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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.

Sunday, March 29

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6th grade BB Practice, 6 pm., Arena

Groton Daily Independent
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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.

Social Media Verdict

A Los Angeles jury held Meta and Google's YouTube liable in a landmark social media addiction trial yesterday, awarding the plaintiff \$3M in compensatory damages. The decision could influence more than 1,600 similar lawsuits from more than 350 families and over 250 school districts.

The case centers on a now-20-year-old woman identified as KGM who began using social media as a child. KGM accused Meta and YouTube of "addictive design," with notifications and recommendation features she says fostered a decline in her mental health, including body dysmorphia, depression, and suicidal thoughts. Now, after two weeks of deliberations, the jury found Meta and Google negligent in the design and operation of their platform. Meta is being held liable for 70% of the harm, with YouTube responsible for 30%.

The decision has been likened to the tobacco trials of the 1990s.

'Three Musketeer' Remains

The skeleton of what may have been Charles de Batz de Castelmor was discovered beneath a Dutch church, local media reported yesterday. The French soldier known as d'Artagnan was the inspiration behind Alexandre Dumas' 1844 novel "The Three Musketeers."

D'Artagnan was a 17th-century Gascon nobleman who traveled to Paris to serve as a member of the royal bodyguard. He served Kings Louis XIII and Louis XIV before being killed in the 1673 siege of Maastricht. His body was never found. Now, researchers believe they may have found his remains in a Maastricht church. Renovations this year revealed a skeleton beneath where the altar used to be, suggesting the person buried there was important. A bullet at chest level also supports the theory the remains could be D'Artagnan. DNA analysis is ongoing.

The Architect of Food Safety

Dutch food scientist Huub Lelieveld received the 2026 World Food Prize yesterday for pioneering a global food safety movement. He is credited with preventing millions of cases of foodborne illness, improving access to food, and reducing food waste.

Lelieveld, 82, spent four decades at Unilever, updating food production practices to improve hygiene and reduce reliance on salt, sugar, and preservatives. He then founded the Global Harmonization Initiative, a network of roughly 1,600 volunteers spanning 113 countries, in 2004. The nonprofit has introduced atmospheric water generation to areas with unsafe drinking water and taught communities to remove toxins that cause neurological diseases from cassava plants.

The award, which comes with \$500K and is often called the Nobel Prize for Food and Agriculture, was created by 1970 Nobel laureate Norman Borlaug. Lauded as the "Father of the Green Revolution," Borlaug developed high-yield, disease-resistant wheat varieties that improved food security from Mexico to India.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Supreme Court rejects \$1B lawsuit from record labels seeking to hold Cox Communications liable for repeated piracy by its internet users.

BBC taps former Google executive Matt Brittin as next director-general.

Savannah Guthrie interview about her mother's disappearance airs today and tomorrow on "Today".

Stephen Colbert to write new "Lord of the Rings" film with his screenwriter son after wrapping up "The Late Show" in May.

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Men's NCAA Sweet 16 tips off with four games tonight (More, w/full schedule) | Mikaela Shiffrin wins record-tying sixth overall World Cup skiing title.

Science & Technology

Engineers design wristband that tracks hand motion in real time, allowing users to remotely control robotic hands—a potential boost for virtual reality.

Ancient dog genes suggest dogs originated from wolves and began living with humans before farming, at least 5,000 years earlier than previously assumed.

Meet 10 of the world's oldest dog breeds.

Robot accompanies first lady Melania Trump to global technology and education summit, makes history as first US-made humanoid robot in the White House.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close up (S&P 500 +0.5%, Dow +0.7%, Nasdaq +0.8%) amid hopes for Iran peace talks progress.

USPS to reportedly impose first-ever 8% fuel surcharge on packages, beginning in April.

SpaceX reportedly preparing to file for initial public offering this week.

Legal AI startup Harvey valued at \$11B after raising \$200M in fresh capital.

Meta begins laying off employees across Reality Labs and four other units.

Politics & World Affairs

Iran calls for reparations, sovereignty in the Strait of Hormuz amid other demands in counterproposal to the US' 15-point peace plan.

TSA official warns small US airports could soon close amid partial government shutdown, shortage of agents.

Conservative Political Action Conference begins in Texas; President Donald Trump expected to skip for the first time in a decade.

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Enrich Groton SoDak Inc. shared the spirit of Easter by delivering meals to local families Wednesday. Board members, volunteers, and city employees came together to prepare and deliver the meals, helping neighbors enjoy the holiday. It was a simple act of kindness that brought comfort to Groton SD Community families this Easter.

Pictured are Nancy Larsen, Justin Cleveland and April Abeln. Not pictured are drivers Todd Gay and Paul Kosel. (Photo courtesy

April Abeln)

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Ruby Larson, Pat Johnson and Nancy Larsen were busy packing bags for the Easter deliveries. (Courtesy photo April Abeln)



Steve Dresbach, Nancy Larsen, Sandy Dresbach and Ruby Larson were sorting out items to be used for the Easter deliveries. (Courtesy photo April Abeln)



Diane Warrington, Sue Stevenson, Pat Johnson, Ruby Larson, Mary Boehmer, Sandy Dresbach and Steve Dresbach helped pack 71 bags that were delivered to local residents on Wednesday. (Courtesy photo April Abeln)

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**GROTON AREA
TIGERS**
GIRLS FAST PITCH SOFTBALL
2026 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	TIME
Sat, Mar 28	at Clark/Willow Lake	1 p.m.
Tues, Mar 31	Sisseton	4 p.m.
Thur, Apr 2	at Aberdeen Central	4 p.m.
Thur, Apr 9	at Deuel	4:30 p.m.
Fri, Apr 10	Mobridge-Pollock	4:30 p.m.
Mon, Apr 20	at Arlington	4 p.m.
Mon, Apr 27	Clark/Willow Lake (Senior Night)	4 p.m.
Sat, May 2	NEC at Redfield	—
Thur, May 7	Florence/Henry	5:30 p.m.
Mon, May 11	Sioux Valley	4 p.m.
Tues, May 12	at Milbank	4:30 p.m.
Mon, May 18	at Redfield	4:30 p.m.
Sat, May 23	at Hanson	1 p.m.

High School Spring Girls Fast Pitch Softball Schedule

Saturday, March 28 – at Clark, 1 p.m. (JV to follow)

Tuesday, March 31 – Sisseton, 4 p.m. (JV to follow)

Thursday, April 2 – at Aberdeen Central, 4 p.m. (JV to follow)

Thursday, April 9 – at Deuel, 4:30 p.m. (JV to follow)

Friday, April 10 – Mobridge-Pollock, 4:30 p.m. (JV to follow)

Monday, April 20 – at Arlington, 4 p.m. (JV to follow)

Monday, April 27 – Clark/Willow Lake, 4 p.m. (Senior Night) (JV to follow)

Saturday, May 2 – NEC at Redfield

Thursday, May 7 – Florence/Henry 5:30 p.m. (2 varsity games)

Monday, May 11 – Sioux Valley, 4 p.m. (JV to follow)

Tuesday, May 12 – at Milbank, 4:30 p.m. (JV to follow)

Monday, May 18 – at Redfield, 4:30 p.m. (JV to follow)

Saturday, May 23 – at Hanson, 1 p.m. (JV to follow)

GDILIVE.COM Livestreaming Softball Games

A new sport is High School Girls Fast Pitch Softball. This is Groton's first year in the sport. There are 13 regular season games - but I will probably not be able to cover all of them due to my work schedule. So not knowing for sure of which ones I can go too, we'll have to go on a per game basis.

If you want to be a sponsor, it would be \$15 per game (Let me know how many games you would want to sponsor). If you want to be an exclusive sponsor for a game or games, it would be \$150 per game. Dacotah Bank has offered to be an exclusive sponsor of two games.

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The graphic features a roaring tiger on the left side. The text 'GROTON AREA TIGERS' is prominently displayed in the upper right, with 'TIGERS' in a large, bold, orange font. Below this, 'FOOTBALL SCHEDULE' and '2026 SEASON' are written in white and orange respectively. A table with a gold border lists the season's games. At the bottom left, a portion of a football is visible.

WEEK	DATE	OPPONENT	LOCATION
0	Aug 21	Miller/H-H	Away
1	Aug 28	Beresford	Home
2	Sept 4	Flandreau	Home
3	Sept 11	Clark/Willow Lake	Away
4	Sept 18	Elk Point-Jefferson (HC)	Home
5	Sept 25	— BYE —	—
6	Oct 2	Deuel	Away
7	Oct 9	Mobridge-Pollock	Home
8	Oct 16	Aberdeen Roncalli	Away

Home games played at Groton Area Athletic Complex

Britton-Hecla, Webster Area, Hamlin, Sisseton and Redfield are all 9-Man Football.

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Family: \$72.43 per month
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Governor vetoes home care regulation bill

Legislation doesn't deliver 'meaningful protections,' Rhoden says while issuing his second veto this session

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER

South Dakota Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden vetoed a bill on Wednesday that would require state licensing of non-medical home care agencies, his second veto of the 2026 legislative session.

The vetoed bill is sponsored by Brookings Republican Rep. Mellissa Heermann, who said she introduced the legislation to protect "vulnerable" South Dakotans using personal or home care services — often people who are disabled or elderly.

South Dakota doesn't mandate licensure, training or background checks for home services unless they're paid through Medicaid. The bill would require eight hours of training and background checks for all non-medical home care workers, along with a \$100 annual license fee for each non-medical home care agency.

Lawmakers will consider the veto Monday. Overriding it will require a two-thirds vote in each chamber — 47 votes in the House and 24 in the Senate. The bill was supported 41-25 by the state House in February and 20-14 earlier this month in the state Senate.

Rhoden explained his veto in a letter, saying the regulations in the bill are too broad and create a false sense of consumer protection because the state Department of Health doesn't have authority to examine or verify the background checks required in the bill. A representative with the state Department of Health opposed the bill during legislative committee hearings.

Rhoden's explanation surprised Heermann, who said she worked with the Health Department on a compromise. Originally, the bill was "more aggressive" in its protections.

"We made this compromise in good faith, but one of the concerns is that it's not strong enough now," Heermann said.

The Department of Health continued to oppose the bill after Heermann's amendments.

More regulations could risk reducing access to services in rural areas of the state, Rhoden added. He said in a news release that state regulation should be "as limited and targeted as possible."

"I am directing the Department of Health to work with stakeholders to develop a more effective framework that provides meaningful protections without placing unnecessary burdens on those who provide essential services," Rhoden said.

Heermann said if the Legislature doesn't override Rhoden's veto, she'll push for legislative discussions with the executive branch, stakeholders and affected South Dakotans to introduce a bill next winter if she's reelected.

"I think it's a critical piece of legislation and a critical protection that should already be in place," Heermann said. "When it comes to veto day, I think it's a heavy lift and involves many conversations."

Rhoden has signed 222 bills into law and vetoed two this legislative session. The other veto is on a bill that would ban lab-grown meat in the state. Although lawmakers have not yet considered that veto, Rhoden has signed a compromise bill into law that will place a five-year moratorium on lab-grown meat.

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

Trump EPA to ease restrictions on summer ethanol-blend sales as gas prices soar

BY: JACOB FISCHLER

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will allow gas stations to sell a blended fuel containing 15% ethanol into the summer season in an effort to lower gas prices, Administrator Lee Zeldin said Wednesday.

The blend, known as E15, is usually barred in many Midwest states over the summer to reduce smog, though the federal government has routinely in recent years issued waivers to allow summer sales. The move, which ethanol producers applauded, could prevent a spike in prices at the pump during the war with Iran that has scrambled oil markets.

"EPA is working with our federal partners to reduce unnecessary costs and uncertainty and ensure that gas prices remain affordable for all Americans through the summer," Zeldin said in a statement. "This emergency action will provide American families with relief by increasing fuel supply and consumer choice."

Bipartisan officials in corn-producing states had sought the waiver, and continue to push for year-round availability of the product. Ethanol is manufactured from corn and other plant materials.

Move wins praise from industry, officials

Seven Midwestern governors — Republicans Kim Reynolds of Iowa, Mike Kehoe of Missouri, Jim Pillen of Nebraska and Larry Rhoden of South Dakota and Democrats Tim Walz of Minnesota, JB Pritzker of Illinois and Tony Evers of Wisconsin — signed a March 6 letter to Zeldin requesting the waiver.

More recently, the top Democrat on the U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee also endorsed the move.

"With gas prices spiking, now's the time to make E15 available year-round," Minnesota U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar, said in a March 19 statement. "It will help lower costs and decrease our dependence on foreign oil."

U.S. Rep. Adrian Smith, a Nebraska Republican, also applauded Wednesday's announcement, and called on Congress to make the policy permanent.

Ethanol industry groups also approved of the waiver. Geoff Cooper, the president and CEO of the national ethanol advocacy group Renewable Fuels Association, said the move was "exactly what the supply chain needs right now."

"President Trump and Administrator Zeldin understand that year-round E15 is a solution that can extend domestic fuel supplies and reduce pump prices for hardworking American families," Cooper said. "With geopolitical conflict roiling energy markets worldwide, we applaud President Trump and Administrator Zeldin for acting quickly and decisively to combat potential fuel shortages and help keep a lid on gas prices this summer."

Iowa Renewable Fuels Association Executive Director Monte Shaw also thanked the administration in a statement.

"With rising fuel prices and a war in the Middle East, this is the worst time to force retailers to bag E15 pumps. E15 adds home-grown supply and reduces prices for consumers," he said.

Iran war disrupts oil market

Gas prices have risen since President Donald Trump launched strikes against Iran on Feb. 28. Transport through the Strait of Hormuz has been limited due to threats from Iran during the conflict.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt noted at Wednesday's press briefing the waiver was a part of the administration's response to rising fuel costs during the war.

"Obviously the administration is coming up with creative new solutions by the day to keep the price of oil stable, something the president wants to see," she said.

Trump will also welcome nearly 1,000 farmers to the White House for a National Agriculture Day event on Friday, where the president plans to promote his record on the issue, Leavitt said.

The E15 waiver will be in effect May 1 through May 20. Twenty days is the longest period a single waiver can be applied under the Clean Air Act, the EPA said in the press release. The move signals the adminis-

tration views further waivers as an option as restrictions ramp up over the summer.

Shauneen Miranda contributed to this report.

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

Plaque unveiled at South Dakota Capitol for 100-year-old Medal of Honor recipient

BY: MEGHAN O'BRIEN

PIERRE — There's a new name in the South Dakota Hall of Honor at the state Capitol building.

One-hundred-year-old South Dakota native and retired U.S. Navy Capt. E. Royce Williams was celebrated at a Wednesday ceremony where a plaque honoring him was unveiled, although Williams did not attend.

"In spite of being outnumbered and facing incredible danger, Captain Williams engaged the enemy with courage and skill," said Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden. "Our state has always had a strong tradition of service, and Captain Williams is the very best of that tradition."

President Donald Trump awarded Williams the Medal of Honor, the country's highest military honor, at the State of the Union address earlier this year. The medal honors actions by Williams that had been classified for decades.

"His story was secret for over 50 years, he didn't even want to tell his wife, but the legend grew and grew," Trump said during the speech in February. "But tonight, at 100 years old, this brave Navy captain is finally getting the recognition he deserves."

On Nov. 18, 1952, over Korean coastal waters during the Korean War, then-Lt. Williams, from Wilmot, South Dakota, led three F9F Panthers against seven Soviet MiG-15s. He disabled three enemy jets and damaged a fourth.

The Soviet jets, according to the U.S. Naval Institute, were "superior to the F9F in almost every fashion." The mission was the only direct overwater combat between U.S. Navy fighters and Soviet fighters during the Cold War.

Williams, one of 11 Medal of Honor recipients from South Dakota, now lives in California. The Hall of Honor at the South Dakota Capitol is located in the hallway that visitors enter immediately after going through security.

Meghan O'Brien is the audio reporter for South Dakota Searchlight where she covers the state government and its impact on South Dakotans. She's previously reported in Nebraska with a focus on health care and rural communities across the state.

Talks underway about state airplane purchase as new law requires consultation with expert panel

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

When Republican state Sen. Joy Hohn, a pilot from Hartford, asked a state department head if he consulted with South Dakota's Aeronautics Commission about an upcoming \$5 million airplane purchase, the department head said he'd never heard of the commission.

That was despite the existence of a state law requiring the commission to advise state departments on aircraft purchases.

So, Hohn introduced a bill to strengthen the law. It passed both chambers of the Legislature, and the governor signed it earlier this month.

"It seemed obvious that the state should be using the commission of experts," she said.

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The governor-appointed, seven-member commission must have at least four members with aeronautics experience, and all of the current members are pilots. The commission is primarily tasked with helping to allocate funds for airport projects.

Existing state law says the commission "shall provide advice and expertise to state agencies regarding the purchase, transfer, and disposition of state-owned and operated aircraft, including those owned or operated by any state institution."

Hohn and Rep. Tim Goodwin, R-Rapid City, the bill's House sponsor, said they interpreted the law to mean agencies should already have been meeting with the commission about airplane purchases.

Gov. Larry Rhoden's spokesperson, Josie Harms, said in a statement that "the current law is permissive." "If a state agency wants advice or expertise, they can ask the Aeronautics Commission for it, and the Aeronautics Commission must give it," Harms wrote. "The new law now requires the state agency to ask for that advice."

Hohn's Senate Bill 219, which takes effect in July, adds language clarifying that "a state agency shall consult the commission prior to purchasing, transferring, or disposing of state-owned and operated aircraft." Hohn and Goodwin said the new language leaves no room for argument.

The new law also says the commission shall provide its advice and expertise in the form of a written report to the governor and the agency requesting the information. It does not require the governor or state agencies to follow the commission's guidance.

Last week, Department of Public Safety officials discussed their proposed \$5 million aircraft purchase with the commission, one day after the governor signed the bill.

A \$5 million plan

The governor signed another bill Monday that would authorize up to \$5 million in spending authority for the Highway Patrol to buy a plane.

Although the consultation law has yet to take effect, the Department of Public Safety has shared details about its chosen plane and fielded questions from Aeronautics Commission members. In a document shared with the commission March 11, the Highway Patrol explained its interest in a used, 35-foot-long, Kodiak 100 propeller plane to replace the 2004 Cessna it now uses to assist with high-speed pursuits and searches for missing people.

The patrol said the Kodiak would be an upgrade for law enforcement work because it can better handle camera equipment, carry heavier camera systems and use a mounting setup that would create less drag and fewer handling problems. The department would then sell the Cessna. A department spokesman did not provide an estimated value for the Cessna, but said the value will depend on whether it's sold outright or traded.

Patrol officials spoke to lawmakers about the replacement on Jan. 20. Public Safety Secretary Bob Perry told the House Transportation Committee that the funding would allow the department to buy a more reliable aircraft less likely to break down.

"The aircraft we're looking at are not luxury aircraft by any means," Perry said.

Col. Casey Collins, the patrol's commander, said the Cessna was down for about a quarter of last year for maintenance. A lot of that is tied to the airplane's age, he said, and how long it takes to get replacement parts.

"We've had to reuse bolts for an exhaust, for example, where we shouldn't probably be doing that," Collins said. "The aircraft always gets an inspection, obviously, before we put it back up and we make sure it's safe, but the aircraft is failing on a regular basis, way more than it should be."

The last time the Highway Patrol purchased an aircraft was 2007, according to Department of Public Safety spokesman Brad Reiners.

During an Aeronautics Commission meeting last week, members suggested that the department consult additional experts on whether the Kodiak would be better than a Cessna, look into an aircraft called the Pilatus PC-12, and consult the commission throughout its deliberations.

According to Reiners, the department has not made a selection yet or engaged in the procurement

process. He said in a written statement that "while we don't have a deal pending, our goal is to find a suitable used plane and purchase updated camera equipment, for a total purchase not to exceed \$5 million."

South Dakota owns three planes, according to Department of Transportation spokesperson Julie Stevenson. The Department of Transportation has a King Air 90 and a King Air 350, and the Department of Public Safety has its Cessna 206.

The administration of former Gov. Kristi Noem acquired the King Air 350 for a net cost of \$5 million after selling two older-model planes. It is used for state employee passenger travel. The King Air 90 is also used for passenger travel and providing aerial surveillance to assist with the fighting of wildfires.

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.

Passengers pack airport security lines as US Senate remains snarled over DHS shutdown

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — U.S. senators showed no movement Wednesday toward a deal to end the shutdown at the Department of Homeland Security, despite the problems it's causing for the thousands of federal workers set to miss yet another paycheck and travelers waiting hours to get through airport security lines.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., said an offer from Democrats, sent over in the morning, was completely unacceptable and that GOP lawmakers wouldn't even bother to send back a counterproposal.

"They know better. They're asking for things that have already been turned down," he said. "So it just seems like they're going in circles."

Thune said the chamber would vote later on a funding bill for DHS that doesn't include Enforcement and Removal Operations at Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the deportation and detention arm of the agency.

"They said over the weekend that they didn't want to fund ERO. They'll fund everything else," he said. "So we're going to give an opportunity to vote to do that."

Thune said Republicans' decision to remove funding for those deportation programs represents a "significant" compromise that shows GOP lawmakers are "coming to the table and trying to get a deal."

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said the offer Democrats sent over represented "a reasonable, good-faith proposal that contains some of the very same asks Democrats have been talking about now for months."

Schumer said a proposal Republicans sent earlier this week didn't include any of the overhauls to immigration enforcement that Democrats have been talking about since January, when federal officers killed two U.S. citizens in Minneapolis.

"For Republicans to send us a proposal that has no reforms is bad faith as well and will only slow things down," he said.

Trump 'pretty much not happy' with 'any deal'

President Donald Trump remains a wild card in the negotiations. His support will be needed for any DHS funding bill to become law, regardless of how much longer it takes lawmakers to reach consensus.

"Well, I don't want to comment until I see the deal," he said Tuesday when asked about ongoing DHS talks. "But as you know, they're negotiating a deal. I guess they're getting fairly close. But I think any deal they make, I'm pretty much not happy with it."

Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., when asked about those comments during a Wednesday morning press conference, appeared skeptical of breaking off some line items in the DHS funding bill.

