crossing the runway was the culmination of a series of events that began much earlier.

The Associated Press created this timeline based on a review of air traffic control recordings and information from the Federal Aviation Administration, publicly available flight tracking data and the National Transportation Safety Board, including information it obtained from the jet's cockpit voice recorder.

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A late departure from Montreal

10:12 p.m.: Air Canada Express Flight 8646, operated by Jazz Aviation, leaves Montréal–Trudeau International Airport, two hours and 13 minutes late. By the time the aircraft reaches New York, it is part of an influx of late-arriving flights, including some waiting extended periods for a gate.

Issues on the ground at LaGuardia

11:16:42 p.m.: A United aircraft, Flight 2384, aborts takeoff for a second time because of an anti-ice warning light in the cockpit.

11:20:48 p.m.: "We have an odor on the plane as well here at this time," the United pilot reports. "We are going to be going back to the gate, request fire as well," using shorthand for the airport's fire rescue team.

11:21:12 p.m.: Another pilot chimes in: "If that's a sewer smell ... we smelled that too going around the terminal there."

11:22:24 p.m.: A controller asks the United pilot if it is a smoke odor. He responds: "No, it was a weird odor. I don't know exactly how to describe it," and says he can't get ahold of anyone to obtain a gate assignment.

11:24:49 p.m.: The controller confirms there is no gate available. He asks the pilot, "Do you still need us to send fire there?" The pilot says yes, citing the odor.

11:27:44 p.m.: United 2384's pilot tells the controller he doesn't plan on evacuating the plane. The controller instructs the pilot to move to another taxiway.

11:29:54 p.m.: United 2384 makes a wrong turn and ends up in a different part of the taxiway, but the controller doesn't sound concerned. "You can just stay over there ... and we'll have the guys go over there," he says.

11:31:41 p.m.: United 2384 declares an emergency. The pilot says: "The flight attendants in the back are feeling ill because of the odor. We will need to go into any available gate at this time."

11:31:59 p.m.: The controller asks again if there's an available gate, telling the person he's speaking with, "now they're declaring an emergency. They want to get out."

11:33:39 p.m.: The controller tells United 2384 there is still no open gate, but fire trucks are headed over with a stair truck if they want to evacuate. "Let me know if you do," he says.

Flight 8646 is cleared to land

11:34:18 p.m.: In a routine step near the end of a flight, the air traffic controller handling approaches into LaGuardia instructs the pilots of Air Canada Express Flight 8646 pilots to contact the airport's control tower, which will guide them the rest of the way.

11:35:08 p.m.: Flight 8646 is cleared to land on Runway 4/22.

Fire truck is cleared to cross

11:36:45 p.m.: At the airport, a controller asks: "Is there a vehicle that needed to cross the runway?"

11:37:00 p.m.: "Truck 1 and company, LaGuardia Tower, requesting to cross 4 at Delta," the firefighter says, meaning he is requesting clearance to use Taxiway D to cross Runway 4 — the same runway where Flight 8646 is about to land.

11:37:05 p.m.: "Truck 1 and company cross 4 at Delta," the controller says, authorizing the truck and other emergency vehicles to cross Runway 4. Simultaneously, on a different frequency, the pilot on the odor-stricken United flight reports that his plane has finally been cleared to go to a gate.

11:37:08 p.m.: "Truck 1 and company crossing 4 at Delta," a firefighter in Truck 1 repeats, confirming that the controller has cleared the vehicle to cross.

11:37:11 p.m.: An electronic call out in Flight 8646's cockpit indicates the plane is 50 feet above the ground.

11:37:12 p.m.: A controller tells the pilot of an outbound Frontier Airlines flight to stop on a taxiway.

Flight 8646 lands and collides with the fire truck

11:37:15 p.m.: "Sorry, Truck 1," a controller says as Flight 8646 bears down on Runway 4/22.

11:37:16 p.m.: A controller then frantically tells the fire crew: "Stop. Stop Stop. Stop. Truck 1. Stop. Stop. Stop. Stop."

11:37:17 p.m.: Flight 8646's cockpit voice recorder captures a sound that investigators say is consistent

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with the plane's landing gear touching down..

11:37:19 p.m.: Flight 8646's first officer, who was flying the plane, transfers control to the captain.

11:37:20 p.m.: The controller continues, "Stop Truck 1. Stop. Stop Truck 1. Stop." As he speaks, an alarm begins to beep.

11:37:25 p.m.: Flight 8646 slams into the fire truck. The cockpit voice recording stops.

Aftermath

11:37:45 p.m.: A controller tells the pilot of the next plane set to land to "go around," meaning he should keep flying instead of landing.

The controller then tries to raise the pilots of Flight 8646. "I see you collided with a vehicle there. Just hold position. I know you can't move. Vehicles are responding to you now." Other rescue vehicles race to the crash site.

11:55:37 p.m.: The pilot of another plane tells a controller: "That wasn't good to watch." The controller responds: "Yeah, I know. I was here ... We were dealing with an emergency earlier. I messed up." The pilot says: "Nah, man, you did the best you could."

Airport disruptions abound as senators chase deal to end Homeland Security budget standoff

By LISA MASCARO and JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Travel disruptions deepened Tuesday as senators raced to salvage a proposal to end the Homeland Security shutdown by funding much of the department, including airport workers going without pay, but excluding immigration operations that have been core to the dispute.

The sudden sense of urgency comes as U.S. airports are snarled by long security lines, with travelers being told to arrive hours before their flights in Houston, Atlanta and Baltimore/Washington International. Routine Department of Homeland Security funding was halted in mid-February ahead of the busy spring travel season. Nearly 11% of Transportation Security Administration workers who were scheduled to report for duty Monday — more than 3,200 — missed work, and at least 458 have quit altogether since the shutdown began, according to DHS.

Democrats are refusing to fund the department without restraints on Trump's immigration enforcement and mass deportation operations after federal agents killed two citizens in Minneapolis.

"The time to end this is now," said Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D.

But Democrats panned the offer as insufficient. And President Donald Trump himself was noncommittal.

"I think any deal they make, I'm pretty much not happy with it," Trump said at an event at the White House swearing in his new Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin.

Airport conditions have become increasingly unpredictable with swelling crowds seen in major hubs. Travelers headed to LaGuardia and John F. Kennedy airports in New York — as well as Newark Liberty International in neighboring New Jersey — still couldn't check online TSA wait times Tuesday morning.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents were spotted in terminals, including at Philadelphia International Airport, where a protester was seen at one of the checkpoints holding a sign criticizing ICE. In Houston, passengers at George Bush Intercontinental Airport spent hours Tuesday navigating meandering security lines that twisted and turned across multiple floors.

Acting TSA administrator Ha McNeil said multiple airports are experiencing greater than 40% call out rates, according to prepared remarks she will give Wednesday to the House Committee on Homeland Security.

She is also expected to tell lawmakers of the personal toll the shutdown has had on TSA workers who "are running out of options to keep a roof over their head and put food on the table."

Hopes for a quick deal

The contours of the deal emerged once a group of Republican senators met with Trump at the White House late Monday, after he upended talks and deployed federal immigration officers at certain airport security checkpoints — a move some lawmakers warned could lead to heightened tensions.

The proposal would fund most of Homeland Security, but not one main part of ICE — the enforcement

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and removal operations that are core to Trump's deportation agenda.

Under the plan, ICE's Homeland Security Investigations would be funded as well as Customs and Border Protection, and it would include funding for officers to wear body cameras, but few other restraints.

The proposal was not substantially different from one the two sides had already agreed on before the deaths sparked demands for more changes, according to a person granted anonymity to discuss the details, which have not been publicly released.

For example, there was no mandate that immigration officers wear identification or other changes the White House had floated earlier in talks, including a ban on immigration enforcement at schools, churches, hospitals and other sensitive places, the person said.

While the ICE officers manning airports are going without face-covering masks, the Democratic demand that they go unmasked during immigration operations does not appear to be part of the deal.

"We need strong, strong reforms and we need to rein in ICE," said Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer.

Since so much of ICE is already funded through Trump's big tax breaks bill, immigration officers are still receiving paychecks despite the shutdown.

Congress is controlled by the Republican president's party, and House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries said his party members insist on "bold" changes to ICE.

On Tuesday, Delta Air Lines confirmed it was suspending its specialty services for members of Congress amid the shutdown, meaning those who fly with the carrier will be treated like other passengers based on their SkyMiles status. The Atlanta Journal-Constitution first reported the suspension.

Political standoff, long airport lines

Efforts to end the standoff stalled when Trump linked any deal to his push to pass the so-called SAVE America Act, a strict proof-of-citizenship and voter ID bill that has stalled in the Senate ahead of the midterm elections. Some GOP senators have pitched him on the idea of tackling it in another legislative package.

"It's not a perfect deal but I think it works," said Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., who met with Trump and thinks the president is on board. "If you're waiting in line four hours in Atlanta, this madness needs to come to an end."

The White House on Tuesday stressed that conversations were ongoing. But it also said an agreement to split off immigration enforcement funding, while addressing Trump's elections bill separately, "seems to be acceptable."

Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del., said his understanding was that there was a "sense of urgency" coming from the talks as the airport disruptions worsen.

Changes at Homeland Security

The deal could provide a political exit from the standoff over the embattled Department of Homeland Security, which was created in the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks but has come to symbolize Trump's aggressive mass deportation agenda, with its goal of removing 1 million immigrants this year.

Under mounting political pressure, Trump ousted Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem amid the public outcry over the immigration operations, and senators late Monday confirmed Mullin, one of their own, as the president's handpicked replacement.

Mullin, a former Oklahoma senator aligned with Trump's agenda, provides a potentially new face for the department. He told senators during his confirmation hearing that he supported another key demand of Democrats — ensuring a judge has signed off on warrants that immigration officers use to search people's homes, rather than simply relying on administrative warrants issued by the department.

"This is significant," Sen. Peter Welch, D-Vt., said about the progress toward changes. "Noem is gone. That's a big deal."

ICE's budget grew under last year's bill by \$75 billion, which has been untouched by the shutdown. Rather, its routine annual funding, some \$10 billion, would be cut almost in half under the proposal.

Minnesota sues Trump administration over shootings, including deaths of Alex Pretti and Renee Good

By HANNAH FINGERHUT and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Minnesota officials sued the Trump administration on Tuesday for access to evidence they say they need to independently investigate three shootings by federal officers, including the killings of Renee Good and Alex Pretti.

The lawsuit claims that the federal government reneged on its promise to cooperate with state investigations after the surge of federal law enforcement in Minneapolis. State officials are seeking a court order demanding that the Trump administration comply.

"We are prepared to fight for transparency and accountability that the federal government is desperate to avoid," Hennepin County Attorney Mary Moriarty told reporters.

The lawsuit marks an escalation in the clash between Minnesota leaders and the Trump administration over the investigations into the high-profile shootings by federal officers that sparked public outcry and protests. The Trump administration has suggested that Minnesota officials don't have jurisdiction to investigate, but state officials insist they need to conduct their own probes because they don't trust the federal government to investigate itself.

"There has to be an investigation any time a federal agent or a state agent takes the life of a person in our community," Moriarty said.

The administration sent thousands of officers to the Minneapolis and St. Paul area for the immigration crackdown as part of President Donald Trump's national deportation campaign. The Department of Homeland Security considered its largest immigration enforcement operation ever a success but it was staunchly criticized by Minnesota's leaders who raised questions over officers' conduct.

There continues to be fallout from Operation Metro Surge in the form of a Homeland Security shutdown, as Democrats in Congress hold up funding in an effort to secure restraints on Trump's immigration agenda.

An email seeking comment was sent to Justice Department. A DHS spokesperson said in an email Tuesday that all shootings are reviewed by an appropriate law enforcement agency, followed by an independent review within the agency.

The Justice Department in January said it was opening a federal civil rights investigation into Pretti's killing but has said a similar federal probe was not warranted in the killing of Good. The decision in Good's case marked a sharp departure from past administrations, which moved quickly to investigate shootings of civilians by law enforcement officials for potential civil rights offenses.

Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche has said that the department's Civil Rights Division does not investigate every law enforcement shooting and that there have to be circumstances and facts that "warrant an investigation."

DHS said Tuesday that Customs and Border Patrol is conducting its own internal investigation of the Pretti case. On Good, DHS said the matter remains under investigation but that footage shows Good impeded law enforcement operations and weaponized her vehicle, leading the officer to act in self-defense.

Minnesota's lawsuit also demands access to evidence in a third case — that of Julio Cesar Sosa-Celis, who was shot and wounded in his right thigh by a federal agent in January.

Federal officials initially accused Sosa-Celis and another man of beating an Immigration and Customs Enforcement officer with a broom handle and a snow shovel. But federal prosecutors later dropped all charges against the men, and authorities opened a criminal investigation into whether two immigration officers lied under oath about the shooting.

Both officers are on administrative leave as ICE and DOJ conduct a joint review, DHS said Tuesday, adding in a statement that ICE is committed to transparency and accountability.

Minnesota's lawsuit said the federal government is not permitted to "withhold investigative evidence for the purpose of shielding law enforcement officers from scrutiny where a State is investigating serious potential violations of its criminal laws, targeting its citizens, within its borders."

Moriarty said Tuesday that the federal government "has adopted a policy of categorically withholding

evidence," calling the practice unprecedented and alarming. She said the lawsuit followed formal demands for evidence after the federal government blocked Minnesota investigators from accessing evidence related to the shootings.

Such cases by states against the federal government are highly unusual, said Rachel Moran, law professor at the University of St. Thomas in Minneapolis.

That is because local agencies don't often try to investigate potential crimes by federal officers, and also because the federal government rarely refuses to cooperate. The opposite, where state officials might try to obstruct federal agents, used to be more common during the civil rights era, Moran said.

"The state should have a chance at success because, what their basic claim is, is that they have a right to review evidence regarding a possible crime," Moran said. "They have not only a right, but an obligation to investigate whether officers have committed crimes in their jurisdiction."

Either outcome of the lawsuit could have significant implications for federal and state power. If a federal judge grants the state's request, Moran said, that provides legal support for state and local officials to investigate federal officers. If the federal government is allowed to withhold evidence, it could discourage federal and state cooperation, she said.

Jewish communities boost security and continue observances amid rise in hateful incidents

By MATT BROWN Associated Press

Law enforcement officials on Tuesday said they are taking steps to monitor and counter threats to Jewish and Muslim communities nationwide since the onset of war in the Middle East, multiple hate crimes and an attempted terror attack prompted increased security measures at places of worship and investigations into extremist activity.

As the FBI conducts an investigation into a March 12 incident in West Bloomfield, Michigan, in which a driver drove a vehicle through the doors of Temple Israel, the nation's second-largest congregation in Reform Judaism, officials offered an assessment of threats against faith communities and discussed strategies for maintaining safety and security at places of worship.

"We know a goal of our enemies is to scare us into submission so that we make a decision to not show up," said Michael Masters, national director of the Secure Community Network, during a national security briefing that included insights from federal and local law enforcement agencies.

"With strong safety and security measures in place, that doesn't need to happen," Masters said.

The network, which coordinates security for Jewish communities in North America, hosted the national security briefing ahead of Passover and amid rising global tensions. Hateful incidents against Jewish people were recently documented in southern California and Toronto, while European officials are investigating car burnings in Antwerp and London as antisemitic attacks.

For many Jewish Americans, the antisemitic incidents have confirmed longstanding fears about the rise of antisemitism, as well as the need to vigorously counter extremism and live their faith undaunted by threats. Meanwhile, the upsurge of virulent anti-Muslim rhetoric from some GOP politicians and Christian nationalists carries echoes of the early 2000s, when the 9/11 attacks and the Afghanistan and Iraq wars bred Islamophobic sentiment across the U.S. and around the world.

Jewish leaders meet with federal officials on threats to communities

Jewish leaders have called on lawmakers and civic leaders to combat the heightened threats.

"As shocking as the incident in Temple Israel was, it has become, for us in the Jewish community, no longer a surprise," said Gary Torgow, chair of the Jewish Federations of North America, during the briefing on security measures Jewish organizations were taking nationwide. Torgow, a Michigan business executive, said that "hate today spreads at lightning speed through misinformation on social media" and warned that its unchecked spread "inevitably creates a climate where violence becomes more likely."

Torgow and other Jewish leaders met last week with senior FBI officials to discuss federal efforts to combat antisemitic incidents since the Trump administration launched joint strikes with Israel on Iran,

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sparking retaliatory strikes and a regional conflict that has reverberated globally. Among the meeting's participants was Andrew Bailey, the FBI's deputy director, who Torgow said was receptive and responsive to their concerns.

"What we saw in that meeting is a sincere concern and a really active engagement," said Torgow. "An attack on a synagogue, we shared with them, has to be really understood for what it is: an attack on the principle that every American should be able to worship in peace."

Federal authorities are also monitoring for increased activities from radicalized individuals who may seek to attack places of worship or strike during high profile upcoming events or holidays. Officials during the security briefing did not share any known threats to upcoming events and Secure Community Network officials said they did not know of any active threats to Jewish communities at present.

"As we not only seek to defend against would-be malicious actors, particularly ones encouraged by or empathetic to Iran, we also need to be equally on guard for all aspects and assailants as America looks forward to hosting both the 2026 FIFA World Cup and the America 250 celebrations later this year," said Matthew Kozma, the under secretary for intelligence and analysis at the Department of Homeland Security, during the security briefing.

Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard said during a March Senate hearing that intelligence agencies had focused efforts "on individuals either who have been radicalized by Islamist propaganda and may not have ever had contact with ISIS or al-Qaida" but were nonetheless radicalized online while in the U.S.

The FBI is investigating two recent incidents as acts of terrorism, including an attempted bombing of anti-Muslim protests in front of the New York mayor's residence and a deadly shooting at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia.

