

# Groton Daily Independent

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

## Good Morning Saturday Blessings

1 Chronicles 16:34 KJV.

O give thanks unto the Lord; for  
He is good; for His mercy  
endureth forever.



*Have a blessed day  
and a joyful weekend.*

## Sunday, March 29

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6th grade BB Practice, 6 pm., Arena

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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.**

## **Cosmic Fertility Challenge**

Humans may struggle to reproduce beyond Earth, according to a study published this week. The finding presents a new hurdle for the prospect of space colonization.

Researchers placed human, pig, and mouse sperm samples into a device called a 3D clinostat, which simulates microgravity conditions by spinning vials to confuse cells about their position in space. The sperm were separated from egg cells by a thin channel designed to mimic the female reproductive tract. Under these conditions, the sperm became disoriented, with about 30% fewer reaching the egg than in regular gravity. Even when fertilization occurred, embryos showed developmental delays over time relative to those formed under standard gravity.

Interestingly, embryos conceived in microgravity appeared stronger than their counterparts for a few hours—a result researchers attribute to only the strongest sperm reaching the egg. They say this finding could inform new advances to treat infertility on Earth.

## **House rejects Senate DHS funding bill, White House orders TSA pay.**

The bill passed by the Senate yesterday would fund the Department of Homeland Security, excluding Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Customs and Border Protection. House Republican leaders are pushing a separate bill that would fully fund DHS for 60 days. Meanwhile, President Donald Trump yesterday signed an executive order to pay Transportation Security Administration workers amid the shutdown; more than 480 TSA officers have quit since the shutdown began.

## **Florida congresswoman found guilty of 25 out of 27 ethics violations.**

The House Committee on Ethics yesterday determined Rep. Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick (D, FL-20) stole roughly \$5M in COVID-19 relief funds for her congressional campaign, among other violations, concluding a three-year probe. The ruling came after a nearly seven-hour public trial—the first in 16 years. The panel will recommend disciplinary action in the coming weeks; expulsion is on the table.

## **Implantable living pharmacy produces drugs inside rats' bodies for weeks.**

The device—roughly the size of a folded stick of gum—houses engineered cells that produce medicines inside the body. In a trial on rats, it delivered an anti-HIV antibody, a GLP-1-like peptide, and a hormone that regulates appetite and metabolism, with about 65% of cells still viable after 30 days. Researchers say the device could one day treat chronic conditions without daily medication.

## **Tiger Woods arrested, charged with DUI after Florida car crash.**

Neither the golfer nor the other driver was injured in yesterday's rollover crash. Woods, 50, reportedly showed signs of impairment at the scene but registered a 0.000 on a Breathalyzer test. Authorities believe he could have been under the influence of medication or another substance. Woods was seriously injured in a 2021 rollover crash and arrested in 2017 on suspicion of driving under the influence.

## **Savannah Guthrie to return to "Today" show April 6.**

Retired "Today" anchor Hoda Kotb announced Guthrie's return yesterday, shortly after airing the third part of her prerecorded interview with Guthrie. Kotb has been filling in for Guthrie since early February, when Guthrie's 84-year-old mother went missing. The investigation into the disappearance remains ongoing.

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## Stranded humpback begins journey back to sea after four-day rescue operation.

A roughly 40-foot, 26,000-pound humpback whale trapped in shallow waters off Germany's Baltic coast broke free yesterday. After many failed attempts, rescuers dug a channel the whale used to swim to open waters. Experts hope the whale will use the straits between Germany, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway to reach the North Sea and Atlantic Ocean, which are native humpback habitats.

## Bruce Springsteen to headline flagship No Kings protests in Minneapolis.

More than 3,100 events are planned nationwide today, with over 9 million people expected to participate. Rallies are also planned in over a dozen countries, including Canada, Germany, and Mexico. Organizers designated Minneapolis the flagship event after the city became an epicenter of large-scale federal immigration enforcement actions earlier this year.

## Humankind(ness)

Today, we're sharing a story from reader Sara B. in Ann Arbor, Michigan, who works for a nonprofit performing arts presenter.

"Last month, we hosted a School Day Performance with the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis at Hill Auditorium (on the University of Michigan campus) for about 2,200 kids in grades K-12. At the end of the performance, students were invited to ask questions of the group, and a first grader from Ypsilanti, Michigan, asked the band, 'Can we play music with you?' The trombonist of the group said, 'Well, there's no time like the present. Do you know any songs?'

"What followed was the girl singing 'Baby Shark' and the band improvising behind her, with the entire audience cheering her on."

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**BURGER NIGHT**



**Groton  
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**Tuesday, March 31**  
**6:00 - 9:00 PM**

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## GROTON GIRLS FASTPITCH SOFTBALL

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## Secretary of State announces validation of first U.S. Senate petitions

(Pierre, S.D.) – Secretary of State Monae L. Johnson has announced that Senator Mike Rounds will be placed on the ballot as a Republican candidate for U.S. Senate at the Primary Election held on June 2, 2026.

A Republican candidate for U.S. Senate requires 2,171 valid signatures to appear on the ballot. As outlined in SDCL § 12-1-36, the Secretary of State's office conducted a random sample of the petition signatures and found 91.13 percent to be valid. Based on the results of the random sample, 3,160 signatures were deemed valid.

Upon the filing of a candidate petition, any interested person may challenge the Secretary of State's validation of the petition under SDCL § 12-1-13. A person challenging the validation must submit an original, signed affidavit listing out each specific deficiency to the Secretary of State's office no more than five business days after validation. For this candidate petition, the deadline to file a challenge is Friday, April 3, 2026 at 5:00 PM (CT).

For more information on candidates who will be on the ballot at the Primary Election, please see the candidate list on the Secretary of State's website: <https://vip.sdsos.gov/candidatelist.aspx?eid=773>.

## Donation to Provide 900 Dozen Eggs to Feeding South Dakota.

Dakota Layers is set to make a significant contribution in the fight against hunger, donating 10,800 eggs—equivalent to 900 dozen—to Feeding South Dakota during a special delivery event scheduled for Wednesday, April 1.

The eggs will be delivered to Feeding South Dakota's Sioux Falls warehouse as part of Dakota Layers' annual giving campaign, which ties donations to the performance of South Dakota State Jackrabbits men's and women's basketball teams. For every three-point basket made during the regular season, Dakota Layers pledged to donate one dozen eggs. The total contribution was further boosted by an additional dozen eggs for every point scored by Jackrabbits guard Luke Haertle.

Representatives from Dakota Layers and Feeding South Dakota will be on hand for the noon event, along with Haertle, to mark the delivery and highlight the impact of the partnership.

The donation aims to support Feeding South Dakota's mission of providing nutritious food to individuals and families facing hunger across the state. Eggs, recognized as a high-quality source of protein, will help ensure that those in need have access to essential nutrition.

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## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### Iran war 'not going well' strategically, former NATO commander tells South Dakota audience

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

SIOUX FALLS — Former NATO Supreme Allied Commander James Stavridis told an audience Thursday evening at Augustana University that the war with Iran is “not going well” strategically, and America’s leaders are stretched too thin with conflicts around the globe.

Stavridis also described Ukraine as a grinding war likely headed toward a disappointing settlement, China as a long-term strategic test, and Venezuela as a place where the recent U.S. removal of the country’s dictator was strategically risky but could produce an opening for democratic reforms.

With its involvement in those and other international matters at the same time, Stavridis said, the Trump administration has created a “bandwidth” problem for the few people President Donald Trump has entrusted to handle each situation.

“It’s too much, and they don’t have the professional support that they need,” Stavridis said.

Stavridis was the longest-serving combatant commander in recent U.S. history. He is a retired four-star U.S. Navy admiral who oversaw operations in Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, the Balkans and counter-piracy efforts off the coast of Africa. He also led operations across Latin America.

Stavridis was the featured speaker for Augustana University’s Boe Forum on Public Affairs at the Elmen Center athletic arena.

#### Iran

“We’re a month into it,” Stavridis said of the war against Iran. “How’s it going? It’s not going well, in my view.”

Stavridis said the war has gone better militarily than strategically. He said U.S. strikes have been effective at hitting their targets, with four goals in mind: “snip the nuclear capability,” “beat down the Iranian Revolutionary Guard,” “take out the Iranian navy,” and “take out the ballistic missiles.”

“Our strikes are very effective, and we’re quite good at this,” he said, aside from fatal errors, including a Tomahawk missile that hit an Iranian elementary school adjacent to a military base.

“But strategically, how’s it going?” he said. “Not very well.”

Stavridis said the military successes have not resolved the larger problem: Iran still has ways to impose pain, such as controlling the Strait of Hormuz by attacking oil and gas shipments passing through it. That has driven oil prices higher, and “the Trump administration is trying to get out of this,” Stavridis said. “They’re trying to stand down. They want to find a solution.”

But Stavridis said Trump cannot end the war by declaring victory and walking away, because “you may not be interested in war, but war is interested in you,” meaning both sides must agree to stop launching attacks for a war to end.

Stavridis said his best guess is that there’s a “70% chance” the war ends by the U.S. promising to stop the bombing, Iran releasing its grip on the Strait of Hormuz, and both sides leaving Iran’s efforts to build nuclear weapons to be addressed later.

“That would be sufficient for Trump to declare a win,” Stavridis said. “He’ll say it’s the greatest victory in military history; whatever,” he added, to which the audience erupted in laughter and applause. He added that the conflict is costing the U.S. about \$2 billion a day.

Stavridis said there is a 30% chance of a prolonged war. Stavridis said in that scenario, Iran would keep

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pressuring global energy markets and activate terror networks throughout the Middle East, Europe and the United States.

He said putting boots on the ground in Iran would be a mistake that would increase the likelihood that the war escalates and continues.

"For that, you need a big plan, a big strategy," he said. "They have neither."

## Ukraine

Stavridis said Ukraine has survived because of its own fighting spirit against Russia's invasion, reinforced by Western weapons, sanctions on Russia and NATO's backing.

"It's really the war of Putin's ego," he said of Russian dictator Vladimir Putin.

"You can forget this idea that he purports of histories, destiny and Ukraine 'has always been part of Mother Russia, and the Rodina,'" Stavridis said, referencing a Russian term for the homeland. "That's a crock."

He said what Putin wants is the country's natural resources.

Stavridis is pessimistic about a clean Ukrainian victory. He said Russia controls 20% of Ukraine's territory, having invaded from the east, and an end to the war will likely include Ukraine giving up that land, "and I hate it." Though Stavridis added that Ukraine would likely join NATO shortly after.

"And believe me, we want them in NATO," he said, to which the audience again applauded.

Stavridis said negotiations could come soon, given that Russia and Ukraine are both "burning through troops."

Stavridis added that Putin "wants desperately" to build an alliance with China, "and he's kind of getting there."

## China

Stavridis said U.S. tensions with China span trade, cyber attacks, threats to Taiwan's independence, and China's militarization of the South China Sea, including its buildup of artificial islands that function like mini-bases.

Stavridis said Taiwan must become a "porcupine," meaning well-armed and hard to conquer, to deter China from invading. He said Taiwan's military lacks the modern weapons it needs.

But Stavridis said he does not see a U.S. military conflict with China as inevitable. Instead, he suggested the goal should be competition without tipping into war.

"I think we will probably get there," he said of that balance.

## Venezuela

Stavridis said the U.S. operation that removed the former Venezuelan dictator Nicolás Maduro was militarily impressive, but that the harder and more important test is what comes next.

"You can debate the legality of it, or the strategy of it, but as a military operation, quite extraordinary," he said.

Stavridis said removing Maduro has resulted in a, "shall we say, cooperative regime."

He suggested that the best-case scenario is a transition that leads toward free and fair elections.

"And then, you have the opportunity to really flip the table in Latin America," he said. "It's not a terrible outcome."

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

## Warden from Virginia hired to run newly constructed Rapid City women's prison

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER

The South Dakota Department of Corrections hired Eric Aldridge as warden of the Rapid City women's prison, the department announced on Friday.

The \$87 million facility, which is South Dakota's second women's prison, is under construction and expected to open in July.

Aldridge, most recently warden of the medium-security Fluvanna Correctional Center for Women in Troy, Virginia, will begin his job in South Dakota on April 1.

Aldridge has also worked as a rehabilitation counselor, security assessment analyst and in facility leadership positions, according to the department. Aldridge said he plans to "implement industry best practices" at the new facility.

"My focus is on positive change and improving the lives of offenders so that they will re-enter society as productive citizens," Aldridge said in a news release.

The Rapid City prison, designed for minimum and medium-security inmates, will house up to 300 women. The facility will also house a mother-infant program for up to 12 mothers.

The prison will help ease overcrowding at an existing women's prison in Pierre, which will continue to operate.

The new facility will incorporate a therapeutic community model for substance use disorder treatment. That means women will receive four to five hours of intervention and support daily from medical, behavioral health and vocational professionals.

More than half of imprisoned women in the state have drug convictions, and more than 90% have substance use disorders, according to state reports.

Department of Corrections Secretary Nick Lamb said the model will be a "first-of-its-kind" program in the state.

"We have not used this model in our other facilities because of a lack of available programming space," Lamb said in a news release. "This modern facility allows us to do so."

Women in the prison will also have the chance to participate in a business-entrepreneurship program and earn a certificate in hospitality training.

Other positions are still being staffed, including security, case management, medical and behavioral health services.

Meanwhile, the state is preparing to build a \$650 million men's prison in northeast Sioux Falls. It will replace the oldest parts of the Sioux Falls penitentiary, which dates to 1881.

*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.*

## Support from governor means state will cover gap in reduced-price school meals

BY: SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT STAFF

South Dakota's Republican governor approved legislation Friday that will provide state funding to relieve families and schools of costs for reduced-price student meals.

Gov. Larry Rhoden's signature on the bill comes after several years of advocacy by its prime sponsor, Sioux Falls Democratic Rep. Kady Wittman.

"This is a meaningful step forward for South Dakota families and a direct investment in our kids' ability to learn and thrive," Wittman said.

Rhoden signed the bill and several others while visiting a school Friday in Aberdeen.

Families with children in public schools are expected to pay the cost of their children's school meals, unless the families have incomes low enough to qualify for free or reduced-price meals. The federal government covers the entire cost of the free meals and a portion of the reduced-price meals.

The remaining costs of reduced-price meals are charged to families at the rate of 30 cents for breakfast and 40 cents for lunch. If families don't pay, school districts absorb the costs or seek outside donations.

The new law prohibits school districts from charging families for reduced-price meals and requires the state to reimburse districts through the state Department of Education.

The law will cost the state about \$593,000 a year, according to an estimate prepared by the Legislative Research Council.

The bill passed the state House 46-20 and the Senate 20-14 during the recently concluded legislative session. It's among the last pieces of legislation to be considered by Rhoden before lawmakers return Monday to Pierre for one day to consider the two bills he's vetoed.

One of those vetoed bills would require state licensing of non-medical home care agencies, and the other would ban lab-grown meat, although Rhoden has signed a compromise bill into law that places a five-year moratorium on lab-grown meat in the state.

Overriding a veto requires a two-thirds vote of the members-elect in each chamber.

### More bills signed

Other bills signed recently by the governor include:

House Bill 1017, which gives school boards and administrators authority to send aggressive and violent students to an alternative learning setting.

House Bill 1262, which makes a \$2 million appropriation for a non-residential, school-based, therapeutic services facility that the bill title says will be in Brown County.

Senate Bill 231, which creates the water infrastructure development fund and seeds it with \$3 million for the awarding of grants and loans for water projects, such as pipelines proposed from the Missouri River.

House Bill 1048, which makes an \$87 million appropriation of federal funds for the expansion of broadband internet infrastructure throughout the state.

*Searchlight Senior Reporter John Hult contributed to this story.*

## COMMENTARY

### For South Dakota farmers, the war in Iran is far worse than it may seem

by Rick Snedeker

Iran is more than 6,000 miles from the U.S., but South Dakota farmers, as all American ag producers, are intimately feeling the catastrophic potential of our current war with that rogue Mideast nation.

Since Iran has vengefully halted the flow of oil through the Strait of Hormuz, that narrow Persian Gulf chokepoint through which about 20% of the world's petroleum transits, farmers everywhere have been collectively holding their breath as the critical crop-planting season looms and the U.S.- and Israel-inflicted war rages on.

Crude oil, particularly diesel fuel refined from it, is the lifeblood of modern agriculture, powering virtually all the tractors, combines, spraying units and every other piece of heavy equipment farmers use. And refined gasoline powers their ubiquitous heavy-duty pickup trucks that haul bulky trailers to market carrying cattle, pigs and horses.

That collateral farming fuel-price premium from the war is worrisome enough, but there's another essential agriculture input passing through Hormuz en route to the United States that is also being suppressed: fertilizer.

The world's most popular ag fertilizer — urea — is refined from natural gas, which is a byproduct of crude oil production as well as produced in gas-only fields in countries lining the Persian Gulf. A fifth of the world's natural gas and a third of its urea fertilizer pass through Hormuz.

Most commonly used in pellet form, urea is produced initially by reforming methane to create hydrogen and carbon dioxide. The hydrogen is then combined with nitrogen to form ammonia, which is then reacted with carbon dioxide to create urea. The end result is growth-stimulating nitrogen bioengineered so plants can use it.

The current blocking of unauthorized ships through Hormuz, thus promises manifold negative effects on South Dakota's and other farmers.

Because the global supply of oil is now sharply constrained and not reliably reaching global markets, the price of a barrel of oil has risen from an average \$70 to \$100 since the start of the war, briefly spiking to nearly \$120 soon after hostilities erupted.

That means fuel prices — for both gas and diesel — have soared in response. On March 22, the average price of gasoline was \$3.94 a gallon, up a dollar from a month before and expected to peak around \$4.36 in May. The average household would then be paying about \$740 a year more in fuel costs, according to The Associated Press. So, it will also cost farmers more to operate their hefty, gas-guzzling pickup trucks.

The hit is far bigger on farmers' diesel equipment, as the national average reached a five-year high of \$5.25 per gallon on March 22, according to the American Automobile Association, dwarfing the \$3.71 average one month ago, AAA data shows.

In addition and for the same reason — the war — urea fertilizer prices since February have spiked on average from 30-40% from under \$500 to more than \$700 per metric ton, Reuters reported in mid-March.

"I think prices will kind of keep soaring because if we bring in urea from the Middle East, especially a place like Qatar, where they've had a facility shut down because of the war, and they produced, I believe, over 15 million tons," Kurt Bennett, general manager of Dell Rapids Grain Co-Op, told Dakota News Now. "It takes 50 days to get it from there to Port Neal in New Orleans. Then it takes another 30 to 40 days to bring it upriver to unload."

The worries are real, Nobel economics laureate Paul Krugman warned on March 21:

"[T]he farmers have long since contracted for their fertilizer. They've already paid or at least signed the contracts. The prices are locked in. But will there actually be fertilizer available? It's not at all hard to imagine that the suppliers will declare force majeure, say there's a war on, which is normally a valid excuse for backing out of contracts, and simply fail to supply the fertilizer. That would be a real catastrophe."

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-South Dakota, has introduced a bipartisan bill to amend the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946 to aid American producers by requiring the U.S. Department of Agriculture to collect and publish data on fertilizer prices from manufacturers on a weekly basis. But how this might help ease current planting-season risks is unclear.

