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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

Postponed to Sunday, May 3, 4 p.m.: 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.

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.

Maduro in the Courtroom

A New York judge yesterday rejected a bid by ousted Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and first lady Cilia Flores to dismiss their drug trafficking charges over a legal fees dispute.

Maduro and Flores' attorneys claim the US is violating the couple's right to counsel by blocking the Venezuelan government from paying their legal expenses. Maduro has said he cannot personally afford his attorney of choice, Barry J. Pollack, a New York lawyer who previously represented WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange. Prosecutors countered that granting access to state funds would undermine US sanctions. While the judge decided not to dismiss the case, he is still considering whether the couple can access Venezuelan funds. If unable, they may be assigned public defenders. Maduro is awaiting trial in a jail within a jail in Brooklyn; Flores is housed separately in the same facility.

Separately, former Cuban President Raúl Castro has joined US-Cuba talks as President Donald Trump expresses interest in "taking" Cuba, a Venezuelan ally.

Olympics Transgender Ban

Transgender women will be barred from competing in women's Olympic events, starting with the 2028 Los Angeles Summer Games. Women athletes must undergo a one-time genetic test, already used in track and field, skiing, and boxing.

The International Olympic Committee announced the shift yesterday, reversing a 2004 decision that allowed transgender participation. The genetic test—via saliva, a cheek swab, or a blood sample—screens for the SRY (sex-determining region Y) gene, a DNA marker typically found on the Y chromosome that triggers male sex development in utero. The IOC cited research suggesting advantages linked to male puberty, such as strength and endurance, can persist even after puberty suppression or hormone therapy.

The change comes a year after two-time swimming gold medalist Kirsty Coventry became the IOC's first woman president in its 132-year history. To date, one openly transgender woman has competed at the Olympics: a weightlifter in 2021.

Savannah Guthrie Speaks

NBC's "Today" cohost Savannah Guthrie gave her first interview since the Feb. 1 disappearance of her mother, Nancy Guthrie. The discussion with cohost Hoda Kotb this week was split into two parts.

Guthrie detailed the moment she discovered her mom was missing, and her initial belief Nancy may have had a medical episode and was taken by paramedics to the hospital. She discussed the realization her mother had been taken by force and the guilt she feels at the prospect her mother's kidnapper could have been motivated by Savannah's own celebrity. Guthrie denounced rumors suggesting a family member may have been involved and reiterated calls for help locating her mother.

Women comprise 70% of kidnapping victims. Abductions of people over the age of 70, however, are rare, comprising 1% of the nearly 50,000 kidnappings documented in the US since last year.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

No. 9 Iowa upsets No. 4 Nebraska in NCAA Men's Sweet 16; games continue today with Duke (1) vs. St. John's (5) at 7:10 pm ET.

Women's Sweet 16 begins today with Vanderbilt (2) vs. Notre Dame (6) at 2:30 pm ET.

Comedian Bill Maher to accept the Mark Twain Prize for American Humor at the Kennedy Center on June 28, the final event before the DC venue closes for a two-year renovation.

Beatles star Paul McCartney drops new single, announces May 29 release of first album in nearly six years.

Oscars to move from Hollywood's Dolby Theatre, its home since 2002, to downtown LA's Peacock Theater in 2029.

Science & Technology

Fast, long-haul space travel inches closer to reality after scientists achieve first-ever plasma ignition in nuclear fusion rocket engine, which can create up to 1,000 times more thrust than standard engines.

Implantable device with insulin-producing cells could offer new long-term management method for type 1 diabetes; study shows cells can survive in body for at least 90 days.

Scientists capture clan of sperm whales helping a pregnant mother birth a calf, suggesting a level of social coordination similar to that seen in humans and primates.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close down (S&P 500 -1.7%, Dow -1.0%, Nasdaq -2.4%) in biggest drop across indexes since the start of the Iran war; Nasdaq enters correction territory after falling over 10% from recent peak.

Wall Street posts record \$49.2B in total bonuses, nearing \$250K per person, on average; figure is key source of New York City tax revenue.

United Airlines flight attendants reach tentative labor deal for first raise since the pandemic.

German consumer brand Henkel to buy hair-care brand Olaplex for \$1.4B.

Meta boosts investment in West Texas AI data center to \$10B, up from \$1.5B.

Politics & World Affairs

House passes third bill to fund the Department of Homeland Security; bill is stalled in Senate.

Longest line at Philadelphia airport was for cheesesteaks.

President Donald Trump says Iran let 10 ships pass through the Strait of Hormuz, pauses planned destruction of Iranian energy sites.

Israel says it killed the Iranian naval chief, responsible for blockade on oil ships.

The government of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán is accused of mass voter intimidation in film released ahead of April 12 election.

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The advertisement features a colorful illustration of a teddy bear, a baby bottle, and a stack of colorful blocks on the left, and a yellow bucket filled with cleaning supplies like a spray bottle, a broom, and a mop on the right. At the bottom, there is a small house and a red car on a road.

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Groton Prairie Mixed Bowling League Week #18 Results

Team Standings: Foxes 14, Coyotes 11, Jackelopes 10, Chipmunks 7, Cheetahs 4, Shihtzus 2
Men's High Games: Tony Waage 204, Scott Kettering 198, Vern Meyers 193 & 189
Women's High Games: Sam Bahr 172, Suzie Easthouse 169 & 167, Nancy Radke 168 & 164
Men's High Series: Vern Meyers 548, Tony Waage 516, Scott Kettering 511
Women's High Series: Suzie Easthouse 487, Sam Bahr 475, Nancy Radke 455
Fun Game: Most 7 Spares - Cheetahs with 10!

Groton Prairie Mixed Bowling League Week #19 Results

Team Standings: Jackelopes 14, Foxes 14, Coyotes 11, Chipmunks 11, Cheetahs 5, Shihtzus 5
Men's High Games: Austin Schuelke 211, Brad Larson 200, Brad Waage 193 & 191
Women's High Games: Michelle Johnson 205 & 180, Suzie Easthouse 163 & 161, Nancy Radke 158 & 156
Men's High Series: Brad Waage 553, Austin Schuelke 532, Tony Waage 507
Women's High Series: Michelle Johnson 525, Suzie Easthouse 469, Nancy Radke 425
Fun Game: Most 9 Spares - Chipmunks with 23!

Secretary of State announces guidance on new voter registration law

(Pierre, S.D.) – Secretary of State Monae Johnson issued guidance on SB 175, a new voter registration law that was signed by Governor Larry Rhoden earlier yesterday. Due to an emergency clause, SB 175 takes effect immediately.

Under the new law, individuals registering to vote in South Dakota must provide documentary proof of citizenship. For South Dakotans who are already registered to vote, no action is required to comply with any changes made by SB 175, as the law only applies to individuals registering to vote for the first time or who have been removed from the state's voter rolls.

"This bill is the result of a good legislative process. After a series of amendments, the Legislature approved SB 175 by a supermajority," said Secretary Johnson. "As the head of elections for South Dakota, I have the honor to hold our elections as an example to the nation of security and integrity."

The Secretary of State has been working with the Governor's Office, Department of Social Services, Department of Health, Department of Labor, Department of Human Services, and Department of Public Safety for the last several weeks to ensure state employees who facilitate voter registration processes are educated and can help constituents who visit those offices around the state. A memo has been issued to each agency, and the Secretary of State has also issued guidance to county auditors to help them implement the new requirement efficiently and correctly.

SB 175 requires that an individual registering to vote for the first time or who has been removed from the state's voter rolls provide documentary proof of citizenship. Proof of citizenship can be any one of the following documents:

A South Dakota driver license or nondriver identification card that was issued after July 1, 2025, and indicates citizenship status on the back of the card;

Another state's driver license or nondriver identification card that indicates the person has provided sufficient documentation to demonstrate citizenship;

A tribal identification card; or

A legible photocopy of:

A birth certificate;

A United States passport;

A consular report of birth abroad issued by the United States Department of State

A certificate of naturalization; or

Any other type of acceptable documentary evidence permitted under 42 C.F.R. § 436.407.

The law does not require individuals who are already registered to vote to provide proof of citizenship. If someone is already registered to vote but is updating their information, such as their address or political party affiliation, the law does not require them to present proof of citizenship. An individual who has changed their name, such as a newly married woman, does not need to provide proof of citizenship if they are already registered to vote.

You can check your current registration status at: <https://vip.sdsos.gov/VIPLogin.aspx>.

If you have questions, you may call or visit your local county auditor.

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Groton Area 55m high hurdlers are lead by McKenna Tietz. Followed by L-R Taegan Hanton, Emerlee Jones, and Ella Kettner. (Photo courtesy Bruce Babcock)



Ashlynn Warrington during the 800m race. (Photo courtesy Bruce Babcock)

Photos from Tuesday's Indoor Track Meet at NSU



Lincoln Krause leads his 55m sprint heat. (Photo courtesy Bruce Babcock)



Groton Area 55m sprinter standouts L-R Makenna Krause & McKenna Tietz open last Tuesday NSU Indoor High School track meet. (Photo courtesy Bruce Babcock)

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L-R Freshman Riley Shellenberger and Senior Jayden Schwan during the 1600m race.

(Photo courtesy Bruce Babcock)



Freshman Jordan Schwann rounds the curve of the 200m race. (Photo courtesy Bruce Babcock)



Ryelle Gilbert leads here 800m heat early in the race. (Photo courtesy Bruce Babcock)



Lincoln Krause rounds the final curve of the 200m race. (Photo courtesy Bruce Babcock)

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South Dakota governor signs bill into law requiring proof of citizenship for new voter registrations

BY: MEGHAN O'BRIEN

A new state law will require people to prove their citizenship when they register to vote in South Dakota state and local elections.

Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden signed the legislation Thursday. An emergency clause puts the law into effect immediately, before the June 2 primary election, rather than the usual July 1 effective date of new laws. The voter registration deadline for the primary election is May 18.

"In South Dakota, we do things right, especially when running our state elections," Rhoden said in a news release. "This bill ensures only citizens vote in state elections, keeping our elections safe and secure."

The legislation passed South Dakota's Republican-dominated Legislature earlier this year by votes of 28-6 in the Senate and 64-3 in the House.

The South Dakota Democratic Party issued a news release Thursday condemning the new law, saying it will disenfranchise people who lack access to their birth certificate or a passport.

"This is exactly what voter suppression looks like," the party said.

Samantha Chapman, the American Civil Liberties Union of South Dakota's advocacy manager, said similar laws have had a chilling effect on legal voting in other states. When lawmakers adopt such a requirement, she said, "that is a government that's actively trying to choose its own voters."

No action required for those already registered

People already registered to vote don't need to take any action. Nor do they need to provide proof of citizenship if they're updating registration information like their address or political party affiliation. Someone who has changed their name and is already registered to vote also won't need to provide proof of citizenship, according to the South Dakota Secretary of State's Office.

New voters will be required to provide documentation of their U.S. citizenship. One of the acceptable forms of documentation is a driver's license or nondriver identification card, if the card indicates the person is a citizen. Last year, South Dakota lawmakers adopted a law requiring driver's licenses to reflect citizenship status.

Other acceptable forms of citizenship documentation for voter registration are a tribal ID or a legible photocopy of a birth certificate, U.S. passport, consular report of birth abroad from the U.S. Department of State, or a certificate of naturalization. Existing law also requires South Dakotans to show identification at the polls when they vote, such as a driver's license or other approved ID.

The new law will prevent people from registering and voting on South Dakota state and local races and issues if they don't prove their citizenship. But it allows those who fail to document their citizenship to register as a "federal voter," eligible to vote only in presidential and congressional races.

Federal legislation, known as the SAVE Act, could change that. It would require voters to provide proof of citizenship to register for voting in federal elections. A version of the bill has passed the U.S. House, and the Senate is considering a version of the legislation while President Donald Trump demands its passage.

Opposing views from sponsor, opponent

Previously, when voters registered in South Dakota, they signed a form asserting their citizenship under the penalty of perjury. That "honor system" isn't sufficient, said state Sen. John Carley, R-Piedmont, who

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sponsored the legislation.

"I think the average citizen really wants to make sure it's just our citizens that are voting," Carley said.

Carley also sponsored a bill adopted into law last year that clarifies a person must be a U.S. citizen to vote in South Dakota. The Legislature also voted last year to send a question to the ballot this November that will ask voters to put the same clarification in the state constitution.

The American Civil Liberties Union of South Dakota had called for Gov. Rhoden to veto the bill requiring proof of citizenship for registration. The organization said the law is "unnecessary" and "deeply harmful to the ability of South Dakotans to register to vote and participate in democracy."

"It's already illegal to vote in South Dakota if you're not a U.S. citizen," said Chapman.

People who have changed their name before registering to vote will need additional documentation to support their citizenship, Chapman said, and college students and elderly or low-income voters might not have easy access to their birth certificates or passports. The law could also impact people who have a limited time to register, she said.

"If you show up and you don't have these documents, are you going to come back and register to vote with those documents?" Chapman said. "Every additional burden that we're putting in place for people who are trying to simply participate in our democracy makes it less and less likely that they'll be able to do so."

'A growing movement' for verified citizenship status

South Dakota joins at least nine other states that require proof of citizenship for voter registration in some cases.

A similar law in Kansas has not been enforced since 2018 after federal courts declared it unconstitutional. It prevented more than 30,000 Kansans from voting and caused "a yearslong breakdown in communication and coordination between the DMV, the secretary of state, county election offices, and voters," according to a report that analyzed the effects of the Kansas law.

Chapman suspects the results could be similar in South Dakota.

"We're looking into everything that we can do to potentially ensure that all eligible voters can register to vote in South Dakota," she said, "but our fear is absolutely that potentially we will see thousands of South Dakotans being shut out of the voting process."

Carley said he isn't worried about his law going the way of the Kansas law.

"It's a growing movement across individual states, across the U.S., and the fact that it's being discussed at the federal level also shows that," Carley said. He said people want to be sure that voters are "those that are paying taxes, those that are living in America, those that followed the law to become citizens. I think people want that, and I don't see any concern with a legal challenge on that."

Another new law allows challenges to voters' citizenship

Rhoden also approved a law earlier this year that allows voters to challenge another voter's citizenship. That law will not affect the June 2 primary, but will be in effect for the general election Nov. 3.

The challenge must be in the form of a signed, sworn statement and must include what state law describes as "documented evidence."

The ACLU opposed the passage of that law.

"I think that it throws into question or it makes it easier for people to throw into question anyone's voter eligibility, based on an individual's own perception of somebody else's citizenship status," Chapman said. "It just makes it a lot harder and more discouraging for folks to turn out to vote."

Carley said the two new laws are complementary.

"The federal government is asking the states right now to review their voter rolls and scan those and check those against some databases," Carley said. "That may help in kind of cleaning up those rolls, so that we make sure that if there are still any remaining non-citizens voting in our state elections, that gets cleaned up."

In 2024, South Dakota officials discovered and cancelled the voter registrations of 273 non-U.S. citizens.

The registrants had answered "no" on their driver's license applications when asked if they were citizens, but were registered to vote due to human error, according to the Secretary of State's Office. Noncitizens can obtain a driver's license or state ID if they are lawful permanent residents or have temporary legal status, and the driver's license application form includes a voter registration section.

One of those 273 noncitizens cast a ballot, the Secretary of State's Office said. That was during the 2016 general election.

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.

Trump to sign emergency order to pay TSA agents with no deal in Congress on shutdown

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump announced Thursday that he will sign an order allowing the Department of Homeland Security to pay airport security workers who have gone without a full paycheck since the shutdown began in mid-February.

The order for Transportation Security Administration workers does not appear to include pay for other federal employees working for DHS, including those at the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Secret Service.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement as well as Customs and Border Protection have largely been insulated from the DHS shutdown since Republicans approved tens of billions in additional funding for those two agencies in last year's "big, beautiful" law.

"It is not an easy thing to do, but I am going to do it! I want to thank our hardworking TSA Agents and also, ICE, for the incredible help they have given us at the Airports," Trump wrote on social media. "I will not allow the Radical Left Democrats to hold our Country hostage any longer."

Trump's decision will give both chambers of Congress, which are controlled by Republicans, a bit of cover to leave for their two-week spring break without actually reaching bipartisan compromise to fund DHS.

Democrats have held up the department's funding bill in the Senate to demand new constraints on federal immigration actions after officers shot and killed two U.S. citizens in Minnesota in January.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., said shortly after Trump's announcement that his decision "takes the immediate pressure off" lawmakers to make a deal, but that it's a "short-term solution."

Thune said "we'll see" when asked if negotiations over the DHS funding bill would continue.

"I'll have more to say about that here soon," he said. "But we obviously are going to try and fund as much of the DHS budget as we possibly can."

Thune hadn't provided an update as of 10 p.m. Eastern as senators struggled to find a path forward.

Senate Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee ranking member Chris Murphy, D-Conn., said earlier in the evening that talks over funding the department continued with Republicans.

"There's an active negotiation going on. I hope they don't unilaterally decide to walk away. But that's their decision," he said. "They ultimately take orders from a higher power."

Hawaii Democratic Sen. Brian Schatz said around the same time "it's just not true that we're not in a negotiation."

"It may be that one person or the other has lost patience and that would be too bad," he said. "But we're still talking."

Senate Majority Whip John Barrasso, R-Wyo., said Trump made the right decision to choose to pay TSA agents as the shutdown drags on.

"I just got off the phone with the president," he said. "The president is doing absolutely the right thing. He's showing leadership."

House Appropriations Committee ranking member Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn., released a statement saying

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the administration needs to explain to Congress what funding it plans to divert to pay TSA workers and why it didn't take the step sooner.

"If the White House believes they have the authority to pay these workers, then every day for the past 41 days, they have been making a conscious decision not to pay them," she said. "As the lines got longer, as workers called out, as agents quit or got second jobs, they chose again and again not to pay these workers."

A senior administration official said the administration plans to use money from Republicans' signature tax and spending package that was enacted last summer.

Union reaction

American Federation of Government Employees National President Everett Kelley said in a statement that while the union is "grateful" that TSA employees will be paid, lawmakers need to find a deal to fully fund the entire department.

"These workers and their families cannot wait," she said. "All DHS workers must be paid immediately.

"Congress needs to continue working to pass a real, bipartisan appropriations deal that funds DHS, pays all DHS workers, and keeps these vital agencies running — even if that means canceling their upcoming vacation."

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.

Overdose deaths decline in South Dakota

Fatal opioid overdoses increase slightly; state is working with nonprofit to distribute antidote kits

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER

The number of South Dakotans who died from drug overdoses continued to decrease in 2025, but many of those deaths were potentially preventable, according to data presented Wednesday to the state Opioid Advisory Committee.

Drug overdose deaths decreased to 83 in 2025, according to provisional data, down from 94 in 2024 and significantly down from a peak of 104 in 2021. Fentanyl-related overdose deaths decreased by two last year, and meth overdose deaths were cut in half — down from 42 to 19.

Opioid-related deaths were the only category to increase, growing from 39 in 2024 to 41 in 2025.

Of the 2025 overdose deaths, 68 are labeled by the state as unintentional or intent unknown. Sixty-two percent of those victims were white, and the same percentage were male victims. Thirty-seven percent of those overdose death cases were caused by fentanyl, followed by meth at 28%.

Fifty-eight percent of victims of unintentional or intent unknown overdose deaths were between the ages of 25 and 44. That is the "young, working population" mostly affected, said Amanda Weinzetl, with the state Department of Health.

Of those who died from overdose, 25% worked as a construction or trade worker. Another 19% were unemployed and 13% worked in food service.

Opioids made up a larger share of overdose deaths in the northeast and southeast regions of South Dakota between 2020 and 2024, according to the latest data from the State Unintentional Drug Overdose Reporting System. Stimulants, especially meth, were a larger problem in western and central South Dakota.

Over 60% of overdose deaths in that timeframe had at least one opportunity for intervention, Weinzetl said, while 43% of the unintentional overdose deaths happened with a potential bystander nearby, and 21% involved a victim with a known mental health diagnosis.

Those are among the reasons the state is pushing to distribute thousands of kits containing naloxone, an opioid-overdose antidote, to counties across the state. The effort began last year as a partnership with the nonprofit Emily's Hope and had distributed 22,416 naloxone kits as of February. Distribution sites

range from emergency rooms to repurposed magazine racks in hospital lobbies, libraries, grocery stores, gas stations and other high-traffic, temperature-controlled community hubs.

Vanessa Barnes, with the state Department of Social Services, said prevention efforts have to be widespread since overdose deaths are largely unpredictable.

Some areas of the state are oversaturated: the Sioux Falls area has 6,215 more naloxone medications freely available than research suggests it needs, and Pennington County, which includes Rapid City, has 1,542 more than it needs. The state needs to distribute 3,624 more naloxone medications across 48 counties to reach its target.

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.

'Sense of urgency' about airport lines as US Senate considers new offer on DHS funding

Thune: 'We did everything we could to accommodate'

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — Senate Democratic leaders on Thursday were reading through a new Republican offer to fund the Department of Homeland Security that could end the shutdown that began nearly six weeks ago, with a congressional recess set to begin.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., said in the afternoon that Democrats hadn't "responded officially" to a proposal GOP negotiators sent over in the morning but that discussions were ongoing. He described it as the "last and final" offer.

"There are some language requests that they made that we did everything we could to accommodate," he said.

Delaware Democratic Sen. Chris Coons said "it's a good sign that there is paper going back and forth," though he said the two political parties are still somewhat far apart.

"I think there's a lot of sense of urgency around getting TSA funded," he said, referring to the Transportation Security Administration and long wait times at some of the nation's airports. Some unpaid TSA officers are calling out sick, causing jams in security lines.

"But frankly, we're not that far from where we've been for weeks, which is, Democrats want real reforms to ICE and CBP and are resistant to funding them without reforms, and Republicans would like us to fund them without reforms beyond what Secretary Noem committed to," Coons said, referring to the Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Customs and Border Protection agencies.

Some Republican senators, he said, view the confirmation of former Oklahoma Republican Sen. Markwayne Mullin earlier this week as a form of compromise on DHS' immigration enforcement activities. Mullin replaced the former secretary, Kristi Noem.

That, however, isn't enough for Democrats.