Jewish Federations president Eric Fingerhut said the terror attack on Temple Israel showed that "even our most advanced security efforts can be overtaken by world events and by the very determined planning of terrorists," meaning that Jewish communities "must, yet again, increase our level of security for our community" and work closely with law enforcement to monitor risks, and civic leaders to address the root causes of bigotry and extremism.

The Jewish Federations of North America will also host rallies calling for greater efforts to combat anti-semitism from lawmakers in Washington in May.

Since the attack on Temple Israel, for instance, Oakland County, Michigan, Sheriff Michael Bouchard said that he'd received antisemitic death threats himself for responding to the attacks.

"I think it's incumbent on all of us to step up, stand out and do everything we can to protect our communities," Bouchard said.

A spike in hateful activities

The causes of the spikes in antisemitic attacks and other hateful conduct are complex and longstanding, experts say. Heightened international tensions, polarized domestic politics and new digital technologies have all contributed to the increase in bigoted views.

"We're seeing a lot of ideas and conspiracy theories that were once on the fringes of public conversation being ingested into political debate," said Seth Levi, chief strategy officer at the Southern Poverty Law Center. Levi cited social media and the increased ease of hateful rhetoric to spread unfiltered to a mass audience as the primary driver of radicalization for many extremists.

Muslim Americans, meanwhile, have expressed fear and alarm as anti-Muslim rhetoric and actions by state governments designating Muslim communities as security threats have risen in recent months.

The Southern Poverty Law Center has monitored a large rise in antisemitic and Islamophobic rhetoric over the last year that only intensified since the war in the Middle East began, Levi said.

"We continue to see incidents like hateful and racist flyering, especially neighborhoods that have a particular faith community," Levi said. "In person, physical harassment where you live creates a different, more visceral reaction than online activity."

Levi said that most Americans still strongly disapprove of hateful violence and rhetoric in polling reviewed by the Southern Poverty Law Center, but that comments from federal lawmakers, including President Donald Trump, were often echoed in the hateful rhetoric used by some figures online or in physical threats

reviewed by the center.

For many Jewish leaders, the moment underscores a need for greater resolve and closer community. "The vibrancy of Jewish life in North America, Jewish life everywhere, only happens with our own efforts," said Wendy Berger, chair of the Secure Community Network. "It is in our hands. And we have these extraordinary, amazing federal, local, state partners. But security is up to us, and the vibrancy of Jewish lives depends on it."

Pilots killed in LaGuardia collision were young Canadians who had long dreamed of flying planes

By SAFIYAH RIDDLE Associated Press

The pilots killed in Sunday's collision between a plane and a fire truck on a runway in New York were two young, ambitious Canadian men that had long dreamed of becoming pilots.

Mackenzie Gunther and Antoine Forrest were operating the Air Canada jet that was landing at New York's LaGuardia Airport on Sunday when it collided with a fire truck. Officials still haven't identified the two men publicly, but a family member who spoke to The Associated Press and a Canadian college that one of the men attended separately confirmed their identities.

About 40 of the roughly 70 passengers and crew members on the regional jet from Montreal, and two people from the fire truck, were taken to hospitals, some with serious injuries. Most were released by Monday morning, authorities said.

"These were two young men at the start of their careers," FAA Administrator Brian Bedford told reporters Monday. "It's an absolute tragedy that we're sitting here with their loss."

An investigation is underway into the cause. Federal officials said on Tuesday that a runway warning system failed to sound an alarm moments before the collision, and are looking into the role of the air traffic controllers and what they were doing while juggling a late night emergency involving another plane. The crash occurred during an already messy time at U.S. airports because of a partial government shutdown.

Here is what is known so far about both pilots.

Antoine Forest

Jeannette Gagnier, the great aunt of one of the pilots, identified him as Antoine Forest. Gagnier, who said that Forest looked to her as a grandmother figure, told AP that he always wanted to be a pilot. His LinkedIn page showed he had worked for two airlines the past five years.

Forest's Facebook page said that he was from Coteau-du-Lac, a small city in southwestern Québec. The mayor of Coteau-du-Lac, Andrée Brosseau, offered condolences to Forest's family in a translated post on Tuesday from French.

"Antoine was one of our own. In a community like ours, everyone knows someone who knew him. His passing represents an immense loss for our entire community," Brosseau wrote.

Antoine's brother, Cédric Forest, shared a picture of his brother and him when they were kids. "Have a safe flight, my brother! Oh yes, we've often heard that phrase, but this time will be the last," he wrote on Facebook. "You were coming and going in the wind, always full of new projects in mind. Gone again in the wind too soon to say goodbye I love you brother you can leave with your head held high."

A woman who said she is Forest's girlfriend and also a young pilot shared a photo of the couple on her Facebook account on Tuesday captioned "the love of my life."

Mackenzie Gunther

Toronto college Seneca Polytechnic said in a statement on Tuesday that Mackenzie Gunther graduated from its Honors Bachelor of Aviation Technology program in 2023.

He joined the Jazz Aviation Pathways Program, a training program operated by Air Canada, immediately after graduating. The flight that crashed on Tuesday was a Jazz Aviation plane operating on behalf of Air Canada.

"Seneca sends our deepest condolences to Mr. Gunther's family and friends, and to his former colleagues and professors. He will be deeply missed," the school's post said.

The school lowered its flags to half-staff to honor Gunther on Tuesday.

Some have said it was a miracle that more people weren't hurt, and at least one passenger Clément Lelièvre credited Gunther and Forest's "incredible reflexes" with saving his life and those of others. The pilots braked extremely hard just as the plane touched down, he said.

Russia fires nearly 400 drones at Ukraine with signs its spring offensive has started

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A major Russian drone and missile attack on civilian areas of Ukraine killed six people and injured at least 46, officials said Tuesday, while Moscow's army stepped up efforts to break through Ukrainian front-line defenses in what could be the start of an anticipated spring ground offensive.

Russia fired almost 400 long-range drones at Ukraine overnight, Ukraine's air force said, in its biggest attack in weeks. The onslaught continued into Tuesday as dozens of drones targeted the capital Kyiv during daylight.

Russia launched swarms of Iranian-designed Shahed drones, hitting at least seven cities, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha said on X.

Russia also launched 23 cruise missiles and seven ballistic missiles at Ukraine during the night, hitting at least 10 locations across the country, according to the air force. Daytime strikes injured 13 people, including three children, in the central Ukraine city of Dnipro, and another daylight attack hit an apartment block in the center of the western city of Lviv, near the Polish border, where 13 people were injured, regional officials said.

The Lviv attack set fire to the city's 17th-century St. Andrew's Church, which is part of a UNESCO World Heritage site, Prime Minister Yulia Svyrydenko said.

In the central city of Ivano-Frankivsk, the attack damaged maternity hospitals and about 10 apartment buildings, according to Svitlana Onyshchuk, the head of the regional military administration. Two people were killed and four injured, including a 6-year-old child, she said.

Ukrainian civilians have endured relentless barrages since Russia launched a full-scale invasion of its neighbor more than four years ago. U.S.-brokered talks between Moscow and Kyiv over the past year have brought no respite, with Russia rejecting Ukraine's offer of a ceasefire, and in recent weeks the Iran war has diverted international attention from Ukraine's plight.

Russia intensifies front-line attacks

On the roughly 1,250-kilometer (750-mile) front line snaking along eastern and southern parts of Ukraine, the short-handed defenders have been bracing for a new offensive by Russia's bigger army as the weather improves.

The commander-in-chief of Ukraine's armed forces, Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi, said Russian troops have in recent days made simultaneous attempts to break through defensive lines in several strategic areas.

"Fierce fighting unfolded along the entire line of contact," Syrskyi said Monday on the Telegram messaging app, with Russia launching 619 attacks in four days.

"The occupiers are attempting to bring up new units and are preparing to continue attacks," Syrskyi said, adding that Ukraine had deployed reinforcements to counter the assaults.

It was not possible to independently verify the battlefield claims.

The Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank, said Syrskyi's report backed up its assessment that Russia's spring-summer offensive is now underway.

Russia escalated its strikes from March 17 and has moved heavy equipment and more troops to the front line, the ISW said late Monday.

Each year, as the weather improves, Russia has moved its grinding war of attrition up a gear. However, it has been unable to capture cities and has made only incremental gains across rural areas. Russia occupies about 20% of Ukraine. That includes the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia seized in 2014.

Ukrainian soldier says front line situation is 'tense but not critical'

A Ukrainian soldier fighting near the city of Lyman in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region, whose complete capture is one of Russian President Vladimir Putin's main invasion goals, said Russian forces have intensified assaults in recent days but failed to achieve a breakthrough, despite increasing bombardments and repeated ground attacks.

Russian troops had earlier sought to isolate Lyman by targeting logistics routes before escalating their offensive, according to the soldier, who gave only his call sign King, in keeping with the rules of the Ukrainian military.

Ukrainian units repelled initial assaults, destroying advancing Russian columns and inflicting significant losses in armored vehicles and personnel, he said. In response, Russian forces have increased airstrikes on the town, including the use of powerful glide bombs.

"The situation is tense, but not critical," King said.