South Dakota's farmers are feeling high anxiety heading into spring planting under this black pall of global uncertainty.

It appears President Trump failed to responsibly consider the potential catastrophe this war could inflict on American farmers. Or much care.

*Rick Snedeker, a retired journalist living in Mitchell, is the author of a 2020 memoir about growing up in a Saudi oil camp in the 1950s, "3,001 Arabian Days," and a 2022 historical overview of Christianity's coercive evolution in America, "Holy Smoke."*

## EPA increases biofuels in new Renewable Fuel Standard

BY: JACOB FISCHLER

New U.S. Environmental Protection Agency goals call for an all-time high volume of biofuels to be blended into gasoline and diesel, the agency said in a Friday news release following President Donald Trump's announcement at the White House.

The EPA's Renewable Fuel Standard for 2026 and 2027 will set the volume of biofuels at the highest level in the program's 20 years, the agency said in a statement released shortly after Trump touted the move in a speech to farmers gathered at the White House South Lawn.

The president framed the new standards as a move away from regulations based on radical environmentalism.

"What they've done to you — and the country, what they've done to the country — is just incredible," he told the farmers. "The environmentalists, I mean, they are terrorists. They were terrorists."

Trump added that the standards will generate over \$10 billion of rural economic benefit in rural areas and create an estimated 100,000 jobs. Biofuels are primarily produced from corn and soybean crops, with corn-derived ethanol by far the most common biofuel in the country.

Trump and top administration officials said the new standards would help provide more domestic energy sources. The standards would reduce the demand for foreign oil by approximately 300,000 barrels per day, the EPA release said.

"For 20 years, this program has diversified our nation's energy supply and advanced American energy independence," EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin said in the release. "EPA is proud to deliver on this mission and to do so at historic levels."

The standards will require a roughly 60% increase in biofuel and renewable diesel production over 2025 levels, the EPA estimated. That production would translate directly to a major economic boost for farmers, Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins said.

"With President Trump and Administrator Zeldin's leadership, these historically high volumes are expected to create a \$3 to \$4 billion dollar increase in net farm income," she said in the EPA release.

While biofuels groups commended the new standards, the Fueling American Jobs Coalition, an advocacy group that represents independent oil refiners, said the goals were "too aggressive" and did not reflect what could realistically be blended into transportation fuels.

"Unfortunately, with today's announcement, it's clear that our efforts to advocate for achievable volumes were ignored, and this will now likely result in even higher prices at the pump for consumers," the group said.

*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.*

## As No Kings protests grow, a bigger question looms: What comes next?

**With more than 3,000 demonstrations planned nationwide, organizers are hoping for lasting political momentum**

**BY: ANNA CLAIRE VOLLERS**

Thousands of protests are scheduled across the United States on Saturday as part of the "No Kings" movement opposing President Donald Trump's administration.

Organizers expect millions of people to turn out for this third round of No Kings demonstrations, with more than 3,000 local-level events mapped on the movement's official website.

Previous No Kings protests, held in June and October of 2025, were among the largest single-day demonstrations in U.S. history, according to Harvard University's Crowd Counting Consortium, a data project that documents political protests and other demonstrations around the country.

Driving the No Kings movement at the national level are prominent progressive organizations, including Indivisible, 50501 and MoveOn. But demonstrations are organized at the local level by coalitions of hundreds of progressive groups that run the gamut from civil rights organizations to labor unions, religious communities to nonprofits dedicated to issues such as education, climate, gun control and immigration.

"People are angrier. Our numbers are growing and we're really widening the tent of people that are going to stand up to a consolidation of authoritarian power," said Hannah Stauss, one of the organizers of New York City's No Kings protest. "Every time that (Trump) attacks, we get to reach a new section of people that are ready to stand with us."

Top Republican leaders, after dismissing last year's No Kings protests as "hate America" rallies backed by "radical leftists," have remained mostly silent ahead of these latest scheduled protests.

But as the weekend promises massive crowds and spectacle across the nation, political observers and protesters alike wonder whether the demonstrations signal a coming wave of change at the polls, or whether momentum will fizzle after the crowds go home.

Democrats and other progressives are good at mobilizing people for large-scale protests, note some experts, but they've been less successful than conservatives in recent years at building the kind of local infrastructure needed to effect sweeping policy changes.

To that end, as No Kings enters its second year, organizers are looking for ways to connect the disparate groups that have united under the No Kings banner. Indivisible and other national organizers have offered training, online tools and other assistance that extends beyond the protests.

"There's this traditional critique of protests or rallies, that single-day events don't do much and don't connect people to action," said Salvador Espinoza, a board member of Hands Off Central Texas, a progressive nonprofit that's one of the main organizers of Austin's No Kings event. "So we consciously took steps to change the shape of how those events are structured, starting with the second No Kings, and now with No Kings 3."

### **A sense of momentum**

Trump's approval rating this month is the lowest it's been since his reelection. His administration is governing amid national and global upheaval that includes an unpopular war with Iran, an immigration crackdown that nearly two-thirds of Americans view as excessive, spiking gas prices and continued fallout related to the Jeffrey Epstein files.

"The No Kings protests are a powerful way to explain that the way President Trump has behaved is just out of step with the way presidents have behaved historically," said Dan Greenberg, a senior legal fellow at the conservative-leaning Cato Institute.

No Kings is not an organization itself, but the movement's protests are supported by national progressive groups, such as Indivisible, that solicit donations to provide training, digital tools and marketing help. In 2023, Indivisible received a two-year, \$3 million grant from the Open Society Foundations, which funds a

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variety of groups that support democracy and human rights. It was founded by billionaire philanthropist George Soros, long a bête noire of conservatives.

A nonprofit called Home of the Brave is running a \$1 million ad campaign in hundreds of newspapers nationwide to promote the event. Meanwhile, local groups provide their own grassroots-level organizational support, such as event logistics and volunteer coordination.

Past No Kings events have included big-city marches with tens of thousands of attendees as well as small-town demonstrations with just a handful of protesters. They've taken place in staunchly Democratic states as well as ruby-red Republican strongholds.

In Fairfield County, Connecticut, this year, a progressive group called REBs is planning a costumed line dance along a four-lane highway in Wilton.

In Austin, Texas, organizers are expecting tens of thousands at a downtown rally that will include live music, art and performances.

And in Red Oak, Iowa, Jenny Horner expects at least 50 people to show up to protest in her small, conservative farming community. Horner is a Spanish teacher and immigrant advocate who's scheduled to speak at her hometown event.

"I've never in my life thought there would be so many issues at any given moment that are horrendous, that are scary, that need addressing," she said. "But here we are."

## Expanding power

The idea and the anger behind the No Kings protests stem from the belief that Trump is governing as though Congress and the courts should be subservient to the president rather than being co-equal branches of the government, said Shannon O'Brien, a political scientist and associate professor at the University of Texas at Austin who studies American presidents.

She doesn't like referring to his behavior as "kinglike" because she believes the term can be hyperbolic and inflammatory. But, she said, Trump has worked to expand the power of the government's executive branch and pushed the boundaries of the Constitution's system of checks and balances.

"We have an executive who does not believe in the constraint of guardrails, and I think he does believe that the bureaucracy exists to serve him rather than the American people," O'Brien said.

And some of Trump's actions have jarred Americans, calling to mind the trappings of monarchy or dictatorship, such as hanging massive banners with his face on the facades of U.S. government buildings or seeking to rename public buildings after himself.

"It's grotesque in the way that an American king is grotesque, to have someone eager to get his name plastered all over these government buildings," said Greenberg, of the conservative Cato Institute. "We think of it as kingly behavior, not presidential behavior."

O'Brien also noted the belief, propagated by his supporters and some in his government, that Trump has been divinely "anointed" or ordained, or that his decisions, such as going to war with Iran, are blessed by God. It's the kind of belief that underpins monarchies.

That thinking, she said, leads "down that slippery slope of royalty, of infallibility, being blessed by God and being the chosen one."

## Lasting impact

The first No Kings event in Austin, Texas, last June was a traditional rally on the steps of the state Capitol. But the biggest takeaway afterward, said Espinoza, was that organizers felt they could have done more to push rallygoers toward the next step of getting more deeply involved in a cause they care about. With the second No Kings event, and with the third on Saturday, they're hosting a traditional protest march from City Hall to a large outdoor venue that will have speakers and performers, but will also be packed with booths from local progressive groups.

"We built a garden of opportunities so everybody could find the organization that matched their values," said Espinoza. "From mutual aid to civil rights, students and young people, labor, LGBTQ+ groups. The

goal in changing the events was about connection and action.”

In Huntsville, Alabama, a midsize city in the northern part of the state, No Kings organizers plan to group attendees by neighborhood at the rally on Saturday, so that people can start to build their own networks around local issues.

Attendees are encouraged to write the name of their neighborhood on their protest signs so it’s easier to find each other.

“We want people to know that they don’t have to wait on us to organize,” said Brittney Whitehead, vice chair of her local Indivisible chapter. She said that while Indivisible would love more volunteers, the group primarily wants to help people connect and organize around any local issues that matter to them.

“They can organize themselves, and they can do so more quickly than waiting for us to get to them, so we’re going to look to make connections and networks through all of our neighborhoods, as well as gather them all together in a larger network.”

She said that since Trump’s inauguration, her chapter of Indivisible has seen an increase in the number of people volunteering with it and its coalition groups, which include get-out-the-vote organizations, civil and disability rights advocates and Indigenous groups.

More volunteers have signed up for political canvassing after the upcoming state primaries, she said. Others are joining local groups that track immigration incidents.

Horner, in Iowa, hopes the No Kings protests won’t echo the Occupy Wall Street protests of 2011 — a progressive movement with lots of spectacle but few lasting changes. She remembers it as being a “fractured” movement without strong consensus on how to solve problems.

“I wonder if we can do something like Occupy Wall Street, but this time have it not be fractured, so that it can actually get the traction it needs, and get staying power and grow,” she said.

*Stateline reporter Anna Claire Vollers can be reached at [avollers@stateline.org](mailto:avollers@stateline.org).*

*This story was originally produced by Stateline, which is part of States Newsroom, a nonprofit news network which includes South Dakota Searchlight, and is supported by grants and a coalition of donors as a 501c(3) public charity.*

*Anna Claire Vollers covers health care for Stateline. She is based in Huntsville, Alabama.*

## US Senate, House pass dueling Homeland Security bills, keeping department unfunded

**BY: JENNIFER SHUTT AND ARIANA FIGUEROA**

WASHINGTON — The two chambers of Congress, both controlled by Republicans, were at odds Friday over how to fund the Department of Homeland Security, prolonging the shutdown that began in mid-February.

The Senate voted before dawn to approve a funding bill that would have reopened every agency within the department impacted by the funding lapse. But that legislation didn’t include additional money for Immigration and Customs Enforcement or Border Patrol.

House GOP leaders, infuriated by their colleagues’ decision to leave out that money, didn’t put it on the floor for a vote. They chose instead to take up an eight-week stopgap spending bill for the department, which has little chance of moving through the Senate.

The House bill passed on a 213-203 mostly party-line vote. Texas Rep. Henry Cuellar, North Carolina Rep. Donald Davis and Washington Rep. Marie Gluesenkamp Perez, all Democrats, voted with all Republicans present. The Senate bill passed by voice vote, with Democratic support. Both chambers are now out of session for a two-week spring break.

The development reduces hope for the tens of thousands of federal workers within DHS who have gone without a full paycheck since the stalemate began when Senate Democrats demanded new constraints on immigration enforcement after federal officers shot and killed two U.S. citizens in Minneapolis.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement as well as Customs and Border Protection have been largely exempt from the impacts of a shutdown since Republicans approved tens of billions for their operations

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in their “big, beautiful” law. But federal workers throughout other DHS agencies, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Secret Service and Transportation Security Administration haven’t been in the same situation.

Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., announced in the afternoon the House would not even consider the Senate-passed funding bill for the Department of Homeland Security, and would instead vote on a temporary measure that would run through May 22.

“We’re going to send that over to the Senate and we hope that they’ll accept that,” Johnson said.

President Donald Trump hasn’t weighed in publicly on whether he would sign either of the bills, if they ever reach his desk, and the White House did not respond to a request for comment. But Johnson said Trump backs House Republicans over the Senate.

“I spoke to the president a few moments ago,” he said. “He understands exactly what we’re doing and why, and he supports it.”

Trump signed an order Friday that would provide pay for TSA workers, which a senior administration official said would come from Republicans’ signature tax and spending bill. A DHS spokesperson, in an email, said that TSA workers should see paychecks as early as Monday.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., wrote in a social media post that any stopgap bill to fund DHS “that locks in the status quo is dead on arrival in the Senate, and Republicans know it.”

“We’ve been clear from day one: Democrats will fund critical Homeland Security functions—but we will not give a blank check to Trump’s lawless and deadly immigration militia without reforms,” Schumer wrote.

## Overnight Senate vote

The Senate approved a modified DHS spending bill by voice vote around 2:30 a.m. Eastern after a week of mounting pressure on lawmakers to end the stalemate that has led to hourslong wait times in airport security lines.

The Senate-passed DHS bill didn’t include funding for ICE or Border Patrol. GOP lawmakers signaled ahead of the vote they’ll try to pass another boost in funding for immigration enforcement and deportation in a second party-line package later this year.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., said during brief floor debate that funding DHS through a “piecemeal” approach wouldn’t have happened if Democrats handled negotiations differently.

“They wanted reforms to Immigration and Custom Enforcement, and Republicans offered to give that to them,” he said. “The White House made offer after offer putting forward a robust list of additional reforms. And Democrats just kept moving the goal posts, and today they just walked away.”

Democrats, he said, “might think twice before” before they tried to use this as a campaign issue during November’s midterm elections, when voters throughout the country will decide whether Republicans keep both chambers of Congress.

“We could be standing here right now passing a funding bill with a list of reforms, if Democrats had made the smallest effort to actually reach an agreement, but they didn’t, because it’s now clear to everyone, Democrats didn’t actually want a solution,” he said. “They wanted an issue, politics over policy, self-interest over reform, pandering to their base over actually solving a problem.”

Schumer said the bill to fund most of DHS “could have been accomplished weeks ago if Republicans hadn’t stood in the way.”

“Democrats held firm in our opposition that Donald Trump’s rogue and deadly militia should not get more funding without serious reforms, and we will continue to fight for those reforms,” he said.

## More money for immigration deportations pledged

Missouri Sen. Eric Schmitt said he and other Republican lawmakers would seek to bolster funding for immigration and deportations through budget reconciliation, the complex process the party used last year to approve its “big, beautiful” law.

That, he said, would allow Republicans to move funding through the Senate with just a simple majority

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vote, skipping the procedural steps that would otherwise require 60 senators to end debate on a bill.

"To my Democrat colleagues, this bill is the moderate option. What's coming next is going to supercharge deportations," he said. "To my Republican colleagues, let this be a rallying cry every time the Democrats obstruct the safety of American families, the wall gets 10 feet higher and ICE gets another \$100 billion."

New Jersey Sen. Andy Kim said Democrats have been clear for months they would "not support providing more funding for ICE without also including common sense reforms to rein in the abuses we have seen in Minnesota and elsewhere, particularly after two Americans were shot and killed."

"All we've been demanding here is what the American people are demanding — body-worn cameras; no masks; keeping ICE agents out of our hospitals, schools and churches; and ensuring ICE follows the same practices and procedures as local law enforcement," he added.

## 'Republicans have relented'

Senate Appropriations Chairwoman Susan Collins, R-Maine, wrote in a statement that earlier negotiations included "proposals to expand the use of body-worn cameras; limit civil immigration enforcement in sensitive areas such as schools and hospitals; increase oversight of detention facilities; and implement visible officer identification."

"While Republicans worked in good faith to try to reach agreement, Democrats remained intransigent and unreasonable with their list of demands," she wrote.

Senate Appropriations Committee ranking member Patty Murray, D-Wash., wrote in a statement that since "Republicans have relented" lawmakers were "on track to fund the areas we agree on and get TSA agents paid, get our airports moving again, and fund important disaster relief and cybersecurity work."

"But it is a shame that instead of working with Democrats to land the plane on several common-sense reforms to ICE and Border Patrol that the White House had already agreed to, Republicans walked away from constructive conversations and ultimately rejected some basic steps to reform these agencies," she wrote. "I will keep fighting to secure real, meaningful steps to help rein in these rogue agencies—we just need Republicans to join us."

*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.*

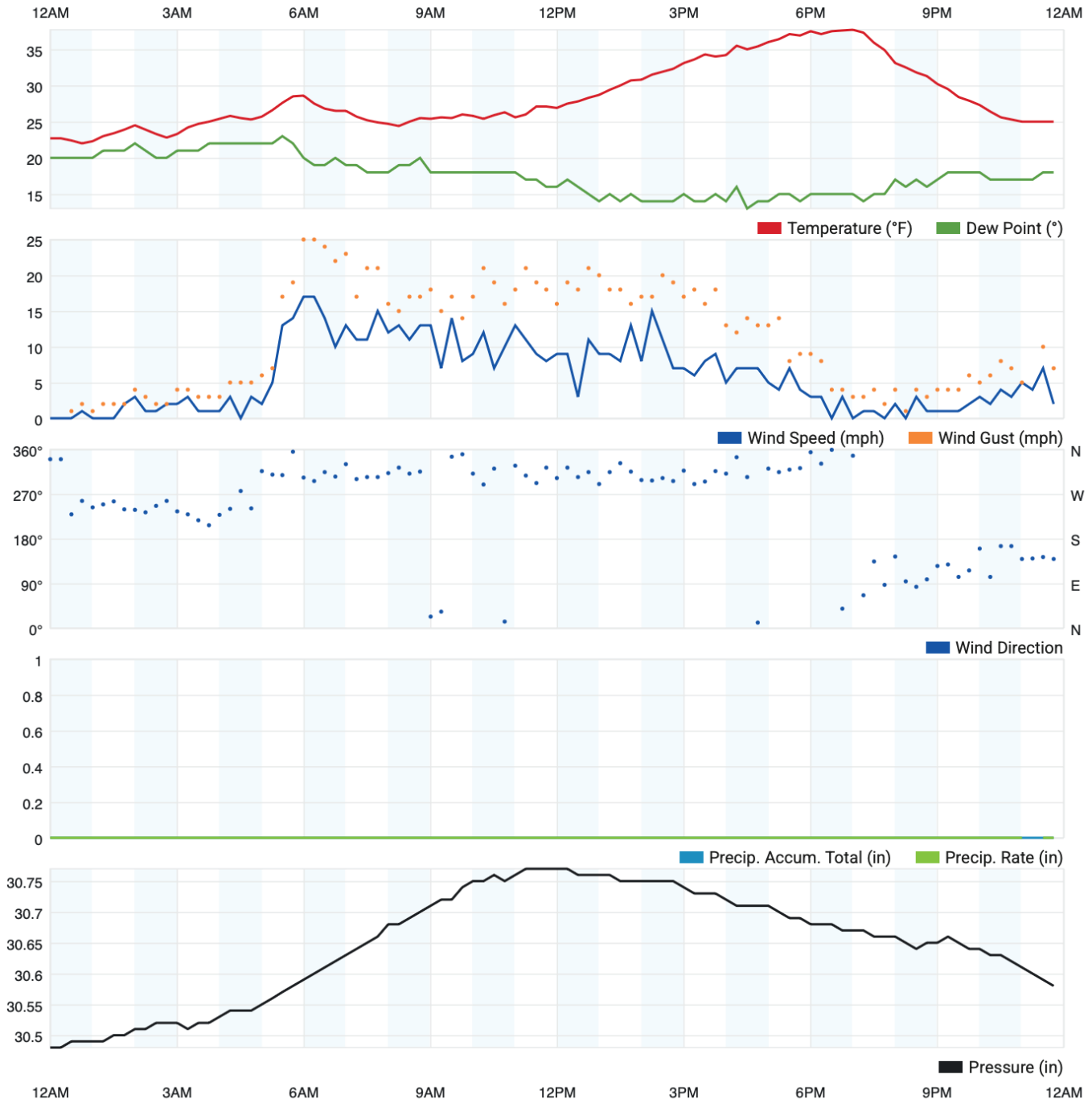
*Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include immigration, congressional policy and legal challenges with a focus on how those policies impact the lives of immigrants and migrants coming to the U.S.*