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Any legislation to end the shutdown that passes the Senate will need to move through the House before it could reach Trump's desk.

"We always have Homeland funded as an entire department. There's obvious reasons for that. It's very important. I don't think we need to be breaking it apart," he said. "And so I think that's what the president is reflecting there. He wants Congress to do its dang job."

Will Congress leave town without an agreement?

It isn't clear whether the Senate will still depart for its two-week spring break without a bipartisan agreement to fund DHS, which has been shut down since Feb. 14.

Legislation cannot advance in that chamber without the support of at least 60 senators, making buy-in from each party essential to end the shutdown.

Thune said he hadn't made a final decision but seemed likely to let lawmakers head back home for the scheduled recess absent progress toward a deal.

"If we're not here, and when the Democrats are willing to make a deal, we'd certainly get everybody back to vote on it," he said. "But no decisions on that yet. So hopefully the next couple days will be productive."

Until a deal is reached, the DHS funding lapse will continue to affect workers and programs run by many of the agencies within the department, including the Coast Guard, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Secret Service and Transportation Security Administration.

ICE and Customs and Border Protection operations have largely continued uninterrupted since Republicans approved tens of billions in additional funding for those agencies in their "big, beautiful" law.

'We've got a lot of plate spinning'

Oklahoma Republican Sen. James Lankford said lawmakers need to find some sort of solution to fund DHS following weeks of stalemate.

"At the end of the day, we got to get them open," he said. "And the frustration that we have is we literally offered what they asked for three days ago, and then suddenly it's like, 'Oh no, no, we got new stuff.'"

Lankford said he doesn't want to see senators leave for the recess without a deal to reopen DHS.

North Carolina Republican Sen. Thom Tillis said lawmakers should stick around Capitol Hill until they solve at least some of the several outstanding issues.

"We've got a lot of plate spinning. And I'm afraid if we leave until we get some certainty around them, a few of them are going to fall to the floor and people are going to be wondering what's going on," he said.

Connecticut Sen. Chris Murphy, the top Democrat on the Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee, said the way the Trump administration has approached immigration enforcement and deportation has led to the problems over DHS funding.

"I have a constitutional responsibility to fund only a government that obeys the law," he said. "I would be violating my oath of office to fund ICE without reforms."

Moreno and Merkley face off

Ohio Republican Sen. Bernie Moreno went to the floor in the evening to ask unanimous consent to approve a bill that would fund every component of DHS for two weeks, providing back pay to all of its employees.

Moreno said that would give senators enough time to work out a bipartisan deal on the full-year DHS spending bill if they canceled the recess and stayed around to work.

Oregon Democratic Sen. Jeff Merkley proposed that lawmakers instead fund TSA through the end of September, when the current fiscal year ends.

Moreno then asked Merkley to change that request to fund every agency within DHS except for Enforcement and Removal Operations for the rest of the fiscal year.

Merkley then said he would agree to fund every agency within DHS except ICE and CBP.

"He keeps asking for Customs and Border Protection to be funded without modifying how they're behaving across the nation," Merkley said. "He keeps asking for ICE to be funded without modifying their

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actions where they're acting like a secret police."

The senators were unable to come to an agreement to approve funding for any of the agencies at DHS for any length of time during a nearly hour-long exchange that became tense at several points.

Moreno said the impasse represented "a sad day for the United States Senate."

Ariana Figueroa contributed to this report.

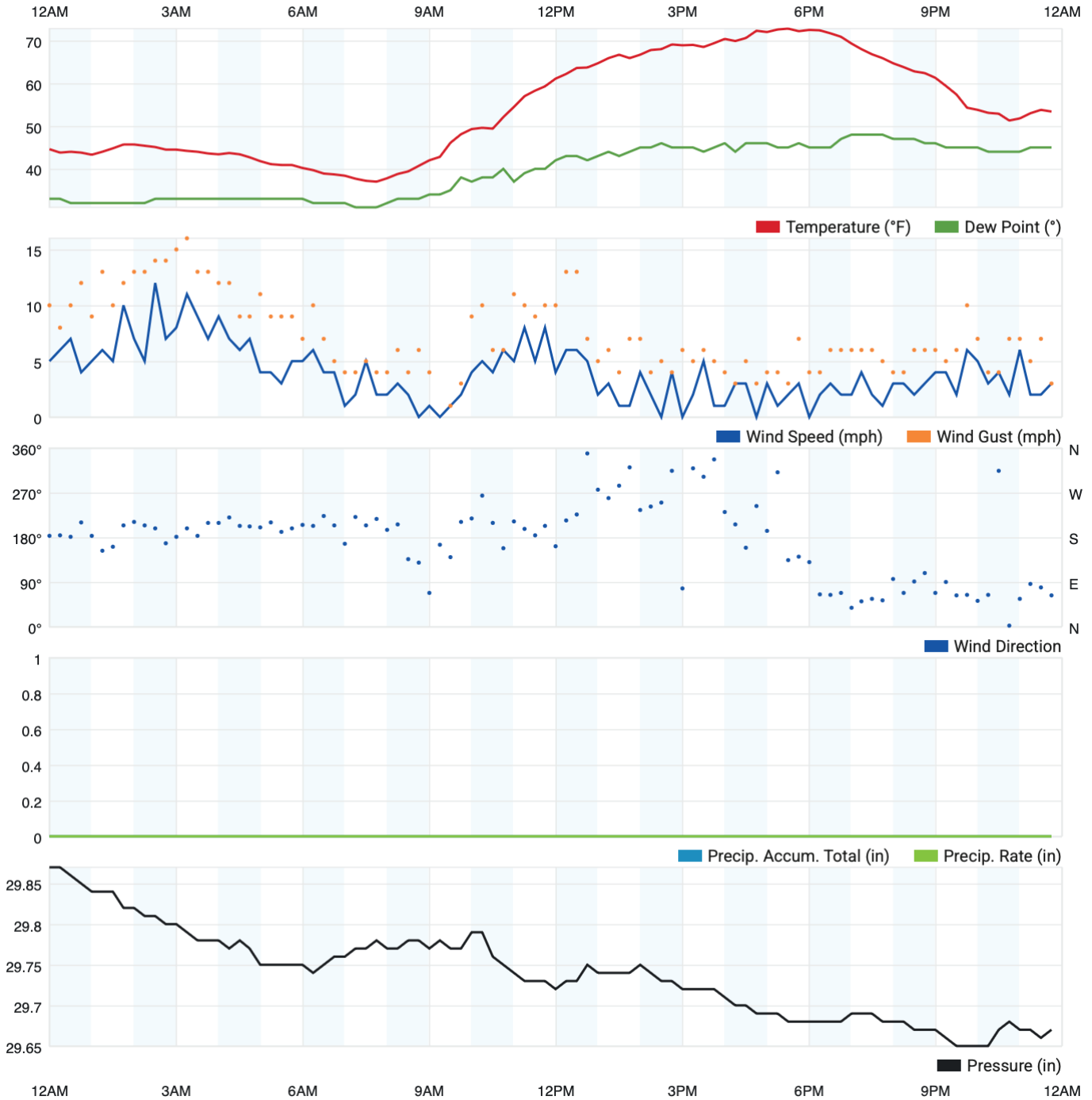
Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

March 25, 2026



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Thursday

Thursday
Night

Friday

Friday Night

Saturday



High: 36 °F

Low: 19 °F

High: 40 °F

Low: 26 °F

High: 61 °F

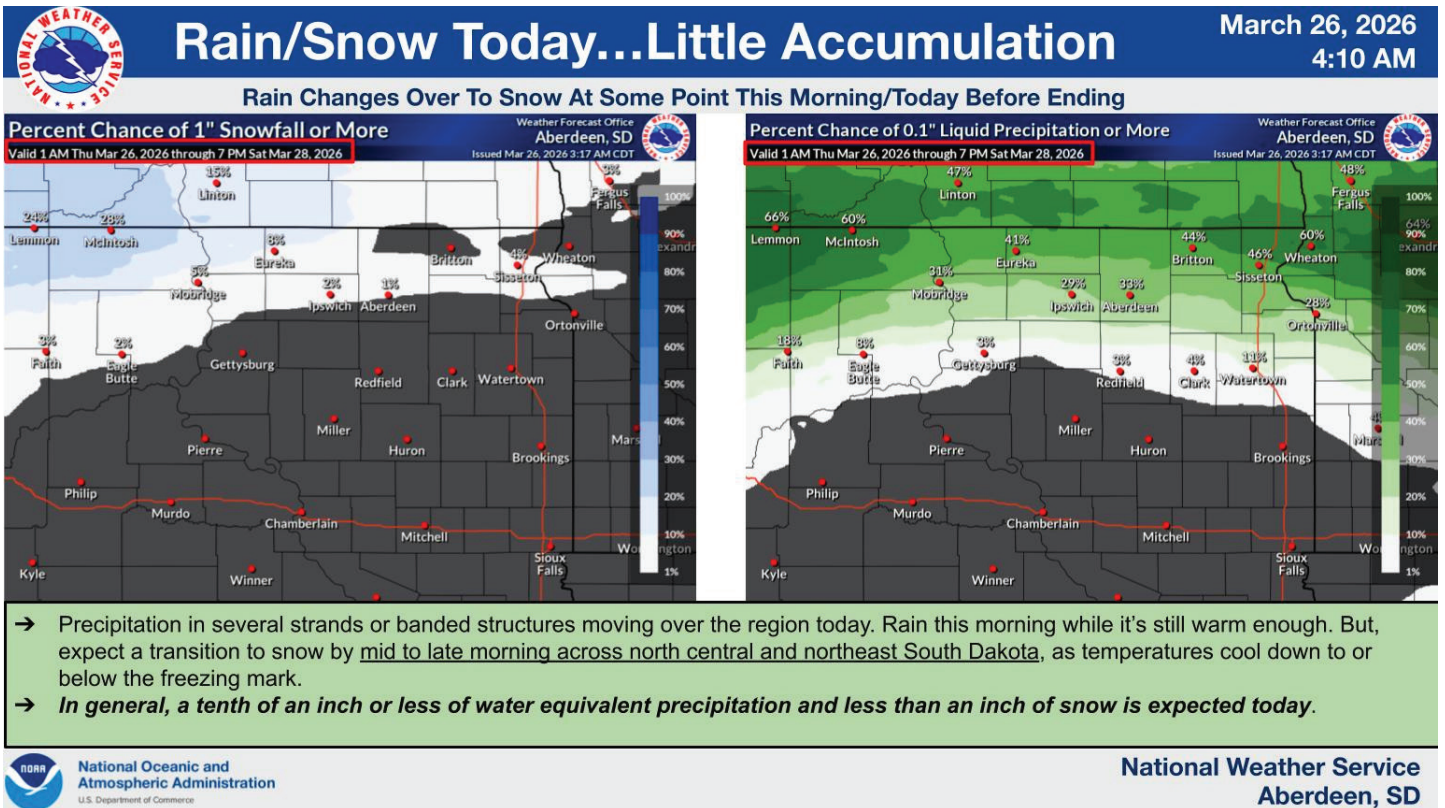
Chance
Rain/Snow and
Breezy

Decreasing
Clouds

Sunny

Mostly Clear

Mostly Sunny



Light rain this morning could change over to light snow for a couple of hours before ending. Generally less than a tenth of an inch of water equivalent precipitation and less than an inch of snow is expected today.

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All Aboard The Temperature Roller Coaster

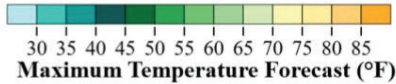
March 26, 2026

4:20 AM

No End In Sight To The Gusty Winds, Either (Well, At Least Through Saturday)

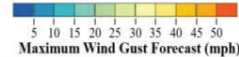
Maximum Temperature (°F) Forecast

	3/26 Thu	3/27 Fri	3/28 Sat	3/29 Sun	3/30 Mon	3/31 Tue	4/1 Wed
Aberdeen	50	42	63	69	58	64	47
Miller	58	46	66	73	64	71	50
Mobridge	54	43	65	67	57	60	44
Murdo	59	47	70	74	68	71	48
Ortonville	49	37	58	68	58	62	47
Pierre	60	49	70	74	66	72	50
Sisseton	46	37	58	68	56	61	45
Watertown	53	38	58	67	57	63	45



Maximum Wind Gust (mph) Forecast

	3/26 Thu						3/27 Fri						3/28 Sat								
	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm
Aberdeen	40	36	35	28	22	15	13	17	20	21	21	20	14	15	22	25	28	28	26	22	18
Miller	35	36	36	31	24	17	13	17	21	23	22	20	14	18	29	35	36	37	31	25	20
Mobridge	43	29	26	22	16	12	18	23	24	21	16	15	15	21	25	25	23	21	17	16	16
Murdo	31	35	33	30	24	17	15	20	22	22	20	15	16	26	32	33	32	31	24	20	17
Ortonville	28	30	30	26	24	21	20	18	18	22	23	23	17	9	15	21	25	28	28	24	17
Pierre	25	29	29	25	20	13	12	16	20	21	18	13	13	18	25	25	23	21	18	16	14
Sisseton	29	31	31	28	24	20	16	16	18	22	24	24	17	12	20	26	30	30	30	26	18
Watertown	33	33	32	30	25	20	15	14	16	21	23	23	17	12	18	26	32	35	33	28	20



- Up and down temperatures are forecast throughout the 7-day.
- An active wind forecast is in store, too, with breezy to windy north winds today and Friday becoming breezy to windy south winds on Saturday.
- **Moderate to High** Grassland Fire Danger today and Friday; **High to Very High** Saturday.

Northerly wind gusts of 30 to 40 mph can be expected through about mid day before diminishing. Cooler temperatures will move into the area on these northerly winds. High temperatures today and Friday are expected to be below normal for late March.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 73 °F at 5:09 PM

Low Temp: 37 °F at 7:41 AM

Wind: 16 mph at 3:08 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 74 in 1905

Record Low: -13 in 1964

Average High: 47

Average Low: 24

Average Precip in Mar.: 0.70

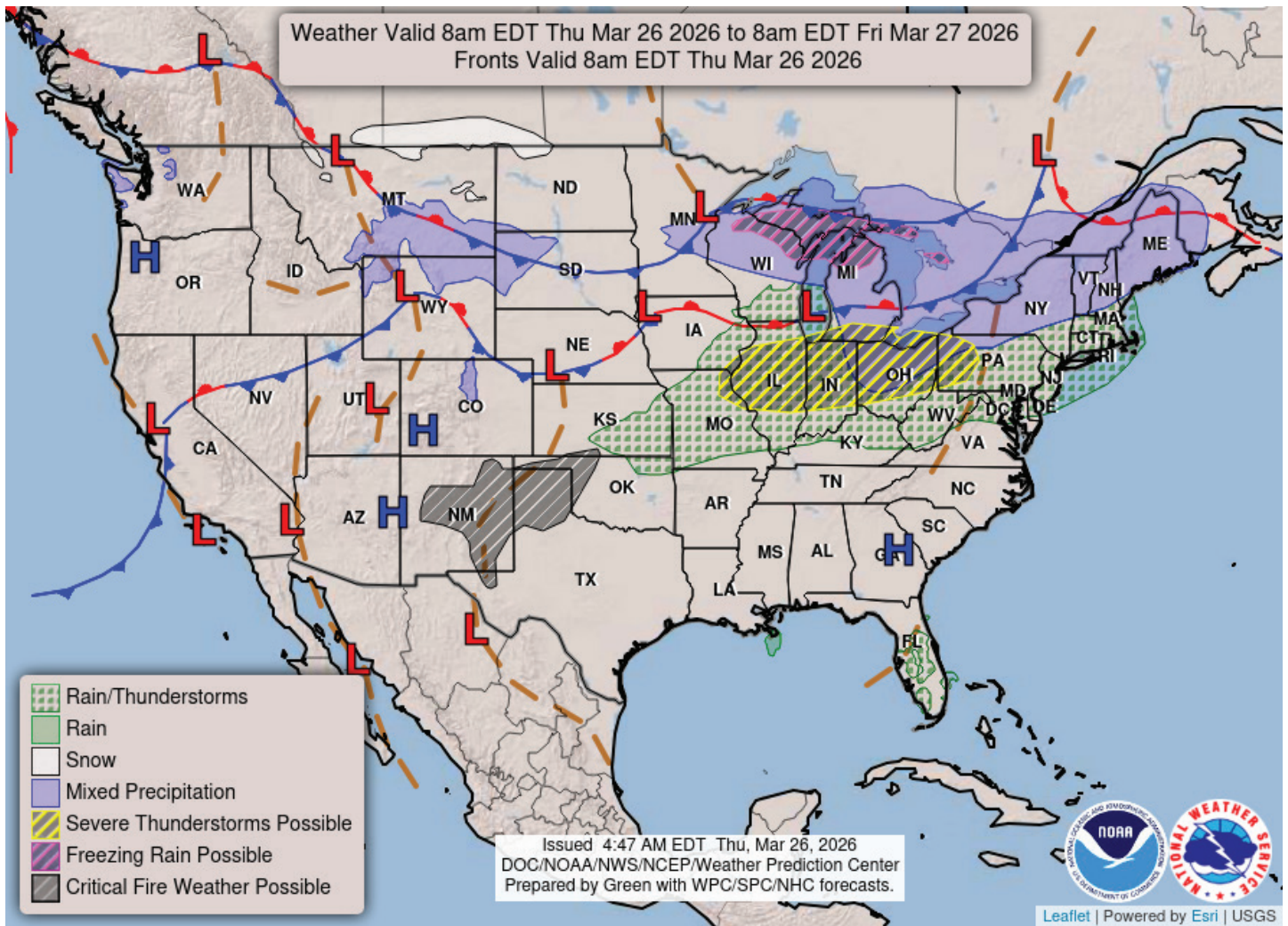
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.29

Average Precip to date: 1.87

Precip Year to Date: 1.62

Sunset Tonight: 7.51 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:22 am



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Today in Weather History

March 26th, 1977: During the early morning severe weather event, hail up to 1.75 inches in diameter fell 1 mile NE of Watertown in Codington County. Hail up to 1.50 inches in diameter fell in Milbank, Grant County.

March 26th, 1995: Heavy snow fell over most of central South Dakota and the northern Black Hills. Heavier accumulations included 14 inches at Murdo, 13 inches at Lead, and 12 inches at Eureka and Leola. A few traffic accidents were reported, although many other vehicles slid into ditches. There was some damage to power lines and poles. Some livestock losses were feared, as the snow fell during the calving season, although this could not be assessed in the short term.

March 26th, 2008: An area of low pressure moving across the Northern Plains brought heavy snow from 6 to 15 inches in a band across much of central and northeast South Dakota from the evening to the early morning hours. Schools were delayed or canceled, and road travel was difficult, if not impossible. Some snowfall amounts included: 6 inches at Stephan, Willow Lake, Harrold, Miller, and near Hoven; 7 inches at Hayti, east of Hayes, and Eagle Butte; 8 inches at Highmore and Doland; 9 inches at Orient, Bryant, and near Onida; 10 inches at Gettysburg and Faulkton; 11 inches at Seneca and Redfield. Locations with a foot or more of snowfall included 12 inches 23 miles north of Highmore, 13 inches near Agar, and 15 inches 24 miles north of Highmore.

1913 — The Ohio River Basin flood reached a peak. Ten inch rains over a wide area of the Ohio River Basin inundated cities in Ohio, drowning 467 persons, and causing 147 million dollars damage. The Miami River at Dayton reached a level eight feet higher than ever before. The flood, caused by warm weather and heavy rains, was the second mostly deadly of record for the nation. (David Ludlum)

1954 — The temperature at Allaket, AK, plunged to 69 degrees below zero. (The Weather Channel)

1971 — Parts of northern and central Georgia experienced their worst snow and ice storm since 1935. Two day power outages ruined two million eggs at poultry hatches. Two persons were killed when a tree landed on their car. (25th-26th) (The Weather Channel)

1987 — A cold front crossing the Plateau Region produced high winds in Utah causing some property damage. Winds gusted to 51 mph at Salt Lake City. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — Twenty cities in the southwestern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date. Afternoon highs of 73 degrees at Flagstaff AZ, 90 degrees at Sacramento CA, 95 degrees at Santa Maria CA, 95 degrees at Los Angeles CA, 99 degrees at Tucson AZ, and 100 degrees at Phoenix AZ set records for March. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 — The Easter Bunny brought record warm temperatures to the central U.S. while such records were still welcome. A dozen cities reported record warm readings, including Dodge City KS with an afternoon high of 88 degrees. Strong southerly winds gusted to 51 mph at Dodge City, and reached 55 mph at Salina KS. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 — Fair weather prevailed across the nation for the second day in a row. Freezing temperatures were reported in the Middle Atlantic Coast Region in the wake of an early spring snowstorm. Afternoon highs were again in the 70s and 80s in the southeastern U.S., and for the ninth day in a row, temperatures in the southwestern U.S. reached the 90s. (The National Weather Summary)

Becoming Whole

Hardship is inevitable in life, but the Holy Spirit helps believers survive and heal.

- Romans 8:33-39: 33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies;
34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.
35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?
36 Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED."
37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.
38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,
39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Modern society has many solutions for unhappiness, but worldly "happiness" will inevitably falter. Only God's transforming power can change someone with a broken spirit into a content Christ follower who understands his or her own value.

To find wholeness, a person must start by receiving Jesus as Savior—for that to occur, the sin that stands between him and God has to be wiped away. Then, with the Holy Spirit's strength, he'll be able to find the courage to confront past disappointments, hurts, and sins that perhaps left him feeling unworthy.

Someone with a sense of wholeness feels satisfied with life. Hardship is inevitable in this world, but it doesn't devastate the born-again believer. Why? Because he knows God has promised to work everything out for his good (Romans 8:28).

In contrast, someone who feels fragmented or empty often has the opposite experience. He may look okay on the outside while struggling within. This can even be the case with Christians who haven't learned to experience God's love fully.

The Lord can and will make His love known to believers who ask. And through it comes the wholeness that they have been seeking.