"My Republican friends on this topic have said, 'Hey, Secretary Mullin in his confirmation committed to A, B, C, D,'" Coons said. "And that's a far cry from, 'We'll put it in statute or we have promulgated this in regulation.' So that's some of the problems. I think they feel like they've already offered key reforms in Secretary Mullin's confirmation. And at least the senators that I've talked to don't think that's enough."

Virginia Democratic Sen. Mark Warner said there is "a conundrum" over how to provide more funding for Customs and Border Protection "without some agreement that they need to go back to their statutory role, not doing interior enforcement."

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., had not commented publicly on the latest Republican offer as of late afternoon.

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Trump vows 'very drastic measures'

President Donald Trump said during a morning Cabinet meeting at the White House that he wants to see a deal to fund DHS soon, but didn't disclose any details of the latest offer.

"They need to end the shutdown immediately, or we'll have to take some very drastic measures," he said, opting not to elaborate on what he meant.

Thune said he'd leave the White House to speak for Trump on whether he supports the latest Republican DHS funding offer but added that administration staff have "been involved in the back-and-forth that has occurred overnight and all morning."

"It's never done until it's done," he said.

Timing on a deal to fund DHS is somewhat important, with the House scheduled to depart Friday for a two-week spring break that their Senate colleagues are supposed to leave for as well.

Thune said the chamber will likely head off for the recess if they fund DHS, but suspects "we'll probably be around here" if they don't.

Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., didn't commit to put a reworked DHS appropriations bill on the House floor, especially if it doesn't include funding for ICE's Enforcement and Removal Operations.

"We have never been in favor of breaking the bill up," he said.

But Johnson said it may be possible for Republicans to move funding for that specific program through the complex budget reconciliation process, which the party used last year to approve tens of billions in additional funding for immigration enforcement and deportation in its "big, beautiful" law.

"If they break away that subset, I suppose we'd have to fund it through reconciliation and find some other means," he said.

Working without pay

Workers at the several agencies within DHS, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency and Secret Service, will continue to work without pay until Congress brokers some sort of funding deal for the department.

Any federal employee who handles national security issues or the protection of life or property keeps working during a shutdown. All others are supposed to be sent home. Everyone is supposed to get back pay once the shutdown ends.

TSA airport security screeners this weekend will miss their second full paycheck since the funding lapse began, after seeing only a partial paycheck early in the shutdown.

While TSA workers are required to work without pay during a shutdown, thousands have called in sick over the last six weeks as they seek gig work and other ways to pay bills. Call-out rates nationwide reached double digits this week, with some airports seeing more than 40% of employees miss shifts.

Some TSA workers have turned to selling plasma to make ends meet, officials from the union representing the agency's employees told reporters Tuesday.

The staffing shortages have led to hours-long waits at security lines in some highly trafficked airports, causing passengers to miss flights and generally adding to the anxiety of air travel.

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said in a statement that the administration "is having discussions about a number of ideas to blunt the impact of the Democrat shutdown crisis, but no preparations or plans are currently underway. The best and easiest way to pay TSA Agents is to fund DHS."

Jacob Fischler 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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'Because I'm president': Trump explains why he voted by mail yet opposes voting by mail

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump, who wants to ban mail-in voting, said he had the right to vote by mail-in ballot in Florida's special election Tuesday "because I'm president of the United States."

The president's statement at his Cabinet meeting Thursday comes as he aggressively pushes U.S. Senate Republicans to break the long-standing filibuster to pass a restrictive voting bill ahead of the 2026 midterm elections.

The legislation, which would require a birth certificate and other documentation for voter registration, also would federally prohibit universal voting by mail without special approval, according to the Brennan Center and other sources.

"Because I'm president of the United States, and because of the fact that I'm president of the United States, I did a mail-in ballot for elections that took place in Florida because I felt I should be here instead of being in the beautiful sunshine," Trump told reporters at the White House.

"We have exceptions for mail in ballots. You do know that, right?" he said to the reporter who asked about his mail-in ballot. "So if you're away, we have an exception. If you're in the military, we have an exception. If you're on a business trip, we have an exception. If you're disabled, we have an exception. And if you're ill, if you're not feeling good. So I was away mostly in Washington, D.C., so I used a mail-in ballot."

The president regularly travels on Air Force One between the nation's capital and Florida, including taking a trip to his Palm Beach home this past weekend.

The White House declined to comment on whether someone other than the president requested, picked up and dropped off or mailed the president's mail-in ballot.

Florida election law states that only a person's immediate family member or legal guardian can do so.

"As President Trump has said, the SAVE America Act has commonsense exceptions for Americans to use mail-in ballots for illness, disability, military, or travel — but universal mail-in voting should not be allowed because it's highly susceptible to fraud. As everyone knows, the President is a resident of Palm Beach and participates in Florida elections, but he obviously primarily lives at the White House in Washington, D.C. This is a non-story," White House spokesperson Olivia Wales said in a written statement.

Trump's statement also was made three days after conservative Supreme Court justices appeared skeptical that federal law allows states to accept mail-in ballots postmarked by Election Day but not received until after polls close, during a five-day grace period. While the case was out of Mississippi, 14 states — both red and blue — have similar laws.

2020 election refrain

Discrediting mail-in voting has been a common refrain of Trump's since the 2020 presidential election, which he lost but still falsely claims he won.

Roughly 30% of voters cast mail-in ballots in the 2024 election, according to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission.

Eight states and Washington, D.C., allow all elections to be conducted entirely by mail, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. They are: California, Colorado, Hawaii, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Vermont and Washington state.

Nebraska and North Dakota permit counties to opt into conducting elections via mail.

Idaho, Minnesota, New Jersey and New Mexico allow mostly mail elections for certain small jurisdictions. A handful of other states permit mail voting for local elections.

SAVE America Act and filibuster

Writing on his social media platform Thursday morning, Trump said: "When is 'enough, enough' for our Republican Senators. There comes a time when you must do what should have been done a long time ago, and something which the Lunatic Democrats will do on day one, if they ever get the chance. TERMI-

NATE THE FILIBUSTER, and get our airports, and everything else, moving again. Also, add the complete, all five items, SAVE AMERICA ACT items. Go for the Gold!!! President DJT"

Trump complicated negotiations Monday when he said at an event in Memphis, Tennessee, that he would not approve a deal to end the shutdown of the Department of Homeland Security, ongoing since mid-February, unless senators could find a way to also pass his voting bill, dubbed the SAVE America Act.

The filibuster requires nearly all legislation to receive 60 votes to advance to passage in the Senate. With all Democrats against the legislation, the bill would not garner enough support in the upper chamber, which is split 53-47.

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

Bipartisan US senators want investigation into farm equipment companies moving jobs to Mexico

BY: JACOB FISCHLER

A bipartisan pair of U.S. senators from the Midwest on Thursday asked the Commerce Department to investigate major agricultural machinery manufacturers, saying they paid shareholders handsomely while offshoring jobs.

Sens. Tammy Baldwin, a Wisconsin Democrat, and Bernie Moreno, an Ohio Republican, asked Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick to open an investigation under a law that allows tariffs to be used for national security purposes.

John Deere, Caterpillar and the Wisconsin-based Case New Holland had all laid off U.S. workers in recent years while moving manufacturing jobs to Mexico. The moves hollowed out Midwest industrial towns but made the companies enormous profits, Baldwin and Moreno wrote.

"These companies should not be allowed to eliminate American jobs, pay Mexican workers poverty wages, and then ship products back to the U.S. for additional profit on the backs of our communities," they wrote. "They argue that offshoring is necessary to remain competitive, but when it comes time to pay executives or shareholders, they are never short of money."

The companies have all delivered generous payments to shareholders in recent years, the senators said. John Deere has paid \$8.4 billion, CNH has paid \$1.7 billion and Caterpillar has paid \$18.2 billion through dividends and stock buybacks, they wrote.

But payouts for investors came at the expense of their blue-collar workforce, Baldwin and Moreno wrote. CNH laid off 220 workers from its Racine, Wisconsin, facility in 2024 and moved production to Mexico. All of the roughly 200 CNH workers in a Burlington, Iowa, facility are set to lose their jobs after the company announced in January it would close the plant. And John Deere laid off more than 3,600 union employees after moving production from Iowa to Mexico, the senators said.

Representatives for the companies did not immediately return messages seeking comment Thursday.

Section 232

The lawmakers asked Lutnick to open an investigation that could result in so-called Section 232 tariffs to deter the companies from moving production to Mexico.

"These companies and their executives should not be rewarded for destroying American jobs or permitted to import their products without facing a penalty," they wrote.

The tariffs, named for the section of the 1962 law that created them, permits the administration to levy tariffs for national security purposes. Though created in 1962, no administration used them until President Donald Trump's first term, when he imposed tariffs on steel and aluminum.

The administration now "has a unique opportunity," the senators said, to prevent heavy equipment manufacturers from moving more jobs out of the country.

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However, they added that any Section 232 investigation would be limited by a free trade agreement with Canada and Mexico that Trump approved in his first term. They called for the administration to “address ... issues” created by the agreement, known as the U.S.-Mexico-Canada trade agreement.

The agreement “has incentivized major heavy equipment manufacturers to locate production in Mexico,” they wrote. “Any efforts that the Administration takes solely on Section 232 will be weakened by the shortcomings that currently exist in USMCA.”

Spokespeople for the Commerce Department and White House did not immediately return messages seeking comment.

MAGA appeal

The senators’ letter appeals to key parts of Trump’s political coalition.

Throughout his decade in politics, he has focused messaging on protecting farming and reviving domestic manufacturing industries.

In both his victorious presidential elections, the Republican won unusually large slices of union workers in swing states with legacy manufacturing industries while running up a major advantage with rural voters.

Trump has aggressively — and controversially — employed tariffs to encourage domestic production.

He is scheduled to host nearly 1,000 farmers at the White House on Friday.

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.

US Senate turns down photo ID requirement for voting, slammed by Dems as ‘theatrics’

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate was unable to agree Thursday whether to require photo identification to vote in federal elections, as the chamber debated a larger bill that would make several changes to how Americans register and cast ballots.

The 53-47 procedural vote rejected an amendment from Ohio Republican Sen. Jon Husted to the SAVE America Act, which President Donald Trump and some GOP lawmakers believe is an essential piece of legislation, but Democrats say will make it more difficult for Americans to vote.

The bill already included a section that is very similar to the amendment, but the vote gave Republicans the opportunity to put Democrats on the record about whether they supported voter ID to cast a ballot.

California Democratic Sen. Alex Padilla urged lawmakers to oppose the amendment, saying the vote was an indication of “showmanship and theatrics” from Republicans.

Padilla said the effort would have prevented people from using student IDs or tribal IDs that don’t have an expiration date from participating “in our democracy even though you are eligible.”

The photo ID requirement to cast a ballot, he said, would also add an “additional and unnecessary obstacle” to the tens of millions of Americans who vote by mail.

“In the 2024 election, 48 million voters chose to vote by mail,” he said. “And in case you missed the breaking news a couple days ago, President Trump once again voted by mail in the special election in Florida. So what is it, good enough for the president but not good enough for the rest of us? Secure enough for the president but not secure enough for the American people?”

Republicans defend photo ID

Husted said during floor debate on the proposal that his amendment is “clean, simple, straightforward.”

“States across our country have shown that you can simultaneously make it easy to vote and hard to cheat,” he said. “Georgia, Wisconsin, New Hampshire, all along with my home state of Ohio, all have photo ID requirements, just to name a few.”

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Husted said it's "common sense" for Americans to prove who they are when they vote.

"Americans are required to show a photo ID when they rent a car, when they start a job, when they board a plane. This is something that people do every single day," he said.

New rules for mail-in ballots

The amendment would have required anyone voting in person to provide election workers with a valid photo identification, which would include a driver's license, state-issued identification card, U.S. passport, military ID card issued by either the Defense Department or the Department of Veterans Affairs, or a tribal identification card that has an expiration date.

Americans submitting a mail-in ballot would need to send a copy of their photo identification. If for some reason a voter was unable to do that, they could submit the last four digits of their Social Security number along with an affidavit that they couldn't provide a copy of their ID.

The provision would have requested state or local election officials "to the extent practicable" ensure people have access to a digital scanner and printer to copy their photo IDs for their mail-in ballots.

State election officials would have been required to notify people of the new photo ID requirement to cast a ballot when they registered to vote.

The bill itself, which holds several other provisions, has no chance of advancing in the Senate amid Democratic opposition. Major legislation cannot move forward without the support of at least 60 senators, a procedural step known as the legislative filibuster.

Republicans earlier this week floated the possibility of moving pieces of the package through the complicated budget reconciliation process, though several GOP senators conceded it will be difficult to move a policy proposal through a pathway designed for changes to federal tax, spending and debt limit issues.

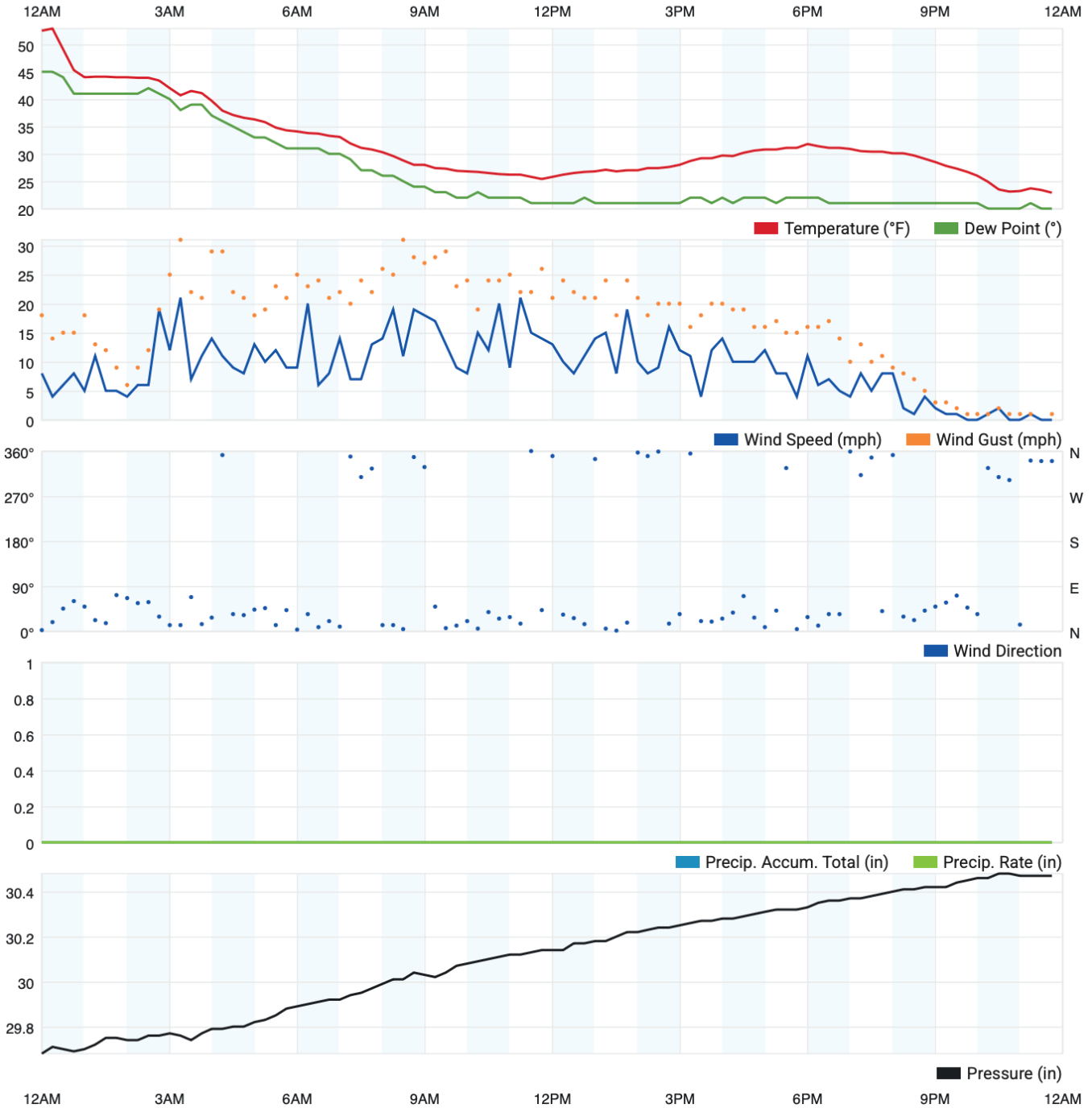
Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

March 26, 2026



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Today



High: 42 °F

Sunny

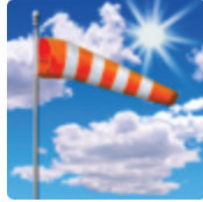
Tonight



Low: 27 °F

Mostly Clear
then Partly
Cloudy and
Breezy

Saturday



High: 66 °F

Mostly Sunny
and Breezy

Saturday Night



Low: 33 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Sunday



High: 61 °F

Mostly Sunny

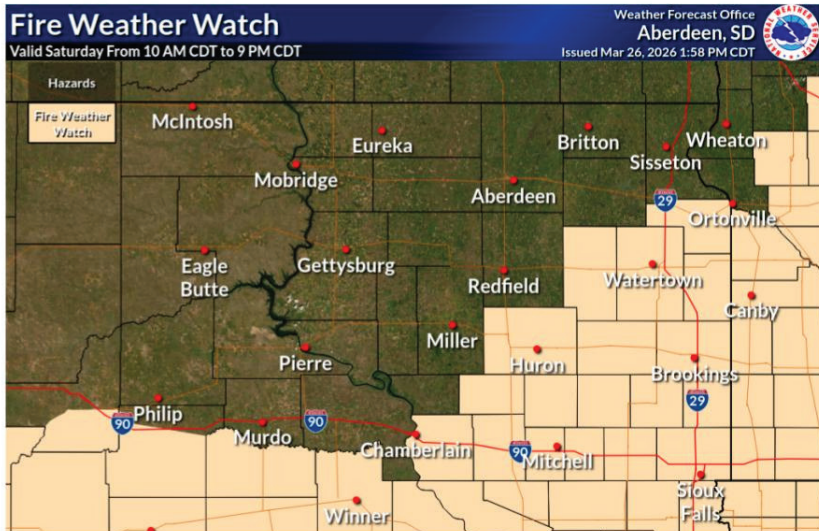
Fire Weather Watch Saturday March 26, 2026 3:22 PM

Strong Winds & Dry Conditions Saturday

- Winds increase Friday night into Saturday morning
 - Southwesterly winds gusting to 35-45 mph expected Saturday morning to decrease through the afternoon
- Strong winds and dry conditions will increase fire weather concerns**
 - Extreme Grassland Fire Danger Index values over southeastern SD

Maximum Wind Gust Forecast (mph)

	3/27 Fri		3/28 Sat							
	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm
Aberdeen	14	16	23	30	35	37	35	29	21	16
Britton	15	16	22	31	39	43	39	31	22	17
Chamberlain	13	12	24	29	31	38	37	30	18	14
Clark	17	16	23	32	40	43	43	37	25	18
Eagle Butte	20	31	31	31	31	28	22	18	18	16
Eureka	13	22	26	30	31	31	26	22	17	15
Gettysburg	14	24	29	33	33	33	30	23	18	17
McIntosh	18	31	31	31	28	24	20	20	18	15
Milbank	18	10	15	23	31	37	37	33	23	15
Miller	13	21	28	36	40	43	40	31	22	15
Mobridge	14	24	26	30	30	28	22	18	16	14
Murdo	16	29	33	37	37	37	30	22	17	14
Pierre	12	23	25	28	26	26	24	20	15	10
Redfield	13	18	25	32	37	39	39	32	22	17
Sisseton	18	14	18	26	36	40	39	33	23	14
Watertown	18	10	17	26	38	44	44	37	25	17
Webster	18	15	21	30	38	41	40	35	24	18
Wheaton	18	14	16	22	26	31	32	28	21	15



Southwesterly winds will increase Friday night into Saturday morning, gusting up to 35-45mph before decreasing through the afternoon. These strong winds as well as dry conditions will increase the fire weather concerns Saturday, with Extreme Grassland Fire Danger Index values over southeastern SD. Take caution as any fires that ignites will spread rapidly and become difficult to control or suppress.

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Warming Through the Weekend

Friday



Highs:
35 to 48°

Saturday



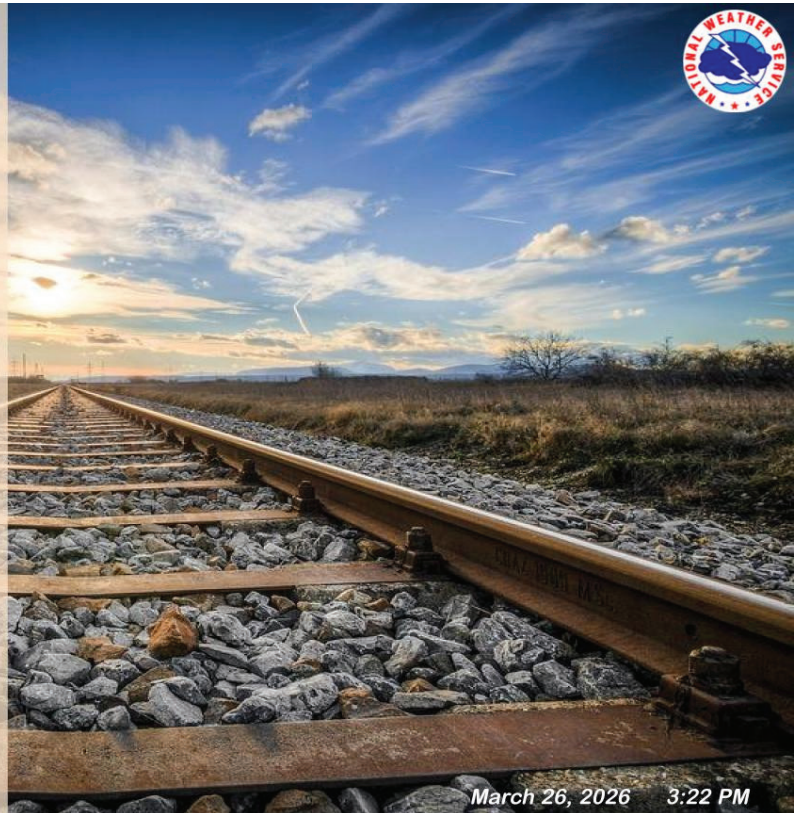
Highs:
58 to 72°

Sunday



Highs:
60 to 73°

- Sunny to mostly sunny skies through the weekend, with warming temperatures.
- Winds Friday night through Saturday morning to gust 35-45 mph.
 - Strong winds and dry conditions to cause increased fire weather concerns Saturday across south central to northeastern SD and west central MN, especially over east central SD.