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

March 27, 2026



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Today



High: 65 °F

Mostly Sunny  
and Breezy

Tonight



Low: 32 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Sunday



High: 65 °F

Mostly Sunny

Sunday Night



Low: 36 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Monday



High: 68 °F

Partly Sunny



## Strong Winds & Dry Today

March 28, 2026

3:46 AM CDT

Red Flag Warning remains in effect from late morning through evening

### Key Messages

- Early morning strong wind speeds across central SD shift east into northeast SD/west central MN after sunrise
  - **Southerly winds** gusting to **35-45 mph** for most areas with **45-55 mph over northeast SD/west central MN**
- **Extreme Grassland Fire Danger across central and northeast SD**
  - Relative humidity values fall to between 15-25%

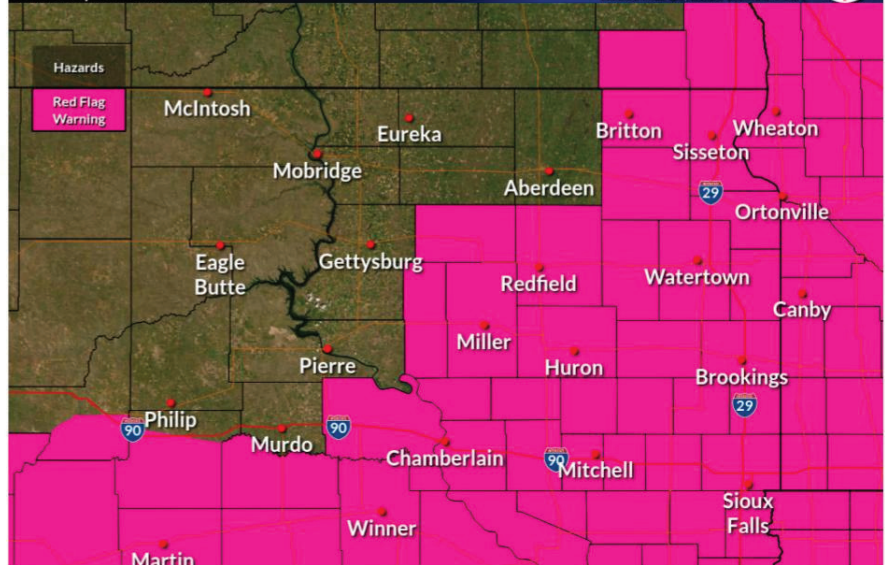
### NEW What Has Changed

- No significant changes to headlines or the forecast

### Red Flag Warning

Valid Today from 10 AM - 9 PM CDT

Weather Forecast Office  
Aberdeen, SD  
Issued Mar 28, 2026 1:50 AM CDT



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

A Red Flag Warning remains in effect today across northeastern SD and parts of central SD due to strong southerly winds as well as dry conditions. The winds will be gusting up to 35-45mph over most areas with 45-55mph over northeastern SD this morning, with relative humidity values falling between down to 15-25%. This will lead to Extreme Grassland Fire Danger across central & northeast SD. Take caution as any fires that ignites will spread rapidly and become difficult to control or suppress.

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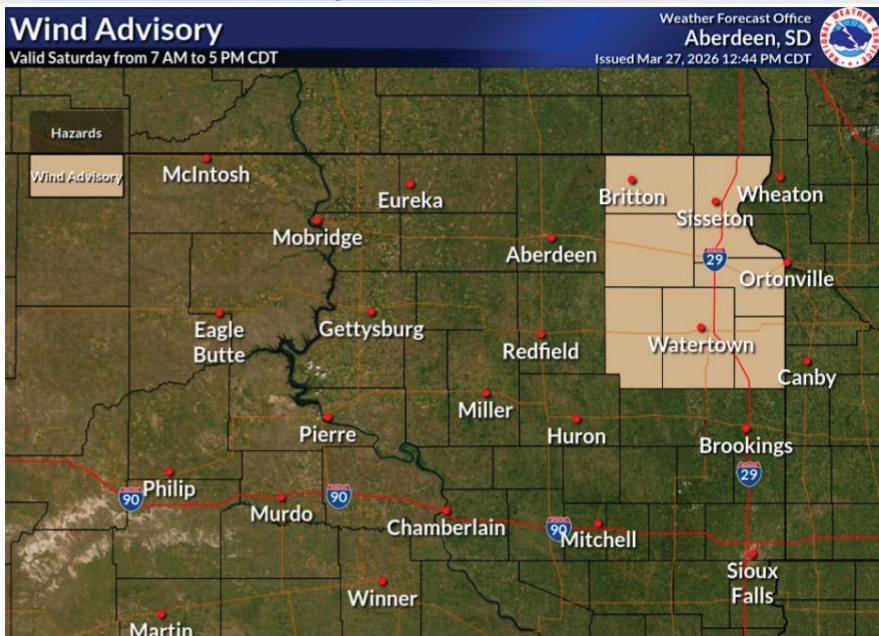


## Wind Advisory Today

March 28, 2026  
3:51 AM CDT

Wind Gusts **50-65 mph** along the **Sisseton Hills** downslope area

- Wind speeds increase after sunrise this morning
  - **Southerly winds** gusting to **35-45 mph** for most areas. Gusts **45-55 mph over northeastern South Dakota.**
- Caution: Any fire the does ignite will spread quickly and be difficult to control or suppress



  
AVOID OUTDOOR BURNING  
& BE CAUTIOUS AROUND  
ANYTHING THAT COULD SPARK

  
REPORT FIRES TO  
LOCAL AUTHORITIES



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

Southerly winds will increase through this morning, gusting up to 45-55 mph over northeastern SD. Even stronger gusts in excess of 50-60 mph will be possible in the favored downslope areas of the Sisseton Hills. These strong winds could cause problems if a fire were to ignite as they could make it difficult to control or suppress the fire.



## Timing of the Wind Gusts

March 28, 2026  
3:54 AM CDT

Wind gusts peak this morning and into the early afternoon hours

### Quick Forecast

- **Southerly winds** gusting to **35-45 mph** for most areas across central and northeast SD and west central MN
  - Gusts of **50-65 mph in Sisseton Hills downslope areas**
- Localized areas of **Blowing Dust** will be possible this afternoon into tonight resulting in brief reductions to visibility and breathing difficulties for sensitive individuals



Early this morning through late this afternoon



The combination of **strong winds**, **low relative humidity values**, and **dry fuels** will lead to **dangerous to extreme fire weather conditions**

### Maximum Wind Gust (mph) Forecast

	3/28 Sat														
	4am	5am	6am	7am	8am	9am	10am	11am	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm
Aberdeen	23↑	28↑	33↑	36↑	38↑	40↑	43↑	41↑	37↑	36↑	33↑	29↑	25↑	22↑	17↑
Britton	31↑	33↑	36↑	40↑	43↑	46↑	49↑	48↑	43↑	41↑	37↑	33↑	29↑	25↑	21↑
Clark	24↑	31↑	39↑	44↑	46↑	49↑	51↑	51↑	46↑	44↑	43↑	38↑	33↑	30↑	25↑
Eagle Butte	24↑	26↑	32↑	30↑	30↑	29↑	28↑	25↑	23↑	21↑	17↑	16↑	17↑	14↑	12↑
Ellendale	22↑	26↑	31↑	32↑	33↑	35↑	36↑	36↑	33↑	32↑	29↑	26↑	23↑	18↑	15↑
Eureka	30↑	32↑	33↑	31↑	30↑	30↑	32↑	31↑	28↑	25↑	22↑	20↑	17↑	15↑	12↑
Gettysburg	29↑	33↑	39↑	35↑	36↑	36↑	37↑	35↑	32↑	30↑	25↑	23↑	21↑	16↑	14↑
Kennebec	25↑	31↑	37↑	36↑	37↑	39↑	41↑	40↑	38↑	35↑	32↑	29↑	25↑	21↑	17↑
McIntosh	25↑	25↑	26↑	25↑	23↑	23↑	22↑	20↑	17↑	15↑	14↑	14↑	13↑	13↑	13↑
Milbank	20↑	22↑	25↑	33↑	33↑	40↑	46↑	48↑	45↑	40↑	39↑	36↑	32↑	29↑	24↑
Miller	36↑	41↑	47↑	47↑	51↑	51↑	48↑	48↑	45↑	41↑	39↑	35↑	30↑	25↑	21↑
Mobridge	29↑	32↑	36↑	30↑	29↑	28↑	29↑	24↑	23↑	20↑	17↑	15↑	15↑	14↑	13↑
Murdo	29↑	31↑	33↑	31↑	32↑	32↑	33↑	30↑	29↑	26↑	24↑	22↑	18↑	16↑	13↑
Pierre	24↑	26↑	29↑	26↑	26↑	25↑	29↑	28↑	25↑	22↑	21↑	18↑	17↑	13↑	10↑
Redfield	26↑	32↑	38↑	39↑	41↑	43↑	45↑	45↑	44↑	40↑	39↑	35↑	31↑	26↑	21↑
Sisseton	23↑	26↑	30↑	40↑	41↑	47↑	51↑	52↑	48↑	44↑	43↑	37↑	31↑	28↑	23↑
Watertown	25↑	29↑	32↑	40↑	41↑	47↑	51↑	52↑	47↑	45↑	44↑	39↑	35↑	31↑	26↑
Webster	24↑	29↑	35↑	43↑	43↑	47↑	51↑	49↑	45↑	41↑	39↑	36↑	31↑	29↑	24↑
Wheaton	22↑	24↑	26↑	29↑	30↑	31↑	35↑	36↑	35↑	32↑	30↑	26↑	24↑	20↑	16↑

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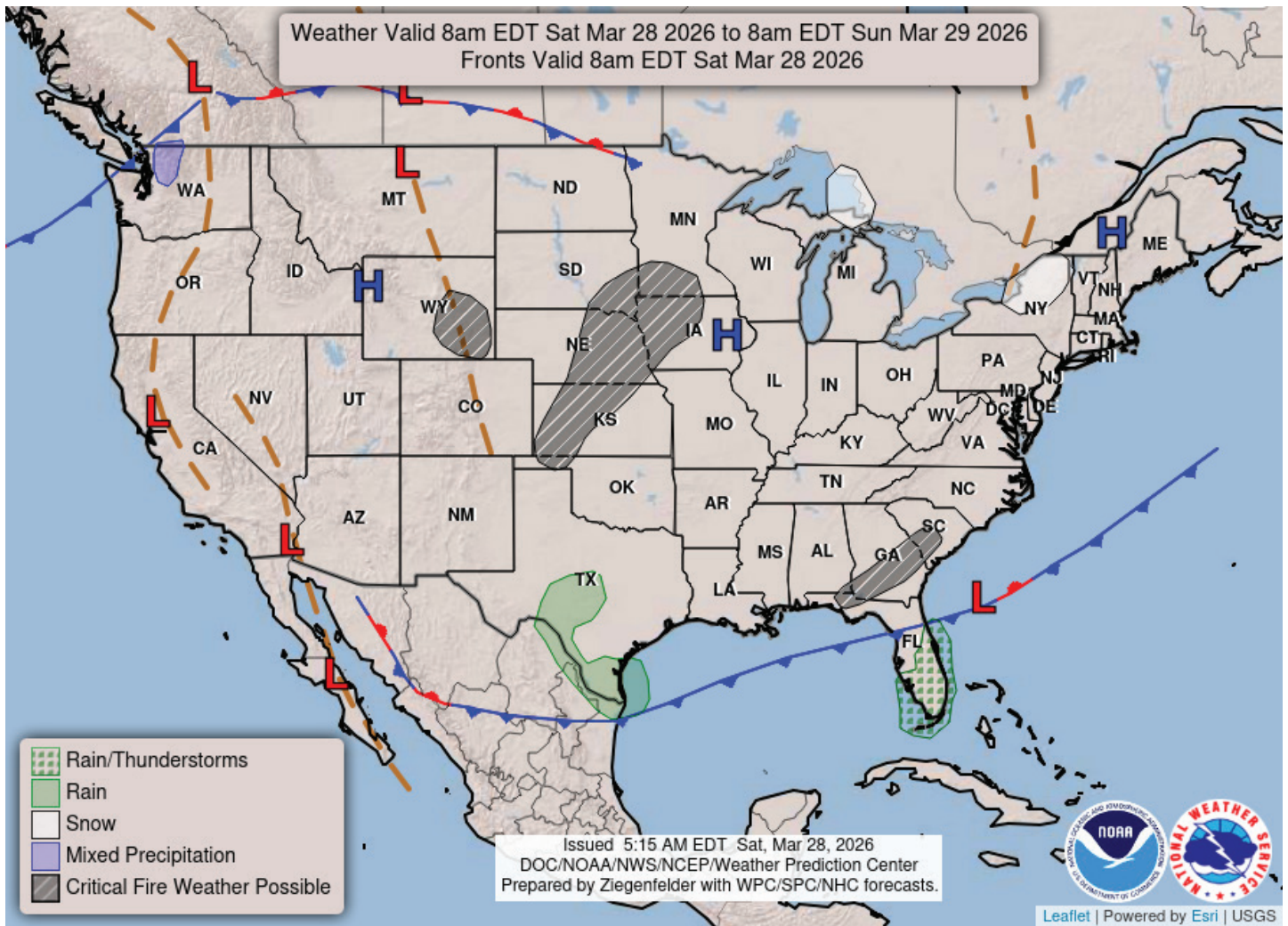
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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 38 °F at 7:03 PM**  
**Low Temp: 22 °F at 12:42 AM**  
**Wind: 25 mph at 5:54 AM**  
**Precip: : 0.00**

## Today's Info

Record High: 82 in 1946  
Record Low: -10 in 1913  
Average High: 48  
Average Low: 25  
Average Precip in Mar.: 0.77  
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.29  
Average Precip to date: 1.94  
Precip Year to Date: 1.62  
Sunset Tonight: 7.54 pm  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:18 am



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## Today in Weather History

March 28th, 1977: A slow-moving storm system affected South Dakota from March 28th through March 30th, 1977. The storm produced heavy snow in the west and thunderstorms in the east. Northerly winds gusting to 50 miles an hour in the West created blizzard conditions as the snow totals mounted. Some areas in western Butte, Pennington, northern Shannon, and Lawrence counties received over 20 inches of snow. With drifts exceeding 6 to 8 feet, many people in western South Dakota thought it was the worst blizzard of the quarter century. A few locations in the northern Black Hills received over 4 feet of snow. Because of blocked roads, westbound traffic was halted on I-90, and many schools and businesses were forced to close for several days. Across the eastern portion of the state, rains of over 1" fell in many areas. Milbank even reported walnut size hail.

1917 — Thane Creek, AK, reported a snow cover of 190 inches. (The Weather Channel)

1920 — The worst tornado disaster of record occurred in Chicago IL as a tornado killed 28 persons and caused three million dollars damage. (David Ludlum)

1984 — A violent outbreak of tornadoes hit the Carolinas. Thunderstorms spawned 22 tornadoes during the late afternoon and evening hours which killed 57 persons and injured 1248 others. Nearly half the deaths occurred in mobile homes. A tornado from near Tatum SC to southern Cumberland County NC was 2.5 miles in width at times. (The Weather Channel)

1987 — A blizzard raged from southern Nebraska to central Iowa. Snowfall totals ranged up to 17 inches at Blue Hill NE. Winds gusted to 68 mph at Carroll IA. High winds produced snow drifts twenty feet high in western Iowa, and produced wind chill readings as cold as 30 degrees below zero in Nebraska. The snowfall total of 9.4 inches at Omaha NE was a record for the date. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 — Severe thunderstorms in central Oklahoma produced hail up to four inches in diameter causing 35 million dollars in southern Oklahoma County. Baseball size hail and seven inches of rain caused another eighteen million dollars damage in Stephens County. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 — Unseasonably warm weather prevailed from the Southern and Central Plains to the Atlantic coast. Eighteen cities reported new record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 81 degrees at Beckley WV was a record for March, and the high of 90 degrees in downtown Baltimore MD tied their March record. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 — A storm system brought heavy snow to the west central and southern mountains of Wyoming, and high winds to the Wasatch Mountains of northern Utah. Snowfall totals in Wyoming ranged up to ten inches at the Snowy Ski Range Area, and the storm pushed the snowfall total for the month at Cheyenne above 37 inches, surpassing their previous record for March of 35 inches. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

## Our Rewards in Heaven

**The Lord sees and rewards each act of obedience, no matter how small.**

Matthew 6:16-20: 16 ``Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

17 ``But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face

18 so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

19 ``Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

20 ``But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal;

Have you ever thought about what type of rewards you are going to receive in heaven? When we stand before the judgment seat of Christ, we will be evaluated on the basis of what we've received—that is, the truth God has made available to us—and what we've done with the opportunities we were given.

Furthermore, some specific actions and attitudes will result in special acknowledgment. For instance, Matthew's gospel says there is a great reward stored up in heaven for those who are insulted and persecuted for Jesus' sake (Matthew 5:11-12). Elsewhere, the Lord tells us that acts of kindness done for His followers will be noted and rewarded (Matthew 25:40). Even a cup of water given to a thirsty person will not be overlooked on judgment day (Matthew 10:42). Other actions that draw the Father's special attention are love directed toward enemies and lending without expectation of repayment. These behaviors will bring great reward and the designation "sons of the Most High" (Luke 6:35).

Sometimes others seem to prosper and reap a great harvest without even noticing how we prepared the soil. Yet God assures us that neither the one who plants nor the one who waters will be overlooked (1 Corinthians 3:8). The Lord sees each detail, and everything done for His sake will be rewarded.

*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:  
03.27.26

6 9 28 33 46 4

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

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 8 Mins 32 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:  
03.27.26

13 27 28 41 62 16

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$80,000,000**

NEXT DRAW:

[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: 16 Hrs 8 Mins 32 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
03.25.26

3 25 27 31 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$34,000**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 23 Mins 32 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
03.25.26

35 38 41 43 62 8

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

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 52 Mins 32 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: 16 Hrs 52 Mins 32 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 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 or a form of government-issued photo identification that states the applicant's place of birth. Military IDs and other government-issued photo IDs that do not state place of birth or otherwise confirm citizenship would need to be presented with additional documentation.

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% 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.

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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.