Drones allow Ukraine to fend off Russian ground attacks

Ukraine has developed advanced drone technology to make up for its shortage of infantry.

Amid the Middle East conflict, Kyiv is offering Ukraine's battle-tested drone defenses to U.S. and Gulf partners, hoping to trade that know-how for scarce Patriot air defense missiles it needs to fend off Russia's barrages.

Ukraine has also used its domestically produced long-range drones to hit areas of Russia that support Moscow's war effort. Russian air defenses intercepted 55 Ukrainian drones overnight over Russian regions, the annexed Crimea and the Black Sea, the Russian Defense Ministry reported Tuesday.

Supreme Court considers letting Trump administration revive restrictive immigration asylum policy

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court grappled Tuesday with whether the Trump administration should be able to revive an immigration policy that has been used to turn back migrants seeking asylum at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Some conservative justices seemed receptive to the Justice Department's push to overturn a lower-court ruling against the practice known as metering. Immigration authorities limited the number of people who could apply for asylum, saying it was necessary to handle an increase at the border.

Advocates say the policy created a humanitarian crisis during President Donald Trump's first term as people who were turned away settled in makeshift camps in Mexico as they waited for a chance to seek asylum.

The policy isn't in place now, and Trump ordered a wider suspension of the asylum system at the start of his second term.

The administration, though, argues that metering remains a "critical tool" used under administrations from both parties, and should be available if necessary in the future.

Some justices seemed open to that argument, though others raised questions about whether the policy would allow people who entered the country illegally to apply for asylum while new arrivals seeking legal entry at the border could be blocked.

"Why would Congress privilege someone who illegally enters the United States?" Justice Brett Kavanaugh asked.

An attorney for the Trump administration maintained that people turned away one day could potentially come back later. "It's saying our port is at capacity today, try again some other day," said Vivek Suri, assistant to the solicitor general.

The Associated Press found thousands of immigrants on waiting lists when the policy was in place in 2019.

Under the Immigration and Nationality Act, migrants who arrive in the U.S. must be able to apply for asylum if they fear persecution in their home countries. The legal dispute at the heart of the metering case centers around the meaning of the words "arrive in."

The Justice Department argues it means anyone who is in the United States already, so it doesn't apply

to people authorities stop on the Mexico side of the border. But immigration attorneys say the law has long meant anyone who comes to a port of entry must be able to apply, and it should stay that way.

"This life saving protection and more importantly, access to it is enshrined in our laws and has been for decades now," said Rebecca Cassler, an attorney for the American Immigration Council, after arguments.

Chief Justice John Roberts peppered an attorney for the migrants with questions on exactly where someone must be to claim asylum. But Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson suggested that those questions are hard to answer when the policy isn't being used.

"It just seems to me that we have a lot of hypotheticals regarding how this policy may have worked in the past, how it's possibly going to work in the future, but we don't have a policy in effect right now that we can actually rule on," she said.

Metering was first used during President Barack Obama's administration when large numbers of Haitians appeared at the main crossing to San Diego from Tijuana, Mexico. It was expanded to all border crossings from Mexico during Trump's first term in the White House.

The practice ended in 2020 when the coronavirus pandemic led the government to greater restrictions on asylum-seekers. President Joe Biden formally rescinded the use of metering in 2021.

Also that year, U.S. District Judge Cynthia Bashant, an Obama nominee, ruled that metering violated the migrants' constitutional rights and a federal law requiring officials to screen anyone who arrives at the border seeking asylum.

A divided 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed her ruling, but nearly half of the judges on the full San Francisco-based appeals court voted to rehear the case, a strong signal that may have caught the justices' attention.

People seeking refuge in the U.S. are able to apply for asylum once they are on American soil, regardless of whether they came legally. To qualify, they have to show a fear of persecution in their own country because of specific reasons, such as their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion.

Once people are granted asylum, they can't be deported. They can work legally, bring immediate family into the country, apply for legal residency and eventually seek U.S. citizenship.

The metering case is one of several immigration suits the court is considering this term, including Trump's push to end birthright citizenship for babies born to people in the U.S. illegally and the administration's effort to strip legal protections for migrants fleeing from instability and armed conflict.

Brazil's Bolsonaro to serve sentence at home due to ill health, judge to review in 90 days

By MAURICIO SAVARESE Associated Press

SAO PAULO (AP) — Brazil's former President Jair Bolsonaro will continue to serve his 27-year sentence for a coup attempt at home instead of in prison due to failing health, a judge ruled Tuesday.

Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes allowed the 71-year-old to return to his residence in capital Brasilia after he is discharged from the hospital, but he argued in his decision that he will review the case within 90 days.

Bolsonaro will wear an ankle monitor and is not allowed to use cellphones, the judge ruled. Local police will surveil his house in a gated community, where protesters are not allowed to gather. Bolsonaro is not allowed any visitors except for doctors and family members.

The embattled leader has been hospitalized since March 13 for pneumonia, one of several health problems he has faced since he was stabbed by a man in 2018 before he was elected president.

His house imprisonment could be extended after another medical report. Legal experts say it is rare for Brazilian judges to establish limits for house imprisonment measures, which are also hard to be revoked.

Historically, Brazil's Supreme Court has only reversed house arrest if a detainee's health improves dramatically or if there's violation of the established rules, such as not making public statements, posting on social media or giving interviews to the media.

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De Moraes had previously rejected similar requests from Bolsonaro's family.

"After that deadline, we will analyze once again whether the necessary requirements for keeping the humanitarian house arrest stand, including a medical examination if necessary," the judge said in his ruling.

The same day that Bolsonaro was taken to the private DF Star hospital, U.S. State Department official Darren Beattie had his Brazilian visa revoked as he allegedly considered visiting the former president in prison. Brazil's foreign ministry argued the request on behalf of Beattie was an interference in internal affairs. De Moraes rejected a request from Bolsonaro's family to allow Beattie to visit.

90 days?

De Moraes, who oversaw the former president's coup case and is deemed by Bolsonaro's supporters as a foe, stressed in his decision that the former president will return either to prison or to a hospital if he does not comply with the rules of his house arrest.

Bolsonaro governed between 2019 and 2022 and remains popular, polls show. One of his sons, Sen. Flávio Bolsonaro, says his father chose him to run for the presidency in October. Polls show he is in a dead heat with incumbent Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

Former Army captain Bolsonaro has been treated in intensive care for a few days because of kidney problems and other issues. On Tuesday, the DF Star hospital said he was in a stable condition and did not offer an estimate on when he will be able to return home.

His family questioned the temporary nature of the decision.

"He is going home for his health to improve. And then in 90 days if he improves he goes back to the place where his health was getting worse?" Flávio Bolsonaro told reporters after the ruling. "There's no sense in a temporary house imprisonment. If he improves, he can go back to a battalion."

Days before he started serving out his sentence, Bolsonaro was temporarily arrested after he used a soldering iron to break his ankle monitor. De Moraes considered him to be a flight risk then.

The family of the far-wing leader had been requesting that the court allow him home since his conviction in November. Bolsonaro was transferred from the local federal police headquarters to a larger cell in January.

Brazil's Attorney General Paulo Gonet on Monday said he agreed with Bolsonaro being sent home for health reasons, paving the way for him to be put under house imprisonment instead of returning to prison.

Bolsonaro was also convicted on charges that include leading an armed criminal organization and attempting the violent abolition of the democratic rule of law. He has denied any wrongdoing.

US stocks give back some of the rally sparked by Trump's talk of negotiations with Iran

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. stock indexes slipped Tuesday and gave back some of their rallies from the day before, while oil prices got back to rising as uncertainty continues about how long the war with Iran will last.

The S&P 500 fell 0.4% after yo-yoing through the day. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dipped 84 points, or 0.2%, while the Nasdaq composite sank 0.8%.

Markets have been on a roller coaster since President Donald Trump raised hopes that the war with Iran could end soon when he said Monday that the United States and Iran held productive talks "regarding a complete and total resolution of our hostilities in the Middle East." His announcement, which came just before Wall Street opened for trading, caused financial markets worldwide to reverse momentum immediately.

It calmed worries that the war may cause a long-term disruption to the oil and natural gas industry in the Persian Gulf, one big enough to send a blast of inflation to the region's customers worldwide.

But financial market have since gotten both encouraging and discouraging signals about the war. On one side, attacks continued in the Middle East Tuesday after Iran denied having direct talks with the United States. On the other, Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif wrote on X that his country is ready to "facilitate meaningful and conclusive talks" to end the Iran war.

After all that, the price for a barrel of Brent crude oil rose 4.6% to settle at \$104.49 per barrel, a day

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after slumping more than 10%. Benchmark U.S. crude rose 4.8% to \$92.35 per barrel and clawed back some of its own 10.3% plunge from the day before.

In the bond market, Treasury yields returned to rising and upped the pressure on financial markets worldwide. Higher yields make mortgages and other kinds of borrowing more expensive for households and for businesses, which slows the economy. They also hurt prices for all kinds of investments, from stocks to gold to cryptocurrencies.