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

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The Groton Independent

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WINNING NUMBERS

MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.25.26

1 26 40 46 50 3

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

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 35 Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.24.26

4 13 52 53 69 10

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$70,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 20 Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.25.26

2 4 9 30 43 4

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,030,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 35 Mins 54 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.25.26

3 25 27 31 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$34,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 50 Mins 54 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.25.26

35 38 41 43 62 8

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 19 Mins 54 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.25.26

7 21 55 56 64 26

Power Play: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$166,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 19 Mins 54 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Indian Health Service is digging out of decades-old construction backlog for medical buildings

By SAVANNAH PETERS Associated Press

SANTA ANA PUEBLO, N.M. (AP) — An empty lot between a fire station and a soccer field just outside Albuquerque soon will be the home of a federal medical center first promised to Native American patients more than 30 years ago.

Earlier this month, Santa Ana Pueblo Gov. Myron Armijo took officials from the U.S. Indian Health Service and the Department of Health and Human Services on a tour of the location where patients are to receive everything from dialysis and diabetes care to optometry services.

"This will definitely change the game for healthcare in our area," Armijo said.

Set to break ground in 2027, the 235,000-square-foot (22,000-square-meter) center will be run by the IHS, the U.S. agency that provides healthcare to Native Americans. Tribal leaders hope it will relieve pressure on the aging and overextended Albuquerque Indian Health Center, a federal facility originally built 90 years ago where some patients report waiting months for an appointment.

The Albuquerque facility was among more than 60 clinics and hospitals the agency identified for replacement in 1993 due to their age, condition and inability to serve a growing population. It remains on the list along with six other projects scattered around Arizona and New Mexico. IHS officials say it will eventually be replaced by two new facilities in the Albuquerque area, including the center planned at Santa Ana Pueblo.

In February, HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. pledged \$1 billion toward those long-delayed projects, including \$22 million for the Santa Ana Pueblo center. The agency estimates \$8 billion is needed to tackle all remaining projects on the 1993 list that, under federal law, must be complete before the IHS can address other major construction needs.

A.C. Locklear, CEO of the nonprofit National Indian Health Board, said the \$1 billion is the single largest financial investment by any administration in addressing the aging facilities. Yet, he said, it also shows the federal government has neglected its legal duty to provide adequate healthcare to tribal nations.

"It's a drop in the bucket in terms of what's needed to modernize these facilities," Locklear said.

Aging infrastructure impacts access, quality of care

The IHS serves 2.8 million Native American and Alaska Native patients at 21 hospitals and 78 smaller health centers nationwide. The average age of those facilities is around 40 years old and one-third are in "poor" physical condition, according to a 2023 U.S. Government Accountability Office report.

That isn't lost on Theresa Nelson, a 62-year-old Navajo Nation citizen who started relying on the Albuquerque Indian Health Center after retiring and losing her health insurance.

"It felt like going back in time," she said, describing everything from the X-ray machines to exam rooms and waiting room furniture as outdated.

Nelson said the center relies on a complex system of outside referrals for treatments and tests that were easier to access in the private sector. She has been waiting for eight weeks for IHS to approve a referral for a 3D mammogram, a tool the Mayo Clinic says is offered at most U.S. healthcare facilities.

The Indian Health Service said appointment wait times at the Albuquerque center are less than 14 days for patients who are established with a primary care provider. But Nelson and other patients report going years without being assigned a doctor and waiting months to be seen for preventative care.

Farther west, the Gallup Indian Medical Center operates out of a mashup of modular buildings and piecemeal renovations. The hospital, which opened over six decades ago and is on the 1993 list, serves a population that includes the Navajo Nation. Tribal lawmaker Vince James said constant construction and a disjointed layout make it difficult for elderly and disabled patients to navigate the hospital and for providers to do their jobs.

"These are Band-Aid fixes," James said. "Eventually the GIMC campus will become unsafe."

An “unacceptable” backlog

Senior HHS adviser Mark Cruz urged Congress to make a special appropriation to complete the remaining projects that are in various stages of planning and design.

Without that funding, he said, it could take another 40 years to get through the priority list.

“It’s really unacceptable that we’re still working off of that 33-year-old construction list,” Cruz said during the Santa Ana Pueblo tour.

Federal law requires the Indian Health Service to complete that list before replacing clinics and hospitals that have fallen into disrepair since 1993. That includes two nearly 90-year-old hospitals in Montana and Minnesota. The agency also can’t build new facilities to meet patient demand, which has grown and shifted geographically in recent decades.

“I can’t get to additional projects that have merit across Indian Country or Alaska because I have a statutory obligation to get through the 1993 list first,” Cruz said.

In 2023 the IHS crossed a project in Rapid City, South Dakota off its priority list. The replacement of the aging and troubled Sioux San Hospital has been “transformational,” said Jerilyn Church, CEO of the Great Plains Tribal Leader’s Health Board.

The renamed Oyate Health Center is three times larger than the former hospital and equipped with far more modern medical equipment. But demand for care at the new center is already outstripping available space.

“That’s what happens when you work from a backlog,” Church said. “In the time between identifying the need and the money finally becoming available, the population grows.”

Iran and the US harden their positions as Tehran keeps its grip on the Strait of Hormuz

By JON GAMBRELL and DAVID RISING Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran and the United States hardened their positions as a diplomatic push for a ceasefire in the Middle East war appeared to falter on Thursday. Tehran moved to formalize its control over the crucial Strait of Hormuz while Washington prepared for the arrival of U.S. troops in the region that could be used on the ground in the Islamic Republic.

Sirens over Israel warned of barrages of incoming Iranian missiles and in the United Arab Emirates, two people were reported killed and three were wounded by falling shrapnel from a missile interception over Abu Dhabi on Thursday.

Industry experts say Iran is implementing a “de facto ‘toll booth’ regime,” with some ships paying in Chinese yuan to pass through the Strait of Hormuz, where 20% of all traded oil and natural gas is transported in peacetime.

Meanwhile, a strike group anchored by the amphibious assault ship USS Tripoli drew closer to the Mideast with some 2,500 Marines. Also, at least 1,000 paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne have been ordered to the region.

The troop movements don’t guarantee U.S. President Donald Trump will use force to try and compel Iran to open the strait and halt its attacks on Gulf Arab states.

Trump previously deployed a large force in the Caribbean before the American military captured former Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro in January. In the current situation, the U.S. is seen as focused on possibly seizing Iran’s oil terminal at Kharg Island or other sites near the strait.

U.S. Navy Adm. Brad Cooper, who commands the American military in the region, said his forces have hit more than 10,000 targets since Israel and the U.S. started the war Feb. 28, destroying 92% of Iran’s largest ships and more than two-thirds of the country’s missile, drone and naval production facilities.

“We’re not done yet,” said Cooper, who heads the U.S. Central Command, in a video message. “We are on a path to completely eliminate Iran’s wider military apparatus.”

Iran seen as operating Strait of Hormuz as ‘de facto toll booth’

With its stranglehold on traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, which leads from the Persian Gulf toward

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the open ocean, Iran has been blocking ships it perceives as linked to the U.S. and Israeli war effort, but letting through a trickle of others.

The Fars and Tasnim news agencies, both close to Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, quoted lawmaker Mohammadreza Rezaei Kouchi as saying that parliament was working to formalize the process of charging fees to let ships pass.

"We provide its security, and it is natural that ships and oil tankers should pay such fees," he was quoted as saying.

Lloyd's List Intelligence called it a "de facto 'toll booth' regime."

The shipping intelligence firm said vessels have to provide manifests, crew details and their destination to Iran's Guard for sanctions screening, cargo alignment checks that currently prioritizes oil over all other commodities, and for what is described as "geopolitical vetting."

"While not all ships are paying a direct toll, at least two vessels have and the payment is settled in yuan," Lloyd's List said, referring to China's currency.

Iran's grip on the strait and relentless attacks on Gulf regional energy infrastructure has sent oil prices skyrocketing and concerns of a global energy crisis surging. Brent crude, the international standard, traded at US\$104 early Thursday, up more than 40% from the day the war started.

"To make it crystal clear, this war is a catastrophe for world's economies," German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius told reporters during a visit to Australia.

US maintains negotiations are ongoing but Iran says there are no talks

Using Pakistan as an intermediary, Washington has delivered to Iran a 15-point ceasefire proposal, which includes the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz.

Trump, speaking at a fundraiser Wednesday night in Washington, insisted that Iran still wants to cut a deal.

"They are negotiating, by the way, and they want to make a deal so badly, but they're afraid to say it because they figure they'll be killed by their own people," Trump said.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said in an interview on state TV, however, that his government has not engaged in talks to end the war, "and we do not plan on any negotiations."

Araghchi said the U.S. had tried to send messages to Iran through other nations, "but that is not a conversation nor a negotiation."

Press TV, the English-language broadcaster on Iranian state television, said Iran has its own five-point proposal, which includes "sovereignty over the Strait of Hormuz."

A wave of Israeli airstrikes hits as Iran fires on Gulf neighbors

Israel said it carried out a wave of attacks early on Thursday targeting Iranian infrastructure, and air defenses were heard in Tehran, while heavy strikes were also reported around Isfahan, a city some 330 kilometers (205 miles) south of the Iranian capital.

Ifahan is home to a major Iranian air base and other military sites, as well as one of the nuclear sites bombed by the U.S. during the 12-day war between Israel and Iran in June.

Sirens sounded very early on Thursday morning in parts of Tel Aviv and cities in central Israel and later explosions were heard in Jerusalem. Rescue workers said two people were injured in a blast in Kfar Qasim.

Saudi Arabia's Defense Ministry said it intercepted multiple drones over its oil-rich Eastern Province, and Bahrain reported extinguishing a blaze in a neighborhood that is home to the Bahrain International Airport.

Since the war began, more than 1,500 people have been killed in Iran, its Health Ministry says. Twenty people have been killed in Israel while three Israeli soldiers have also been killed in Lebanon, including one whose death was announced Thursday. At least 13 American troops have been killed. Four people have been killed in the occupied West Bank and 20 in Gulf Arab states.

Nearly 1,100 people have died in Lebanon, authorities said. In Iraq, where Iran-backed militias have entered the conflict, 80 members of the security forces have been killed.

Asian stocks fall and oil climbs again over Iran war de-escalation uncertainties

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By CHAN HO-HIM AP Business Writer

HONG KONG (AP) — Asian stocks traded lower and oil prices rose back to around \$100 per barrel on Thursday as a de-escalation of the Iran war remained uncertain.

U.S. futures were down 0.5%.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 was trading 0.3% lower at 53,603.65. South Korea's Kospi lost 3.2% to 5,460.46.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng fell 1.9% to 24,856.43, while the Shanghai Composite index was down 1.1% to 3,889.08.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 edged down 0.1%, while Taiwan's Taiex was trading 0.3% lower.

Oil prices were up again on Thursday. Brent crude, the international standard, rose 3.3% to \$100.41 per barrel. It was below \$95 on Wednesday. Benchmark U.S. crude was 3.8% higher at \$93.74 a barrel.

The rise in oil prices came as Tehran on Wednesday dismissed a ceasefire plan by the U.S., after the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump offered a 15-point proposal to Iran and Trump this week delayed a self-imposed deadline to "obliterate" its power plants in order to force Iran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran also launched more attacks on Israel and Gulf Arab countries as Israel launched airstrikes on Tehran and the U.S. prepared to deploy more American troops to the region.

With the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial waterway between Iran and Oman where roughly a fifth of the world's oil typically passes through, remaining largely closed after the Iran war began, oil prices have fluctuated, climbing around 40% since the beginning of the war, which is now in its fourth week.

On Wednesday, Wall Street stocks closed higher. The S&P 500 gained 0.5% to 6,591.90. The Dow Jones Industrial Average climbed 0.7% to 46,429.49, and the Nasdaq composite rose 0.8% to 21,929.83.

U.S.-listed shares of Arm Holdings jumped 16.4%, following an announcement by the U.K. company that it would be launching and selling its own chips which is expected to drive future revenue.

On Holding, the Swiss sportswear company selling On running shoes, fell 11.2% in the U.S. Its CEO Martin Hoffmann is stepping down and the company has named two co-founders as co-CEOs.

In other dealings early Thursday, gold and silver prices fell. Gold prices dropped 2.7% to \$4,428.80 per ounce. Silver prices lost 5.2% to \$68.88 an ounce.

The U.S. dollar rose to 159.49 Japanese yen from 159.47 yen. The euro was unchanged at \$1.1559.

Bus sinks in Bangladesh river, killing at least 18 people

DHAKA, Bangladesh (AP) — A bus carrying about 50 people plunged into a major river in central Bangladesh as it was driving onto a ferry, leaving at least 18 people dead, authorities said Thursday.

The bus plunged into the Padma River on Wednesday afternoon in Rajbari district, about 84 kilometers (52 miles) from the capital, Dhaka, said fire official Dewan Sohel Rana.

The bus was traveling to the capital from the southwestern district of Kushtia as people return to work after the Islamic festival of Eid al-Fitr.

Rana said many of the passengers swam to safety after the accident but others got trapped.

A rescue vessel joined the operation late Wednesday and lifted the bus, he said, and rescuers worked overnight to recover bodies, finding 18 by Thursday morning.

Strong currents and rains disrupted the rescue operations overnight, he said.

It was not clear if there was still anyone missing.

Ten women and two children were among the dead, according to the Fire Service and Civil Defense Department.

Southeast Asia revisits nuclear power plans for AI data centers as Iran war disrupts energy supplies

By ANTON L. DELGADO Associated Press

BANGKOK, Thailand (AP) — Nuclear power is getting a second look in Southeast Asia as countries prepare

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to meet surging energy demand as they vie for artificial intelligence-focused data centers.

Several Southeast Asian nations are reviving mothballed nuclear plans and setting ambitious targets and nearly half of the region could, if they pursue those goals, have nuclear energy in the 2030s. Even countries without current plans have signaled their interest.

Southeast Asia has never produced a single watt of nuclear energy, despite long-held atomic ambitions. But that may soon change as pressure mounts to reduce emissions that contribute to climate change, while meeting growing power needs.

The Iran war is underscoring the vulnerability of Asia's energy supplies, raising the sense of urgency about finding alternatives to oil and gas in Southeast Asia, analysts say.

The surge in crude oil prices caused by the escalating conflict has raised the motivation for countries to speed up their nuclear efforts, said Alvie Asuncion-Astronomo of the Philippine Nuclear Research Institute.

Vietnam and Russia advanced a nuclear power deal this week as the region's energy security concerns worsened. In South Asia, Bangladesh is racing to power up its new nuclear power plant, also backed by Russia, to address the country's energy shortfalls.

Southeast Asia will account for a quarter of growth in global energy demand by 2035, according to the International Energy Agency, or IEA. That partly is because of the more than 2,000 data centers in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines, according to the think tank Ember.

Many more data centers are in the pipeline.

That's most obvious in Malaysia, which aspires to be Southeast Asia's AI computing hub and has drawn investments and interest from tech giants like Microsoft, Google and Nvidia.

The revival of Southeast Asia's nuclear interest mirrors a global trend.

Nearly 40 nations — including the United States, Japan, South Korea and China — have joined a global push to triple installed nuclear energy capacity by 2050. Southeast Asia will account for nearly a fourth of the 157 gigawatts expected from "newcomer nuclear nations" by mid-century, according to the industry-backed World Nuclear Association.

"There is a more serious, new and growing momentum for the development of nuclear energy in Southeast Asia," said King Lee, with the association.

Southeast Asia revisits nuclear power

Five of the 11 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations — Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines — are chasing nuclear.

Vietnam is building two nuclear plants, backed by the Russian state corporation Rosatom. These are "nationally significant, strategic projects," according to Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh. Vietnam's revised atomic energy law took effect in January.

Indonesia added nuclear to its new energy plan last year, aiming to build two small modular reactors by 2034. Officials there say Canada and Russia have issued formal cooperation proposals and others will soon follow.

Thailand set a target last year of adding 600 megawatts of nuclear generating capacity by 2037. Nuclear is a "promising solution" to supplying enough affordable, clean electricity to meet rising demand, officials with Thailand's Electricity Generating Authority told a conference in Bangkok.

No Southeast Asian nation has engaged with atomic energy more than the Philippines, which built a nuclear power plant in the 1970s that it never turned on.

A new atomic energy regulatory authority launched last year will "usher in the integration of nuclear power," according to Philippine officials. The country set a 2032 target and approved a roadmap for potential investors in February.

"We are not anticipating that nuclear electricity will be cheap at the onset," said Asuncion-Astronomo. But in the long term, she said it will improve the Philippines' energy reliability, security, independence and eventually costs.

"The ongoing conflict in the Middle East definitely demonstrates how volatile fossil fuel costs are and the instability of the supply," she said. "Nuclear is an alternative solution that can give us more self-reliance

in terms of energy.”

Southeast Asian nations without firm plans are also showing interest.

Cambodia’s latest national strategy signaled an openness to nuclear and Singapore outlined plans last year to study its own atomic potential.

Even the tiny oil and gas sultanate of Brunei told the International Atomic Energy Agency, or IAEA, that it is “carefully exploring nuclear energy.”

Data centers revive Malaysia’s nuclear plans

The AI-focused data centers contributing to Southeast Asia’s growing energy demand are large windowless buildings filled with rows of computers.

A standard AI data center consumes as much electricity as 100,000 households, the IEA says.

Malaysia has more than 500 operational data centers. Another 300 or so are under construction and around 1,140 are planned, according to Ember.

Malaysia revived its nuclear program last year and set a 2031 target for bringing atomic energy online.

“A lot more industries are expanding in Malaysia,” said Zayana Zaikariah, with the Kuala Lumpur-based Institute of Strategic & International Studies, listing growing interest in data centers, semiconductors and mining. “Everything requires energy.”

The U.S. is helping.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio signed an agreement with Malaysia last year. He called it “a signal to the world of how civil nuclear cooperation is something that is available.” President Donald Trump also sees nuclear as a way to meet data center demands. In 2025, he ordered the quadrupling of U.S. nuclear power within the next 25 years.

“There’s more incentive to follow through compared to previous flirtations with nuclear energy,” said Amalina Anuar, with the ISEAS-Yusof Institute, a Singapore-based think tank. The fact that Malaysia’s oil and gas reserves are finite is driving a search for new energy sources.

Fossil fuels generate 81% of Malaysia’s electricity, Ember found, while solar and wind provide just 2%.

“Malaysia’s decarbonization is both urgent and critical as rising demand from AI and data centers is anticipated,” said Dinita Setyawati with Ember. “But the nuclear option should be approached cautiously.”

Nuclear power risks remain

Global nuclear capacity will more than triple — to about 1,446 gigawatts — by 2050 if existing reactors continue operations and governments meet their stated targets, according to the World Nuclear Association.

More than 400 nuclear reactors, in about 30 countries, generate around 380 gigawatts of energy, according to the IAEA’s Power Reactor Information System. This makes up between 4.5% to 10% of the world’s energy, the IEA and nuclear association estimate.

Concerns over nuclear safety, waste and supply remain. Public resistance flared after the cataclysmic 1986 Chernobyl and 2011 Fukushima nuclear meltdowns. But even Japan, which idled all its plants after that disaster, is restarting its nuclear plants.

Bridget Woodman, with the research group Zero Carbon Analytics, said that as the world strays farther off track from its climate goals, nuclear can look deceptively more enticing than other less risky alternatives, like renewable energy.

Southeast Asian countries “considering starting a nuclear industry from scratch” need to consider “the possibility of accidents,” she said.

Missed paychecks and airport delays: Pressure mounts on Congress to end the funding shutdown

By LISA MASCARO and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pressure is mounting on Congress to end the funding shutdown that’s resulted in travel disruptions, missed paychecks and even warnings of airport closures, but lawmakers have yet to resolve the underlying issue of reining in President Donald Trump’s immigration enforcement operations.

Senators are expected to vote Thursday on a Republican proposal that would fund the Transportation

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Security Administration and much of the Department of Homeland Security, except the enforcement and removal operations conducted by Immigration and Customs Enforcement. But it's expected to fail.

Democrats argue the GOP plan does not go far enough at putting guardrails on ICE, Customs and Border Protection and other federal officers who are engaged in the Trump administration's immigration sweeps, particularly after the deaths of two Americans protesting the actions in Minneapolis.

With Congress set to leave town by week's end for its own spring break recess, calls are intensifying for an end to the 41-day stalemate that's put the livelihoods of TSA officers at risk as they provide airport security without pay.

"This is a dire situation," the acting TSA administrator Ha Nguyen McNeill testified at a House hearing Wednesday.

She described the multiple hardships facing unpaid TSA workers — piling up bills and eviction notices, even plasma donations to make ends meet — and warned of potential airport closures if more employees refuse to come to work. Daily callout rates have increased to 11% nationwide.

"At this point, we have to look at all options on the table," she said. "And that does require us to, at some point, make very difficult choices as to which airports we might try to keep open and which ones we might have to shut down as our callout rates increase."

Trump stays out of the fray

The Republican president has largely stayed out of the public debate over the path his party should take to end the standoff. Trump initially signed off on the plan the GOP senators brought to him late Monday, but on Tuesday he said he wouldn't be happy with any deal.

Trump didn't directly address the status of negotiations late Wednesday evening during an annual fund-raising dinner for the House Republicans' campaign committee as Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., works to keep majority control of the chamber in the November midterm elections.

But Trump criticized Democrats for refusing to settle their demands on immigration changes.

The GOP's big tax cuts bill that Trump signed into law last year funneled billions to the Department of Homeland Security, including \$75 billion for ICE operations, ensuring the money is flowing for his immigration and deportation agenda even with the routine department funding shutdown. ICE and other immigration officers are still being paid.

The situation is partly of Trump's making, a strategy the president put in place last fall, when he cut a deal with Democrats to end a previous federal shutdown. At that time, Trump agreed to fund the federal government, except for Homeland Security, which was then put on temporary funding that has expired.

A stopgap measure

While the Republican offer added one new restraint on immigration officers, funding the use of body cameras that had previously been agreed to, it excluded other policies that Democrats have demanded — such as that federal agents wear identification, remove their face masks and refrain from conducting raids around schools, churches or other sensitive places.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York said they needed to see real changes. "We've been talking about ICE reforms from day one," he said.

