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Tuesday, March 31

Senior Menu: Scalloped potatoes, carrots, fruit, dinner roll.
School Breakfast: Muffins.
School Lunch: Tater tot hot dish, mixed vegetables.
United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.
Indoor Track Meet at NSU, 3:30 p.m.
Biogirls, 3:45 p.m., elementary gym
Softball: Sisseton at Groton Area, Varsity at 4 p.m.

Wednesday, April 1

Senior Menu: Swiss steak, mashed potatoes and gravy, peas and carrots, fruit, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Oatmeal
School Lunch: Chicago pasta, mixed vegetables.
Pickleball, 5:30 p.m., Elementary Gym
6th Grade Boys Basketball, 6 p.m., Arena
Chamber Meeting, noon, City Hall
Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.; Sarah Circle, 5 p.m.; League, 6:30 p.m.
SEAS: Living Stations, 7 p.m.
United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.
Groton C&MA: Kid's Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study, 7 p.m.



Thursday, April 2

Senior Menu: Tator tot hot dish, green beans, fruit, breadstick.
School Breakfast: Maple French Toast Bake
School Lunch: Sloppy Joes, tri taters.
5th Grade Girls Basketball, 4 p.m., Elementary Gym
Girls Softball: vs. Aberdeen Central at the Aberdeen Dome, 4 p.m., double header
HS Baseball Practice, 6 p.m., GHS Gym
Pickleball, 6 p.m., Elementary Gym
Emmanuel Lutheran: Nigeria Circle, 2 p.m.; Maundy Thursday service, 7 p.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Maundy Thursday Service, 7 p.m., at St. John's
United Methodist: Maundy Thursday Service, 6 p.m., in Groton

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

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1440

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

\$10M Art Heist

Four masked men stole three paintings (w/photos) worth over \$10M combined from the Magnani-Rocca Foundation outside Parma, Italy, officials confirmed yesterday.

The thieves reportedly entered the museum through the front door on March 22 and stole Paul Cézanne's "Still Life With Cherries," Henri Matisse's "Odalisque on the Terrace," and Pierre-Auguste Renoir's "Les Poissons," which alone is worth about \$7M. A fourth piece was left behind after an alarm was triggered, prompting the men to flee by climbing a fence. Officials said the heist was highly coordinated and lasted just three minutes. The museum has remained open, keeping the news of the theft from the public for a week. No suspects have been identified as of this writing.

What might the thieves want to do with the art? Stolen art is typically ransomed instead of resold.

xAI Cofounders Exodus

All 11 cofounders of Elon Musk's artificial intelligence startup xAI have now departed, capping a two-year exodus that accelerated after Musk's rocket maker, SpaceX, bought the company in February. The final two cofounders left last week.

The departures at xAI—which was founded in 2023 by researchers from Google DeepMind, Microsoft, and OpenAI—unfolded in waves. The first exits came in mid-2024 and early 2025, with the pace quickening after SpaceX completed its all-stock acquisition of xAI that valued the latter at \$250B. Reported reasons for the exits include a shift in priorities, internal disagreements, and changes in workplace culture. Musk has said xAI "was not built right the first time around."

The reset comes as SpaceX moves toward a midyear initial public offering, targeting a valuation of up to \$1.75T. Investors are likely to scrutinize xAI, given the loss of its founding team and regulatory concerns surrounding its Grok chatbot.

Cuba Oil Relief

A Russian oil tanker arrived in Cuba yesterday carrying around 730,000 barrels of oil. The delivery breaks a monthlong US blockade that has led to daily blackouts. It is not clear as of this writing if the US will allow other ships to reach the island.

President Donald Trump instated the effective blockade in January, citing national security concerns and accusing Cuba of harboring terrorist organizations. The move came weeks after the US ousted Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro. It has led to speculation that Trump aims to control Cuba, with Trump suggesting he could "take" the island and that, after Iran, "Cuba is next." In recent weeks, Cubans have relied increasingly on solar energy from China to supplement the failing electricity grid.

The oil can be refined into other products like diesel, gasoline, and jet fuel; refinement and distribution are expected to take roughly four weeks.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

NCAA Women's Final Four set, with No. 1 UConn facing No. 1 South Carolina and No. 1 UCLA facing No. 1 Texas Friday.

Connecticut Sun reach deal to sell WNBA team to Rockets owner for \$300M, will move to Houston in 2027.

Jeffrey Epstein TV series in the works with Sony Pictures, based on the book "Perversion of Justice" by Julie K. Brown, a journalist who investigated the late sex offender.

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Céline Dion announces comeback shows in Paris, four years after stiff-person syndrome diagnosis.
Peter Alexander to join MS NOW as chief national reporter; he is leaving the "Today" show after 22 years with NBC News.

Science & Technology

French AI startup Mistral raises \$830M in debt financing to fund data center powered by Nvidia chips near Paris; Mistral is one of the few European companies building foundational AI models like OpenAI, Anthropic.

Parasite behind sleeping sickness edits genetic material in real time to evade immune system detection, often making cases fatal by the time they're identified; new insight could lead to earlier detection.

Sequenced squid genomes reveal how squid and cuttlefish began rapidly evolving about 100 million years ago, surviving the mass extinction event that wiped out dinosaurs.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 -0.4%, Dow +0.1%, Nasdaq -0.7%) as US crude oil settles above \$100 per barrel for first time since 2022.

Air Canada CEO to step down after facing criticism for his largely English condolence message to the LaGuardia crash that killed two pilots; Canada's largest airline is based in French-speaking Quebec.

JetBlue Airways raises bag fees as fuel prices rise amid Iran war.

Sysco—America's biggest food distributor—to acquire family-owned Restaurant Depot for roughly \$29B.

Politics & World Affairs

Israel's parliament approves law making death penalty the default sentence for Palestinians convicted of carrying out deadly terror attacks.

Justice Department sues Minnesota over state's policy of allowing transgender girls to participate in female high school sports.

Spain closes airspace to US military aircraft in protest of US war with Iran.

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Weismantel honored with Distinguished Service Award

COLUMBIA — Years of quiet leadership, steady commitment and a deep passion for education and student activities have earned Marty Weismantel one of the state's highest honors.

Weismantel, a Columbia resident and longtime public servant, was recently recognized by the South Dakota High School Activities Association with its Distinguished Service Award, an honor reserved for individuals who have made lasting contributions to high school activities across the state.

For Weismantel, the recognition reflects decades of involvement at both the local and state level.

A graduate of Groton High School, Weismantel went on to attend Northern State College. His connection to education and athletics began early, eventually leading him into officiating, where he spent years working basketball and football contests across South Dakota.

That involvement naturally evolved into leadership roles.

Weismantel's involvement with the South Dakota High School Activities Association spanned an impressive 37 years, beginning as a basketball and football official — a role he continues to hold. His dedication to high school athletics eventually led to a leadership position, where he served five years on the SDHSAA Board of Directors, including time as president. In that role, he helped guide decisions impacting student-athletes across the state while remaining deeply connected to the games themselves.

Closer to home, Weismantel also dedicated many years to the Groton Area School District, serving on the Groton Area School Board. In that role, he helped shape local education, supporting both academic programs and extracurricular activities that remain a vital part of the student experience.

Throughout his service, Weismantel became known as a strong advocate for high school activities, understanding their role in building character, discipline and community pride.

Those who have worked alongside him often point to his steady approach and willingness to serve wherever needed. Whether officiating a game, attending board meetings or contributing to statewide decisions, Weismantel consistently focused on what was best for students.

The Distinguished Service Award citation highlights those contributions, recognizing not only his longev-



Marty Weismantel was recognized with the Distinguished Service Award from the South Dakota High School Activities Association at the State B Basketball Tournament recently held in Aberdeen.



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ity, but also the impact he has made on schools, communities and generations of young people across South Dakota.

Despite the statewide recognition, Weismantel has remained grounded in his community roots, continuing to support local schools and activities long after his formal roles concluded.

His legacy is reflected not only in the policies he helped shape, but in the countless students who benefited from the opportunities he worked to strengthen.

For Columbia, Groton and communities across the region, the honor serves as a reminder of the difference one dedicated individual can make over a lifetime of service.

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SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

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Legislature commits more money to prevent 'catastrophic failure' at dam near Aberdeen

BY: MEGHAN O'BRIEN

PIERRE — A plan to replace the dam and spillway at a northeast South Dakota lake will receive \$8.2 million in additional state funding, lawmakers decided Monday, raising the total funds available for the project to more than \$34 million.

The state House voted 61-3 and the Senate voted 28-2 to support the spending. Because lawmakers didn't finish work on the bill earlier this month, they dealt with it Monday on Veto Day, which is the final legislative day reserved for considering the governor's vetoes.

The deteriorating, nearly 90-year-old Richmond Lake Dam is state-owned and the state's responsibility to fix, said Sen. Mark Lapka, R-Leola. The lake, which is part of a state recreation area, is on a creek several miles upstream from the city of Aberdeen.

"If a catastrophic failure would occur, there is, in fact, people's lives in danger, and it's one of those what-ifs that you have to take seriously and address," Lapka said. "What we have the opportunity here today to do is to leave it better than when we got it."

This year's bill will transfer \$8.2 million from the state's unclaimed property trust fund to the Office of School and Public Lands for the project. Unclaimed property consists of an array of abandoned or forgotten private assets, including money from bank accounts, PayPal accounts, stocks and even the contents of safe deposit boxes. Holders of the money or items, such as banks, try to find the owners. The property reverts to the state after three years.

Office of School and Public Lands Commissioner Brock Greenfield said the state has a legal requirement to repair the dam.

"I hate that I have to be back here asking for funds, but this is a state responsibility," Greenfield told a panel of six lawmakers Monday morning.

Some lawmakers were concerned with the office returning again for more funding after several prior approvals, but said the risk of damage to life and property outweighed concerns about the cost.

Republican Rep. Al Novstrup, who lives just south of the dam in Aberdeen, said if the structure breaks, the damage could be seven times that of the 1972 Black Hills flood, which caused an estimated \$165 million worth of damage and also killed 238 people, primarily in Rapid City.

"We know this dam is a high-hazard dam," he said. "And we're going to worry about \$8 million? This makes no sense at all."

The governor signed the spending bill immediately Monday, so the Office of School and Public Lands now has a total of \$34.9 million available for the project, including money from past spending bills. Greenfield told lawmakers that's "probably a reliable number," based on a bid from Journey Group, a Sioux Falls construction company.

Lawmakers have appropriated state money for the project several times since 2022, but Greenfield said his office received less federal funding than anticipated.

"There we were back last year and we thought we had enough to get us by and we learned this year that we didn't," he said. "But I'm hopeful that with the appropriation that has now been passed, that we can get the project done, get the project done right."

The multi-phase project will take until 2028 to complete, according to Greenfield.

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

Lawmakers fail to override vetoes of lab-grown meat ban and in-home care regulations

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

South Dakota lawmakers failed Monday to reach the two-thirds majority needed to override Gov. Larry Rhoden's vetoes of a lab-grown meat ban and regulations on non-medical home care providers.

The lab-grown meat bill would have classified the products as adulterated food, effectively banning their sale in the state. Rhoden argued in his veto message last month that South Dakota should not ban products simply because some people dislike them. He also warned of legal concerns raised by lawsuits against similar bans in other states.

Rhoden instead supported a compromise bill that imposed a five-year moratorium on lab-grown meat in South Dakota. He signed that bill into law on March 11.

On Monday, which was the day set aside to consider the governor's vetoes at the Capitol in Pierre, the lab-grown meat ban died in the House of Representatives. The override vote was 32-32 with six members absent, which fell short of the 47-vote threshold and made Senate consideration unnecessary.

Lesterville Republican Rep. Julie Auch sponsored the vetoed bill. She told House colleagues that livestock production is a way of life in South Dakota.

"It's wholesome meat raised the way God intended," Auch said. She described lab-grown meat as a threat to replace the cattle industry.

The other bill Rhoden vetoed would have required licenses for non-medical home care agencies and created penalties for violations.

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

Rhoden also said he directed the department to work with stakeholders on a better framework "that provides meaningful protections without placing unnecessary burdens on those who provide essential services."

Brookings Republican Rep. Mellissa Heermann, the bill's sponsor, argued Monday that Rhoden's veto overstated the bill's reach and ignored how much the bill had already been narrowed through talks with stakeholders and the Department of Health.

She and others said the measure was a basic consumer-protection bill for elderly and other vulnerable people receiving non-medical care at home, requiring things like liability insurance and a background check.

Heermann said the Department of Health could work out implementation details through the rulemaking process.

"They have within their ability, right now, to correct any problems that they perceive," she said.

The House's override vote was 36-27 with seven members absent, falling short of the required 47 votes and ending the bill's journey without the need for Senate consideration of the veto.

The Legislature finished the rest of its work earlier this month. The conclusion of Veto Day brings the 2026 legislative session to an end.

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.

How Trump's expansion of federal power threatens states' authority

Ahead of the country's 250th birthday, the bedrock principles of federalism — the uniquely American system of power sharing between Washington and the states — are being tested

BY: JONATHAN SHORMAN AND KEVIN HARDY

As the United States of America marks its 250th anniversary this year, the relationship between the states and the federal government is approaching a breaking point.

Led by a bellicose president, the executive branch has moved to dominate states, resulting in more than a year of escalating confrontations between the two levels of government.

President Donald Trump has worked quickly: In the first year of his second term, he surged thousands of immigration enforcement agents into a resistant Minneapolis and other cities, with fatal results. He seized control of the National Guard in some states against the will of governors.

His administration is trying to force states to turn over sensitive data on millions of voters ahead of the midterms. And it is blocking states from receiving, and distributing to their residents, billions of federal dollars for child care, public health, housing and a host of other congressionally approved programs.

Political parties have swung in and out of power in Washington for centuries, and recent administrations have increasingly clashed with states run by the other party. This time is different, dozens of sources in and around government told Stateline.

Trump and a coterie of loyal aides have set out to remake the nation in the president's image. Along the way, retribution and raw power have become the administration's primary tools to bend recalcitrant states to its will. Grants are pulled, armed force deployed, disaster aid withheld.

The states have repeatedly gone to court, asking the federal judiciary to rein in the executive branch. They have also started testing the bounds of their own authority, such as moving to restrict the actions of federal immigration enforcement agents.

The past year has led to a period of sustained state and federal conflict without parallel in modern U.S. history. The consequences for Americans over time will prove enormous, shaping the very nature of our government.

"This kind of battle between the federal government and the states, we've just never seen that before and it makes no sense," said former New Jersey Gov. Christine Todd Whitman, who was elected as a Republican but later helped co-found the centrist Forward Party.

Tensions between the states and the central government are as old as the nation itself. Alexander Hamilton famously favored a strong central government, while James Madison offered the Bill of Rights — including what became the 10th Amendment, which reserves for the states and the people those powers not delegated to the federal government.

But current strains are testing the bedrock principles of federalism, the uniquely American system created by the framers of the Constitution of power sharing between Washington, D.C., and the states.

Ahead of the 250th anniversary of the country's founding on July 4, Stateline is exploring how the Trump era is transforming the relationship between the states and the federal government. This article is the first in an occasional series, The 50 vs. The One, that will examine the current fraught moment and what evolving — and often deteriorating — state-federal ties mean for the country, now and in the future.

In interviews and public remarks, current and former elected officials at all levels of government, as well as experts on American government, have described the country as approaching a pivot point. Trump's second term could mark a defining moment for American federalism, one that will be studied in history books alongside Reconstruction, the New Deal and the Civil Rights Movement.

The United States will either continue to adhere to the principles of federalism, they say, or it will take a significant step toward a more powerful central government that sidelines the states.

"We are in a period of challenged federalism," said Lisa Parshall, a federalism researcher and political

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science professor at Daemen University near Buffalo, New York. "The fact that we're here talking about federalism tells you something about the current state of American politics."

Dramatic changes in a year

Fears of diminishing state authority have animated state officials over the past year. Republican lawmakers in Utah have invested in federalism education and expanded a group to assess state-federal boundaries, for instance.

In July, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz and Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly, both Democrats, publicly abandoned the nonpartisan National Governors Association, in part because they said the organization was not doing enough to protect states' rights.

States are "laboratories of democracy," Kelly said during an interview in February, using a classic civics textbook description. States have traditionally operated with relative freedom to pursue their own agendas and solutions to the challenges they face. In turn, states learn from one another.

"That's been the beauty of it," Kelly said. "If that's to go away, if the federal government were — and they are, at this point — undermining states' authority and responsibility, I think you end up slowing down the entire country."

In the same way the three branches of government — the legislative, the executive and the judicial — provide checks and balances on one another, federalism imposes a state check on federal power. The U.S. Constitution, which went into effect in 1789, ensured states would command broad power over local commerce, policing, elections and other matters within their borders.

But Trump has at times raised doubt about whether he will always follow the Constitution and has claimed that he can ignore some of its requirements.

Last spring, Trump replied "I don't know" when asked whether he needed to uphold the U.S. Constitution in the context of due process for immigrants. In 2022, he said massive election fraud allows parts of the Constitution to be terminated. And after his 2020 election defeat, he urged then-Vice President Mike Pence not to certify the results, even though the vice president has no constitutional authority to do so.

In February, Trump asserted that "states are just an agent of the federal government" as he called to "nationalize" elections. Under the Constitution, the responsibility of running elections belongs to the states.

Trump's critics fault the Republican-controlled Congress for failing to challenge his sweeping assertions of executive power. His administration's efforts to withhold from states billions in dollars appropriated by Congress, for instance, have spurred relatively little outrage among GOP lawmakers.

"What I think we're seeing now is a whole different system of crushing state and local government," said U.S. Rep. Emanuel Cleaver, a Missouri Democrat who has been in Congress since 2005. "And bowing down to a new system where we are almost living in a one-person government."

In response to questions from Stateline, White House spokesperson Davis Ingle said in a statement: "The Trump Administration faithfully upholds our Constitution and the immortalized American principles of federalism, the rule of law, and the separation of powers."

Trump and his allies have cast the president as a heroic figure capable of smashing through the machinery of government to achieve results on behalf of his voters and at the expense of his enemies. "For those who have been wronged and betrayed ... I am your retribution," he said in 2023.

He has at times taken steps that his supporters argue empower states, including effectively gutting the U.S. Department of Education, which Republicans have long accused of federal overreach. His appointments to the U.S. Supreme Court during his first term helped cement a conservative majority that in 2022 returned the issue of abortion access to the states.

In a statement, the Republican Governors Association told Stateline the current administration trusts governors to run their own states.

"By cutting government bureaucracy and unnecessary red-tape, President Trump is empowering governors to make decisions that best serve their individual states," wrote Kollin Crompton, an RGA spokesperson.

Scrambled identities

The U.S. Constitution has been gradually amended in ways that have limited state power, most impor-

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tantly through amendments that abolished slavery, required states to treat their citizens equally under the law, and prohibited states from denying suffrage on the basis of race and sex.

The federal government has also expanded its reach through legislation. President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal in the 1930s and President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society in the 1960s imposed new economic regulations and created a federal social welfare apparatus that touches nearly every American.

Over time, Democrats broadly came to be seen as the party more comfortable with an active federal government and Republicans as the party seeking a more restrained Washington.

But the Trump era has scrambled those identities.

Trump has shown less respect for traditional conservative ideology, such as limited government and a general deference to the authority of states. Instead, he has taken a maximalist approach to executive power.

His actions have placed Democratic state officials in a position of advancing limits on the federal government, whether through lawsuits or legislation. And they have put Republican supporters of the president at odds with decades of conservative rhetoric.

"I do think that progressives are seeing that federalism — there's a reason it's in our constitutional order and it isn't just something that's left for conservatives," said Sean Beienburg, an associate professor at Arizona State University who researches federalism and constitutional law.

In Los Angeles, Chicago and Portland, Oregon, Trump deployed federalized National Guard troops onto city streets before courts held him back and he withdrew. For a time, active-duty Marines also patrolled Los Angeles, an extraordinary use of the military for domestic purposes.