## **Pope Leo XIV visits Monaco to urge its people to use their faith and wealth for good**

By PAOLO SANTALUCIA and NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

MONACO (AP) — Pope Leo XIV urged residents of the cosmopolitan Mediterranean principality of Monaco on Saturday to use their wealth, influence and Catholic faith for good, especially to uphold Catholic teaching on protecting the sanctity of life.

Leo made a one-day trip to the glitzy enclave, becoming the first pope to visit since Pope Paul III came in 1538. As a cannon boomed, Prince Albert and Princess Charlene met Leo at the Monaco heliport, just down the coast from the marina that is home to the megayachts of the rich and famous.

At the palace, members of the royal family stood in the courtyard waiting for Leo, the women dressed in black and with lace head coverings. Charlene wore white — a protocol privilege granted by the Vatican to Catholic royal sovereigns when meeting popes, known in diplomatic terms as “le privilège du blanc.”

In his opening greeting from the palace balcony, Leo urged Monaco to use its wealth, influence and “gift of smallness” for good.

It was important, he said, “especially at a historical moment when the display of power and the logic of oppression are harming the world and jeopardizing peace.”

Speaking in French, Leo urged Monaco’s people to use their faith and be “always ready to protect every human life with love, at any time and in any condition, so that no one is ever excluded from the table of fraternity.”

Monaco is one of the few European countries where Catholicism is the official state religion. And Prince Albert recently refused a proposal to legalize abortion, citing the important role Catholicism plays in Monaco society.

The decision was largely symbolic, since abortion is a constitutional right in France, which surrounds the coastal principality of 2.2 square kilometers (about 1 square mile).

But in refusing to allow it in Monaco, Albert joined other European Catholic royals who have taken a similar stand over the years to uphold Catholic doctrine on an increasingly secular continent. When Pope Francis visited Belgium in 2024, he announced he was putting the late King Baudouin on the path to possible sainthood because he abdicated for a day in 1990 rather than approve legislation to legalize abortion.

A coastal playground for the rich and famous, Monaco is renowned as much for its tax-friendly incentives and Formula 1 Grand Prix as its glamorous royal family. The son of the late American actress Grace Kelly, Albert spoke in perfect, unaccented English when he greeted Leo at the heliport. Leo was heard noting that he landed three minutes late.

Leo’s one-day visit includes a meeting with Monaco’s Catholic community in the cathedral and Mass in the sports stadium.

Monaco’s population of 38,000 is heavily Catholic and also multinational, with only a fifth of the population actually citizens of the principality.

## **Iran-backed Houthis claim first missile launch on Israel as war in the Mideast intensifies**

By SAMY MAGDY, AAMER MADHANI and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iranian-backed Houthi rebels claimed a missile launch toward Israel early Saturday, their first since the war in the Middle East started. The Israeli military said it intercepted the projectile.

The war, now marking its one-month anniversary, erupted after the United States and Israel attacked

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Iran, which retaliated with strikes against Israel and neighboring Gulf Arab states. The conflict has upended global air travel, disrupted oil exports and caused fuel prices to soar. Iran's stranglehold on the Strait of Hormuz, a strategic waterway, has also exacerbated the economic fallout of the war.

Israel struck Iran's nuclear facilities hours after threatening to "escalate and expand" its campaign against Tehran on Friday. Iran vowed to retaliate and struck a base in Saudi Arabia, wounding more than a dozen U.S. service members and damaging planes.

Before Saturday's attack, there appeared to be a breakthrough as Tehran agreed to allow humanitarian aid and agricultural shipments through the strait.

Houthi involvement could further complicate the war

Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree, a military spokesman for the Houthis, claimed responsibility in a statement aired Saturday morning on the rebels' Al-Masirah satellite television. He said the Houthis fired a barrage of ballistic missiles targeting what he described as "sensitive Israeli military sites" in southern Israel. The attack came hours after Saree signaled in a vague statement Friday that the rebels would join the war.

Sirens went off around Israel's southern city of Beer Sheva and the area near Israel's main nuclear research center as Iran and Hezbollah continued to fire on Israel overnight. Loud explosions also filled the air in Tel Aviv and Israel's Fire and Rescue Service said it was responding to 11 different impact sites across the metro area.

Saturday's assault calls into question whether the Houthis will again target commercial shipping traveling through the Red Sea corridor, as they did during the Israel-Hamas war, upending shipping in the Red Sea, through which about \$1 trillion worth of goods passed each year before the war. The rebels also fired drones at Israel.

The potential involvement of the Houthis in the war would also complicate the deployment of the USS Gerald R. Ford, the aircraft carrier that went to port in Crete on Monday for repairs. Sending the carrier back into the Red Sea could draw it into the same high tempo of attacks seen by the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower in 2024 and the USS Harry S. Truman in the 2025 American campaign against the Houthis.

The Houthis have held Yemen's capital, Sanaa, since 2014, and so far had stayed out of the war as the rebels have had an uneasy ceasefire for years with Saudi Arabia, which launched a war against the group on behalf of Yemen's exiled government in 2015.

More than two dozen US troops have been wounded in Iranian attacks on Saudi base in the past week, AP sources say

More than two dozen U.S. troops have been wounded in Iranian attacks on Saudi Arabia's Prince Sultan Air Base in the past week, according to two people who have been briefed on the matter. Iran fired six ballistic missiles and 29 drones at the base in the Friday attack that injured at least 15 troops, including five seriously, according to the sources who were not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The base, about 96 kilometers (60 miles) from the Saudi capital of Riyadh, came under attack twice earlier in the week, including a strike that wounded 14 U.S. troops, according to the people briefed on the matter. The base is run by the Royal Saudi Air Force but is also used by U.S. troops.

Attempts at diplomacy as US troops build up in the Mideast

The latest attacks happened after Trump claimed that talks on ending the war were going "very well" and that he had given Tehran until April 6 to reopen the Strait of Hormuz. Iran maintains that it has not engaged in any negotiations.

With the economic repercussions from the war extending far beyond the Middle East, Trump is under growing pressure to end Iran's chokehold on the strait.

Pakistan said Saturday Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt will send their top diplomats to Islamabad for talks aimed at ending the war.

Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar said in a statement that Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan, Turkey's Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan and Egypt's Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty will arrive Sunday for a two-day visit to "hold in-depth discussions on a range of issues, including efforts to de-escalate tensions

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in the region.”

Trump envoy Steve Witkoff has said Washington delivered a 15-point “action list” to Iran for a possible ceasefire, with a proposal to restrict Iran’s nuclear program and reopen the strait. Tehran rejected the proposal and presented its own five-point proposal that included reparations and recognition of its sovereignty over the waterway.

Meanwhile, U.S. ships drew closer to the region carrying some 2,500 Marines, and at least 1,000 paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne trained to land in hostile territory to secure key positions and airfields have been ordered to the Middle East.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the U.S. “can achieve all of our objectives without ground troops.”

Death toll climbs

Iranian authorities say more than 1,900 people have been killed in the Islamic Republic, while 19 have been reported dead in Israel.

In Lebanon, where Israel has started an invasion in the south, officials said more than 1,100 people have been killed since the start of the war.

Meanwhile, at least 13 U.S. troops have been reported killed, while in Iraq, where Iranian-supported militia groups have entered the conflict, 80 members of the security forces have died.

In the Gulf states, 20 people have been killed and four others in the occupied West Bank.

The U.N.’s International Organization for Migration also said Friday that 82,000 civilian buildings in Iran, including hospitals and the homes of 180,000 people, were damaged.

Israel strikes Iranian nuclear facilities

Israel focused its attacks Friday on sites “in the heart of Tehran” where ballistic missiles and other weapons are produced, the military said. It said it also hit missile launchers and storage sites in Western Iran, while witnesses in eastern Tehran reported a partial power outage following airstrikes.

Iran’s Atomic Energy Organization said the Shahid Khondab Heavy Water Complex in Arak and the Ardakan yellowcake production plant in Yazd Province were targeted, IRNA reported. The strikes did not cause casualties and there was no risk of contamination, it said.

Yellowcake is a concentrated form of uranium after impurities are removed from the raw ore. Heavy water is used as a moderator in nuclear reactors.

The Israeli military later said raw materials are processed for enrichment at the Yazd plant and the strike was a major blow to Iran’s nuclear program.

Tehran vowed to retaliate.

Possible breakthrough to allow aid and agricultural shipments through Hormuz

Iran agreed to allow humanitarian aid and agricultural shipments through the Strait of Hormuz following a request from the United Nations.

Ali Bahreini, the country’s ambassador to the U.N. in Geneva, said Iran agreed to “facilitate and expedite” such movement.

The vital waterway usually handles a fifth of the world’s oil shipments and nearly a third of the world’s fertilizer trade. While markets and governments have largely focused on blocked supplies of oil and natural gas, the restriction of fertilizer ingredients and trade threatens farming and food security around the world.

## **One month into the war, Iranians wrestle with lost livelihoods, bombs and worries of the future**

By AMIR-HUSSEIN RADJY, SARAH EL DEEB and LEE KEATH Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Iranians were already reeling from a shattered economy and the mass killing of protesters when the first U.S. and Israeli bombs slammed into Tehran a month ago.

Now they are struggling to get by through a war with no end in sight, wrestling with lost livelihoods, damage to homes and the stress of explosions. Many wonder where it is leading — to the destruction of their homeland, the chaotic fall of the theocracy or its survival, wounded but more extreme.

“I think we’ve experienced everything bad possible,” said a 26-year-old designer in Tehran, “from the

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terrible atmosphere of January and the killings and arrests to the war.”

Daily explosions, near and far and unpredictable, shake and damage homes. Businesses are struggling. An unprecedented internet blackout since January has largely cut people off from the outside world and made communication within Iran more difficult.

The trauma of war comes on top of the shock from January, when hundreds of thousands across Iran marched in the biggest protests against the theocracy in decades — only to be met by security forces opening fire, killing thousands. Tens of thousands were detained, and arrests have continued.

The AP spoke to 10 people across Iran, most of whom spoke on condition of anonymity for their security. Businesses crumbling

The designer, who with a partner runs a factory making leather fashion products, said her business was on the verge of closing.

“When the economy gets bad, nonessential goods are the first thing to be removed from the shopping cart,” she said. Much of her sales are online, and the internet blackout practically reduced “the small sales to zero.”

Since the January protests, she has had to live off her meager savings, and the violence of the crackdown upset her so much she has not been able to return to work.

When the war began on Feb. 28, she moved to her parents’ house. A few days later, the blast from a nearby strike damaged her apartment that she had just left. Like most Iranians, she doesn’t have home insurance, so she will have to pay for repairs herself.

She only leaves her parents’ house to buy necessities.

Trying to track strikes

The terrifying cadence of airstrikes shapes daily life in Tehran.

An engineer living in Tehran tries to find a pattern in strikes – are certain times safer? Recent nights saw explosions light up the skies. One evening, a blast shook his home as he had guests over. They climbed up on the roof and tried in vain to figure out where it hit. “We didn’t see any visible fire,” he said.

He thinks the strikes are less frequent now, or maybe “our perception of it has changed,” as everyone gets used to bombings.

He feels anxious when family or friends go out on the streets, and struggles to sleep. He had a job offer before the war but does not know if it is still there. Soon, he says, many will struggle with rent and bills.

Government workers, who make up a large part of the workforce, are still getting salaries. But private businesses are struggling to pay employees as they close for days on end or reduce hours.

The collapse of Iran’s currency, largely caused by U.S. and international sanctions over its nuclear program, triggered the protests late last year.

Strained resources in the relatively unscathed north

Many Iranians have fled to the north, which has been relatively unscathed. One of the main cities, Rasht, has been packed with Iranians who fled from Tehran and elsewhere, straining local resources.

A doctor at a pediatric hospital said the number of patients has nearly doubled. Medicines are running out, he said, and patients now are asked to buy some basic supplies, including antibiotics or IV fluids, from the market.

The internet blackout is affecting his ability to access his patients’ history and check correct dosages online, he said. It has also forced the doctor to set aside his own personal effort to document the casualty toll from the January crackdown because witnesses are unreachable and the online database is inaccessible.

He plays video games or watches television to pass the time. In a week-old binge, he is five seasons into “The Walking Dead,” the American postapocalyptic horror drama series.

Anxiety over the future

Throughout, Iranians have been wrestling with widely mixed feelings over the war, the ruling theocracy and the future.

Authorities continue to organize pro-government street rallies, aiming to show public support. The feared paramilitary Basij, charged with internal security, has stepped up patrols even as it is targeted in airstrikes.

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The engineer said decades of misrule have been hard on Iranians. But he said that doesn't justify the U.S.-Israeli attacks. He was angered by the deaths and the damage to infrastructure and military capacities.

He's trying to channel that anger into determination to rebuild. "I'm going to be stronger after this war. I will be damaged, just like my country. But that's it. This is life. We're going to make it better."

At the start of the war, U.S. President Donald Trump called on Iranians to overthrow their leaders. Now, he says he is negotiating with senior Iranian officials who he claims are "begging" for a deal, without naming them. Iran has denied any such talks are underway.

Some Iranians fear the war will leave behind a wounded but even more oppressive Islamic Republic.

One woman in her 40s said she feared negotiations more than war. "This is what our situation has come to — we are willing to endure war in the hope of being freed from them," she said.

The doctor in Rasht said he viewed the war as "the last remaining option" for getting rid of the ruling clerics. But he fears the way that the U.S. and Israel are conducting it. If the U.S. strikes a deal now, he said, it would only entrench the theocracy.

"We now have the Islamic Republic on steroids," he said. "We are afraid they will take this revenge out on the people, which they very openly see as the enemy from inside."

In southwestern Iran, a lawyer who has represented detainees and women's rights defenders — and has herself been imprisoned — spoke to the AP earlier in the war, saying she dreamed of the day the Islamic Republic would crumble. She spoke about the power of collective action and self-determination.

After a month of bombings, she seemed more introspective, taciturn, exhausted by isolation and uncertainty.

"There is no sign of hope, no dreams, no joy," she said. "Worry about the future has taken over."

## **Yemen's Houthis claim responsibility for missile attack on Israel, their first since war started**

By FARNOUSH AMIRI, JON GAMBRELL and KONSTANTIN TOROPIN Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Israel's military said it intercepted a missile launched from Yemen toward Israel early Saturday, the first time it had faced fire from that country. The Iranian-backed Houthi rebels claimed responsibility for the attack, which calls into question whether the rebel group backed by Tehran will again target commercial shipping traveling through the Red Sea corridor.

Sirens went off around Beer Sheba and the area near Israel's main nuclear research center for the third time overnight Friday into Saturday as Iran and Hezbollah continued to fire on Israel overnight.

The Houthis have held Yemen's capital, Sanaa, since 2014, and so far had stayed out of the war as the rebels have had an uneasy ceasefire for years with Saudi Arabia, which launched a war against the group on behalf of Yemen's exiled government in 2015.

Attacks on vessels during the Israel-Hamas war upended shipping in the Red Sea, through which about \$1 trillion worth of goods passed each year before the war. The rebels also fired drones at Israel.

Israel struck Iran's nuclear facilities hours after threatening to "escalate and expand" its campaign against Tehran on Friday. Iran vowed to retaliate and struck a base in Saudi Arabia, wounding U.S. service members and damaging planes.

Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree, a military spokesman for the Houthis, issued the claim in a statement Saturday on the rebels' Al-Masirah satellite television.

Saree said they fired a barrage of ballistic missiles targeting what he described as "sensitive Israeli military sites" in southern Israel. The attack came hours after Saree signaled in a vague statement Friday that the rebels would join the war that shocked the region and rattled the global economy.

In 2024, the Trump administration launched strikes against the Houthis that ended weeks later. The U.S.-led campaign against the Houthi rebels, overshadowed by the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip, turned into the most intense running sea battle the Navy had faced since World War II.

The Houthi rebels attacked over 100 merchant vessels with missiles and drones, sinking two vessels and killing four sailors, from November 2023 until January 2025. That would cause further chaos in global

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shipping, which already is reeling from Iran's stranglehold over the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which a fifth of all oil and natural gas once passed.

The potential involvement of the Houthis in the war also would complicate the deployment of the USS Gerald R. Ford, the aircraft carrier that went to port in Crete on Monday for repairs. Sending the carrier back into the Red Sea could draw it into the same high tempo of attacks seen by the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower in 2024 and the USS Harry S. Truman in the 2025 American campaign against the Houthis.

Prior to the attack from Yemen, there appeared to be a breakthrough as Tehran agreed to allow humanitarian aid and agricultural shipments through the Strait of Hormuz, accepting a request from the U.N. Ali Bahreini, the country's ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, said Iran agreed to "facilitate and expedite" such movement.

The vital waterway usually handles a fifth of the world's oil shipments and nearly a third of the world's fertilizer trade. While markets and governments have largely focused on blocked supplies of oil and natural gas, the restriction of fertilizer ingredients and trade threatens farming and food security around the world.

"This measure reflects Iran's continued commitment to supporting humanitarian efforts and ensuring that essential aid reaches those in need without delay," Bahreini said on the social platform X. The U.N. earlier announced a task force to address the ripple effects that the war has had on aid delivery.

More than two dozen U.S. troops have been wounded in Iranian attacks on a Saudi air base in the past week, according to two people who have been briefed on the matter. Iran fired six ballistic missiles and 29 drones at Saudi Arabia's Prince Sultan air base in a Friday attack that injured at least 15 troops, including five seriously, according to the people who were not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The base had come under attack twice earlier this week, including an incident that injured 14 U.S. troops, according to the people who had been briefed on the matter.

Located about 96 kilometers (60 miles) from the Saudi capital of Riyadh, the base is run by the Royal Saudi Air Force, but also used by U.S. troops.

## Israel strikes Iranian nuclear facilities

Bahreini's announcement came just hours after Iranian state media said two nuclear facilities had come under attack. Israel, which had threatened to "escalate and expand" its campaign against Tehran, claimed responsibility, and Iran quickly threatened to retaliate.

"Iran will exact HEAVY price for Israeli crimes," Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said via X.

Iran's Atomic Energy Organization said the Shahid Khondab Heavy Water Complex in Arak and the Aradkan yellowcake production plant in Yazd Province were targeted, IRNA reported. The strikes did not cause any casualties and there was no risk of contamination, it said. The Arak plant has not been operational since Israel attacked it last June.

Yellowcake is a concentrated form of uranium after impurities are removed from the raw ore. Heavy water is used as a moderator in nuclear reactors.

The Israeli military later said raw materials are processed for enrichment at the Yazd plant and the strike was a major blow to Iran's nuclear program.

Seyed Majid Moosavi, IRGC's Aerospace Force commander, said on X that employees of companies tied to the U.S. and Israel should abandon their workplaces: "This time, the equation will no longer be 'an eye for an eye,' just wait."

Late Friday, Israeli authorities said Iran had launched missiles at the country that killed a 52-year-old man in Tel Aviv. Sirens alerted people to seek shelter in and around Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Beer Sheva and areas near the country's main nuclear research center, which were targeted by Iranian strikes that injured dozens last weekend.

## Trump renews call for Israeli-Saudi ties

Speaking in Miami at an event sponsored by the Saudi sovereign wealth fund, Trump reiterated his desire for those two countries to normalize relations.

The president has been pressing the two biggest powers in the Middle East on that for years as part of

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his Abraham Accords efforts, and he said the time will be right when hostilities end with Iran.

"It's now time," he said. "We've now taken them out, and they are out bigly. We got to get into the Abraham Accords."