Gold's price sank again and settled at \$4,402.00 per ounce, down roughly \$1,000 from a high point early this month. Its price has dropped despite its reputation as a safe harbor for investors during scary times.

Treasuries paying more in interest make gold, which pays its owners nothing, look worse in comparison, and investors have lost some of the fever that drove gold prices to records earlier this year.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury climbed to 4.39% from 4.34% late Monday and from just 3.97% before the war.

The yield on the two-year Treasury, which more closely tracks expectations for what the Federal Reserve will do with overnight interest rates, rose to 3.92% from 3.83% late Monday.

The Fed came into this year with expectations of resuming its cuts to interest rates, which would give the economy a boost. But oil prices have jumped so much and the threat of high inflation is so large that traders have nearly erased their bets for a cut to rates this year.

Instead, some are even betting on the possibility that the Fed may have to hike rates this year, according to data from CME Group. That was a nearly unthinkable scenario before the war began.

Higher interest rates would slow the economy, but they would also help keep a lid on inflation.

On Wall Street, Estee Lauder dropped 9.8% to one of the market's sharpest losses after confirming that it's in merger talks with Spanish cosmetics company Puig. The potential deal could put such brands as MAC, Clinique, Charlotte Tilbury and Apivita together under one company. Estee Lauder said no final decision has been made yet.

On the winning side of Wall Street was Smithfield Foods. Its stock rose 4.3% after the meat company reported stronger profit and revenue for the latest quarter than analysts expected.

All told, the S&P 500 fell 24.63 points to 6,556.37. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dipped 84.41 to 46,124.06, and the Nasdaq composite sank 184.87 to 21,761.89.

In stock markets abroad, indexes were mixed in Europe.

Asian stocks rose in their first chance to trade following Trump's announcement on Monday about talks with Iran. Hong Kong's Hang Seng jumped 2.8%, and South Korea's Kospi climbed 2.7% for two of the world's larger moves.

As US pressure grows for leadership change in Cuba, a Castro could be the next president

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — As U.S. President Donald Trump pushes for change in Cuba's leadership, speculation is mounting about who, if anyone, might replace Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel.

As Raúl Castro's handpicked largely figurehead successor in 2018, Díaz-Canel has been the only leader without the last name Castro to govern since the 1959 revolution. He still has two years left in his term — but some experts and a growing number of Cubans doubt he'll make it.

Two Castro cousins have come into focus as potential replacements, experts said.

Oscar Pérez-Oliva Fraga — Raúl Castro's 55-year-old great nephew — has shot to power since emerging from obscurity several years ago. He became minister of Cuba's influential Ministry of Foreign Trade and Investment in May 2024 and was appointed the island's deputy prime minister in October.

By contrast, Raúl Guillermo Rodríguez Castro — Raúl Castro's grandson — has never occupied a government post, having served as his grandfather's bodyguard and later as head of Cuba's equivalent of the U.S. Secret Service. He has long been known as "Raulito," or "Little Raúl" and is new to the spotlight cast

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on high-ranking government officials.

But he made news last month when he secretly met on the sidelines of a Caribbean Community summit in St. Kitts with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio. At the time, Rubio refused to say who he was speaking to in the Cuban government.

"The role Raulito is playing right now is the connection between Raúl Castro and whoever is on the U.S. side," said Sebastián Arcos, interim director of the Cuban Research Institute at Florida International University. "He enjoys the absolute trust of Raúl Castro."

But, Arcos and other experts argue, even should someone with the Castro pedigree take the presidency, little is likely to change.

"Party leadership doesn't mean anything in Cuba," Arcos said. "The party is just a hollow façade. The real power resides in the military, under Raúl Castro."

The 94-year-old remains at the helm as general, appears at key events and is considered the most powerful person in Cuba, a country subject to more than six decades of absolute rule, first by revolutionary leader Fidel Castro, and then for the past decade, his younger brother Raúl.

And that is unlikely to change.

"The most significant thing that we have to consider for the last 30 years in Cuba is the absolute reluctance of this regime to implement serious structural economic reforms," Arcos said. "Asking them for political reforms would be too much."

One Castro cousin is described as a technocrat

Pérez-Oliva studied electrical engineering before becoming director general of an import company and then business director within Cuba's Mariel Special Development Zone. That's all the Cuban government has officially shared on Pérez-Oliva.

Online, there are barely traces of him; he doesn't even have a Wikipedia page. His X account is private and inscribed with this sentiment: "Committed to the Revolution and to the ideas of FIDEL."

Pérez-Oliva until only recently became a public figure, traveling with Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez to Russia and Vietnam earlier this year. He also made a public appearance in early February, when a massive blackout hit Cuba's western region. While other high-ranking officials solely blamed the U.S. energy blockade, Pérez-Oliva acknowledged otherwise.

"We don't want to justify ourselves with the blockade; there are a number of internal deficiencies," he said in a TV interview with state media.

A key achievement came in December, when Pérez-Oliva was named a deputy within Cuba's National Assembly Popular Power — a requirement for any Cuban president.

Carlos M. Rodríguez Arechavaleta, a Cuba expert and professor at the Iberoamerican University in Mexico City, said Pérez-Oliva has the profile of a technocrat with commercial negotiation skills. "This could be a more ideological figure ... a more technocratic, potentially reformist-oriented official," he said.

Arcos said he believes that Díaz-Canel could "very well be replaced" by Pérez-Oliva.

"This man looks more proper, more polished. He has been through more important positions," Arcos said. "This is a family business."

Known as Raulito, this cousin was a fixture on Cuba's party scene

Rodríguez Castro is the son of Raúl Castro's oldest daughter, and his father is Luis Alberto Rodríguez López-Calleja — one of Cuba's most powerful figures who ran GAESA, the military's long-standing business wing, before his unexpected death in July 2022.

In his youth, Rodríguez Castro became a fixture at Cuba's music and party scenes. During his public appearances, people would poke each other with an elbow and whisper, "That's El Cangrejo" — a nickname that means "The Crab," because he was born with an extra finger.

He went to military school and became Raúl Castro's bodyguard, accompanying him on trips abroad. Rodríguez Castro was later promoted to head of the Cuban equivalent of the U.S. Secret Service, but with a mission to spy on the country's leadership, Arcos said.

Then, on March 13, experts noted that Rodríguez Castro was present at a government meeting with

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Díaz-Canel, when he announced that Cuba had held talks with the U.S. government. He also was present at the news conference that followed.

It was a rare public appearance tied to government business — and drew some public scrutiny from ordinary Cubans.

“The Crab doesn’t have a position there, so I don’t know why he was there,” said 20-year-old Maday Beltrán Acosta. “People posted a lot of comments about it.”

Beltrán Acosta said she also is bothered by Rodríguez Castro’s social media posts because they feature “abundant food.”

“The people are suffering while he enjoys life,” she said.

But Arcos said he doesn’t believe Rodríguez Castro could be Cuba’s next president, at least in public, because his name would reflect a continuation of the island’s current leadership, not a change as demanded by Trump and Rubio.

“He cannot be the transitional figure,” Arcos said, “because his last name disqualifies him.”

“Not up for negotiation”

While speculation remains rampant over whether Cuba might have a new president before Díaz-Canel’s term expires, experts note he is an unpopular leader.

He ordered a crackdown following the July 2021 anti-government protests that stemmed from food shortages, the largest of their kind in decades.

Under Díaz-Canel, Cuba’s economic and energy crises have deepened.

“The living conditions of the population are on the verge of a humanitarian crisis,” said Rodríguez Arechavaleta. “The social situation is already unsustainable.”

Arcos added: “He’s a man with a pot belly in a country where everybody is trying to find (something) to eat.”

Last week, Deputy Foreign Minister Carlos Fernández de Cossío refuted comments about a possible change in the political system or the departure of Díaz-Canel as part of ongoing talks with the U.S.

“The Cuban political system is not up for negotiation, nor is the president, nor the position of any official in Cuba, subject to negotiation with the United States or with the government of any other country,” Fernández de Cossío told reporters.

Arcos, the Cuban expert, said he cannot imagine Raúl Castro relinquishing power but believes Díaz-Canel could be replaced, referring to him as “a gray apparatchik” within the party when he was appointed president.

He noted that Castro’s eventual death “would be the kind of shock that would crack the regime.”

“No one really knows who’s coming up to replace him,” Arcos said. “For the first time ever in Cuba, you have the possibility of several people struggling for power.”

Geneva’s CERN hails delicate test on transporting antimatter as a scientific success

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — Scientists in Geneva took some antiprotons out for a spin — a very delicate one — in a truck, in a never-tried-before test drive that has been deemed a success.

If this so-called antimatter had come into contact with actual matter, even for a fraction of an instant, it would have been annihilated in a quick flash of energy. So experts at the European Organization for Nuclear Research, known as CERN, had to be extra careful when they took 92 antiprotons on the road for a short ride on Tuesday.

The antiprotons were suspended in a vacuum inside a specially designed box and held in place by supercooled magnets.

In methodical exercise over about three hours, the nearly 1,000-kilogram (2,200-pound) cryogenic box was craned up slowly and moved through a cavernous lab the onto the truck.