March 26, 2026 3:22 PM

Sunny to mostly sunny skies will be around through the weekend with warming temperatures. The winds Friday night will increase through Saturday morning, with gusts up around 35-45 mph. These strong wind will combine with the warm temperatures and dry conditions to cause increase fire weather concerns Saturday across south central and northeastern SD as well as west central MN, especially over east central SD.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 54 °F at 12:08 AM

Low Temp: 23 °F at 10:52 PM

Wind: 32 mph at 3:11 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 83 in 1946

Record Low: -12 in 1913

Average High: 48

Average Low: 24

Average Precip in Mar.: 0.74

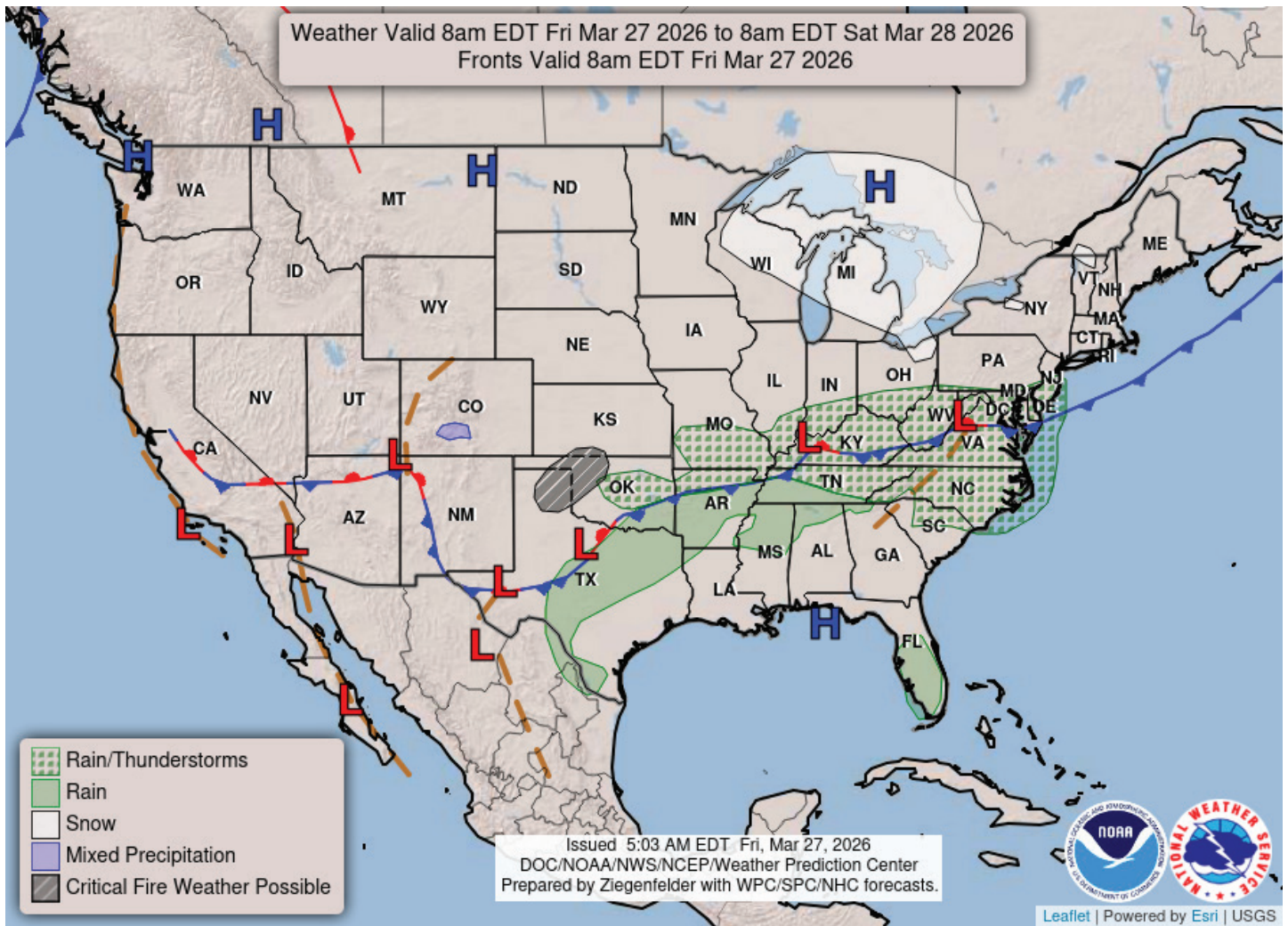
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.29

Average Precip to date: 1.91

Precip Year to Date: 1.62

Sunset Tonight: 7.53 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:20 am



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Today in Weather History

March 27th, 1993: Rain and rapid snowmelt caused the Big Sioux and Vermillion Rivers to rise to 1 to 8 feet above flood stage from March 26th through March 31st, 1993. The worst flooding occurred in far southeast South Dakota, where large farmland areas were under water. The floodwaters closed at least four state highways in southeast South Dakota and blocked dozens of more minor roads in the east. Large chunks of ice on the Big Sioux led to many temporary ice jams. The ice jams took out fences and washed out roads. In some areas, the ice had to be pushed off the streets with tractors.

1890 — An outbreak of tornadoes occurred in the Ohio Valley. One of the tornadoes struck Louisville KY killing 78 persons and causing four million dollars damage. (David Ludlum)

1950 — A three day snowstorm in the High Plains Region finally came to an end. The storm produced 34 inches of snow in 24 hours at Dumont, located in the Black Hills of South Dakota, and a total of 50 inches. (David Ludlum)

1984 — The temperature at Brownsville, TX, soared to 106 degrees, and Cotulla, TX, reached 108 degrees, equalling the March record for the U.S. (The Weather Channel)

1987 — The second blizzard in less than a week hit eastern Colorado and western Kansas. Snowfall totals ranged up to 24 inches at San Isabel CO. Winds gusted to 50 mph at Goodland KS. The high winds piled snow into massive drifts, closing roads for days and killing thousands of cattle. Snow drifts thirty feet high were reported in northwest Kansas. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — Temperatures rose quickly, then dropped just as rapidly, in the central U.S. Eight cities reported record high temperatures for the date as readings soared into the 80s. In southeastern Colorado, the temperature at Lamar CO reached 91 degrees. Strong southerly winds gusted to 63 mph at Gage OK. Strong northwesterly winds, gusting to 61 mph at Goodland KS, then proceeded to usher much colder air into the area. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 — Afternoon and evening thunderstorms produced severe weather in the south central U.S. Two tornadoes were reported, and there were 77 other reports of large hail and damaging winds. Baseball size hail was reported at Willow OK and Bartlesville OK. Twenty-six cities in the central and eastern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date, including Yankton SD with a reading of 84 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 — Temperatures dipped into the teens and single numbers in the northeastern U.S. Scranton PA tied their record for the date with a morning low of 18 degrees. Temperatures warmed into the 60s and lower 70s in the Pacific Northwest. The afternoon high of 65 degrees at Astoria OR equalled their record for the date. (The National Weather Summary)

Building for Eternal Rewards

Are you living and working with eternity in mind?

1 Corinthians 3:10-15:L 10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it.

11 For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

12 Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,

13 each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.

14 If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward.

15 If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

Today's passage contains a sobering message about heavenly rewards and how they're acquired. Paul is comparing kingdom work to the efforts of a master builder. He says Christ is the only foundation on which to build, but each of us is responsible for the materials we use on that foundation. We can build with wood, hay, and straw or with gold, silver, and costly stones. Each man's work will be tested with fire to determine the quality of the materials used. Paul then tells us that if our works survive the trial by fire, we will receive a reward (v. 14).

For our achievements to survive, we must learn to build with imperishable materials. We'll be judged not just by our "church work" but also by the way we've handled other responsibilities. This means we're to go about our daily jobs with the same diligence that we would show when tending to matters we might typically label as "spiritual" (Colossians 3:23-24).

Ask yourself if you're being honest with the Lord. Remember, He knows our heart and the truth of every situation. Our heavenly Father expects us to do our very best, and He has given us His Spirit to sanctify our efforts and enable the quality of work that He desires.

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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.26.26

1 8 18 39 47 1

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

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 35 Mins 24 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.24.26

4 13 52 53 69 10

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$70,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 20 Mins 24 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: 1 Days 16 Hrs 35 Mins 24 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.25.26

3 25 27 31 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$34,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 50 Mins 24 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.25.26

35 38 41 43 62 8

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 19 Mins 24 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: 1 Days 17 Hrs 19 Mins 24 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

FACT FOCUS: Only some driver's licenses usable for voter registration under the SAVE America Act

By MELISSA GOLDIN The Associated Press

As the Senate debates the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility Act, or SAVE America Act, misleading claims about the bill's impact on voter registration are spreading on social media, with elected officials on both sides of the aisle putting their own spin on it.

Sen. Tammy Duckworth, a Democrat from Illinois, wrote in an X post: "Under the SAVE Act, you cannot use your driver's license to register to vote. Republicans want you to buy a passport instead. If you can afford one. This is a modern-day poll tax." Sen. Mike Lee, a Republican from Utah, replied in his own X post, which included Duckworth's, "this is a lie" and cited a section of the legislation that requires states to establish their own processes for voter registration applicants who cannot provide the required proof of U.S. citizenship.

But the truth lies somewhere in the middle.

Here's a closer look at the facts.

CLAIM: People would not be allowed to use their driver's license when registering to vote under the SAVE America Act.

THE FACTS: This is missing context. Driver's licenses that include verification of citizenship, such as an Enhanced Drivers License (EDL), could be used for voter registration in a limited number of states if the SAVE America Act passes. It has passed the House and is now in the Senate. However, those without such a license or who live in states or territories that don't issue them would need to provide additional documentation.

"Most driver's licenses, the purpose of it is to license you to drive," said Pamela Smith, president and CEO of Verified Voting, a nonpartisan organization. "It's not designed to prove your citizenship. And so the requirement to prove your citizenship is sort of separate and beyond."

The SAVE America Act requires that when registering to vote in federal elections people provide "documentary proof of United States citizenship." This can include REAL ID-compliant identification that confirms citizenship, a valid U.S. passport, a military ID card, or another form of government-issued photo identification that states the applicant's place of birth. Additional documentation to prove U.S. citizenship would be required in some cases.

People who are legal U.S. residents but not citizens also can obtain a REAL ID. According to the Department of Homeland Security, only five states — Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Vermont and Washington — issue enhanced driver's licenses, which are REAL ID-compliant and prove citizenship as well as identity. Other states, such as Montana, South Dakota, Florida, and Iowa, have passed or are considering legislation that requires licenses to include citizenship markers.

"For the vast majority of Americans, a REAL ID would not be sufficient to register to vote under the SAVE Act," said Eliza Sweren-Becker, deputy director of the voting rights and elections program at the Brennan Center for Justice. "That's because most REAL IDs do not have any affirmative indication of U.S. citizenship, which is a part of what the bill would require if a REAL ID were to be used for registration."

Republicans, including President Donald Trump, have argued that the SAVE America Act is needed to eliminate instances of noncitizen voting, which is already illegal in federal elections and can lead to felony charges and deportation. Cases where it occurs are rare. Opponents stress that the bill's proof of citizenship requirements would create an undue burden for many voters due to obstacles such as the costs associated with obtaining a passport and processing times for government documents, including birth or marriage certificates. A recent survey found that more than 9 percent of voting-age Americans — 21.3 million people — cannot readily access documents proving they are citizens.

Neither Duckworth nor Lee responded to a request for comment.

The SAVE America Act was passed by the House in April 2025 and is currently being debated by the Senate. Efforts to end a Homeland Security shutdown that has caused severe travel disruptions stalled when Trump linked any deal to his push to pass the act.

Why Pakistan has emerged as a mediator between US and Iran

By MUNIR AHMED and E. EDUARDO CASTILLO Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — As fears of a wider regional conflict escalate following U.S. and Israeli strikes on Iran that began in late February, Pakistan has emerged as an unexpected mediator, offering to help bring Washington and Tehran to the negotiating table.

Islamabad isn't often called on to act as an intermediary in high-stakes diplomacy, but it's stepped into the role this time for a number of reasons, both because it has relatively good ties with both Washington and Tehran and because it has a lot at stake in seeing the war resolved.

Pakistani government officials have said that their public peace effort follows weeks of quiet diplomacy, though they have provided few details. They have also said that Islamabad stands ready to host talks between representatives from the U.S. and Iran.

Here's what to know about Pakistan's mediation effort:

Pakistan helped US deliver 15-point plan to Iran

Pakistan's role in Iran-U.S. negotiations surfaced only days ago following media reports. Officials in Islamabad later acknowledged that a U.S. proposal had been conveyed to Iran.

It remains unclear who has served as Iran's point of contact in the indirect talks. Iran has maintained it has not held such talks and dismissed the U.S. proposal, but Tehran has acknowledged responding with its own proposals.

According to Pakistani officials, U.S. messages are being passed to Iran and Iranian responses relayed to Washington, though they did not specify how the process is being handled or who is directly communicating with whom. Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar said this week that Turkey and Egypt are also working behind the scenes to bring the sides to the negotiating table.

Abdullah Khan, managing director of the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies, said that Pakistani's mediation efforts may be contributing to relative restraint in the conflict. He noted that U.S. President Donald Trump has delayed his threats of large-scale attacks on Iran's energy infrastructure citing diplomatic progress, and Iranian responses toward U.S. interests in the Gulf have been measured in what may be an effort to preserve space for diplomacy.

Ties with both US and Iran set Pakistan up for new role

Previous US-Iran negotiations have been facilitated mainly by countries in the Middle East, including Oman and Qatar, but as they come under Iranian fire during the war Pakistan has stepped into the role.

Analysts say Pakistan's geographic proximity to Iran — it's one of its neighbors — coupled with its long-standing ties with the U.S., gives it a unique position at a time when direct communication between the two sides remains constrained.

Islamabad has good working relations with most of the key parties in the war, including both the U.S. and Iran. It has close strategic ties with Gulf states including Saudi Arabia, with which it signed a defense cooperation agreement last year. However, Pakistan has no diplomatic relations with Israel because of the lingering issue of Palestinian statehood.

Relations between the United States and Pakistan have improved since last year, with increased diplomatic engagement and expanding economic ties. Pakistan also joined Trump's Board of Peace, which aims to ensure peace in Gaza, despite opposition from Islamists at home.

Over the weekend, Trump spoke to the Pakistani army chief Field Marshal Asim Munir, whom the U.S. president has publicly described as his "favorite Field Marshal." Analysts say he's a player who enjoys good ties with both the Iranian and U.S. militaries.

Pakistan has a lot at stake in ceasefire talks

The conflict poses some of "the biggest economic and energy security challenges" in Pakistan's history,

said Islamabad-based security analyst Syed Mohammad Ali.

The country gets most of its oil and gas from the Middle East — and, he said, the five million Pakistanis working in the Arab world send home remittances each year roughly equal to the country's total export earnings.

Rising tensions have already contributed to higher global oil prices, forcing Pakistan to increase fuel prices by about 20% and putting pressure on the government of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

The war is also adding to domestic turmoil, even as Pakistan has been grappling for months with its own conflict with neighboring Afghanistan. Islamabad has accused the country's Taliban government of tolerating militant groups that are behind attacks in Pakistan.

Earlier this month, protests erupted across the country following U.S. strikes on Iran, with demonstrators clashing with security forces in several cities.

A day after the United States and Israel attacked Iran, killing Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, clashes erupted in Pakistan's southern port city of Karachi and in parts of the north, leaving at least 22 people dead and more than 120 injured nationwide.

At least 12 people were killed in and around the U.S. Consulate in Karachi after a mob breached the compound and attempted to set it on fire.

Khamenei was a central religious and political figure for Shiites worldwide, including in Pakistan.

Pakistan has a record as a mediator

While Pakistan rarely serves as a mediator, its record does include playing a role in some very high-profile talks.

Pakistan's then-President Gen. Yahya Khan facilitated backchannel contacts that led to U.S. President Richard Nixon's historic 1972 visit to China. That paved the way for the establishment of diplomatic ties between Washington and Beijing in 1979.

Since then, Pakistan has played a role in several other complex regional conflicts, most notably during the 1988 Geneva Accords that paved the way for the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. Acting as a frontline state and key interlocutor, Islamabad participated in U.N.-brokered negotiations while working closely with the United States and other stakeholders and helped increase pressure on Moscow to pull out its forces.

More recently, Pakistan facilitated contacts between the Afghan Taliban and Washington that led to talks in Doha that culminated in a 2020 agreement and set the stage for the withdrawal of U.S.-led NATO troops and the Taliban's return to power in 2021.

Rubio tries to sell Iran war to skeptical G7 diplomats after Trump insults allies

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

VAUX-DE-CERNAY, France (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio is in France meeting his Group of Seven foreign minister counterparts on Friday, after President Donald Trump attacked NATO countries over a reluctance or refusal to take part in the Iran war, a conflict that some of America's closest allies have met with deep skepticism.

Rubio will have a hard time trying to sell the other top diplomats from G7 countries on the U.S. strategy for the Iran conflict, to which almost all nations have raised objections. On his arrival at the meeting venue at a historic 12-century abbey in Vaux-de-Cernay outside of Paris, Rubio posed for a group photo with his fellow foreign ministers but none of them spoke.

Trump's vitriolic comments about NATO during a Cabinet meeting on Thursday will likely make it an even tougher task. Of the G7 nations — besides the U.S. — Britain, Canada, France, Germany and Italy are members of the trans-Atlantic military alliance. Japan is the only one that is not.

Rubio left Washington for the G7 meeting just hours after Trump complained bitterly about NATO countries not stepping up to help the U.S. and Israel in the Iran war.

"We are very disappointed with NATO because NATO has done absolutely nothing," Trump said.

Rubio has work to do to smooth things over with allies like those in Europe that have faced criticism or

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outright threats from Trump and others in his administration. The Europeans are still smarting over Trump's earlier demands to take over Greenland from NATO ally Denmark and are concerned about U.S. support for Ukraine in its war with Russia. The conflict in the Middle East has added another point of tension.

"Frankly, I think countries around the world, even those that are out there complaining about this a little bit, should actually be grateful that the United States has a president that's willing to confront a threat like this," Rubio said at the Cabinet meeting.

Trump has complained about lack of support from allies

Asked by reporters about the reception he was expecting to get, Rubio said before his flight to France that he was looking forward to gathering with his G7 counterparts and that "we're going to have great meetings."

"I'm not there to make them happy," he said. "I get along with all of them on a personal level, and we work with those governments very carefully, but the people I'm interested in making happy are the people of the United States. That's who I work for. I don't work for France or Germany or Japan."

"What we need is a partnership, including the diplomacy, including some of the discussions that we will have today because frankly, Iran cannot be able to just hold the global economy hostage," British Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper said Friday as she headed into the meeting.

Trump has complained that he has not been able to rally support behind his war of choice in Iran and that NATO and most other allies have rejected his calls to help secure the Strait of Hormuz, where Iran's chokehold has disrupted oil shipments and pushed up energy prices.

"We're there to protect NATO, to protect them from Russia. But they're not there to protect us," Trump said Thursday. He later added: "I never thought we needed them. I was more doing a test."

Before the U.S. leader's comments, NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte reiterated the increase in defense spending by alliance members — which Trump has urged — saying Europe and Canada had been "overreliant on U.S. military might" but a "shift in mindset" has taken hold.

Rutte said NATO has been clear that Iran cannot have a nuclear weapon and has "long recognized the threat Iran's missile program posed to allies and their interests. And what the United States is currently doing is degrading those capabilities, both the nuclear and the missile."

G7 host France has been skeptical of the Iran war

France is hosting the G7 meeting near Versailles and has been highly skeptical of the war. The chief of the French defense staff, Gen. Fabien Mandon, complained this week that U.S. allies had not been informed about the start of hostilities.

"They have just decided to intervene in the Near and Middle East without notifying us," Mandon said. "We acted immediately, surprised by an American ally, who remains an ally, but who is less and less predictable and doesn't even bother to inform us when it decides to engage in military operations. This affects our security. This affects our interests."

However, 35 countries joined military talks hosted by Mandon on how to reopen the Strait of Hormuz "once the intensity of hostilities has sufficiently decreased," France's Defense Ministry said in a statement.

Rubio said that with Iran threatening global shipping, countries that care about international law "should step up and deal with it."

Similar sentiments to Mandon's have been expressed by other allies that also worry about the U.S. commitment to Ukraine as the Iran war closes in on four weeks.

"We must avoid further destabilization, secure our economic freedom and develop perspectives for an end of and the time after the hostilities," German Foreign Minister Johann Wadepful said Thursday. "Our joint support for Ukraine ... must not crumble now. That would be a strategic mistake with a view to Euro-Atlantic security."

Wadepful said he expected "that we can define a joint position" on the Middle East.

"Of course, this is about ending this conflict as quickly as possible, but also ending it sustainably, and that means bringing about security in the Strait of Hormuz and ensuring overall that the Iranian regime, which in the past has behaved negatively enough, is also curtailed in the future," Wadepful said.

Senate approves funding for TSA and most of Homeland Security, but not immigration enforcement

By LISA MASCARO and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate early Friday morning approved Homeland Security funds to pay Transportation Security Administration agents and most other agencies, but not the immigration enforcement operations at the heart of the budget impasse that has jammed airports, disrupted travel and imposed financial hardship on workers.

The deal, which the Senate approved unanimously without a roll call, next goes to the House, which is expected to consider it Friday.

“We can get at least a lot of the government opened up again and then we’ll go from there,” said Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D. “Obviously, we’ll still have some work ahead of us.”