Significant headwinds remain, including Saudi Arabia's insistence that there needs to be a credible path to a Palestinian state before it normalizes commercial and diplomatic ties with Israel.

US pushes diplomatic solution

Word of the attacks on Iran came after Trump claimed that talks on ending the war were going "very well" and that he had given Tehran more time to reopen the Strait of Hormuz. Iran maintains that it has not engaged in any negotiations.

With stock markets reeling and economic fallout from the war extending far beyond the Middle East, Trump is under growing pressure to end Iran's chokehold on the strait.

A Gulf Arab bloc said Thursday that Iran has been exacting tolls from ships to ensure safe passage.

Trump envoy Steve Witkoff said Washington delivered a 15-point "action list" to Iran for a possible ceasefire, using Pakistan as an intermediary. It proposes restricting Iran's nuclear program and reopening the strait.

Iran rejected the offer and presented its own five-point proposal that included reparations and recognition of its sovereignty over the waterway.

Trump has said if that Iran doesn't reopen the strait to all traffic by April 6, he will order the destruction of Iran's energy plants.

Uncertainty surrounding the conflict prompted a further drop in U.S. stocks Friday. The S&P 500 sank 1.7% to close out its worst week since the Iran war started and its 5th losing week in a row. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 1.7%, and the Nasdaq composite sank 2.1%. Meanwhile, crude oil prices continued to soar.

With U.S. gas prices approaching \$4 a gallon, members of Congress have been pushing to suspend the federal gasoline tax, set at 18.4 cents per gallon on gasoline and 24.4 cents per gallon on diesel fuel. Trump said he has "thought about" suspending it but suggested states should look at suspending their taxes on fuel.

Attacks appear to intensify early Saturday

Witnesses in eastern Tehran reported a partial power outage following airstrikes. In Israel, loud explosions filled the air in Tel Aviv and emergency crews responded to nearly a dozen impact sites.

An Associated Press journalist heard loud explosions in Tel Aviv, and Israel's Fire and Rescue Service said it was responding to 11 different impact sites across the metro area.

Defense Minister Israel Katz had earlier vowed that Iran "will pay heavy, increasing prices for this war crime."

Israel focused its attacks Friday on sites "in the heart of Tehran" where ballistic missiles and other weapons are produced, the military said. It said it also hit missile launchers and storage sites in Western Iran.

Saudi Arabia's Defense Ministry, meanwhile, said it shot down missiles and drones targeting the capital, Riyadh. In Lebanon, the Health Ministry said two people were killed.

Kuwait said its Shuwaikh Port in Kuwait City and the Mubarak Al Kabeer Port to the north, which is under construction as part of China's "Belt and Road" initiative, sustained "material damage" in attacks. It appeared to be one of the first times a Chinese-affiliated project in the Gulf Arab states has come under assault in the war. China has continued to purchase Iranian crude.

Diplomatic wrangling endures even as US sends more troops

Diplomats from several countries including Pakistan and Turkey have tried to organize a direct meeting between U.S. and Iranian envoys. Separately, G7 foreign ministers meeting Friday in France formally asked for an immediate halt to attacks against populations and infrastructure.

Meanwhile, U.S. ships drew closer to the region carrying some 2,500 Marines, and at least 1,000 paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne — trained to land in hostile territory to secure key positions and airfields — have been ordered to the Middle East.

Nevertheless, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the U.S. "can achieve all of our objectives without

ground troops." Rubio, speaking to reporters following the G7 meeting, said the deployments are designed to ensure "maximum opportunity to adjust to contingencies should they emerge."

Israel sent the 162nd Division into southern Lebanon to support efforts to protect its northern border towns from Hezbollah attacks and uproot the militant group, the military said.

The U.N.'s International Organization for Migration said Friday that 82,000 civilian buildings in Iran, including hospitals and the homes of 180,000 people, are damaged.

"If this war continues, we risk a far wider humanitarian disaster," Jan Egeland, secretary general of the Norwegian Refugee Council, said in a statement. "Millions could be forced to flee across borders, placing immense pressure on an already overstretched region."

Death toll climbs, primarily in Iran and Lebanon

Nineteen people have died in Israel, while four Israeli soldiers have been killed in Lebanon.

Authorities said more than 1,100 people have been killed in Lebanon, and over 1,900 people in Iran.

At least 13 American troops have been killed, and four people in the occupied West Bank and 20 in Gulf Arab states have also died.

In Iraq, where Iranian-supported militia groups have entered the conflict, 80 members of the security forces have died.

## **Nepal police arrest former prime minister and former home minister over September protest deaths**

By BINAJ GURUBACHARYA Associated Press

KATHMANDU, Nepal (AP) — Police in Nepal arrested former Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Oli early Saturday over the deaths of dozens of people during violent protests in September that toppled the government and resulted in new elections.

Authorities arrested the powerful communist leader at his residence on the outskirts of the capital Kathmandu. They also arrested Ramesh Lekhak, the former home minister who has been accused of ordering authorities to fire on protesters.

Home Minister Sudan Gurung announced the arrests on social media.

"No one is above the law. We have taken former Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli and former home minister Ramesh Lekhak under control," Gurung said. "This is not revenge against anyone, it is just the beginning of justice."

An investigation by a commission set up by the government called for punishment of up to 10 years in prison for Oli, Lekhak and the chief of police at the time of the protests.

Several trucks of police officers in riot gear conducted the arrests at the mens' homes before taking them to the Kathmandu District Police office.

The arrests come a day after a new government headed by rapper-turned-politician Balendra Shah took office following a landslide win in parliamentary election earlier this month by his Rastriya Swatantra Party.

Shah and Gurung have promised justice for those killed and wounded.

The election was the country's first since the youth-led protests against corruption and poor governance on Sept. 8 and Sept. 9 that left 76 people dead and more than 2,300 injured. Angry mobs burned down the offices of the prime minister and president, police stations and the homes of top politicians who were forced to flee on army helicopters.

The demonstrations fueled by "Gen Z" activists forced the Sept. 12 appointment of Nepal's first female prime minister, Sushila Karki, a retired Supreme Court judge who served during the transition leading up to the election.

## Tiger Woods released on bail hours after arrest at crash scene on suspicion of DUI

By CODY JACKSON and DOUG FERGUSON Associated Press

JUPITER ISLAND, Fla. (AP) — Tiger Woods was released on bail late Friday, hours after his Land Rover clipped a truck, rolled onto its side and the golfer was arrested on suspicion of driving under the influence, officials said.

Woods had been traveling at “high speeds” on a residential road and after the crash showed “signs of impairment,” Martin County Sheriff John Budensiek said, adding that investigators believe he had taken some kind of medication or drug. He described Woods as lethargic and said he agreed to a Breathalyzer test that showed no signs of alcohol, but he refused a urine test and was arrested.

Florida law required that he spend at least eight hours in jail before he could post bail.

Woods, who was not injured in the crash, had been held separate from others at the jail, Budensiek said.

“He’s not going to be with other inmates that could hurt him or try to capitalize on what he did,” he said. “He’ll pay the price, but he’s not going to pay the price by getting punished in jail.”

Woods’ manager at Excel Sports did not immediately respond to a text message seeking comment.

It was the second time Woods has been arrested for a DUI not as a result of the influence of alcohol. He said he took a bad mix of painkillers when authorities found him in 2017 asleep behind the wheel of his car, the engine still running and its driver’s side damaged. Woods pleaded guilty then to reckless driving.

President Donald Trump, whose former daughter-in-law is dating Woods, was asked about the golfer when he landed in Miami on Friday afternoon for an investment summit.

“I feel so badly. He’s got some difficulty,” Trump said. “Very close friend of mine. He’s an amazing person. Amazing man. But, some difficulty.”

The crash occurred just before 2 p.m. not far from where Woods lives on Jupiter Island.

Budensiek said Woods attempted to pass a pressure cleaner truck while driving on a two-lane road with a 30 mph (48 kph) speed limit. He said authorities could not determine how fast Woods was going.

The Land Rover swerved to avoid a collision as he was passing the truck but clipped the back end of the truck’s trailer, Budensiek said. Woods’ car then rolled onto its driver’s side and he crawled out.

The sheriff said Woods was “cooperative, but he’s not trying to incriminate himself.” He said Woods has the right to refuse the urine test and that authorities “will never get definitive results with what he was impaired on.”

This was the fourth time Woods has been involved in a car crash, most recently in February 2021 when his SUV ran off a coastal road in Los Angeles at a high rate of speed, leading to multiple leg and ankle injuries. Woods said later doctors considered amputation. He also previously sustained multiple injuries to his left knee and his back during his golf career.

Woods returned from multiple back surgeries to win the 2019 Masters for his 15th major. His 82 titles on the PGA Tour is tied for the career record with Sam Snead. Since that LA crash, he has played 11 tournaments without being closer than 16 shots to the winner the four times he was able to finish 72 holes.

Friday’s arrest comes as Woods was trying to decide if he was fit enough to play the Masters, which starts April 9. He also was to be in Augusta, Georgia, on April 5 to unveil a golf course project with Masters chairman Fred Ridley.

Woods also was days away from what was described as a “soft deadline” to decide whether to be the U.S. Ryder Cup captain for the 2027 matches in Ireland.

Woods, 50, had been working his way back to golf from a seventh back surgery in September.

His last official tournament was the British Open in 2024. Woods ruptured his Achilles tendon in March 2025 and that kept him off the course all season even before the back surgery. He managed to play in his indoor TGL golf league on Tuesday night.

He has remained deeply involved in PGA Tour affairs as chair of the Future Competition Committee that is restructuring the model of the tour.

## The top moments from this year's CPAC conference in Texas

By MIKE CATALINI and THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

GRAPEVINE, Texas (AP) — For the first time in nearly a decade, President Donald Trump did not attend one of the biggest annual meetings of conservatives. But even in his absence, the Conservative Political Action Conference revolved around him.

There were disagreements over his war with Iran, pride over his immigration crackdown and lots of encouragement to avoid infighting as the Republican Party faces a difficult midterm election.

It was a contrast with last year's gathering, when conservatives were riding high after Trump's return to office and Elon Musk waved a chain saw to symbolize his new role leading the Department of Government Efficiency.

Here's a look at some of the key moments.

'Save that for the socialists'

From the conference's opening moments, speaker after speaker appealed for unity.

"They want us divided," warned Mercedes Schlapp, a senior fellow at CPAC whose husband, Matt, chairs the organization.

Evangelist Franklin Graham said the war with Iran represents a "critical time for our country."

"We can discuss our differences, but do it with respect without attacking and tearing down the other person," he said. "Save that for the socialists."

Conservative influencer Benny Johnson said he was "well aware" of debates within the conservative movement but said Trump's supporters should focus on his victories, such as tighter border security.

"I want to establish something very clearly here that your enemy is not the people that you have good-faith disagreements with inside your movement," he said. "Your enemy is the Marxist, and they're going to be running against us hard in the midterms and in 2028."

Warnings about war

It was clear, however, that the conservative movement was not on the same page about war with Iran. While there was little criticism of Trump, some warned against deepening the conflict.

"A ground invasion of Iran will make our country poorer and less safe. It will mean higher gas prices, higher food prices, and I'm not sure we would end up killing more terrorists than we would create," said former Florida Rep. Matt Gaetz.

Steve Bannon, a longtime Trump ally, said that "the decision in going forward is obviously the commander in chief's," but he suggested that the American people still need to be convinced.

"You have to be convinced that this is the right thing to do, particularly now that we're on the eve of potentially the insertion of American combat troops," he said. "Your sons, daughters, granddaughters, grandsons could be on Kharg Island or holding a beachhead down by the Strait of Hormuz."

Recent polling from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research shows that Trump risks frustrating his voters if gas prices continue rising as the country faces the kind of prolonged war in the Middle East that he promised to avoid.

'Thank you, Trump'

Hundreds of Iranian Americans who support U.S. military action in Iran attended the conference and frequently had impromptu pro-war demonstrations.

The crowds included roaring chants of, "Thank you, Trump! Thank you, Trump!"

David Mansouri, an Iranian immigrant and U.S. citizen who lives in Plano, Texas, described the conflict as a war of liberation that could lay the groundwork for a new American ally in the Middle East.

"It's the best time to make America great again," Mansouri said, describing Iran as the "biggest part of the puzzle."

Applause for immigration crackdown

Trump's handling of immigration got some of the biggest applause at the conference, and one of the special guests included recently retired Border Patrol commander Gregory Bovino. He had led high-profile urban crackdowns but was pushed aside after two protesters were killed by federal agents in Minneapolis.

Bovino briefly came onstage during Benny Johnson's speech. The actor Dean Cain also shook Bovino's hand.

Tom Homan, Trump's border czar who took over for Bovino in Minnesota, was also at the conference. He drew cheers when he said Trump wouldn't walk away from his deportation campaign.

"I don't care if people hate me," he said.

## **One month into Iran war, some Trump objectives are unfulfilled as he looks to wind down the conflict**

By MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump has listed five objectives that the U.S. wants to achieve before ending its war with Iran. Now, one month into the conflict, he has suggested the U.S. may soon be "winding down" the operation, even though some of his key aims remain undefined or unfulfilled.

Trump last week outlined five goals for the massive air campaign. That's up from four laid out by his staff since the war's start on Feb. 28 (and up from the three generally enumerated by the Pentagon and Secretary of State Marco Rubio). Though the Trump administration has said its objectives are clear and unchanging, the list of priorities has expanded and shifted as the war has taken a toll on the global economy, tested alliances and raised unanswered questions about the planning for the conflict, its justification and its aftermath.

By most accounts, the strikes by the U.S. and Israel have significantly degraded Iran's military capabilities and killed scores of senior leaders. But those tactical successes don't necessarily translate to achieving all the president's strategic aims.

Some of his objectives are difficult to achieve and if the U.S. walks away with unfinished aims and Iran's paramilitary Islamic Revolutionary Guard in power, Trump could face political fallout at home and global repercussions about what was accomplished in his decision to launch a war of choice that upended the Middle East and roiled the global economy.

Trump and the White House have insisted the operation is going well and on track to meet its goals. "We are very close to meeting the core objectives of Operation Epic Fury, and this military mission continues unabated," press secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters this week, saying the operation was "ahead of schedule and performing exceptionally."

Here's a look at the objectives as laid out by Trump and where they stand:

### 1. 'Completely degrading Iranian Missile Capability'

One of the prime objectives laid out by the president with Iran was to "destroy their missiles and raze their missile industry to the ground."

The administration says that the ability has been significantly degraded. But Iran is still launching missiles and drones, including a series of barrages at Israel as Trump claimed that negotiations with Iran were underway.

Trump said Thursday at the White House that about 90% of Iran's missiles and launchers have been knocked out, and that drones and the factories where drones and missiles are manufactured "are way down."

### 2. 'Destroying Iran's Defense Industrial Base'

Before last week, the president and his administration sometimes listed this as a standalone objective, describing it as a goal to "raze their missile industry to the ground." Other times, this has fallen off the list. The Pentagon has generally lumped it into the first objective of destroying Iran's missile capability.

U.S. Central Command has said its targets for strikes in Iran have included weapons production and missile and drone manufacturing facilities. But Iranian attacks against its Gulf neighbors and Israel continue.

### 3. 'Eliminating their Navy and Air Force'

The U.S. and Israel quickly established air superiority in the skies above Iran, where they have flown largely unchallenged. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said Thursday that the U.S. has damaged or destroyed more than 150 Iranian vessels.

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After a U.S. submarine torpedoed and sank an Iranian warship in early March, two other Iranian vessels — the IRIS Bushehr and IRIS Lavan — docked in Sri Lanka and India and sought assistance from the two countries. There has been no indication from the U.S. that they have since been sunk or captured.

Iran's Revolutionary Guard has its own navy that also relies on smaller vessels to do swarm attacks and drop mines. It is unclear how much of that force remains or whether it has planted any mines. But Iranian missiles continue to disrupt shipping through the Strait of Hormuz.

#### 4. 'Never allowing Iran to get even close to Nuclear Capability'

Trump made a marked shift over the last year after declaring that the U.S. has "obliterated" Iran's nuclear program in June, only for his aides to warn that Iran was just weeks away from a bomb to justify the current operations.

Iranian state media said its nuclear facilities were attacked Friday. A heavy water plant and a yellowcake production plant were struck and Israel later confirmed it was behind the strikes.

Israel had previously announced strikes on other nuclear-related targets, including the killing of a top Iranian nuclear scientist.

One of the most pressing questions in the war is whether Trump will seek to seize or destroy about 970 pounds of enriched uranium that Tehran has that could potentially be used for a weapon.

Trump, for the first time on Monday, said the U.S. would retrieve the uranium, which is believed to be buried deep under a mountain facility. But he indicated that would occur if the U.S. struck some kind of deal with Iran to the U.S. to retrieve it. Without permission from Iran, seizing it would be a dangerous mission, experts say, and would require a sizable deployment of U.S. troops into the country.

#### 5. 'Protecting, at the highest level, our Middle Eastern Allies'

Trump, in a recent social media post, added a fifth objective for the U.S.: "Protecting, at the highest level, our Middle Eastern Allies, including Israel, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, and others. The Hormuz Strait will have to be guarded and policed, as necessary, by other Nations who use it — The United States does not!"

The U.S. already maintains thousands of troops on bases and other installations in the region. It's not clear how much further Trump is willing to go to protect Middle East allies from threats, and Iran is still able to attack those countries. It's also not clear how far the U.S. is willing to go to keep open the Strait of Hormuz. Trump has vacillated on whether the U.S. needs to take a role in policing it. He has again extended a deadline for Iran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz or face attacks on its power plants, now giving them until April 6.

#### Regime change is not officially on the list

Trump has spoken about regime change since the start of the war, encouraging the Iranian people to "take over your government" after Israel, assisted by the U.S., launched strikes that killed Iran's supreme leader and much of its upper echelon of leaders.

Trump and his administration, however, have never explicitly stated regime change as an objective in Iran, despite making it clear they want to end the repressive theocracy's 47-year reign.

Trump said Thursday at the White House that the regime is "largely decimated."

"You could really say we have regime change because they have been killed," he said in a Fox News Channel interview.

Now the U.S. claims to be holding talks with elements of the same Iranian government as it looks to bring a swift end to the conflict and reopen the Strait of Hormuz to maritime traffic. Iran, however, continues to publicly insist it is not negotiating with the White House.

And Trump's initial hopes for the Iranian people appear set to continue unfulfilled.

Also falling off the list: Cutting off support for Iranian proxy groups

Trump administration officials have offered few updates about this objective, which the president has described as ensuring that "the region's terrorist proxies can no longer destabilize the region or the world and attack our forces" and "ensuring that the Iranian regime cannot continue to arm, fund, and direct terrorist armies outside of their borders."

While the U.S. has struck Iranian-aligned militia groups in Iraq, and Israel appears to be expanding its operations against Hezbollah in Lebanon, the administration has not offered details about how it's going to permanently halt Tehran's support for the militant groups.

The White House said in a statement that ensuring that Iranian proxy groups cannot further destabilize the region remains a key goal and that "proxies are hardly putting up a fight because our United States Military is so strong and lethal."

## Minnesota serves as the flagship for nationwide 'No Kings' protests against Trump

By STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — Organizers of Saturday's "No Kings" rallies across the country are predicting that the protests against the actions of President Donald Trump and his administration could add up to one of the largest demonstrations in U.S. history, with Minnesota taking center stage.

