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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

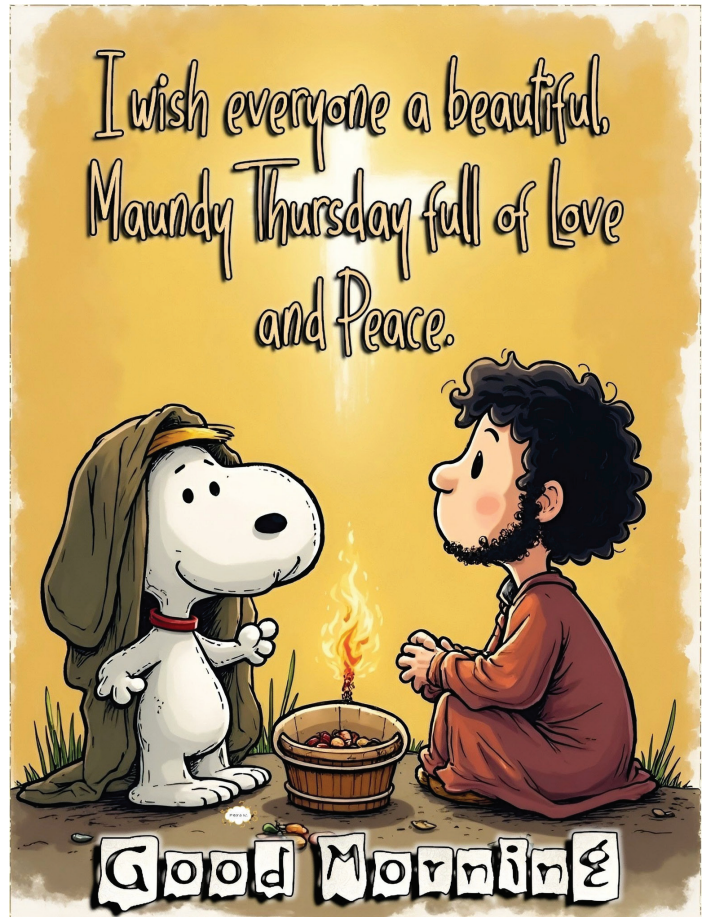
HS Baseball Practice, 6 p.m., GHS Gym

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



Friday, April 3

No Senior Meal.

NO SCHOOL - Easter Break

HS Baseball Practice, 6 p.m., GHS Gym

Emmanuel Lutheran: Good Friday Service, 7 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Good Friday Service, 7 p.m., at St. John's

United Methodist: Good Friday Service: Noon at Britton, 5 p.m. in Conde

Saturday, April 4

Pickleball, 9:30 a.m., Elementary Gym

Airport Fundraiser, 6:30 p.m., Groton Legion

Groton Daily Independent
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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.

Iran War Outlook

President Donald Trump, in an address to the nation last night, said the war in Iran is nearing completion, projecting another two to three weeks of US involvement. He also expressed confidence that key military objectives are close to being met, including dismantling Iran's missile production, destroying its naval capabilities, and curbing its regional proxies.

The operation, which began roughly a month ago following coordinated US and Israeli airstrikes, also aims to prevent Tehran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian sent an open letter to the American people yesterday, urging a reassessment of narratives around the conflict and arguing that Iran holds no hostility toward ordinary US citizens. He also framed Tehran's military actions as defensive and questioned US foreign policy priorities.

Separately, earlier in the day, Trump became the first sitting US president to appear at a Supreme Court hearing after attending oral arguments on his executive order to narrow birthright citizenship.

Multiple Sclerosis Breakthrough

Neuroscientists have discovered a new mechanism contributing to multiple sclerosis, according to research published yesterday, opening an additional path to treating the chronic neurodegenerative disease.

MS is a condition in which the immune system attacks the protective coating (known as myelin) around individual nerve cells, disrupting central nervous system functions throughout the body. While researchers have long focused on protecting the myelin sheaths, a second process also occurs: Neurons in the brain's cortex, the outermost layer of gray matter that controls higher-level cognition, also die. The new research reveals that chemical reactions caused by inflammation significantly damage the DNA of gray matter neurons, leading to cell death. The results suggest focusing solely on myelin is insufficient to treat the progressive symptoms of the disease.

There is no current cure for MS, and the condition is typically diagnosed by the appearance of white lesions in the brain.

Caste Count Returns

India yesterday launched what is expected to be the world's largest census, covering over 1.4 billion people and marking the nation's first effort to collect detailed caste data since 1931 under British rule. The move could reshape social programs and political representation.