Oregon Democratic Attorney General Dan Rayfield, who challenged the deployment of the National Guard in his state, said the fight underscores why lawsuits matter in checking Trump's power.

"People should be shocked that Oregon has filed 55 lawsuits," Rayfield said in an interview earlier this year. "Their mind should be blown. But their mind should be equally blown at how often we're winning these cases."

The Trump administration has won seven court decisions — and lost 58 — so far, according to a New York Times litigation tracker.

Democratic state lawmakers have also searched for ways to restrict federal immigration agents. In California, Democratic Assembly member Alex Lee has proposed prohibiting state tax breaks for Immigration and Customs Enforcement contractors — a move that could carry national implications because of the size of the state's economy.

"We also, now, are reasserting what the role of the states and the federal government are," Lee said.

But among Republicans, Trump has successfully maintained his grip. Many conservative state leaders have supported the president's most controversial moves, even those criticized as federal overreach.

During President Joe Biden's term, Texas Republican Gov. Greg Abbott was a staunch proponent of state autonomy and repeatedly challenged the federal government on regulatory issues and its deployment of a state's National Guard. But Abbott has supported Trump's expansion of federal powers, going so far as to authorize the deployment of the Texas National Guard to aid immigration enforcement in Illinois and Oregon.

Republican U.S. Sen. Jim Justice, the previous governor of West Virginia, said federalism remains "alive and well" under Trump. He said he was worried about the nation's trajectory before coming to Washington in 2025.

"We've had to change things," he said. "There's new things that are going on that no question they're disrupting folks on the other side of the aisle."

Still, other Republicans have pushed back on the administration's escalating hostility toward liberal states.

Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt sharply criticized the deployment of the National Guard, saying "Oklahomans would lose their mind" if a Democratic-controlled state sent troops to his state during Biden's presidency. He has warned that the expanding power and spending of the federal government is dangerous no matter which party controls Washington.

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"When we have this powerful of a federal government, it should be frightening for everyone," Stitt said during a February event at The Pew Charitable Trusts in Washington, D.C.

'States created the Constitution'

As the reach of the federal government ballooned over generations, Democratic and Republican presidents have used federal funding to wield more influence over state and local governments.

Federal dollars account for an increasingly large percentage of state revenues, rising from 22% in 1989 to 36% in 2023, according to Pew, which analyzed census and federal economic data. States received more than \$1 trillion in federal grants that year.

Over the years, that largesse has encouraged states to pursue policy agendas favored by the current party in power at the federal level.

But Trump has weaponized federal funds in unprecedented ways, experts say. Bypassing Congress and despite numerous court losses, the White House has held up funding for higher education, transit, housing and infrastructure — particularly for states that displease him.

The administration's attempts to terminate funding for the \$16 billion Gateway rail tunnel connecting New York and New Jersey remain entangled in a lawsuit. New Jersey Democratic Gov. Mikie Sherrill said the White House has caused millions in cost overruns and delays, in what she characterized as the most urgent and consequential infrastructure project in the country.

In February, Politico reported Trump told congressional leaders he would release funding for the project in exchange for renaming Washington Dulles International Airport in Virginia and Penn Station in New York City in his honor.

Parshall, of Daemen University, noted that more state leaders of both parties are pushing to reassert state-federal boundaries — whether in the areas of agriculture or the future of artificial intelligence.

"Federalism scholars are seeing this as a potentially pivotal moment in federal-state relationships," she said.

Last August, elected leaders gathered at the National Conference of State Legislatures in Boston, where in 1773 colonists hurled chests of tea into the Boston Harbor in protest of Great Britain's King George III. At the conference, lawmakers grumbled about a federal government increasingly sidelining states. That organization, representing more than 7,000 state and territory legislators, has consistently urged the Trump administration to respect states' inherent authority.

In December, a bipartisan group of more than 40 lawmakers from 30 states gathered to discuss federalism issues, unanimously approving a declaration on the importance of states' ability to legislate independently. That document noted that the Constitution did not create the states, "but rather the states created the Constitution, ratifying a framework in which we would both govern collectively and independently."

New Hampshire state House Speaker Sherman Packard, a Republican, said state-federal tensions have been mounting for decades. He noted that the major tax and spending law the president signed last summer — often called the One Big Beautiful Bill Act — both cut federal funding to states and saddled them with new costs and administrative work. But it's just the latest example of what he views as a federal government overstepping its bounds.

"And it's getting more and more prolific that they're taking on and doing things that most of us feel is inappropriate," Packard said. "If we don't fix this, we're going to lose state sovereignty altogether. And that's just not the way it was set up."

Reporter David Lightman contributed to this story. Stateline reporters Jonathan Shorman and Kevin Hardy can be reached at jshorman@stateline.org and khardy@stateline.org.

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Jonathan Shorman covers democracy for States Newsroom. Based in Kansas City, his coverage area includes elections and voting rights, fights over state and federal power, civil liberties and more. An alumnus of the University of Kansas, he previously covered politics for The Kansas City Star.

Kevin Hardy covers business, labor and rural issues for Stateline from the Midwest.

TSA officers finally get paid amid ongoing Homeland Security shutdown

BY: JACOB FISCHLER

Most Transportation Security Administration officers received a paycheck Monday covering four weeks of back wages that were held up by the funding lapse at the Department of Homeland Security, a TSA spokesperson said.

The lack of pay had produced long wait lines for security checks at some of the nation's busiest airports after TSA officers quit or called out sick.

The 45-day partial government shutdown of DHS remains ongoing — with each chamber of Congress, both led by Republicans, unable to reach a consensus on a solution. It is now the longest government shutdown in history, exceeding last year's 43-day record.

But President Donald Trump on Friday ordered the department and the White House Office of Management and Budget to reprogram funds with a "logical nexus" to TSA in order to compensate the airport screeners who had remained on the job without pay.

That month of back pay went out Monday, DHS spokeswoman Lauren Bis wrote in an email.

"Most TSA employees received a retroactive paycheck today that included at least two full paychecks ... today," Bis wrote.

Some TSA workers "might see a slight delay," which could be attributed to a variety of factors, such as processing by their banks, Bis added. She said the department was working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Finance Center to process the half-paycheck employees missed in February.

Because TSA workers are considered essential, they are required by law to stay on the job even when the government cannot fund their positions. Though they receive back pay once funding is available, long shutdowns cause major problems for workers.

More than 500 TSA workers have quit since the shutdown began and thousands more have missed shifts, Bis wrote.

Breakdown in Congress

The House and Senate passed competing measures Friday to end the shutdown. Because the chambers diverged in how to fund the department, it remains shuttered.

The shutdown began Feb. 14 after Democrats in Congress said they would only support a funding bill for the department if it contained changes in how the Trump administration carried out immigration enforcement following the fatal shootings of two U.S. citizens by immigration agents in Minneapolis.

Senators last week reached a deal to fund the department except for its immigration enforcement agencies, which received a massive influx from Republicans' spending and tax cuts law last year.

The House bill would have extended 2025 funding levels for the entire department for two months. Lawmakers from both chambers left for a two-week recess after passing their respective bills.

White House wants full funding

At a Monday briefing, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt urged Congress to pass full funding for the department.

"The president just can't keep signing presidential memorandums and proclamations every time Congress fails to do its job and every time Democrats hold our country hostage, picking and choosing the programs and agencies they want to fund just because they don't like this administration's policies," she said. "That's not how it's supposed to work."

Jennifer Shutt contributed to this report.

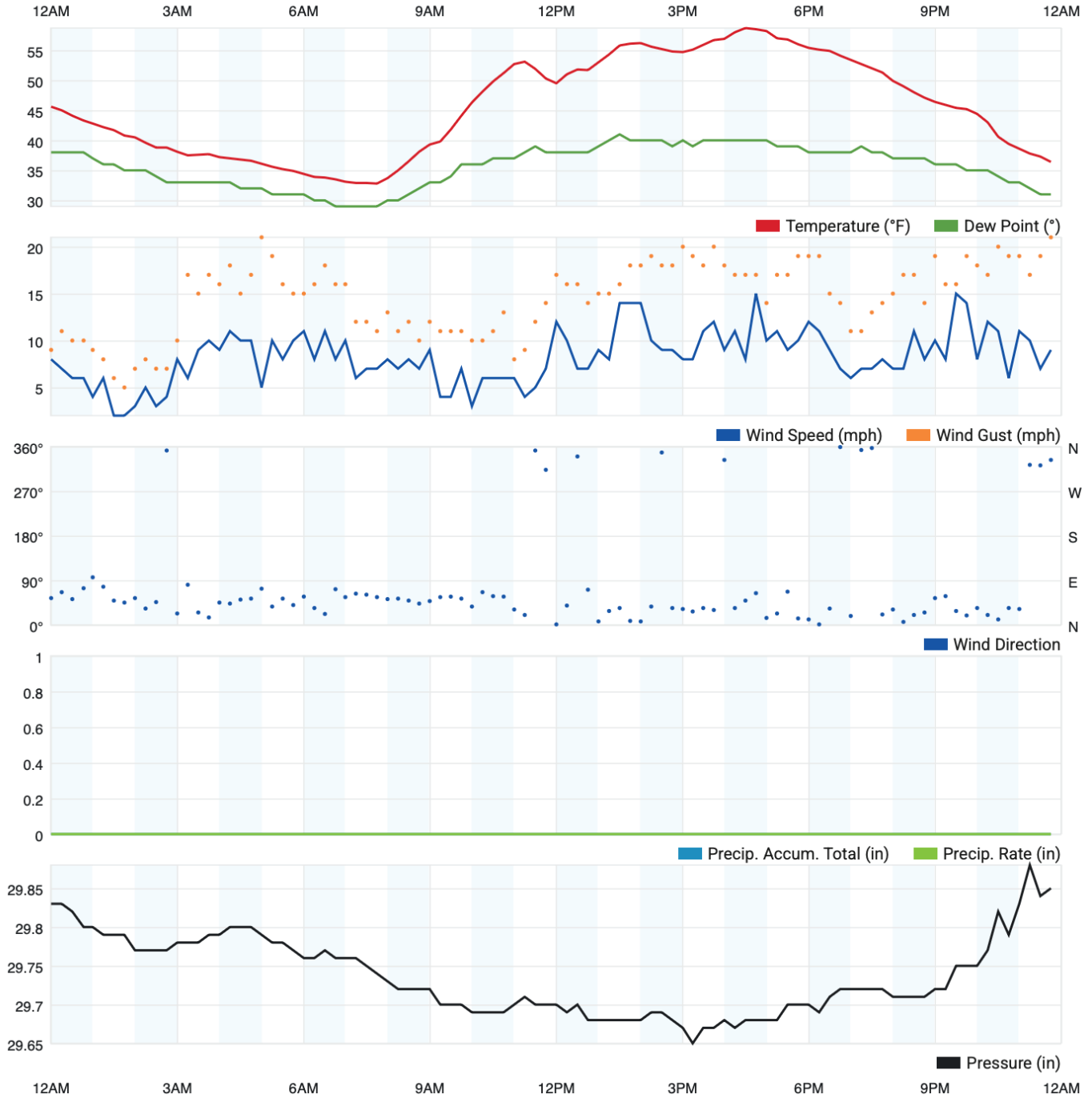
Jacob covers federal policy and helps direct national coverage as deputy Washington bureau chief for States Newsroom. Based in Oregon, he focuses on Western issues. His coverage areas include climate, energy development, public lands and infrastructure.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

March 30, 2026



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Today



High: 44 °F

Partly Sunny
and Breezy

Tonight



Low: 26 °F

Mostly Cloudy
then Slight
Chance Snow

Wednesday



High: 39 °F

Chance Snow
then
Rain/Snow
Likely

Wednesday
Night



Low: 28 °F

Rain/Snow

Thursday



High: 37 °F

Snow Likely

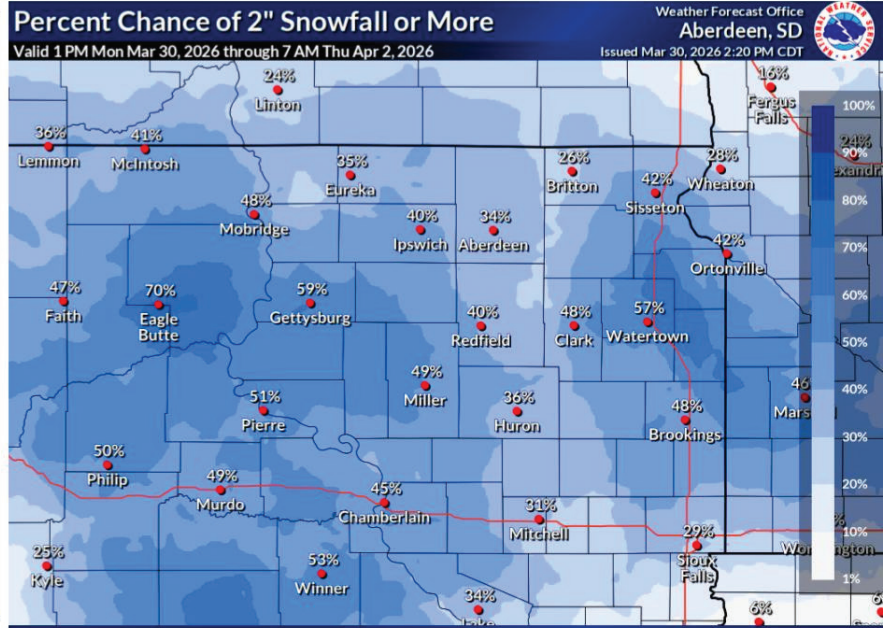


Snow Returns Wednesday

March 30, 2026
3:12 PM CDT

30-60% chance for 2 inches of snow or more through Thursday morning

- Snow returns this week, beginning late Tuesday night into Wednesday morning.
- The heaviest snowfall is expected over central South Dakota on Wednesday and over northeastern South Dakota and western Minnesota on Thursday.
 - **Highest confidence in snow totals is currently over central South Dakota, who may see 2-4 inches.**
- Winds out of the east will gust up to 25-35 mph both afternoon
 - This could cause some localized areas of blowing and drifting snow which will reduce visibilities at times.
- Another round of snow is expected Friday into Saturday, with the heaviest snow expected over north central South Dakota.



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Snow will be returning through the rest of the week starting late Tuesday night into Wednesday morning with another round on late Wednesday into Thursday. The heaviest snowfall is expected over central SD Wednesday and then over northeastern SD Thursday, with the highest confidence in snow totals over central SD who could see 2-4 inches. Winds could gust up to 25-35 mph during the afternoon and cause some localized areas of blowing and drifting snow, which could reduce visibilities at times.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 71 °F at 5:14 PM

Low Temp: 33 °F at 7:24 AM

Wind: 16 mph at 8:37 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 86 in 1946

Record Low: -0 in 1899

Average High: 50

Average Low: 26

Average Precip in Mar.: 0.89

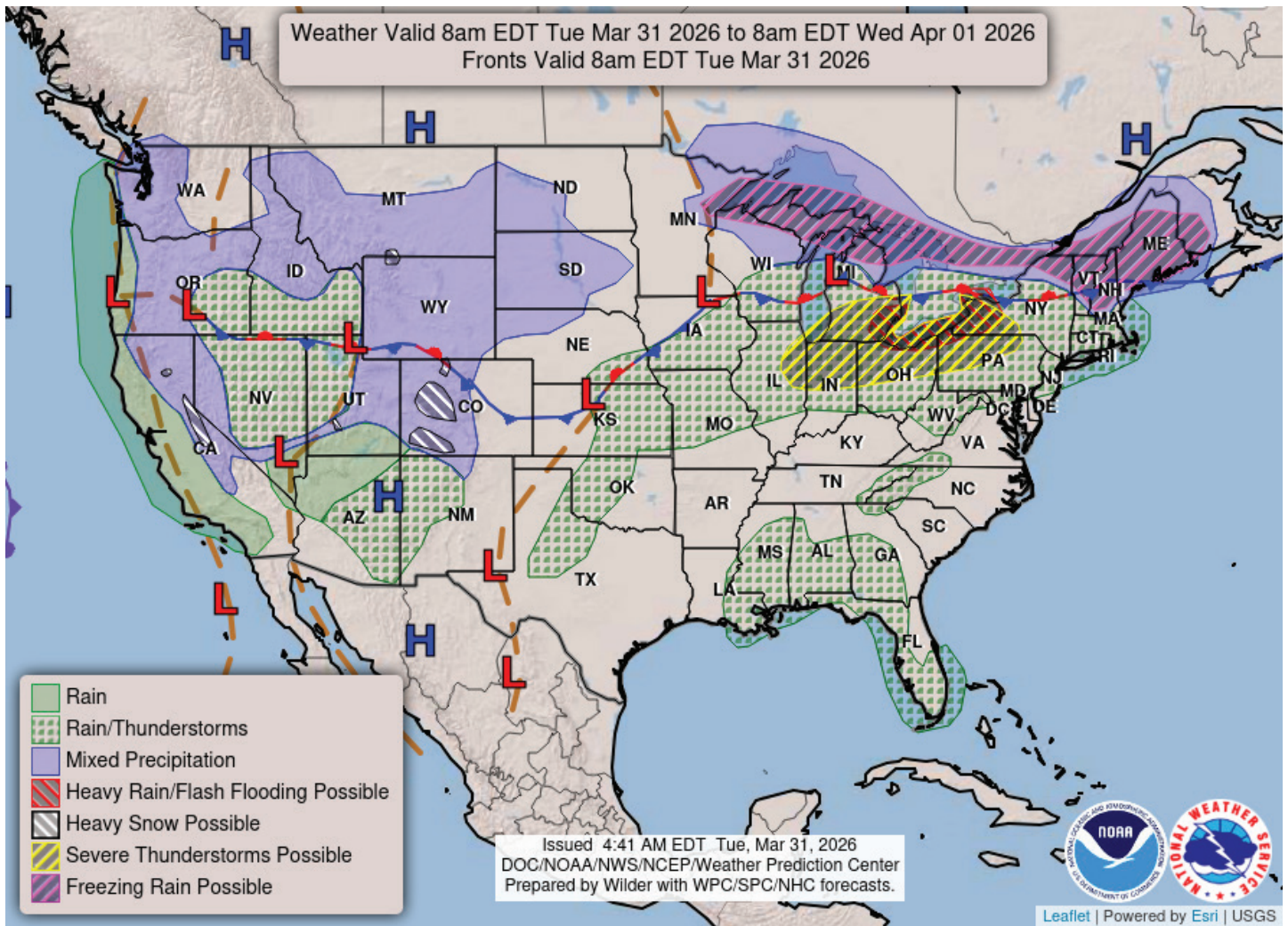
Precip to date in Mar.: 0.29

Average Precip to date: 2.06

Precip Year to Date: 1.62

Sunset Tonight: 7.58 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:12 am



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Today in Weather History

March 31st, 1967: Heavy snow of 6 to 15 inches combined with 30 to 50 mph winds caused blizzard conditions across most of northeast South Dakota. Many people were stranded, especially along Interstate 29 and Highway 12. In Hamlin County, a man was injured when his snowmobile struck a snowplow in Bryant in the early evening. Also, in the early afternoon, 4 miles west of Lake Norden on Highway 28, a car crossed the lane and hit a semi. The vehicle was destroyed with thousands of dollars of damage to the semi. The driver of the vehicle was injured. Many schools were let out early on the 31st and were canceled for April 1st. Many activities and sports events were either postponed or canceled. Some snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Doland, Conde, and Castlewood, 7 inches at Turton and Clear Lake, 8 inches at Clark and Britton, 9 inches at Bryant and Webster, 10 inches near Peever, and 11 inches at Summit. Snowfall amounts of a foot or more included 12 inches at Watertown and Big Stone City, 13 inches at Victor, the Waubay NWR, and Sisseton, 14 inches at Wilmot, and 15 inches at Milbank.