Organizers say more than 3,100 events have been registered in all 50 states, with more than 9 million people expected to participate.

And they've designated the rally at the Minnesota Capitol in St. Paul as the national flagship event, in recognition of how the state where federal agents fatally shot two people who were monitoring Trump's immigration crackdown became an epicenter of resistance.

Headlining that observance will be Bruce Springsteen, performing "Streets of Minneapolis," which he wrote in response to the deaths of Renee Good and Alex Pretti, and in tribute to the thousands of Minnesotans who took to the streets over the winter. Springsteen's Land of Hope & Dreams American Tour, which has a "No Kings" theme, kicks off Tuesday in Minneapolis.

Minnesota organizers have told state officials they expect 100,000 people could converge on the Capitol grounds, where last June's event drew an estimated 80,000 people.

The St. Paul rally will also feature singer Joan Baez, actor Jane Fonda, Sen. Bernie Sanders and a long list of other activists, labor leaders and elected officials.

The White House dismissed the nationwide protests as the product of "leftist funding networks" with little real public support.

"The only people who care about these Trump Derangement Therapy Sessions are the reporters who are paid to cover them," White House spokesperson Abigail Jackson said in a statement.

Rallies are also planned in more than a dozen other countries, from Europe to Latin America to Australia, Ezra Levin, a co-executive director of Indivisible, a group spearheading the events, said in an interview. Countries with constitutional monarchies call the protests "No Tyrants," he said.

For those unable to attend in person, another activist group, Stand Up For Science, is hosting a "virtual and accessible" event online.

National organizers told reporters in an online news conference Thursday that they expect Saturday's protests to be larger than the first two rounds of No Kings rallies, which they estimate drew more than 5 million people in June and more than 7 million in October.

"This administration's actions are angering not just Democratic voters or folks in big blue city centers — they are crossing a line for people in red and rural areas, in the suburbs, all over the country," said Leah Greenberg, the other co-executive director of Indivisible. "The defining story of this Saturday's mobilization is not just how many people are protesting, but where they are protesting,"

Two-thirds of the RSVPs have come from outside of major urban centers, Greenberg said, listing registration surges in conservative-leaning states like Idaho, Wyoming, Montana, Utah, South Dakota and Louisiana, as well in competitive suburban areas of Pennsylvania, Georgia and Arizona.

"Millions of us are rising up from all walks of life, from rural communities to big cities at No Kings," said Katie Bethell, executive director of MoveOn, another major organizer. "And as we do so, we will send the loudest, clearest message yet that this country does not belong to kings, dictators, tyrants. It belongs

to us.”

## Trump signs order to pay TSA employees after Congress fails to agree on DHS funding

By KEVIN FREKING, LISA MASCARO and JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Friday signed a promised executive action to pay Transportation Security Administration employees after a bid to end the shutdown of the Department of Homeland Security abruptly fell apart in Congress.

Trump signed the action with an eye toward easing long security lines at many of the nation’s top airports. “America’s air travel system has reached its breaking point,” Trump said in the memo authorizing the payments. He added, “I have determined that these circumstances constitute an emergency situation compromising the Nation’s security.”

Trump said his administration would use “funds that have a reasonable and logical nexus to TSA operations” for the payments. In a statement Friday, Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin said TSA workers “should begin seeing paychecks as early as Monday.”

While Trump’s action could help ease the plight of air travelers, it does little to resolve the DHS shutdown that has jammed airports and imposed financial hardship on thousands of federal workers. The House and Senate ended the week by passing vastly different bills, creating a new impasse as lawmakers leave Washington for a two-week recess.

The shutdown of Homeland Security will reach 44 days on Sunday, eclipsing the record 43-day shutdown last fall that affected all of the federal government.

House Republicans reject Senate deal

The Senate passed a funding deal early Friday, but blowback from House Republicans came quickly. House Speaker Mike Johnson, upon opening the chamber for business, accused Democrats of playing a dangerous game and said he needed to talk with fellow Republicans about how to proceed.

After a lengthy conference call, Johnson blasted the Senate’s action and announced that the House would be going in a different route. “This gambit that was done last night is a joke,” Johnson said.

Instead, the House on Friday night passed a bill to fund the entire department through May 22. The vote was 213-203. Johnson said he had spoken with Trump about the House Republican plan and the president supported it.

House Republicans were livid that the bill passed by the Senate does not fund Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Border Patrol. Democrats refused to fund those departments without changes to immigration enforcement practices.

“We’re going to do something different,” Johnson said. He challenged the Senate to take up the House’s short-term fix to fund Homeland Security into May.

But senators left town after voting to fund most of DHS, so it would take time for them to return once the House passes a different measure. And even if they were to return, Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer made clear the House GOP plan would be “dead on arrival in the Senate, and Republicans know it.”

House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries said the Senate-passed bill would clear the House with Republican and Democratic votes if Johnson would allow it to be voted on.

“This could end, and should end, today,” Jeffries said.

What’s in the Senate compromise

Senators worked through the night to approve a bill by voice vote that would fund much of Homeland Security, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Coast Guard and TSA.

Senate Republicans said they were disappointed by the lack of funding for ICE and Border Patrol, but noted that immigration enforcement has remained largely uninterrupted. That’s because the GOP’s big tax cuts bill that Trump signed into law last year funneled billions of dollars in extra funds to DHS, including \$75 billion for ICE operations.

Conservative Republicans, however, were against establishing a precedent that allows Congress during

the yearly appropriations process to fund some agencies within Homeland Security, but not others.

"We will fully fund ICE. That is what this fight is about," Sen. Eric Schmitt, R-Mo., said. "The border is closing. The next task is deportation."

Democrats have refused to provide funding for ICE and the Border Patrol after the deaths of two Americans protesting the sweeping immigration crackdown 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 Mullin, the new DHS secretary, said he is open to considering.

The Republican leadership rift

The rejection of the Senate deal creates a noticeable rift between Johnson and Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., who have mostly worked in tandem this Congress trying to enact Trump's agenda.

With all Democrats opposed, Thune had to find a solution to the funding impasse that would win the 60 votes needed to break a filibuster in the 53-47 Senate.

After more than a week of intense negotiations -- some involving the White House -- the two sides agreed early Friday to fund most parts of the Homeland Security Department except for ICE and parts of CBP. It passed by voice vote with no objections from either side just after 2 a.m.

Asked if he had cleared the compromise with Johnson, Thune said the two had texted.

"I don't know what the House will do," Thune said.

The White House was silent as senators reviewed the compromise, and Trump did not weigh in publicly.

The next day, as the deal fell apart in the House, Thune did not respond to Johnson's comments that he was left in the dark.

The speaker, asked about a rift with Thune, said Democrats in the Senate were to blame for the situation.

Airport lines grow as TSA workers endure hardships

The DHS shutdown has resulted in travel delays and even warnings of airport closures as more TSA workers missing paychecks stopped going to work. Those workers had already endured the nation's longest government shutdown last fall.

Multiple airports have been 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 Thursday, more than 11.8% of the TSA employees on the schedule missed work, according to DHS. That is more than 3,450 callouts.

## **2 students dead and at least 7 others injured in Tennessee school bus crash**

HUNTINGDON, Tenn. (AP) — A school bus crash in west Tennessee on Friday killed two students and injured at least seven other people, officials said.

The crash involving a Tennessee Department of Transportation dump truck, a Chevrolet Trailblazer and the school bus took place at about noon on Highway 70 in Carroll County, said Maj. Travis Plotzer, a spokesperson for the Tennessee Highway Patrol. Plotzer said details of the crash were still being sorted out, but it appeared that the transportation department dump truck did not contribute to the crash itself.

Plotzer said there were a total of 25 students and five adults on the bus. The school bus was carrying students and employees from Kenwood Middle School in Clarksville for a field trip to Jackson, Tennessee, the Clarksville-Montgomery County School System said in a statement. The cause of the crash was under investigation.

Plotzer announced the deaths of two students in the crash during a news conference. Officials said at least seven other people were taken by air ambulance to hospitals in Tennessee. The nature of their injuries was not immediately disclosed. Plotzer called the crash "a parent's worst nightmare."

The school's principal, Karen Miller, said counselors will be available starting Monday. In a written message to families shared on Facebook, she called the crash an unimaginable tragedy and encouraged parents to

be attentive to their child's emotional needs as they process the deaths of their classmates.

"Please continue to pray with us for our students, families, faculty, and staff," Miller wrote. "I am grateful for the strength of our Kenwood community, and I trust we will all support each other during this difficult time."

Four people were taken to Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt in Nashville and were in stable condition Friday, according to a Vanderbilt Health spokesperson.

Another 19 people were taken to Baptist Memorial Hospital-Carroll County, said Kim Alexander, a spokesperson for Baptist Memorial Health Care. All were evaluated and released, though it was unclear how many actually were injured, she said.

## Hawaii to take over aging dam after failure scare during flood evacuations

By JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — A 120-year-old Hawaii dam that reached worrisome levels during heavy rains and devastating flooding, prompting thousands of residents to evacuate for fear of life-threatening failure last week, will soon be taken over by the state.

The state's land board on Friday voted to acquire certain irrigation lands from Dole Food Co., clearing the way for the state to take over the aging dam and move forward on at least \$20 million in repairs and an expansion of the spillway.

The earthen structure was built in 1906 to increase sugar production for the Waiialua Agricultural Co., which eventually became a subsidiary of Dole Food Co. It was reconstructed following a collapse in 1921.

"Dole is proud to transfer this vital resource to the State of Hawai'i at no cost, ensuring its continued use and stewardship in support of agriculture and the broader community," the company said in a statement after the vote.

The Wahiawa Dam north of Honolulu is a "high hazard" because its failure would likely have fatal consequences, the state Department of Land and Natural Resources wrote in recommending approval.

Residents worry the dam will fail during each substantial rain, said Kathleen Pahinui, who a week ago was among the 5,500 people ordered to evacuate from two communities on Oahu's North Shore, famous for big-wave surfing. Evacuation orders were lifted Saturday when water receded.

State control has long been supported by the governor's office, lawmakers, neighbors and farmers, making Friday's vote a foregone but welcome development, Pahinui said before the vote.

Pahinui, a neighborhood board chairperson, had submitted testimony in support of the plan. Officials also heard testimony from a farming advocate who reminded the board about the dam's importance to crops and a resident who urged the board to act quickly.

State ownership of the dam will go a long way toward reassuring the community, Pahinui said, but residents will be keeping close tabs to ensure repairs and improvements are made.

Waters rose quickly as heavy rains fell in the most recent storm, adding to already saturated earth from other recent downpours.

Gov. Josh Green said the cost of the storm could top \$1 billion, including damage to airports, schools, roads, homes and a Maui hospital. He called it the state's most serious since flooding since 2004.

Cleaning up from thick mud that oozed into homes and raging waters that lifted houses and vehicles could take years, Pahinui said.

The state has sent Dole four notices of deficiency about the dam since 2009, and five years ago it fined the company \$20,000 for failing to address safety deficiencies on time, according to records.

Dole Chief Legal Officer Jared Gale told the land board Friday fines were for missed deadlines for submitting paperwork and not related to maintenance. Dole has maintained the dam and spillway "very well" over the years, he said.

Dole proposed to donate the dam, reservoir and ditch system to the state in exchange for an agreement to repair the spillway to meet and maintain dam safety standards.

Prior to the vote board member Wesley "Kaiwi" Yoon expressed reservations about the deal, including whether the state can bear the costs and Dole's history of plantation-era colonization.

"If the state is going to endure this and partner with Dole, who again has a checkered past and issue with its Native community and what it's done to aina over time, it's very difficult to be so nonchalant about this issue," he said, using the Hawaiian word for "land."

Yoon ultimately was the only board member to vote against the land acquisition.

Dole consultant Trisha Kehaulani Watson-Sproat told the board that as a Native Hawaiian who grew up near the dam, she believes state takeover is the "best way forward." The alternative would be Dole decommissioning the dam, she said.

"I call it the decolonizing of this watershed system," she said.

## Savannah Guthrie to return to 'Today' show on April 6 after mother's disappearance

By SARAH BRUMFIELD Associated Press

Savannah Guthrie, who will return on April 6 as co-host of NBC's "Today" show after a nearly two-month absence sparked by the disappearance of her 84-year-old mother, said in an interview that aired on Friday that "joy will be my protest."

Guthrie, speaking with colleague Hoda Kotb, said that while it's hard to imagine returning to a place of joy and lightness, she wants to try, even as she acknowledged she's not sure she can do it or if she'll belong anymore.

"I can't come back and try to be something that I'm not. But I can't not come back, because it's my family," Guthrie said. "I think it's part of my purpose right now. I want to smile and when I do, it will be real and my joy will be my protest. My joy will be my answer. And being there is joyful and when it's not, I'll say so."

Nancy Guthrie was reported missing from her Arizona home on Feb. 1. Authorities believe she 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. Authorities have not released new evidence publicly in weeks.

The Guthrie family has offered a \$1 million reward for information leading to the recovery of their mother.

Savannah Guthrie, who's co-hosted NBC's morning show since 2012, pulled out of covering the 2026 Milan-Cortina Winter Olympics, which began just days after her mother's disappearance.

Abductions are rare. The vast majority of people who are reported missing are believed to be runaways — not kidnapped or abducted. Throughout all of 2024, the latest year that the National Crime Information Center published data, over 530,000 missing person records were entered. Roughly 95% of the hundreds of thousands of cases filed in 2024 were believed to be runaways and only 1% were listed as abducted.

Savannah Guthrie, acknowledging her mother is among the many missing, donated to the Center for Missing and Exploited Children. The organization on Thursday highlighted the cases of three children who disappeared in Arizona — Jimmy Hendrickson in 1991, Karen Grajeda in 1996 and Jesse Florez in 2001.

"We encourage everyone to stay alert," the center said in a statement. "It's up to the public to keep their eyes open. You never know when the next lead will be the one that brings someone home."

The Pima County Sheriff's Office said Friday that tips are still coming in on Nancy Guthrie but at a declining rate. The FBI says it's no longer revealing the number of tips it receives daily in the investigation. Portions of Kotb's interview with Savannah Guthrie were released over multiple days this week. In the videos, Guthrie said she and her siblings knew their mother didn't wander off, given her medical condition, and that doors were propped open at her house. Authorities also discovered blood and a missing camera near the doorstep.

Some media outlets reported receiving ransom notes tied to the case. Guthrie and her siblings responded to two that they believed were real and offered to pay money. Guthrie said her celebrity status might be the reason her mother was taken, but that possibility was "too much to bear."

She again appealed for information, saying the family can't be in peace or move forward with healing without knowing what happened to their mother.

"How can someone vanish without a trace?" Guthrie asked. "How? Someone knows something. Even if that something is someone's been acting strange for the last seven or eight weeks. Even if it's just that. Somebody knows. And maybe somebody's afraid and I understand that, but our hearts are in agony."

## Rubio pushes postwar plan for Strait of Hormuz after meeting G7 allies skeptical about Iran strategy

By MATTHEW LEE and SAMUEL PETREQUIN Associated Press

VAUX-DE-CERNAY, France (AP) — Top diplomats from the Group of Seven countries showed divisions with the United States over the Iran war but agreed Friday during a meeting in France to call for an immediate halt to attacks against civilians and urge the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz to international shipping.

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio joined his G7 counterparts a day after President Donald Trump lobbed his latest round of insults at other NATO countries, making it even more difficult for America's top diplomat to try to sell the U.S. strategy for the Iran conflict to close allies. Trump has repeatedly complained that allies have ignored or rejected requests for help confronting Tehran's retaliation, including its chokehold on the waterway that has disrupted oil shipments and pushed up energy prices.

Rubio struck a softer tone, saying the U.S. would seek international cooperation on a plan to keep the strait open after hostilities end. Trump, as part of an evolving rhetorical approach, warned as recently as last week that the U.S. would "obliterate" Iran's power plants if the waterway were not reopened within 48 hours, though he has extended that deadline until April 6.

Rubio emerged from discussions with fellow diplomats with a longer-term message about the conclusion of the war, when he said the U.S. and allies will face a challenge in keeping the strait open. He cautioned that Iran may seek to set up a toll on the waterway — where 20% of the world's oil typically passes — an act that he said could cause significant economic damage to many nations around the globe.

"Not only is this illegal, it's unacceptable. It's dangerous to the world," Rubio told reporters of the possibility that Iran would seek to restrict traffic through the strait. "And it's important that the world have a plan."

France says the Iran war 'is not ours' as allies call for diplomacy

Most of America's closest allies have greeted the Iran war with deep skepticism, which was on display as the G7 foreign ministers gathered at a historic 12th century abbey in Vaux-de-Cernay, outside Paris, even as they urged a diplomatic solution. Four weeks into the war that the U.S. and Israel launched, the allies face concerns about instability in the oil markets and uncertainty over potential negotiations to end the crisis.

Several EU countries, now grappling with economic consequences of the war, have said they were not consulted by the U.S. before it launched its military actions in Iran. French Minister of the Armed Forces Catherine Vautrin said Friday that the war "is not ours," adding that France's position is strictly defensive.

"The aim is truly this diplomatic approach, which is the only one that can guarantee a return to peace," she said on Europe 1 and CNews.

British Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper said Britain also favored a diplomatic path, acknowledging differences with the United States.

"We have taken the approach of supporting defensive action, but also we've taken a different approach on the offensive action that has taken place as part of this conflict," she said.

German Foreign Minister Johann Wadepuhl said he made "our position clear, namely that there is certainly a readiness on Germany's part to play a role after the end of hostilities when it comes to ensuring the security of shipping in the Strait of Hormuz."

He said his interest is "to broaden what we have as a common basis" regarding the conflict in the Middle East.

Rubio seemed to play down the potential for a widening conflict, saying the U.S. was capable of achieving its objectives without ground troops.

G7 diplomats agree to call for halt to attacks on civilians

French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot said after the meeting that the group adopted a declaration calling for the "immediate cessation" of attacks against civilian populations and infrastructure during the Iran war.

"Nothing justifies deliberately targeting civilians during armed conflicts, nor carrying out attacks against diplomatic facilities," Barrot told reporters, saying the declaration "also reaffirms the absolute necessity of permanently restoring free and safe navigation in the Strait of Hormuz."

Echoing Wadepful's comments, Barrot said that once U.S. military objectives have been achieved, escort missions could "provide the necessary security so that ship traffic can resume as quickly as possible."

"You can clearly see that with each passing day, the situation is worsening due to the lack of ship traffic from the Persian Gulf to the rest of the world," he said.

Barrot added that Rubio, like others in the discussions, "wants that once the United States' military objectives have been achieved, maritime security and freedom of navigation can be ensured in the Strait of Hormuz, as in all international waters around the world."

Trump's criticism of NATO allies makes Iran war a harder sell for Rubio

Trump has complained that other NATO countries were not stepping up to help against Iran.

"We are very disappointed with NATO because NATO has done absolutely nothing," Trump said during a Cabinet meeting Thursday.

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.

"We're there to protect NATO, to protect them from Russia. But they're not there to protect us," Trump added.

Rubio, however, said the U.S. is "not asking for anybody to join the war" against Iran but that the countries most affected by the closure of the Strait of Hormuz "should be willing to do something about it, and we'll help them" after the conflict ends.