Democrats had been in several days of talks with the White House, including with border czar Tom Homan, that appeared to be making progress toward a deal. The White House presented its own offer with several items Democrats had been demanding, including officer IDs and training.

But those negotiations broke down over the weekend.

Republicans say Democrats are putting the country at risk. They say the Trump administration has already made strides to meet Democrats' demands and has shown a new approach to its immigration operations, swearing in Markwayne Mullin as the new Homeland Security secretary to replace Kristi Noem.

"They know this is crazy," Johnson said.

But conservative Republicans also panned the proposal, demanding full funding for immigration operations and skeptical of the promise from GOP leaders that they would address Trump's proof-of-citizenship voting bill in a subsequent legislative package.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune said late Wednesday that if Democrats put a "more realistic offer on the table, we'll be back in business."

Asked if Congress would consider a stopgap measure to temporarily fund the department, Thune said: "We'll see."

Airport lines grow as TSA workers endure hardships

McNeill, the acting TSA administrator, told lawmakers that multiple airports are experiencing greater than 40% callout rates and more than 480 transportation security officers have now quit during the shutdown.

She cited the growing financial strain on the TSA workforce.

"Some are sleeping in their cars, selling their blood and plasma, and taking on second jobs to make ends meet, all while being expected to perform at the highest level when in uniform to protect the traveling public," she said.

McNeill also said TSA officers working at the nation's airports have experienced a more than 500% increase in the frequency of assaults since the shutdown began.

"This is unacceptable, and it will not be tolerated," McNeill said.

As juries turn against social media for harming kids, Big Tech's invincibility starts to show cracks

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

For years, parents, teenagers, pediatricians, educators and whistleblowers have pushed the idea that social media is detrimental to young people's mental health and can lead to addiction, eating disorders, sexual exploitation and suicide.

For the first time, juries in two states took their side.

In Los Angeles on Wednesday, a jury found both Meta and YouTube liable for harms to children using their services. In New Mexico, a jury determined that Meta knowingly harmed children's mental health and concealed what it knew about child sexual exploitation on its platforms.

Tech watchdog groups, families and children's advocates cheered the jury decisions.

"The era of Big Tech invincibility is over," said Sacha Haworth, executive director of The Tech Oversight Project. "After years of gaslighting from companies like Google and Meta, new evidence and testimony have pulled back the curtain and validated the harms young people and parents have been telling the world about for years."

While it's too soon to tell if this week's outcomes will lead to fundamental changes in how social media platforms treat their young users, the dual verdicts signal a changing tide of public perception against tech companies that is likely to lead to more lawsuits and regulation. For years, they have argued that the harms their platforms cause to children are a mere byproduct, unintentional and inevitable consequences of broader societal issues or bad actors taking advantage of safeguards. They pushed against the notion that psychological harms could be the result of social media use and downplayed research that showed otherwise.

When asked about whether people tend to use a platform or product more if it's addictive during his testimony in the Los Angeles trial, Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg said "I'm not sure what to say to that. I don't think that applies here."

The verdicts show the public's growing willingness to hold the companies responsible for harms and demand meaningful changes in how they operate. What's not apparent, at least not yet, is whether the companies will take heed. Both Meta and Google said they disagree with the verdicts and are exploring legal options, including appeals.

Arturo Béjar, a former Meta engineering director who raised alarms about Instagram's harms inside the company for years before testifying in Congress in 2023, said jury trials "level the playing field" for these trillion-dollar companies. But he cautioned that it will take actual regulation to rein them in.

"One thing that I saw working inside the company that effectively led to behavior change was when an attorney general or the FTC stepped in and required things of the company," he said. "Both New Mexico

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and Los Angeles and all the attorneys general that are part of this process have really an extraordinary opportunity and the ability to ask for meaningful change.”

While both cases focused on harms to children, there are key differences between the two. New Mexico’s lawsuit was filed by state Attorney General Raúl Torrez in 2023. State investigators built their case by posing as children on social media, then documenting sexual solicitations they received as well as Meta’s response. The jury was asked to determine if Meta violated New Mexico’s consumer protection law.

The Los Angeles case had a single plaintiff, who goes by the initials KGM, against Meta, Google’s YouTube, TikTok and Snap. TikTok and Snap settled before trial. The plaintiff in this case argued that the platform design features of the two remaining defendants, Meta and YouTube, were designed to be addictive, especially for young users. Because thousands of families have filed similar lawsuits, KGM 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, eventually leading to a broader settlement reminiscent of the Big Tobacco and opioid trials.

By focusing on deliberate design choices and product liability, the lawsuits were able to sidestep Section 230, which generally exempts internet companies from liability for the material users post on their services. Past lawsuits, which have focused on how the platforms distributed content, often failed on these grounds.

“For the first time, courts have held social media platforms accountable for how their product design can harm users,” said Nikolas Guggenberger, an assistant professor of law at the University of Houston Law Center. “This is a new legal territory that could reshape an industry long shielded by Section 230. Platforms will have to rethink their focus on engagement at any cost, which has outlived itself.”

The final outcome of the cases could take years to resolve pending appeals and settlement agreements, but experts say the shift in the public’s sentiment and understanding of social media’s dangers is already happening. In a 2025 Pew Research Center poll, for instance, 48% of teens said social media harms people their age. In 2022, only 32% said the same.

Amid social media’s reckoning, however, artificial intelligence chatbots are emerging as the next frontier in the fight to make technology safer for young people.

“You can ban today’s harm, but how do you know what tomorrow is going to bring?” said Sarah Kreps, a professor and director of Cornell University’s Tech Policy Institute. Whether it’s another social media app, AI or some other new technology, she added, new things will crop up.

“And people will flock to those because where there’s demand you will see a supply come to meet that demand,” she said.

US appeals court sides with Trump administration on detaining immigrants without bond

By AUDREY McAVOY Associated Press

The U.S. can continue to detain immigrants without bond, an appeals court ruled on Wednesday, handing a victory to the Trump administration’s crackdown on immigration.

The opinion from a panel of the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals in St. Louis overturned a lower court ruling that required that a native of Mexico arrested for lacking legal documents be given a bond hearing before an immigration judge.

It’s the second appeals court to rule in favor of the administration on this issue. The 5th Circuit in New Orleans ruled last month that the Department of Homeland Security’s decision to deny bond hearings to immigrants arrested across the country was consistent with the Constitution and federal immigration law.

Both appeals court opinions counter recent lower court decisions across the country that argued the practice is illegal.

In November, a district court decision in California granted detained immigrants with no criminal history the opportunity to request a bond hearing and had implications for noncitizens held in detention nationwide.

Under past administrations, most noncitizens with no criminal record who were arrested away from the

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border had an opportunity to request a bond hearing while their cases wound through immigration court. Historically, bond was often granted to those without criminal convictions who were not flight risks, and mandatory detention was limited to recent border crossers.

In the case before the 8th Circuit, Joaquin Herrera Avila of Mexico was apprehended in Minneapolis in August 2025 for lacking legal documents authorizing his admission into the United States. The Department of Homeland Security detained Avila without bond and began deportation proceedings.

He filed a petition seeking immediate release or a bond hearing. A federal judge in Minnesota granted the petition, saying the law authorized detention without bond when a person seeking admission is not clearly and beyond a doubt entitled to being admitted. The judge found this was not the case for Avila because he had lived in the country for years without seeking naturalization, asylum or refugee status and thus wasn't "seeking admission."

Circuit Court Judge Bobby E. Shepherd wrote for the majority in a 2-1 opinion that the law was "clear that an "applicant for admission" is also an alien who is "seeking admission," and so Avila couldn't petition on these grounds.

Circuit Court Judge Ralph R. Erickson dissented, saying that Avila would have been entitled to a bond hearing during his deportation hearings if he had been arrested during the past 29 years. Now, he wrote, the Circuit Court has ruled that Avila and millions of others would be subject to mandatory detention under a novel interpretation of "alien seeking admission" that hasn't been used by the courts or five previous presidential administrations.

The American Civil Liberties Union, which is representing Avila, didn't immediately return an email message seeking comment.

Attorney General Pam Bondi hailed the ruling, writing in a social media post: "MASSIVE COURT VICTORY against activist judges and for President Trump's law and order agenda!"

At question is the issue of whether the government is required to ask a neutral judge to determine whether it is legal to imprison someone.

It's based on the habeas corpus, which is a Latin legal term referring to the constitutional right for people to legally challenge their detention by the government.

Immigrants have filed more than 30,000 habeas corpus petitions in federal court alleging illegal detention since Trump took office, according to a tally by The Associated Press. Many have succeeded.

Louisiana's crawfish industry feels the pinch of limits on foreign workers

By STEPHEN SMITH and JACK BROOK Associated Press

CROWLEY, La. (AP) — Spring is peak season in Louisiana for crawfish, the hard-shelled star of outdoor parties. But a shortage of foreign workers is dampening the mood.

Deep in Louisiana's bayous, where crawfish production is a \$300 million industry that is a key ingredient for backyard boils and buttery etouffees served in New Orleans' French Quarter, operators are fuming over labor struggles and pointing fingers at President Donald Trump's administration over what they say has been a failure to authorize enough guest foreign workers.

The shortages add to a list of industries in the U.S. that rely on seasonal foreign labor, including landscaping and construction, whose struggle to fill jobs has been exacerbated during the Trump administration's wider clampdown on legal avenues for immigration. In Louisiana, the need for crawfish workers has strained an industry that is a symbol of state pride and frustrated Republican officeholders, many of whom broadly support Trump's hard-line immigration agenda but say their pleas for more legal laborers have gone unanswered.

"People have built businesses around these workers and this year we can't get them," said Alan Lawson, who runs a crawfish production facility in the rural town of Crowley. "This industry would not exist without it because the American people don't want to do the jobs we're offering."

Large-scale crawfish producers use guest workers, many from Mexico and Central America, to shell and

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freeze the freshwater catch that is often pulled from swampy rice fields. They are hired on H-2B visas for nonfarming jobs and are allowed to stay in the U.S. for less than a year after businesses first offer the jobs to Americans.

The Department of Homeland Security is required to release 66,000 H-2B visas each year and can release nearly double that amount. But that process happened later than usual this year — after Louisiana's crawfish season had already begun.

DHS did not respond to multiple requests for comment. The Department of Labor said it respects the crawfish industry and importance to the U.S. economy, and that the agency "has been actively engaging with industry stakeholders to help address workforce needs and identify workable solutions."

But even if guest workers arrive before crawfish season ends around June, Lawson says, the damage is done. Restaurant owners and processors say crawfish prices could spike for consumers already struggling with affordability.

The demand for seasonal guest workers is high

U.S. businesses' increasing reliance on seasonal foreign workers to do grueling jobs predates the Trump administration. The federal government has not kept pace with the expanding need, and Trump's immigration crackdown also has impacted the labor market. Businesses are seeking tens of thousands more guest workers than the federal government has made available, according to Labor Department data.

"The demand is there but the supply is not," Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation Public Policy Coordinator Andy Brown said. "These businesses want to follow the law. They want to go through the legal parameters to meet their labor needs."

Most seasons at Lawson's facility, the job of peeling and packaging thousands of pounds of the sweet-tasting, bright red crustaceans is handled by more than 100 foreign workers. None have been allowed to come this season.

DHS can begin offering supplemental visas in consultation with the Labor Department at the start of the federal fiscal year in October. However, the Trump administration did not release supplemental visas until February. Initially, it capped them at 35,000, or roughly half what the Biden administration authorized. The Trump administration eventually agreed to release nearly 65,000 supplemental visas — on par with recent years — following pressure from businesses.

Crawfish producers say they don't have enough workers for the season

Louisiana officials say the federal government rejected many crawfish producers' applications because they listed start dates before January. DHS told Lawson that his company was not eligible because he had applied months earlier, according to a February rejection notice he showed to The Associated Press.

At least 15 of the state's 20 major crawfish processing plants have no guest workers this year, according to Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry Commissioner Mike Strain. The Republican said the Trump administration's indifference to their plight has been "unacceptable."

Crawfish processors say that despite advertising locally for months for their peeling jobs, only a handful of Americans have turned up for seasonal gigs paying around \$13 an hour.

"I can't put the crawfish somewhere else. They have to be peeled at this time," said processor David Savoy. "The locals don't want to do it, I've tried — standing on concrete for seven, eight hours a day, peeling crawfish until your hands hurt."

Some immigration law experts said the crawfish industry's labor shortage reflects the administration's attitude toward legal immigration.

"There's much less of a push to facilitate legal immigration," said Julia Gelatt, associate director of the U.S. Immigration Policy Program at the Migration Policy Institute. "It's not a high priority to make sure that the immigration system is moving smoothly."

Restaurants and crawfish lovers could lose out

Crawfish farmers will have fewer options to sell their products and the price of frozen tail meat in grocery stores will rise, processors warn.

Chandra Chifici, who owns the New Orleans seafood restaurant Deanie's, is worried she won't be able

to stockpile enough Louisiana crawfish to get through the monthslong offseason.

"Some companies might not be able to have some of their dishes on the menu," Chifici said. "When tourists come into town, that's what they're here for."

'This is our fight': Suburbanites embrace anti-Trump resistance ahead of No Kings protests

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

MONTCLAIR, N.J. (AP) — A few years ago, Allison Posner was barely involved in politics.

Now the 42-year-old mother of two from Maplewood, New Jersey, hands out food and diapers to immigrant families outside a nearby detention facility. She waves signs on a highway overpass in between school pickups and orthodontist appointments. And this weekend, she'll lead a "No Kings" protest march across this affluent town alongside her husband, her children and thousands of others who are convinced that President Donald Trump represents a direct threat to American democracy.

"The people in the suburbs are definitely radicalizing," said Posner, a freelance actor.

A growing faction of concerned citizens living in suburban communities across the United States — places once known for political moderation or even conservatism — are increasingly positioned on the front lines of the anti-Trump resistance. More than a year into the Republican president's second term, the so-called "soccer moms" are becoming bona fide activists taking to their well-manicured streets to fight Trump and his allies.

The leftward lurch could cost Republicans control of Congress for the president's final two years in office. It could also reshape the Democratic Party by elevating a fresh crop of fiery progressive candidates emboldened to push back against the Trump administration more aggressively than the establishment may prefer.

Indivisible, the activist organization spearheading the third round of No Kings protests this weekend, said roughly two-thirds of more than 3,000 planned demonstrations will be held outside urban areas. Overall, more than 9 million people are expected to turn out nationwide for what leaders predict will be the largest single day of protesting in U.S. history.

"We're going to be everywhere," said Indivisible co-founder Ezra Levin.

Organizers said sign-ups have been especially enthusiastic in suburban areas with high-profile congressional races like Scottsdale, Arizona; Langhorne, Pennsylvania; East Cobb, Georgia; and here in northern New Jersey's 11th district, which holds a special election April 7.

Democratic voters last month chose Analilia Mejia, a former political director for Sen. Bernie Sanders, as their candidate to replace Mikie Sherrill, the more moderate Democrat who was recently elected as New Jersey's governor.

Posner said she's excited to have a fighter represent her district, someone who can channel the outrage that she sees every day.

"I'm seeing people from the PTA or the neighborhood who would have never joined a protest in the past, who are now asking how they can get involved," Posner said. "This is not some other people's fight. This is our fight."

'Hair on fire'

For decades, affluent suburbs like those in northern New Jersey helped elect Republicans who fit the districts they represented: business-oriented, culturally moderate and disinterested in ideological fights.

That began to change in the Trump era.

Across the country, college-educated suburban voters recoiled from Trump's brand of politics. They shifted sharply toward Democrats in the 2018 midterms and in the presidential elections that followed. Districts like New Jersey's 11th, once a Republican stronghold, have since become part of a new liberal coalition rooted in places that were, until very recently, politically competitive.

Even in Summit, New Jersey, one of the nation's wealthiest suburbs, Jeff Naiman feels like he's living in an "authoritarian nightmare" of Trump's making.

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"It's like our hair is on fire," says Naiman, a 59-year-old radiologist who leads his local chapter of Indivisible. "Our country's being torn apart."

He's supporting Mejia, and he has no doubt that she will win next month's special election — and again in November's general election.

"In this environment," Naiman said, "I think the chances of her losing the general election are basically zero."

Mejia, an outspoken progressive activist endorsed by Sanders and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., emerged from the crowded Democratic primary last month, beating more moderate candidates like former congressman Tom Malinowski.

She's critical of Israel's war in Gaza, calls for the abolition of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and backs Medicare for All. She's also eager to raise concerns about what she describes as Trump's dictatorial tendencies, and will be one of the featured speakers at a "No Kings" protest this weekend.

"A ZIP code does not protect anyone from rising violent authoritarianism," she said in an interview.

Mejia still describes herself as a "soccer mom," even as her Republican critics accuse her of trying to soften her activist image ahead of Election Day.

"My youngest plays baseball and soccer, my oldest lacrosse and basketball," she said. "And when I take my children to activities, to games, and I speak to other parents, I know that we're all experiencing this economy and this political moment very similarly."

Mejia defended herself against accusations of antisemitism for her position on Israel, which she accused of committing genocide in the war in Gaza, a topic that emerged as a key issue in the race.

"When I say Palestinians have rights, like Jewish people and Israelis have rights, that is not antisemitism, that is humanism," she said while acknowledging there is antisemitism within the Republican and Democratic parties. "I am an Afro Latina raising two Black sons in America. I know othering kills. I know how dangerous it is when we dehumanize communities."

A Republican balancing act

New Jersey's 11th district was represented by a Republican until Sherrill was elected during the 2018 midterm elections that served as a harsh verdict at the halfway mark of Trump's first term.

Joe Hathaway, the Republican nominee in next month's special election and a town councilman from Randolph Township, hopes to convince voters that Mejia is too radical for them. Republican strategists in Washington, too, believe a surge of far-left Democratic candidates nationwide like Mejia in otherwise moderate districts might help their party maintain its razor-thin House majority this fall.

Yet suburban Republicans are facing serious political headwinds from the leader of their own party in the White House. Hathaway, for example, initially declined to say whether he voted for Trump.

"I don't think it's important," he said in an interview, before acknowledging that he cast his ballot for the president three times. "This job is representing the district, NJ-11 comes first, before a president, before your party."

Hathaway backs the president's war in Iran and many of the economic policies in Trump's "one big, beautiful" bill. But he was also quick to highlight areas of disagreement.

The Republican said he supports most of the Democrats' demands in the Department of Homeland Security shutdown fight, including proposals to require federal immigration agents to wear body cameras, clearly identify themselves, take off face masks and receive better training.

He also wants Republicans who lead Congress to stand up to Trump, whose use of executive authority Hathaway said is "pressure testing" the checks and balances outlined in the Constitution.

"Congress needs to reassert that it is the first branch of government and take more of a leadership role than it's been doing," he said.

Inside the suburban shift

Suburban Americans have been slowly moving away from the Republicans over the past 15 years, according to Gallup polling that tracks party affiliation over time.

Trump was unable to stop the shift despite warnings that Democrats would "destroy" the suburbs with

low-income housing.

In 2020, Joe Biden won 54% of voters who said they lived in the suburbs while Trump won only 44%, according to AP VoteCast. That was a substantial improvement on Democrat Hillary Clinton's performance in a smaller survey of validated 2016 voters conducted by the Pew Research Center, which found that Clinton and Trump split the group about evenly.

The suburbs have also grown more diverse and educated over the past few decades, demographic shifts that may make Democrats more confident. In both of the past two presidential elections, AP VoteCast found that college-educated and non-white suburban voters were much likelier to support the Democratic candidate.

Naiman, the Summit radiologist, said he's witnessed a transformation in his town, which was represented by Republicans at the state and federal level for decades until Trump took over.

"I don't think that Summit is going to be swinging towards Republicans anytime soon — at least not as long as Trumpism is around," he said.

What men and women think about gender and pay, according to a new AP-NORC poll

By ALEXANDRA OLSON, CLAIRE SAVAGE and LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Most working women in the U.S. believe they are disadvantaged when it comes to earning competitive wages, but many men have a different view, according to a new AP-NORC poll.

Equal pay emerged as a major source of concern for working women in the poll and an area where men and women are far apart in their perception of gender equity.

Most employed women, about 6 in 10, say men have more opportunities when it comes to earning competitive wages, according to the survey from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, while about one-third think neither gender has an advantage. About 3 in 10 employed women say they have personally experienced wage discrimination because of their gender.

Employed men are more divided: About 4 in 10 believe men have an advantage when it comes to wages, while about half think both genders have about the same opportunities and about 1 in 10 say women have more opportunities. Just about 1 in 10 men say they have personally experienced wage discrimination because of their gender.

The survey also found that a majority of employed women say the amount of money they get paid is a "major" source of stress in their life right now, compared to about 4 in 10 employed men.

The findings come at a time when men's earnings are rising faster than women's, and the gender wage gap has widened for two years in a row, according the U.S. Census Bureau.

Reflecting that shift, Equal Pay Day — which symbolizes how many more days into the year women have to work for their earnings to catch up with men — was Thursday, falling a day later than in 2025. That was still 16 days earlier than the first Equal Pay Day on April 11, 1996, when women earned about 75 cents for every dollar earned by men.

The country is deeply divided over how to confront gender pay disparity. A growing number of mostly Democratic-led states are adopting pay transparency laws aimed at making it easier to uncover unfair practices, including requiring employers to disclose pay ranges in job postings.

President Donald Trump's second administration, for its part, has hollowed out some agencies and limited legal tools that have been key to investigating unfair pay practices, arguing they threatened meritocracy and presuppose that disparities in the workforce are the result of discrimination.

Many employed women say they've experienced wage discrimination

Jessica Thompson, 47, said she has seen gender bias throughout her working life. Until losing her job in January, Thompson said she earned \$65,000 a year as a senior sales manager in Rockford, Illinois, while a male colleague with similar credentials had earned \$87,000.

Thompson said she had to "really prove myself over four years to get the role. And you know, he just

came in, just within a few months and got it.”