With pressure mounting to resolve the 42-day stalemate over funding for the Department of Homeland Security, the endgame emerged in the final hours before TSA workers miss another paycheck Friday. President Donald Trump said he would sign an order to immediately pay the TSA agents, saying he wanted to quickly stop the “Chaos at the Airports.” The deal did not include any of the restraints Democrats have demanded as they sought to rein in Trump’s mass deportation agenda.

Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer said the outcome could have been reached weeks ago, and vowed that his party would continue fighting to ensure Trump’s “rogue” immigration operation “does not get more funding without serious reform.”

What’s in and out of the funding package

Senators worked through the night on the deal that would fund much of the rest of the department, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Coast Guard and TSA, but without funding for Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Customs was funded, but Border Protection was not.

The package puts no new limits on immigration enforcement, which has remained largely uninterrupted by the shutdown. The GOP’s big tax cuts bill that Trump signed into law last year funneled billions in extra funds to DHS, including \$75 billion for ICE operations, ensuring the immigration officers are still being paid despite the lapse.

Next steps in the House, where Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., holds a slim majority, are uncertain. Passage will almost certainly require bipartisan support, as lawmakers on the left and right flanks revolt.

Conservative Republicans have panned their own party’s proposals, demanding full funding for immigration operations. Many have vowed to ensure ICE has the resources it needs in the next budget package to carry out Trump’s agenda.

“We will fully fund ICE. That is what this fight is about,” Sen. Eric Schmitt, R-Mo., said as he tried to offer legislation to fund the agency. “The border is closing. The next task is deportation.”

On-again, off-again talks collapsed

Earlier Thursday, Thune announced he had given a “last and final” offer to the Democrats. But as the day dragged on, action stalled out.

Democrats argued the GOP proposals have not gone far enough at putting guardrails on officers from ICE, Customs and Border Protection, and other federal agencies who are engaged in the immigration sweeps, particularly after the deaths of two Americans protesting the actions in Minneapolis.

They want federal agents to wear identification, remove their face masks and refrain from conducting raids around schools, churches or other sensitive places. Democrats have also pushed for an end of administrative warrants, insisting that judges sign off before agents search people’s homes or private spaces — something new Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin has said he is open to considering.

Trump had largely left the issue to Congress, but warned he was ready to take action, threatening to send the National Guard to airports in addition to his deployment of ICE agents who are now checking travelers’ IDs.

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The White House had floated the extraordinary move of invoking a national emergency to pay the TSA agents, a politically and legally fraught approach. Instead, Trump's order would pay TSA agents using money from his 2025 tax bill, according to a senior administration official who spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to discuss it publicly.

If the Senate package is approved by the House and signed it into law, the action Trump announced to pay TSA agents may be temporary or unneeded.

Airport lines grow as TSA workers endure hardships

The funding shutdown has resulted in travel delays and even warnings of airport closures as TSA workers missing paychecks stop coming to work.

Multiple airports are experiencing greater than 40% callout rates of TSA workers and nearly 500 of the agency's nearly 50,000 transportation security officers have quit during the shutdown. Nationwide on Wednesday, more than 11% of the TSA employees on the schedule missed work, according to DHS. That is more than 3,120 callouts.

Everett Kelley, the president of the American Federation of Government Employees, said the union is grateful the TSA workers will be paid, but said Congress must stay in session to pass a deal "that funds DHS, pays all DHS workers, and keeps these vital agencies running."

At George Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston, Melissa Gates said she would not make her flight to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, after waiting more than 2½ hours and still not reaching the security checkpoint. She said no other flights were available until Friday.

"I should have just driven, right?" Gates said. "Five hours would have been hilarious next to this."

Asian stocks mostly lower after Wall Street's worst day since start of Iran war

By CHAN HO-HIM AP Business Writer

HONG KONG (AP) — Asian shares mostly fell and oil gained again Friday after Wall Street had its worst day since the start of the Iran war over growing doubts about a de-escalation.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 closed 0.4% lower at 53,373.07. South Korea's Kospi also lost 0.4% to 5,438.87, narrowing the sharp drop earlier in the day at trading close.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng was up 0.4% to 24,952.98 after dipping earlier in the day, while the Shanghai Composite index traded 0.6% higher at 3,913.72.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 fell 0.1% to 8,516.30.

Taiwan's Taiex was 0.7% lower, while India's Sensex lost 1.7%.

On Thursday, Wall Street fell to its worst drop since the Iran war began, with the S&P 500 sinking 1.7% for its worst day since January to 6,477.16. The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 1% to 45,960.11. The Nasdaq composite slumped 2.4% to 21,408.08, and is off 10% below its recent all-time high in what is considered a "correction."

Expectations this week of de-escalation negotiations between Washington and Tehran have sent markets into disarray.

Shortly after Wall Street trading closed Thursday, U.S. President Donald Trump said he was postponing a threatened attack on Iran's energy facilities as he further delayed until April 6 a deadline for Iran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, a critical waterway for oil and gas transport.

U.S. futures were up 0.3% on Friday.

Oil prices gained in early Friday trading. Brent crude futures, the international standard, was 1% higher at \$102.92 per barrel. Benchmark U.S. crude rose 0.8% to \$95.25 a barrel.

Doubts over a possible end to the war grew after Iran rejected a U.S. ceasefire proposal and issued a counterproposal, while the U.S. was sending more troops to the region. The war, now in its fourth week, is likely to fuel global inflation and impact economic growth of many countries amid rising energy costs and trade disruptions.

The Strait of Hormuz has been largely closed since the start of the Iran war, although Iran has said the

strait is only closed to its enemies. It appears recently to have set up a "toll booth" for vessels transiting the strait, with Lloyd's List Intelligence reporting that some ships are paying for passage in China's yuan currency.

In other dealings early Friday, gold and silver prices rose. Gold's price was up 1.6% to \$4,446.90 per ounce. The price of silver was 2.7% higher to \$69.74.

The U.S. dollar rose to 159.95 Japanese yen from 159.81 yen. The euro was trading at \$1.1525, down from \$1.1527.

Somali children are 'on the edge' as hunger spreads. UNICEF says Iran war has worsened the crisis

By OMAR FARUK Associated Press

DOLLOW, Somalia (AP) — The sound of a crying child is a sign of hope in a crowded displacement camp in southern Somalia — the most malnourished children are too weak to even cry.

For the mothers in the Ladan camp in the town of Dollow, survival is the only thing on their minds — not the Iran war or how UNICEF gets the supplies to keep the place running. The displaced here have fled the drought that has ravaged swaths of this Horn of Africa nation after four failed rain seasons.

Their crops and livestock devastated, they show up at the camp, often with nothing but their children.

Aid workers at Ladan say the raging war in the Middle East — more than 3,000 kilometers (1,800 miles) away — has made their work harder, disrupting supplies and sending fuel costs soaring.

Raising the alarm

UNICEF says it has \$15.7 million worth of lifesaving supplies — including therapeutic food, vaccines, and mosquito nets — in transit or being prepared for delivery to Somalia. But those shipments now are uncertain.

Transport costs could rise by 30% to 60%, and even double on some routes, while delays caused by rerouting and backlog become more likely, the U.N. agency says.

During a visit to Dollow on Wednesday, Catherine Russell, UNICEF's executive director, said the Iran war has been a "shock to the system" for the agency's work on the ground in Somalia.

"It means that we can't get supplies in as easily, and that fuel costs are really high," she said. "It's another problem that we have to try to deal with, and it means that more and more children will suffer."

At the same time, more than 400 health and nutrition facilities have closed over the past year across Somalia, due mainly to U.S. funding cuts, leaving many communities without access to support. Aid agencies warn more closures could follow.

All those issues have compounded the situation in Ladan, where hunger threatens especially the youngest.

"What we're seeing is that children are really on the edge already," Russell said.

Grim numbers

In Mogadishu, Somalia's capital, the government warned last month that nearly 6.5 million people — out of the population of more than 20 million — face severe hunger as the drought worsens and conflict and global aid cuts intensify the country's crisis.

The humanitarian needs are just the tip of the iceberg as the Somali government grapples with its long-running war against the al-Qaida-linked al-Shabab militant group, fighting to reclaim territory from the extremists.

The latest data from a report by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, a global hunger monitoring group, estimates that 1.84 million children under the age of 5 in Somalia are expected to suffer acute malnutrition in 2026.

Fending for their lives

In Ladan, spread across the town's dusty outskirts, rows of makeshift shelters stretch under the harsh sun, fragile structures of plastic sheets and torn fabric held together by sticks and thorn branches. The camp is home to about 4,500 households.

"We just want our children to survive," said Shamsu Nur Hussein, a 20-year-old widow with three children.

She fled their village in the Bakool region after losing all her farm animals.

Her cooking hearth at the camp — three stones and ash — was cold, with no sign of a recent fire.

"Since morning we have only had black tea," she told The Associated Press at the camp.

At the hospital in Dollow, mothers sat shoulder to shoulder on narrow beds holding frail children, some too weak to cry while others let out soft whimpers.

Liban Roble, a nutrition program coordinator, said the hospital used to see mainly "moderate cases."

"Now we are receiving children in extremely critical condition — severely malnourished, weak, and in some cases almost skeletal," he said.

Supplies running low

Roble said the hospital has only supplies to treat the malnourished "until mid-April or the end of April."

"If new stock doesn't arrive, more children will deteriorate and potentially die," he said.

At Ladan's nutrition center, health workers weighed children and dispensed a peanut-based paste, squeezing it into the children's mouths.

It's a lifeline, a means to prevent rapid decline of the malnourished children, nurse Abdimajid Adan Hussein said.

"Their weakened bodies make them vulnerable to pneumonia, diarrhea and other illnesses," Hussein said.

Community leaders say support is already falling short.

"We used to receive assistance from humanitarian agencies, but that stopped in September 2025," said Abdifatah Mohamed Osman, Ladan's deputy chairman. "Now the little support we get is mainly therapeutic food for malnourished children."

Older and younger conservatives at CPAC are split over Trump's war in Iran

THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

GRAPEVINE, Texas (AP) — A generational divide over the Iran war surfaced Thursday between older attendees and their political heirs at this year's Conservative Political Action Conference, as the group's leaders pleaded for unity in a challenging midterm election year for Republicans.

Younger conservatives spoke of disappointment and even "betrayal" over President Donald Trump's launch of strikes against Iran, saying in interviews with The Associated Press that the president's actions run counter to his many pledges to oppose foreign entanglements.

Meanwhile, older conservatives were looking past Trump's campaign criticism of military action to topple foreign regimes, arguing the war in Iran is a pragmatic act forced by threats to the United States.

The bright dividing line emerged in conversations with a dozen participants on either end of the age spectrum who gathered for the annual meeting of conservatives, being held outside Dallas. That split could reflect flagging enthusiasm for Trump among some younger voters, a potentially troubling sign for Republicans heading into midterm elections and for the conservative movement as it looks to build beyond Trump's tenure.

"We did not want to see more wars. We wanted actual America-first policies, and Trump was very explicit about that," said Benjamin Williams, a 25-year-old marketing specialist for Young Americans for Liberty. "It does feel like a betrayal, for sure."

Younger conservatives concerned about sending troops to Iran

Williams, from Austin, Texas, worries about his friends in the military, especially his Air Force officer brother. More broadly, he sees the war as an unnecessary disruption to the stability in the Middle East that could have long-term negative effects on the U.S. economy.

"Trump's rhetoric was very important for people of my generation," Williams said.

Auburn University sophomore Sean O'Brien's support for Trump has slipped, especially with talk of sending U.S. troops into the Middle East. "I'm not happy," he said.

Sending troops into Iran, he said, "would be full betrayal."

In light of the U.S. military preparing to deploy at least 1,000 troops from the 82nd Airborne Division to

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the Middle East in the coming days, O'Brien said, "That's what keeps me up at night."

Older attendees say Trump responded to a threat

Older CPAC participants were far more forgiving, describing Trump as wisely responsive to what they described as the threat Iran posed. Several, in fact, suggested Trump did not initiate the war, but that Iran had decades ago.

"I don't believe he started a new war. He was acting in response to a 40-year-old war by Iran," said 70-year-old retired defense contractor Joe Ropar of McKinney, Texas. "How long were we supposed to wait? I think he did what he had to do when he had to do it."

"Do nothing? I'm not on board with that," Ropar said.

Echoing a common theme from older participants, Kelle Phillips said Trump's decision was a pragmatic reaction to a real threat that overrules the best hopes of campaign rhetoric.

"You campaign on what you want to do and then the world's dynamics happen," said Phillips, a 61-year-old author and religious instructor from Frisco, Texas. "I think the difference is if you have someone in the Iranian regime who wants to destroy America. You can't reason with them."

Trump's goals in Iran, as James Scharre believes, are short-term and not a concern for those adverse to a long slog overseas.

Scharre, 61, also interprets Trump's early campaign opposition to government overthrow as a preference, not an ironclad promise.

"I think he said he was against it," he said. "Trump is a wise leader. He does what works. And I'm for it."

Some prominent conservatives also are split on Iran

Cracks in the conservative coalition began appearing early in the war, led by influential opinion leaders like podcaster Tucker Carlson.

This month, Joe Kent, the director of the Center for Counterterrorism at the Department of Homeland Security, quit his Trump administration post, saying in his departure statement that "I cannot in good conscience support the ongoing war in Iran" and that "Iran posed no imminent threat to our nation."

Right-wing podcaster Steve Bannon, who is expected to speak at CPAC, has worried aloud that a protracted Mideast military engagement would cost Republicans support by pushing some conservatives to sit out the November midterms.

This comes at a time when Republicans' hold on the U.S. House is in jeopardy and the GOP's thin Senate majority is not as secure as it was a year ago.

A recent survey from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research indicates that while Trump's approval rating is holding steady, the conflict could be turning into a major political liability for his administration. About 59% of Americans say U.S. military action in Iran has been excessive, the poll found.

Calls for unity

CPAC Chairman Matt Schlapp acknowledged conservatives were divided over Iran and said the convention's annual straw poll will include a question about it. The results will be released Saturday, the convention's final day.

"Any consensus is still to be determined. I think people trust President Trump, so I don't think there's been any shaking of his support," Schlapp told the AP. "But I think underneath there's concern about where does this lead."

Tiffany Krieger, a 20-year-old sophomore at the University of Pittsburgh, said her onetime level-10 support for Trump has dipped to five over the war.

"It seems like the love for him is plateauing. We see our party splitting apart and we're supposed to be united," said Krieger, of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. "I think this issue with the war has put a line through the conservative movement."

Almost if addressing Krieger directly, Mercedes Schlapp, senior fellow for the CPAC foundation, opened Thursday's session of the conference in Texas with a direct appeal.

"We cannot divide from within," she told an audience of hundreds from the stage at the convention center. Referring to political opponents, she added: "Let's stay united. They want us divided."

Minnesota to host 'No Kings' flagship rally, headlining Springsteen amid tensions over ICE and war

By STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — Minnesota will be the flagship of the "No Kings" protest movement Saturday when Bruce Springsteen performs "Streets of Minneapolis" in a state where emotions are still raw over President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown and the deaths of two residents shot by federal officers.

More than 3,100 events are being organized in communities large and small across all 50 states, with more than 9 million people expected to participate. A growing number of them will be in suburbs, which are increasingly on the front lines of resistance against Trump.

Organizers have designated the Minnesota rally, at the State Capitol in St. Paul, as Saturday's flagship event. They've told a state oversight agency that 100,000 people could converge on the Capitol complex, where last June's event drew an estimated 80,000 people.

The movement is spreading around the world, said Ezra Levin, a cofounder of Indivisible, the activist group spearheading the events. Rallies are also planned in more than a dozen other countries, he said in an interview, including Canada, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, France, Spain, Portugal, Switzerland, Italy, Greece, the Netherlands, Ireland, Sweden, Mexico and Australia. In countries with constitutional monarchies, he said, they call the protests "No Tyrants."

Besides Springsteen, the St. Paul rally will also feature singer Joan Baez and actor Jane Fonda, who've been noted for their activism since the Vietnam War era, and Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont, a hero of the progressive movement, along with a long list of other national and local activists, labor leaders and elected officials.

Levin said the national organizers chose Minnesota because it was subject to "some of the most horrific, sadistic behavior you can imagine" from the Trump administration.

"At the same time, in the Twin Cities earlier this year, we saw some of the most inspiring, neighborly, brave organizing that we've seen anywhere in the country, and it serves as an inspiration to all of us," Levin added.

This will be the third round of "No Kings" protests, which often have a street festival vibe. They're organized by a broad coalition of groups opposed to what they call authoritarianism under Trump, and his attempts to consolidate and expand his power. Organizers say more than 5 million people took to the streets at more than 2,100 events last June, followed by more than 7 million people at more than 2,700 events last October.

Organizers announced Saturday's protests in January, shortly after the killings in Minneapolis of Renee Good and Alex Pretti. Plans had already been in the works, but their deaths during the surge of around 3,000 federal officers into Minnesota provided a new focus.

Opposition to the war in Iran, which the U.S. and Israel launched with airstrikes on Feb. 28, is expected to draw even more people to the protests, Levin said.

Trump reacted to previous "No Kings" rallies by insisting "I'm not a king" and saying attendees were "not representative of the people of our country."

Springsteen came to Minnesota soon after composing "Streets of Minneapolis" to honor Good, Pretti and other residents for their courage in standing up against the federal crackdown. He first performed it live at a fundraiser at the iconic First Avenue nightclub. He's sure to sing it at the Capitol on Saturday, and again Tuesday night at the city's Target Center when he and the E Street kick off their Land of Hope & Dreams American Tour.

Springsteen has long feuded with Trump, who has called the New Jersey rock icon "overrated."

The tour logo includes the "No Kings" slogan. Springsteen has said they're coming in defense of "American democracy, American freedom, our American Constitution and our sacred American dream — all of which are under attack by our wannabe king and his rogue government."

"The No Kings movement is of great import right now," Springsteen told the Minnesota Star Tribune

ahead of the rally. "When you have the opportunity to sing something where the timing is essential and if you have something powerful to sing, it elevates the moment, it elevates your job to another level."

Georgia's Fulton County heads to court to seek return of 2020 ballots seized by FBI

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — A federal judge plans to hear arguments Friday on a demand by officials in Georgia's Fulton County that the FBI return seized ballots and other materials from the 2020 election.

U.S. District Judge J.P. Boulee wrote in a scheduling order that the hearing was needed after the two sides failed to reach an agreement in court-ordered mediation.

The Jan. 28 seizure from a warehouse near Atlanta targeted the elections hub in Georgia's most populous county, which is heavily Democratic and includes most of the city of Atlanta. Fulton County has been at the center of unfounded claims by President Donald Trump and his allies that widespread election fraud cost him reelection.

The FBI's move was one of several actions by the Trump administration that have alarmed Democrats and many election officials who are concerned it is using law enforcement to pursue the president's personal grievances and is planning ways to interfere in this year's midterm elections. The FBI also used a subpoena earlier this month to obtain records related to a controversial audit of the 2020 presidential election in Maricopa County in Arizona, another battleground state Trump lost that year.

At the same time, the Justice Department is fighting numerous states in court for access to voter data that includes sensitive personal information. Election officials, including some Republicans, have said handing over the information would violate state and federal privacy laws.

Lawyers for Fulton County argued in a court filing that the seizure of its documents was "improper and unjustified" and demonstrates "callous disregard" for the Fourth Amendment protection against unreasonable search and seizure. The Justice Department seeks to "set a precedent that would grant the federal government unchecked power to interfere with the local administration of elections," they wrote.

Justice Department attorneys argued that preparing a detailed affidavit and presenting it to a judge "is the exact opposite of 'callous disregard'" for those constitutional rights. "Their goal to disrupt an ongoing federal criminal investigation is clear," they wrote of Fulton County officials.

The Justice Department said it is investigating "irregularities that occurred during the 2020 presidential election in the County" and identified two laws that might have been violated. One requires election records to be maintained for 22 months, while the other prohibits procuring, casting or tabulating false, fictitious or fraudulent ballots.

The filing said the FBI is looking into whether Fulton County properly retained ballot images; whether some ballots were scanned and counted multiple times; whether unfolded, unmailed ballots were counted as mail-in absentee ballots; and potential irregularities concerning tabulator tapes from the scanners used to count ballots.

Fulton County's lawyers wrote that the "deficiencies" or "defects" in the county's handling of the 2020 election cited in the affidavit are the kinds of human errors that commonly occur without any intentional wrongdoing and cannot establish probable cause.

To support their claims, Fulton officials submitted a sworn declaration from Ryan Macias, an election technology and security expert who advised the county during the 2020 election. He said the affidavit contains "a multitude of false or misleading statements and omissions" and offered explanations for the alleged "deficiencies."

Investigations by the Georgia secretary of state and independent reviews contradict the core allegations of the affidavit, which is "rife with statements from witnesses lacking credibility, with extraordinary and undisclosed biases," Fulton's lawyers argued.

Georgia's votes in the 2020 presidential race were counted three times, including once by hand, and

each count affirmed Democrat Joe Biden's win.

Federal government lawyers rejected the idea that the FBI agent who wrote the affidavit "intentionally or recklessly misled" the judge, writing that "the supposed misrepresentations and omissions flagged by Petitioners are illusory and/or immaterial." They also asserted that a lapse of the statute of limitations on the potential crimes does not negate probable cause.

Justice Department lawyers say they don't believe the records were "properly retained and preserved" and wrote that Fulton County officials "can hardly claim a meaningful interest" in the records because the clerk of courts previously sought permission from a judge to destroy them.

The department also noted that a federal magistrate judge reviewed the FBI affidavit and signed off on the search warrant. Fulton County sought to have the FBI agent who wrote the affidavit testify at Friday's hearing, but the Justice Department objected and the judge sided with the federal government and quashed the subpoena.

Woman whose son died from drugs bought on social media celebrates verdicts against Meta, YouTube

By THOMAS PEIPERT and HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

THORNTON, Colo. (AP) — A Colorado woman whose son died from a fentanyl-laced pill he bought through social media celebrated a pair of verdicts this week against Meta and YouTube that she said opened the door for companies to be held responsible for harms to children using their platforms.