Europeans concerned about Iran war's impact on Ukraine

Russia's war in Ukraine also was a major topic at the G7 meeting, with U.S.-brokered talks persisting but making no breakthroughs and allies concerned that the new conflict in the Middle East will divert U.S. attention from a commitment to Ukraine.

Wadepful, the German foreign minister, said he made clear at the meeting that "there must be no cuts when it comes to maintaining Ukraine's defense capability."

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Rubio said that while no U.S. weapons have been pulled from sales bound for Ukraine to go to the Middle East instead, it could happen if deemed necessary.

## **Pro-Iranian group claims credit for hack of FBI Director Kash Patel's personal account**

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A pro-Iranian hacking group claimed Friday to have hacked an account of FBI Director Kash Patel and posted online what appear to be years-old photographs of him, along with a work resume and other personal documents dating back more than a decade.

"Kash Patel, the current head of the FBI, who once saw his name displayed with pride on the agency's headquarters, will now find his name among the list of successfully hacked victims," said a message posted Friday from the group Handala.

The message was accompanied by a collection of photographs of Patel, including ones of him standing beside an antique sports car and another with a cigar in his mouth. The group also said that it was making available for download emails and other documents from Patel's account. Many of the records appeared to relate to his personal travels and business from more than 10 years ago

"The FBI is aware of malicious actors targeting Director Patel's personal email information, and we have

taken all necessary steps to mitigate potential risks associated with this activity," the FBI said in a statement. "The information in question is historical in nature and involves no government information."

The FBI statement did not identify the hackers believed responsible for the breach, but it noted that the Trump administration is offering a reward of up to \$10 million for information leading to the identification of members of the Handala hacking group — an entity it said "has frequently targeted U.S. government officials."

It was not clear when the hack claimed by Handala might have occurred. News reports from December 2024, before Patel was confirmed as director, said that Patel had been informed by FBI that he had been targeted as part of an Iranian hack.

Handala is a pro-Iranian, pro-Palestinian hacking group that earlier this month claimed credit for disrupting systems at Stryker, a Michigan-based medical technology company. Handala said the attack was in retaliation for suspected U.S. strikes that killed Iranian schoolchildren. They're a prominent example of the proxy groups that carry out cyber attacks on behalf of Iran.

## Wall Street drops again to close its 5th straight losing week and its worst since the Iran war

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. stocks deepened their drops Friday as Wall Street finished off a fifth straight losing week, its longest such streak in nearly four years.

The S&P 500 fell 1.7% to close its worst week since the war with Iran began. The Dow Jones Industrial Average lost 793 points, or 1.7%, and fell more than 10% from its record set last month, while the Nasdaq composite sank 2.1%.

The losses were a break from Wall Street's pattern this week, where the U.S. stock market flip-flopped from gains to losses each day as hopes rose and fell about a possible end to the war.

Moments after the U.S. stock market finished trading on Thursday, President Donald Trump offered more potential for optimism. He extended a self-imposed deadline to "obliterate" Iran's power plants to April 6 if it doesn't fully allow oil tankers to exit the Persian Gulf through the Strait of Hormuz to the open ocean.

Oil prices eased immediately afterward in a sign of hope that some normalcy may return to the strait. It was similar to the relief that swept markets Monday, when oil prices slid 10% after Trump announced the first delay to his deadline for clearing the Strait of Hormuz.

But oil prices resumed their climb as trading moved westward Friday from Asia to Europe and back to Wall Street. Despite Trump's latest announcement, fighting continued in the Middle East. Iran gave no signs of backing down, and Israel threatened to "escalate and expand" its attacks on Iran.

"The diplomatic dissonance this week between the U.S. and Iran dismayed investors," said Doug Beath, global equity strategist at Wells Fargo Investment Institute. "By the end of the week, risk appetite could not withstand the fog of war."

"Any further statements by Trump about a deal are white noise to the markets," Jim Bianco, president and macro strategist at Bianco Research, wrote in a social media post. "Only if the IRANIANS say the talks are going well will it impact markets."

The price for a barrel of Brent crude oil climbed 3.4% to settle at \$105.32. That's up from roughly \$70 just before the war began. Benchmark U.S. crude rose 5.5% to settle at \$99.64 per barrel.

The fear in financial markets is that the war will disrupt the Persian Gulf's energy industry for a long time. That could keep enough oil and natural gas out of the world's markets to send a punishing wave of inflation through the global economy.

Not only would it raise prices for drivers buying gasoline, it could push businesses that use any trucks, ships or planes to move their products to raise their own prices. It would also make electricity from gas-fired power plants more expensive.

If the war continues until the end of June, strategists at Macquarie say the price of oil could reach \$200 per barrel. The record is just above \$147, set during the summer of 2008. That's when Iran's testing of

missiles, including one that could reach Israel, and strong demand for oil from China helped send prices spiking despite the Great Recession.

High gasoline prices and the war are already hitting confidence among U.S. consumers, whose spending makes up the bulk of the economy. Sentiment among them fell slightly more in March from February than economists expected, according to a survey by the University of Michigan.

On Wall Street, most stocks fell, including three out of every four in the S&P 500. The index, which is the main measure of the U.S. stock market's health, is 8.7% below its all-time high set in January.

Big Tech stocks were among the heaviest weights on the market, including drops of 4% for Amazon, 4% for Meta Platforms and 2.2% for Nvidia.

Companies selling things that are not essentials, which customers could stop buying if they're spending much more on gasoline, also sank sharply. Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings lost 6.9%, Starbucks dropped 4.8% and Chipotle Mexican Grill sank 4.1%.

All told, the S&P 500 fell 108.31 points to 6,368.85. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 793.47 to 45,166.64, and the Nasdaq composite sank 459.72 to 20,948.36. The Dow and Nasdaq are both down more than 10% from their records, a steep-enough drop that professional investors have a name for it: a "correction."

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

In the bond market, which has helped influence Trump's actions in the past, Treasury yields swiveled.

The yield for the 10-year Treasury rose as high as 4.48% before pulling back to 4.43%. That's up from 4.42% late Thursday and from just 3.97% before the war began. The rise has already sent rates jumping for mortgages and for other loans taken by U.S. households and businesses, slowing the economy.

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.

## Vance holds first meeting of a new anti-fraud task force targeting benefit programs

By MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President JD Vance on Friday held the inaugural meeting of a new anti-fraud task force he's leading as the Trump administration seeks to show it's cracking down on potential misuse of social programs.

Vance, speaking Friday before the task force held a closed-door meeting, said that the federal government, for decades, had not taken the issue of fraud seriously and that it needed to be tackled with "a whole-government approach."

"This is not just the theft of the American people's money," Vance said. "It is also the theft of critical services that the American people rely on."

President Donald Trump, a Republican, has made a crackdown on fraud a central part of his domestic agenda as voters have expressed concern about affordability ahead of November's midterm elections. That effort comes after allegations of fraud involving day care centers run by Somali residents in Minneapolis prompted a massive immigration crackdown in the Midwestern city, resulting in widespread protests.

Vance cited some of the Minnesota allegations on Friday. Last month, he held a news conference to announce a temporary halt of some Medicaid funding until the state took actions that federal officials said would address their concerns.

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, a Democrat who faced Vance as a vice presidential candidate in 2024, has called it a "campaign of retribution" and said the Trump administration was "weaponizing the entirety of the federal government to punish blue states like Minnesota."

The task force is also the most visible assignment to date that Trump has given to Vance, who is seen as a potential 2028 presidential candidate.

Vance and the task force, which includes about half the president's Cabinet, the leader of a new Justice

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Department division focused on prosecuting fraud and Federal Trade Commission Chair Andrew Ferguson, are set to meet regularly to look at rooting out potential fraud and waste in federal benefit programs.

Ferguson, who is vice chair of the task force, cast the issue of fraud as a dire crisis facing the country and said it "shreds the social trust on which these programs and our entire nation depend."

"This fraud crisis is thus existential," he said. "If we fail to address it, the fabric of our nation will swiftly unravel."

Joining the task force was Colin McDonald, a top aide to the Justice Department's second in command. He was recently confirmed as the assistant attorney general overseeing the department's new division focused on prosecuting fraud.

The Justice Department has long prosecuted fraud nationally through its Criminal Division, but the Trump administration says the new division is needed to crack down on rampant fraud.

The Justice Department under the Biden administration brought a massive \$300 million pandemic fraud case involving the nonprofit Feeding Our Future, accusing dozens of defendants, most of Somali descent, of exploiting a state-run, federally funded program intended to provide food for children.

The investigations into the fraud there expanded, with a lead prosecutor estimating that half or more of the roughly \$18 billion in federal funds that supported 14 programs in Minnesota since 2018 may have been stolen.

That prosecutor who had been leading the sprawling fraud investigation there under the Biden and Trump administrations was among those who resigned from the Justice Department amid frustration with the department's response to the fatal shootings of civilians by federal agents in Minneapolis.

## Frustrated travelers hear a new message from airports: Don't get here so early

By JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

Maybe Dad was right about getting to the airport early. But it turns out there's still such a thing as TOO early.

Travelers panicked by scenes of never-ending lines at U.S. airport security checkpoints and frustrating tales of missed flights over the past few weeks are now showing up way before their departures. Some airports where the wait times have been manageable say those early birds are only adding to the misery — and in some cases causing other passengers to get to their gate too late.

In Ohio, John Glenn International Airport in Columbus is warning passengers against arriving hours in advance, even creating a chart showing when to show up: "90 minutes before departure is all you need."

The airport says those premature arrivers — reacting to the funding standoff on Capitol Hill that's creating crowded security checkpoints — are making things worse by creating bottlenecks during peak times.

"Arriving too early can actually create longer lines right when we open," the airport said in a social media post Thursday. "Spacing out arrival times helps keep things moving smoothly for everyone."

It's Airport Dad's moment — finally

In some ways, the airport chaos is turning into a full circle moment for "Airport Dad" — a humorous TikTok and social media take on the dad who always makes sure the family is out the door, parked, through security and positioned at the correct gate well before anyone else, with paper boarding passes in hand.

Airline customers aren't laughing, at least right now. They're facing record wait times in a jumbled environment — the modern American airport — that can serve up assorted stresses and snafus on the best of days.

Amber Campbell said she missed a morning flight this week despite arriving at Baltimore-Washington International Airport more than three hours ahead of time.

"We noted several people in line with later afternoon flights," Campbell posted on Facebook. "There was no organization or consideration for those of us missing flights vs people with later flights. We missed our flight by ten minutes!"

What's confusing for air passengers is that it's hard to predict which airports will be plagued next by

security lines spilling out of terminals.

Checkpoints in some places are beyond two hours

The government shutdown straining Transportation Security Administration staffing has ballooned checkpoint wait times beyond two hours at some major airports. George Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston has become the biggest chokepoint for travelers with four-hour security lines.

"An absolute nightmare," said Arthur Tsebetzis, while standing in a line Friday that snaked through the main terminal and spilled outside Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport in Atlanta.

Those are by far the worst-case scenarios. Many airports — like the one in Ohio — have been seeing wait times comparable with those in normal times. That's why airlines say the best advice for passengers right now is to check TSA wait times before their scheduled departures.

It's a bit reminiscent of the days of "panic buying" during the early part of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

"It's human nature. You don't have control over what's going on at an airport," said Shari Botwin, a Philadelphia clinical social worker who counsels people about anxiety.

"There's so much media attention about the chaos at airports," she said. "They might not trust when someone says, 'Well, you don't need to come out early anymore.'"

## Florida congresswoman Cherfilus-McCormick committed 25 ethics violations, House panel finds

By STEPHEN GROVES and MEG KINNARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democratic Rep. Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick of Florida committed numerous violations of House rules and ethics standards, the House Ethics Committee found Friday in a ruling that could add weight to Republicans' potential push to expel her from Congress.

After meeting into early Friday morning following a seven-hour hearing, the ethics panel of four Democrats and four Republicans found that Cherfilus-McCormick had committed 25 ethics violations, including breaking campaign finance laws. The panel said it would recommend a punishment in the coming weeks.

The allegations center on Cherfilus-McCormick's receipt of millions of dollars from her family's health care business following Florida's overpayment of roughly \$5 million in disaster relief funds. Cherfilus-McCormick is accused of using that money to fund her 2022 congressional campaign through a network of businesses and family members.

The congresswoman, who is running for a fourth term representing a southeastern Florida district, has denied wrongdoing, and her attorney stridently criticized Thursday's public hearing — the first open proceeding in nearly 15 years. But the ruling from the Ethics Committee could fuel a potential vote on her expulsion and divide a Democratic caucus that is trying to make a comeback to power in the November midterm elections.

Cherfilus-McCormick also faces federal charges for allegedly stealing \$5 million in COVID-19 disaster relief funds and using the funds to purchase items such as a 3-carat yellow diamond ring. Her brother, former chief of staff and her accountant were also charged. She has pleaded not guilty to those charges, and her attorney indicated Thursday that the trial is expected to start in the coming months.

"I look forward to proving my innocence," Cherfilus-McCormick said in a statement. "Until then, my focus remains where it belongs: showing up for the great people of Florida's 20th District who sent me to Washington to fight for them."

What did the Ethics panel find her guilty of?

The congresswoman declined to testify during Thursday's ethics hearing, citing her Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination. Her attorney, William Barzee, sparred with some of the lawmakers on the ethics panel and argued that they should have allowed a thorough ethics trial, where he could present witnesses and evidence to counter the conclusions of House investigators.

Barzee accused the panel of giving further momentum to the effort to "throw a woman out of Congress who was duly elected by her constituents" based primarily on bank records.

Committee investigators laid out 27 violations of House ethics standards and rules in a 242-page report. The report accused Cherfilus-McCormick of winning a 2022 special election by portraying her campaign as self-financed when it was actually funded through the \$5 million overpayment her family's company received from Florida for coronavirus vaccination services.

Barzee had argued that "she was entitled to that money," citing a document detailing how her family would share the proceeds from the health care business. But lawmakers on the ethics panel were skeptical of that argument.

The panel found Cherfilus-McCormick guilty of all but two of the ethics violations proposed by investigators. Lawmakers declined to find her guilty on one allegation that she received political help from an organization run by an adviser and her husband, which received funding from the Haitian government. The panel also did not find her guilty of refusing to cooperate with the ethics investigation.

Will there be a push to expel Cherfilus-McCormick?

The full House Ethics Committee said it would meet after Congress returns from a two-week break in April and consider what punishment to recommend for a vote in the House.

Rep. Greg Steube, a Florida Republican, told reporters Thursday that once the committee makes a determination, he "will move on the floor to expel."

House Democratic leaders have declined to condemn Cherfilus-McCormick and said they wanted to see the ethics process play out. A couple of members of the Congressional Black Caucus, one of the most powerful groups of Democratic members, also showed up to the start of the ethics hearing Thursday in an apparent show of support for Cherfilus-McCormick.

Every seat in the tightly divided House is valuable, with votes routinely coming down to just a couple of votes. If Cherfilus-McCormick's seat is vacated, it would give Republicans a little more room to maneuver bills through the chamber.

But Democratic Rep. Marie Gluesenkamp Perez, a moderate member from Washington state who often breaks with her caucus, posted on social media Friday morning that "since she was found guilty, she should resign or be removed."

The last member to be expelled from Congress was Republican Rep. George Santos of New York in 2023. He argued at the time that the House would be "haunted" by the precedent of expelling a member before a criminal trial played out. House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., voted against expulsion at the time, expressing the same concern.

It takes a two-thirds majority in the 435-member House to expel a member.

## He suddenly couldn't speak in space. NASA astronaut says his medical scare remains a mystery

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — The astronaut who prompted NASA's first medical evacuation earlier this year said Friday that doctors still don't know why he suddenly fell sick at the International Space Station.

Four-time space flier Mike Fincke said he was eating dinner on Jan. 7 after prepping for a spacewalk the next day when it happened. He couldn't talk and remembers no pain, but his anxious crewmates jumped into action after seeing him in distress and requested help from flight surgeons on the ground.

"It was completely out of the blue. It was just amazingly quick," he said in an interview with The Associated Press from Houston's Johnson Space Center.

Fincke, 59, a retired Air Force colonel, said the episode lasted roughly 20 minutes and he felt fine afterward. He said he still does. He never experienced anything like that before or since.

Doctors have ruled out a heart attack and Fincke said he wasn't choking, but everything else is still on the table and could be related to his 549 days of weightlessness. He was 5 1/2 months into his latest space station stay when the problem struck like "a very, very fast lightning bolt."

"My crewmates definitely saw that I was in distress," he said, with all six gathering around him. "It was all hands on deck within just a matter of seconds."

Fincke said he can't provide any more details about his medical episode. The space agency wants to make sure that other astronauts do not feel that their medical privacy will be compromised if something happens to them, he said.

The space station's ultrasound machine came in handy when the event occurred, he said, and he's gone through numerous tests since returning to Earth. NASA is poring through other astronauts' medical records to see if any related instances might have happened in space, he said.

Fincke identified himself late last month as the one who was sick to end the swirling public speculation. He still feels bad that his illness caused the spacewalk to be canceled — it would have been his 10th spacewalk but first for crewmate Zena Cardman — and resulted in an early return for her and their two other crewmates. SpaceX brought them back on Jan. 15, more than a month early, and they went straight to the hospital.

"I've been very lucky to be super healthy. So this was very surprising for everyone," he said.

Fincke stopped apologizing to everybody after NASA's new administrator Jared Isaacman ordered him to stop.

"This wasn't you. This was space, right?" his colleagues assured him. "You didn't let anybody down."

Ever the optimist, he's holding out hope that he can return to space one day.

## 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's policies.

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

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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.

The White House dismissed the planned protests as the product of "leftist funding networks" with little real public support.

"The only people who care about these Trump Derangement Therapy Sessions are the reporters who are paid to cover them." White House spokesperson Abigail Jackson said in a statement.

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 Saturday at the Capitol 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."

## Dietary supplement makers push the FDA to allow peptides and other new ingredients

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Makers of dietary supplements are pushing the Food and Drug Administration to expand the types of ingredients they can put in their products, a change that could open the door to more marketing of peptides, probiotics and other trendy wellness offerings.

The FDA was holding a public meeting Friday to discuss its longstanding criteria for dietary supplements and whether they could be broadened to include substances that don't come from food, vitamins, herbs or other traditional ingredients. FDA officials will hear from industry executives, consumer advocates and academics.

It's the first such meeting since Robert F. Kennedy Jr. became the nation's top health official last year. Kennedy has vowed to "end the war at FDA" on dietary supplements, peptides and other products that are popular within his Make America Healthy Again movement.

Friday's meeting came at the request of the Natural Products Association, an industry group that has clashed with the FDA over certain new supplement ingredients. The group asked for the meeting in a January letter, citing "the cost and uncertainty that arise when regulatory expectations are unclear."

The FDA's top food official, Kyle Diamantas, opened the meeting by underscoring the administration's commitment to "cutting red tape" to lower the industry's costs.

"The industry has grown tremendously over the last 30 years yet the regulatory framework has largely stayed the same," Diamantas told attendees.

Here's what to know about the issue:

Many wellness products don't qualify as supplements

Under FDA regulations, supplements are deemed to be a category of food, with most of their ingredients coming from plants, herbs and other substances found in the American diet.

That requirement has become a challenge for the industry in recent years as newer wellness products often feature substances that have never been used in food.