The drive on CERN’s campus itself lasted only about a half-hour to test how — if at all — the infinitesimal

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particles could be transported by road without seeping out.

The antiprotons were then placed back in their usual lab area, and the operation was concluded with applause, claims of success, and a bottle of Champagne.

"Transporting antimatter is a pioneering and ambitious project," said Gautier Hamel de Monchenault, CERN's director for research and computing. "We are at the beginning of an exciting scientific journey that will allow us to further deepen our understanding of antimatter."

Taking the first step in a journey to Germany

Manipulating antimatter, like antiprotons, can be tricky business. As scientists understand the universe today, for every type of particle that exists, there is a corresponding antiparticle, exactly matching the particle but with an opposite charge.

If those opposites come into contact, they "annihilate" each other, setting off lots of energy, depending on the masses involved. Any bumps in the road on the test journey that aren't compensated for by the specially-designed box could spoil the whole exercise.

"The motivation behind these experiments is to compare matter and antimatter with extremely high accuracy and watch for differences which we might have not seen yet," said Stefan Ulmer, the leader and spokesperson for Tuesday's test run.

The exercise was a first step toward making good on hopes, one day, to deliver CERN antiprotons to researchers abroad — such as at Heinrich Heine University in Düsseldorf, Germany, which is about eight hours away in normal driving conditions.

"We are scientists. We want to understand something about the fundamental symmetries of nature, and we know that if we do these experiments outside of this accelerator facility, we can measure 100 to 1,000 times better," Ulmer said.

The antiprotons were encased in a "transportable antiproton trap" box that is compact enough to fit through ordinary laboratory doors and fit on a truck. It used superconducting magnets cooled to -269 degrees Celsius (-452 Fahrenheit) that allowed the antiprotons to be remain suspended in a vacuum — not touching the inner walls, which are made of ... matter.

To put the amount into perspective:

The mass in Tuesday's test — slightly less than that of about 100 hydrogen atoms — is so little, experts say, that the worst possible outcome was the loss of the antiprotons. Even if they did touch matter, any release of energy would be unnoticeable, only an oscilloscope, which picks up electrical signals, would be able to detect it.

To put the amount into perspective, Ulmer noted that a single grain of salt contains 10 to the 18th power — or a billion times a billion — of particles, and "we are transporting 100," give or take.

The trap, said CERN press officer Sophie Tesauri, "is supposed to contain these antiprotons no matter what: If the truck stops, if it starts again, if it has to slam on the brakes — all that." Work remains: The trap can contain the antiprotons on its own for only about four hours, and the drive to Düsseldorf is twice that.

The facts of the antimatter: Still being explored

Antimatter, says experimental particle physicist Tara Shears, is "one of the biggest mysteries that we have in science." It is now rare, but when the universe was created, half of it was made of antimatter.

"We haven't been able to study it very much," said Shears, a professor at the University of Liverpool. "But it holds the keys to our understanding of what — literally — why the universe is like it is."

Particle physicist Alan Barr said science has progressed enough that precise experiments are necessary to spot "rather subtle" differences between matter and antimatter.

"To do this, it's useful to be able to take small amounts of antimatter from places where it is produced, like CERN, to other laboratories around Europe, where precise tests of it can be done," said Barr, a professor at the University of Oxford.

CERN known for other successes

The Geneva-based center is best known for its Large Hadron Collider, a network of magnets that accelerates particles through a 27-kilometer (17-mile) underground tunnel and slams them together at velocities

approaching the speed of light. Scientists then study the results of those collisions.

But the sprawling, buzzing complex of scientific experiment is more than just about smashing atoms together: The World Wide Web, for example, was invented here by Britain's Tim Berners-Lee in 1989. Advances as varied as touch screens and tools to fight cancer have been worked on and developed at CERN.

Heinrich Heine University is seen as a better place to study antiprotons in-depth because CERN, with all its other activities, generates a lot of magnetic interference that can skew the study of antimatter.

The university is still working on a center that can take in such antiprotons, by 2029 at the earliest, Ulmer said.

CERN's Antiproton Decelerator, where a proton beam gets fired into a block of metal, causes collisions that generate secondary particles, including lots of antiprotons. It's billed as a unique machine that produces low-energy antiprotons for the study of antimatter.

The CERN "Antimatter Factory" is said to be the only place in the world where scientists can store and study antiprotons.

The center has been experimenting with antimatter for years, and has made breakthroughs on measurement, storage and interaction of antimatter. Two years ago, the team transported a "cloud" of about 70 protons — not antiprotons — across CERN's campus.

Even with robot umpires, MLB managers will find reasons to argue and get ejected

By RONALD BLUM AP Baseball Writer

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — Kevin Cash isn't worried that manager ejections will become a relic of baseball's past just because robot umpires have arrived to settle some debates.

"You only get two challenges, right? That can come up in the first inning," the Tampa Bay Rays manager said.

Manager tantrums at umpires have long delighted fans: the Yankees' Billy Martin kicking and throwing dirt on Dale Scott in 1988, Cincinnati's Lou Piniella heaving first base into right field in anger at Dutch Rennert in 1990 and the Orioles' Earl Weaver going face to face with Bill Haller in 1980, each profanely calling the other a liar.

But Major League Baseball has given managers less to gripe about in the past two decades. Video reviews began for home run calls in August 2008 and were widely expanded to many decisions for the 2014 season. The Automated Ball-Strike System starts this year to allow challenges to human strike zone calls, dubbed robot umpires.

"Manager ejections have been down for a while now because of the replay system," said Hall of Famer Jim Leyland, a three-time Manager of the Year tossed 73 times over 22 seasons. "I really like the ABS. I think it's going to be great for the game."

Last year, 61.5% of ejections among players, managers and coaches (99 of 161) were related to ball/strike calls, according to MLB, up slightly from 60.3% (114 of 189) in 2024. The figure included what MLB counted as inappropriate comments and conduct, and throwing equipment in protest.

"I'm in favor of anything that allows our technology to play in this game," Cash said. "We have so much of it. Why not use it?"

Each team gets two challenges per game, and a club keeps its challenge if successful. A team out of challenges gets an additional one in each extra inning.

"You're going to take out the argument of balls and strikes initially," Minnesota Twins manager Derek Shelton said. "I think the challenge is going to be after the challenges go away, how managers are and what they do? But I do think that there is going to be probably less general complaining about balls and strikes in the early going."

Aaron Boone of the Yankees has led or tied for the most ejections in four straight seasons, and his nine in 2022 were the most since Atlanta's Bobby Cox was tossed 10 times in 2007.

Cox was thrown out a record 162 times, followed by John McGraw (121), Leo Durocher (100), Weaver

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(96), Tony La Russa (93) and Bruce Bochy (89).

Cincinnati's Terry Francona, starting his 25th season in a big league dugout, leads active managers with 54. Boone, beginning his ninth season, is second with 46.

Boone is less concerned over whether his dugout dissents will dwindle and more focused on keeping his players locked in if a challenge goes against them. If an umpire calls strike three to strand the bases loaded and the pitcher pumps a fist and bounds off the mound, how will the pitcher quickly regain composure if ABS reverses the call and forces a 3-2 offering?

"It's a whole new thing that pitchers have never dealt with. That's an emotional thing you've got to deal with," Boone said. "That's something we've already addressed, same with the hitters to a lesser degree: that reset. How do you clear the mechanism?"

Bobby Valentine, who managed three major league teams over 16 seasons, will be honored by the New York Mets this May with a giveaway promotion commemorating one of his 44 ejections. After he was tossed by Randy Marsh on June 9, 1999, Valentine returned to the dugout with a fake mustache fashioned from eye black and sunglasses.

Valentine thinks players have evolved past the point where a manager could spark his team with a histrionic argument.

"I found that by the end of my career that that was only entertainment," he said. "It didn't fire anyone up except for my wife, who was worried about the fine that I was going to get."

Georgia could become the first state with weapons detection in all public schools

By JEFF AMY Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Georgia could become the first state to require every student to be checked for weapons when arriving at a public school each day.

A bill is nearing passage that would require weapons detection systems in a further reaction to a 2024 school shooting that killed four.

"That rifle would have never reached our hallways," said Daria Lezczynska, a junior at Apalachee High School in Winder, where the shooting took place. "Lives would have been saved. Families would not be grieving, Students like me would not be carrying this trauma."

Some schools have long used metal detectors or required students to carry clear backpacks to cut down on weapons. But a new generation of technology marries computer analysis with cameras or the same electromagnetic fields as metal detectors to detect knives and guns. The systems have spread rapidly through schools, arenas, stadiums and hospitals.

"It's very commonplace for me to walk through a weapons detection system when I enter into a courthouse," said Chuck Efrstration, the bill's sponsor and Republican house majority leader who represents the Apalachee campus. "Georgia's students and educators deserve similar security with weapons detection systems inside of every Georgia public school."