March 31st, 2014: A strong surface low-pressure area moving across the region brought mixed precipitation to the area, including rain, freezing rain, sleet, snow, and thunder. As the precipitation changed over to all snow, northwest winds increased substantially to 30 to 40 mph with gusts to 50 to 60 mph, causing widespread blizzard conditions. Much of the area received a coating of ice with trace amounts up to a tenth of an inch, with several locations receiving up to 2 inches of sleet. Snowfall amounts from 2 to as much as 10 inches occurred with this storm. The precipitation changed to snow in the morning out west and into the late afternoon hours across the east. The light snow did not end in the eastern portion of South Dakota until the early morning hours of April 1st. Many schools, government offices, and businesses were closed or canceled early. Travel was not advised across much of the region, with Interstate 29 being closed from Brookings to the North Dakota border.

1890 — Saint Louis, MO, received 20 inches of snow in 24 hours. It was the worst snowstorm of record for the St Louis. (David Ludlum)

1954 — The temperature at Rio Grande City, TX, hit 108 degrees, which for thirty years was a U.S. record for the month of March. (The Weather Channel)

1962 — A tornado struck the town of Milton, FL, killing 17 persons and injuring 100 others. It was the worst tornado disaster in Florida history. (David Ludlum)

1973 — A devastating tornado took a nearly continuous 75 mile path through north central Georgia causing more than 113 million dollars damage, the highest total of record for a natural disaster in the state. (The Weather Channel)

1987 — March went out like a lion in the northeastern U.S. A slow moving storm produced heavy snow in the Lower Great Lakes Region, and heavy rain in New England. Heavy rain and melting snow caused catastrophic flooding along rivers and streams in Maine and New Hampshire. Strong southerly winds ahead of the storm gusted to 62 mph at New York City, and reached 87 mph at Milton MA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — March went out like a lion in eastern Colorado. A winter-like storm produced 42 inches of snow at Lake Isabel, including 20 inches in six hours. Fort Collins reported 15 inches of snow in 24 hours. Winds gusted to 80 mph at Centerville UT. Albuquerque NM received 14 inches of snow. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 — Afternoon thunderstorms produced severe weather from North Carolina to Pennsylvania. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 76 mph at Cape Henry VA. While squalls blanketed northwest Pennsylvania with up to 9 inches of snow, thunderstorms in eastern Pennsylvania produced golf ball size hail at Avondale. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1990 — The month of March went out just as it came in, like a lamb. Marquette MI, which started the month with a record high of 52 degrees, equalled their record for the date with a reading of 62 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

2010 — Jacksonville, Florida's, record streak of days with high temperatures below 80 degrees comes to an end at 105 days. It was also Jacksonville's first 80 degree reading of the year. The previous latest first 80 degree day was on March 14, 1978.

Our Awesome God

Do you have an accurate view of our loving and holy heavenly Father?

Revelation 4:9-11: 9 And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever,

10 the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

11 "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created."

How do you see the Lord? Our view of God impacts three areas of life:

Prayer. As we come to know the Lord better, our desires will start to look like His and our petitions will align more closely with His will. What's more, as we recognize His greatness and power, we'll become more confident that He can accomplish mighty things through us (1 John 5:14-15; Ephesians 3:20).

Behavior. Our understanding of His righteousness and goodness influences our actions. We realize, If God has these attributes, surely it's in our best interest to obey gladly. And as we, too, desire righteousness, we'll be quick to repent of sin.

Faith. Grasping that Jesus is holy, good, and powerful increases our trust in Him. Knowing our awesome God and remembering His great works will further build our confidence.

Do you personally know our loving and holy heavenly Father? He desires that we have an intimate relationship with Him. But as with any good human friendship, time and intentionality are necessary if we're to understand Him and learn His ways. Make a priority of knowing Him better, and watch how your prayers, behavior, and faith are impacted.

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

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The Groton Independent

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WINNING NUMBERS

MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.30.26

24 25 32 34 44 4

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

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 30 Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.27.26

13 27 28 41 62 16

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$80,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 15 Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.30.26

1 21 44 47 48 4

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,700,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 30 Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.28.26

4 8 13 31 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$37,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 45 Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.30.26

7 29 42 67 68 8

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 14 Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.30.26

7 11 31 41 57 20

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$194,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 14 Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

US strikes a city home to an Iranian nuclear site while Tehran hits oil tanker off Dubai coast

By JON GAMBRELL and DAVID RISING Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — U.S. strikes hit a city Tuesday that is home to one of Iran's main nuclear sites, sending a massive fireball into the sky, and Tehran attacked a fully loaded Kuwaiti oil tanker in the Persian Gulf.

The attacks were testament to the intensity of the war more than a month after the U.S. and Israel launched their first strikes. The conflict has left more than 3,000 dead and caused major disruptions to the world's supply of oil and natural gas. On Tuesday, the average price of gasoline in the U.S. shot past \$4 a gallon — just another sign of the war's effects far beyond the Middle East.

U.S. President Donald Trump, who has vacillated between insisting there is progress in diplomatic talks with Iran and threatening to widen the war, shared footage of the attack on Isfahan. The central city is home to one of three nuclear enrichment sites attacked by the U.S. in a 12-day war in June, and analysts believe much of Iran's highly enriched uranium is likely stored there.

The war is roiling oil markets

Iran's stranglehold on the Strait of Hormuz, the waterway leading out of Persian Gulf through which a fifth of the world's oil is transported during peacetime, has driven up global oil prices, as have Tehran's attacks on regional energy infrastructure. That has shaken stock markets around the world and pushed up the cost of many basic goods.

Spot prices of Brent crude, the international standard, hovered around \$106 a barrel Tuesday, up more than 45% since the war started Feb. 28.

Trump warned this week that if a ceasefire is not reached "shortly," and if the strait is not reopened, the U.S. would broaden its offensive, including by attacking the Kharg Island oil export hub and possibly desalination plants.

Israel and the US launch a new wave of strikes on Iran

Israel and the U.S. launched a wave of strikes on Iran, hitting Tehran in the early morning.

The video shared by Trump appeared to show a massive attack on Isfahan, and NASA fire-tracking satellites suggest explosions happened in a mountainous region on the city's southern edge. Iran has not confirmed the attack.

A satellite image taken just before the June war suggests Tehran transferred a truckload of highly enriched uranium to a nuclear facility about 20 kilometers (12 miles) from Tuesday's strikes.

Analysts believe the truck — which the image showed going into a tunnel loaded with 18 blue containers — likely carried most or all of Iran's stockpile of uranium enriched up to 60% purity. That's a short, technical step to weapons-grade levels.

Iran hits oil tanker in waters off Dubai

An Iranian drone hit a Kuwaiti oil tanker in waters off the United Arab Emirates city of Dubai, sparking a blaze that was later put out, the Dubai Media Office said. Authorities said no oil spill resulted.

Four people were also wounded when debris from an intercepted drone fell into a residential area, and loud explosions could be heard later from another attack on Dubai.

Air raid sirens sounded in Bahrain, while Saudi Arabia said it intercepted three ballistic missiles launched toward its capital. Loud explosions were also heard in Israel not long after the military warned of an incoming missile barrage from Iran.

Gulf allies of the United States that have been hit hard have urged Trump to continue the conflict until Iran's military capabilities are destroyed, according to U.S., Gulf and Israeli officials.

In response to that growing anger, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi insisted Tuesday that Tehran is only targeting U.S. forces in the region.

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"Our operations are aimed at enemy aggressors who have no respect for Arabs or Iranians, nor can provide any security," Araghchi wrote on X.

Peacekeepers killed in Lebanon as Israel battles Hezbollah

The U.N. Security Council planned to convene an emergency session Tuesday after officials said three peacekeepers in southern Lebanon had been killed in less than 24 hours during Israel's invasion there.

The U.N. peacekeeping mission in the country, where Israel is battling the Iran-backed Hezbollah, did not say who was responsible for the deaths.

In Iran, authorities say more than 1,900 people have been killed, while 19 have been reported dead in Israel.

Two dozen people have died in Gulf states and the occupied West Bank. In Lebanon, officials said more than 1,200 people have been killed, and more than 1 million displaced.

Ten Israeli soldiers have died in Lebanon, including the four announced Tuesday, while 13 U.S. service members have been killed.

European diplomats steer attention to Ukraine with visit on Russian atrocities anniversary

By LORNE COOK Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — European foreign ministers visited Ukraine on Tuesday to mark the fourth anniversary of atrocities committed in a town near Kyiv by Russia's invading forces.

With U.S.-led efforts to end the war on hold and Washington's attention gripped by the conflict in the Middle East, European governments are keen to keep a spotlight on the continent's biggest land war in decades, now in its fifth year.

A group of 12 European foreign ministers, as well as numerous lower-ranking officials, arrived by train in Kyiv where they were welcomed by Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha, who noted the "grim anniversary" of the shocking atrocities in Bucha.

Russian troops quickly occupied the town after invading Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022. They stayed for about a month. When Ukrainian troops retook Bucha they found more than 400 bodies left by Russia's cleansing operation.

"Such a strong European presence (in Ukraine) on this day demonstrates that justice for this and other Russian atrocities is inevitable," Sybiha said in a post on X. "Comprehensive accountability for Russian crimes is vital to restore justice in Europe."

At the Church of Saint Andrew in Bucha, after viewing dozens of graphic photographs and a video display of the massacres with his EU counterparts, Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski was grim.

"Anybody who claims that (Russian President) Vladimir Putin is not a war criminal should come and see for themselves," Sikorski told The Associated Press.

Authorities say that many of the victims were gunned down in the street. Some had their hands tied behind their backs, and others showed signs of torture or rape.

The United Nations has documented more than 70 summary executions.

'Revenge and retaliation'

Part of Tuesday's meeting between the EU officials and their Ukrainian counterparts was to focus on reassuring Kyiv of continued European efforts to hold Russia to account for its invasion.

On the way to Kyiv, European Union foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas underlined the importance of ensuring that those who gave the orders to kill in places like Bucha are held to account, as much as those who carried the atrocities out.

"One of the things that is really necessary is accountability. Otherwise, you have revenge and retaliation," Kallas said. "If you don't see people doing this to your family held accountable, you will want revenge."

The Iran war is currently a top priority for the United States and risks diverting resources that Kyiv needs, such as air defense systems, while providing Russia with windfall profits through high energy prices.

"We can't let it (the Ukraine war) slip off the table," Kallas said. "We are the ones who have to keep this

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up because nobody else does.”

U.S.-mediated negotiations to end the war are going nowhere, and it’s unclear when they might resume after being put on ice while the Middle East conflict unfolds.

“The talks are stalled,” Kallas said.

Long-range drone attacks

The EU has faced its own challenges in helping Ukraine. The bloc failed to approve new sanctions on Russia last month after surprise objections from Hungary. Budapest has also blocked a 90 billion euro (\$103 billion) loan to Ukraine as Kyiv runs low on cash. Ukraine’s application for EU membership, meanwhile, is expected to take years.

Russia, meanwhile, hopes to reap a windfall from a surge in oil prices and a U.S. temporary waiver on Russian oil sanctions designed to ease supply shortages. Russia is one of the world’s main oil exporters, and Asian nations are increasingly competing for Russian crude oil as an energy crisis mounts.

In response, Ukraine has intensified its long-range drone attacks on Russian oil facilities, which have rattled Moscow.

Ukraine’s Defense Ministry said its forces carried out a series of strikes over the past week targeting Russia’s oil export infrastructure on the Baltic Sea, hitting key facilities in the Leningrad region used to ship crude and petroleum products.

Ukrainian drones struck oil loading infrastructure and storage tanks at the Transneft terminal in Primorsk on March 22–23, starting fire, the ministry said. Further strikes on March 24 and again overnight into March 29 hit the Novatek Ust-Luga port complex, damaging storage facilities and loading docks and igniting large fires.

Alexander Drozdenko, the governor of the Leningrad region, confirmed that the port of Ust-Luga was again attacked by Ukrainian drones overnight, saying it caused unspecified damage to the port facilities.

Oil steadies and Asian stocks are mostly lower on mixed signs on Iran

By CHAN HO-HIM AP Business Writer

HONG KONG (AP) — Oil steadied and Asian stocks were mostly lower Tuesday as signs of a de-escalation of the Iran war remained mixed.

Tokyo’s Nikkei 225 was down 1.6% to 51,063.72. Losses after the Iran war began on Feb. 28 have been wiping out the gains it made from the beginning of the year.

South Korea’s Kospi lost 4.3% to 5,052.46. Hong Kong’s Hang Seng was down 0.3% to 24,678.17, while the Shanghai Composite index fell 0.8% to 3,891.86.

Australia’s S&P/ASX 200 was up 0.3%, while Taiwan’s Taixex was trading 2.5% lower.

U.S. futures were up more than 0.7% early Tuesday.

With the Iran war in its fifth week, attacks in the Middle East continued and there was still no clear end to the war. Brent crude futures were less than 0.1% lower at \$107.37 a barrel on Tuesday, while benchmark U.S. crude edged up 0.1% to \$102.93 per barrel.

Oil prices have surged in March with Brent crude prices rising more than 40% since the start of the Iran war.

On Tuesday, a drone hit a Kuwaiti oil tanker in Dubai waters and caused a fire. The U.S.’s Gulf allies were privately making a case to the White House that Iran has not been weakened enough, officials said, and were urging U.S. President Donald Trump to keep fighting. Meanwhile, Trump has said the U.S. is in negotiation with Iran’s parliamentary speaker, though Iran denied such talks were happening.

Maritime traffic disruptions at the Strait of Hormuz, where roughly a fifth of the world’s oil normally passes through, remains the pain point for global energy supplies. U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Trump has “options available” in response to Tehran’s threats to control the strait, after Iran was said to have effectively created a “toll booth” there.

Wall Street stocks were mixed on Monday. The S&P 500 dropped 0.4% to 6,343.72, the Nasdaq composite

lost 0.7% to 20,794.64, while the Dow Jones Industrial Average added 0.1% to 45,216.14.

Shares of food distributor Sysco fell 15.3%, after it said it would be acquiring supplier Jetro Restaurant Depot in a \$29 billion deal.

In other dealings early Tuesday, gold and silver prices were up. Gold's price was 0.7% higher at \$4,590.30 an ounce, and silver prices rose 2.8% to \$72.56 per ounce.

The U.S. dollar was at 159.69 Japanese yen, down from 159.71 Japanese yen. The euro was trading at \$1.1470, up from \$1.1465.

Meta, Snapchat, TikTok and YouTube aren't fully complying with child account ban, Australia says

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Australia's online safety watchdog said Tuesday it was considering court action against Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok and YouTube alleging they are not doing enough to keep Australian children younger than 16 off their platforms.

Experts say the Australian courts could decide what steps the platforms can reasonably be expected to take under the laws that took effect on Dec. 10 banning young children from holding accounts.

eSafety Commissioner Julie Inman Grant on Tuesday released her first compliance report since those laws took effect demanding 10 platforms remove all Australian account-holders younger than 16.

While 5 million Australian accounts had been deactivated, a substantial number of Australian children continued to retain accounts, create new accounts and pass platforms' age assurance systems, the report said.

Inman Grant said in a statement her office had "significant concerns about the compliance" of half of those 10 platforms. Her office was gathering evidence against the five that they had not taken "reasonable steps" to prevent young children holding accounts.

Courts could order fines of up to 49.5 million Australian dollars (\$33 million) for systemic failures to comply. eSafety would decide on whether to initiate court action against any platform by midyear.

Age-restricted platforms that aren't under investigation are Reddit, X, Kick, Threads and Twitch.

Communications Minister Anika Wells said the five criticized platforms were deliberately not complying with Australian law.

"Social media platforms are choosing to do the absolute bare minimum because they want these laws to fail," Wells told reporters.

"This is the world-leading law. We're the first in the world to do it. Of course they don't want these laws to work because they want that to be a chilling effect on the dozen countries that have come out since Dec. 10 to follow Australia's step," she added.

eSafety had identified "poor practices" such as platforms allowing unlimited attempts for a user to pass their age assurance methods and prompting the user to try to pass the age assurance method even after they declared themselves underage.

Meta, which owns Facebook and Instagram, told The Associated Press it was committed to complying with Australia's social media ban. "We've also been clear that accurately determining age online is a challenge for the whole industry," the statement said.

Snap Inc. said it has locked 450,000 accounts in compliance with the law and continued to lock more every day.

"Snapchat remains fully committed to implementing reasonable steps under the legislation and supporting its underlying goal of improving online safety for young Australians," a Snap statement said.

TikTok declined to comment on Tuesday and Alphabet Inc., which owns YouTube and Google, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Lisa Given, an information sciences expert at RMIT University in Melbourne, said she expected the courts will decide whether platforms have taken "reasonable steps" to exclude young children.

"If a tech company has said: look, we put in age assurance, we've done all these steps. That's reason-

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able. Even though the aged assurance technologies are flawed, whose fault is that? Should they be held accountable for a piece of technology that is not 100% and likely not going to be 100% foolproof any time soon?" Given said.

"That's really the crux of it: what the courts will deem reasonable," she added.

Reddit has filed one of two constitutional challenges to the social media ban in the Australian High Court. The other was filed by Digital Freedom Project, a Sydney-based rights group that did not immediately respond to a request for comment Tuesday..

Both suits claim the law is unconstitutional because it infringes on Australia's implied freedom of political communication.

A preliminary hearing is set for May 21 when the court will set a date for oral arguments, Reddit said Tuesday.

Global online forum Reddit on Friday filed a court challenge to Australia's world-first law that bans Australian children younger than 16 from holding accounts on the world's most popular social media platforms.

California-based Reddit Inc.'s suit filed in the High Court follows a case filed last month by Sydney-based rights group Digital Freedom Project.

Both suits claim the law is unconstitutional because it infringes on Australia's implied freedom of political communication.

Israel's parliament approves the death penalty for Palestinians convicted of murdering Israelis

By JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel's parliament on Monday passed a law approving the death penalty for Palestinians convicted of murdering Israelis, a measure that has been harshly condemned by the international community and rights groups as discriminatory and inhumane.

The passage of the bill marked the culmination of a yearslong drive by the far-right to escalate punishment for Palestinians convicted of nationalistic offenses against Israelis. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu came to the Knesset to vote for the bill in person.

The law makes the death penalty — by hanging — the default punishment for West Bank Palestinians convicted of nationalistic killings. It also gives Israeli courts the option of imposing the death penalty on Israeli citizens convicted on similar charges — language that legal experts say effectively confines those who can be sentenced to death to Palestinian citizens of Israel and excludes Jewish citizens.

It will not apply retroactively to any prisoners Israel currently holds, including the Hamas-led militants who attacked the country on Oct. 7, 2023, triggering the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip.

After the final 62-48 vote in favor, lawmakers erupted into cheers and stood up in jubilation. Netanyahu, who remained in his seat, did not immediately react or speak.

Israel's firebrand minister of national security, Itamar Ben-Gvir, who spearheaded the push for the legislation, brandished a bottle in celebration. Far-right lawmaker Limor Son Har-Melech, one of the bill's original sponsors whose first husband was killed in a Palestinian militant attack in the West Bank, smiled through tears.

The law will face legal challenges

The legislation, which says it will take effect in 30 days, is certain to face legal challenges that may stall its implementation.

Minutes after the bill passed, the Association of Civil Rights in Israel said it had already petitioned Israel's highest court to challenge the law. It called the legislation "discriminatory by design" and said the parliament had enacted it "without legal authority" over West Bank Palestinians, who are not Israeli citizens.

Amichai Cohen, a senior fellow at the Israel Democracy Institute's Center for Democratic Values and Institutions, said that under international law, Israel's parliament should not be legislating in the West Bank, which is not sovereign Israeli territory.

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Many in Netanyahu's far-right coalition seek to annex the West Bank to Israel.