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Peptides, for instance, are druglike chains of amino acids that have been widely promoted by celebrities and influencers as a way to build muscle and look younger, although there's little science supporting their use.

Many specialty pharmacies and clinics sell them as injections or IV infusions, but some supplement makers have also begun adding them to capsules, gummies and powders.

Technically, those products violate FDA rules, according to FDA lawyers. The same goes for certain types of probiotics, bacteria-containing products that are pitched to aid digestion and promote gut health.

Companies argue that FDA law, as written, doesn't specify that all ingredients must come from food.

"The hope of the meeting is that FDA is willing to open up its interpretation of what constitutes a dietary ingredient to allow dietary substances that aren't already in food," said Robert Durkin, a former official in the FDA's supplements program who now consults for companies.

But consumer advocates warn that allowing new ingredients would vastly expand the market for supplements, which the FDA has long struggled to oversee.

"FDA should focus on making the current market safer instead of allowing more chemicals and substances in supplements," said Jensen Jose, senior regulatory counsel of the nonprofit Center for Science in the Public Interest, in a presentation at Friday's meeting.

Supplement makers view Kennedy as an ally

Kennedy recently declared himself "a big fan" of peptides, telling podcast host Joe Rogan that he's personally used them to treat injuries. He also vowed to loosen FDA limits on producing injectable peptides, which have been subject to federal safety restrictions.

Some of Kennedy's allies and supporters are proponents of the chemicals, including Gary Brecka, a self-described "longevity expert," who sells peptide injectables, patches and nasal sprays through his website.

Dr. Mark Hyman, another Kennedy friend, sells dozens of dietary supplements, including some claiming to contain peptides, through his website.

Two former health advisers from Kennedy's presidential campaign also have ties to the industry.

Calley Means, now serving as a senior adviser in the Department of Health and Human Services, co-founded an online platform that helps people spend tax-free health dollars on supplements and other wellness goods.

Dr. Casey Means — his sister and President Donald Trump's surgeon general nominee — made hundreds of thousands of dollars promoting supplements, probiotics and related products, according to financial disclosure forms.

Supplements have never been subject to strict FDA oversight

The FDA does not review dietary supplements the way it approves drugs and other medical products after confirming their safety and effectiveness. The agency does not even have a list of all the products in circulation.

With some 100,000 or more supplements on the market, manufacturers are legally responsible for making sure their products are safe and truthfully advertised, according to the FDA. Supplements can't claim to treat specific diseases or medical conditions.

The 1994 law that gave the FDA oversight of the industry also exempted supplement makers from nutrition labeling requirements, under which companies must scientifically support health claims.

Instead, supplement makers can make more general claims, such as that their products maintain or support health and well-being.

Some former regulators think that approach was a mistake.

"It sanctioned unauthorized, implied health claims" said Mitch Zeller, who worked on supplement issues at the FDA during the 1990s. "There are all manner of claims being made on supplement labeling or in advertising that are carefully worded to avoid making a drug or treatment claim."

Companies can also say their products improve the structure or function of certain body parts, such as strengthening bones. Products making general or specific claims must carry a disclaimer: "This statement has not been evaluated by the FDA."

## **A Build America, Buy America law is causing construction delays amid the US housing crisis**

By CHARLOTTE KRAMON Associated Press/Report for America

It has a catchy name — Build America, Buy America — and the lauded goal of bringing manufacturing jobs back to the United States.

But the law has spurred a bottleneck for affordable housing.

Nearly everything from HVACs and lighting to sink hooks and ceiling fans in affordable housing projects that get federal dollars must carry the Made in the USA label. But, developers say, numerous products do not, as they have long been imported from overseas markets with cheaper labor costs.

Although builders can apply for waivers, the process has been at a near standstill as the Department of Housing and Urban Development, which has had its staff slashed by the Trump administration, has only greenlit a handful of projects.

The waiver process has caused construction delays and hundreds of thousands of dollars in extra costs as the country faces an affordable housing crisis.

“They need to be treating this like the fire that it is,” said Tyler Norod, president of Westbrook Development Corporation, which builds affordable housing in Maine.

“We’ve sort of resigned ourselves that we’re just gonna build less units across the entire country during a housing crisis.”

Facing a standstill

Diana Lene has been on affordable housing waitlists for the past five years. The 75-year-old loves living close to her daughter and grandchildren in Fargo, North Dakota, but her apartment is too expensive on her Social Security income.

“It’s just maxing my budget down to pennies,” she said. To save money, she avoids driving often and buys food on sale.

“I’m just trying to keep a roof over my head, but it’s getting more and more difficult,” Lene said. “I don’t like to live in fear, and yet sometimes it jumps in there.”

Lene is on a waitlist for one of nonprofit developer Beyond Shelter’s apartments. CEO Dan Madler is building a 36-unit building for people like Lene, but he had to postpone lumber orders to verify they comply with the law and can’t find ceiling fans made in America. He doesn’t know when HUD will approve a waiver.

U.S. President Joe Biden signed the Build America, Buy America Act as part of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act in 2021, building on longstanding efforts to boost American manufacturing at a time when the U.S. economy was emerging from a pandemic-era recession. Known as BABA, it applies to infrastructure projects funded by federal agencies, not just affordable housing.

Denver developer Julie Hoebel says she has spent over \$60,000 just on a consultant to comb through websites and call suppliers to try to find American-made materials, not to mention the additional labor costs involved.

But the waivers she submitted to HUD in November for around 125 materials in an 85-unit building haven’t been approved.

“If they take much longer then we’ll come to a standstill,” she said.

A cumbersome process

HUD is taking at least six months to approve many waivers.

Even BABA advocates agree HUD must grant waivers more quickly and give the industry clearer instructions on how to prepare them, which they note other federal agencies are doing.

HUD did not address questions from The Associated Press about waiver approval delays developers say increase costs, as well as concerns about making the process more transparent. In a statement it said it’s committed to “ensuring that federal spending supports America’s industrial base” while “closely monitoring how compliance with these policies impact costs for builders.”

Asked in January about whether the delays and cost increases mean affordable housing should be exempt from BABA rules, HUD Secretary Scott Turner said the agency was looking into the issue, but did not

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provide details. "We are looking at this ... with BABA as it pertains to HUD to provide flexibility to certain projects in certain places around our country," Turner said, adding that HUD is committed to assuring developers get "the flexibility they need as it pertains to building."

The law itself isn't the problem, supporters say.

Unions representing the steel and manufacturing industries say taxpayer dollars should fund American-made materials and suppliers will adjust to meet demand for products that aren't available.

"You've got a system in place that leans heavily on using imported materials to make a better profit," said Scott Paul, president of the Alliance for American Manufacturing. "I don't know if that serves the public good."

Jennifer Schwartz, director of tax and housing advocacy at the National Council of State Housing Agencies, said there's no national data on how much BABA is increasing costs. But the waiver process is "failing," she said, because requirements were put in place before assessment of domestic manufacturing capacity.

It won't be as challenging for suppliers to produce more raw materials in the U.S., but it will take time for manufactured products — such as appliances and elevators — to become available, said Kaitlyn Snyder, managing director of the National Housing and Rehabilitation Association, an affordable housing industry group.

"I don't know that it economically, financially makes sense for people to be producing door hinges," Snyder said. "We are an advanced country and we've outsourced a lot of that stuff."

The housing bill that passed the Senate in March did not require HUD to address problems with implementing BABA.

"The process isn't working for affordable housing," said Jessie Handforth Kome, who spent nearly 40 years working at HUD until 2024. "People want to comply, but it's unclear how to."

Vermont-based Developer Jessica Neubelt estimates she spent an additional \$150,000 just to verify iron and steel she used in a project was American-made. She's just as frustrated over the hundreds of hours that takes, which, she said, could be spent on another project.

"I would like every member of Congress to sit in on a construction meeting," Neubelt said. "The amount of detail that goes into figuring out if a specific thing is compliant or not is enormous."

Debates over solutions

U.S. Rep. Mike Flood, a Nebraska Republican, has advocated to exempt some HUD funding from BABA.

"Owning a home is the American dream, but it's out of reach in a very big way and anything that adds cost to that isn't allowing hardworking Americans to achieve the dream," Flood told the AP.

Roy Houseman, legislative director at United Steelworkers, said complaints about cost increases are overblown.

"A lot of developers seem to have tried to throw things in and make statutory changes to policies that have been in place for basically five years now instead of making a good-faith effort to really push HUD," Houseman said.

Union leaders note the law offers some leeway.

Developers can get exemptions for an American-made product if it increases the project's overall cost by more than 25%. A very small percentage of a project's total material cost is also exempt. But most developers say that percentage isn't enough to cover all items not made in the U.S.

Some developers are looking for ways to avoid federal funds altogether. But that is challenging. Even though federal dollars often make up a small portion of funding for affordable housing projects, that sliver can make or break whether there's enough money to build them.

Kentucky developer Scott McReynolds says that instead of applying for a federal grant to build 20 to 30 affordable homes, he plans to build two four-unit projects, small enough so that they aren't subject to BABA. American-made materials are especially hard to find near the rural areas McReynolds serves.

"It's a nightmare," he said.

## Iran starts to formalize its chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz with a 'toll booth' regime

By DAVID McHUGH and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP) — Iran appears to be setting itself up as the gatekeeper for the Strait of Hormuz, the world's most important artery for oil shipments. The move could cement Tehran's de facto chokehold over the crucial waterway and formalize its ability to keep its own oil flowing to China.

Iranian communications to the United Nations maritime authority and the experience of ships transiting the strait suggest the creation of something akin to a "toll booth." Ships must enter Iranian waters and be vetted by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps. At least two vessels have paid for passage.

Traffic through the strait has fallen by 90% since the start of the Iran war, sending global oil prices skyrocketing and inflicting alarming shortages on the Asian nations that get their oil from Persian Gulf countries via the strait.

Only about 150 vessels, including tankers and container ships, have transited since March 1, according to Lloyd's List Intelligence shipping information firm. That's a little more than one day's normal traffic before the war. Iran's Kharg Island terminal loaded 1.6 million barrels in March — largely unchanged from prewar monthly loading totals, according to data and analytic firm Kpler. Most of the customers are small, private refineries in China that don't care about U.S. sanctions.

A majority of the ships that have made it through in recent weeks headed east, out of the Gulf; Iran-affiliated ships accounted for 24% of transits, Greece 18%, and China 10% counted by ownership or flag registration. Yet on closer examination, vessels connected to Iran accounted for 60% of transits during the first part of the war and in the last few days, some 90%.

About half of the vessels turn off radio identification systems that show their location before going through, and reappear on the other side in the Gulf of Oman. There's a reason for their reluctance and caution. At least 18 ships have been hit and at least seven crew members have been killed, according to the U.N.'s International Maritime Organization, which tracks maritime security. It did not specify which nation attacked the vessels.

Lloyd's List says tolls are paid in yuan, China's currency

"Iran's IRGC has imposed a de facto 'toll booth' regime in the Strait of Hormuz," says shipping information firm Lloyd's List Intelligence.

Normally ships use a two-lane shipping channel in the middle of the strait. But increasingly, vessels are taking a different route, to the north around Larak Island, placing them in Iran's territorial waters and closer to the Iranian coastline.

Entities that want their vessels to safely pass through must submit their details to what Lloyd's List Intelligence refers to as "approved intermediaries" of the Revolutionary Guard, including the cargo, owners, destination and a complete crew list. Approved vessels receive a code and are escorted by an IRGC vessel. Oil is prioritized and vessels are subject to "geopolitical vetting," Lloyd's said.

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

Some ships appear to have been allowed through following diplomatic pressure. Two Indian vessels loaded with liquid petroleum gas have been able to pass, according to Lloyd's.

Iran appears to be setting up a permanent system

On Tuesday, the IMO received a letter from the Iranian government saying it "had implemented a set of precautionary measures aimed at preserving maritime safety and security." The letter claimed Iran was acting within the principles of international law.

Iran's parliament appears to be working on a bill to formalize fees for some ships in the Strait of Hormuz, local media reported.

The Fars and Tasnim news agencies, both close to Iran's Revolutionary Guard, quoted lawmaker Mohamadreza Rezaei Kouchi saying "parliament is pursuing a plan to formally codify Iran's sovereignty, control and oversight over the Strait of Hormuz, while also creating a source of revenue through the collection

of fees.”

The IMO has condemned the attacks on vessels and called for an internationally coordinated approach to secure passage through the strait that respects freedom of navigation.

An Emirati oil executive calls Iran’s chokehold ‘economic terrorism’

The comment by Sultan al-Jaber, who leads the massive state-run Abu Dhabi National Oil Co., signaled the hardening rhetoric of the United Arab Emirates as the war nears its one-month mark.

“Weaponizing the Strait of Hormuz is not an act of aggression against one nation,” al-Jaber said in a speech for an event hosted by the Middle East Institute in Washington.

“It is economic terrorism against every consumer, every family that depends on affordable energy and food. When Iran holds Hormuz hostage, every nation pays the ransom, at the gas pump, at the grocery store and at the pharmacy,” he said. “No country can be allowed to destabilize the global economy in this way.”

Iran’s approach may violate international law

Article 19 of the U.N.’s Law of the Sea Treaty states that countries must allow “innocent passage” of peaceful, law-abiding vessels in their territorial waters.

“There’s no provision in international law anywhere to set up a toll booth and shake down shipping. ... This is Iran using the element that they have right now, which is control of the Strait of Hormuz,” said Sal Mercogliano, a maritime historian at Campbell University in North Carolina.

The secretary general of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Jasem Mohamed al-Budaiwi, said Iran’s collection of fees for passage is “an aggression and a violation of the United Nations agreement on the law of the sea.”

Such payments likely run afoul of American and European sanctions on the Guard, a key power center within Iran that controls its ballistic missile arsenal and was key in suppressing nationwide protests in January.

## **UNICEF says Iran war means more children will suffer in Somalia**

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.

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## 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."

## In the wake of US social media verdicts, a look at what limits other countries have imposed for kids

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

Dual jury verdicts this week have validated longstanding concerns about the dangers of social media for young people. But the U.S. lacks federal regulation that meaningfully addresses these harms.

On Wednesday, a Los Angeles jury found both Meta and YouTube liable for harms to children using their services. A day earlier 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.

Although parents and children's advocates cheered the decisions, they argue that without federal regulation to rein in the companies, platforms like Instagram, YouTube and TikTok are unlikely to implement any meaningful change. Many are pinning their hopes on the Kids Online Safety Act, a bill aimed at protecting kids from the harms of social media, gaming sites and other online platforms. It won Senate approval in

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2024 but has lingered since.

Other countries, meanwhile, have implemented — or are planning — a bevy of restrictions on children's online activities, ranging from social media bans to requiring younger teens to link their accounts to a parent's. Here's a look at how countries outside the United States are regulating kids and technology.

## Australia bans kids under 16 from social media

In 2024, Australia became the first country to kick kids under 16 off social media. The law makes platforms — including TikTok, Facebook, Snapchat, Reddit, X and Instagram — liable for fines of up to 50 million Australian dollars (\$34 million) if they fail to prevent children younger than 16 from holding accounts. While many parents have cheered the move, some experts have questioned the efficacy of their age estimation methods (the platforms are not required to ask users for government-issued IDs) and their effects on young people's free speech, social connections and privacy. Critics also fear that the ban will impact the privacy of all users who must prove they are older than 16.

## Brazil requires supervision and restricts the infinite scroll

A Brazilian law that seeks to shield minors from addictive, violent and pornographic online content took effect this month, with experts calling it a milestone in the protection of children and adolescents.

Under the new law, children under 16 are required to link their social media accounts to a legal guardian to ensure supervision. The legislation also prohibits platforms from using addictive features, such as infinite scroll and the automatic play of videos. Digital services are also required to implement an effective age verification mechanism that goes beyond self-declaration.

## Indonesia plans under-16 social media ban

Following in Australia's footsteps Indonesia will ban social media for children under 16 beginning this month.

The regulation that will mean children under the age of 16 can no longer have accounts on "high-risk" digital platforms, including YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, Threads, X, Bigo Live and Roblox.

The implementation will start gradually from March 28 until all platforms comply.

Indonesia will be the first country in Southeast Asia to restrict the access of children to social media.

## Malaysia restricts young teens, tightens digital rules

Since January 2025, major social media and messaging platforms with at least 8 million users in Malaysia are required to obtain a license as part of a broader tightening of state oversight over digital platforms. Licensed platforms must implement age verification, content-safety measures and transparency rules, reflecting the government's push for a safer digital space. The country also plans to ban kids under 16 from social media beginning this year.

## Europe and the UK look into limits

Spain's prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, announced in February that the country plans to limit social media access for children under 16, in a move designed to shield young people from the harms of online content.

In January, France approved a bill banning social media for children under 15, paving the way for the measure to take effect at the start of the next school year in September. The bill would also ban the use of mobile phones in high schools. The French government had previously passed a law banning the use of phones in all primary and middle schools.

Denmark has introduced similar legislation to ban access to social media for users under 15, while the United Kingdom said last month it would consider banning young teenagers from social media, as it tightens laws designed to protect children from harmful content and excessive screen time.

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## Today in History: March 28

### Three Mile Island nuclear plant accident

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Saturday, March 28, the 87th day of 2026. There are 278 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On March 28, 1979, America's worst commercial nuclear accident occurred with a partial meltdown inside the Unit 2 reactor at the Three Mile Island plant near Middletown, Pennsylvania.

Also on this date:

In 1898, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *United States v. Wong Kim Ark*, ruled 6-2 that Wong, who was born in the United States to Chinese immigrants, was an American citizen. It was the first Supreme Court decision to rule on the citizenship status of a child born in the United States to noncitizen parents.

In 1935, the notorious Nazi propaganda film "Triumph des Willens" ("Triumph of the Will"), directed by Leni Riefenstahl, premiered in Berlin with Adolf Hitler present.

In 1941, author Virginia Woolf, 59, drowned herself near her home in Lewes, East Sussex, England.

In 1969, the 34th president of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower, died in Washington, D.C., at age 78.

In 1990, President George H.W. Bush posthumously awarded the Congressional Gold Medal to the late Jesse Owens, who won four gold medals in track at the 1936 Berlin Olympics (Owens, who was Black, won in front of Adolf Hitler, thwarting Nazi claims of Aryan racial supremacy).

In 2024, FTX cryptocurrency exchange founder Sam Bankman-Fried was sentenced to 25 years in prison after being convicted on fraud and conspiracy charges related to the collapse of the exchange.

In 2025, Utah became the first state to prohibit flying LGBTQ+ pride flags at schools and government buildings after Gov. Spencer Cox announced he was allowing a ban on unsanctioned flag displays to become law without his signature; the law took effect the following May.

Today's Birthdays: Basketball Hall of Famer Rick Barry is 82. Actor Dianne Wiest is 78. Singer-actor Reba McEntire is 71. Olympic gymnastics gold medalist Bart Conner is 68. Rapper Salt (Salt-N-Pepa) is 60. Country musician Rodney Atkins is 57. Actor Vince Vaughn is 56. Sen. Ashley Moody, a Republican from Florida, is 51. Actor Julia Stiles is 45. Singer-actor Lady Gaga is 40. Stylist-TV personality Jonathan Van Ness is 39. Rapper Jackson Wang is 32. Russian figure skater and Olympic gold medalist Anna Shcherbakova is 22.