The poll indicates that women are particularly likely to see wages as a pain point. Fewer women, about 2 in 10, say they’ve been discriminated against in getting hired because of their gender, and men are about as likely to say the same thing.

The overrepresentation of women, especially Black and Hispanic women, in lower-paying jobs is a key driver of the gender wage gap, as is the “motherhood penalty.” Studies show that women’s earnings fall after having children while men see their wages increase after becoming fathers.

Earnings for women barely rose in 2024, while male earnings jumped 3.7%, widening the gender wage gap for the second straight year after two decades of slight narrowing, according to the latest annual report from the U.S. Census Bureau, which analyzes earnings for full-time workers. Women working full-time on average earned 80.9% of what men earned in 2024, down from 82.7% in 2023.

Most employed women say their pay is a ‘major’ source of stress

Women aren’t just likelier than men to be worried about pay equity — the poll also found that employed women are more economically stressed on a range of measures.

About 6 in 10 working women say the cost of groceries and the cost of housing are a “major” source of stress in their lives, and about half, 56%, say this about the amount of money they get paid. By contrast, about 4 in 10 employed men say the same.

Economists attribute the widening pay gap in part to the post-pandemic return to work of many low-wage women, which brought down the average female earnings. But the past two years have also seen a drop-off in the labor force participation rate of mothers with young children, in part because return-to-office mandates have reduced pandemic-era flexibility.

Few men think they are disadvantaged

Democratic lawmakers have criticized the Trump administration for making it more difficult to investigate wage discrimination as part of its campaign to stamp out diversity and inclusion practices.

Trump has ordered federal agencies to stop enforcing “disparate impact liability,” a concept in civil rights law that has been used in wage discrimination cases against top companies. The Labor Department has also gutted the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs, an agency that has audited the pay practices of major companies and obtained hundreds of millions of dollars in compensation for women and minorities who have suffered from unfair policies.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, meanwhile, has pivoted to prioritizing anti-DEI investigations under the premise that men, especially white men, have been discriminated against by practices aimed at advancing women and minorities in the workplace.

The poll suggests that few men see themselves as disadvantaged compared to women in the workplace. Only about 1 in 10 employed men said women had more opportunities when it comes to competitive wages or job advancement.

Michael Bettger, a 51-year-old mechanic who earns \$26 an hour in rural Arkansas, said he has seen his wages fall as a result of layoffs and a decade-long struggle with opioid addiction that started after he hurt his back in a worksite accident. But he still believes women struggle more to get ahead in his male-dominated field because of the misogyny he sees, saying other mechanics make jokes about being prone to accidents because female colleagues are a distraction.

“Men do have an advantage and more opportunities for wages. I’ve seen that first hand,” Bettger said. “I have a daughter who wants to be a mechanic, and I’m scared to death of what kind of work she’s going to get.”

California set to rename César Chavez Day following sexual abuse allegations

By TRÂN NGUYỄN Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif (AP) — California lawmakers will vote Thursday to rename César Chavez Day as Farmworkers Day in an effort to reconcile the Latino labor icon’s legacy with explosive sexual abuse al-

legations before the state holiday March 31.

Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom is expected to quickly sign the bill.

The change comes after allegations became public last week that Chavez had sexually abused girls and women during his days building a major farmworker labor rights movement in the 1960s in California's agricultural heartland. Among those who accused him was Dolores Huerta, who co-led the movement that eventually became the United Farm Workers.

The state's effort to rename the holiday is part of a wave of other moves to alter memorials honoring the man who in the 1960s helped secure better wages and working conditions for farmworkers and had been admired by many Democratic leaders. The swift and sweeping effort to erase Chavez's name from public life was previously unthinkable, as his status had only grown more iconic since his death in 1993.

California was the first state to designate Chavez's birthday, March 31, as a holiday to honor the civil rights leader nearly 30 years ago. The Legislature then in 2000 passed a bill to make it an official paid day off for state employees and require that students learn about his legacy and his role in the labor movement in California.

The California bill passed in the Assembly with bipartisan support on Monday and is now before the Senate.

"We cannot ignore wrongdoing and we should not continue to celebrate a single person when the movement itself is so much bigger," Assemblymember Cecilia Aguiar-Curry said before the vote Monday.

Republican Assemblymember Alexandra Macedo said the change is about honoring workers and their families.

"This isn't just about a date on a calendar or a name on a building," Macedo said. "It is about the hands that feed this nation. It is about the men and women who are in the orchards, in the fields, before the sun even touches the horizon, and who are still there long after it sets."

Since the allegations came to light, California State University, Fresno had covered up Chavez's statue on campus, while cities like San Francisco, Los Angeles and Sacramento have taken steps to erase his names from public landmarks. Some advocated for Huerta's name to replace Chavez's, and several states already said they won't observe the day.

Nicolás Maduro heads back to a US court, fighting charges as Venezuela moves on without him

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, JENNIFER PELTZ and REGINA GARCIA CANO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Former Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro returns to a New York courtroom Thursday as he seeks to have his drug trafficking indictment thrown out over a geopolitical dispute over legal fees.

Maduro's lawyer contends that the U.S. is violating the deposed leader's constitutional rights by blocking Venezuelan government funds from being used to pay his legal costs.

It's the first time that Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, will be in court since a January arraignment at which he protested their capture by U.S. military forces and declared: "I am not guilty. I am a decent man, the constitutional president of my country." Flores has also pleaded not guilty.

Both remain jailed at a detention center in Brooklyn, and neither has asked to be released on bail. Judge Alvin Hellerstein has yet to set a trial date, though that could happen at the hearing.

Maduro, 63, and Flores, 69, continue to enjoy some support in Venezuela, with murals and billboards across the capital, Caracas, demanding their return. But while Maduro's ruling party remains in power, he has slowly been erased from the government of Delcy Rodríguez, Venezuela's acting president.

Rodríguez has replaced senior officials including Maduro's faithful defense minister and attorney general, reorganized agencies, appointed ambassadors and eliminated tenets of the self-proclaimed socialist movement that has ruled Venezuela for more than two decades.

She has even shaken up state television, which had been dominated by Maduro's hours-long evening appearances. Rodríguez favors much shorter appearances without the musical acts to which her prede-

cessor often danced.

Venezuela has also reestablished diplomatic relations with the U.S., which in 2019 cut ties with Maduro's government and recognized the then-head of the National Assembly, a member of the opposition, as the country's legitimate leader. The U.S. has eased economic sanctions on Venezuela's crucial oil industry and also dispatched a chargé d'affaires to Caracas.

But even that may not be enough to spare Maduro and Flores from having to foot their own legal bills.

In a court filing last month, Maduro lawyer Barry Pollack said the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control, which administers sanctions, flip-flopped on a decision to let Venezuela pay for his legal fees.

The office approved the arrangement Jan. 9, he said, but then rescinded it without explanation less than three hours later.

In a written declaration filed with the court, Maduro argued that he is "entitled to have the government of Venezuela pay for my legal defense."

Prosecutors responded that the U.S. government had authorized Maduro and Flores to use personal funds to pay their legal fees but would let them do so from a fund controlled by a sanctioned government.

Maduro said in his declaration that he is unable to afford his defense. To qualify for a lawyer at U.S. taxpayer expense, he would have to show he is too poor to pay for it.

Maduro and Flores were seized Jan. 3 in a middle-of-the-night raid on their Caracas home.

A 25-page indictment accused him and others of working with drug cartels and members of the military to facilitate the shipment of thousands of tons of cocaine into the U.S.

Maduro and his wife are accused of ordering kidnappings, beatings and murders of those who owed them drug money or undermined their trafficking operation. That included the killing of a drug boss in Caracas, the indictment said. If convicted, they face life in prison.

Post-Maduro, everyday life for most Venezuelans remains the same.

Many public sector employees earn just about \$160 per month, while the average private sector worker makes about \$237. Last year the annual inflation rate soared to 475%, according to Venezuela's central bank, putting the cost of food and other essentials beyond the reach of many.

Iran war deflects attention from Ukraine as an emboldened Russia starts spring offensive

By BARRY HATTON Associated Press

The Iran war has deflected global attention from Russia's all-out invasion of its neighbor Ukraine as Europe's biggest conflict since World War II enters its fifth year and an emboldened Kremlin undertakes a spring offensive.

The past week showed that neither side is easing up. Russia on Tuesday fired almost 1,000 drones and 34 missiles at Ukraine in one of the war's biggest bombardments. The following day Ukraine launched almost 400 drones in the largest reported overnight attack on Russian regions and Crimea.

Ukraine's fate is still Europe's top foreign policy issue, fueled by fears that Moscow has wider ambitions. Meanwhile, the Trump administration has wound down talks with Russian and Ukrainian delegations as the Iran war grips its attention. The administration has warned it could turn its back on the conflict if peace efforts come to nothing.

Russian takes in billions after US eases oil sanctions

Only weeks ago, the Russian economy was starting to feel the pinch of sanctions. But Russia is now raking in billions of dollars from a temporary U.S. waiver on oil sanctions against Moscow. The measure taken earlier this month aims to free up Russian oil cargo stranded at sea and ease supply shortages caused by the Middle East conflict.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the U.S. move was "not the right decision" because it will further enable Russia's military campaign.

American Patriot air-defense missiles have been moved from Europe toward the Middle East as Wash-

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ington redirects resources to its war on Iran. Zelenskyy warned that Kyiv will "definitely" face shortages of Patriot systems because of the war against Iran.

The U.S. produces 60 to 65 missiles per month, or about 700 to 800 missiles per year, Zelenskyy said. "And on the first day in the Middle East war, 803 missiles were used," he said.

Aiming to secure some geopolitical leverage, Ukraine offered its battle-tested technology to help Gulf states fend off Iranian drones. In return, Ukraine wants more of the high-end air-defense missiles that Gulf countries possess and which Kyiv needs to stop Russia's missiles. Zelenskyy also made Ukrainian drone interceptors available to the U.S.

Ukraine desperately needs money, too. A promised 90-billion-euro (\$104-billion) loan from the European Union to fund Ukraine's armed forces and its war-shattered economy for the next two years is being held up by Hungary.

Fighting on the front line escalates as weather improves

After a winter of relative calm on the front line, Russia is gearing up for the summer fighting season as fields dry out.

Russian forces are in an early phase of a spring offensive, assaulting Ukraine's eastern so-called Fortress Belt of cities, said Elina Beketova of the Center for European Policy Analysis, a Washington-based think tank.

"Over the past weeks, the Russians have intensified pressure on the battlefield and in the air," she told The Associated Press. In Ukraine's eastern Donbas region, Ukraine's industrial heartland long coveted by Russian President Vladimir Putin, the situation is "critical," she said, though Ukrainian troops say they are holding firm.

"Russia is trying, on the tactical level, some new approaches" with mechanized infantry and armor in its offensive, according to Robert Murrett, a retired vice admiral in the U.S. Navy who is deputy director of Syracuse University's Institute for Security Policy and Law.

Fierce fighting is taking place along the roughly 1,250-kilometer (750-mile) front line snaking along eastern and southern parts of Ukraine, the commander-in-chief of Ukraine's armed forces, Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi, said this week.

Moscow's forces have made only incremental gains across rural areas. Russia occupies about 20% of Ukraine. That includes the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia seized in 2014.

Russian war bloggers expect a new Moscow effort to create more footholds in the southern Zaporizhzhia and Dnipropetrovsk regions. That would pave the way for a possible push toward those regions' capital cities, which are key industrial hubs.

The Russian tactic is to surround and then choke cities while bombing them to rubble.

Russia bombards civilian areas, Ukraine targets Moscow's war machine

After crushing Ukraine's power grid during one of the worst winters in recent memory, Russian drone and missile barrages of civilian areas have continued unabated.

More than 15,000 Ukrainian civilians have been killed in the war, according to the U.N. Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine.

For its part, Ukraine has developed long-range drones and missiles to hit targets in rear areas that keep Moscow's war machine going. The targets have included oil refineries, chemical plants, ammunition depots and military logistics hubs up to 1,500 kilometers (900 miles) from Ukraine.

US-led talks are on ice and making little progress

Washington's peace efforts are largely on hold while the White House is "totally distracted by Iran," Murrett said.

Months of U.S.-mediated talks between delegations from Moscow and Kyiv have produced no breakthrough on the knottiest problems, such as who keeps Ukrainian territory and how to prevent future Russian invasions.

Russia has rejected Ukraine's offer of a ceasefire. European leaders have accused Putin of stalling in peace efforts while his army tries to capture more Ukrainian land.

The Kremlin has "never come off (its) maximalist demands" for a settlement, and it would take "overwhelming" Western military and financial support for Ukraine for Putin to back down, Murrett said.

Teens get probation after using AI to create fake nudes of classmates

By MARK SCOLFORO Associated Press

LANCASTER, Pa. (AP) — Two teenage boys who used artificial intelligence to create fake nude photos of their classmates at an exclusive private school in Pennsylvania received probation Wednesday after dozens of victims described the images' traumatizing effect on them.

The boys were 14 at the time. They admitted this month that they made about 350 images, showing at least 59 girls under 18, along with other victims who so far have not been identified.

Authorities and the girls themselves said the boys took images of the girls from school photos, year-books, Instagram, TikTok and FaceTime chats in 2023 and 2024, and morphed them with images of adults depicting nudity or sexual activity.

More than 100 students and parents from Lancaster Country Day School were in court to hear victims describe the shock of having to identify their own faces in pornographic photos to detectives. Juvenile proceedings in Pennsylvania are normally closed, but this was opened by the judge, providing an unusual opportunity for the community to be seen and heard.

The girls described the fallout — anxiety attacks, a loss of trust, problems focusing on schoolwork and a fear that the images may someday surface in unexpected ways.

The two defendants stood stone-faced throughout, flanked by their lawyers and parents, as they were called pedophiles, "sick and twisted" and perverted.

"I will never understand why they did this," one victim told Judge Leonard Brown, saying it "destroyed my innocence."

One teen told Brown "how excruciating it is to bring these feelings up again and again." Another choked back tears as she excoriated one of the defendants for expressing "fake empathy" as girls confided with him about their pain, before it became known that he had been involved. Still another said all of her friends transferred schools, and that she "needed trauma therapy to even walk around my neighborhood."

Judge said he hadn't heard boys apologize

The defendants declined several opportunities to comment to the judge, who said he had not heard either boy take responsibility or apologize.

"This has been a regrettable, long, torturous process for everyone involved," said Heidi Freese, defense attorney for one of the defendants. "There were very interesting, underlying legal issues surrounding the charges in this case and those will be decided on a different day in a different case."

The other defendant's lawyers emailed a statement late Wednesday that said he was "extremely remorseful for his part in the AI-generated images and very sorry for any hurt he caused."

Defense attorneys Adam Szilagyi and Christopher Sarno wrote that the images, which the lawyers said their client did not intend to be public, "contained nudity but did not contain any representations of sexual conduct or activity."

They said their client did not use "any AI generator himself nor did he disseminate any of the images." Szilagyi said in a follow-up text that his client was accountable as part of the conspiracy and that both of the boys "gathered and exchanged the unaltered/original images that were put into the generator."

Brown ordered each to perform 60 hours of community service, have no contact with the victims and pay an unspecified amount of restitution. If they don't have any additional legal problems, Brown said, the case can be expunged after two years.

As he imposed his sentence, Brown said that if they were adults, they probably would be headed for state prison. He said they should "take this opportunity to really examine" themselves.

Rise of AI has led to deepfakes

The resolution of the Pennsylvania case comes days after three teenagers in Tennessee sued Elon Musk's xAI, claiming the company's Grok tools morphed their real photos into explicitly sexual images. The high school students are seeking class-action status to represent what the lawsuit says are thousands of people

who were similarly victimized as minors.

The scandal in Pennsylvania led to a student protest, criminal charges against the two teenagers and the departure of leaders at the school, which says it has about 600 students K-12, class sizes averaging just 12 kids, and "an endowment in excess of \$25 million."

Nadeem Bezar, a Philadelphia lawyer who represents at least 10 of the victims, said Tuesday he expects to file a claim "against the school and anybody else we think has culpability in these deepfakes being created and disseminated."

He said he has not yet seen the photos but expects the legal process to determine "exactly when and where and how the school knew, how the boys created these images, what platforms they used to create these images and how they were disseminated."

As AI has become accessible and powerful, lawmakers across the country have passed laws aimed at barring deepfakes.

President Donald Trump signed the Take it Down Act last year, making it illegal to publish intimate images including deepfakes without consent, and requiring websites and social media sites to remove such material within 48 hours of being notified by a victim.

Forty-six states now have laws addressing deepfakes, with legislation introduced in the remaining four — Alaska, Missouri, New Mexico and Ohio — according to the consumer advocacy group Public Citizen.

Associated Press writers Geoff Mulvihill in Haddonfield, New Jersey, and Holly Ramer in Concord, New Hampshire, contributed.

Silver insists NBA will 'fix' tanking issue before next season, says he likes 65-game rule

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Tanking is going to be addressed. The 65-game rule might remain.

NBA Commissioner Adam Silver insisted Wednesday that the league will change its draft process and address its tanking problem before the start of next season. And he pointed to the league's player participation policy — citing the effect it has had on load management — as proof of how the league can make effective fixes.

The league's board of governors discussed tanking — the issue of teams trying not to win in order to enhance their odds of landing the best possible draft pick — at its two-day meeting that ended Wednesday. No votes were taken and no fingers were pointed at any specific teams, Silver said.

"We are going to fix it," Silver said. "Full stop."

Silver said the league has been working on the most recent tanking issues for months — and noted that the NBA has addressed the problem countless times over the years, including with several changes to the draft and lottery process.

"I would say it seemed unanimous in the room that we needed to make a change, and we need to make a change for next season," Silver said at a news conference, wrapping up the two-day session with owners. "Exactly what that change is, we're continuing to work on. ... I think there's also unanimous agreement that we need to make this change in advance of the draft and free agency this year, so all the teams understand the rules of the road going into next year."

The next step, Silver said, will likely be a special board meeting in May to get something done. The league's general managers have discussed the matter multiple times, and numerous teams have offered some sort of suggestion about how to fix the issue.

Utah was fined \$500,000 for sitting some of its best players late in games earlier this season, including one the Jazz actually won. Three teams — Sacramento, Indiana and Washington — have had losing streaks of 16 games so far this season, and other teams like Brooklyn have not been shy about saying they're looking at the future more than the present.

"I will say I really like where the league is right now. I'm sorry to have to talk about tanking because it

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takes away from the incredible competition we're seeing from roughly 20 teams in the league right now, going into a wide-open playoffs, so many different teams," Silver said. "It's really exciting basketball. ... Of course, the opposite of that is when there's a sense that both teams aren't out there trying to kill themselves to win a game. As I said, we have to fix that problem."

In other matters addressed Wednesday:

The 65-game rule

Silver responded to the National Basketball Players Association's statement Tuesday calling for change to the 65-game rule for major individual awards.

The NBPA, through collective bargaining, agreed to that rule as part of the current agreement between the league and its players. It pointed to the case of Detroit star Cade Cunningham, who would almost certainly be an All-NBA selection this season but may fall short of qualifying because of the 65-game threshold.

"We always knew when there's a line you draw that somebody's going to fall on the other side of that line and it may feel unfair in that particular instance," Silver said. "Let's see what happens at the end of this year. By the way, Cade Cunningham, he's an incredible player. I'm sorry that he's injured and can't wait to see him back on the floor.

"But having said that, we also have to remember that to the extent that one player is no longer eligible, some other player will then be All-NBA and will slot into that spot. I'm not ready to stand here saying, I don't think it's working. I think it is working."

The NBPA believes the rule should focus on preventing "excessive load management," and that precautions should be taken so players don't miss out on deserved recognition or get forced to play when injured just to meet a games-played standard.

WNBA deal

Silver said the NBA's governors — many of whom have a significant stake in the WNBA as well — discussed the new collective bargaining agreement between that league and its players.

"People were extremely happy about the fact that the collective bargaining situation was resolved in time to save training camp and free agency and the season," Silver said.

Silver was asked if he thought WNBA Commissioner Cathy Engelbert would keep that role after the 2026 season.

"We haven't had those discussions yet with the WNBA board," Silver said. "I would obviously say Cathy's done a fantastic job since she's come to the WNBA. ... I would say the results speak for themselves. I'm very happy, and I know the ownership is very happy with where things stand."

Blazers sale

Carolina Hurricanes owner Tom Dundon's agreement to buy the Portland Trail Blazers from Paul Allen's estate could be finalized in the next few days. Dundon was at the board meeting on Tuesday, presumably one of the final steps in the process before the governors give their blessing.

"He's a go-getter," Silver said. "He's got a great reputation as sort of leading a turnaround in the NHL. He certainly has enormous passion and spirit. He wants to be successful. He wants to be successful both as a businessman in Portland, and he wants to be successful with the team on the floor."

Iran rejects US ceasefire plan, issues its own demands as strikes land across the Mideast

By JON GAMBRELL, MIKE CORDER, MUNIR AHMED and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran on Wednesday dismissed an American plan to pause the war in the Middle East and launched more attacks on Israel and Gulf Arab countries, including strikes that hit a fuel tank at Kuwait International Airport, sparking a fire.

Iran's defiance came as Israel launched airstrikes on Tehran and as the United States deployed paratroopers and more Marines to the region.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said in an interview on state TV that his government has not engaged in talks to end the war, "and we do not plan on any negotiations." That followed a report from

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Iranian state TV's English-language broadcaster quoting an anonymous official as saying Iran rejected America's ceasefire proposal and has its own demands to end the fighting.

Earlier, two officials from Pakistan, which transmitted the U.S. plan to Iran, described the 15-point proposal broadly, saying it addressed sanctions relief, a rollback of Iran's nuclear program, limits on missiles and reopening the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's oil is shipped.

An Egyptian official involved in the mediation efforts said the proposal also includes restrictions on Iran's support for armed groups. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss details not yet released.

President Donald Trump, speaking at a fundraiser Wednesday night in Washington, insisted that Iran still wants to cut a deal.

"They are negotiating, by the way, and they want to make a deal so badly, but they're afraid to say it because they figure they'll be killed by their own people," said Trump, who added: "They're also afraid they'll be killed by us."