Concerns raised in the Knesset

The vote capped a daylong debate in the parliament. During earlier deliberations, lawmakers raised other concerns, including how the bill does not allow clemency, contradicting international conventions. Opposition lawmakers at times appeared to plead with their colleagues to vote against the bill.

Before the vote, Ben Gvir described the law as long overdue and a sign of strength and national pride.

"From today, every terrorist will know, and the whole world will know, that whoever takes a life, the State of Israel will take their life," he told lawmakers. On his lapel, he wore a signature pin — a small metal noose.

Gilad Kariv, of the Labor Party, condemned the bill's stipulation that a unanimous judgment is not required to impose the death sentence.

"A law in which a person can be sentenced to death without a unanimous conviction. Is this justice in your eyes? Is this the sanctity of life that Israeli tradition has taught us?" he asked.

The bill contravenes international law, he added, and risks turning Israeli soldiers and prison guards into "war criminals against their will."

Some, like Aida Sliman of Hadash, the leftist Jewish-Arab political party, left the chamber in dismay before the votes were complete.

What does the bill say?

Experts say the legislation has two key elements that will effectively limit the death penalty to Palestinians.

First, the bill makes the death penalty a default punishment for nationalistic killings in military courts, which try only West Bank Palestinians and not Israeli citizens. It says that only in special circumstances can military judges change the sentence to life imprisonment.

It gives Israeli civilian courts a greater degree of leniency in sentencing, with judges having the option to choose between the death penalty and life imprisonment.

The second element is how the bill defines the offense punishable by death: killing that rejects the existence of the state of Israel.

"It will apply in Israeli courts, but only to terrorist activities that are motivated by the wish to undermine the existence of Israel. That means Jews will not be indicted under this law," Cohen said.

The foreign ministers of Australia, Britain, France, Germany and Italy released a statement Sunday urging Israel to abandon plans to pass the law, calling it "de facto discriminatory," and saying the death penalty was unethical and had no "detering effect."

The bill breaks with Israeli history

Though Israel technically has the death penalty on the books as a possible punishment for acts of genocide, espionage during wartime and certain terror offenses, the country hasn't put anyone to death since Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann in 1962.

The Public Committee against Torture in Israel says the state has consistently voted in favor of abolishing the death penalty at the U.N. Israel's Shin Bet's security agency had — until recently — objected to the practice, believing it could spur further revenge plots by Palestinian militants.

Some opposition lawmakers worry that the bill could harm future hostage negotiations. Israel exchanged some 250 hostages taken during the October 2023 attack for thousands of Palestinian prisoners.

There is a separate bill under consideration dealing with punishment for the Oct. 7, 2023 attackers in Israel's custody.

Gulf allies privately make the case to Trump to keep fighting until Iran is decisively defeated

By AAMER MADHANI, SAMY MAGDY, MATTHEW LEE and SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Gulf allies of the United States, led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, are urging President Donald Trump to continue prosecuting the war against Iran, arguing that Tehran hasn't been weakened enough by the monthlong U.S.-led bombing campaign, according to U.S., Gulf and Israeli officials.

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After private grumbling at the start of the war that they were not given adequate advance notice of the U.S.-Israeli attack and complaining the U.S. had ignored their warnings that the war would have devastating consequences for the entire region, some of the regional allies are making the case to the White House that the moment offers a historic opportunity to cripple Tehran's clerical rule once and for all.

Officials from Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Bahrain have conveyed in private conversations that they do not want the military operation to end until there are significant changes in the Iranian leadership or there's a dramatic shift in Iranian behavior, according to the officials, who were not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The push from the Gulf nations comes as Trump vacillates between claiming that Iran's decimated leadership is ready to settle the conflict and threatening to further escalate the war if a deal is not reached soon.

All the while, Trump is struggling to rally public support at home for a war that's left more than 3,000 dead across the Mideast and is shaking the global economy. Yet the U.S. leader is sounding increasingly confident that he has the full support of his most important Mideast allies — including some that were hesitant about a new military campaign in the lead-up to the war.

"Saudi Arabia's fighting back hard. Qatar is fighting back. UAE is fighting back. Kuwait's fighting back. Bahrain's fighting back," Trump told reporters on Air Force One on Sunday evening as he made his way to Washington from his home in Florida. "They're all fighting back."

The Gulf countries host U.S. forces and bases from which the U.S. has launched strikes on Iran, but have not joined the offensive strikes.

Gulf allies support the war to varying degrees

While regional leaders are broadly supportive now of the U.S. efforts, one Gulf diplomat described some division, with Saudi Arabia and the UAE leading the calls for increasing military pressure on Tehran.

The UAE has emerged as perhaps the most hawkish of the Gulf countries and is pushing hard for Trump to order a ground invasion, the diplomat said. Kuwait and Bahrain also favor this option. The UAE, which has faced more than 2,300 missile and drone attacks from Iran, has only grown more irritated as the war grinds on and the salvos threaten to tarnish its image as the safe, pristine and monied hub for trade and tourism of the Mideast.

Oman and Qatar, which historically have played the role of intermediary between the long economically isolated Iran and the West, have favored a diplomatic solution.

The diplomat said Saudi Arabia has argued to the U.S. that ending the war now won't produce a "good deal," one guaranteeing security for Iran's Arab neighbors.

The Saudis say an eventual war settlement must neutralize Iran's nuclear program, destroy its ballistic missile capabilities, end Tehran's support for proxy groups, and also ensure that the Strait of Hormuz cannot be effectively shutdown by the Islamic Republic in the future as it has during the conflict. About 20% of the world's oil flowed through the waterway before the war.

Achieving those goals would require a sharp course correction by the theocracy that has been in charge of the country since the 1979 Islamic Revolution or its removal.

Senior Emirati officials, meanwhile, have become more pointed in their rhetoric toward Iran.

"An Iranian regime that launches ballistic missiles at homes, weaponizes global trade and supports proxies is no longer an acceptable feature of the regional landscape," Noura Al Kaabi, a minister of state at the UAE's Foreign Ministry, wrote in a column published Monday by the state-linked, English-language newspaper The National. She added: "We want a guarantee that this will never happen again."

The White House declined to comment for this story about the deliberations with Gulf allies. But Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Monday underscored that the U.S. and its Gulf Arab allies are in sync about Iran.

"They are religious zealots who can never be allowed to possess a nuclear weapon because they have an apocalyptic vision of the future," Rubio said of Iran in an appearance on ABC's "Good Morning America." "And all of their neighbors know that, by the way, which is why all of their neighbors have been supportive of the efforts we're conducting."

Saudi crown prince urges US not to let up

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Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the kingdom's de facto leader, has told White House officials that a further defanging of Iran's military capabilities and clerical leadership serves the long-term interest of the Gulf region and beyond, according to a person who has been briefed on the conversations.

Still, the Saudis are sensitive to the fact that the longer the conflict goes on the more opportunity Iran has to carry out strikes on the kingdom's energy infrastructure, the heartbeat of its oil-rich economy.

A Saudi government official underscored that the kingdom ultimately wants to see a political solution to the crisis, but its immediate focus remains safeguarding its people and critical infrastructure.

Iran's foreign minister early Tuesday insisted Tehran's attacks on the Gulf Arab states only target U.S. forces, even after assaults have hit civilian targets.

"Iran respects the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and considers it a brotherly nation," Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi wrote on X, sharing a photo purportedly showing damage to an American aircraft at a Saudi air base. "Our operations are aimed at enemy aggressors who have no respect for Arabs or Iranians, nor can provide any security. ... High time to eject U.S. forces."

Trump, in recent days, has sought to spotlight that most of the Gulf countries have stood in lockstep with his administration as the U.S. prosecutes the war, noting how they've coalesced in the thick of crisis as he criticizes NATO allies for not joining the U.S. in the fight.

On Friday, he heaped praise on Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates for showing "bravery" as the war has unfolded.

The president, speaking at an event in Miami sponsored by the Saudi sovereign wealth fund, was particularly effusive about the Saudi crown prince, hailing him as a "warrior" and a "fantastic man."

Trump also alluded to the fact that the Gulf countries were hesitant about his and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's decision to launch the war, but have since rallied.

"They weren't thinking this was going to happen, nobody was," said Trump, referring to Iran launching thousands of retaliatory salvos around the Gulf. "And they turned against them and really became very powerfully aligned. And they were with us, but they weren't with us very obliquely. They were with us."

Will Gulf allies join the fight?

Trump has yet to call on Gulf nations to take part in offensive operations.

One factor may be that the administration might have calculated that it's not worth the complications that come with crowding the skies with additional militaries beyond Israel.

Three American fighter jets were mistakenly downed by friendly Kuwaiti fire in the first days of the conflict in the midst of an Iranian air assault. All six crew members safely ejected from the F-15E Strike Eagles.

And six American service members were killed on March 12, when their KC-135 refueling aircraft crashed in western Iraq.

Another factor is that only UAE and Bahrain are among the Gulf states that have formal diplomatic relations with Israel, adding a layer of complication to their calculus, notes Yasmine Farouk, the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula project director at the International Crisis Group

But Iran has warned it will attack its neighbors' critical infrastructure, including desalination plants used to provide drinking water to the region, if Trump follows through on his threat to strike Iran's power plants if it doesn't open the Strait of Hormuz by April 6.

"The absence of a clear objective, the absence of the trust that the United States is really going to go until the end and finish the jobs ... it's making some of them reluctant," Farouk said. "But if there is a consequential or mass casualty (event) in one of those countries, then it would be justified for them to become a belligerent."

Schumer had a plan to win back the Senate. But some Democrats aren't on board

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats' hopes of reclaiming the U.S. Senate are colliding with a fight within their own party.

In Maine, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer has thrown his weight behind Gov. Janet Mills in a crucial race, but some of his Senate colleagues are backing insurgent candidate Graham Platner in a rebuke of his strategic vision. A similar dynamic is playing out in other battlegrounds, including Michigan and Minnesota, where progressive senators are endorsing non-establishment candidates.

At stake is more than any single race. Democrats are fighting over whether the party's traditional playbook still works in a country that elected Donald Trump for a second time — and whether leaders like Schumer should remain in charge.

"Clearly there's a disagreement of strategy here," said New Mexico Sen. Martin Heinrich, who has endorsed Platner.

He added that "the business-as-usual calculation for what is going to be successful in a given election cycle does not necessarily, in my view, meet the moment."

The divide reflects a Democratic base frustrated after the last presidential election, when President Joe Biden ran for a second term despite widespread concerns about his age. He dropped out and endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris, who lost to Trump.

Nan Whaley, a Democratic strategist in Ohio who ran for governor four years ago, said the debate is no longer about progressive or moderate.

"It's really about, who do you trust? Establishment or not establishment," she said. "And frankly, the establishment hasn't given us a lot to trust these past few years."

'A rebuke of Schumer'

In Maine, Schumer and the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, or DSCC, have backed Mills, a 78-year-old moderate in her second term.

Platner, a veteran and oyster farmer, quickly won the backing of Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., just days after launching his campaign. His bid has since gained momentum despite scrutiny over past controversial comments and a tattoo resembling a Nazi symbol.

In recent weeks, Heinrich, Arizona Sen. Ruben Gallego and Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren have endorsed Platner as he builds support on Capitol Hill. Heinrich and Rhode Island Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse held a fundraiser for him, too.

Gallego, a first-term senator who won a battleground race in 2024, downplayed the endorsements as a broader critique of party leadership.

"Senate leadership didn't back me at the beginning. So I didn't take that as a critique," Gallego said.

Michigan also has a contentious primary, with three high-profile candidates. State Sen. Mallory McMorrow has said she would not support Schumer as the caucus leader if Democrats regain the majority, and she's been endorsed by four senators.

Abdul El-Sayed, running further to the left, has been endorsed by Sanders and has also run on an anti-establishment platform.

U.S. Rep. Haley Stevens has aligned with establishment figures, working with a former DSCC executive director and securing support from two senators.

Democratic strategist Lis Smith said the endorsements in races like Maine and Michigan are "as much as a rebuke of Schumer as it is an endorsement of these candidates."

"It's pretty uncommon for sitting senators to endorse against the Senate leader," Smith said. "Senators are reading the tea leaves and are getting feedback from the grassroots that they are dissatisfied with Schumer's performance as leader."

In Minnesota, an open-seat race has similarly emerged as a test of the party's direction. Rep. Angie

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Craig is seen as the centrist candidate in the primary, with endorsements from House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries and Rep. Nancy Pelosi. Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan, the more progressive candidate, has been backed by Sanders, Warren and others, including Minnesota Sen. Tina Smith, who is vacating the seat.

"She understands that right now what we need are fierce fighters, people who are willing to stand up to the status quo," Smith said in her endorsement.

'The election may impact' Schumer's time as leader

Some tensions trace to March 2025, when Schumer voted with Republicans to end a government shutdown, drawing backlash from Democrats who argued he did not push hard enough against Trump's agenda.

Later that year, Democrats held firm in a record-long shutdown fight, helping regain some ground with activists and progressives. But divisions resurfaced when a group of moderates ultimately sided with Republicans, fueling renewed frustration with party leadership even as Schumer opposed the move.

Since he became Senate leader in 2017, Schumer's record in elections has been mixed. He led Democrats back to the majority in 2020 and expanded it in 2022 but lost ground in both 2018 and 2024.

"Leader Schumer's North Star is taking back the Senate and is pursuing a path to do just that," said Allison Biasotti, a spokesperson for Schumer.

He's recruited high-profile candidates this year in tough Senate races, such as Alaska, Ohio and North Carolina. Maeve Coyle, communications director for the DSCC, said Schumer "created a path to win a Democratic Senate majority this cycle" with the recruitment.

"Senate Democrats overperformed in the last four election cycles and in 2026, we will win seats and flip the majority," she added.

David Axelrod, who served as a top strategist for President Barack Obama, said that being Senate leader is never easy, and that Schumer "has been under fire for some time, particularly from progressives in the party."

Schumer's time as leader, Axelrod added, is likely directly linked to the outcome of the 2026 midterms.

"There's questions as to whether he'll run in 2028. There's even questions as to whether he might be challenged as leader," he said. "I think the results of this election may impact that."

For now, Schumer's caucus is tentatively standing behind him. None have explicitly called for him to step aside. But discontent has lingered, with some openly questioning whether the party needs a new direction.

"How people did politics in the 1990s is going to feel different than in the 2020s," said Heinrich.

For César Chavez supporters, a painful question: What to do with his legacy now

By FERNANDA FIGUEROA and JESSE BEDAYN Associated Press

Antonio Bustamante has kept a watercolor of labor leader César Chavez for more than 35 years, hanging it on the wall of his law office in Yuma, Arizona. As a young man, he was moved by Chavez and helped organize workers before joining his security team.

Like many others, Bustamante must now wrestle with reconciling the man he adored with the allegations Chavez groomed and sexually abused women and young girls.

"I'm trying to figure out how emotionally and intellectually I'll be able to understand my perception of him as an extremely good man," Bustamante said, his voice heavy with emotion, "compared to these things that are said he did."

Chavez built a national reputation organizing in the fields. With Dolores Huerta — also one of his victims — he co-founded the United Farm Workers union, led a hunger strike, a grape boycott with Filipino farmworkers, and eventually pressured growers to negotiate better wages and working conditions for Mexican American farmworkers.

Nearly two weeks after a New York Times report detailing allegations of sexual abuse, communities and rights groups across the country are still figuring out how he should be remembered. His name and image have already been erased from monuments, streets and murals around the country.

Reckoning with a legacy

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Bustamante said he learned of the allegations when an old friend called to tell him about the upcoming report. What flashed through his mind, he said, were the faces of others who had known and admired Chavez, and "how their eyes would be devastated."

"We were looked down upon by society, we were Mexicans," Bustamante said, recalling the first time he saw Chavez speak outside the Arizona Capitol in 1972 as he launched a hunger strike. He "gave us worth, and for young people that was everything."

Now, some of Bustamante's friends have taken down images of Chavez. In his community, Bustamante likened it to denouncing Catholicism and removing photos of the pope.

One person does not make a movement

For many, it's an example of why movements should not be tied to a single leader.

Teresa Romero, president of United Farm Workers, said the contradiction between the Chavez's legacy and the allegations is unavoidable.

"We have in one hand César Chavez, the man who committed horrible acts that we're not going to justify," Romero said. "On the other hand, we have César Chavez, the organizer who brought thousands and thousands of people together to be able to work for farm workers, and improve their lives and working conditions."

Unfortunately, both of those things came from the same person, Romero said.

Sehila Mota Casper, executive director of Latinos in Heritage Conservation, said the farmworker movement was always driven by collective effort.

"The rights and protections that came from it belongs to the people that built it," she said. "It wasn't just one individual."

That perspective, she said, offers a way to move forward: recognizing Chavez's role without letting it overshadow the contributions of others, including Huerta, and the challenges they faced.

Advocacy groups like the nonprofit Voto Latino took a similar stance, saying, "The women who organized, marched, and sacrificed alongside farmworkers carried this movement on their backs."

Dismantling a man, preserving history

The allegations also prompted swift public action. Within days, statues were removed and celebrations cancelled or renamed, including events tied to the federal César Chavez Day on March 31.

Political leaders from both parties have condemned the alleged abuse. Some Republicans, including Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, cited it as part of a broader criticism of Chavez's progressive legacy.

Abbot said Texas — a state with dozens of Confederate monuments — would no longer celebrate César Chavez Day, saying the allegations "undermine the narrative that elevated Chavez as a figure worthy of official state celebration."

At the same time, groups like the nonpartisan Latino Victory Project, which focuses on developing Hispanic political leadership, said this current moment should not distract from the still-ongoing civil rights battles.

"Those legacies are unchanged," said Paul Ortiz, a labor history professor at Cornell University and director of graduate studies for Latino Studies. "And those legacies are all about people power."

What seems inevitable, Bustamante said, is that there will always be an asterisk next to Chavez's name.

"Does that take away the greatness of what his accomplishments were, the meaning of them? No, it doesn't," he said. "But can we look past that to honor him? That's the tough part."

Georgia proposal could take DNA swabs from immigrants in custody for minor offenses

By CHARLOTTE KRAMON and DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Over the past three decades, the collection of DNA from convicted criminals has become standard in the U.S. justice system, and many states now also swab people arrested for serious crimes.

Legislation awaiting a final vote in Georgia would take that a step further by collecting DNA from people charged with less serious misdemeanors — but only if federal immigration authorities want them detained.

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That could include immigrants not ultimately deported.

If enacted, Georgia's measure would make it the third state to single out immigrants believed to be in the U.S. illegally for the collection of genetic material that wouldn't be taken from others. Florida passed a similar law in 2023. And Oklahoma in 2009 authorized DNA collection from immigrants in the U.S. illegally, though it remains subject to funding.

The new legislation comes as President Donald Trump's administration seeks to expand its use of DNA and biometrics in immigration enforcement as it carries out a plan to deport millions of people from the U.S.

"It is one example of something we are seeing across the landscape, which is government actors at all levels vacuuming up DNA in all available contexts," said Stevie Glaberson, director of research and advocacy at the Center on Privacy and Technology at Georgetown University law school.

Immigrant DNA collection has grown in recent years

The FBI launched the National DNA Index System in 1998 to compile DNA samples submitted by federal, state and local authorities. It's grown in size and scope and now contains more than 26 million DNA profiles, many from people convicted of crimes.

A federal law enacted 20 years ago allowed the attorney general to expand DNA collection to people arrested and to noncitizens detained under federal authority. But because of exceptions authorized by federal officials, few immigrants had their DNA collected.

That changed in 2020, during Trump's first term, when a new Department of Justice rule took away much of that discretion. Over the next five years, the Department of Homeland Security added the DNA profiles of more than 2.6 million detainees to the national database, according to an analysis by the Center on Privacy and Technology.

The department did not answer questions from The Associated Press about the percentage of detained immigrants whose DNA has been collected during Trump's second term.