There's little rigorous research nationwide proving that weapons detectors prevent school shootings. In Georgia, there are questions about who will pay what can be \$10,000 or more per system. School employees must staff checkpoints and search bags. And even supporters of the systems say searchers can become dulled by a multitude of false alarms and miss the few actual weapons. Some question whether weapons detectors are necessary in elementary schools, as Efrstration's bill mandates. And those who find Georgia's gun laws too permissive say installing weapons detectors everywhere is a form of surrender, accepting that society will be awash in guns and violence.

A Senate committee on Monday passed an amended version of Efrstration's bill, meaning it needs final votes in the Senate and House in the closing days of Georgia's 2026 legislative session before reaching Republican Gov. Brian Kemp's desk for his signature or veto.

Few schools traditionally required weapons checks

It's unclear how many schools nationwide use weapons detectors. A U.S. Department of Education

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survey found that in the 2021-2022 school year, 6.2% of all schools and 14.2% of high schools nationwide required random metal detector checks. Only 2.4% of all schools and 6.2% of high schools required daily metal detector checks. More schools required clear bookbags or banned bookbags than required daily metal detector checks. Checks were more likely to be required when a school was in a city, when the majority of students were nonwhite, and when large majorities of students were poor.

Atlanta's school district spent more than \$4 million to roll out new systems in 2021 in middle and high schools, replacing old-style metal detectors. District Police Chief Ronald Applin said officials wanted something that students could move through more quickly, saying traditional detectors were "too cumbersome."

Applin said guns found at Atlanta schools fell from 32 the year before the new system to four so far this year.

The 1,700 students at Midtown High School typically hold their laptops in the air as they pass through detection gates, with a computer screen telling employees whether a bag needs a secondary search.

"It's not real adversarial at the metal detector," said School Resource Officer Meredith Littles. "A lot of people get worried about the dynamics of what that looks like. But it's very non-intrusive."

False alarms can dull vigilance

One key question is how sensitive to make the system, said Nikita Ermolaev, a research engineer at IPVM, which tests and researches security technology. Too sensitive, and alarms go off for everything. Not sensitive enough, and weapons slip through. And trying to maintain vigilance is a challenge.

"You have 100 alarms and the first 99 of them are false alarms on laptops or binders, right? You're naturally going to assume that the 100th alarm is also going to be on something benign," Ermolaev said. "And that's how sometimes weapons such as guns or knives can go through the system."

Then there's the cost. Georgia gives each public school campus \$50,000 a year for school safety, but many districts are already using that money to pay on-campus officers. House budget writers have proposed borrowing an additional \$50 million for grants to districts.

"While we absolutely think weapons detection is imperative, it can only be made possible with appropriate funding," said Gretchen Walton, an assistant superintendent in Cobb County, which with 103,000 students is Georgia's second-largest school system.

Others, including some Democrats, see the focus on weapons detection as misplaced. They say Georgia should be looking to limit children's access to guns.

"We have allowed guns and weapons of war to become more available than a pack of gum in this state, then act confused when people keep dying," said Democratic state Rep. Bryce Berry, a public school teacher who voted against the bill in the House. "Let's stop hiding behind procedure and politics and pretending that the threat our children face is some vague, mysterious force."

It's a bad time to hunt for new jobs, most US workers say in new Gallup poll

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Americans' outlook on the job market has turned increasingly pessimistic, a surprisingly negative shift given the low unemployment rate but one that likely reflects an ongoing hiring drought.

Just 28% of workers in a quarterly Gallup survey conducted late last year said now is a "good time" to find a quality job, with 72% saying it is a bad time. Those figures are a sharp reversal from just a few years ago, in mid-2022, when 70% said it was a good time.

Americans have quickly gotten more pessimistic: As recently as late 2024, just under half of workers still said it was a good time to search for a job. The current survey was conducted during the final three months of 2025, long before the Iran war that has sent oil and gas prices soaring and threatens to slow the economy as Americans redirect more of their dollars to filling gas tanks and away from other spending.

The figures help explain other surveys that show Americans have a largely bleak view of the economy, even as many headline measures suggest it has been growing and job losses are low.

College graduates are especially gloomy

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Job pessimism is especially pronounced among college graduates. The shift is likely because hiring in many white-collar professions has been unusually weak for the past two years, in areas such as software, customer service and advertising.

The survey found a split based on education levels, with just 19% of workers with a college degree thinking that now is a good time to find a quality job, while 35% of workers without a college degree are optimistic.

A separate Gallup survey of U.S. adults overall found that college graduates' optimism about the job market is the lowest it's been since 2013. Meanwhile, the gap in job market sentiment between Americans with and without a college degree was at its widest in that survey since Gallup started asking the question in 2001.

Signs of broad discontent among young workers

Just about 2 in 10 workers ages 18-34 think now is a good time to find a job, compared to about 4 in 10 workers ages 65 and older who say the same.

Gallup's survey is consistent with what economists call the "low-hire, low-fire" job market: Businesses are largely holding onto their workers and measures of layoffs remain quite low. As a result, older workers are largely secure in their jobs. But hiring is also quite sluggish, making it harder for younger workers to break in and find permanent work.

It also found that younger workers are much likelier than older workers to say they're actively looking for a new job or watching for opportunities. Most Gen Z and Millennial workers say they're at least watching for opportunities, while about three-quarters of baby boomers say they're not looking at all.

Other surveys signal negative economic views

The Gallup results come as government data shows that overall hiring is at its weakest level in more than a decade. The Labor Department tracks a "hiring rate," or the proportion of people who are hired each month as a percent of those with jobs. The hiring rate dropped to 3.2% last November, around when Gallup conducted its survey, the lowest since March 2013. It was 3.9% before the pandemic.

A hiring rate at that 3.2% is quite low: When it was last reached in March 2013, the unemployment rate was 7.5%, as millions of Americans were still struggling to find work after the 2008-2009 Great Recession. It suggests it is much harder to find a job now than the unemployment rate would indicate.

Government data also shows that there are more unemployed people — 7.4 million — than available jobs, at 6.9 million. That is a reversal from the first few years after the pandemic, when vacancies outnumbered those out of work.

Gallup's survey also found that workers have a dimmer view of their current life and future prospects than at any point since 2009, when the firm began measuring the workforce's life evaluations.

Other surveys echo Americans' generally dark view of the economy. The Conference Board's consumer confidence survey was just 91.2 in February, not far from its pandemic-era lows and down from nearly 130 before the pandemic.

More people believe jobs are "easy to get" than "hard to find," the Conference Board's survey finds, but the gap has narrowed steadily in recent years.

Afghanistan releases American national Dennis Coyle held for more than a year

By ABDUL QAHAR AFGHAN, ELENA BECATOROS and ERIC TUCKER undefined

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Afghanistan's Taliban authorities on Tuesday released American academic Dennis Coyle after holding him for over a year, with the Foreign Ministry saying the release came on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr, the Muslim holiday that marks the end of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan.

A statement from the ministry said the academic researcher had been released in Kabul, the country's capital, following an appeal from his family and after Afghanistan's Supreme Court "considered his previous imprisonment sufficient."

Coyle was detained in January 2025. Afghan authorities accused him of violating laws, but never speci-

fied which ones.

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio welcomed the release.

"President (Donald) Trump is committed to ending unjust detentions overseas – Dennis joins over 100 Americans who have been freed in the past 15 months under his second term in office," Rubio said in a statement. "While this is a positive step by the Taliban, more work needs to be done," he added.

Earlier this month, the U.S. State Department announced the designation of Afghanistan as a sponsor of wrongful detention, accusing it of engaging in "hostage diplomacy." Afghanistan joined Iran as countries singled out by the United States for detaining Americans in hopes of extracting policy concessions.

Afghanistan rejected U.S. allegations that it detains foreigners to obtain leverage over other countries, saying Afghan authorities arrest people for violating laws not to make a deal.

The State Department said earlier this month that the Taliban was believed to hold at least four U.S. nationals, including Coyle and Mahmood Habibi, an Afghan American businessman who worked as a contractor for a Kabul-based telecommunications company.

The FBI and Habibi's family have said they believe he was taken by Taliban forces in 2022, but Afghan authorities have denied holding him.

Habibi's brother, Ahmad Habibi, welcomed Coyle's release but said in a statement that "we hope that our family will soon have the same feeling of relief, when Mahmood is returned home to us."

Rubio also mentioned another American, Paul Overby, who is listed on the FBI's missing persons website as having disappeared in eastern Afghanistan's Khost province in mid-2014 while conducting research for a book he was writing.

"We are still seeking the immediate return of Mahmood Habibi, Paul Overby, and all other unjustly detained Americans," Rubio said. "The Taliban must end their practice of hostage diplomacy."

Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi said his country "has not arrested citizens of any country to achieve political goals," according to a statement released by the ministry. Coyle, he said, had been released "after going through the judicial process as a result of violating the laws."

Both Rubio and Muttaqi thanked the United Arab Emirates for helping mediate the release, and mentioned Qatar had also played a role. The foreign ministry said Muttaqi had met in Kabul with former U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad ahead of the release.