Discrimination based on caste—a hereditary social hierarchy rooted in Hindu scripture—has been banned in India since 1950. Since its first post-independence census in 1951, India has tracked only the lowest caste and marginalized Indigenous groups, not the population at large. The stated intention was to phase out labels long tied to profession, neighborhood, and social life. Critics have said that largely ignoring caste downplays its continued influence. About 70% of surveyed Indian adults say most of their friends are within their caste, and the majority say stopping inter-caste marriages is very important.

The census, anticipated to last one year, will be the first India conducts digitally, with over 3 million government workers uploading data to mobile apps.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Democratic Republic of Congo declares national holiday after soccer team qualifies for first World Cup in 52 years.

Iraq beats Bolivia 2-1 to earn final World Cup spot, marking the nation's first appearance in 40 years.

Megan Thee Stallion hospitalized after exiting "Moulin Rouge!" Broadway show early Tuesday; singer cites exhaustion, plans to return today.

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Tiger Woods to skip next week's Masters, says he is seeking treatment after DUI charge.
Robot umpire makes first MLB game-ending call, giving Baltimore Orioles pitcher Albert Suárez his first major league save in nine years; Orioles beat Texas Rangers 8-3.

Science & Technology

NASA launches four astronauts on 10-day journey around the moon and back, the first crewed flight beyond Earth's orbit since 1972.

Anthropic issues over 8,000 copyright takedowns after accidental leak of Claude Code's internal source code.

Over 100 Baidu robotaxis in China's Wuhan halt, stranding passengers due to system malfunction.

Engineered tobacco plants produce five psychedelics at once, potentially preserving Indigenous traditions and expanding medicinal potential.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close up (S&P 500 +0.7%, Dow +0.5%, Nasdaq +1.2%) for second consecutive day as traders bet on Iran war de-escalation.

Elon Musk's SpaceX confidentially files for initial public offering, with expectations to go public this summer; SpaceX could become first company to enter public markets at over \$1T valuation.

Eli Lilly shares rise after FDA approves its GLP-1 pill roughly three months after Novo Nordisk's pill; Novo's pill is slightly more effective and has dietary restrictions.

Politics & World Affairs

US lifts sanctions on Venezuela's acting President Delcy Rodríguez, a potential signal the Trump administration sees her as Venezuela's legitimate leader.

Republican leaders back Department of Homeland Security funding plan that excludes Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Customs and Border Protection; a vote could come as early as today.

Luigi Mangione's federal trial for killing UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson postponed to October, state trial postponed to September.

Serial killer Ted Bundy linked to 1974 murder of teen girl using DNA evidence.

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Johnson begins new job at Northern Electric

Landon Johnson has joined the crew at Northern Electric on March 16. Johnson has five years of experience as a journeyman lineman at Groton. Prior to that, he worked as a traveling lineman for several years. A Groton local, Johnson loves to hunt, fish, and spend time with his family.

He was hired after Kenny Swanson, Redfield Foreman, retired.

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LIVE WATCH LIVE ON **GDILIVE.COM**

GIRLS FAST PITCH SOFTBALL

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At The Aberdeen Dome

Thursday, April 2

Varsity at 4 p.m., JV to follow

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A mouse at city hall — or so I thought

April 1 rolled around this week — April Fool's Day — but in my one-track mind, I figured I was in the clear. No pranks. No tricks. Just another normal day.

That assumption didn't last long.

As I was heading back to City Hall, I got a call from Kellie telling me I needed to get there immediately — there was a mouse in the building.

I didn't think much of it. Seemed like a simple enough task.

When I walked in, though, it looked like anything but simple.

Doug was up on the counter. April was at her station, trying to keep things together. Kellie was in the corner, pressing down on an upside-down garbage can with everything she had, clearly in full panic mode.

I took one look and said, "Well, you've already got the mouse — I don't need to be here."

But Kellie quickly corrected me: "No, you have to get rid of it."

At that point, I figured I'd better do it right.

I asked for a piece of cardboard. April started searching around until we found something that would work.

I slid the cardboard under the garbage can while Kellie kept it pinned down like her life depended on it.

With everything lined up, I pushed the cardboard tight against the can and flipped it over.

That's when I heard it — a solid kerplunk.

I remember thinking, "That seems a little loud for a mouse."

But I didn't question it.

I pulled the cardboard back just enough to peek inside... and sure enough, there was a mouse.

Just not the kind we were expecting.

It was a computer mouse.

No tail. No teeth. No problem.

Just a perfectly executed April Fool's prank — and apparently, I was the only one who didn't see it coming.

The room erupted in laughter as I stood there, realizing I had just handled a full-scale "mouse emergency" with complete seriousness.

Lesson learned.

Even when you think you're safe on April 1... you're not.