Iran has long insisted it won't discuss its ballistic missile program or its support of regional militias, which it views as key to its security. And its ability to control passage through the Strait of Hormuz represents one of its biggest strategic advantages.

Iran's attacks on regional energy infrastructure, along with its restrictions on the strait, have sent oil prices skyrocketing, putting pressure on the U.S. to find a way to end the chokehold and calm markets.

More U.S. troops are on the way to the Middle East

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 paratroopers are trained to jump into hostile or contested areas to secure key territory and airfields.

The Pentagon is also sending about 5,000 more Marines trained in amphibious assaults and thousands of sailors to the region.

Most Americans believe the U.S. military action against Iran has gone too far and many are worried about the cost of gasoline, according to a new AP-NORC poll.

The survey indicates that while Trump's approval rating is holding steady, the conflict could be swiftly turning into a major political liability for his Republican administration.

Diplomatic efforts face major challenges

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

Trump has said the U.S. is "in negotiations right now" and that the participants include special envoy Steve Witkoff, Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Vice President JD Vance. Trump has not identified anyone from Iran taking part.

Press TV, the English-language broadcaster on Iranian state television, cited an Iranian five-point proposal that includes a halt to killings of its officials, safeguards against future attacks on Iran, reparations for the war, the end of hostilities and Iran's "exercise of sovereignty over the Strait of Hormuz."

Those measures, particularly reparations and its continued chokehold over the Strait of Hormuz, likely will be unacceptable to the White House.

While Iran and Oman both have territory in the strait, its narrow shipping channels are viewed as international waters through which all ships can travel.

Any talks between the U.S. and Iran would face monumental challenges. It's not clear who in Iran's government has the authority and willingness to negotiate.

Iran remains highly suspicious of the United States, which twice under the Trump administration has attacked during high-level diplomatic talks, including when the war began on Feb. 28.

Israel launches new strikes on Iran — and also comes under attack

The Israeli military said Wednesday it had carried out waves of airstrikes in Tehran, following strikes a day earlier targeting an Iranian submarine development center in Isfahan.

Missile alert sirens sounded in Israel as Iran and the Iranian-backed militant group Hezbollah in Lebanon

launched attacks. Hezbollah has fired rockets into northern Israel around the clock since the war began.

Iran also kept up pressure on its Gulf Arab neighbors. Saudi Arabia's Defense Ministry said it had destroyed at least eight drones in its oil-rich Eastern Province, and missile alert sirens sounded in Bahrain. Kuwait said it shot down multiple drones but that one hit a fuel tank at Kuwait International Airport.

Meanwhile, six people allegedly linked to Hezbollah were arrested in Kuwait for planning to assassinate Gulf leaders, Kuwait's Ministry of Interior said in a statement. Fourteen associates had fled the country, officials said.

More than 1,500 people have been killed in Iran, its Health Ministry says. Twenty people have been killed in Israel; two Israeli soldiers have also been killed in Lebanon. At least 13 U.S. military members have been killed. More than a dozen civilians in the occupied West Bank and Gulf Arab states have also died.

Nearly 1,100 people have died in Lebanon, authorities said. In Iraq, where Iranian-supported militant groups have entered the conflict, 80 members of the security forces have been killed.

Energy prices fall back but remain high

The news of potential negotiations drove down the price of oil. Brent crude oil, the international standard, was trading around \$100 a barrel Wednesday, after nearing as high as \$120 earlier last week. That's still up around 35% from the start of the war.

Economists and leaders have warned of far-reaching effects if energy prices remain high — from rising prices on food and other basics to higher rates for mortgages and auto loans.

Iran has allowed a small number of ships through the Strait of Hormuz, but has said no ships from the U.S., Israel or countries seen as linked to them can pass.

Cuban president says Raúl Castro involved in US talks that are in early stages

By ANDREA RODRÍGUEZ Associated Press

HAVANA (AP) — Former Cuban President Raúl Castro is involved in talks between the island and the United States, Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel said Wednesday.

The talks, which Díaz-Canel said are in the early stages, come at a time of increasing tensions between the two nations, with Cuba plagued by nationwide blackouts resulting from a crumbling power grid and an ongoing oil blockade implemented by U.S. President Donald Trump, who has threatened tariffs on any country that provides oil to Cuba. Trump recently said he'd have "the honor of taking Cuba" soon.

The talks overall are being handled collectively by the Cuban government, Díaz-Canel told Spanish leftist leader Pablo Iglesias in a videotaped interview that lasted more than an hour and was shared by state media. Though Díaz-Canel became president in 2018, 94-year-old revolutionary leader, brother of Fidel Castro, is still considered the most powerful person in the nation.

Iglesias was in Cuba as part of a delegation of some 600 activists from 33 countries who arrived last week to deliver humanitarian aid.

"A process of conversations that leads to an agreement is a long process," Díaz-Canel told Iglesias, who produced the interview for his crowdfunding TV channel, Canal RED.

"First, we must build a channel for dialogue. Then, we must build common agendas of interests for the parties, and the parties must demonstrate their intention to move forward and truly commit to the program based on the discussion of those agendas," Díaz-Canel said.

In late January, Trump threatened tariffs on any country that sells or provides oil to Cuba as he pushes for a change in the island's political model.

Although the initial threats were formally softened, the embargo has remained in place, and the island has not received any fuel shipments in the past three months.

Prolonged power outages and a near-paralysis of economic and social life are the visible consequences on the island, which in the last week experienced two nationwide blackouts that left millions without electricity as Cuba's power grid continues to crumble.

The U.S. has said that Cuba was in negotiations, and Trump has threatened that he would take over

the island soon.

Díaz-Canel was more nuanced in his response and said his officials and those from the U.S. State Department "held recent talks."

He also addressed speculation surrounding the role that Castro, would be playing a role in these overture. "The other thing they've tried to speculate about is that there are divisions within the leadership of the revolution," Díaz-Canel said, not clarifying who he was referring to.

Castro "is one of those who, along with me and in collaboration with other branches of the (Communist) Party, the government, and the State, has guided how we should conduct this dialogue process, if this dialogue process takes place," the president added.

He noted that Castro is "the historical leader of this revolution, even though he has relinquished his responsibilities," and that he maintains a "prestige earned with the people" due to "historical recognition that no one can deny."

Raúl Castro, who succeeded his brother, Fidel, as president, led historic talks with former U.S. President Barack Obama in 2014 that led to the reopening of embassies and re-establishment of diplomatic relations.

Trump has opposed such policy, tightening sanctions even further, exacerbating a deep economic crisis to the extreme of the current energy blockade.

Meanwhile, Francisco Pichón, resident coordinator of the United Nations in Cuba, warned that if the situation continued to spiral it could provoke a "humanitarian crisis". Pichón and other officials said it would require \$94 million to address the island's energy crisis and hurricane damage from last year.

The crippled energy grid was slated to cut off 96,000 people, around 11,000 of them children, from getting surgeries they need, and cause 30,000 minors to fall behind of their vaccine schedules, he estimated.

It's already cut around a million people who depend on water deliveries from trucks, off from access to water.

The Un officials highlighted the desperate need for fuel to enter Cuba, but also solar power as a potential solution to keep schools and hospitals up and running and to pump water for irrigation.

"If the current situation continues and the country's fuel reserves are depleted, we do fear an accelerated deterioration with the possible loss of lives," said Francisco Pichón, Resident Coordinator of the United Nations in Cuba.

Justice Department settles lawsuit from Trump ally Michael Flynn for \$1.2 million, AP source says

By ERIC TUCKER and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department has settled for roughly \$1.2 million a lawsuit from Michael Flynn, the former national security adviser to President Donald Trump who pleaded guilty during the Republican's first term to lying to the FBI about his conversations with a top Russian diplomat and was later pardoned.

Court papers filed Wednesday do not reveal the settlement amount, but a person familiar with the matter, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to disclose nonpublic information, confirmed the total as about \$1.2 million.

The settlement resolves a 2023 lawsuit in which Flynn sought at least \$50 million and asserted that the criminal case against him amounted to a malicious prosecution. It also represents a stark turnabout in position for a Justice Department that during the Biden administration had pressed a judge to dismiss Flynn's complaint. Attorney General Pam Bondi, a former personal lawyer for the president, has openly criticized the Russia investigation in which Flynn was charged and the Justice Department in the last year has opened investigations into former officials who participated in that inquiry.

The Justice Department cast the settlement as an "important step in redressing" what it says was a "historic injustice" of the Russia investigation that shadowed Trump for much of his first term.

"This Department of Justice will continue to pursue accountability at all levels for this wrongdoing. Such weaponization of the federal government must never be allowed to happen again," a spokesperson said.

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In a separate statement, Flynn said: "Nothing can fully compensate for the hell that my family and I have endured over these many years — the relentless attacks, the destruction of reputations, the financial ruin, and the profound personal toll inflicted upon us all. No amount of money or formal resolution can erase the pain caused by a prosecution that should never have been brought."

The settlement is the latest turn in the long-running legal saga involving Flynn, one of six Trump associates charged as part of special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into potential ties between Russia and Trump's 2016 presidential campaign. That investigation found Russia interfered in the election on Trump's behalf and that the Trump campaign eagerly welcomed the help, but it ultimately found insufficient evidence of a criminal conspiracy.

Flynn, a retired Army lieutenant general who vigorously campaigned at Trump's side, served for weeks as his first national security adviser before being pushed out of his position. He remained a Trump ally even after agreeing to cooperate with Mueller's team. He was pardoned in the final weeks of the president's first term.

Flynn pleaded guilty in December 2017 to lying to the FBI when he said he had not discussed with the Russian envoy, Sergey Kislyak, sanctions that the outgoing Obama administration had just imposed on Russia for election interference. During that conversation, Flynn advised that Russia be "even-keeled" in response to the punitive measures, and assured him "we can have a better conversation" about relations between the countries after Trump became president.

The conversation alarmed the FBI, which at the time was investigating whether the Trump campaign and Russia had coordinated to sway the election. In addition, White House officials were stating publicly that Flynn and Kislyak had not discussed sanctions, which the FBI knew was untrue.

Flynn was ousted from his position in February 2017 after news broke that Obama administration officials had warned the White House that Flynn had indeed discussed sanctions with Kislyak and was vulnerable to blackmail. He pleaded guilty months later to a false statement charge.

But Flynn later sought to withdraw his guilty plea, saying federal prosecutors had acted in "bad faith" and broken their end of the bargain when they sought prison time for him.

The Justice Department in 2020 moved to dismiss the case, asserting that the FBI had no basis to interview Flynn about Kislyak and that any statements he made during the interview were not material to the FBI's broader counterintelligence probe.

Flynn was pardoned by Trump in November 2020, ending the court case and the legal wrangling.

In his lawsuit, Flynn maintained his innocence and said he was targeted by the "virulently anti-Trump leadership" of the FBI's Russia investigation. He contended that investigators pursued him despite knowing there was no evidence of a crime and coerced his guilty plea.

"He was falsely branded as a traitor to his country, lost at least tens of millions of dollars of business opportunities and future lifetime earning potential, was maliciously prosecuted and spent substantial monies in his own defense," says the lawsuit, adding that Flynn will continue to suffer "mental and emotional pain."

Houston airport has become a symbol for the shutdown's impacts on air travel

By JUAN A. LOZANO and LEKAN OYEKANMI Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — George Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston has become the symbol for how the ongoing partial government shutdown has wreaked havoc on the nation's air travel system.

While long security lines have hobbled airports across the U.S., Bush Intercontinental's problems have been more pronounced. Frustrated travelers at Houston's largest airport have confronted warnings of four-hour wait times to get through security, as many Transportation Security Administration workers aren't showing up for their shifts since they're not getting paid during the shutdown.

"And we've been in this airport since 8 o'clock in the morning. Very tired, queuing and queuing and very slow," Edgaer Fernando, who was traveling to Guatemala, said on Tuesday.

Union and airport officials have offered a variety of reasons why Bush Intercontinental seems to be

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worse than other airports.

These include the Houston airport having one of the highest callout rates of TSA workers in the country due to the economic challenges they are facing, higher passenger traffic as the airport is a major hub for United Airlines, and a busy tourism month for Houston.

More TSA workers in Houston are not coming to work compared to other cities

Both Bush Intercontinental and Hobby, the city's other major airport, have had some of the highest callout rates in the U.S.

While 11% of TSA workers nationally did not show up for work on Tuesday, at Bush Intercontinental, that number was nearly 40%. At Hobby, it was even higher — 43%. The callout rate in Houston has averaged between 35% and 40%, said Johnny Jones, the secretary and treasurer for Council 100 of the American Federation of Government Employees, which represents TSA workers nationwide.

But Bush Intercontinental is much busier than Hobby, having served over 48.4 million passengers in 2024, compared to 14.6 million passengers at Hobby.

Jim Szczesniak, director of aviation for the Houston Airport System, said that at Bush Intercontinental, 37 TSA checkpoint lanes are usually operating. Only between a third and 50% of lanes are currently being operated, he said.

"We worry conditions will only get worse at airports across the U.S. until Congress ends this shutdown," Szczesniak said in a video posted on social media Tuesday.

TSA workers were already dealing with financial difficulties and debt from last year's shutdown, and with higher costs for groceries and gas, employees "are just tired of it," Jones said.

"There could be a million factors, but I can just tell you as simple as this: If everybody's being paid, you wouldn't have no lines," Jones said.

Bush Intercontinental is among the nation's largest hub airports

The Houston airport is one of the nation's busiest and is also a major hub for United Airlines. Of the 48.4 million passengers that went through the airport in 2024, 34.8 million were from United Airlines.

"There's high call outs, but it's also the excessive origination point for a lot of flights," Jones said.

With the high volume of passengers, the Houston airport might have also been experiencing a staffing shortage even before the shutdown, as no TSA workers have been hired around the country in about a year, Jones said.

March has been a busy month for Houston

Besides spring break travelers, Houston has hosted a variety of high-profile events this month.

These include games during the World Baseball Classic and CERAWEEK, a major energy conference with more than 10,000 participants from around the world. The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo reportedly drew 2.6 million attendees, many from outside the metro area, during its three-week duration. And this week, two of the NCAA Tournament's Sweet 16 games will be played in Houston.

"While the delays are frustrating for travelers, they do not appear to be impacting tourism. In fact, Houston is experiencing the strongest month of March in terms of hotel rooms and reservations in the city's history," Mayor John Whitmire said in a statement.

Wait times at Bush Intercontinental seemed to improve on Wednesday as it took less than two hours to get through TSA security.

"Everyone's trying their best. And thanks to all the TSA members who are here," Raj Chauhan, who was traveling to Miami, said on Wednesday.

Verdicts against social media companies carry consequences. But questions linger

By MORGAN LEE Associated Press

SANTA FE, N.M. (AP) — Two landmark jury verdicts against social media companies have arrived at the front of a wave of lawsuits alleging that the popular platforms endanger the mental health of children.

Financial penalties total \$381 million in the two cases involving tech giant Meta in New Mexico and both

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Meta and YouTube in California. The verdicts highlight a growing shift in the public perception of social media companies and their responsibilities toward child safety.

But it may be too soon to tell whether litigation will change the way popular social media and messaging platforms function — or influence the complex algorithms that deliver content to billions of users worldwide.

Here are looming questions as related lawsuits approach trial.

Will these verdicts harm Meta's business?

The answer is not really — or, at least, not yet.

Meta — the owner of Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp — says it had \$201 billion in sales last year.

That revenue stream dwarfs the \$375 million in civil penalties imposed on Tuesday by a jury in New Mexico with a verdict that Meta knowingly harmed children's mental health and concealed what it knew about child sexual exploitation on its social media platforms.

Meta said it disagrees with the verdicts and plans to appeal the jury's finding that it violated the state Unfair Practices Act.

And tech companies still are shielded from legal responsibility for posted content, based on Section 230 of the 1996 Communications Decency Act.

Investors are shrugging off the verdicts. Meta's stock closed slightly higher Wednesday, although it is down about 8% year-to-date.

Does Meta have to make changes now to its design or algorithm?

The verdicts this week don't mandate specific changes to the design of social media platforms, nor to the algorithms that make them tick.

But a second phase of the New Mexico trial in May, before a judge with no jury, could spell out changes for Meta's platforms for local users by court order.

A state district court judge will determine whether Meta created a public nuisance — and could impose restrictions and order the company to pay for programs that remedy potential harms to children.

New Mexico Attorney General Raúl Torrez, who filed the lawsuit against Meta in 2023, says his office wants improvements to Meta's enforcement of minimum age limits and removal of sexual predators — in part by lifting encryption on communication that can interfere with police work.

Meta says it continuously works to improve safety and already has made changes that phase out encryption on Instagram and limit access to explicit content by teenagers, block unsolicited messages to children from adults and help young users manage time spent on its platforms and avoid sleep disruptions.

Both the California and New Mexico trials highlighted the addictive properties of platform algorithms and the negative impacts on child mental health.

How much money do Meta and YouTube have to pay?

In New Mexico, a jury in Santa Fe arrived at the \$375 million fine against Meta by endorsing the maximum penalty of \$5,000 per violation of state consumer protection law — multiplied by thousands of social media accounts for children under 18.

Prosecutors intend to pursue more damages in that trial's second phase, while an appeal could delay payment — or reverse penalties.

In California, the jury ruled that Meta and Google's video streaming platform YouTube must pay at least \$3 million in damages to a 20-year-old woman who says she became addicted to social media as a child, exacerbating her mental health struggles. TikTok and Snap settled before the trial began.

California jurors recommended an additional \$3 million in punitive damages pending a judge's final review.

Google defends YouTube as a responsibly built streaming platform, and not a social media site.

More trials to come on social media safety

The California verdict has much broader legal and financial implications. The case was designated as a bellwether test that might guide the resolution of other lawsuits. There are thousands of those lawsuits pending, including hundreds in California.

The New Mexico verdict may be an early indicator for lawsuits brought by other publicly elected prosecutors.

Attorneys general in more than 40 states have filed suit against Meta, claiming it is contributing to a mental health crisis among young people. Most are pursuing remedies in U.S. federal court.

Jury finds Instagram and YouTube liable in a landmark social media addiction trial

By KAITLYN HUAMANI and BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writers

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Meta and YouTube must pay millions in damages to a 20-year-old woman after a jury decided the social media giant and video streamer designed their platforms to hook young users without concern for their well being.

The California jury's decision Wednesday in a first-of-its-kind lawsuit could influence the outcome of thousands of similar lawsuits accusing social media companies of deliberately causing harm.

The plaintiff, known by her initials KGM, testified at trial that she became addicted to social media as a child and that this addiction exacerbated her mental health struggles. After more than 40 hours of deliberations, a majority of jurors agreed and awarded her \$3 million in damages.

Jurors later recommended an additional \$3 million in punitive damages after deciding the companies acted with malice, oppression or fraud in harming children with their platforms. The judge has final say over how much damages are awarded.

It's the second verdict against Meta this week, after a jury in New Mexico determined the company harms children's mental health and safety, in violation of state law.

Meta, the parent of Instagram and Facebook, and Google-owned YouTube issued statements disagreeing with the verdict and vowed to explore their legal options, which include appeals.

Google spokesperson Jose Castañeda said the verdict misrepresents YouTube "which is a responsibly built streaming platform, not a social media site." A Meta spokesperson said teen mental health is "profoundly complex and cannot be linked to a single app."

Peter Ormerod, an associate professor of law at Villanova University, called the verdict "a momentous development" but noted it's just "one step in a much longer saga" and that he doesn't expect to see large changes to the platforms immediately.

"I don't think it is an unequivocal victory and I think there's a long way to go before you see something akin to the master settlement that this is often analogized to in the tobacco and opioid litigation," he said. To get to that kind of significant change in the platforms' operation, Ormerod said Meta and YouTube would likely have to lose their legal arguments on appeal and additional bellwether trials, or test cases, like this one would have to go against them.

Both Meta and YouTube were negligent, jury says, but Meta bears more responsibility

The jury determined that Meta and YouTube were negligent in the design or operation of their respective platforms, and that the negligence was a substantial factor in causing harm to the plaintiff.

They also determined each company knew their platforms could be dangerous when used by a minor, and agreed that they failed to adequately warn of that danger, further contributing to the plaintiff's harm.

Only nine of the 12 jurors had to agree on each claim against each defendant. Two jurors consistently disagreed with the other 10 on whether the companies should be held liable, but a majority of the jury agreed on all seven claims against each company.

The jurors also decided Meta held more responsibility for harm to KGM, or Kaley, as her lawyers called her during the trial. The jury said Meta shouldered 70% of the responsibility while YouTube bore the remaining 30%. That division was reflected in the breakdown of the \$3 million in punitive damages, with the jury deciding on \$2.1 million from Meta and \$900,000 from YouTube.

Meta and YouTube were the two remaining defendants in the case. TikTok and Snap settled before the trial began.

One juror, who did not feel comfortable sharing her full name, said to reporters outside the courtroom that Mark Zuckerberg's testimony, and how he "changed it back and forth," did not "sit well" with the jury.

She also said they landed on the \$6 million in damages even though some jurors were advocating for

a higher amount because they were concerned about giving the sole plaintiff a larger lump sum all at once. But the jury still wanted the companies to understand they felt their practices were not acceptable.

"We wanted them to feel it," she said.

The plaintiff was on social media all day from the age of 6

Jurors listened to about a month of lawyers' arguments, testimony and evidence, and they heard from Kaley, as well as Meta leaders Zuckerberg and Adam Mosseri. YouTube's CEO, Neal Mohan, was not called to testify.

Kaley said she began using YouTube at age 6 and Instagram at age 9. She told the jury she was on social media "all day long" as a child.

Lawyers representing Kaley, led by Mark Lanier, were tasked with proving that the respective defendants' negligence was a substantial factor in causing Kaley's harm. They pointed to specific design features they said are designed to "hook" young users, like the "infinite" nature of feeds that allowed for an endless supply of content, autoplay features, and notifications.

The jurors were told not to take into account the content of the posts and videos Kaley viewed because tech companies are shielded from legal responsibility for posted content, based on Section 230 of the 1996 Communications Decency Act.