But the department is looking to expand its authority. A proposed rule would allow it to collect DNA, including from U.S. citizens, to determine family relationships in immigrant benefit cases.

States don't typically collect DNA for misdemeanor arrests

Though many states collect DNA from people arrested for felonies, just 10 states collect it from people arrested for certain misdemeanors, such as sex offenses, and none collect it for all misdemeanor arrests, according to an AP analysis of data compiled by the Boise State University Department of Criminal Justice.

But under the Florida and Oklahoma laws, any arrest could lead to DNA collection for immigrants subject to federal detainer requests. Officials in the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation did not respond to questions about whether those laws are being used.

The Georgia legislation would require DNA collection from immigrants facing any misdemeanor or felony charges if U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement has issued a detainer request but has not picked up the person within 48 hours.

Georgia state Sen. Tim Bearden, a Republican sponsoring the bill, described the measure as a means of solving crimes.

"Technology is changing quickly, and DNA is one of those things that help us tremendously when we're trying to make sure to bring justice to victims in this state and across this country," Bearden said at a March hearing.

The Department of Homeland Security said in a statement that "partnerships with law enforcement are critical to having the resources we need to arrest criminal illegal aliens across the country."

Could a broken tail light lead to a DNA swab?

A 2024 Georgia law mandates that local law enforcement cooperate with federal authorities to identify and detain immigrants in the U.S. illegally, or else lose state funding. This year's legislation would build upon that.

Some legal experts say it could result in DNA collections from immigrants taken into custody for minor violations. Traffic offenses that are penalized as civil violations in some states are considered misdemeanors in Georgia, making them subject to the new law, said Mazie Lynn Guertin, executive director and policy advocate with the Georgia Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers.

"We don't think that swabbing a person who's committed a traffic violation is a boon for public safety," Guertin said. "The correlation between a broken tail light and a crime that's solvable with DNA is pretty attenuated in most cases."

People subject to federal immigration detainer requests aren't necessarily undocumented or deportable, because they may later prove their legal presence, said Kyle Gomez-Leineweber, director of policy for Common Cause Georgia. But such people could have their DNA collected under the Georgia legislation.

"What this really does is it creates a two-tiered system where some of the DNA would be collected based off of the perception of an individual's immigration status," said Gomez-Leineweber.

Legal experts raise questions about constitutional rights

The U.S. Supreme Court in 2013 upheld a Maryland law allowing DNA to be collected from people charged — but not yet convicted — of certain serious crimes. That law allows DNA to be added to a database after it's determined there is probable cause to detain someone, provided it's deleted if the person is not ultimately convicted.

The Maryland case often is cited as justification for an expansion of DNA collection. But some immigrant advocates question whether civil immigration detainers meet the probable cause threshold to make DNA collection acceptable under the U.S. Constitution's Fourth Amendment protection against unreasonable searches and seizures.

"There doesn't appear to be any kind of meaningful justification for states to step in to require the collection of DNA -- of genetic material -- from noncitizens in their custody who have merely been accused of a crime, even a low-level crime," said Jorge Loweree, managing director of the American Immigration Council. "It seems like this is just an effort to increase the surveillance of noncitizens."

Federal 'God squad' poised to exempt oil and gas drilling in the Gulf from endangered species rules

By MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

A U.S. government panel was due to convene Tuesday for the first time since 1992 to consider exempting oil and gas drilling in the Gulf of Mexico from the Endangered Species Act due to unspecified national security concerns, a move critics say could doom a rare whale species and harm other marine life.

Nicknamed the "God Squad" by groups who say it can decide a species' fate, the Endangered Species Committee comprises several Trump administration officials and is chaired by Interior Secretary Doug Burgum.

Republican President Donald Trump has made increased fossil fuel production a central focus of his second term. He wants to open new areas of the Gulf off the Florida coast to drilling, and has proposed sweeping rollbacks of environmental regulations disliked by industry.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth notified Burgum on March 13 that an Endangered Species Act exemption for oil and gas drilling in the Gulf was "necessary for reasons of national security," according to a court filing from the administration.

Government officials have not disclosed the rationale for the request, which came amid global oil shocks and soaring energy prices brought on by the Iran war. Experts say the administration must specify the military need that would endanger a species to make a case for the national security exemption.

The Gulf of Mexico is one of the nation's top oil-producing regions. It accounts for more than 10% of crude pumped annually in the U.S., plus a small share of domestic natural gas production.

But the Gulf also has been the scene of environmental disasters such as BP's Deepwater Horizon blow-out in 2010 that killed 11 workers and spilled 134 million gallons (500 million liters) of oil. A spill in the Gulf earlier this month spread 373 miles (600 kilometers), contaminating at least six species and polluting seven protected natural reserves.

The Trump administration in mid-March approved BP's new \$5 billion ultra-deepwater drilling project in the Gulf.

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Environmental groups sought unsuccessfully to block Tuesday's meeting. They claimed an exemption would doom the rare Rice's whale to extinction. Only about 50 remain in the Gulf.

A judge who struck down the environmentalists' request suggested it was premature since officials had not yet acted on the proposed exemption.

A 2025 National Marine Fisheries Service analysis determined the Gulf oil and gas program was likely to harm several species of whales, sea turtles and Gulf sturgeon that face potential harm from ship strikes, oil spills and other impacts.

The Endangered Species Committee was established in 1978 as a way to exempt projects from the Endangered Species Act, which makes it illegal to harm or kill species on a protected list, if no alternative would provide the same economic benefits in a region or if it was in the nation's best interest.

The panel has convened just three times in its 53-year history and issued only two exemptions. The first was in 1979 to allow construction on a dam on the Platte River in Wyoming, home to the whooping crane. It last met in 1992, allowing logging in northern spotted owl habitats in Oregon. That exemption request was later withdrawn.

Its latest meeting follows a federal judge's ruling on Monday that struck down attempts during Trump's first term to weaken rules for endangered species.

The panel's members include the secretaries of agriculture, interior and the Army, the chairperson of the Council of Economic Advisers, and the administrators of both the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The Associated Press left email and telephone messages with Interior and Defense Department officials requesting comment.

Seizing Kharg Island would risk US troops' lives and may not end Iran war, experts say

By BEN FINLEY and SAM METZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is threatening to deploy ground troops to seize critical oil infrastructure on Iran's Kharg Island, a military gambit that experts say would risk American lives and could still fail to end the war.

If Trump wants to hobble Iran's oil industry for leverage in negotiations, a better option might be setting up a blockade at sea against ships that have filled up at Kharg Island's oil terminals, the experts said.

The island — located on the other side of the Persian Gulf from U.S. bases in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia — is the beating heart of Iran's oil industry, through which 90% of its exports pass. It is important because Iran's coastline is mostly too shallow for tanker ships to dock.

"Putting people on the ground might be the most psychologically compelling way of striking a blow at Iran," said Michael Eisenstadt, a former U.S. military analyst who now directs the Military and Security Studies Program at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

"On the other hand, you're putting your own troops at jeopardy," said Eisenstadt, a retired Army reserve officer who served in Iraq. "It's not far from the mainland. So they can potentially rain a lot of destruction on the island, if they're willing to inflict damage on their own infrastructure."

Seizing Kharg Island could escalate the conflict, said Danny Citrinowicz, an Iran expert at Israel's Institute for National Security Studies.

He said Iran and its proxies — including Yemen's Houthi rebels — could intensify their retaliation, including by laying mines in the Strait of Hormuz and striking targets with drones across the Arabian Peninsula, from the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea.

Commodities researchers and investment banks warn major retaliation could have lasting implications for energy prices and the global economy.

"It will be hard to take. It will be hard to hold," Citrinowicz said of Kharg Island. "And it might damage the economy, but not in a way that will force the Iranians to capitulate."

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Trump says 'maybe we take Kharg Island'

Trump is under growing pressure to end the monthlong conflict with Iran, which has attacked U.S. bases and allies in the region.

Iran also has largely closed the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow chokepoint through which 20% of the world's oil normally flows, causing fuel prices to soar and other economic tumult.

Trump said in a social media post Monday that "great progress is being made" in talks with Iran to end military operations. But he said that if a deal is not reached "shortly" and the strait is not immediately reopened, the U.S. would obliterate power plants, oil wells, Kharg Island and possibly even desalination plants.

Trump has raised the idea of American forces seizing Kharg Island.

"Maybe we take Kharg Island, maybe we don't. We have a lot of options," Trump told the Financial Times. "It would also mean we had to be there (on Kharg Island) for a while."

Asked about Iranian defenses there, he said: "I don't think they have any defense. We could take it very easily."

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Friday that ground troops would not be needed to achieve the Trump administration's goals. He did not repeat that assertion Monday after being asked about plans for U.S. ground troops, saying "the president has several options at his disposal" but diplomacy is Trump's preference.

"Now, they are making threats about controlling the Hormuz Strait in perpetuity, creating a tolling system and the like," Rubio told ABC's "Good Morning America." "That's not going to be allowed to happen. And the president has a number of options available to him, if he so chooses, to prevent that from happening."

US has hit targets on the island crucial to Iran

The U.S. has already struck various targets on the island, including air defenses, a radar site, the airport and a hovercraft base, according to satellite analysis by the Institute for the Study of War and American Enterprise Institute's Critical Threats Project.

Kharg Island is about 33 kilometers (21 miles) off Iran's coast and is the primary terminal through which nearly all of the country's oil exports pass. It would be difficult for Iran to function without the island because it's "the main node" of the country's economy, said Petras Katinas, an energy researcher at the Royal United Services Institute.

However, Tehran has too much at stake to surrender over a single asset — no matter how economically significant — and it could still export some oil even if U.S. forces seized the island, said Citrinowicz, the Iran expert at Israel's Institute for National Security Studies.

While occupying Kharg might offer Washington some leverage in any negotiations, he said the notion that control of the island could be traded for Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium was far-fetched.

"It's in no way a decisive blow," Citrinowicz said.

US troops face risk from Iran's mainland if they tried to seize Kharg Island

A U.S. Navy ship carrying about 2,500 Marines recently arrived in the Middle East, while at least 1,000 troops from the 82nd Airborne Division are expected soon. Another 2,500 Marines are being deployed from California. The Trump administration has not said what all those troops will be doing, but the 82nd Airborne is trained to parachute into hostile or contested territory to secure key territory and airfields.

One of the reasons American troops would be vulnerable on Kharg Island is its close proximity to the Iranian mainland, from which missiles, drones and artillery could be fired. Despite continued U.S. and Israeli strikes, the Islamic Republic is still attacking targets across the region, including a Saudi air base hundreds of miles away where more than two dozen American troops were injured last week.

Even with American ships and planes providing support, there would still be a relatively short window of time to shoot down every drone or missile launched from the mainland at the island, Eisenstadt said.

"The coast tends to be mountainous, so the drones can come in through mountain passes where it's hard for our radar to pick up," he said. "And we don't have the warning time."

Eisenstadt says a sea blockade against ships carrying Iranian oil would be a safer strategy and achieve the same goal of controlling most of Iran's oil industry.

"Throw up a quarantine that seeks to seize Iranian oil shipments that are exiting the Gulf," agreed Clayton Seigle, an energy security expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. It could be done at a distance "outside the range of the lion's share of Iran's weapon systems."

Seigle argued against destroying Kharg Island's oil infrastructure, which Trump also suggested.

"We were supposed to be coming to the rescue of the people that had been rising up and protesting for a better future," Seigle said. "So to cripple Iran's revenue-generating potential for many years to come would definitely not work in that direction."

China factory activity rebounds in March as Iran war looms over growth

By CHAN HO-HIM AP Business Writer

HONG KONG (AP) — China's factory activity expanded in March, ending two months of contraction, the government said Tuesday, but analysts say prolonged impacts of the Iran war could weigh on growth.

The official manufacturing purchasing managers index rose to 50.4 from 49 in February, the National Bureau of Statistics reported, beating economists' expectations and notching the strongest reading in a year. PMI is measured on a scale of 0 to 100 and a reading above 50 indicates expansion.

While the latest official data covered a period after the Iran war began on Feb. 28, analysts say the impacts of surging energy costs have not yet been fully seen. "So far supply disruptions have not occurred in a material way," said Jacqueline Rong, Chief China Economist, BNP Paribas, a French bank.

A years-long property sector slump in China has also weighed on economic growth and weakened domestic consumption and investment demand in China, the world's second-largest economy after the U.S. To help drive its economy, China has been reliant on growing exports, especially to regions such as Southeast Asia and Europe, which propelled its trade surplus last year to a record \$1.2 trillion despite higher U.S. tariffs.

China's export engine could hit headwinds as the Iran war drive up energy costs and disrupts supply chains, with most maritime traffic blocked from passing the Strait of Hormuz, through which roughly a fifth of the world's oil normally passes.

The extent of the impact will depend on how long the energy flows from the Middle East are cut off, said BNP Paribas' Rong. "If it is months, rather than weeks, then the supply disruptions, not just from oil, but also from the shortage of many chemical products — such as rare gases — would manifest itself in disrupting industrial production and services," she said.

China's exports could also suffer if overall global growth takes a serious hit from the energy crisis, Rong said. Analysts say, for example, higher global inflation could weaken consumption demand for Chinese goods.

Chinese leaders in early March unveiled an economic growth target of 4.5% to 5% for this year, a slightly lower goal than the "around 5%" last year and the lowest growth target since 1991.

For now, China's economy "appears to have weathered" the energy shock from the Iran war well, wrote Zichun Huang, China economist at Capital Economics, in a recent research note, although she also cautioned it is "likely that the fallout from the Iran war will grow over the coming months."

With China's exports to the U.S., its largest trading partner, in decline over the past months, economists are closely watching for positive signs in trade relations between Washington and Beijing as U.S. President Donald Trump is expected to meet with Chinese leader Xi Jinping in May.

Some analysts say lower U.S. tariffs following a recent Supreme Court ruling against Trump's wide-reaching global tariffs could give China a small boost to exports and factory activity.

Airport bottlenecks ease as TSA workers get paid, but shutdown continues

By RIO YAMAT, JOSH FUNK and JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

Frustrating security lines dwindled at U.S. airports Monday, clearing the worst bottlenecks as Transportation Safety Administration officers began receiving backpay for working during the government shutdown.

Checkpoint lines that at times stretched to four hours at Houston's George Bush Intercontinental Airport shrank to waits of 10 minutes or less on Monday. In other previous trouble spots such as Atlanta and Baltimore-Washington International Airport, travelers were moving smoothly to their flights.

After weeks of airport chaos, there was finally optimism for the beleaguered aviation system.

Weary travelers hope the overdue paychecks will end the seemingly endless security lines and missed flights many experienced. It remains unknown how long federal immigration officers will maintain a visible presence in airport terminals as the busy spring break travel season continues.

TSA workers told union leadership Monday that they received some — but not all — of their back pay, according to Johnny Jones, secretary-treasurer of the TSA chapter of the American Federation of Government Employees. He said the rest is expected by next week. Some employees also reported incorrect backpay amounts, including missing overtime, the union said.

Jones, who is also a TSA agent at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport, said one colleague told him he was already "back to zero" after covering his car and housing payments and late fees. Workers are relieved the money has arrived, but with the shutdown still unresolved, he said, they worry it won't provide lasting relief.

"None of my colleagues feel like they've been made whole," Jones said. "Their finances are destroyed."

What about the TSA officers who couldn't work without pay?

The union said the TSA updated its furlough policy on Sunday, removing guidance that allowed officers to request a furlough if they could not report to work for reasons tied to the shutdown, such as lack of transportation or child care.

"Working without pay forced more than 500 officers to leave TSA and thousands were forced to call out," acting TSA Assistant Secretary Lauren Bis said in announcing the delayed payday.

The union agreed with these numbers, but said those who could not afford to report for duty now "have disciplinary actions looming over their heads."

"Backpay alone does not fix those problems," the union said.

The AP emailed TSA and DHS seeking comment and additional details on the agency's furlough guidance.

The DHS shutdown resulted in not only travel delays but also warnings of airport closures as TSA workers who were only just recovering financially from last fall's extended government shutdown stopped going to work. TSA employees had gone without pay since DHS funding lapsed in February.

Other agencies affected by this latest shutdown include the Secret Service and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

What Congress is doing about partial shutdown

President Donald Trump on Friday ordered the Department of Homeland Security to pay TSA officers immediately to ease the lines plaguing airports. Trump had rejected bipartisan efforts to fund the TSA while negotiations over ICE continue with Democrats, who have refused to approve more funding without restraints on Trump's immigration enforcement and mass deportation operations. Trump's order left other DHS employees unpaid.

Democrats are demanding that ICE agents wear cameras, identify themselves and operate without masks. They also want judges to decide whether to issue their warrants, and they want ICE raids to avoid schools, churches or other sensitive places.

Republicans and the White House have been willing to negotiate on some points, but a final agreement remains elusive.

On Monday, there were few signs of progress on Capitol Hill. Senators held a short session without considering the House bill, then resumed their two-week break.

The union again urged Congress to approve funding for the entire Department of Homeland Security. "To say we are utterly disgusted and disappointed with our elected officials is an understatement," the union said.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said Monday that Trump has offered to host an Easter Dinner for members of Congress who return to resolve the impasse. On Democrats' demands, she said "there has not been a change in policy."

"It has always been the policy of this president and this administration to deport the worst of the worst illegal alien criminals," Leavitt said.

As for the ICE agents Trump deployed to some airports a week ago to help with security, White House border czar Tom Homan said how long they stay depends on how quickly TSA employees return to work.

Trump again threatens widespread destruction in Iran if a deal is not reached 'shortly'

By JON GAMBRELL, JOSH BOAK and MIKE CORDER Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — U.S. President Donald Trump on Monday threatened widespread destruction of Iran's energy resources and other vital infrastructure, potentially including desalination plants that supply drinking water, if a deal to end the war is not reached "shortly."

Iran, meanwhile, struck a key water and electrical plant in Kuwait, and an oil refinery in Israel came under attack. A drone hit a Kuwaiti oil tanker in Dubai waters, causing a fire that authorities were working to control early Tuesday, the Dubai Media Office said.

Israel and the U.S. launched a new wave of strikes on Iran, as the war raged with no end in sight.

Trump's new threat came in a social media post. Earlier comments to the Financial Times suggested American troops could seize Iran's Kharg Island oil export hub. Trump has repeatedly claimed to be making diplomatic progress — though Tehran denies negotiating directly — while ramping up his threats and sending thousands more U.S. troops to the Middle East.

Trump told the New York Post that the U.S. is negotiating with Iran's parliament speaker, Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf. The former Revolutionary Guard commander, who has taunted the U.S. on social media, dismissed the talks facilitated by Pakistan as a cover for the latest American troop deployments.

Trump says diplomacy is going well but threatens major escalation

In a social media post, Trump said "great progress is being made" in talks with Iran to end military operations. But he said if a deal is not reached "shortly," and if the Strait of Hormuz is not immediately reopened, the U.S. would broaden its offensive by "completely obliterating" power plants, oil wells, Kharg Island and possibly even desalination plants.

The strait is a crucial waterway through which a fifth of the world's oil is shipped in peacetime.

The laws of armed conflict allow attacks on civilian infrastructure such as energy plants only if the military advantage outweighs the civilian harm, legal scholars say. It's considered a high bar to clear, and causing excessive suffering to civilians can constitute a war crime.

A 22-year-old resident of Karaj, near Tehran, said his area lost power for several hours overnight following nearby strikes.

"I was really scared. I thought that they'd hit the power plants and that we are not going to have power anymore," he said, speaking on condition of anonymity out of security fears.

Iran says US demands are 'excessive, unrealistic and irrational'

The U.S. already has targeted military positions on Kharg. Iran has threatened to launch its own ground invasion of Gulf Arab countries and to mine the Persian Gulf if U.S. troops set foot on its territory.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei said Tehran had received a 15-point proposal from the Trump administration containing "excessive, unrealistic and irrational" demands, while denying there had been any direct talks.