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Students of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church parish put on their annual Living Stations presentation. The event was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by the parish. Here Veronica is meeting Jesus as the guards are taking him to the crucifixion. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Secretary of State announces validation of U.S. House petitions

(Pierre, S.D.) – Secretary of State Monae L. Johnson has announced that Attorney General Marty Jackley will be placed on the ballot as a Republican candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives at the Primary Election held on June 2, 2026.

A Republican candidate for the U.S. House requires 2,171 valid signatures to appear on the ballot. As outlined in SDCL § 12-1-36, the Secretary of State's office conducted a random sample of the petition signatures and found 86.7 percent to be valid. Based on the results of the random sample, 3,168 signatures were deemed valid.

Secretary of State announces validation of 2nd U.S. House petitions

(Pierre, S.D.) – Secretary of State Monae L. Johnson has announced that Nicole "Nikki" Gronli will be placed on the ballot as a Democratic candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives at the Primary Election held on June 2, 2026.

A Democratic candidate for the U.S. House requires 1,232 valid signatures to appear on the ballot. As outlined in SDCL § 12-1-36, the Secretary of State's office conducted a random sample of the petition signatures and found 87.3 percent to be valid. Based on the results of the random sample, 1,844 signatures were deemed valid.

Upon the filing of a candidate petition, any interested person may challenge the Secretary of State's validation of the petition under SDCL § 12-1-13. A person challenging the validation must submit an original, signed affidavit listing out each specific deficiency to the Secretary of State's office no more than five business days after validation. For this candidate petition, the deadline to file a challenge is Wednesday, April 8, 2026, at 5:00 PM (CT).

Application period now open for POET Bioprocessing – Groton Community Impact Grants

GROTON, S.D. (April 1, 2026) – Applications are now open for POET Bioprocessing – Groton’s annual Community Impact Grants.

Each year, POET selects local projects that benefit the community and improve the quality of life for area residents. These one-time grants are available to support local nonprofits, schools, churches, earth-friendly groups, and individuals.

“We’re proud to be part of this community,” said Blake Gomer, General Manager of POET Bioprocessing – Groton. “POET is happy to support the hardworking people who share their time and talents to make this an even better place to live and grow.”

Last year’s grants included:

The Groton Area Fire Protection and Rescue District received a grant to update tools and safety gear and provided continuing education courses for its volunteer firefighters.

Columbia Fire and Rescue received a grant to purchase a standby generator for the fire hall.

The Area IV Senior Citizens Planning Council was awarded a grant to support its program of delivering meals and providing social interaction to senior citizens in the community.

The Fifth Circuit Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program received a grant to purchase training materials, background checks, printed outreach items like postcards, t-shirts, pens, and booth supplies for volunteer advocates.

The grant application period for 2026 runs from now until May 15. For more information, visit poet.com/grants.

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Jeremiah Schneider,
Secretary
South Dakota
Department of
Veterans Affairs

Military Child Month: Honoring the Quiet Strength Behind the Uniform

Each April, we observe the Month of the Military Child — a time to honor the sons and daughters of those who serve. Their strength reminds us that service to our nation extends beyond those in uniform. In South Dakota and across the country, military children exemplify resilience, courage, and patriotism long before they are old enough to wear the uniform themselves. This year, Purple Up! Day will be recognized on April 15.

Military children grow up learning lessons that many adults take a lifetime to master. They adapt during deployments, face frequent moves, navigate new schools, and endure holidays marked by an empty chair at the table. Yet, through these challenges, they continue to thrive with quiet determination and pride. They are vital

members of the military community whose sacrifices often go unseen but are no less profound.

As Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs (SDDVA), I view Military Child Month as more than a recognition—it is an expression of gratitude. These young people serve in their own right. Their contributions may not be measured in medals or ceremonies, but they deserve our deepest respect. Behind many service members and veterans stands a child who learned patience, perseverance, and sacrifice at an early age.

Military children benefit from schools, neighbors, coaches, and communities that recognize their experiences and celebrate their strength. The greatest gift we can offer is acknowledgment. Seeing them, encouraging them, and reminding them that their sacrifices matter. When we honor military children, we honor the full family commitment behind military service and invest in the next generation of leaders and citizens.

This April, I encourage all South Dakotans to recognize the courage and resilience of our military children. Wear purple, extend encouragement, and support military families in your community.

When we honor military children, we honor the quiet strength that sustains our armed forces and veterans. May each of these young people know they are seen, valued, and deeply appreciated.

April also brings other important military observances:

- April 5: Gold Star Spouses Day
- April 9: National Former POW Recognition Day
- April 14: Air Force Reserve Birthday
- April 15: Purple Up! Day
- April 23: Army Reserve Birthday

These dates remind us that service impacts entire families and communities. They also invite us to pause, remember, and recommit to supporting those who carry the weight of service.