"The truth is out, and it's time that they are held accountable for the design of the platforms," said Kimberly Osterman, whose son Max died in 2021 at age 18. "They put profits over safety."

Flipping through photo albums Thursday at her home in Colorado, Osterman reflected on "the days before social media. The days before the infinite scrolling lured him in." Photos of him in frames with hearts and angels wings dotted the shelves.

Osterman said Max arranged to meet a drug dealer he connected with on Snapchat and purchased what he thought was Percocet. The pill was laced with a deadly dose of fentanyl, and he was dead the next morning. Osterman is pursuing a wrongful death lawsuit that is separate from cases decided this week.

In Los Angeles on Wednesday, a jury found both YouTube and Meta, which owns and operates platforms including Instagram and Facebook, liable for harms to children for designing their platforms to hook young users. The companies said they disagreed with the verdicts and may appeal.

And 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. Meta said it would appeal.

Snapchat's parent company, Snap Inc., settled for an undisclosed sum in January just before the Los Angeles trial began. TikTok also agreed to settle, and details were not disclosed.

Osterman is part of Parents for Safe Online Spaces, or ParentsSOS, a group that includes parents who have lost children to online harm and advocate for more regulation. It has campaigned for the Kids Online Safety Act, pending federal legislation that would require social media platforms to take reasonable steps to prevent harm on platforms minors are likely to use.

She hopes to see social media companies enact strict guardrails, such as age verification technology, to prevent anyone under 18 from accessing the platforms.

"You think your kids are safe in their home, in their bedroom, but that's not the way it is with the current status of social media," she said.

Osterman knew Max used Snapchat to communicate with friends but did not realize the danger he was in. She said he loved lacrosse and wrestling and was academically brilliant.

The man who sold the pill to him, Sergio Guerra-Carrillo, was sentenced to six years in prison on two distribution charges in 2023.

Snapchat did not immediately comment Thursday when asked about Osterman's case. The company has said previously that it uses cutting-edge technology to proactively find and shut down drug dealers' accounts and blocks search results for drug-related terms.

It is not yet clear whether the recent verdicts against the social platforms will lead to major changes. But the verdicts demonstrate a growing willingness to hold major social media companies responsible and demand meaningful change. Tech watchdogs expect they will open the door for more lawsuits and regulations.

Man accused in Gilgo Beach serial killings is expected to plead guilty, sources say

By PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The man accused in Long Island's infamous Gilgo Beach serial killings intends to plead guilty in the case next month, according to two people familiar with his decision.

Rex Heuermann, a former architect charged with murdering seven women over 17 years, is set to change his plea from not guilty at his next scheduled court hearing on April 8, they said.

The two people, who have both been involved in the case, spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the plea has yet to be entered in court. One of the people said the victims' families and Heuermann's own family have already been notified of the decision.

Lawyers for Heuermann didn't immediately respond to emails seeking comment.

Still, much can happen before the court date. Heuermann simply can change his mind, and any guilty plea would also have to be accepted by a judge.

Heuermann, 62, had been scheduled to go on trial in September. He has been in custody since his arrest in July 2023 and had previously told the court he wasn't guilty. His plan to change his plea was first reported by Newsday.

Prosecutors have said DNA evidence, cellphone data and evidence found in a search of Heuermann's Massapequa, New York, home connect him to the victims, who were all young women involved in sex work.

Remains of several victims were found on an isolated stretch of shoreline parkway, though some remains were scattered in other remote areas.

The victims include Melissa Barthelemy, Maureen Brainard-Barnes, Amber Lynn Costello, Sandra Costilla, Valerie Mack, Jessica Taylor and Megan Waterman.

Suffolk County District Attorney Ray Tierney declined to comment when reached late Thursday, as did Gloria Allred, a prominent California lawyer representing some of the families of the victims.

The investigation of a potential Long Island serial killer spilled into public view in 2010, when police searching for a missing woman discovered numerous sets of human remains in the scrub along Ocean Parkway, not far from Gilgo Beach.

Over the years, investigators used DNA analysis and other clues to identify the victims. In some cases, they were able to connect them to remains found elsewhere on Long Island years earlier.

It would take years for investigators to identify Heuermann as a potential suspect.

A renewed investigation into the cold case first identified him as the potential culprit in 2022. Detectives linked Heuermann to a pickup truck that a witness reported seeing when one of the victims disappeared in 2010.

Then, investigators surveilling Heuermann recovered a pizza crust he'd discarded in the trash and used it to link him to DNA from a hair recovered from the one of the victim's bodies.

Cellphone data additionally showed Heuermann was in contact with some of the victims just before their disappearances, and a review of his internet searches revealed a history of viewing violent torture pornography — and of looking for information about the investigation into the killings.

Last year, investigators recovered files from Heuermann's computer that they described as a "blueprint" for the killings, including a series of checklists with reminders to limit noise, clean the bodies and destroy evidence.

In recent months, the judge in the case rejected motions from Heuermann's lawyers to exclude certain DNA evidence from the trial as well as to break up the case into multiple trials.

Ethics panel weighs allegations against Florida congresswoman as expulsion threat looms

By STEPHEN GROVES and MEG KINNARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House Ethics Committee held a rare public hearing Thursday into alleged ethics violations committed by Democratic Rep. Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick of Florida, pushing into the open a yearslong investigation into how she funded her political rise.

Over two years of work, committee investigators say they collected “a mountain of evidence” that the third-term congresswoman committed numerous ethics violations, including failing to follow campaign finance laws, commingling campaign, personal and business funds and using her position to benefit allies. She is also facing federal charges for allegedly stealing \$5 million in COVID-19 disaster relief funds. She denies any wrongdoing, and her attorney criticized the House hearing as unfair.

By the end of the nearly seven-hour hearing Thursday night, lawmakers on the panel of four Republicans and four Democrats expressed heavy skepticism at the arguments Cherfilus-McCormick’s attorney presented.

“It strains credulity,” said Rep. Mike DeSaulnier, the top Democrat on the ethics committee, responding to the congresswoman’s contention that her receipt of millions of dollars was aboveboard.

After the hearing, the panel met in a closed session and planned to later release its judgment. The conclusions could carry significant political repercussions because some Republican lawmakers are threatening a vote to expel Cherfilus-McCormick from the House. Both parties are vying for the ethical high ground before the November elections.

Cherfilus-McCormick, who represents a heavily Democratic district in southeastern Florida, has pleaded not guilty to the federal charges and last year called it “an unjust, baseless, sham indictment.”

A rare public ethics hearing

Thursday’s hearing gave House investigators an opportunity to lay out their findings and make a motion for the panel of lawmakers to conclude that Cherfilus-McCormick committed 27 ethics violations.

Sydney Bellwoar, senior counsel for the House Ethics Committee, told the panel that investigators found “a mountain of evidence” that showed Cherfilus-McCormick violated laws, ethical standards and rules for House members.

Yet to start the hearing, Cherfilus-McCormick’s lawyer, William R. Barzee, asked the subcommittee to postpone the proceedings. Barzee had told the committee that if she wants to preserve her Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination in the upcoming federal trial, “she must remain silent before the committee.”

Cherfilus-McCormick did not address the panel throughout the proceedings, but took notes and at some moments whispered with her attorney and asked him to make a point.

“She is not guilty of these allegations. She is absolutely innocent,” Barzee said, adding, “But she is in between a rock and a hard place right now.”

But the panel declined to postpone the hearing.

Still, Barzee called it a “travesty of justice” for the committee to proceed without allowing him to cross-examine witnesses and submit competing evidence to refute the allegations against the congresswoman.

“At least give her a fair shake and let me cross-examine some witnesses,” he said.

The hearing grew tense at several turns, with Barzee getting into spirited exchanges with lawmakers on the panel. The proceedings centered on a profit-sharing agreement between Cherfilus-McCormick and her family’s business, Trinity Health Care Services.

Barzee argued the agreement absolved the congresswoman of guilt. But lawmakers were skeptical of that argument, pointing out that the only evidence presented for it was an unsigned document that appeared to be the basis of transferring millions of dollars to Cherfilus-McCormick. Barzee retorted that Trinity Health Care Services was a family business that made decisions “around the kitchen table.”

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What ethics charges does Cherfilus-McCormick face?

Committee investigators have laid out their findings in a 242-page report that concludes Cherfilus-McCormick committed 27 counts of ethics violations.

The report alleges that Cherfilus-McCormick first won a special election in 2022 with a campaign that presented itself as self-financed. But in reality, the campaign was substantially funded through a \$5 million overpayment for COVID-19 vaccination services that her family's company had received from the state of Florida, according to investigators.

Barzee said that, regardless of the overpayment, Cherfilus-McCormick was entitled to profits from the business. "There was nothing nefarious or improper about that," he said.

But investigators laid out an argument that funds were channeled into Cherfilus-McCormick's campaign through a number of business entities that were connected to the congresswoman and her siblings. Bank records also showed a pattern of transferring funds into her campaign accounts shortly before filing deadlines, only to transfer the money out after the deadline. This misled voters about the strength of her campaign, investigators argued.

One of the committee members, Republican Rep. Brad Knott, read from text messages that he said indicated Cherfilus-McCormick was aware of when funds were moved into her account to show a higher balance.

"You and I both know that sometimes evidence speaks for itself," he said, pointing at Barzee.

The investigation also found evidence that the congresswoman then funded her reelection campaign largely through outside groups run by her friends and family, including a company that was mostly funded by the Haitian government.

Investigators allege that she continued to commit ethics violations in office, including using her position to benefit allies with special favors during the appropriations process and disregarding restrictions on volunteer work by her senior campaign adviser.

Could Cherfilus-McCormick be expelled from the House?

Republicans are moving to do just that, although it would require a significant number of Democrats to join them. It takes a two-thirds vote to expel a member from the House.

Democratic leaders have so far declined to condemn Cherfilus-McCormick. California Rep. Pete Aguilar, the third-ranked Democrat in House leadership, said this week that he would not "prejudge" the allegations against her.

"Let's see what happens in the Ethics Committee," he said at a news conference Tuesday.

But Thursday's hearing was a rare occurrence that underscored the gravity of the allegations. It has been more than 15 years since a sitting member of the House faced a public hearing, dating to the 2010 ethics trial of Rep. Charles Rangel, D-N.Y., on charges related to his personal finances. The panel also held a hearing that year on allegations against Rep. Maxine Waters, D-Calif., but found insufficient evidence to prove them.

The last member of Congress to be expelled was Rep. George Santos, R-N.Y., in 2023. Santos had not yet been convicted of federal charges, and House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., voted against it at the time, expressing concern about setting a precedent of expelling members based on untried allegations.

But a scathing House Ethics Committee report preceded the expulsion vote for Santos. ____

Kinnard reported from Columbia, S.C., and can be reached at <http://x.com/MegKinnardAP>

Trump says he'll sign order to pay TSA agents as Senate works into the night on funding deal

By LISA MASCARO and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said Thursday he would sign an order instructing the Homeland Security secretary to immediately pay Transportation Security Administration agents, while senators worked late into the night trying to end a budget impasse that has jammed airports and left workers without paychecks.

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Trump announced his decision in a social media post saying he wanted to quickly stop the "Chaos at the Airports."

With pressure mounting, the White House and senators, who have been engaged in on-again, off-again talks to resolve the stalemate over Department of Homeland Security funding, appeared to be narrowing in on an endgame in the final hours before TSA workers miss another paycheck Friday.

Trump's order will pay TSA agents using money from his 2025 tax bill, according to a senior administration official who spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to discuss it publicly. They compared the move to actions Trump took during a past shutdown to pay troops. The rationale is that Democrats have created an emergency by declining to approve funding, the official said.

The White House had floated the extraordinary move of invoking a national emergency to pay the TSA agents, a politically and legally fraught approach.

Senators, ready to leave town for their own spring break recess, stayed late trying to resolve the remaining issues. GOP leaders were preparing a package to fund as much as possible of the rest of the department, which includes the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Coast Guard as well as the immigration enforcement agencies central to the standoff.

Democrats have demanded restraints on Trump's immigration enforcement and mass deportation operations as part of any deal to fund Homeland Security. They are particularly refusing to fund Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Customs and Border Protection divisions, though they had repeatedly offered proposals to pay TSA and the rest of DHS.

"The president is doing absolutely the right thing," said Sen. John Barrasso, R-Wyo., the GOP whip. "The TSA agents are going to be paid."

Airport lines grow as TSA workers endure hardships

The funding shutdown has resulted in travel delays and even warnings of airport closures as TSA workers missing paychecks stop coming to work.

Multiple airports are experiencing greater than 40% callout rates of TSA workers and nearly 500 of its nearly 50,000 transportation security officers have now quit during the shutdown. Nationwide on Wednesday, more than 11% of the TSA employees on the schedule missed work, according to DHS. That is more than 3,120 callouts.

At George Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston, Melissa Gates said she would not make her flight to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, after waiting more than 2½ hours and still not reaching the security checkpoint. She said no other flights were available until Friday.

"I should have just driven, right?" Gates said. "Five hours would have been hilarious next to this."

The acting TSA administrator, Ha Nguyen McNeill, 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.

"At this point, we have to look at all options on the table," she testified at a House hearing this week.

A 'last and final' offer on the table

Earlier Thursday, Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., announced he had given a "last and final" offer to the Democrats.

Thune did not disclose details of the new framework, but he said it picked up from a previous offer over the weekend, before talks with the White House and Democrats had broken off.

"Enough is enough," he said.

But as senators retreated to privately discuss the new plan, action stalled out.

Democrats argued the GOP proposals have not gone far enough at putting guardrails on officers from ICE, Customs and Border Protection and other federal agencies who are engaged in the immigration sweeps, particularly after the deaths of two Americans protesting the actions in Minneapolis.

They want federal agents to wear identification, remove their face masks and refrain from conducting raids around schools, churches or other sensitive places. Democrats have also pushed for an end of administrative warrants, insisting that judges sign off before agents search people's homes or private spaces — something new Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin has said he is open to considering, but

senators want to see in writing.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York said they needed to see real changes.

Trump, had largely left the issue to Congress, but warned he was ready to take action, threatening to send the National Guard to airports, in addition to his deployment of ICE agents who are now checking travelers' IDs — a development drawing concerns.

"They need to end this shutdown immediately or we'll have to take drastic measures," Trump said during a morning Cabinet meeting.

Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, the chairwoman of the Appropriations Committee, has said there was funding elsewhere that can be legally used to pay TSA as well as the Coast Guard, without declaring a national emergency.

The GOP's big tax cuts bill that Trump signed into law last year funneled billions to DHS, including \$75 billion for ICE operations, ensuring the immigration officers are still being paid during the shutdown.

Any deal almost certainly needs to involve a compromise as lawmakers on the left and right flanks revolt.

Conservative Republicans have panned their own GOP proposals, demanding full funding for immigration operations. Republicans say the Trump administration has made strides to meet Democrats' demands, particularly after swearing in Mullin to replace Kristi Noem.

The war in Iran sparks a global fertilizer shortage and threatens food prices

By ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL and ALLAN OLINGO Associated Press

HANOI, Vietnam (AP) — Farmers around the world are feeling the squeeze of the Iran war. Gas prices have shot up and fertilizer supplies are waning due to Tehran's near shutdown of the Strait of Hormuz in retaliation for U.S. and Israeli bombing.

The fertilizer shortage is putting the livelihood of farmers in developing countries — already troubled by rising temperatures and erratic weather systems — further at risk, and could lead to people everywhere paying more for food.

The poorest farmers in the Northern Hemisphere rely on fertilizer imports from the Gulf, and the shortage comes just as planting season begins, said Carl Skau, deputy executive director of the World Food Program.

"In the worst case, this means lower yields and crop failures next season. In the best case, higher input costs will be included in food prices next year."

Baldev Singh, a 55-year-old rice farmer in Punjab, India, says smallholders — the bulk of the country's farmers — may not survive if the government cannot subsidize fertilizers when demand peaks in June.

"Right now, we are waiting and hoping," he said.

The war halts supplies of key nutrients

Iran is seriously limiting shipments through the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow passage that usually handles about a fifth of the world's oil shipments and nearly a third of global fertilizer trade.

Nitrogen and phosphate — two major fertilizer nutrients — are under immediate threat from the blockade.

Supplies of nitrogen including urea, the most widely traded fertilizer that helps plants grow and boosts yields, are the hardest hit because of shipping delays and the soaring price of liquefied natural gas — an essential ingredient.

The conflict has restricted about 30% of global urea trade, said Chris Lawson of CRU Group, a London-based commodities consultancy.

Some countries are already facing critical shortages, according to Raj Patel, a food systems economist at the University of Texas. For example, Ethiopia gets over 90% of its nitrogen fertilizer from the Gulf through Djibouti, a supply route that was strained even before the war began in February.

"The planting season is now," Patel said. "The fertilizer isn't there."

Phosphate supplies, which support root development, are also under pressure. Saudi Arabia produces about a fifth of the world's phosphate fertilizer, and the region exports more than 40% of the world's sulfur, a key ingredient and byproduct of oil and gas refining, Lawson said.

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Even after the war ends, producers in the Gulf would need clear security guarantees before resuming shipments through the strait, and insurance costs would almost certainly rise, said Owen Gooch, an analyst with London-based Argus Consulting Services.

In India, the government has prioritized urea supplies for domestic use and provides fertilizer manufacturers with about 70% of their natural gas needs. Some plants are still running below capacity, leading to lower output.

"The food system is fragile, and it depends on stable fertilizer supply chains to ensure farmers can produce the food the world relies on," said Hanna Opsahl-Ben Ammar of Yara International, one of the world's largest fertilizer companies.

Shortages hit at a critical time

Fertilizers are generally applied just before or at planting, so crops miss key early growth stages and yields can fall when deliveries are delayed, even if supplies improve later.

The impact is already being felt in the United States and Europe, where the main planting season is underway, and it is expected to hit the first planting season in much of Asia in the coming months.

"Our crops out in the field need nitrogen now — the sooner the better — so they can get off to a good start, helping them establish themselves and build up reserves for the harvest later this summer," said Dirk Peters, an agricultural engineer who runs a farm outside Berlin.

Fertilizer prices are below the peaks seen after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but grain prices were higher then, helping farmers absorb the costs, said Joseph Glauber of the International Food Policy Research Institute. Grain prices are lower now meaning margins are tighter and farmers may have to switch to less fertilizer-intensive crops — such as soybeans in the U.S. — or apply less fertilizer, reducing yields. Lower yields can lead to higher consumer prices.

Other nations likely won't make up the shortfall. China, the world's largest producer of nitrogen and phosphate fertilizers, is prioritizing domestic supply, and urea shipments probably won't resume until May, Lawson said. Plants in Russia, another major producer, are already running near full capacity, he said.

Developing nations are vulnerable

The disruptions are already being felt across Africa, where many farmers rely on fertilizer imported from the Middle East and Russia.

Early heavy rains in East Africa have left farmers with about a week of dry weather to prepare fields and apply fertilizer, said Stephen Muchiri, a Kenya maize farmer and CEO of the Eastern African Farmers Federation, which represents 25 million smallholders.

Fertilizer shortages and price hikes hit farmers hard, forcing them to use less and leading to reduced yields. Even short delays can reduce maize yields by about 4% in a season, Patel said, citing research from Zambia.

Governments can intervene by applying subsidies, promoting domestic production and controlling exports.

India already subsidizes fertilizer to ease the financial strain on farmers, but those subsidies leave less money for long-term farming investments. It has budgeted \$12.7 billion this year for urea subsidies alone, according to the U.S.-based Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis.

Efforts to produce domestic urea have increased India's dependence on imported gas, and excessive urea use has harmed local soil, said Purva Jain of IEEFA, who supports the use of organic fertilizers.

Less reliance on imported fertilizers could protect farmers and consumers from energy price swings and climate shocks, said Oliver Oliveros, executive coordinator of the Agroecology Coalition.

"This could be a turning point," he said.

LaGuardia Airport runway reopens, days after crash on tarmac killed 2 Canadian pilots

By PHILIP MARCELO and ROB GILLIES Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The runway where two pilots were killed in a collision between a jet and a fire truck reopened Thursday morning at New York's LaGuardia Airport, which had been operating at limited capacity

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all week as investigators examined the wreckage and work crews cleaned up debris.

The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey said the tarmac resumed operations at around 10 a.m. after the runway and its associated infrastructure were "repaired, inspected, and confirmed" to meet Federal Aviation Administration regulations for safe operation.

The agency, which oversees the region's airports, said reopening the second of two runways at LaGuardia, one of the busiest airports in the nation, will help "restore full operational capacity," though it advised travelers to still check with their airline for flight status.

LaGuardia continues to register the most delays and cancellations among airports in the country with more than 300 canceled in the last 24 hours, according to Flight Aware, a flight tracking website.

The bodies of the two Air Canada pilots, meanwhile, were being repatriated to Canada.

Pilots carried the casket of Jazz Aviation first officer Mackenzie Gunther off a plane at the Ottawa International Airport on Thursday afternoon. Capt. Antoine Forest's body was then flown from Ottawa to Montréal Trudeau International Airport.

Gunther, 30, and Forest, 24, died when their Air Canada plane collided with a firetruck after landing at LaGuardia.

Hundreds of pilots and flight staff waited in the rain, lined up in front of Air Canada's Montreal headquarters to honor Forest.

Capt. Tim Perry, president of the Air Line Pilots Association Canada, said the pilot community is mourning the two young aviators.

"No family should go through this," he said,

The destroyed Air Canada plane and the fire truck were towed from the crash site late Wednesday as the National Transportation Safety Board continues its investigation.

The agency said Thursday that the truck has been placed in an undisclosed, secure location and deferred to questions about the status of the plane to Air Canada, which didn't immediately respond to an email seeking comment.

The airline has said the plane would be placed in a hangar and that it would soon begin the process of reuniting passengers with their baggage and personal belongings.

Michael Rousseau, the company's CEO, also apologized Thursday for his inability to express himself in French after facing calls to resign over his English-only message of condolence.

The crash happened late Sunday night as an Air Canada regional jet arriving from Montreal and carrying 76 people struck an airport fire truck that had initially been cleared to cross the runway to respond to a separate incident aboard another plane.

Roughly 40 people were treated at hospitals for injuries, including the two firefighters and a flight attendant who survived after being thrown onto the tarmac while still strapped in her seat. Most have since been released from the hospital.