Qalibaf, the parliament speaker Trump says he is negotiating with, said Iranian forces were "waiting for the arrival of American troops on the ground to set them on fire and punish their regional partners

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forever," according to state media.

Twice during Trump's second term, the U.S. has attacked Iran during high-level diplomatic talks, including with the Feb. 28 strikes that started the current war.

Iran attacks Israel and Gulf infrastructure

Sirens sounded at dawn near Israel's main nuclear research center, a part of the country that has been targeted repeatedly in recent days. Israel's military also said it had taken out two drones launched from Yemen, where the Iran-backed Houthi rebels entered the war on Saturday with their first missile attack.

Iran kept up the pressure on its Gulf Arab neighbors: Saudi Arabia intercepted five missiles targeting its oil-rich Eastern province; a fireball erupted over Dubai, United Arab Emirates, as a missile was intercepted; and in Kuwait, an Iranian attack hit a power and desalination plant, killing one worker and wounding 10 soldiers, the state-run KUNA news agency reported.

An Emirati official signaled that the UAE wants more than just a ceasefire.

"An Iranian regime that launches ballistic missiles at homes, weaponizes global trade and supports proxies is no longer an acceptable feature of the regional landscape," Noura Al Kaabi, a minister of state at the UAE's Foreign Ministry, wrote in a column published by the state-linked, English-language newspaper The National.

She added: "We want a guarantee that this will never happen again."

NATO air defenses intercepted a ballistic missile over Turkey that was fired from Iran, Turkey's Defense Ministry said, in the fourth such incident since the start of the war. Iran has denied firing the previous missiles. Turkey is taking part in mediation efforts.

Israel launched a new wave of attacks on Iran, saying it was striking "military infrastructure" across Tehran. Explosions were heard in the Iranian capital, and Iranian state media reported that a petrochemicals plant in Tabriz, in the north, sustained damage in an airstrike.

Peacekeepers killed in Lebanon, where Israel is battling Hezbollah

The U.N. Security Council planned to convene an emergency session Tuesday after officials said three peacekeepers in southern Lebanon had been killed in less than 24 hours. The meeting was scheduled after a request from France.

The U.N. peacekeeping mission in the region where Israel is battling the Iran-backed Hezbollah did not say who was responsible for the deaths overnight and into Monday.

Two of the peacekeepers were killed when an explosion of "unknown origin" destroyed their vehicle, and a third was killed earlier when a base for the peacekeeping mission, known as UNIFIL, was hit by a projectile. All three peacekeepers were from the Indonesian army, U.N. officials said.

The Israeli army said it was reviewing the deaths to determine if they resulted from Hezbollah activity or Israeli fire, noting that they "occurred in an active combat area."

An Israeli airstrike on a Beirut suburb killed one person and wounded 17, including four children, according to Lebanon's Health Ministry.

Over the weekend, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the military would widen its invasion, expanding the "existing security strip" in southern Lebanon.

In Iran, authorities say more than 1,900 people have been killed, while 19 have been reported dead in Israel.

Two dozen people have been killed in Gulf states and the occupied West Bank. In Lebanon, officials said more than 1,200 people have been killed, and more than 1 million have been displaced.

Ten Israeli soldiers have died in Lebanon, while 13 U.S. service members have been killed in the war.

Oil prices rise again as concerns of global energy crisis grow

Iran's attacks on the energy infrastructure of the region and its stranglehold on the Strait of Hormuz have threatened global supplies of oil, natural gas and fertilizer. They have sent fuel prices skyrocketing and given rise to growing concerns about an energy crisis.

Trump has said that Iran agreed to allow 20 oil tankers through the Strait of Hormuz starting Monday as "a sign of respect." There was no information on whether those ships were actually moving.

Brent crude oil, the international standard, was trading around \$115 Monday, up nearly 60% from when the war started.

Oil-thirsty Asian nations seek Russian crude as Iran war strains supplies

By ANTON L. DELGADO, CHAN HO-HIM and ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Asian nations are increasingly competing for Russian crude oil as an energy crisis mounts amid the month-old war by the U.S. and Israel against Iran, which has choked off roughly a fifth of the world's oil supply.

Much of the oil from the mostly shut Strait of Hormuz was headed for Asia, hit hardest by recent energy shocks. Over the weekend, Iran-backed Houthi rebels entered the conflict, further threatening shipping.

To shore up global crude oil supplies, the U.S. has temporarily eased sanctions on Russian oil shipments already at sea — first for India, then for the rest of the world.

Demand is rising in Asia while Russia is raking in billions of dollars. But experts say there is a limit to how much Moscow can boost its exports of crude oil, which is unrefined petroleum needed to make fuels like gasoline and diesel, and it is already exporting at a level close to its previous peak.

In addition, Russia's 4-year-old full-scale invasion of Ukraine and recent drone attacks on its energy facilities by Kyiv are hurting its export capabilities.

For desperate countries in Asia the opportunity is short-lived and shrinking, said Muyu Xu, a senior crude oil analyst at the global trade data firm Kpler.

"The real problem is how much cargo is still available in this market," she said.

A flurry of interest

Before the Iran war, China, India and Turkey were the main importers of Russian oil, flouting Western sanctions for a healthy discount.

U.S. and European Union sanctions were meant to economically hinder Russia after its invasion of Ukraine.

But the U.S. sanction waiver sent energy-hungry Southeast Asia into a flurry. This month, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam signaled new interest in Russian oil.

Manila, a long-time U.S. ally, imported Russian crude for the first time in five years — days after it declared an energy emergency.

Others may follow, but will compete with China and India for roughly 126 million barrels still at sea, according to Kpler.

India alone typically needs 5.5 million to 6 million barrels of oil per day.

Analysts say Russia is unlikely to boost exports sharply. In March, flows were about 3.8 million barrels a day, above February's 3.2 million but still below the mid-2023 peak of 3.9 million.

Xu said the crisis was a reminder of how quickly geopolitics can shift — sometimes driven by just a few decision-makers — making it hard for countries to plan ahead. She said "right now, really the priority is to ensure your supply and all the other considerations are secondary."

Southeast Asian countries competing for the dwindling amount of Russian crude oil at sea are likely hoping the U.S. extends its sanction waiver beyond April, Xu added.

The options are limited for these nations, and safer bets — like crude oil from the U.S., South America or West Africa — are too far for Asia, meaning shipments won't arrive for months. That leaves poorer nations scrambling.

A squeeze in the Philippines

Airlines in the Philippines are weighing fuel rationing. Cash handouts are being rushed to those hit hardest, like transportation workers. On most days, lines at gas stations stretch for blocks.

The nation of 117 million is an early warning for Southeast Asia.

Before the war, the Philippines relied on the Middle East for nearly 97% of its total seaborne oil imports, according to Kpler data. The energy emergency declaration is a "new frontier" in its scale and magnitude, said Kairos Dela Cruz of the Institute for Climate and Sustainable Cities.

"It will definitely drive people down even further in the poverty line," he said.

To ease energy shortfalls, the Philippines imported crude oil, a first since 2021. Other Southeast Asian nations are weighing similar options.

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Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh's March 23 visit to Russia included agreements on oil and gas cooperation, alongside nuclear energy, as rising diesel prices begin to squeeze Vietnam's manufacturing sector.

In Indonesia, officials said "all countries are possible" partners as they shore up reserves. This includes Russia and the tiny oil and gas sultanate of Brunei, said Indonesian Energy Minister Bahlil Lahadalia.

"When you don't have any other options, all options are on the table," said Putra Adhiguna of the Jakarta-based Energy Shift Institute.

While weighing similar moves, Thailand is not as desperate as the Philippines, said Jitsai Santaputra of the energy consultancy The Lantau Group in Bangkok. She added that Thailand will likely wait and see so long as the impact is limited.

But it's growing.

Fuel prices in Thailand jumped on March 26 after caps and subsidies were lifted, with most fuels rising about 20 U.S. cents per liter, with diesel up roughly 18% — a hit to industry and transportation that risks pushing up the price of other goods.

China and India have the advantage

Defying Western sanctions, China and India were major Russian crude oil customers before the U.S. and Israel attacked Iran on Feb. 28.

An additional advantage for India was having U.S. sanctions on Russian crude oil removed about a week before other countries.

"They took that chance and snapped up quite many cargoes," Xu said. By the time U.S. President Donald Trump allowed everybody else to buy, she said it was "already a bit too late because most of the cargo had already been ordered" by China and India.

Even with the head start, Kpler data shows India's crude oil imports from Russia probably aren't enough to offset the lack of supplies from the Middle East.

Its oil imports from Russia jumped to roughly 1.9 million barrels a day in March, from about 1 million barrels before the Iran war. Before that conflict, India imported around 2.6 million barrels per day of crude oil from the Middle East.

That may not be enough, with the approach of peak summer energy demand — driven by travel, agriculture and freight needs — especially as emergency oil stockpiles run down, said Duttatreya Das of the think tank Ember. He added that short-term buys cover only a few days of supply, leaving any gap hard to fill without extra shipments from the U.S. or Canada.

"I don't know how the shortfall will be met," he said.

Despite being the fifth-largest crude producer and pushing clean energy, China still has strong oil demand from its 1.4 billion people. But it also has built a vast oil stockpile.

It has approximately 1.2 billion barrels of onshore crude inventories, Kpler estimates. That is nearly four months of its overall seaborne crude imports, which cushion short term impacts from the war.

China sourced about 13% of its seaborne crude from Iran, according to Kpler, and roughly 20% from Russia, said financial data group LSEG.

With ample reserves and deep pockets, analysts say some Russian shipments bound for China could be diverted to more desperate countries.

"Russia emerges as a major winner from the entire conflict," said Sam Reynolds of the U.S.-based Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis. Given the energy crisis, speed of delivery and temporarily lower prices, he said Asia has "a much larger incentive to import Russian oil."

"We can argue whether there's a moral dilemma there, but I think it's a reflection of the fact that countries are going to do whatever they need to to protect their energy security," he said.

NASA begins the countdown for humanity's first launch to the moon in 53 years

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — NASA began the countdown Monday for humanity's first launch to the moon in 53 years.

The 32-story Space Launch System rocket is poised to blast off Wednesday evening with four astronauts. After a day in orbit around Earth, their Orion capsule will propel them to the moon and back. There are no stops — just a quick U-turn around the moon. The nearly 10-day flight will end with a splashdown in the Pacific.

"Our team has worked extremely hard to get us to this moment," said launch director Charlie Blackwell-Thompson. "Certainly all indications are right now we are in excellent, excellent shape."

Managers said the rocket is doing well following the latest round of repairs. Forecasters said the weather should cooperate.

NASA's Artemis II mission should have soared in February, but was grounded by hydrogen fuel leaks. The leaks were fixed, but then a helium pressurization line became clogged, forcing a return to the hangar late last month. The rocket returned to the pad 1 1/2 weeks ago, and its U.S.-Canadian crew arrived at the launch site on Friday.

Unlike Apollo, which sent only men to the moon from 1968 through 1972, Artemis' debut crew includes a woman, person of color and a non-U.S. citizen.

Artemis II's pilot Victor Glover said over the weekend that he wants young people to see them and think, "Girl power and that's awesome, and that young brown boys and girls can look at me and go 'Hey, he looks like me and he's doing what???'"

At the same time, Glover, who is Black, looks forward to when "one day we don't have to talk about these firsts" and exploring the cosmos becomes an all-encompassing "human history."

NASA has the first six days of April to launch Artemis II before standing down until the end of the month.

Student shoots a teacher at Texas high school before fatally shooting self, authorities say

By JAMIE STENGLE Associated Press

A 15-year-old student shot a teacher at a Texas high school and then fatally shot himself Monday, according to authorities, who were still investigating what led to the early morning attack.

No other injuries were reported at Hill Country College Preparatory High School in Bulverde, a small but growing city near San Antonio.

The teacher was taken to a nearby hospital. Comal County Sheriff Mark Reynolds said hours after the shooting that he did not know her condition.

"What happened today is something no community ever wants to face, but we prepare for something that we hope never occurs," Reynolds said.

He said the student shot the teacher before turning the gun on himself. Reynolds said investigators were working to understand the relationship between the student and the teacher and looking into how the firearm was obtained.

The small campus of roughly 250 students was placed on lockdown shortly after 8:30 a.m., according to the school. One student told San Antonio television station KSAT that they heard loud bangs coming from a room on the second floor and then heard screaming.

Another student told the TV station that she heard five shots and yelling before her debate teacher told students to get inside a classroom.

Students were bused to a nearby middle school, where parents stood in long lines, some praying, as they waited to be reunited. Reynolds said the family members of the shooter had also gone into reunification line.

"We're trying to collect as much information as we can from witnesses," Reynolds said.

Jesse Lopez, a parent, told KSAT that it will be difficult to tell his daughter that she has to eventually go back to class.

"For one, she has autism, and she'll be afraid to go back, she'll be real afraid to go back," Lopez said.

The school canceled classes for Tuesday but counselors would still be made available for students and families, principal Julie Wiley said in a statement. She did not provide details about the teacher's condition.

"Our hearts are with everyone impacted, especially that teacher, their family, and our school community," Wiley said. "We know this has been a difficult day."

The high school, which is part of the Comal Independent School District, focuses on academics and skills to prepare students for college, according to the district's website. Its curriculum is centered on science, technology, engineering, arts and math, known as STEAM, with electives that include cybersecurity and engineering.

The school opened in August 2020 with a freshman class. It has since grown to offer grades nine through 12.

Man who crashed pickup into Michigan synagogue was inspired by Iran-backed Hezbollah, FBI says

By COREY WILLIAMS Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — An armed man who crashed his pickup truck into a major Detroit-area synagogue earlier in March was inspired by the Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah and had sought to inflict as much damage as he could on Jewish people, the FBI said Monday.

Ayman Ghazali made a video just minutes before the attack at Temple Israel in West Bloomfield Township, saying he wanted to "kill as many of them as I possibly can" in the large Jewish congregation, said Jennifer Runyan, head of the FBI in Detroit, who announced the new information.

Ghazali, 41, sat in the parking lot for a few hours on March 12 before smashing his F150 through doors and into the hallway of an early childhood education area, striking a security guard. He then exchanged gunfire with another guard before fatally shooting himself. No one else among the 150 children and staff was injured.

It was a "Hezbollah-inspired act of terrorism purposely targeting the Jewish community and the largest Jewish temple in Michigan," Runyan said.

He sent two final videos to a sister overseas about 10 minutes before launching the assault, she said.

"This is the largest gathering place for Israelis in the State of Michigan in the United States," Runyan quoted him as saying in Arabic. "I have booby-trapped the car. I will forcefully enter and start shooting at them. God willing, I will kill as many of them as I possibly can."

Assault rifle and a lot of ammunition

The FBI cited videos and other images discovered on Ghazali's social media accounts in which he embraced vengeance and Hezbollah's militant ideology. Runyan said he searched for Michigan synagogues and Jewish cultural sites a few days earlier before settling on Temple Israel, even looking up the time for lunch.

Runyan said there was no way to know whether Ghazali knew children would be present at the time.

Ghazali bought an AK-style rifle and 300 rounds of ammunition from a gun store on March 9 and practiced at a shooting range, she said.

His Ford F150 was stocked with commercial-grade fireworks and containers with more than 30 gallons (113 liters) of gasoline. The truck caught fire after barreling into the synagogue, Runyan said, though there was no explosion.

Detroit-area U.S. Attorney Jerome Gorgon noted that Hezbollah in 1983 drove a massive truck bomb into U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut, Lebanon.

"That is exactly what this terrorist did a few weeks ago in our backyard," Gorgon said, speaking along with Runyan.

Family ties to Hezbollah

The FBI did not release the entirety of Ghazali's videos and materials but showed screengrabs and quotes

from several of the recordings.

Ghazali, who lived in Dearborn Heights, came to the U.S. in 2011 on an immediate relative visa as the spouse of a U.S. citizen and was granted U.S. citizenship in 2016, according to the Department of Homeland Security.

His family ties to Hezbollah were publicly disclosed soon after the synagogue attack. Israel's military said a brother, Ibrahim Ghazali, was a Hezbollah commander in Lebanon who was killed there on March 5. A Detroit-area mosque held a memorial service for the brother and other family members who also died.

Ghazali's ex-wife had called police in Dearborn Heights around the time of the synagogue attack to warn that he seemed distraught and suicidal after losing family during the Israeli airstrike, according to 911 audio. The strike came days into the Iran war with Israel and the U.S. that began Feb. 28.

Founded in 1982 during Lebanon's civil war, Hezbollah initially was devoted to ending Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon. Israel withdrew by 2000, but Hezbollah has continued its battle and seeks Israel's destruction. The U.S. has designated Hezbollah as a terrorist group since 1997. Hezbollah is also a political party with lawmakers in the Lebanese parliament and a presence in most Lebanese governments for decades.

Temple Israel, which has more than 12,000 members, is part of Reform Judaism, the largest branch of the religion in North America, which emphasizes progressive values such as social justice and gender equality. The congregation is the second-largest, according to the Union for Reform Judaism.

The attack was the latest in a spate of recent attacks targeting religious buildings — which has intensified fear among religious leaders and worshippers worldwide.

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 be produced in the United States. 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

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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 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

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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.

US stocks swing through another shaky day as oil prices keep climbing

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. stocks swung Monday as oil prices kept climbing because of uncertainty about when the war with Iran could end.

The S&P 500 slipped 0.4% and deepened its loss since the war began to pull 9.1% below its record set early this year. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 49 points, or 0.1%, and the Nasdaq composite fell 0.7%.

Caution was prevalent throughout financial markets. After jumping to an initial gain of 0.9%, the S&P 500 quickly erased nearly all of it before seesawing lower. Stock indexes rose in Europe but fell sharply in some Asian markets, while the price for a barrel of benchmark U.S. crude rose 3.3% to settle at \$102.88

The mixed movements followed a whirlwind of action in the war over the weekend, including an entry into the fighting by Houthi rebels in Yemen. None of it gave any clarity for the main questions weighing on financial markets: When will oil and natural gas resume their full flows from the Persian Gulf to customers worldwide, and will it be soon enough to prevent a brutal blast of inflation?

Shortly before the U.S. stock market opened for trading Monday, President Donald Trump said on his social media network that "great progress has been made" with "A NEW, AND MORE REASONABLE, REGIME to end our Military Operations in Iran."

But he also threatened the possibility of "blowing up and completely obliterating" Iranian power plants if a deal is not reached shortly and if the Strait of Hormuz, an integral waterway for the flow of oil, is not opened immediately.

The statement fit and condensed last week's pattern, where Trump would tout progress being made in talks and offer some optimism for the market, only for doubts to rise quickly afterward about whether the war can end soon.

All the back and forth has some investors saying they're giving Trump's pronouncements less weight than before. But stock prices are nevertheless cheaper than they were before the war, which has some investors looking for an opportune time to buy.

The S&P 500 finished last week 8.7% below its all-time high, which was set in January. The Dow and Nasdaq both were more than 10% below their records, a steep-enough fall that professional investors

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call it a "correction."

Taking into account how much profits are expected to grow in the coming year for companies in the S&P 500, the index looks roughly 17% cheaper than before the war, by one measure. That's in a similar range as where prior growth scares for the market ended, as long as they didn't result in a recession or the Federal Reserve hiking interest rates, according to strategists at Morgan Stanley.

That's one of the signs that the strategists led by Michael Wilson point to as "growing evidence the S&P 500 correction is getting closer to its ending stages."

Of course, the Federal Reserve could upset that if it decides oil prices are threatening to stay high for long enough that it needs to raise interest rates. Higher interest rates would help keep a lid on inflation, but they would also slow the economy and push down on prices for all kinds of investments.

Treasury yields have been leaping in the bond market since the war began because of such worries, but they eased somewhat on Monday.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury fell to 4.35% from 4.44% late Friday. That's a significant move for the bond market and offers some breathing room for Wall Street. But it remains far above its 3.97% level from before the war.