Social media identified as substantial factor in causing harm

Meta argued that Kaley's mental health struggles were not connected to her social media use and pointed to her turbulent home life. Meta also said "not one of her therapists identified social media as the cause" of her mental health issues. But the plaintiffs did not have to prove that social media caused Kaley's struggles — only that it was a "substantial factor" in causing her harm.

YouTube focused more on the nature of the platform, arguing that it's a video platform akin to television rather than a social media platform. The company also mentioned her declining YouTube use as she aged. According to their data, she spent about one minute a day on average watching YouTube Shorts since its inception. YouTube Shorts, which launched in 2020, delivers short-form, vertical videos with the "infinite scroll" feature that plaintiffs argued was addictive.

Lawyers representing both platforms also pointed to their safety features and guardrails for users to monitor and customize their use.

The California case could influence others

The Los Angeles case was filed by a single plaintiff against Meta, YouTube, TikTok and Snap. After the latter two settled, her lawyers argued that Meta and YouTube were addictive by design, and that they especially target young users.

"The reason why this case is consequential is not the individual case, but the way that it's a bellwether test case that might guide the resolution of other lawsuits," said Sarah Kreps, a professor and director of Cornell University's Tech Policy Institute.

"There are thousands pending, and hundreds in California. So the concern if you're a social media platform is, as this case goes, so might these others," she said. "I think the reason why they would be concerned, and I've seen this analogy with the tobacco lawsuits, is that once you have this type of verdict in one case, it just opens the floodgates for so many more."

Jury finds Instagram and YouTube liable in a landmark social media addiction trial

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Mangled plane in LaGuardia crash is towed from runway as most injured passengers leave hospital

By TED SHAFFREY and JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — All but four of the passengers injured in Sunday's deadly collision between an Air Canada plane and a fire truck have been released from the hospital, the airline said Wednesday, as crews began moving the mangled aircraft off the runway at New York's LaGuardia Airport.

The crash, which remains under investigation, killed two pilots. Roughly 40 people were treated at area hospitals for a range of injuries, some serious. Further details on the four people who remained hospitalized were not immediately available.

The plane, which originated in Montreal, was carrying 76 people, including the crew, when it slammed into the fire truck that had driven out onto the runway. Seconds before the collision, an air traffic controller had cleared the truck to cross the runway.

Since Monday, much of the wreckage had remained on the tarmac, blocking access to one of two runways at one of the country's busiest airports.

Just before 5 p.m. on Wednesday, airport workers began towing the remnants away. Two big tow trucks working in tandem also righted the badly damaged fire truck, which had been laying on its side since the crash.

The jet's tail end was lifted onto a large dolly, which was then towed via long tethers by two vehicles driving side by side. Earlier in the day, much of the wreckage of the nose, which was obliterated in the collision, was cut away by work crews. As it was towed, the middle of the plane was supported by its own landing gear, which appeared to be intact.

In a statement, Air Canada said the plane would be taken to a hangar. The airline said it would soon

begin the process of reuniting people with baggage and personal belongings.

After the collision, many onboard managed to escape the damaged aircraft, including a flight attendant who survived after being thrown onto the tarmac while still strapped in her seat.

The two pilots have been identified as Mackenzie Gunther and Antoine Forest. At least one passenger, Clément Lelièvre, credited their "incredible reflexes" in saving his life and those of others, noting they braked extremely hard just as the plane touched down.

The two Port Authority Police Department firefighters in the truck survived.

What to know about the safety system that failed to prevent the deadly runway collision at LaGuardia

By JOSH FUNK AP Transportation Writer

The systems in place at New York's LaGuardia Airport to prevent ground collisions failed to keep an Air Canada jet from smashing into a fire truck that had just pulled out on the runway as the plane was landing.

The National Transportation Safety Board will determine what went wrong before Sunday's crash that killed both pilots and injured dozens of others. One of the two air traffic controllers on duty that night cleared the fire truck to cross the runway just 12 seconds before the plane carrying 76 people touched down. His frantic calls moments later for the truck to stop didn't prevent the collision.

There will almost certainly be multiple factors that contributed to the crash because the aviation system has many layers of precautions in place to help reduce the risks of such an event happening. Investigators are just beginning to interview everyone involved, examine the wreckage and test everything that could have played a role. The mangled plane was being moved to a secure hangar Wednesday for further examination.

Here's what to know about the surface surveillance system that's supposed to help controllers keep track of planes and vehicles on the ground and the warning lights built into taxiways and runways that are supposed to signal when a plane is landing or taking off.

Surface tracking systems have prevented numerous crashes

LaGuardia is one of 35 major airports nationwide that have Airport Surface Detection Systems known as ASDE-X that combine radar data with information from transponders inside planes and ground vehicles along with other data to create a display in the tower showing controllers where every plane and vehicle is. The system will also sound an alarm in the tower when it anticipates a potential collision.

Just last fall the NTSB credited that warning system with preventing a private jet from running into a Southwest Airlines plane on a runway in San Diego in August 2023. That alarm got the attention of the controllers in time to keep the planes from colliding even though they came within 100 feet of each other.

The system also was credited with keeping a JetBlue plane from hitting another plane crossing a runway in Boston in 2023, and it has been praised in numerous other NTSB reports over the decades since it was created in the late 1990s. A predecessor system dates back to the 1980s.

The deadliest aviation tragedy ever happened when two Boeing 747s ran into each other on a runway in Tenerife, Spain, in 1977, killing 583 people. In 1991, nearly three dozen people died when a plane that was landing hit another plane preparing to take off on a runway at Los Angeles International Airport.

Only the busiest U.S. airports have received the costly ASDE system, but the Federal Aviation Administration is in the process of installing a lower-cost version at 200 other airports over the next few years. That system is already in place at 54 airports and is one of a number of measures the FAA has taken as part of its goal to eliminate runway incursions and collisions.

But NTSB Chairwoman Jennifer Homendy said the ASDE system failed to sound an alarm at LaGuardia before the crash Sunday because it had trouble predicting it.

Fire truck lacked a transponder that would have sent more data

One concern Homendy raised is that the fire truck and other emergency vehicles at LaGuardia lack transponders that would provide more precise information to the system that controllers rely upon. She

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said some other airports do have those transponders in their vehicles.

The FAA has encouraged airports to install those transmitters and offered to help pay for them, but the agency said it doesn't have any details about how common they are. Even without a transmitter, the ASDE system still tracks every vehicle crossing the airport with radar.

Homendy said the number of emergency vehicles parked on the taxiway Sunday — they were en route to help a United Airlines plane that had reported a strange odor making flight attendants feel ill — made it difficult for the system to predict a potential collision.

Rick Castaldo, who helped design and install the ASDE systems during his career at FAA before he retired, said the system is better at predicting potential collisions when vehicles or planes are moving. Its computer can't predict what a stopped vehicle is going to do, and the fire truck didn't start to cross the runway Sunday until after getting approval from the controller 20 seconds before the crash.

So even if the system had sounded an alarm, it may not have come much sooner than when the controller called out, "Stop, stop, stop, Truck 1. Stop, stop, stop. Stop, Truck 1," nine seconds before the crash.

Castaldo said that early on in the system's development officials were concerned about too many nuisance alarms that might have led controllers to ignore warnings, so "they dumbed down the alerts so that you get them just in time to look up and see the accident."

Runway warning lights signal when not to cross

Even though the controller cleared the fire truck to cross the runway, lights embedded in the pavement of the taxiway should have lit up red to warn the driver that the Air Canada plane was coming into land. Aviation safety expert Jeff Guzzetti said that the driver "should have known not to cross, even if the controller told them to cross, because the runway status lights were red -- flashing red."

But the fire truck driver and the controller were also both likely distracted at that moment by the emergency call from the other plane. Mike O'Donnell, who oversaw airport safety programs and accident investigations for much of his 17 years at FAA, said the radios in the truck likely would have been blaring with communications with the New York Fire Department as the first responders tried to quickly reach the United plane.

Homendy said that it appears the runway lights were working although investigators will have to examine and test them to verify that. The lights rely on data from the ASDE system to indicate when planes are landing or taking off on a runway, and they are in place at 20 airports.

O'Donnell said none of these systems are designed to be absolute. He said each one of these systems, along with other safety precautions, are designed to reduce the risk of a crash — but no single thing will prevent every disaster.

"It's just one of several layers that are designed to reduce the risk of incursions," said O'Donnell, who is now president of his own consulting company. "It's a broader framework. There's other things. There's procedures. There's communication. There's decision-making. All those other layers are there as well."

TSA boss warns of airport shutdowns, but no deal yet on day 40 of Homeland Security funding fight

By LISA MASCARO and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Transportation Security Administration may have to shut down operations at some airports if the budget impasse drags on, the agency's acting head said Wednesday, even as record wait time for travelers did little to end the standoff over the funding fight in Congress.

The TSA's Ha Nguyen McNeill described the mounting hardships facing unpaid airport workers — piling up bills and eviction notices, even plasma donations to make ends meet — and warned that lawmakers must ensure "this never happens again."

"This is a dire situation," she testified at a House hearing, warning of potential airport closures. "At this point, we have to look at all options on the table. And that does require us to, at some point, make very difficult choices as to which airports we might try to keep open and which ones we might have to shut

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down as our callout rates increase.”

Yet on the 40th day of the standoff involving the Department of Homeland Security, there was no easy way out in sight. Neither Republican senators, who made the latest offer, nor Democrats, who countered by reiterating their demands for changes to President Donald Trump’s immigration enforcement operations, appeared closer to a compromise.

Trump, who initially appeared to have given his nod to the deal, has declined to lend it his full support or put his political weight behind making sure it is approved.

Top officials at agencies under the DHS umbrella spoke for more than three-hours before the House Homeland Security Committee about the potential risks of security lapses unless the partial government shutdown comes to an end.

A deal teeters on collapse

DHS has gone without routine funding since mid-February. Democrats are insisting on changes to the Trump administration’s immigration enforcement and mass deportation operations after the killings of two U.S. citizens in Minneapolis by federal officers during protests.

The latest GOP proposal would fund most of DHS except for the enforcement and removal operations of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement that have been central to the debate. The plan would provide money for other aspects of ICE as well as Customs and Border Protection.

While the offer added some new restraints on immigration officers, including the use of body cameras, it excluded other policies that Democrats have demanded, such as requirements that federal agents wear identification and refrain from conducting raids around schools, churches or other sensitive places.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York said they needed to see real changes. “We’ve been talking about ICE reforms from day one,” he said.

Republican leaders said Democrats are putting the country at risk.

“They know this is crazy,” said House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La.

But conservative Republicans also panned the proposal, demanding full funding for immigration operations and skeptical of the promise from GOP leaders that they would address Trump’s proof-of-citizenship voting bill in a subsequent legislative package.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune said late Wednesday that if Democrats put a “more realistic offer on the table, we’ll be back in business.”

Airport lines grow as TSA workers endure hardships

McNeill, the acting TSA administrator, told lawmakers that multiple airports are experiencing greater than 40% callout rates and more than 480 transportation security officers have now quit during the shutdown.

She cited the growing financial strain on the TSA workforce.

“Some are sleeping in their cars, selling their blood and plasma, and taking on second jobs to make ends meet, all while being expected to perform at the highest level when in uniform to protect the traveling public,” she said.

McNeil also said TSA officers working at the nation’s airports have experienced a more than 500% increase in the frequency of assaults since the shutdown began.

“This is unacceptable and it will not be tolerated,” McNeill said.

The top executive overseeing Houston’s airport said security lines that have travelers waiting four hours or more could get longer if the political impasse was not soon settled.

Lines that twist and turn across multiple floors at George Bush Intercontinental Airport have been the result of TSA only being able to staff one-third to one-half the usual number of checkpoint lines, said Jim Szczesniak, aviation director for Houston’s airport system.

Trump’s decision to send ICE agents to the airports risks inflaming the situation, lawmakers have said. Video footage of federal officers detaining a crying woman at San Francisco International Airport drew outrage Monday from local officials, although it was unrelated to Trump’s order to deploy immigration officers.

FEMA also at risk

The Federal Emergency Management Agency’s Disaster Relief Fund is “rapidly depleting,” Victoria Barton, a FEMA external affairs official, told lawmakers.

FEMA is able to continue its disaster response and recovery work as long as that fund has money, and about 10,000 of its disaster workers continue being paid through it.

Stocks rise and oil prices ease as Wall Street keeps yo-yoing because of the war with Iran

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Hopes for a possible end to the war with Iran pushed stocks higher on Wall Street Wednesday, while oil prices eased.

The S&P 500 rose 0.5% in its latest flip - flop after the United States delivered a plan to pause the war to Iran. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 305 points, or 0.7%, and the Nasdaq composite gained 0.8%.

But the moves were shaky, and the S&P 500 briefly came close to erasing all of its jump, which maxed out at 1.2% during the morning. Financial markets have swung sharply since the war began more than three weeks ago, and many of the reversals have struck hour to hour as uncertainty continues to dominate about how long the war will last.

Keeping up that uncertainty on Wednesday: Iran's foreign minister, Abbas Araghchi, said in an interview with Iranian state TV that his government has not engaged in talks to end the war, "and we do not plan on any negotiations."

Iran also launched more attacks on Israel and Gulf Arab countries, including an assault that sparked a huge fire at Kuwait International Airport, while coming under attack itself. The U.S. military deployed paratroopers and more Marines to the region.

Optimism, though, was nevertheless evident in financial markets worldwide. Stock indexes climbed more than 1% in London, Paris and Shanghai. Tokyo's Nikkei 225 leaped 2.9%.

The price for a barrel of Brent crude delivered in June fell 3% to settle at \$97.26. Hopes rose that a cooldown in fighting could allow oil and natural gas to flow more freely from the Persian Gulf to customers worldwide. Many oil tankers are currently stuck outside the Strait of Hormuz off Iran's coast, and the blockage has sent Brent crude's price to nearly \$120 per barrel at times.

In the bond market, Treasury yields also eased. That could help soften the rise in rates for mortgages and other kinds of borrowing since the beginning of the war. That in turn could lessen the pressure on the economy.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury fell to 4.32% from 4.39% late Tuesday, though it remains well above its 3.97% level from just before the war.

Even gold, which has been one of the investment world's worst losers through the war, rose. It climbed 3.4% to settle at \$4,552.30 per ounce.

Gold's price had briefly gotten near \$5,400 early this month. That was before Treasury yields rushed higher on worries that high oil prices would drive inflation upward and prevent the Federal Reserve from cutting interest rates. When bonds are paying more in interest, they make gold, which pays its investors nothing, less attractive in comparison.

On Wall Street, Arm Holdings soared 16.4% after the U.K. company announced a suite of chips for data centers and artificial-intelligence technology.

Robinhood Markets rallied 5% to help lead U.S. stocks after its board authorized a program to send up to \$1.5 billion to shareholders by buying back the company's stock.

Terns Pharmaceuticals rose 5.7% after Merck said it would buy the oncology company in an all-cash deal valuing it at \$6.7 billion. Merck rose 2.6%.

On the losing end of Wall Street was On Holding. The Swiss company that sells On shoes slumped 11.2% after saying its chief executive officer, Martin Hoffmann, is stepping down.

In Hong Kong, Pop Mart International Group tumbled 22.5% after the company behind the popular Labubu dolls reported explosive growth in profit and revenue, but not enough to meet analysts' expectations.

The stock prices for the parent companies of YouTube and Instagram held relatively steady after a jury found them liable in a first-of-its-kind lawsuit that aimed to hold social media platforms responsible for harm to children using their services. Alphabet added 0.2%, and Meta Platforms rose 0.3%.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 35.53 points to 6,591.90. The Dow Jones Industrial Average gained 305.43 to 46,429.49, and the Nasdaq composite climbed 167.93 to 21,929.83.

Savannah Guthrie in NBC News interview appeals for help finding her missing mother

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

A tearful Savannah Guthrie, in her first interview since her 84-year-old mother was apparently abducted from her Arizona home, said that "someone needs to do the right thing" and come forward with information to help the investigation.

"We are in agony," she told NBC News colleague Hoda Kotb in a portion of the interview aired Wednesday on the "Today" show. She said she wakes up in the middle of each night thinking of what her mother went through.

NBC said Wednesday that a full interview with its "Today" show host will air on the program Thursday and Friday. It is Guthrie's first interview since her mother was reported missing on Feb. 1. Based on security footage, authorities believe Nancy Guthrie was kidnapped or otherwise taken against her will.

Both Guthrie and Kotb were crying during the brief portion of the interview aired on Wednesday. Kotb, Guthrie's former co-host, has returned to "Today" while her former colleague has been away.

Guthrie said that while it is unbearable to think of the terror her mother must have felt, "those thoughts demand to be thought. And I will not hide my face. But she needs to come home now."

Savannah Guthrie has been a co-host of NBC's morning show since 2012, and is expected to return at some point, although no date has been set as she spends time with her family.

Despite offering a \$1 million reward for information, there has been little movement in the investigation. Guthrie's family last weekend appealed to neighbors in Arizona to search back through their memories for anything they might have seen that could help the investigation. "No detail is too small," they said.

Kotb said Wednesday that "there is a desperation and a steeliness about Savannah. She hopes that somebody, whoever that person is, will say something."

Little information about the investigation has been publicly released by authorities in recent weeks. The Pima County Sheriff's Department and FBI said Wednesday that investigators continue to examine leads.

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. A new AP-NORC poll shows about 59% of Americans think the military action in Iran is excessive. 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 event also comes a day after a Democrat flipped the Florida state legislative seat that's home to Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate.

The gathering will be a contrast to the celebratory meeting one year ago when Trump, newly returned to office, vowed to "forge a new and lasting political majority" and Elon Musk wielded a chain saw to symbolize how the Republican administration was slashing the government workforce and red tape.

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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 and 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.

Hundreds of attendees from around the country and overseas formed winding lines through the corridor outside the event hall at the Gaylord Texan Resort and Convention Center Wednesday. The main program of more than 80 speakers was not scheduled to begin until Thursday.

Bright red outfits, "Trump 2028" caps and star-spangled jackets were part of the dress code. Some women dressed in traditional Iranian attire carried signs expressing support for the war in Iran.

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 his 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 that 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' 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 also 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.

TSA officers share how they're scraping by 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.

They are among about 50,000 Transportation Security Administration officers expecting 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, child care expenses and the threat of eviction keep more screeners from showing up the longer the shutdown continues. At last count, more than 480 had quit instead of weathering the ongoing uncertainty, TSA's acting administrator told lawmakers Wednesday.

"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 40th 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

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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 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."

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.

Vegas and Seattle a step closer to getting NBA teams. League's owners approve expansion exploration

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The NBA has finally decided to consider expanding past its current 30-team footprint, with the league's owners voting Wednesday to start exploring the process of adding franchises in Las Vegas and Seattle.

It was not a surprise move; expansion has been a consideration for years, and it's been clear for some time that those two cities — both with longstanding ties to the NBA — are the ones that are now a significant step closer toward joining the league.

Las Vegas, the league's summer home for years and site of the first NBA Cup championship games, has been clamoring for an NBA team since at least the late 1990s, if not even longer. And Seattle has been waiting for the SuperSonics to return for nearly two decades.

The ball is essentially now in their courts.

"I think Seattle and Las Vegas, in terms of their history and support of NBA basketball, are unique in terms of available markets in the U.S. right now," NBA Commissioner Adam Silver said. "No knock on any other markets. Those are just the markets we're focused on."

What the league's board of governors voted to approve is being called an exploration of "potential team expansion." Prospective ownership groups will now be tasked with putting together their bids and plans in an effort to prove to the league that they're worthy of owning NBA franchises.

Expansion is not guaranteed, Silver reiterated. The league could add no teams, one team or two teams. And there was discussion of what adding teams will mean both economically and on the court; stockpiling two new clubs with players means existing teams will lose some talent in that process.

"There are some owners who felt that we just frankly don't need to expand," Silver said. "They didn't necessarily seem concerned going forward, but they felt we're at a very solid place with the 30-team league we have now."

The league said investment bank PJT Partners has been brought on "as a strategic adviser to evaluate prospective markets, ownership groups, arena infrastructure, and the broader economic implications of expansion."

Governors react

Washington Gov. Bob Ferguson applauded the vote, saying "the time is right."

Seattle had an NBA team from 1967 through 2008, when the Sonics — who won the 1979 title — left to become the Oklahoma City Thunder.

Various groups have lobbied to bring the team — or a team — back ever since.

"Bringing the Sonics back is a top priority, and the state will be a strong partner in this effort," Ferguson said. "I plan to be there at tipoff with thousands of fellow fans when the Sonics return."

Las Vegas has been part of the league for decades. The NBA's Summer League is held in Las Vegas each year and has become a can't-miss event for league executives, coaches, media, agents and even players who aren't taking part in the games.

And the city used to play host to the occasional regular-season game; for example, in 1984, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar of the Los Angeles Lakers broke the league's career scoring record in a game against the Utah Jazz — who used Las Vegas for some of their home games at that time.

The idea of putting a franchise there might have seemed unlikely a couple of decades ago. Not anymore, especially not with the NFL's Raiders, the NHL's Golden Knights and the WNBA's Aces all already there and with Major League Baseball on the way.

"Today's vote by the NBA Board of Governors is a testament to the incredible growth we're seeing in Southern Nevada and our state's business-friendly environment," Nevada Gov. Joe Lombardo said. "Las Vegas have already shown unwavering support for our professional sports franchises, and a new NBA

team will provide even more entertainment, more jobs, and more small business growth for the region.”

What’s next

Now that this step is complete, there are many issues to decide. A partial list:

— The expansion fee, which is expected to be at least \$6 billion.
— The timeline for adding the clubs. It seems like the 2028-29 season would almost certainly be the earliest that could happen.

— The ripple effect. If both Las Vegas and Seattle get teams, they would certainly be in the Western Conference. To avoid having 17 teams in one conference and 15 in the other, the league would look to move a current West team into the Eastern Conference. Geographically, New Orleans, Memphis or Minnesota would be the most logical candidates to move into the East.