North Carolina's photo voter ID mandate can continue as a judge upholds the law

By GARY D. ROBERTSON Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — North Carolina's photo voter identification law was upheld on Thursday, as a federal judge set aside arguments by civil rights groups that Republicans enacted the requirement with discriminatory intent against Black and Latino voters.

The decision by U.S. District Judge Loretta Biggs is a huge legal victory for Republican legislative leaders who passed the law in late 2018 — weeks after voters approved a constitutional amendment backing the idea.

North Carolina state Senate leader Phil Berger said in a news release that with Biggs' decision, "we can put to rest any doubt that our state's Voter I.D. law is constitutional."

Biggs had presided in spring 2024 over a non-jury trial in a lawsuit filed by the state NAACP and local chapters, which argued that the ID requirement violated the U.S. Constitution and the federal Voting Rights

Act. At trial, the NAACP alleged Republican legislators passed the voter ID law to entrench their political power by discouraging people historically aligned with Democrats from voting.

But lawyers for Republican lawmakers helping defend the law with state attorneys argued that Republicans wouldn't have passed one of the most permissive voter ID laws among states that have them if they wanted to entrench themselves in state politics. They argued that the law is race-neutral and contains many more categories of qualifying ID than was allowed under a previously approved 2013 voter ID law that was struck down years ago.

The lawyers also said the General Assembly had legitimate state interests in building voter confidence in elections and preventing voter fraud. Still, nationwide voter identity fraud is rare.

State NAACP President Deborah Dicks Maxwell called Thursday's decision "deeply disappointing and ignores the real and documented barriers" that voter ID laws have on certain voters. No decision has been made on whether to appeal the ruling.

Even with the federal litigation, the 2018 voter ID law has been carried out since the 2023 municipal elections, after the state Supreme Court upheld the law in a separate lawsuit. Those elections have included the March 3 primary — nearly all of its results were certified on Wednesday.

In her 134-page decision and order, Biggs, who was nominated to the court by President Barack Obama, said evidence in the trial record did suggest the burden to obtain IDs fell more on Black and Hispanic voters. As a result, a disparate number of racial minority voters would be among thousands who will not possess the required ID on Election Day, and ultimately "for many their vote will not count when the election is certified."

Biggs said the state's history of race-based discrimination and voter suppression favors a finding that the law was enacted with discriminatory intent. But she wrote that previous rulings — including one from an federal appeals court panel earlier in the case — requires "this Court to assign less weight to the historical background" and "almost impenetrable deference to the presumption" that lawmakers approved the law in good faith.

Biggs had previously issued in 2019 a preliminary injunction blocking enforcement of the 2018 law, saying it was tainted because the 2013 voter ID law was struck down on similar grounds of racial bias.

But the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals reversed her decision, writing that she had put too much emphasis on the past conduct of the General Assembly when evaluating the 2018 law.

So based on the "preliminary injunction record, the limited evidence presented at trial, and the arguments of counsel," the court "concludes that it is compelled by controlling case law" to side with legislative leaders and the state elections board, Biggs wrote Thursday.

North Carolina law offers free ID cards for voting at county election offices statewide and at the Division of Motor Vehicles. People lacking photo ID for the polls should have their votes count if they fill out an exception form or bring in their ID to election officials before the final tallies.

In the separate state court lawsuit, the 2018 law was struck down initially. But when the state Supreme Court flipped from a Democratic to a Republican majority, the justices agreed to revisit the matter and proceeded to uphold the law.

Thirty-six states have laws requesting or requiring identification at the polls, 23 of which seek photo ID, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Brother and sister are charged after an explosive device was found outside a Florida Air Force base

By DAVID FISCHER Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — A man who fled to China after leaving an explosive device outside MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa has been indicted along with his sister in Florida on federal charges, and their mother has been detained pending deportation for overstaying her visa, a federal prosecutor said Thursday.

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Alen Zheng, 20, and Ann Mary Zheng, 27, were charged Wednesday in separate federal indictments. The sister was arrested upon her return from China, where she had flown with her brother after the threat. Both have U.S. citizenship, U.S. Attorney Gregory Kehoe said during a news conference.

The device didn't detonate, but "could have potentially been very deadly," Kehoe said.

Alen Zheng faces 40 years in prison if convicted of attempting to damage government property and unlawfully making and possessing the explosive device. Ann Mary Zheng faces 30 years if found guilty of witness tampering and being an accessory after the fact to the crime, by allegedly selling the car he used to drop off the package, Kehoe said.

A federal public defender declined to comment on the charges against the siblings.

The suspicious package went undiscovered for nearly a week, but the investigation developed very quickly after it was found on March 16, Kehoe said.

Agents determined that Alen Zheng actually planted the device on March 10 and made a 911 call minutes later saying there was a bomb at the base, he said. Then he and his sister sold their Mercedes-Benz SUV, bought tickets to China, and were gone by March 12th.

Air Force personnel had searched the sprawling base without discovering the device initially. When it was found outside the visitors center, investigators kicked into high gear. They used phone data to connect the 911 call to Alen Zheng, and spotted the SUV on surveillance video. By the time they reached CarMax, the car had been vacuumed and cleaned, but they were still able to find evidence including residue matching the explosive, Kehoe said.

Agents also searched the family's home and reported finding explosive device components. Meanwhile, the device found outside the base's gate was flown by helicopter to an FBI lab in Huntsville, Alabama, for further examination, FBI Special Agent in Charge Matthew Fodor said.

Kehoe said he's not sure if the siblings also have Chinese citizenship. He said they have no immediate evidence that Alen Zheng was working on behalf of the Chinese government or any other country. "We're exploring every avenue we can to get him back to the United States," Kehoe said.

The U.S. Central Command is located at MacDill and is responsible for U.S. military operations in the Middle East, Central Asia and parts of South Asia. MacDill is one of the U.S. bases that has been on heightened alert since the war in Iran began.

Another man was arrested earlier this week on charges of making threatening phone calls to the base days after the device was discovered, though investigators haven't accused that caller of planting any devices. There was no immediate connection between that caller and the Zhengs.

Federal judge temporarily blocks the Pentagon from branding AI firm Anthropic a supply chain risk

By MATT O'BRIEN and MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writers

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — A federal judge has ruled in favor of artificial intelligence company Anthropic in temporarily blocking the Pentagon from labeling the company as a supply chain risk.

U.S. District Judge Rita Lin on Thursday said she was also blocking enforcement of President Donald Trump's social media directive ordering all federal agencies to stop using Anthropic and its chatbot Claude.

Lin said the "broad punitive measures" taken against the AI company by the Trump administration and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth appeared arbitrary, capricious and could "cripple Anthropic," particularly Hegseth's use of a rare military authority that's previously been directed at foreign adversaries.

"Nothing in the governing statute supports the Orwellian notion that an American company may be branded a potential adversary and saboteur of the U.S. for expressing disagreement with the government," Lin wrote.

Lin's ruling followed a 90-minute hearing in San Francisco federal court on Tuesday at which Lin questioned why the Trump administration took the extraordinary step of punishing Anthropic after negotiations over a defense contract went sour over the company's attempt to prevent its AI technology from being deployed in fully autonomous weapons or surveillance of Americans.

Anthropic had asked Lin to issue an emergency order to remove a stigma that the company alleges was unjustifiably applied as part of an "unlawful campaign of retaliation" that provoked the San Francisco-based company to sue the Trump administration earlier this month. The Pentagon had argued that it should be able to use Claude in any way it deems lawful.

Lin said her ruling was not about that public policy debate but about the government's actions in response to it.

"If the concern is the integrity of the operational chain of command, the Department of War could just stop using Claude. Instead, these measures appear designed to punish Anthropic," Lin wrote.

Anthropic has also filed a separate and more narrow case that is still pending in the federal appeals court in Washington, D.C. That case involves a different rule the Pentagon is using to try to declare Anthropic a supply chain risk.

Lin wrote that her order is delayed for a week and doesn't require the Pentagon to use Anthropic's products or prevent it from transitioning to other AI providers.

Anthropic said in a statement that it was "grateful to the court for moving swiftly, and pleased they agree Anthropic is likely to succeed on the merits." The company said the case was necessary to protect its business and customers but it remains focused on "working productively with the government to ensure all Americans benefit from safe, reliable AI."

The Pentagon didn't immediately respond to a request for comment about the ruling.

A number of third parties had filed legal briefs supporting Anthropic's case, including Microsoft, industry trade groups, rank-and-file tech workers, retired U.S. military leaders and a group of Catholic theologians.

US Treasury plans to put Trump's signature on new paper currency in first for sitting president

By FATIMA HUSSEIN The Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. Treasury Department plans to put President Donald Trump's signature on all new U.S. paper currency, the agency announced on Thursday.

The move would be a first for a sitting president, since traditionally, U.S. paper currency carries the signatures of the Treasury Secretary and the Treasurer, not the president.

It's the latest instance of Trump putting his name and likeness on American cultural institutions, following his renaming of the U.S. Institute of Peace, the Kennedy Center performing arts venue and a new class of battleships, among other tributes.

And the plans come in tandem with an ongoing effort to get Trump's face on a coin, which has also drawn criticism since federal law prohibits the depiction of a living president on U.S. currency.

Earlier this month, a federal arts commission approved the final design for a 24-karat gold commemorative coin bearing Trump's image to help celebrate America's 250th birthday on July 4. The vote by the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, whose members are supporters of the Republican president and were appointed by him earlier this year, was without objection.

Treasury says the plan to include Trump's signature on all new paper currency is intended to honor the nation's 250th birthday, and that Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent's signature would also appear on the currency.

Bessent said in a statement that "there is no more powerful way to recognize the historic achievements of our great country" than with U.S. dollar bills bearing Trump's name.

Michael Bordo, director of the Center for Monetary and Financial History at Rutgers, said the move will undoubtedly come with political pushback, "but I do not know if he has crossed any legal red lines" since the Treasury Secretary may have the authority to decide who signs the currency.

In 1862, Congress authorized the Treasury Secretary to design and print paper currency, known as "greenbacks," to finance the Civil War.

The U.S. Bureau of Engraving and Printing is responsible for producing all paper currency while the U.S. Mint produces all the coins. According to the Federal Reserve, more than \$2 trillion in Federal Reserve

notes are in circulation.

Democrats criticized the move in part because the announcement comes as Americans face rising costs at the grocery store and the gas pump. The war in Iran, which began Feb. 28, has caused oil and gas prices to soar, deepening people's affordability concerns.

Rep. Shontel Brown, D-OH, tweeted on X Thursday evening that the Treasury plan is "gross and un-American. But at least it will remind us who to thank when we pay more for gas, goods, and groceries," she said.

U.S. Treasurer Brandon Beach said in a statement that printing Trump's signature on the American currency "is not only appropriate, but also well deserved."

Bordo said, "It also means that many years from now those bills will be collectors' items."

Iran and the US harden their positions over talks to end the nearly month-old war

By JON GAMBRELL and DAVID RISING Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran and the United States appeared at an impasse Thursday, hardening their positions over ceasefire talks and setting the stage for more potential escalation in the Middle East war as thousands more U.S. troops neared the region.

Meanwhile, President Donald Trump extended his deadline for Iran to open the Strait of Hormuz to April 6, and Tehran tightened its grip on the crucial strait while Israel poured more troops into southern Lebanon to fight the Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah.

Sirens over Israel warned of barrages of incoming Iranian missiles, and Gulf nations worked to intercept fire. Heavy strikes were reported in Iran's capital and other cities.

In a war that appears defined by who can take the most pain, the U.S. has offered shifting objectives, including ensuring Iran's missile and nuclear programs are no longer a threat and ending Tehran's support for armed groups in the region. Washington at one point also pushed for the overthrow of Iran's theocracy.

While the U.S.-Israeli campaign has hit Iran's military and government hard, killing top leaders and striking scores of targets, Iran continues to fire missiles, and there is no sign of an uprising against the government.

Surviving could be seen as victory for Iran

For Iran's leadership, by contrast, merely outlasting the onslaught could be seen as victory. It may be hoping to get the U.S. to back down by roiling the world economy with its stranglehold on the the strait, which has disrupted oil and natural gas shipments and raised prices worldwide for energy and other goods.

Short of a negotiated solution, the U.S. would need a dramatic escalation to end Iran's attacks and restore the free flow of goods through the strait, where 20% of all traded oil and natural gas is transported in peacetime. Iran rejected a ceasefire proposal put forth by the U.S., while putting forth its own demands.

Trump has vowed to strike Iran's power plants if it does not fully reopen the strait. His new deadline pulls back on an earlier threat to bomb Iran's energy plants if Tehran did not open the waterway.

Iran had threatened to retaliate against the region's vital infrastructure, like desalination facilities, if Trump followed through. Trump said he was holding off on carrying out his threat because talks aimed at ending the conflict are going "very well."

A Gulf Arab bloc said Thursday that Iran is now exacting tolls from ships to ensure their safe passage through the waterway.

Iran is operating Strait of Hormuz as 'de facto toll booth'

Iran has been blocking ships from the strait that it perceives as linked to the U.S. and Israeli war effort, while letting through a trickle of others. Trump said during a Cabinet meeting Thursday that Iran is allowing some oil tankers through as a sign of good faith for talks.

Jasem Mohamed al-Budaiwi, secretary-general of the Gulf Cooperation Council, a bloc of six Gulf Arab nations, said Iran was charging for safe passage.

Lloyd's List Intelligence called it a "de facto 'toll booth' regime," saying that at least two vessels have paid in yuan, China's currency.

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Iran's grip on the strait and relentless attacks on Gulf energy infrastructure have sent Brent crude, the international standard, up more than 40% since the war started.

Israel said it killed the head of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard's navy, Commodore Alireza Tangsiri, and the country's naval intelligence chief, Behnam Rezaei. Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz said Tangsiri was responsible for bombing operations that have blocked ships from crossing the Strait of Hormuz. Iran did not immediately acknowledge the killings.

Trump says Iran needs to 'get serious' about negotiations

Using Pakistan as an intermediary, Washington has delivered to Iran a 15-point "action list," Trump envoy Steve Witkoff confirmed Thursday, calling it a framework for a possible peace deal. Witkoff said there were "strong signs" the U.S. could "convince Iran that this is the inflection point, with no good alternatives for them other than more death and destruction."

A day after saying Iran wants to cut a deal, Trump posted on social media Thursday that Tehran needs to "get serious soon" on negotiating an end to the war "before it is too late."

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

But Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said in an interview on state TV that his government has not engaged in talks to end the war and does not plan to. He said the U.S. had tried to send messages to Iran through other nations, "but that is not a conversation nor a negotiation."

Egypt is also acting as a go-between, according to Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty, who said Thursday that his country sees a desire from both sides "for calm, for the exploration of negotiations."

As the diplomatic efforts went on, a group of ships, including the USS Tripoli, drew closer to the Mideast with some 2,500 Marines. Also, at least 1,000 paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne — trained to land in hostile territory to secure key territory and airfields — have been ordered to the region.

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

The Israeli army said Thursday it had deployed the 162nd Division into southern Lebanon, joining thousands of troops that already have moved there since the war erupted. Israel says the open-ended invasion is aimed at protecting its northern border towns from Hezbollah attacks and uprooting the militant group from the area.

Israel also said it carried out a wave of attacks targeting Iranian infrastructure early Thursday. Heavy strikes were also reported around Isfahan, home to a major Iranian air base and other military sites, as well as one of Iran's nuclear sites.

Witnesses told The Associated Press that power was out in some areas of Iran's capital Tehran. Witnesses had earlier reported the sounds of heavy strikes and fighter jets overhead.

Loud booms could be heard across Israel as it was repeatedly targeted by barrages from Iran. Israel's emergency service said a man in his 30s was killed near the northern coastal city of Nahariya after a wave of strikes that came from Lebanon. In the United Arab Emirates, two people were reported killed by shrapnel from a missile interception over Abu Dhabi.

Israeli military spokesperson Brig. Gen. Effie Defrin said Thursday that the army needs another 15,000 soldiers, roughly half of them combat troops, to be at full strength for its multiple missions. Israel can call up tens of thousands of reservists, but repeated deployments have drawn pushback, with many citing exhaustion and financial strain.

Since the war began, more than 1,900 people have been killed in Iran, Deputy Health Minister Ali Jafarian told Al Jazeera.

Eighteen people have died in Israel, while three Israeli soldiers have also been killed in Lebanon. At least 13 American troops have been killed. More than a dozen civilians in the occupied West Bank and Gulf Arab states have also died.

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

California renames César Chavez Day following sexual abuse allegations

By TRÂN NGUYỄN Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif (AP) — California Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom signed a bill Thursday to rename César Chavez Day as Farmworkers Day in an effort to reconcile the Latino labor icon's legacy with explosive sexual abuse allegations before the state holiday on March 31.

The state Senate approved the legislation earlier in the day with bipartisan support.

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 and 1970s, 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.

Republican Sen. Suzette Valladares said Thursday that her family built a life in California by working the fields and that the movement brought together workers from different backgrounds.

"This is not about one person. This is not about one narrative," she said. "It's about honoring generations of sacrifice, of resilience and hope."

Senate President Pro Tempore Monique Limon said honoring farmworkers is especially important in the face of a series of federal raids across the state last year. A worker in her district died after being chased by a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent last summer, Limon said.

"His death is a reminder of how much farmworkers risk every day to put food on our table," she said before the vote. "Our farmworkers remind us that everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect."

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 legislation passed Thursday didn't address the curriculum requirement. State leaders said they're in conversation with school officials to adjust lesson plans.

The California bill also passed in the Assembly with bipartisan support on Monday.

"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.

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

As his birthday approaches, cities across the country have remade or canceled annual celebrations to honor him. In Tucson last weekend, the annual César Chavez and Dolores Huerta March and Rally were scaled back and rebranded. There was no march or car show, and it was billed instead as the Comunidad y Labor Unity Fair to focus more broadly on labor rights without mentioning Chavez.

In Grand Junction, Colorado, the organizers of the annual event in Mesa County had already printed flyers and T-shirts, all bearing Chavez's name. There has been a flurry of social media posts in recent days to let people know the event will go on Saturday as the *Sí, Se Puede* Celebration instead.

In El Paso, Texas, March 31 will be celebrated as the Community and Labor Heritage Day.

Wall Street falls to its worst drop since the Iran war as the Nasdaq sinks 10% below its record

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By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Stocks fell sharply Thursday, and oil prices rose as doubt took over again from hope on Wall Street about a possible end to the war with Iran.

The S&P 500 slumped 1.7% for its worst day since January and is back on track for a fifth straight losing week. That stretches back to before the Iran war began, and it would be the longest such losing streak in nearly four years.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 469 points, or 1%, and the Nasdaq composite sank 2.4% to fall more than 10% below its all-time high set early this year. That's a steep enough drop that professional investors have a name for it: a "correction."

Stock markets likewise tumbled across much of Asia and Europe. They're the latest flip-flops for financial markets in a week that began with big hopes after President Donald Trump said productive talks had taken place about ending the war. But Iran denied direct talks were underway and then dismissed a U.S. proposal for a ceasefire that was delivered via Pakistan.

On Thursday, the fighting continued, and thousands more U.S. troops neared the region. Iran, meanwhile, tightened its grip on the crucial Strait of Hormuz. It may be creating something like a "toll booth" for tankers to get past the narrow waterway, which typically sees a fifth of the world's oil exit the Persian Gulf through it to customers worldwide.

The price for a barrel of Brent crude oil climbed 4.8% to settle at \$101.89 as hopes dimmed for a potential return to normal for the strait. That's up from roughly \$70 before the war began. Benchmark U.S. crude rose 4.6% to \$94.48 per barrel.

"They better get serious soon, before it is too late," Trump said on his social media network Thursday morning about Iran's negotiators, "because once that happens, there is NO TURNING BACK, and it won't be pretty!"

Just minutes after Wall Street finished its trading for the day, Trump softened his talk a bit. He said he was delaying his threat to "obliterate" Iranian power plants to April 6, allowing more time for talks.

"Talks are ongoing and, despite erroneous statements to the contrary by the Fake News Media, and others, they are going very well."

After that, oil prices trimmed some of their gains, and Brent crude fell back toward \$100 per barrel. Treasury yields also pared their big jumps in the bond market.

High Treasury yields and disruption in the bond market were big factors that Trump named a year ago when he backed off his initial threats for global tariffs made on "Liberation Day." The moves caused critics to allege Trump always chickens out, or "TACO," if financial markets show enough pain.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury jumped as high as 4.43% Thursday from 4.33% late Wednesday and from just 3.97% before the war started. That's a significant leap for the bond market, and it's already sent rates higher for mortgages and other kinds of loans for U.S. households and businesses, which slows the economy.

A report on Thursday morning said slightly more U.S. workers filed for unemployment benefits last week, though the number is still low compared with historical figures.

A slowing job market would typically encourage the Federal Reserve to cut interest rates to juice the economy. But hopes have cratered on Wall Street for a possible cut to interest rates this year, even though traders came into 2026 forecasting several. That's because lower interest rates carry the risk of worsening inflation, and the spike in oil prices has heightened those worries.

On Wall Street, tech stocks were the heaviest weights on the market.

Meta Platforms fell 8%, and Alphabet sank 3.4% after each had held relatively steady the day before, when a jury found Instagram and YouTube liable in a landmark social-media addiction trial.

The financial penalties were small compared with the companies' vast profits, but it could herald a watershed moment that invites more lawsuits.

Other Big Tech stocks also fell, including drops of 4.2% for Nvidia and 2% for Amazon. Apple was an outlier and inched up 0.1%.

Commercial Metals fell 4.7% after the maker of steel rebar and other products reported a weaker profit

for the latest quarter than analysts expected. CEO Peter Matt said bad weather hurt its North American operations during the quarter, but underlying market conditions looked favorable.

All told, the S&P 500 fell 114.74 points to 6,477.16 and is 7.2% below its all-time high set a couple months ago. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 469.38 to 45,960.11, and the Nasdaq composite sank 521.74 to 21,408.08.

In stock markets abroad, Germany's DAX lost 1.5%, Hong Kong's Hang Seng sank 1.9% and South Korea's Kospi dropped 3.2%. Japan's Nikkei 225 had one of the world's milder losses, at 0.3%.