On Wall Street, Sysco fell 15.3% to help lead the market lower after it said it was buying Jetro Restaurant Depot for \$21.6 billion in cash and enough Sysco shares to value the company at about \$29.1 billion.

Alcoa rose 8.2% for one of the market's biggest gains on speculation it could get more business after attacks damaged rival aluminum facilities in the Middle East over the weekend.

All told, the S&P 500 fell 25.13 points to 6,343.72. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 49.50 to 45,216.14, and the Nasdaq composite sank 153.72 to 20,794.64.

In stock markets abroad, the FTSE 100 in London climbed 1.6%, and the CAC 40 in Paris rose 0.9%. That followed drops of 3% for Seoul's Kospi, 2.8% for Tokyo's Nikkei 225 and 0.8% for Hong Kong's Hang Seng.

Trump administration sues Minnesota over transgender athletes in girls sports

By STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The Trump administration sued Minnesota and its school athletics governing body on Monday, carrying out a threat to punish the state for allowing transgender athletes to compete in girls sports.

The lawsuit is part of a broader fight over the rights of transgender youth. More than two dozen states have laws prohibiting transgender women and girls from participating in certain sports and some have barred gender-affirming surgeries for minors. Courts have blocked some of those policies.

In the lawsuit filed Monday, the Justice Department alleges the state Department of Education and the Minnesota State High School League are violating Title IX, a federal law against sex discrimination in educational programs that receive federal money.

"The Trump Administration does not tolerate flawed state policies that ignore biological reality and unfairly undermine girls on the playing field," Attorney General Pamela Bondi said in a statement.

Democratic Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison called the lawsuit "a sad attempt to get attention" over an issue that has already been in litigation for months. He said he'll keep fighting.

"It is astonishing that any president would try to target, shame, and harass children just trying to be themselves, let alone a president with so many actual problems to address," Ellison said in a statement.

The League does not comment on threatened or pending lawsuits, spokesman Tim Leighton said.

The administration has filed similar lawsuits against Maine and California, and has threatened the federal funding of some universities over transgender athletes, including San Jose State in California and the University of Pennsylvania.

Minnesota officials have long resisted the federal push to ban trans athletes from girls sports. Ellison filed a preemptive lawsuit last April, saying Minnesota's human rights act supersedes executive orders issued by President Donald Trump last year. The lawsuit also says the state is already in compliance with Title IX.

A ruling is pending on the federal government's motion to dismiss that case.

The Justice Department said in a statement that Minnesota violates Title IX "by requiring girls to compete against boys in athletic competitions that are designated exclusively for girls and allowing boys to invade intimate spaces designated exclusively for girls, such as multi-person locker rooms and bathrooms."

To buttress its claims that trans athletes have an unfair advantage, the lawsuit highlights the case of a trans pitcher on the Champlin Park High School girls varsity fastpitch softball team who helped lead the school to a 6-0 victory in a state championship game in 2025.

The Trump administration also reversed the Biden administration's interpretation of Title IX, which held that its provisions prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex also extended to gender identity.

According to the Justice Department, Minnesota's Department of Education receives more than \$3 billion annually in federal funding from the U.S. departments of Education and Health and Human Services. It says that funding is contingent on compliance with Title IX.

The lawsuit asks a federal court in Minnesota to declare the state in violation of Title IX and order it to prohibit transgender girls from competing in girls' prep sports.

The civil rights offices at the Education and Health and Human Services put the state and league on notice last September that they faced legal action if they didn't stop violating the federal law.

NFL set to begin hiring and training replacement officials, AP sources say

By ROB MAADDI AP Pro Football Writer

PHOENIX (AP) — The NFL is moving forward with plans to begin hiring and training replacement officials in the next several weeks because negotiations with the referees' union have been unsuccessful, two people with knowledge of the discussions told The Associated Press.

Both people spoke on condition of anonymity Sunday because the conversations are private.

The league and the NFL Referees Association have been negotiating a new collective bargaining agreement since the summer of 2024. The current CBA expires on May 31.

The NFL has increased its offer to a 6.45% annual growth rate in compensation over a six-year labor deal, but the NFLRA wants 10% plus \$2.5 million for marketing fees, the people said.

NFLRA executive director Scott Green told The Associated Press on Monday: "those numbers are not accurate." He said negotiations with the league are similar to 2012 when a stalemate resulted in a 110-day lockout and replacement referees were used.

The league wants compensation tied to performance so that only high-performing game officials during the regular season share in the year-end bonus pool.

The league is also seeking greater flexibility to ensure the best officials are on the field during the post-season. The current CBA includes seniority as a factor in making postseason assignments.

"We had 'high performing officials' who worked this year's championship games and the Super Bowl who were paid less for those games than what they were paid for a regular-season game. That certainly isn't rewarding performance, as the NFL claims is their goal," Green said.

Shortening the "dark period" is also a priority for the NFL. Currently, the league has no communication with game officials during the roughly three-month stretch between the Super Bowl and May 15. The goal is to increase access to game officials for rules discussions, video review, mechanics and appropriate football operations and committee meetings in order to improve the game and officials' performance.

"Apparently 'League sources' are continuing to put out false and misleading information instead of wanting to meet at the negotiating table," Green said in a statement. "The bottom line is our officials work for the wealthiest sports league in America, with profits that far exceed any of the others. That's normally a point of pride for the NFL. However, our officials are substantially under-compensated when compared to baseball and basketball umpires and referees. Our officials also aren't provided the health care benefits that those at 345 Park Avenue have."

The NFL is offering to hire some full-time officials, but one of the people said the union is resisting and

is asking for "full-time pay and part-time hours."

Green told the AP the 2012 and 2019 CBA agreements included provisions that would allow some officials to serve in full-time roles. He said the league experimented with this in 2017, 2019 and 2020.

"Each program ended because of their inability to manage it," Green said. "They could have done full time at any point in the existing CBA and never did. If they want to do it, they need to pay the guys substantially more and provide benefits."

In preparation for the potential use of replacement officials, the NFL competition committee has proposed a contingency that would allow the replay center in New York to advise the on-field officials on any missed roughing the passer or intentional grounding penalty, as well as any act that would have led to an ejection had a penalty been called. NFL owners will vote on the proposal this week at the annual meeting.

The NFL used replacement officials for the first three weeks of the 2012 season and that resulted in several mistakes and wrong calls, including the disputed TD catch known as the "Fail Mary."

"No one in the NFL should want to relive 2012," Green said.

Air Canada CEO will retire this year after his English-only crash message was criticized

By ROB GILLIES Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — Air Canada announced Monday that its CEO will retire later this year, after Michael Rousseau was criticized for his English-only message of condolence following this month's deadly crash in New York.

Canada's largest airline, based in French-speaking Quebec, said that Rousseau, 68, told the board he will leave by the end of the third quarter.

Canada is an officially bilingual nation, and Prime Minister Mark Carney said that Rousseau's decision to retire is "appropriate."

"It is essential that the next CEO of Air Canada is bilingual," Carney said.

Carney had said the English-only message showed a lack of compassion and judgment. Quebec's premier and others called on the airline executive to resign.

"I salute the decision of Air Canada CEO Michael Rousseau to step down from his position. The Air Canada board of directors will have to ensure that the next CEO speaks French," Quebec Premier François Legault said in a statement.

Antoine Forest, one of the two pilots killed in the crash at LaGuardia Airport, was a French-speaking Quebecer. Forest and Mackenzie Gunther died when the Air Canada Jazz flight from Montreal collided with a fire truck on the runway shortly after landing.

Canada's largest airline is headquartered in Montreal. Rousseau previously had been criticized for not speaking French. He delivered his condolence video message in English, with French subtitles. The Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages has received hundreds of complaints about it.

Steven MacKinnon, Canada's transport minister, thanked Rousseau in a social media post and said that the government will continue to work closely with Air Canada to ensure that it "provides safe, reliable, affordable, and bilingual service to all Canadians."

Legault noted that when Rousseau was appointed president of the airline in February 2021, he promised to learn French.

Quebec's identity has been contentious since the 1760s, when the British completed their takeover of what was then called New France. Quebec is about 80% French-speaking.

"Language is a highly political issue in Canada and the Air Canada leadership has been aware of that for a very long time," said Daniel Béland, a political science professor at McGill University in Montreal.

"The fact that Rousseau had promised to learn French back in 2021 but failed to deliver amidst his sky-high level of compensation did not help him in the court of public opinion."

Jason Kenney, a former Conservative Cabinet minister, has said that he would rather the CEO of Canada's flagship carrier focus his scarce time on safety and reliability than language training.

The birthright citizenship case at the Supreme Court hits close to home for this immigrant mother

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — One of the first things an Argentine emigre did after her son was born in Florida last year was get him a U.S. passport.

She saw the passport as tangible evidence that he's an American. But now people like her are in a legal fight over President Donald Trump's executive order that would deny U.S. citizenship to children born in the United States to people who are in the country illegally or temporarily.

"It's funny because I actually booked him for his passport application appointment even before he was born," the 28-year-old woman said, as her now 7-month-old son napped nearby. She spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity, insisted upon by her lawyers, out of fear of possible retribution by the Republican administration if she were publicly identified.

"I would say that I am definitely relieved that at least he is protected," she said.

The Supreme Court is hearing arguments on Wednesday over whether Trump's order, signed on Jan. 20, 2025, his first day back in office, comports with the post-Civil War 14th Amendment and an 86-year-old federal law that has been widely understood to make citizens of everyone born in the country, with narrow exceptions for the children of foreign diplomats and invading armies. Every court to have considered the issue has found the order to be illegal and prevented it from taking effect.

The call to repeal birthright citizenship is part of the Trump administration's broader crackdown on immigrants that has included stepped-up deportations, drastic reductions in the number of refugees allowed into the U.S., suspension of asylum at the border and stripping temporary legal protections from people fleeing political and economic instability.

The case presents another test for a high court that has allowed some anti-immigration efforts to continue, even after lower courts had blocked them. The case before the court comes from New Hampshire, where U.S. District Judge Joseph N. LaPlante ruled that the order "likely violates" both the Constitution and federal law.

Constitution vs. executive order

The first sentence of the 14th Amendment, the Citizenship Clause, makes citizens of "all persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof." The case turns on the meaning of the final phrase about jurisdiction, which also was used in citizenship laws enacted in 1940 and 1952.

Trump's view, asserted in the order titled "Protecting the Meaning and Value of American Citizenship" and backed by some conservative legal scholars, is that people here illegally or temporarily are not "subject to the jurisdiction" of the United States and therefore their U.S.-born children are not entitled to citizenship.

The court should use the case to set straight "long-enduring misconceptions about the Constitution's meaning," Solicitor General D. John Sauer wrote.

In that regard, Sauer likened the case to the seminal 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, which outlawed segregation in public schools, and the landmark 2008 *Heller* case, which declared that people have a constitutional right to keep guns for self-defense.

Last year, Justice Sonia Sotomayor called the Trump administration's effort to defend the order "an impossible task in light of the Constitution's text, history, this Court's precedents, federal law, and Executive Branch practice."

Sotomayor was joined by the other two liberal justices in a dissent from a decision by the court's six conservative justices that used an earlier round of the birthright citizenship dispute to limit the use of nationwide injunctions by federal judges.

Challenging Trump

The pregnant mothers and their advocates challenging the order, as well as lower-court judges who have blocked it, have said the Trump administration's arguments lack merit.

"We have the president of the United States trying to radically reinterpret the definition of American citizenship," said Cecillia Wang, the American Civil Liberties Union legal director who will face off against

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Sauer on Wednesday.

More than one-quarter of a million babies born in the U.S. each year would be affected by the executive order, according to research by the Migration Policy Institute and Pennsylvania State University's Population Research Institute.

While Trump has largely focused on illegal immigration in his rhetoric and actions, the birthright restrictions also would apply to people who are legally in the United States, including students and applicants for green cards, or permanent resident status.

'The most beautiful thing'

The woman from Argentina said she came to the U.S. in 2016 on a visa to attend college and has since applied for a green card.

She described a moment of panic following the court's June ruling, when it was at least possible that the restrictions could take effect, particularly in states such as Florida that had not challenged Trump's order. Lower-court rulings over the summer ensured the order remained on hold and set up the current Supreme Court case.

On top of the predictable worries of a first-time mother, she said, "I never thought that, you know, so close to the end of my pregnancy that I would have to be even thinking about ... the executive order and how it would have impacted my baby."

She has not reconsidered her decision to come to the United States or her desire to stay, she said, as her son stirred.

"And so nothing that happens, politically or otherwise, would have changed my views of the country, I mean, because it gave me the most beautiful thing I have today, which is my family," she said.

Apollo's impatient old-timers are rooting for NASA's return to the moon with Artemis II launch

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — The people who toiled night and day to put astronauts on the moon during Apollo are thrilled that NASA is finally going back. They just wish these Artemis moonshots had happened sooner while more of Apollo's workforce was still alive.

Now in their 80s and 90s, the dwindling survivors of NASA's greatest generation would also like to see more enthusiasm for Artemis.

So few of them are left from the original 400,000 that no reunion is planned to celebrate the upcoming Artemis II flight around the moon by four astronauts as soon as April 1. Those living near Florida's Kennedy Space Center will watch the launch from their backyards.

"Because it was the first time, there was an energy. There was a passion that probably is not exactly the same today and hasn't been for a while," said Charlie Mars, 90, who worked on Apollo's command and lunar modules and helped establish the American Space Museum in nearby Titusville.

Retired engineer JoAnn Morgan is still fuming that the last three Apollo moon landings were canceled under President Richard Nixon's watch because of budget cuts, risk concerns and shifting priorities. She was the lone woman inside launch control when Apollo 11's Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins rocketed to the moon in 1969. Three years later, Apollo 17 closed out the grand era.

"I'm just trying to stay alive so I can see us actually get back and step foot on the moon," she said. "I'm 85 and still feeling cheated after 53 years."

Morgan isn't the only one frustrated with NASA's — and the nation's — dawdling.

"It's a good thing I'm not in charge," Mars said, "because I would be out there beating the bushes and whipping up on people to get moving."

One big difference this time are all the women in key roles.

NASA's Artemis launch director is Charlie Blackwell-Thompson. The Artemis II crew includes Christina Koch, who holds the record for the longest single spaceflight by a woman — 328 consecutive days in orbit.

"It will be even greater when they actually have a woman who plants her boots on the moon," Morgan

said.

Apollo 16's Charlie Duke points out that half the world's population was not yet born when he walked on the moon in 1972.

NASA's new administrator Jared Isaacman, a tech billionaire who paid his own way to space twice, is one of them.

Apollo's old-timers are heartened that the 43-year-old Isaacman is accelerating the pace of Artemis launches to more closely match Apollo's speed and safety record. Artemis has been trudging along at a once-every-three-years flight rate, which Isaacman deems unacceptable.

He's added a test flight in orbit around Earth to practice docking with lunar landers before they're used to put astronauts on the moon. And last week, he released a blueprint for a moon base that, along with a battalion of lunar drones and rovers, is expected to cost \$20 billion over the next seven years.

NASA's self-described "moon base guy," Carlos Garcia-Galan, promises "cool cameras" on everything to ramp up excitement.

In the near term, the overriding goal is to beat the Chinese to the lunar surface. NASA aims to land astronauts in 2028, China by 2030.

The U.S. trounced the Soviet space program in the first race to the moon, landing 12 astronauts from 1969 through 1972.

John Tribe, 90, who managed spacecraft propulsion for Apollo, considers NASA's revised Artemis plan "a whole lot more sensible."

"The other approach was ridiculous," Tribe said. "Whether we're going to beat the Chinese back, I don't know."

Apollo 9's Rusty Schweickart also likes the refashioned Artemis. As for topping Apollo's excitement, though, good luck.

"We can all recall Columbus," Schweickart said in an email, but who can remember "who came along 50 years afterward?"

One of only four moonwalkers still alive, Duke anticipates the thrill of Apollo will return once Artemis astronauts start landing, especially for the younger crowd that missed out before.

"If the first ones are successful and we start landing at the south pole," Duke said, "I think millions are going to be watching that. I know I will if I'm still here."

Gunmen kill more than 70 in South Sudan after a dispute at a gold mine

JUBA, South Sudan (AP) — Gunmen killed more than 70 people in South Sudan over a gold mining row on the outskirts of the capital over the weekend, police said Monday.

A video of dozens of bodies lying on the ground was shared online, and a local journalist said many other victims are believed to have fled to the bushes.

The gold mining site at Jebel Iraq in Central Equatoria State has in the past been the site of violent clashes involving illegal miners. Gold mining in South Sudan is largely unregulated, with state governments operating their own sectors independently of national authorities.

Police spokesperson Kwacijwok Dominic Amondoc said he would share more information about the attack once he gets more details. "All I know is that unknown gunmen attacked Jebel Iraq at a gold mine. There are more than 70 dead and many more injured," he said.

The Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army – In Opposition, or SPLM/A-IO, condemned the attack on Monday and blamed government forces, known as the SSPDF.

"Jebel Iraq lies within a zone that is entirely under the exclusive control of the SSPDF. Consequently, full responsibility for the massacre rests with the SSPDF forces that control the area," a statement from the opposition said.

The army spokesperson told The Associated Press he couldn't comment on the incident.

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A local civil rights group, the Nile Institute for the Study of Human Rights and Transitional Justice, condemned the attack and called for "effective governance and oversight in resource-rich areas."

"This horrific act represents a grave violation of the fundamental right to life and highlights the continued vulnerability of civilians in areas affected by a weak security presence and unregulated resource exploitation," the group wrote in a statement.

Human rights activist Edmund Yakani urged the authorities to address the emerging trend of communities competing for natural resources.

"My appeal is to the government to intervene and stop this culture of illegal gold mining across the country," he said.

The Final Four is set as UConn stuns Duke to join Illinois, Arizona and Michigan

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

All that talent at Arizona and Michigan. All that momentum and good vibes at UConn. And somebody has to play the part of the unheralded "little guy." At the Final Four next weekend, that role belongs, improbably, to Illinois.

In a sign of the times, the Illini — a Big Ten team with more wins in the conference over the last seven seasons than any other program — will pass for something resembling Cinderella when college basketball's biggest party kicks off in Indianapolis on Saturday.

The first challenge for coach Brad Underwood's team will be stopping a hard-charging UConn juggernaut that came from 19 points down and got a game-winner from the logo with 0.4 seconds left from an Indy native — Braylon Mullins — to make its third Final Four in the last four years.

The last two times the Huskies reached this point, they won the championship.

"It's a UConn culture, a UConn heart," coach Dan Hurley said. "We believe we're supposed to win this time of year."

All these teams do.

Arizona, led by Brayden Burries, and Michigan, with Yaxel Lendeborg, have up to nine NBA prospects between them.

The Wildcats opened as slight favorites — at plus-165 to win the championship, according to BetMGM Sportsbook. That was a shade ahead of the Wolverines, who are plus-180 after their 95-62 romp over Tennessee on Sunday.

But, in one of a few strange twists on the odds chart, the Wildcats are 1 1/2-point underdogs to Michigan in Saturday night's marquee semifinal, a matchup of No. 1 seeds.

Illinois is a 1 1/2-point favorite over UConn and, in reality, it's the Huskies, at plus-550, who are the biggest long shot in Indy.

Even so, the fact that Illinois — the flagship university in the nation's sixth most populous state and a school with an enrollment of nearly 60,000 — feels most like this year's out-of-nowhere underdog speaks more about the current state of college hoops than the Illini themselves.

They are a No. 3 seed — the highest number at the Final Four in two years. (UConn is a 2. Last season, all four No. 1s made it.)

This year's meeting of 1 vs. 1 — Michigan vs. Arizona — is a heavyweight matchup of power teams from power conferences meeting with everything at stake.

It's a far cry from a mere three years ago, when mid-majors Florida Atlantic (coached by Dusty May, who now leads the Wolverines) and San Diego State crashed college basketball's biggest party.