Afghanistan released Coyle "based on humanitarian sympathy and goodwill, and believes that such steps can further strengthen the atmosphere of trust between countries," the Foreign Ministry said in its statement, adding that Kabul "also expresses the hope that both countries will find solutions to the remaining problems through understanding and constructive dialogue in the future."

The Taliban seized power in Afghanistan in 2021 in the wake of the chaotic withdrawal of U.S. troops, nearly 20 years after they were ousted from power in a U.S.-led invasion following the 9/11 attacks in the United States.

Iran's parliamentary speaker Qalibaf is floated as a possible US contact in talks as war rages

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Long before he became Iran's parliamentary speaker, Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf went on a charm offensive for almost two decades, portraying himself as a hard-liner the West could do business with in the Islamic Republic.

"I would like the West to change its attitude to Iran and trust Iran, and rest assured that there's an attitude in Iran to advance issues through dialogue," he told London-based newspaper The Times in 2008.

With the war in its fourth week after the joint U.S-Israeli strikes on Iran started last month, the 64-year-old pilot and former Revolutionary Guard commander has denied that there have been discussions with the United States amid reports that he was floated as Washington's negotiating partner in talks.

Questions also remain as to what power Qalibaf has within Iran's theocracy, shattered after the Feb. 28 Israeli airstrike that killed 86-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

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Khamenei's son, Mojtaba, now Iran's new supreme leader, has backed Qalibaf through his repeated and failed presidential campaigns. Still, multiple centers of power within Iran's theocracy now likely vie for control of the Islamic Republic — and uncertainties remain over Mojtaba Khamenei's status as he has yet to be seen after reportedly being wounded.

Meanwhile, Qalibaf has been tied to the crackdown against protesters calling for change within Iran's government and has seen corruption allegations swirl around him during his time in office.

U.S. President Donald Trump may just be looking for an Iranian version of Venezuela's acting President Delcy Rodríguez, who took over as the U.S. military seized then Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro in January.

"Many Iranians despise Ghalibaf; diplomats see him as pragmatic," wrote analyst Michael Rubin, using a different transliteration for the politician's last name.

"Those diplomats confuse pragmatism with opportunism. Ghalibaf is a survivor. He sees in Trump someone who can help him achieve what late Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei denied him: the presidency or some equivalent interim leadership role."

Iran's semiofficial Tasnim news agency, believed close to the Guard, on Tuesday described reports in Western media as a "political bomb" meant to put the country's leaders in disarray.

"Qalibaf was introduced as a negotiating party in order to present a contradictory and non-unified image of Iran," Tasnim said. "The mention of Qalibaf's name was clearly intended to create internal divisions within Iran and to provoke conflict among political forces."

Rise within Iran's theocracy

Qalibaf was born on Aug. 23, 1961 in the city of Torqabeh in Iran's northeastern Razavi Khorasan province to a father who was a shopkeeper — not a member of the Shiite clergy that seized power in the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Like many young men of his generation, he joined the paramilitary Guard during the country's 1980s war with Iraq, quickly rising through the ranks. After the conflict, he served as the head of the Guard's construction arm, Khatam al-Anbia, for several years, leading efforts to rebuild.

Trained as a pilot, he then served as the head of the Guard's air force. In 1999, he co-signed a letter to reformist President Mohammad Khatami amid student protests in Tehran over the government's closure of a reformist newspaper and a subsequent security force crackdown.

The letter warned Khatami that the Guard would take action unilaterally unless he agreed to put down the demonstrations.

Violence around the protests, the first in a string of widening demonstrations over the last decades, saw several people killed, hundreds wounded and thousands arrested.

Qalibaf then became the head of Iran's police, modernizing the force and implementing the country's 110 emergency phone number. However, a leaked recording of a later meeting between Qalibaf and members of the Guard's volunteer Basij force, had him claiming that he ordered gunfire be used against demonstrators in 2003 and praising the violence used in Iran's 2009 Green Movement protests.

Iran's then President Hassan Rouhani hinted at the 2003 incident when the two sparred in a 2017 presidential election debate.

"There was an argument that you were saying that the students should come then we can pincer attack to them and finish the job," Rouhani said at the time.

Alternative to Ahmadinejad

As Tehran's mayor from 2005 to 2017, Qalibaf faced corruption allegations, including over around \$3.5 million being donated to a foundation run by his wife.

However, he also used his prominence to travel to the World Economic Forum and even praised New York City in an interview with The Financial Times, undoubtedly raising eyebrows among other hard-liners. His opponents claimed Qalibaf was like Reza Pahlavi, a hard-charging soldier who became shah in 1925 and rapidly pushed to Westernize Persia and rename it Iran before handing power to his son Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

Qalibaf didn't outright reject the comparison.

"If authoritarianism means when collective sense reaches a plan and decision, I'm very determined and

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firm in carrying it out," Qalibaf told The Financial Times in 2008, casting himself as an alternative to hard-line President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. "When the expediency of the society is in carrying a project, then I'm very firm and show little flexibility and don't let that collective sense be marred or disarranged."

Qalibaf ran in presidential elections in 2005, 2013, 2017 and 2024, but despite the failures of those campaigns, U.S. diplomats suggested that he enjoyed the support of Mojtaba Khamenei, according to diplomatic cables published by WikiLeaks.

"Mojtaba reportedly has long maintained a very close relationship with Tehran Mayor and presidential hopeful Mohammad Baqr Qalibaf; Mojtaba was reportedly the 'backbone' of Qalibaf's past and continuing election campaigns," an August 2008 cable read. "Mojtaba is said to help Qalibaf as an advisor, financier, and provider of senior-level political support. His support for and closeness to Qalibaf reportedly remains undiminished."

With Khamenei now Iran's new supreme leader, Qalibaf's position may be significantly boosted.

Floated as a possible negotiator

Trump pulled back from a 48-hour deadline for Iran to open the Strait of Hormuz, as media reports suggested that Qalibaf may be a possible Iranian contact for the U.S. government. Qalibaf himself has denied any talks are ongoing.

"No negotiations have been held with the US, and fakenews is used to manipulate the financial and oil markets and escape the quagmire in which the US and Israel are trapped," he wrote Monday on X.

Surprisingly, unlike many officials within Iran's government, Qalibaf's name is not on any U.S. bounty.

It remains unclear whether the Israelis view Qalibaf as a target. As parliamentary speaker, Qalibaf praised the Hamas-led attack on Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, saying that it showed the "Zionist regime will never have peace until the day it is annihilated."

Asked why he wouldn't name the Iranian negotiator, Trump told journalists on Monday: "Because I don't want them to be killed, OK? I don't want them to be killed."

Today in History: March 25, Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire in New York kills 146 workers

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Wednesday, March 25, the 84th day of 2026. There are 281 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On March 25, 1911, 146 people, mostly young female immigrants, were killed when a fire broke out at the Triangle Shirtwaist Co. garment factory in New York; the tragedy led to legal reforms for workers' rights and workplace safety.

Also on this date:

In 1894, Jacob S. Coxey began a march from Massillon (MA'-suh-luhn), Ohio, to Washington, leading an "army" of as many as 500 unemployed workers to demand help from the federal government following the Panic of 1893 and ensuing depression.

In 1931, in the so-called Scottsboro Boys case, nine young Black men were taken off a train in Alabama and accused of raping two white women; after years of convictions, death sentences and imprisonment, they were eventually vindicated.

In 1947, a coal dust explosion inside the Centralia Coal Co. Mine No. 5 in Washington County, Illinois, killed 111 miners; 31 survived.

In 1965, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. led 25,000 people to the Alabama state Capitol in Montgomery, completing a five-day march from Selma to protest the denial of voting rights to Black Americans.

In 1975, King Faisal of Saudi Arabia was assassinated by his nephew, Prince Faisal bin Musaid. (Faisal bin Musaid was executed for the killing three months later.)

In 1990, 87 people were killed when fire raced through the Happy Land social club in New York City. (The fire was set by patron Julio Gonzalez, who had been thrown out of the club following an argument with his girlfriend; Gonzalez died in prison in 2016.)

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In 1996, an 81-day standoff by the Montana Freemen, an antigovernment militia, began at a ranch near Jordan, Montana.

In 2018, 64 people, including 41 children, died in a shopping center fire in the Russian city of Kemerovo in Siberia. Relatives of the dead complained the shopping center's emergency exits were locked and the mall's fire alarms didn't sound.

Today's Birthdays: Film critic Gene Shalit is 100. Activist and author Gloria Steinem is 92. Musician Elton John is 79. Actor Bonnie Bedelia is 78. Actor Marcia Cross is 64. Author Kate DiCamillo is 62. Actor Lisa Gay Hamilton is 62. Actor Sarah Jessica Parker is 61. Baseball Hall of Famer Tom Glavine is 60. Comedian-actor Alex Moffat (TV: "Saturday Night Live") is 44. Actor-singer Katharine McPhee is 42. Comedian-actor Chris Redd (TV: "Saturday Night Live") is 41. Rapper Big Sean is 38. Actor Mikey Madison is 27. World-class sprinter Sha'Carri Richardson is 26. Actor Will Buie Jr. is 19.