Transgender women athletes banned from female Olympic events by new IOC policy

By GRAHAM DUNBAR AP Sports Writer

GENEVA (AP) — Transgender women athletes are now excluded from women's events at the Olympics after the IOC agreed to a new eligibility policy on Thursday which aligns with U.S. President Donald Trump's executive order on sports ahead of the 2028 Los Angeles Games.

"Eligibility for any female category event at the Olympic Games or any other IOC event, including individual and team sports, is now limited to biological females," the International Olympic Committee said, to be determined by a mandatory gene test once in an athlete's career.

It is unclear how many, if any, transgender women are competing at an Olympic level. No woman who transitioned from being born male competed at the 2024 Paris Summer Games, though weightlifter Laurel Hubbard did at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021 without winning a medal.

The eligibility policy that will apply from the L.A. Olympics in July 2028 "protects fairness, safety and integrity in the female category," the IOC said.

"It is not retroactive and does not apply to any grassroots or recreational sports programs," said the IOC, whose Olympic Charter states that access to play sport is a human right.

After an executive board meeting, the IOC published a 10-page policy document that also restricts female athletes such as two-time Olympic champion runner Caster Semenya with medical conditions known as differences in sex development, or DSD.

"We know that this topic is sensitive," IOC President Kirsty Coventry said in an online news conference to explain the policy.

Coventry and the IOC have wanted a clear policy instead of continuing to advise sports' governing bodies who previously have drafted their own rules.

"At the Olympic Games, even the smallest margins can be the difference between victory and defeat," Coventry, a two-time Olympic gold medalist in swimming, said in a statement. "So, it is absolutely clear that it would not be fair for biological males to compete in the female category."

She set up a review of "protecting the female category" as one of her first big decisions last June as the first woman to lead the Olympic body in its 132-year history.

Female eligibility was a strong theme in a seven-candidate IOC election last year — held after a furor around women's boxing in Paris — when Coventry's main rivals pledged a stronger policy to leading on the issue.

"This was a priority for me way before President Trump came into his second term," Coventry said. "There's not been any pressure (on) us to deliver anything from anybody outside of the Olympic Movement."

Before the 2024 Paris Olympics, three top-tier sports — track and field, swimming and cycling — excluded transgender women who had been through male puberty. Semenya, who was assigned female at birth in South Africa and has testosterone levels higher than the typical female range, won a European Court of Human Rights judgment in her years-long legal challenge to track and field's rules which did not overturn them.

Performance advantage from testosterone

The IOC document details its research that being born male gives physical advantages that a working group of experts believes are retained.

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"Males experience three significant testosterone peaks: In utero, in mini-puberty of infancy and beginning in adolescent puberty through adulthood," the document said.

It added this gives males "individual sex-based performance advantages in sports and events that rely on strength, power and/or endurance."

The IOC said its research included "in-depth individual interviews with impacted athletes from around the world."

The expert group agreed the current gene test is "the most accurate and least intrusive method currently available." The saliva, cheek swab or blood sample screens for "the SRY gene, a segment of DNA typically found on the Y chromosome that initiates male sex development in utero and indicates the presence of testes/testicles."

Still, the mandatory gender screening — already conducted by the governing bodies of track and field, skiing and boxing — is likely to be criticized by human rights experts and activist groups.

Athlete appeal to CAS?

The IOC policy can — and likely will — be challenged at the Court of Arbitration for Sport in the Olympic body's Swiss home city Lausanne, perhaps by an athlete acting alone.

Track athletes Dutee Chand of India and Semenya challenged previous versions of their sport's eligibility rules at the court.

Any potential appeal would examine science underpinning IOC research which was not published Thursday. A case could occupy much of the near-28 months until the L.A. Olympics open.

"As we know in today's world," Coventry said, "any and all rules and regulations at any point in time could always be challenged."

Women's boxing champions

One of the two women's boxing gold medalists at the center of the gender controversy in Paris, Lin Yu-ting of Taiwan, has passed her gene test and can return to competition, the World Boxing governing body said last week.

The other Olympic boxing champion, Imane Khelif of Algeria, told CNN last month she would take a gene test to be eligible for the L.A. Olympics. She is reportedly preparing for a professional bout next month in Paris.

The IOC document published on Thursday said the male performance advantage over biological women was "10-12% in most running and swimming events," at least 20% in "most throwing and jumping events" but "can be greater than 100%" for explosive power events including "punching sports."

Trump's executive order

In the U.S., President Trump signed the executive order "Keeping Men Out of Women's Sports" in February last year, and pledged to deny visas to some athletes attempting to compete at the L.A. Olympics. The order also threatened to "rescind all funds" from organizations that allowed transgender athletes to take part in women's sports.

Within months the U.S. Olympic body updated its guidance to national sports bodies citing an obligation to comply with the White House.

The White House welcomed the IOC's decision, describing it as the result of the executive order.

"The IOC aligning their policy with President Trump's executive order ahead of the 2028 LA Games is common sense and long overdue," White House spokesman Davis Ingle said in a statement.

Judge weighs whether Venezuela can pay Maduro's legal costs in US drug trafficking case

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

NEW YORK (AP) — A U.S. judge pressed the Trump administration Thursday about its basis for barring Venezuela's government from paying former President Nicolás Maduro's legal fees in the drug trafficking case that has put him behind bars in New York.

As Maduro and Cilia Flores, his wife and co-defendant, looked on in beige jail uniforms, his lawyers

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argued that the U.S. is violating the deposed leader's constitutional rights by blocking Venezuelan government money from being used for the couple's legal costs. The U.S. government hasn't let the funds flow because of sanctions against the South American country.

Judge Alvin Hellerstein questioned why the prosecution's argument still stands, now that U.S. and Venezuelan relations have warmed. Since Maduro's capture by U.S. military forces in January, Venezuela and the U.S. have reestablished diplomatic relations, Washington has eased economic sanctions on Venezuela's crucial oil industry, and the U.S. has dispatched a chargé d'affaires to Caracas.

"We have changed the situation in Venezuela," Hellerstein observed, suggesting that the argument for continuing to block the defense funds has changed with it: "The current paramount goal and need and constitutional right is the right to defense."

He didn't issue a ruling, however, nor say when he will.

As supporters and opponents rallied outside, Maduro and Flores made their first court appearance since a January arraignment at which he declared: "I am not guilty. I am a decent man, the constitutional president of my country." Flores has also pleaded not guilty.

A 25-page indictment accused Maduro 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. He and Flores also are accused of ordering kidnappings, beatings and murders of those who owed them drug money or undermined their trafficking operation. If convicted, they face life in prison.

Maduro and Flores remain jailed in Brooklyn, and neither has asked to be released on bail. Hellerstein has yet to set a trial date.

Rallies held before court hearing

In a noisy scene outside the Manhattan courthouse, contrasting groups of demonstrators chanted, blew horns and beat drums and cowbells. Among Maduro critics, one person waved a sign reading "Maduro rot in prison." On the other side of a metal barrier, people held signs reading "Free President Maduro."

In Caracas, hundreds of people gathered at a public plaza, including ruling party supporters, state employees and civilian militia members. One attendee, retiree Eduardo Cubillan, said he was there to pray for Maduro and Flores and condemn the violation of Venezuela's sovereignty during the Jan. 3 operation.

"We hope that in the United States, if justice truly exists, a trial will be held that will lead to President Maduro's freedom, because this kidnapping violated international legal principles, and we want justice to be served," Cubillan, 80, said.

Maduro, 63, and Flores, 69, continue to enjoy some support in Venezuela, with murals and billboards across 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. She has reorganized agencies, appointed ambassadors and eliminated tenets of the self-proclaimed socialist movement that has ruled Venezuela for more than two decades.

In court Thursday, Hellerstein cut off Flores' lawyer, Mark Donnelly, when he referred to her as "the first lady," telling him: "There are no titles to be used in this court."

As the hearing was ending, Maduro held up two fingers in a "V," a gesture that has become a symbol in Venezuela — portrayed in murals with the slogan "Nosotros Venceremos," or "We Shall Overcome" — since he flashed it upon arriving in New York in January.

"Hasta mañana," he said, shaking hands with Pollack before officers escorted him out.

Funding for defense a key early issue

Assistant U.S. Attorney Kyle Wirshba noted that the sanctions, in place long before Maduro and Flores were charged, were driven by allegations that Maduro's government was cracking down on free speech and plundering Venezuelan wealth.

Allowing them to use Venezuelan government funds to defend themselves in a case arising from that conduct would "undermine the sanctions," Wirshba said.

The U.S. has said Maduro and Flores can use personal funds to pay his lawyers. They have said they

don't have the money.

Maduro lawyer Barry Pollack contended that if Maduro got public defenders, the complex case would sap legal resources meant for people who can't afford their own attorneys. That doesn't make sense, he argued, in "a case where you have someone other than the U.S. taxpayer standing ready, willing and able to fund that defense."

Pollack wants the case thrown out, but Hellerstein ruled out doing so — at least for now, saying he didn't want to consider "such a serious step" when another remedy is available. He said Pollack could revisit the request if the Treasury Department doesn't relent on its decision to bar Venezuela from paying Maduro's legal fees.

Trump comments on the case

During a Cabinet meeting Thursday in Washington, President Donald Trump accused Maduro of being a "major purveyor of drugs coming into our country."

Trump said Maduro would be given "a fair trial."

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.

Dash Crofts of Seals & Crofts, known for hits 'Summer Breeze' and 'Diamond Girl,' dies at 87

By HILLEL ITALIE and JOCELYN NOVECK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Singer-songwriter Darrell "Dash" Crofts, who teamed with childhood friend Jim Seals for such 1970s soft-rock hits as "Summer Breeze," "Diamond Girl" and "Get Closer," has died. He was 87.

Crofts died Wednesday of heart failure at the Heart Hospital of Austin in Austin, Texas, said his daughter, Lua Crofts Faragher. She said her father had been suffering heart issues for several years and had been hospitalized for about a month.

Seals and Crofts were native Texans who had known each other since high school and played together in various groups before becoming a duo, Seals & Crofts, in the late 1960s. Blending pop, country, folk and jazz, they were part of a wave of million-selling soft-rock (or "easy listening") bands that included America, Bread and Loggins and Messina.

"Summer Breeze," "Diamond Girl" and "Get Closer" all reached the Top 10, while their other popular singles included "I'll Play for You," "Hummingbird" and "We May Never Pass This Way (Again)." The wide-eyed sentiments of the latter made it a favorite for high school yearbooks:

"Life / So they say / Is but a game and they'd let it slip away / Love / Like the autumn sun / Should be dyin' / But it's only just begun."

Not always easy listening

Like many bands of the era, Seals & Crofts sang of love, peace, music and the natural world. But the inspirations were rooted less in the counterculture than in the Baha'i faith, a monotheistic religion advocating global unity that they both embraced in the 1960s.

"It became a driving force in their careers and the way they lived their lives," Faragher said.

They worked Baha'i themes into their music — "Hummingbird" is a metaphor for the Baha'i prophet Bahau'llah — distributed literature after their shows, and sometimes preached from the stage, including during a performance on "Tonight" with Johnny Carson.

"You start out writing songs like 'the leaves are green and the sky is blue and I love you and you love me' — very simple lyrics — but you grow into a much, much broader awareness of life, of love, and of unity," Crofts told Stereo Review in 1971. "It's really great to be able to say something real in your music."

One Baha'i tenet, that the soul begins with the formation of the embryo, led to controversy. In 1974, the year after the Supreme Court's Roe v. Wade decision established the right to abortion, Seals & Crofts released the ballad "Unborn Child," the title song of their new album.

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It was inspired by the wife of their recording engineer, who had seen a television documentary about abortion and wrote a poem with such lines as "Oh tiny bud, that grows in the womb, only to be crushed before you can bloom." Numerous radio stations refused to play "Unborn Child" and protesters picketed Seals & Crofts, although the album was certified gold for selling 500,000 copies.

"I think we got more good results out of it than bad," Crofts later told the St. Petersburg Press, "because a lot of people called us and said, 'We're naming our children after you, because you helped us decide to save their lives with that song.' That was very fulfilling to us."

By the early 1980s, soft-rock bands were out of fashion and Seals & Crofts had been dropped by its label, Warner Bros. They broke up for a time but continued to appear together at Baha'i gatherings, while also recording on their own. Crofts released a solo album, "Today," in 1998, and six years later reunited with Seals for "Traces." More recently, their music was revived by Faragher and Seals' cousin Brady, who toured together as Seals & Crofts 2. (Jim Seals died in 2022).

"There's not a time that we performed that we didn't have hundreds of people coming up and expressing their love and often saying the music changed their life," Faragher said.

"There were so many people who loved them," she added. "They were a constant service to mankind." She said that her father's death, a few years after that of Seals, marked the end of an era.

"That's what makes it so painful — that it's the end," she said. "But the music will always, always live on."

Long-awaited breakthrough

Darrell George "Dash" Crofts was born in Cisco, Texas, in 1938 and was singing and playing music from an early age, eventually learning piano, guitar, drums and mandolin.

He met and befriended Seals when both were teenagers and in a local rockabilly band, the Crew Cats. By the end of the 1950s, they had moved to Los Angeles and joined The Champs, best known for the early rock hit "Tequila." Seals and Crofts would later briefly play in a band led by Glen Campbell, and join another California group, the Dawnbreakers, whose members included Crofts' future wife, Billie Lee Day.

Although they performed on the same bill as Eric Clapton and Deep Purple among others, they were turned off by the volume and the lifestyle of hard-rock performers and honed a gentle sound. Seals & Crofts released their eponymous debut album in 1969, and soon followed with "Down Home" and "Year of Sunday."

Their commercial breakthrough came in 1972 with "Summer Breeze," which featured a chorus that ranked with a contemporary hit, the Eagles' "Take it Easy," as a definition of post-1960s escapism: "Summer breeze makes me feel fine/blowing through the jasmine of my mind."

"That was the beginning of bigger concerts, bigger crowds and we kept getting hits in the Top 40," Crofts told the podcast "Inside MusiCast" in 2021. "That cemented us in the music business."

Crofts is survived by his second wife, Louise Crofts; his children Lua, Faizi and Amelia; and eight grandchildren, Faragher said. His first marriage ended in divorce.

Trump interrupts a Cabinet meeting dealing with the Iran war and rising prices to talk Sharpies

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump may believe the adage that the pen is mightier than the sword — as long as it's a Sharpie.

During a Cabinet meeting Thursday that discussed the war in Iran, record-long security lines at many of the nation's top airports, rising oil prices and skittish stock markets, the president interjected by holding up a custom-made black and gold Sharpie and offering a long story about how his preferred marker came to be a White House fixture.

"See this pen right here?" Trump said at the start of a roughly five-minute, on-and-off diatribe on the Sharpie. "This pen is an interesting example."

It was one of several lengthy asides the president made during the meeting that sometimes felt especially jarring given how many more important things his top advisers could have been discussing.

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The Sharpie monologue came after Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, envoy Steve Witkoff, Vice President JD Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio offered sobering comments about missile strikes, Tehran's uranium enrichment efforts and the U.S. troops that remain in harm's way.

The president offered the winding tale as an example of how his business sense can lead to better, cheaper outcomes in federal spending. He was also seeking to drive home his broader, long-standing criticism that renovations to the Federal Reserve building in Washington are too expensive.

"We've gotta get our priorities straight," Trump said.

The anecdote began with Trump insisting that the White House was once stocked with "beautiful" ballpoint pens that cost \$1,000 each.

That presented a problem, Trump said, when, during ceremonial bill signings, he would hand out pens as keepsakes to lawmakers, supporters and various others who helped make new legislation possible. Recipients even included children, whom he lamented did not know the value of what they'd been gifted.

"Sometimes you have 30, 40 people," Trump said.

Despite being known for a love of all things ostentatious — including the sprawling, \$400 million White House ballroom he demolished the East Wing to build — Trump said giving away so many expensive pens meant "I feel guilty by nature."

"I love the government like I love myself, economically," Trump said. "I want to save money."

The president said he worked with a marker maker and worried about giving the company involved too much publicity — only to divulge that it was Sharpie, a longtime favorite of his, drawing laughs from his Cabinet.

For decades as a celebrity businessman, Trump used the pens to sign autographs or mark up newspaper clippings and send them with personalized notes written in the telltale thick black ink. And, as president, Trump has continued to wield Sharpies to sign executive orders, proclamations and bills.

Trump said he contacted the company and was told that they could make a black pen with the White House logo in gold and that they wouldn't charge for it. Trump said he insisted on paying \$5 per marker. Online searches reveal that typical Sharpies sell for usually \$1 to \$2 apiece.

"The head of Sharpie gets a call. I don't even know who the hell he is. He said, 'Is this really the president?'" Trump said.

It was the most attention the marker has gotten at the White House since the "Sharpiegate" scandal involving Hurricane Dorian during Trump's first term. Still, Sharpie's manufacturer, Atlanta-based Newell Brands, said in a statement that it didn't have any information about the conversation Trump described, but that Sharpies are used by current and past U.S. presidents, elected officials, celebrities, athletes, and artists, among others.

Trump summed it up as "a business story."

"For \$5, I get a much better pen than for \$1,000, and I can hand them out," he said. "And, honestly, they've become hot as a pistol, so what can I tell you?"

After concluding his Sharpie recollections, Trump took a moment to revel in his own storytelling ability before offering the floor to Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent.

"Good luck, Scott," he said as the rest of the Cabinet laughed again.

"Well, sir," Bessent offered, "as usual, you're a tough act to follow."

Verdicts against Meta, YouTube validate concerns long raised by parents, child safety advocates

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.

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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 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.

Quadruple amputee cornhole player waives extradition hearing in fatal shooting case

By OLIVIA DIAZ and BRIAN WITTE Associated Press.

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. (AP) — A professional cornhole player with an inspirational story as a quadruple amputee will be moved from a Virginia jail to face charges in Maryland, where he is accused of fatally shooting a front-seat passenger in a car he was driving during an argument.

Dayton James Webber waived his right to an extradition hearing on Thursday while taking part in a court hearing in Charlottesville, Virginia, through a video call.

"I am trying to go back to Maryland," said Webber, 27, who wore a bright green jumpsuit and was calm during the short hearing.

Alexander Goodman, Webber's attorney, declined to comment. It is unclear when Webber will return to Maryland.

Webber was arrested and charged as a fugitive from justice by police in Virginia's Albemarle County after the shooting in Charles County, Maryland, on Sunday night.

Webber allegedly shot 27-year-old Bradrick Michael Wells, of Waldorf, twice in the head after a heated argument, according to police charging documents. Authorities haven't publicly disclosed what the argument was about.

The charging documents say Webber pulled over after the shooting in La Plata, Maryland, and asked two passengers in the back of the car to help pull the victim out, but they refused, got out of the car and flagged down police officers.

Webber fled with the victim still in the car, the Charles County Sheriff's Office in Maryland said. Two hours later, a resident in Charlotte Hall, about a 10-mile (16-kilometer) drive away, found Wells' body in a yard along a road and notified officers.

Detectives tracked down Webber's car in Charlottesville, Virginia, and found Webber at a hospital where he was "seeking treatment for a medical issue," the sheriff's office said.

Charles County authorities have said he will face charges including first-degree murder.

Webber was featured by ESPN in 2023 in a story of inspiration, noting he rode dirt bikes, wrestled and played football before becoming a professional cornhole player. The same year, he wrote an essay for the Today show about how he became a professional competitor. He said he learned to grab the bean bag by the corners and throw it using his amputated arms.

Doors were propped open at missing mother's Arizona home, Savannah Guthrie recounts in interview

By The Associated Press undefined

The back doors of Nancy Guthrie's Arizona home were found propped open and her phone and purse were still at the home when the 84-year-old disappeared, daughter Savannah Guthrie said in an interview that aired Thursday on NBC's "Today," her first since her mother's apparent abduction.

Given the tremendous pain their mother suffered from, Savannah Guthrie said she and her siblings

knew it wasn't a case of a person wandering off. Then there were the propped doors, blood on the front doorstep and a camera yanked off.

"So we were saying, 'This is not OK'" Guthrie said. "Something is very wrong here."

Her brother immediately realized that their mother had been kidnapped for ransom.

"I said, 'What?' And then, I mean, it sounds so, like, how dumb could I be? But I just, I didn't want to believe. I just said, 'Do you think because of me?'" Guthrie recounted, choking up and wiping away tears. "He said, 'I'm sorry, sweetie, but, yeah, maybe.'"

Nancy Guthrie was reported missing on Feb. 1. Authorities believe the 84-year-old was kidnapped, abducted or otherwise taken against her will. The FBI released surveillance videos of a masked man who was outside Guthrie's front door in Tucson on the night she vanished. The Guthrie family has offered a \$1 million reward for information leading to the recovery of their mother.

The longtime "Today" show co-anchor said in the interview that they don't know that their mother was taken because of her, but acknowledged that it would make sense.

"Which is too much to bear, to think that I brought this to her bedside, that it's because of me. And I just say, 'I'm so sorry, Mommy. I'm so sorry,'" Guthrie said. "If it is me, I'm so sorry."

Some of the purported ransom notes were fake, Savannah Guthrie said, but she believed the two notes that she and her siblings responded to were real. But the circumstances were surreal.

"How is it possible that we are having to make a video speaking to a kidnapper who took an 84-year-old woman in the dead of night, in her pajamas, with no shoes, without her medicine?" Savannah Guthrie asked.

Seeing the images of a man in a ski mask from the porch camera was terrifying, Guthrie said, but after "cruel speculation" that a family member might be involved began to swirl, she was "glad that people saw what came to our door." She will never understand that speculation.

"No one took better care of my mom than my sister and brother-in-law. And no one protected my mom more than my brother," Guthrie said.

Investigators have worked tirelessly, but the family needs answers, Guthrie said.

"We cannot be at peace without knowing and someone can do the right thing," she said. "It is never too late to do the right thing and our hearts are focused on that."

Lebanese fear another occupation as Israel threatens to use Gaza tactics in the south

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB and JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — As Israel trades fire with Hezbollah, calls for mass evacuations and sends ground troops deeper into Lebanon, its leaders have hinted at a long-term occupation modeled on the devastating conquest of much of Gaza after Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack.