Since then, NIL and the transfer portal have reshaped the contours of player movement, another spasm of realignment has made the big conferences bigger (Arizona, now in the Big 12, was in the Pac-12 in 2023), and the high-achieving underdogs who used to make March Madness what it is have gone into a slump.

Double-digit seeds won a total of five games in this tournament (not counting the play-in round). Two

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years ago, they won 11 and sent one team (N.C. State) to the Final Four.

Not surprisingly, Underwood — the coach who landed on the Illinois radar a decade ago by coaching double-digit seed Stephen F. Austin to a pair of upset wins in the tournament — views his program's trip to the Final Four more as destiny than a once-in-a-lifetime story.

It is, however, the first trip for Illinois since 2005, when it lost to North Carolina in the title game.

"I don't want to sound arrogant," said Underwood, whose teams have won 96 Big Ten games since 2019-20, two more than Purdue. "I've never doubted us getting to a Final Four would happen. I have thought we have had other teams capable. But I also know how doggone hard it is to do it."

The Big Ten knows all about this. Both Illinois and Michigan have a chance to deliver a title for the conference for the first time since Michigan State won it all in 2000.

Illinois vs. UConn

The Illini, led by the so-called "Balkan Bloc" — a cohort of players with roots in Eastern Europe — have a potential NBA lottery pick of their own in guard Keaton Wagler.

Even so, the best-known name on the Illini roster might be Andrej Stojakovic, whose father, Peja, was a three-time NBA All-Star. Illinois is the third school in three years for the younger Stojakovic, who spent one season at Stanford and another at Cal before joining Underwood's crew.

The task for Illinois: Figuring out who to key on across a roster that has five players who average double figures, led by Tarris Reed Jr.

Michigan vs. Arizona

The Wildcats-Wolverines game is a high-powered matchup of programs that have shown there's more than one way to amass talent in the era of the unlimited transfer portal and big-money name, image and likeness deals.

Four of the five starters for Tommy Lloyd's Wildcats began their careers in Tucson; the fifth, Big 12 player of the year Jaden Bradley, moved over from Alabama and has been with the Wildcats for three years.

Meanwhile, the top four players in minutes played at Michigan — Lendeborg, Morez Johnson Jr., Aday Mara and Elliot Cadeau — all arrived from the transfer portal.

In a twist that makes perfect sense these days, both coaches parlayed roots in the mid-majors to a spot on the sport's biggest stage. Lloyd spent decades as a top assistant for Mark Few at Gonzaga before heading to Arizona to rebuild the program after the ouster of Sean Miller in 2021.

May led FAU to the Final Four before heading to the Michigan program that had thrived, then collapsed, under former Fab Five star Juwan Howard.

Iran's Kharg Island is key to its oil exports. Targeting it carries major risks

By SAM METZ Associated Press

Iran's Kharg Island, home to a terminal through which the country exports most of its oil, has emerged as a focus of the month-old war launched by the United States and Israel.

Strikes on oil infrastructure on Kharg — or a ground invasion — would severely curb Iran's oil exports, a key source of revenue for the Islamic Republic. It would also mark a major escalation that could provoke even heavier retaliatory attacks on Gulf Arab infrastructure and further drive up oil prices. The skyrocketing cost of fuel is already threatening the world economy.

A U.S. occupation of the island would put American troops in a stationary position just 33 kilometers (21 miles) off Iran's coast, well within range of its arsenal of drones and missiles.

Other islands near the vital Strait of Hormuz could also be targeted. Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunb islands are held by Iran but long claimed by the United Arab Emirates, a close U.S. ally. Qeshm Island is home to a desalination plant.

Here's a look at the islands and their importance in the war.

Kharg Island

The small coral island houses the terminal through which nearly all of Iran's oil exports pass. Iran has

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continued to export oil, mainly to China, through the Strait of Hormuz even as its attacks have closed the vital waterway to most traffic.

The destruction or loss of the island would deny the government a major revenue source, but it would also remove even more oil from world markets at a time of soaring prices. The destruction of the terminal would severely damage Iran's economy and would also undermine any future government that might emerge.

U.S. President Donald Trump said strikes in mid-March "obliterated" Kharg's military assets but did not target the island's oil infrastructure. He warned that if Iran continued disrupting traffic through the Strait of Hormuz he would reconsider the decision to spare energy targets on the island.

Iran has continued to exert control over the strait, through which a fifth of the world's traded oil passed before the war. The U.S. has meanwhile sent thousands of soldiers and Marines to the region.

Kharg Island has storage tanks and housing for thousands of workers. Gazelles roam freely near the refineries and depots. It also is home to a medieval Portuguese fortress and the ruins of one of the oldest Christian monasteries in the Persian Gulf.

Abu Musa and Greater and Lesser Tunb

The three tiny Persian Gulf islands guarding the approach to the Strait of Hormuz have long been a source of tensions between Iran and the United Arab Emirates.

Iranian forces seized the islands in November 1971, days after the United Kingdom withdrew from the Gulf and just before the formation of the UAE. Iran maintains military assets and garrisons on the islands, and has staged military drills there.

Iran says the islands have been part of Persian states from antiquity up until they were occupied by the British in the early 20th century. The UAE claims all three islands.

Qeshm Island

The largest island in the Persian Gulf sits near the Strait of Hormuz and is home to about 150,000 people. Iran said the U.S. struck a desalination plant on the island on March 8 — a claim not acknowledged by Washington. The desalination plant supplied water to about 30 villages.

Rescue teams search for 27 missing after a passenger boat sinks in eastern Indonesia

PALU, Indonesia (AP) — Rescue teams raced Monday to find 27 people missing after a passenger boat sank in rough seas on its way to a remote village in eastern Indonesia.

The boat, the Nazila 05, was carrying 27 passengers and crew members when it departed Taliabu Island in North Maluku province just after dusk on Sunday. It was bound for Kema, a coastal village in the same province, said Muhammad Rizal, who heads the search and rescue office in Central Sulawesi's Palu city, near where the boat sank.

He said the incident was first reported to authorities on Monday morning by the ship's owner, Rifani Samatia, after the Nazila 05's captain contacted him to report that the vessel's bow had broken after it was hit by high waves during rough weather. About 30 minutes later, the captain reported that the vessel had sunk.

"All 27 people aboard managed to evacuate using a longboat before the ship went down," Rizal said, "However, their current location remains unknown."

A search-and-rescue team was dispatched using a rescue vessel, supported by navigational equipment and communication tools, a helicopter and assisted by local fishers, Rizal said.

He said the Nazila 05 was frequently used to transport tourists and was also known locally as a fishing or small passenger vessel.

Indonesia is an archipelago with more than 17,000 islands, where boats are a common form of transportation. With lax safety standards and problems with overcrowding, accidents occur frequently.

Ukrainians chide German defense boss for jibes about 'Lego' drones made by 'housewives'

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Senior officials in Kyiv are taking a swipe at the head of German defense giant Rheinmetall, whose unflattering comments about Ukrainian drone technology and the role of women in the war against Russia ignited a social media backlash.

Rheinmetall AG's Chairman and CEO Armin Papperger likened Ukraine's development of cutting-edge drone expertise as like playing "with Lego" and said the drones are being built by "Ukrainian housewives."

"They have 3D printers in the kitchen, and they produce parts for drones," Papperger said in comments to The Atlantic magazine published Friday. "This is not innovation."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who is offering his country's advanced drone technology to Gulf countries amid the Iran war, on Monday described Papperger's remarks as "strange."

"If every Ukrainian housewife can really produce drones, then every Ukrainian housewife could also be the CEO of Rheinmetall," he told reporters via voicemail on WhatsApp. "I congratulate our defense-industrial complex on being at such a high level."

Ukraine has quickly grown into one of the world's leading producers of cutting-edge, battle-tested drone interceptors that are cheap and effective.

Rheinmetall, one of Europe's biggest arms manufacturers with almost 10 billion euros (\$11.5 billion) in sales last year, supplies ammunition, air defense and combat vehicles to Ukraine.

After Papperger's comments appeared, Ukrainians took to social media to berate him under the hashtag #MadeByHousewives.

Ukraine's Prime Minister Yulia Svyrydenko praised the role of Ukrainian women in the effort to thwart Russia's all-out invasion of February 2022.

"Ukrainian women are indeed an essential part of Ukraine's war effort and of Europe's security," she posted on X late Sunday. "They have stepped with courage into many areas once seen as male-dominated, bringing energy, discipline, and determination."

"And they are doing this while raising our next generation and caring for their families under wartime pressures," she added.

Zelenskyy adviser Alexander Kamyshin said he regularly visits military manufacturing plants and sees men and women working side by side.

"They are great housewives, yet they have to work hard in the military factories," he said on X, adding: "They deserve respect."

Rheinmetall responded Sunday on X, saying that the company has "the utmost respect" for Ukrainian people fighting Russia.

"Every single woman and man in (Ukraine) is making an immeasurable contribution," it said. "The innovative strength and the fighting spirit of the Ukrainian people are an inspiration to us."

Could a Democrat really replace Marjorie Taylor Greene? This retired Army general is trying

By CHARLOTTE KRAMON Associated Press/Report for America

ROME, Ga. (AP) — During almost three decades of living in Georgia's conservative northwest corner, Kimberly Seals got used to keeping her liberal opinions to herself. She suspected there were others who felt the same way, but she had no way to know for sure.

So on a recent Saturday afternoon, she gazed in amazement at the crowd of hundreds who gathered in the town of Rome to hear Pete Buttigieg stump for long-shot Democratic congressional candidate Shawn Harris.

"There's a lot more people that think like us than we anticipated," Seals said alongside her husband.

Harris, a farmer and retired Army general, is running to replace conservative firebrand Marjorie Taylor

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Greene, who resigned in January after a falling-out with President Donald Trump. He's up against Republican candidate Clay Fuller, a district attorney, and faces slim chances in a runoff on April 7.

But as early voting begins on Monday, some Democrats are still feeling hopeful after their party performed better than expected in recent special elections leading up to the November midterms, which will determine control of Congress.

"I believe that there is no such thing as a permanently red district or state or town," said Buttigieg, who served as President Joe Biden's transportation secretary. A former mayor of South Bend, Indiana, he previously ran for the White House and might try again.

Speaking to reporters after his speech, Buttigieg insisted "things really are shifting in this country."

Harris is testing the limits of that theory with his second campaign for Georgia's 14th District, banking that nationwide Democratic enthusiasm and simmering discontent with Trump could help him defy political gravity.

Walking the streets

Sporting blue jeans and well-worn orange sneakers last week, Harris zig-zagged down a residential street in south Rome, chatting with voters who recognized him immediately.

Phoebe Johnson, 69, said it was the third time she saw Harris knocking on doors. He is "actually talking about the things that really matters," she said, such as rising grocery prices and the cost of the Republican president's tariffs.

Unlike in 2024, when he lost to Greene, Harris said more people know him — as Shawn, rather than as Gen. Harris. He served in the military for 40 years, including time as an infantry commander in Afghanistan, before retiring as a brigadier general in the Army National Guard. He lives on his cattle farm in Rockmart.

"I went right back to work with my hands and built a cattle farm that I live on every day," Harris said. "That says to the hardworking people here in northwest Georgia that Shawn Harris works hard just like them out in the hot sun and I get the results."

He said a group of Republican veterans helping him put up fences on his farm were among the first people who pushed him to run for office, before they knew he was a Democrat.

Harris said his background as a farmer and veteran resonate with working-class voters.

Odell Battle, 76, said Harris "stands for the kind of lifestyle that I like and enjoy."

"This man is here to serve the community," Battle said after Harris gave him his cellphone number. "It's not just to get into Washington and forget about us."

Republicans doubt Harris' chances

Harris finished first on the ballot in the March 10 election. But while he was the best-known Democrat, Republicans split their vote among several candidates. Consultants from both parties caution against extrapolating too much from special elections with limited turnout.

"It's just too solid a red district," said conservative commentator and former state Rep. Buzz Brockway. "But it might be closer than it should."

Jay Morgan, former executive director of the Georgia Republican Party, said, if anything, the district could become even redder, and he described Fuller as "central casting."

"You have a guy who's a stand-up law enforcement guy who is an extremely attractive candidate," he said. "To have somebody like that follow Marjorie Taylor Greene is just a huge boost for the party."

Many Republicans were relieved to see Fuller make it to the runoff over former state Sen. Colton Moore, the brasher, more controversial far-right candidate whose style mirrors Greene's.

"The people of Northwest Georgia stand with President Trump and Clay Fuller," Fuller campaign manager Dabriel Graham said.

Floyd County Democratic Chair Vincent Mendes works as a chiropractor and said many of his Republican patients are considering voting for Harris. He believes Harris has a shot because the district is "tired of being a talking point."

"We're ready for real representation," Mendes said. "We had somebody who was mostly interested in chasing headlines for years."

Georgia Democratic Party Chair Charlie Bailey hopes that excitement will lift candidates across the state

in the midterms, especially as Republicans attempt to oust Sen. Jon Ossoff.

"This race is critical for Georgia's 14th District, but it's even bigger than that," Bailey said. "Shawn is building momentum right now that will keep growing all the way through November, boosting Democrats at every level of the ticket in North Georgia and beyond."

Trump says he has 'no problem' with Russian oil tanker bringing relief to Cuba despite blockade

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

ABOARD AIRFORCE ONE (AP) — President Donald Trump on Sunday night said he has "no problem" with a Russian oil tanker off the coast of Cuba delivering relief to the island, which has been brought to its knees by a U.S. oil blockade.

"We have a tanker out there. We don't mind having somebody get a boatload because they need ... they have to survive," Trump told reporters as he flew back to Washington.

When asked if a New York Times report that the tanker would be allowed to reach Cuba was true, Trump said: "I told them, if a country wants to send some oil into Cuba right now, I have no problem whether it's Russia or not."

On Monday, Russia's Transport Ministry said the oil tanker Anatoly Kolodkin arrived at the Cuban port of Matanzas carrying "humanitarian supplies" of about 730,000 barrels of oil.

The vessel is sanctioned by the United States, the European Union and the United Kingdom following the war in Ukraine.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Monday that Russia had previously discussed its oil shipment to Cuba with the United States. "Russia considers it its duty not to stand aside, but to provide the necessary assistance to our Cuban friends," he told reporters.

Trump, whose government has come at its Caribbean adversary more aggressively than any U.S. government in recent history, has effectively cut Cuba off from key oil shipments in an effort to force regime change. The blockade has had devastating effects on the civilians Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio say they want to help, leaving many desperate.

Islandwide blackouts have roiled Cubans already grappling with years of crisis, and a lack of gasoline and basic resources has crippled hospital and slashed public transport.

Experts say the anticipated shipment could produce about 180,000 barrels of diesel, enough to feed Cuba's daily demand for nine or 10 days.

Cuba has long been at the heart of geopolitical tug-of-war between the U.S. and Russia, dating back decades. Trump on Sunday dismissed the idea that allowing the boat to reach Cuba would help Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"It doesn't help him. He loses one boatload of oil, that's all it is. If he wants to do that, and if other countries want to do it, it doesn't bother me much," Trump said. "It's not going to have an impact. Cuba's finished. They have a bad regime. They have very bad and corrupt leadership and whether or not they get a boat of oil, it's not going to matter."

He added: "I'd prefer letting it in, whether it's Russia or anybody else because the people need heat and cooling and all of the other things."

Australian police kill a suspect 7 months after he allegedly shot 3 officers, killing 2

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia. (AP) — Australian police said they shot dead a man following a three-hour standoff on Monday, seven months after he was suspected of killing two police officers and seriously wounding a third in a remote forest region.

There had been no confirmed sightings of Dezi Freeman, 56, since he allegedly opened fire on police of-

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ficers who came to serve a warrant at his home near Porepunkah in Victoria state northeast of Melbourne on Aug. 26 last year, Victoria's Chief Commissioner of Police Mike Bush said on Monday.

A man believed to be Freeman was fatally shot by police on Monday at a remote location near Thologolong, around two hours' drive north of Porepunkah, a police statement said.

"We believe it is Freeman, but we have to go through a formal identification process," Bush told reporters in Melbourne. Identification could take up to 48 hours through processes including fingerprinting.

Heavily armed Special Operations Group tactical police were involved in a standoff for three hours before the suspect was shot. He had been inside a shelter like a shipping container and did take up a police offer to surrender, Bush said.

"This was all about bringing this to a conclusion as safely as possible. Our ultimate goal was to arrest the person there ... as peacefully as possible," Bush said.

Bush said he "strongly believed" the suspect was armed but could not say whether the suspect fired at police.

Freeman espoused so-called sovereign citizen beliefs that question the legitimacy of government and had grievances with police. He had wilderness survival skills that police feared could sustain him living in the open indefinitely.

The disabled pensioner changed his family name from Filby as part of his beliefs. He attracted media attention in 2019 when he unsuccessfully attempted to arrest a magistrate and in 2021 when a court rejected his bid to prosecute the then state premier for treason.

The shooting of three police officers led to a massive search across Victoria's heavily forested alpine region. In recent months, police said they suspected Freedman had killed himself.

"We have to follow every avenue of inquiry and there was a lot to suggest that Freeman had taken his own life," Bush said.

Bush would not say whether a tipoff led police to the suspect on Monday. Police had offered a 1 million Australian dollar (\$678,000) reward for information.

Police said they continue to investigate whether others had helped the suspect avoid arrest.

Today in History: March 31, LBJ announces he won't run for reelection

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Tuesday, March 31, the 90th day of 2026. There are 275 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On March 31, 1968, at the conclusion of a nationally broadcast address on Vietnam, Democratic President Lyndon B. Johnson stunned listeners by declaring, "I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your president."

Also on this date:

In 1492, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain issued the Alhambra Decree, an edict expelling Jews from Spanish soil, except those willing to convert to Christianity.

In 1854, Japan and the United States signed the Treaty of Kanagawa, which opened two Japanese ports to American vessels and marked the beginning of Japan's transition away from isolationism.

In 1889, the Eiffel Tower in Paris opened for dignitaries; at 1,024 feet (312 meters), it was the world's tallest building (the tower would open to the public the following May).

In 1918, the United States first observed daylight saving time, moving clocks ahead one hour.

In 1931, Notre Dame college football coach Knute Rockne, 43, was killed in the crash of a TWA plane near Bazaar, Kansas.

In 1993, actor Brandon Lee, 28, was accidentally shot to death during the filming of a movie in Wilmington, North Carolina, when he was hit by a bullet fragment that had become lodged inside a prop gun.

In 1995, Tejano music star Selena, 23, died after being shot by Yolanda Saldívar, the president of Selena's fan club, who was found to have been embezzling money from the singer. (Saldívar was later convicted

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of first-degree murder and sentenced to life in prison.)

In 2004, four U.S. civilian contractors were killed by Iraqi insurgents in Fallujah, Iraq; frenzied crowds then dragged the burned, mutilated bodies and hanged two of them from a bridge.

In 2005, Terri Schiavo, 41, died at a hospice in Pinellas Park, Florida, 13 days after her feeding tube was removed in a wrenching court battle that began in 1998.

In 2022, scientists announced they had finished fully sequencing the human genome, the full genetic blueprint for human life.

Today's Birthdays: Actor William Daniels is 99. Actor Shirley Jones is 92. Musician-producer Herb Alpert is 91. Actor Christopher Walken is 83. Sen. Angus King, I-Maine, is 82. Former Vice President Al Gore is 78. Actor Rhea Perlman is 78. Rock musician Angus Young (AC/DC) is 71. Hockey Hall of Famer Pavel Bure is 55. Actor Ewan McGregor is 55. Actor Brian Tyree Henry is 44. Filmmaker Chloé Zhao is 44. Musician-producer Jack Antonoff is 42. Singer-songwriter Dounia is 29. Singer-actor Noah Urrea (NOAH NOAH) is 25.