Players, coaches react

New Orleans guard Dejounte Murray was 11 years old when Seattle last had an NBA team. He grew up with hopes of being like Gary Payton, Ray Allen and Shawn Kemp, and even remembers a rookie who played for the SuperSonics named Kevin Durant.

“It’s a basketball city, basketball culture, so it’s mandatory I think that they get it back over there,” said Murray, a Seattle native.

Added Orlando’s Paolo Banchemo, another Seattle native: “I think it’s been a long time coming for the city. I think everybody was pretty bummed out when they left. And since then, it’s just been waiting and hoping that one day they will come back. I’m sure with the news, everybody’s excited. I know I’m excited for all the kids growing up because Seattle’s a really big basketball city.”

Golden State coach Steve Kerr said the SuperSonics were “one of the iconic franchises in the NBA.”

“I was shocked when the league left Seattle,” Kerr said. “Incredible fan base. Great basketball market. A ton of talent coming from Seattle. Top 10 media market. Incredible sports city. So, it was kind of shocking to all of us when the league left Seattle. And I think we all hoped it would be a lot sooner than 18, 19 years, whatever it’s going to be, before they got back in the league.

“They belong in that city, and a team belongs there,” he added. “Those fans deserve it.”

New studies of old dogs help scientists understand where they came from

By ADITHI RAMAKRISHNAN AP Science Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Using the oldest dog genes studied so far, scientists are finding more evidence that our furry friends have been our companions for thousands of years.

Scientists think dogs descended from an ancient population of gray wolves somewhere in Europe or Asia. Tens of thousands of years ago, those wolves got used to living with people and became less aggressive. As they became domesticated, their genes shifted along with their behavior, giving rise to the pups we know today.

But exactly when and where this happened remains a mystery. Scientists are studying bits of DNA found in ancient dog and wolf remains to figure out what the earliest dogs may have looked like and where they came from.

In two separate studies published Wednesday in the journal *Nature*, researchers pushed the timeline back. They established a new way to study ancient canine DNA — which is often contaminated and tough to extract — by isolating just the doggy bits.

They examined ancient genes from the remains of over 200 dogs and wolves. The oldest dated back to about 15,800 years ago, moving the origin of dogs back by at least 5,000 years.

“This unique relationship between people and dogs has existed for such a long time and is continuing on today,” said University of Michigan dog genomics expert Jeffrey Kidd, who was not involved with the new research.

The genes showed that dogs were already spread out across Western Europe and Asia 14,200 years ago, at a time before agriculture and farming. These dogs lived with hunter-gatherer humans who were

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constantly on the move.

The dawn of agriculture — a major shift in human history — brought new people to Europe from southwest Asia. They mixed and mingled with Europeans, leaving a lasting and varied imprint on their genes.

But the dog genes studied by the scientists, stretching from the United Kingdom all the way to Turkey, stayed more consistent. They were less impacted by the arrival of new humans during the development of agriculture, and more by interactions between different hunter-gatherer groups and their dogs thousands of years before.

That's different from dogs in Asia and the Americas, whose genes more closely reflect the movement patterns of their owners.

Scientists don't know exactly what the first dogs looked like, but they have some ideas.

"We're suspecting they would have resembled smaller wolves," said study co-author Lachie Scarsbrook with the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich.

It's also not clear how these ancient dogs lived alongside their humans. They could have stood guard or helped them hunt, but probably also played with young children.

There's still more work to go to pinpoint exactly when dogs emerged — the first few pages of a storied relationship that's still going strong.

"They are humanity's best friend, alongside our societies for the last 16,000 years and will continue to in the future," Scarsbrook said.

Trump will travel to Beijing for rescheduled China trip May 14-15, after delay due to Iran war

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump will travel to Beijing for a rescheduled summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping on May 14 and 15, the White House announced on Wednesday.

Trump had been scheduled to travel to China later this month but previously announced he was delaying the trip so he could be in Washington to help steward the U.S. and Israeli war against Iran. The Republican president had announced a rescheduled trip even though the war in Iran continues and the U.S. is pressing Tehran to accept a ceasefire proposal.

The president and first lady Melania Trump also plan to host Xi and his wife, Peng Liyuan, for a White House visit later this year, press secretary Karoline Leavitt said.

Leavitt, when asked if the new dates for Trump's trip could suggest he believes the Iran war could end soon, offered an optimistic tone that the conflict could reach an endgame before he travels.

"We've always estimated four to six weeks," Leavitt responded. "So you could do the math on that."

The United States and Israel launched the attacks against Iran on Feb. 28.

The China trip had been planned for months but began to unravel as Trump pressured Beijing and other world powers to use their military might to protect the Strait of Hormuz, a critical waterway for the flow of oil. The strait has been effectively closed as Iran targets energy infrastructure and traffic through it.

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

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

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

Brazil's Bolsonaro to be discharged from hospital to return to house arrest

SAO PAULO (AP) — Former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro will be discharged from hospital on Friday to return home and continue serving his 27-year sentence for a coup attempt, his doctor said.

Dr. Brasil Caiado told journalists in the capital Brasilia on Wednesday that Bolsonaro's health status is stable and he can return to house imprisonment unless new circumstances emerge.

The 71-year-old 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 being elected president.

On Tuesday, Brazilian Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes allowed Bolsonaro return to his residence due to his poor health after his discharge 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.

What could come next for other social media firms as a jury finds Meta platforms harm children

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

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it knew 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 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.

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

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

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 six people were killed and around 50 people were injured, Ukrainian authorities said.

The United Nations cultural organization UNESCO on Wednesday said it was "deeply alarmed" by Russia hitting a World Heritage site in the western Ukraine city of Lviv during that bombardment.

The escalation in aerial attacks comes amid a pause in U.S.-mediated talks between delegations from Moscow and Kyiv, as Washington's attention is diverted by the Iran war and as Ukraine anticipates a spring offensive by Russia's bigger army.

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.

In Ukraine on Wednesday, Russian drones smashed into residential areas of the second-largest city, Kharkiv, during the afternoon, injuring at least nine people, according to mayor Ihor Terekhov.

The Ukrainian drone blitz aimed at Russia caught public attention in the Baltic states, which lie northwest of Ukraine and relatively close to potential Russian targets in the Leningrad region, which includes St. Petersburg, where drones came down.

Officials in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, which have been close allies of Ukraine in the war, said the drones likely didn't target them. Estonia and Latvia said the drones were Ukrainian, and Lithuania said the drone was a "stray," without saying who launched it.

Estonian media reported that a drone coming from Russia clipped a power plant's chimney early Wednesday but said electricity production was not disrupted. The plant is around 50 kilometers (31 miles) from the port of Ust-Luga that Ukraine targeted.

Also Wednesday, the Latvian defense ministry said a drone had crashed in a region close to Russia. No injuries or damage were reported.

In Moldova, on Ukraine's southwest border, authorities on Tuesday urged citizens to spare electrical energy during peak hours, after Russian strikes on Ukraine's energy grid cut a key power line between Moldova and Romania.

Means' surgeon general nomination is stalled as senators question her experience and vaccine stance

By ALI SWENSON Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Wellness influencer Dr. Casey Means' nomination to be U.S. surgeon general is stalled a month after senators of both major political parties grilled her on vaccines and other health topics during a tense confirmation hearing, deepening doubts about her ability to secure the votes she needs for the role.

The nomination has languished despite ongoing efforts from the White House and Make America Healthy Again activists, revealing how intractable rifts over health policy can be even when Congress has shown deference to President Donald Trump. It's become the latest snag in Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s agenda after two legal setbacks last week.

Means, a 38-year-old Stanford-educated physician who became disillusioned with traditional medicine and did not finish her surgical residency program, has faced scrutiny for her lack of experience and potential conflicts. Another sticking point has been her close alignment with Kennedy, whose efforts to dramatically pull back vaccine recommendations have been slammed by lawmakers and medical groups.

To advance to a full Senate vote, Means likely needs every Republican on the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee to support her nomination. But after last month's hearing, two of them — Sens. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Susan Collins of Maine — told reporters they still had questions for her.

Murkowski told reporters Tuesday that "I'm just in the same spot" when it comes to those hesitations. Collins and Republican committee chairman Sen. Bill Cassidy, a physician from Louisiana who interrogated Means about vaccines during the hearing, didn't respond to multiple inquiries about the delay.

White House spokesman Kush Desai said in a statement that the Trump administration has been having "productive conversations with the Senate" to advance Means. He added that her "elite academic credentials, research background and advocacy on America's chronic disease epidemic will make her a critical asset for President Trump's push to Make America Healthy Again."

Kennedy spokesman Andrew Nixon reinforced the Republican administration's support for Means and praised her message calling for healthier lifestyle choices rather than "sick care."

Contentious hearing set the stage for a tough path to confirmation

Means promotes ideas popular with the MAHA movement, including that Americans are overmedicalized and that diet and lifestyle changes should be at the center of efforts to end widespread chronic disease.

But she's been criticized for having an inactive medical license, for sometimes failing to disclose financial relationships with brands she promotes and for some of her past health-related comments.

Senators asked her during her hearing about how she would speak to the public about vaccines.

Murkowski and Cassidy pressed Means about her past doubts about the birth dose of the hepatitis B vaccine, which the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention stopped recommending for all children late last year in a move later temporarily blocked by a federal judge. Means called the hepatitis B vaccine important and lifesaving but said parents should make their own decisions with their doctors.

Cassidy also asked Means whether she would advise Americans to vaccinate against the flu and measles amid outbreaks across the country. She didn't make that commitment, instead emphasizing the importance of informed consent.

Collins asked Means about her past advocacy for the therapeutic use of psychedelic mushrooms. Means, who has spoken positively of her own experience with the drugs, said she wouldn't recommend psychedelics for the American public.

Kennedy's supporters put pressure on hesitant senators

Once it appeared Murkowski and Collins were undecided, MAHA activists orchestrated a push to support Means' bid by surging phone calls to the two senators.

"Please call both of them. Call them time after time. Get your friends to call them," Tony Lyons, head of the Kennedy-aligned group MAHA Action, told supporters earlier this month.

Others have loudly opposed Means' nomination. Dr. Jerome Adams, Trump's first-term surgeon general, has repeatedly called her unqualified for her lack of an active medical license. He said in an interview that Republicans in Congress and in the Trump administration have told him they disapprove of the pick but see it as Kennedy's choice.

"What I keep hearing from folks is, 'This is what Bobby wants,'" he said.

While surgeons general aren't mandated by law to have an active medical license, they are required to be part of the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps, a group of health professionals that says members should have up-to-date licenses.

Means said during her confirmation hearing that she had voluntarily made her Oregon medical license inactive, and that Adm. Brian Christine, who runs the Commissioned Corps, had testified that she was eligible to serve.

Even if Means advances out of committee, she might have difficulty securing confirmation by the full 100-member Senate. Republican Sen. Thom Tillis of North Carolina, who isn't seeking another term, told The Associated Press that he's leaning against voting for Means.

"Her resume already puts me on alert — and then I don't think she did herself any favors in the hearing," Tillis said.

Means' confirmation delay is unusually long

At nearly 300 days since her nomination in May, Means' confirmation process has taken almost twice as long as the average presidential pick in Trump's second term, according to data from the nonprofit Partnership for Public Service. The group found that in the first 400 days, the average time between nomination and confirmation for Trump's nominees was 157 days.

Sometimes the process has gone far more quickly. Markwayne Mullin, the new Department of Homeland Security secretary sworn in Tuesday, had his confirmation hearing, floor vote and swearing-in all within a weeklong period.

One reason for Means' drawn-out nomination is the birth of her son, which happened last October on the day of her initially scheduled confirmation hearing.

But Chris Piper, manager of public policy and stakeholder engagement at the Partnership for Public Service, said the length of time that has passed since Means' rescheduled confirmation hearing also is unusual. He said candidates are often voted out of committee within a week of their hearing.

"A monthlong delay following a hearing is atypical for most nominations, particularly at this level of position," he said.

Most Americans say US military action against Iran has gone too far, a new AP-NORC poll finds

By LINLEY SANDERS and MICHAEL CATALINI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Most Americans believe recent U.S. military action against Iran has gone too far, and many are worried about affording gasoline, according to a new AP-NORC poll.

As the war launched by the U.S. and Israel continues in its fourth week, the survey from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research indicates that while President Donald Trump's approval rating is holding steady, the conflict could be swiftly turning into a major political liability for his Republican administration.

While Trump is deploying more warships and troops to the Middle East, about 59% of Americans say U.S. military action in Iran has been excessive.

Meanwhile, 45% are "extremely" or "very" concerned about being able to afford gas in the next few months, up from 30% in an AP-NORC poll conducted shortly after Trump won reelection with promises that he would improve the economy and lower the cost of living.

There is significant support for at least one of the president's objectives, which is preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. About two-thirds of Americans say that should be an "extremely" or "very"

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important foreign policy goal for the U.S. However, they are just as likely to say it's important to keep U.S. oil and gas prices from rising — a juxtaposition that could be difficult for the White House to manage.

About 4 in 10 U.S. adults continue to approve of Trump's performance as president, which is unchanged from last month. His approval on foreign policy, while slightly lower than his overall approval, also largely held steady.

Trump has left unclear his next steps on Iran. Despite escalating threats, he's also suggested diplomatic talks could resolve the fighting. Americans remain broadly apprehensive about Trump's ability to make the right decisions on the use of military force outside the U.S., and they mostly oppose more aggressive steps, such as deploying ground forces.

Republicans and Democrats prioritize keeping gas prices low

Keeping the price at the pump down is the rare goal that unites Americans in both major political parties.

About three-quarters of Republicans and about two-thirds of Democrats say it's highly important to prevent U.S. oil and gas prices from going up.

However, concern about the current situation isn't evenly felt. Only about 3 in 10 Republicans said they're "extremely" or "very" worried about affording gas in the next few months, as opposed to about 6 in 10 Democrats.

Trump's focus on Iran's nuclear program also appears more compelling to Republicans than to Democrats. About two-thirds of Americans say the U.S. should prioritize keeping Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, but about 8 in 10 Republicans say this is at least "very" important, compared with about half of Democrats.

The war has exacerbated political debates over the role that Israel should play in U.S. foreign policy, especially since Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was a leading voice for attacking Iran. Only about 4 in 10 U.S. adults say preventing Iran from threatening Israel should be a high priority.

Toppling Iran's leaders is viewed as slightly less important. Only about 3 in 10 say it's at least "very" important for the U.S. to replace Iran's government with one that's friendlier to U.S. interests.

Most Americans say US action has gone too far in Iran

As Trump provides mixed messages on whether the Iran war will end soon, about 9 in 10 Democrats and about 6 in 10 independents say the Iran attacks have "gone too far."

Republicans are more divided. About half of Republicans say the U.S. military action has been "about right," but relatively few want to see it go further. Only about 2 in 10 Republicans say the U.S. military action has not gone far enough, while about one-quarter say it's gone too far.

Recent AP-NORC polling has found that about 6 in 10 Americans say Trump has "gone too far" on a range of issues, including his approach to tariffs and presidential power. That number, which is broadly reflective of his overall approval, signals that while Trump's actions in Iran are unpopular, it's still comparable to other controversial moves he's taken as president.

Further entrenching the U.S. in the war could change that, depending on what happens next. About 6 in 10 Americans "somewhat" or "strongly" oppose deploying U.S. troops on the ground to fight Iran, including about 8 in 10 Democrats and roughly half of Republicans. Just under half of Americans oppose airstrikes targeting Iranian leaders and airstrikes against military targets in Iran, while about 3 in 10 are in favor and about 3 in 10 don't have an opinion.

Many Americans distrust Trump on use of military force abroad

About half of U.S. adults have "only a little" trust or "none at all" in Trump when it comes to making the right decisions about the use of military force outside the U.S., in line with an AP-NORC poll from February.

About 34% of U.S. adults approve of the way Trump is handling foreign policy, similar to 36% in February. That measure has been consistent in recent months despite a cascade of actions, including confrontations over Greenland and an attack on Venezuela, that have generated controversy at home and abroad.

It's also very similar to Trump's approval on Iran in the new poll, which found that 35% of Americans have a positive view of his handling of that issue.

Denmark's 'kingmaker' could decide who will lead its next government after inconclusive election

By KOSTYA MANENKOV, STEFANIE DAZIO and JAMES BROOKS Associated Press

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — Denmark's foreign minister and his centrist party are expected to decide who will lead the Scandinavian country's next government after Tuesday's parliamentary elections ended without a clear majority for any party or bloc.

Center-left Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen could survive for a third term, despite a disappointing result. But she will need to negotiate a deal with the kingmaker, Foreign Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen, if she is to lead a new coalition.

"The Danes have spoken. They have given us a playing field that, to put it mildly, is a bit tricky to handle when it comes to forming a government," Frederiksen said Wednesday. "But a government must be formed. The world out there doesn't wait for us, and it has only become even more unsettled than when the election was called."

The campaign focused on bread-and-butter issues rather than the crisis over U.S. President Donald Trump's ambitions toward Greenland.

The outgoing government resigned Wednesday. Leaders from each party debated their positions in a roundtable setting and met with Danish King Frederik X to discuss the country's future.

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 in a country of 6 million people. Nearly 84% of the electorate cast their ballots.

Here's what to know:

No party won a majority

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

No single party won a majority in parliament, which was expected. 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, and she said she is ready to stay on as prime minister for a third term. Her Social Democrats remained the biggest single party by some distance 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 the Social Democrats again.

Still, Danish election expert Rune Stubager believes Frederiksen will survive as prime minister.

"Whether it will be in a new centrist coalition or a government based mostly on votes from the red bloc, that is up to the negotiations," Stubager, who co-heads the Danish National Election Study, said Wednesday.

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.

The 'kingmaker' decides the next steps

Because neither the left-leaning nor right-leaning blocs won a majority, Løkke Rasmussen is now 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. It takes 90 seats to form a majority.

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."

Neither of the blocs are able to form a majority without the support of the Moderates, making them the only real winner of the election.

"I offered the other day — and it remains our position — to take responsibility for sitting down with par-

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ties on both sides of the political center line to see whether a political platform can be created, on which a government agreement could then subsequently be established," Løkke Rasmussen said Wednesday.

Stubager said they should be able to force concessions from each party's campaign promises to reach their goal — a centrist government.

"As far as I can see it, it's not possible to form a government if all these tripwires are intact," Stubager said. "So somebody will have to go back on a promise in order for there to be a government."

Greenland gave the foreign minister a stage

Part of the Moderates' success can be attributed to Trump and Greenland, Stubager said. Late last year, the party was polling poorly, but then got a major bump from Løkke Rasmussen, the government's foreign minister, through his diplomatic work to calm the tensions with the U.S. that included a headline-grabbing trip to Washington.

"Donald Trump put up a stage on which Lars Løkke could perform, and he performed well in the eyes of most Danes," Stubager said.

Frederiksen also was banking on Greenland. Her own polls earlier this year showed an increase in support, prompting her to call the election in February — several months before she had to. She apparently hoped that her resolute image in the standoff would help her with voters.

The early election was not necessarily a failed gamble, as the Social Democrats' support had been lower before the crisis spiked.

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.

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, and the U.S., Denmark and Greenland started technical talks on an Arctic security deal. The discussions are ongoing.

Today in History: March 26, Francis Scott Key Bridge collapse in Baltimore

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, March 26, the 85th day of 2026. There are 280 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On March 26, 2024, Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge collapsed after being struck by a container ship, killing six maintenance workers on the bridge. (Maryland officials have announced plans to replace the bridge by late 2030.)

Also on this date:

In 1812, an earthquake devastated Caracas, Venezuela, causing as many as 30,000 deaths. (The U.S. Congress later approved \$50,000 in food aid to be sent to Venezuela — the first example of American disaster assistance abroad.)

In 1917, the Seattle Metropolitans became the first U.S. ice hockey team to win the Stanley Cup, defeating the Montreal Canadiens 9-1 to win the championship series, three games to one.

In 1945, U.S. forces declared victory in the Battle of Iwo Jima against the Japanese Imperial Army. (U.S. Marines and Navy personnel suffered roughly 27,000 casualties and Japanese forces more than 18,000 in the 36-day battle.)

In 1979, a peace treaty was signed by Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and witnessed by President Jimmy Carter at the White House.

In 1992, a judge in Indianapolis sentenced former heavyweight boxing champion Mike Tyson to six years in prison for a rape conviction. (Tyson was released in 1995.)

In 1997, the bodies of 39 members of the Heaven's Gate religious cult who had taken their own lives were found inside a rented mansion in Rancho Santa Fe, California.

In 2013, Italy's top criminal court overturned the acquittal of American Amanda Knox in the 2007 killing

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of British roommate Meredith Kercher and ordered Knox to stand trial again. (Convicted in absentia, Knox was exonerated by the Italian Supreme Court in 2015.)

In 2018, a toxicology report obtained by The Associated Press revealed that the late pop superstar Prince had "extremely high" levels of fentanyl in his body at the time of his death in April 2016.

In 2021, Dominion Voting Systems filed a \$1.6 billion defamation lawsuit against Fox News, saying the cable news giant falsely claimed that the voting company rigged the 2020 election. (Fox would eventually agree to pay Dominion \$787.5 million in one of the largest defamation settlements in U.S. history.)

Today's Birthdays: Basketball Hall of Famer Wayne Embry is 89. Former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is 86. Author Erica Jong is 84. Journalist Bob Woodward is 83. Singer Diana Ross is 82. Rock singer Steven Tyler (Aerosmith) is 78. Actor-comedian Vicki Lawrence is 77. Actor-comedian Martin Short is 76. Country singer Ronnie McDowell is 76. Country singer Charly McClain is 70. TV personality Leeza Gibbons is 69. Football Hall of Famer Marcus Allen is 66. Actor Jennifer Grey is 66. Basketball Hall of Famer John Stockton is 64. Actor Michael Imperioli is 60. Country singer Kenny Chesney is 58. Actor Leslie Mann is 54. Google co-founder Larry Page is 53. Rapper Juvenile is 51. Actor Keira Knightley is 41. Actor-comedian Ramy Youssef is 35. Actor Ella Anderson is 21.