Israel says it needs to establish a zone of control in the depopulated south to shield its own northern communities, which have faced daily rocket attacks since the Iran-backed militant Hezbollah group joined the wider war. Many in Lebanon fear that could mean the open-ended displacement of over a million people, the flattening of their homes and a loss of territory.

On Thursday, the Israeli military said it has sent a third division across the border into Lebanon.

Israel's Defense Minister Israel Katz said this week that it would create a "security zone" up to the Litani River, some 30 kilometers (20 miles) from the border in some places. He said troops would destroy homes, which he claimed were being used by militants, and that residents would not return until northern Israel is safe.

The campaign would mirror the one in Gaza, Katz said Tuesday. Israeli forces flattened and largely depopulated the eastern half of the Palestinian territory, and Israel has said it won't withdraw until Hamas disarms as part of a U.S.-brokered ceasefire deal.

"We have ordered an acceleration in the destruction of Lebanese homes in contact-line villages to neutralize threats to Israeli communities, in accordance with the model of Beit Hanoun and Rafah in Gaza,"

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Katz said, referring to border towns that were largely obliterated.

From one war to the next

After a 2024 ceasefire halted Israel's last war with Hezbollah, Israeli forces gradually withdrew from southern Lebanon except for five strategic hilltops along the border.

Lebanese returned to find homes, infrastructure and some entire villages destroyed. Israel said it had dismantled Hezbollah infrastructure that could have been used to launch an Oct. 7-style attack, and it continued to strike what it said were militant targets on a near-daily basis after the truce.

Hezbollah resumed its attacks after Israel and the United States launched the war with Iran on Feb. 28, accusing Israel of having repeatedly violated the ceasefire. Israel accused Lebanon's government of failing to carry out its pledge to disarm Hezbollah despite its unprecedented steps toward criminalizing the group.

In the latest fighting, Israel has launched blistering air raids across Lebanon, killing more than 1,000 people — mostly outside of the border area — and displacing over a million. It has called for the evacuation of a wide swath of the south, extending from the border to the Zahrani River, some 55 kilometers (34 miles) away.

The Israeli military has described it as a limited operation. But Bezalel Smotrich, Israel's far-right finance minister and a member of its Security Cabinet, said this week that the current war must end with "fundamental change."

"The Litani must be our new border with the state of Lebanon," he said.

Echoes of an earlier occupation

Israel invaded southern Lebanon in 1982 during the country's civil war. Hezbollah, established that year, waged a guerrilla campaign that eventually ended the Israeli occupation in 2000.

This time around, Israel has bombed seven bridges over the Litani, the northern edge of a U.N.-patrolled buffer zone established after previous conflicts. Israel says Hezbollah was using the bridges to move fighters and weapons, and that its military will control the remaining crossings.

Heavy fighting has meanwhile erupted in the town of Khiam, the fall of which would cut off the south from Lebanon's eastern Bekaa Valley, another area with a large Hezbollah presence.

After the bridges were bombed, Lebanese President Joseph Aoun accused Israel of seeking to isolate the south "to establish a buffer zone, entrench the reality of occupation, and pursue Israeli expansion within Lebanese territories."

U.N. peacekeepers say the bombing of the bridges and ongoing clashes have hindered their operations and put personnel at risk.

"This is the closest fighting activity we have seen to our positions," said Kandice Ardel, spokesperson for the U.N. mission known as UNIFIL. "Bullets, fragments, and shrapnel have hit buildings and open areas inside our headquarters."

Ardel said peacekeepers have seen a growing presence of Israeli troops and "engineering assets," though they have not seen any new military positions built yet.

'Different shades' of control

Mohanad Hage Ali, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Middle East think tank in Beirut, said Israel has already established "different shades" of control.

"The first line of borders is a no-man zone. This is basically a large parking lot that is facing Israel," he said. "There is nothing there, no movement, nothing at all."

Lebanese movement is restricted farther north. During last year's olive harvest, farmers struggled to reach groves because of Israeli strikes and had to be accompanied by Lebanese troops and UNIFIL peacekeepers, who coordinated with Israel.

Sarit Zehavi, the founder and president of the Alma Institute and a retired Israeli military officer, said Israel will likely establish a more extensive area of control stretching farther north.

She acknowledged that Israel was unlikely to defeat Hezbollah and was at risk of having to maintain a long-term presence in southern Lebanon.

"But the other alternative is to take the risk that we will be slaughtered. It's as simple as that," she said.

No diplomatic offramp in sight

Lebanon's government has broken a longstanding taboo by proposing direct talks with Israel. It has also taken action against Hezbollah since the last war, criminalizing its activities and claiming to have dismantled hundreds of military positions.

But neither the U.S. nor Israel has shown any interest in such talks as they focus on the wider war with Iran.

If negotiations occur, Israel could demand major concessions in exchange for relinquishing territory taken by force — a version of the decades-old "land for peace" formula.

Israel seized parts of Syria after the overthrow of President Bashar Assad and is in talks with the new government about an updated security arrangement. In Gaza, it has vowed to keep half the territory until Hamas lays down its arms, as each side has accused the other of violating the truce reached in October.

Lebanese who fled their homes are meanwhile in limbo — and some fear they may never return.

Elias Konsol and his neighbors fled the Christian border village of Alma al-Shaab with UNIFIL's help. He was reunited with his mother, who cried in his arms, at a church near Beirut where funeral services were being held for a resident killed in an Israeli strike.

Konsol said there were no weapons or Hezbollah fighters in his village, but it was forced to evacuate anyway.

"We no longer know our fate," he said. "We don't know if we will see our homes and village again."

Zelenskyy visits Saudi Arabia as Ukraine provides expertise against Iranian drones

By The Associated Press undefined

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy arrived Thursday in Saudi Arabia on an unannounced visit, days after revealing that Ukraine is helping five countries in the Middle East and Gulf region counter drone attacks on their territory during the Iran war.

"Arrived in Saudi Arabia. Important meetings are scheduled," the Ukrainian leader said on X along with a video of his arrival. "We appreciate the support and support those who are ready to work with us to ensure security."

Zelenskyy provided no more information about his visit but he said last week that Ukrainian officials are helping Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait and Jordan with drone expertise and helping build a defense system. Ukraine is also looking into whether it can play a role in restoring security in the Strait of Hormuz, he said at the time.

In return, Ukraine is seeking more of the high-end air-defense missiles that Gulf countries possess and which Kyiv needs to stop Russia's missiles.

Ukraine has quickly grown into one of the world's leading producers of cutting-edge, battle-tested drone interceptors that are cheap and effective. They are playing a key part in its defense against Russia's more than 4-year-old full-scale invasion.

Ukrainian officials did not announce nor immediately provide details of Zelenskyy's trip.

European countries pledge more action on Russia's shadow fleet

A group of northern European countries vowed Thursday to harden the fight against Russia's "shadow fleet" of tankers exporting its sanctioned oil, as Turkish officials said that one of those tankers approaching the Black Sea entrance to the Bosphorus Strait was hit by a naval drone.

Russia's shadow fleet is made up of aging tankers that are bought used, often by nontransparent entities with addresses in countries that are not sanctioning Russia. Moscow needs the vessels to dodge Western sanctions and sell the oil and petroleum products that largely finance its more than 4-year invasion of Ukraine.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said at a meeting with allies in Finland that "we should go after the shadow fleet even harder."

Speaking with other members of the Joint Expeditionary Force, a 10-country group that has been tracking the vessels, Starmer said the British military will now be able to board shadow fleet tankers when they

transit U.K. waters, joining several other allies in doing so.

"Together, we must close off critical sea routes to this vital trade, to keep up the pressure on (Russian President Vladimir) Putin and to help change the narrative of this war" in Ukraine, Starmer said.

In a recorded video message, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that Russia's oil and gas exports are fueling Moscow's effort to take over Ukraine.

"So please keep the pressure on Russia — its tankers and shadow fleet must not feel safe in European waters," he said.

Turkish crew rescued after sanctioned vessel hit by sea drone

In Turkey, officials said that none of the 27 Turkish crew members of the Altura tanker was injured when it was attacked early Thursday, causing damage to the bridge and engine room.

The Altura, which reportedly was carrying 140,000 tons of crude oil when it was hit some 14 nautical miles north of the Bosphorus, has been owned by Turkey-based Pergamon Maritime since November.

The tanker has been subject to European Union sanctions since October due to its role in transporting sanctions-dodging Russian oil exports, according to the Open Sanctions website.

Transport Minister Abdulkadir Uraloglu said the tanker was subjected to an "attack by an unmanned sea vessel." He did not say whether Ukraine was suspected to be behind the attack.

In the past, Ukraine's military has said it used sea drones to sink Russian vessels in the Black Sea. Earlier this month Russia blamed a Ukrainian naval drone for the sinking of a Russian-flagged tanker carrying liquefied natural gas in the Mediterranean Sea off Libya.

Bus sinks in Bangladesh river, killing at least 26 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 26 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.

Sultana Akhter, local top government administrator, said that at least 26 people were killed in the accident. She said that authorities were handing over the bodies to their families on Thursday.

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

It was not clear if there was still anyone missing.

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

Thousands of people die each year in road accidents in Bangladesh.

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

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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 Washington 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.

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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.

How the war in Iran is landing with Republicans, according to a new AP-NORC poll

By MIKE CATALINI and LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

It's costing more and more to gas up the hot rods that Donnie Beson has spent a lifetime tinkering with. He's not questioning his support for President Donald Trump, but he feels as though the war in Iran has distracted the Republican president from the issues that got him elected.

"Come on, Trump. Worry about us," said Beson, 68, of Woodland Park, Colorado. "We're in a billion-dollar-a-day war. It's like, 'Man, you forgot about the other stuff, and you got to take care of that first.'"

Trump still has deep support among Republicans, but a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research indicates that the president risks frustrating his voters during a midterm election year if the United States gets involved in the kind of prolonged war in the Middle East that he promised to avoid.

Although 63% of Republicans back airstrikes against Iranian military targets, the survey found, only 20% back deploying American ground troops.

Rising gas prices could also pose a problem for Trump. The cost of oil and gas has soared since the Iran war began nearly four weeks ago, adding more financial pressure when many Americans are already worried about affording essentials. About 6 in 10 Republicans say they're at least "somewhat" concerned about being able to afford gas in the next few months, according to the poll, though they're less worried than the rest of the country.

Trust in Trump remains high among Republicans

About three-quarters of Republicans approve of Trump's handling of the presidency, and a similar 70% approve of how he's handling Iran.

Those ratings are in line with Republicans' support for Trump's foreign policy generally and his approach to Cuba, where he's recently ratcheted up pressure to change the island's leadership.

Many Republicans continue to have "a great deal" or "quite a bit" of trust in the president to make the right decisions on foreign issues. About half place a high level of trust in him when it comes to the use of military force outside the U.S. Roughly the same percentage of Republicans have a high level of trust on his dealings with adversaries and allies.

Sharon Fuller, 68, is a firm backer of the president and approves of his handling of the job, as well as the war in Iran.

A retired hospital analyst from Ocklawaha, Florida, Fuller expressed some reservations about the war but called Trump a "huge patriot" and said she's been impressed with how the stock market has done since he became president again.

"I don't really agree with the war, but on the other hand, I think it's a necessity at this point," she said.

Republicans stand out from Americans overall in their support for the war. A recent Quinnipiac University poll found that about 8 in 10 registered voters who are Republicans think the war with Iran will make the world "safer," compared with about one-third of voters overall.

Further entanglement in Iran could frustrate Trump's supporters

The vast majority of Republicans in the AP-NORC poll, 81%, say it's "extremely" or "very" important for the U.S. to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, lending support to one of the goals that Trump has articulated since the war began. But only about half of Republicans see replacing Iran's government with leaders who are more friendly to the U.S. as a high priority.

Stephen Hauss, 40, is a state Agriculture Department employee in Camden, Delaware, where he manages environmental programs. Hauss described his political views as libertarian-leaning, and he voted for Trump in 2024. But the start of the Iran war has changed his views about the president.

"Before the war I was just kind of like, 'OK, like, I voted for him. I got to give him, like, some benefit of the doubt,'" he said.

Now, Hauss said he can't support the U.S. trying to change the leadership of another country. He added, "I don't think I am on board with this anymore."

Other efforts to get the U.S. more involved in Iran could complicate matters further for Trump. Only about 2 in 10 Republicans favor deploying U.S. ground troops to fight Iran, while about one-third don't have an opinion and about half are opposed.

Thomas Sweeney, 76, is a retired chemical engineer from Frisco, Texas, who voted for Trump three times. An Army officer veteran, Sweeney said he can't get behind the war, which has brought down his overall view of the president.

"I'm not happy. I am frustrated," he said. "Soldiers are very, very precious. You just don't go in there and waste lives."

Gas prices causing unease among some in GOP

The rising cost of oil and gas is another vulnerability for Trump, even within his own party. About three-quarters of Republicans say it's "extremely" or "very" important for U.S. foreign policy to keep gas prices down, which could increasingly be at odds with their support for the war.

About 3 in 10 Republican registered voters in the Quinnipiac University poll say the price of gasoline has been a "very" or "somewhat" serious problem for their family lately.

If high gas prices linger, they could create even more frustration for Trump supporters who hoped the president would bring down the cost of everyday goods.

Fuller, the Florida Republican, said there's no chance she'd vote for Democrats, but she had a message for Trump.

"I'd like him to see what he can do to get prices down for, quote, the working people and myself now living on a fixed income," she said.

Suburbanites embrace anti-Trump resistance before No Kings protests, saying, 'This is our fight'

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 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 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 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

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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 day of protesting in U.S. history.

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

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 16.

Democratic voters last month chose Analilia Mejia, a former political director for Vermont independent 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 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."

'Our hair is 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 as if he's living in an "authoritarian nightmare" of Trump's making.

"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 she'll 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

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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 big tax and spending cuts 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, Democrat 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.

Iran war’s environmental toll could leave damage and health risks for decades, experts say

By TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

Oil depots spewing black smoke. Debris sinking in the Persian Gulf. Missiles pounding military sites.

The Iran war has unleashed a toxic mix of chemicals, heavy metals and other pollutants that threaten everything from agriculture to drinking water to people’s health — and will leave behind environmental damage and health risks that could persist for decades, experts said.

“All the burning of oil and gas fields in the coastal areas, all the ships that are there, the oil tankers that are being burned or (sunk) — all of these mean pollution,” said Kaveh Madani, an Iranian scientist and

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director of the United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health. "For someone like me who has fought for sustainability and protection of the environment in that region, this is like going many years backward."

Documenting the damage has proved daunting, with a full accounting impossible for now, said Doug Weir, director of the Conflict and Environment Observatory, a U.K.-based nonprofit that monitors environmental harms from armed conflicts.

The group uses remote satellite sensing and open-source intelligence to identify damage and score environmental risks to people, ecosystems and agricultural land. So far, it has recorded more than 400 environmentally concerning incidents related to the war, though much is still unknown due to delays in satellite imagery and an internet blackout in Iran, Weir said.

Attacks on oil- and gas-related sites create some of the worst environmental risks because of impacts to air quality and soil and water pollution, as well as health threats to people. Harder to quantify are risks from bombed military sites, some of which are deeply buried and some near populated areas, adding to "huge uncertainties" around potential impacts, Weir said.

The air pollution unleashed could lead to many health problems

Perhaps the most enduring images of the war are of darkened skies from oil infrastructure set ablaze by airstrikes, including two weeks ago when black rain fell near Tehran, Iran's capital.

Soot, ash and toxic chemicals from strikes on fuel depots and a refinery combined with water droplets in the atmosphere and fell back to Earth as an oily, acidic rain that prompted warnings to stay indoors. Microscopic soot raises risks of lung and heart problems, while toxic chemicals pose long-term cancer risks and heavy metals from the fallout could contaminate soil and water supplies, experts said.

Debris and contamination from missiles, as well as potential strikes on manufacturing facilities and other infrastructure also could unleash harmful pollution throughout the region, experts said.

"If you hit an ammonia-producing plant for fertilizer or for food production ... those release chemicals that are absolutely toxic and harmful if they spread," said Mohammed Mahmoud, head of Middle East Climate and Water Policy with the United Nations University Institute of Water, Environment and Health and founder of the Climate and Water Initiative.

Intensive fossil fuel emissions also are spiking levels of greenhouse gases that cause climate change, experts said. The carbon accounting platform Greenly estimated that the U.S. military alone released almost 2 billion metric tons of greenhouse gases in just the first six days of the war, meaning the actual amount generated by the fighting is certainly much higher, when accounting for Israeli and Iranian emissions and damage to infrastructure.

That is a significant amount in such a short time, as in an entire year around 50 billion metric tons of greenhouse gases are released around the entire world, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Global oil shortages also are causing some countries to resume or increase their use of coal, which creates more air pollution that hurts people, and more greenhouse gas emissions.

Continued access to clean water is a big concern

Countries in the arid Persian Gulf region rely on hundreds of desalination plants for drinking water, raising health and security risks if plants are damaged or water is polluted, experts say.

Iran has said a U.S. airstrike damaged one of its desalination plants, while neighboring Bahrain accused Iran of damaging one of its plants. Experts fear more could be targeted the longer the war goes on.

People in the region "struggle with having access to clean drinking water, even at peace times," said Madani, the Iranian scientist and U.N. official. "Any damage to water infrastructure can have long-lasting impacts."

Weir worries that pollution, including oil, from sunken ships and other sources could clog desalination plants or that they could be knocked offline by attacks on power plants.

Experts say pollution also could damage fisheries and important ecosystems. Though some contaminants will be dispersed and diluted by water that moves through the gulf, heavy metals and toxic chemicals still could settle in sediment.

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"It's an enclosed basin, quite shallow," Weir said. "There are sensitive habitats there, coral reefs, seagrass meadows, sensitive species which could be impacted."

Nuclear risks are largely unknown

The U.N. nuclear watchdog has not had access to Iranian nuclear sites, including facilities targeted in June by the United States and Israel, meaning their status is largely unknown.

Possible attacks on large and small nuclear sites throughout the region is "another thing to worry about," because of immediate and long-term health and environmental impacts, said Madani. Exposure can cause skin damage and radiation sickness, while long-term risks include cancer, heart disease and genetic damage.

U.S. and Israeli officials have said one of the war's aims is to destroy Iran's ability to produce nuclear weapons.

After Israel and the U.S. this month bombed an Iranian uranium enrichment installation, Iran retaliated by firing missiles at two Israeli towns, including one with a nuclear research center. Israel said the facility wasn't damaged.

"We are hearing that there is no major radiation or change in the level of pollutants so that makes us hopeful that nothing has gone wrong," Madani said. "But the risk is always there."

Addressing environmental damage could take decades

After the war, as Iran and other countries rebuild, environmental damage could be a low priority, experts said.

The focus will be on energy and water infrastructure, manufacturing plants and food production facilities, Mahmoud said. Some pollution, especially to the gulf or other waterways, "I doubt will be addressed soon, and in some cases, not at all."

Weir said environmental damage isn't addressed properly after most conflicts because it's expensive and "humanitarian needs come first," even if environmental risks are high.

In densely populated Tehran, for example, a huge number of strikes have hit not just oil infrastructure, but also buildings and residential areas, generating harmful contamination from pulverized building materials. People are being exposed to dust and chemicals, which may continue for a long time after the war eventually ends and rebuilding begins.

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 freeze the freshwater catch that is often pulled from swampy rice fields. They are hired on H-2B visas for

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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 Chifci, 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.

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"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."

Today in History: March 27

Will Smith slaps Chris Rock during Oscars telecast

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, March 27, the 86th day of 2026. There are 279 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On March 27, 2022, Will Smith slapped presenter Chris Rock onstage at the 94th Academy Awards ceremony; Smith won the Oscar for best actor just minutes later. (Smith later resigned from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and received a 10-year ban from the Oscars.)

Also on this date:

In 1794, Congress approved the "Act to provide a Naval Armament" of six armed ships, which provided the foundation of the permanent U.S. Navy.

In 1912, in Washington, D.C., first lady Helen Herron Taft and the wife of Japan's ambassador to the United States, Viscountess Chinda, planted the first two of 3,000 cherry trees given to the U.S. as a gift by the mayor of Tokyo.

In 1964, Alaska was hit by a magnitude 9.2 earthquake (still the strongest on record in North America) and tsunamis that together claimed over 130 lives.

In 1968, Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin, the first man to orbit the Earth in 1961, died when his MiG-15 jet crashed during a routine training flight near Moscow; he was 34.

In 1973, "The Godfather" won the Academy Award for best picture of 1972, but its star, Marlon Brando, refused to accept his Oscar for best actor and, in what would become one of the Oscars' most famous moments, sent in his place actor and activist Sacheen Littlefeather, who spoke out about the depiction of Native Americans in Hollywood.

In 1975, construction began on the Trans-Alaska Pipeline; the 800-mile (1,290-kilometer) pipeline was completed just over two years later.

In 1977, in aviation's deadliest disaster, 583 people were killed when a KLM Boeing 747, attempting to take off in heavy fog, crashed into a Pan Am 747 on an airport runway on the Canary Island of Tenerife.

In 1980, 123 workers died when a North Sea floating oil field platform, the Alexander Kielland, capsized during a storm.

In 1990, the U.S. government began broadcasting anti-communist programming to Cuba on TV Marti. Cuba's authoritarian government immediately began jamming the broadcasts.

In 2016, an Easter Sunday bombing attack at a park in Lahore, Pakistan, killed at least 69 people and wounded hundreds more. Authorities said a militant group claimed responsibility and deliberately targeted the Christian community.

In 2023, a former student shot through the doors of the private Covenant School in Nashville, Tennessee, killing three children and three adults in an elaborately planned mass shooting at the Christian school. Two responding officers shot and killed the 28-year-old attacker.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Michael York is 84. Film director Quentin Tarantino is 63. Singer Mariah Carey is 57. Actor Pauley Perrette is 57. Actor Nathan Fillion is 55. Singer Fergie is 51. Former MLB catcher Buster Posey is 39. Singer Jessie J is 38. Rapper Lisa is 29. Actor-singer Halle Bailey is 26. Model Amelie Zilber is 24.