April is set to be a busy month for the SDDVA. We warmly invite veterans, their families, and community partners to participate in a series of events designed to foster connection and support.

- Coffee and Camaraderie:

April 7: McIntosh Town Hall, McIntosh, 11:00 a.m. (MT)

April 9: Rosalie's Restaurant Bakery & Lounge, Sisseton, 11:00 a.m. (CT)

April 13: American Legion Post #22, Rapid City, 4:30 p.m. (MT)

• April 11: Women Veterans & Military Spouses Wellness Retreat – Savior's Lutheran Church, Sioux Falls, 9:00 a.m. (CT)

- C/TVSO Spring Mini Conferences:

April 14: Rapid City April 15: Pierre April 16: Sioux Falls

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SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

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Public retirees in South Dakota face potential sixth year of less-than-inflation benefit changes

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

The officials who manage South Dakota's public employee retirement system said Wednesday that if current investment trends continue, retirees are likely to see a July 2027 cost-of-living benefit adjustment similar to the 1.56% increase they will get this July.

If inflation stays above 2% as it has lately, that could mean a sixth straight year of increases less than inflation.

Senior actuary Doug Fiddler noted that inflation jumped from 1.28% in fiscal year 2021 to 5.92% in 2022, then nearly 9% in 2023, and has remained above 2% since.

Most state and local public employees, including teachers and state workers, contribute 6% of their pay to the retirement system with a 6% employer match, although some classes of employees contribute more. There are more than 105,000 members in the system.

"There is no way on 6% contributions we can afford to pay a 9% COLA," Fiddler said, referring to cost-of-living adjustments, "when our return was pretty low that year as well."

He told the retirement system board during a virtual meeting that, given recent headlines affecting the stock market, he does not expect the trend to change.

"We are going to have to balance our benefits with the money we have, the resources we have," Fiddler said. "And those are based on fixed contributions."

With one quarter left to go in the current fiscal year, the retirement system's investments are expected to achieve an annual return of 6% to 6.5%. Fiddler said that's despite "pretty volatile markets."

Fiddler shared a chart showing the retirement system could only have afforded its maximum 3.5% cost-of-living adjustment this year if it achieved returns of about 13.5% or higher.

The board will set the July 2027 cost-of-living increase later this year.

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.

Company that shelved plans for sustainable jet fuel plant in SD will double ethanol production in ND

BY: JEFF BEACH

Gevo, the company that purchased the former Red Trail Energy ethanol plant in Richardton, North Dakota, announced this week it will double production capacity at the site.

Gevo will add a second ethanol production facility capable of producing up to 75 million gallons per year of low-carbon ethanol. Earlier this year, Gevo announced plans to expand production of the existing facility from 67 million gallons per year to 75 million gallons per year.

Paul Bloom, president of Colorado-based Gevo, said North Dakota, being a pro-agriculture and pro-energy state, "is at the top of our list" for expansion opportunities.

"We already have the core elements in place in North Dakota, including proven carbon capture and sequestration infrastructure," Bloom said in a news release.

Red Trail was the first ethanol plant in the country to capture carbon from the fermentation process as it turns corn into ethanol. The carbon is stored underground near the Richardton site in southwest North Dakota.

Gevo bought Red Trail Energy in 2024 in part because of its ability to capture and store carbon and qualify for tax credits and potential for producing sustainable aviation fuel. Gevo has shelved plans for a sustainable jet fuel plant in South Dakota, focusing instead on North Dakota.

In the announcement, Bloom said it was "building the foundation" for sustainable aviation fuel production at the site. Sustainable aviation fuel sells at a higher price than conventional ethanol.

Ethanol is made from corn with animal feed and corn oil as byproducts. One bushel of corn, 56 pounds, will produce 2.9 gallons of ethanol, according to the Renewable Fuels Association. Based on that estimate, that means the expanded plant could use nearly 52 million bushels of corn in a year.

North Dakota produced about 711 million bushels of corn last year, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The Environmental Protection Agency recently announced it will allow gasoline with up to 15% ethanol to be sold this summer. It normally doesn't allow 15% ethanol blends in the summer.

The EPA also calls for an all-time high volume of biofuels to be blended into gasoline and diesel.

Gevo did not provide a cost estimate or a timeline for the project in its announcement.

The expansion would require approval from the North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality.

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

North Dakota Monitor Deputy Editor Jeff Beach is based in the Fargo area. His interests include agriculture, renewable energy and rural issues.

Democrats sue to block Trump's 'unconstitutional' mail ballot order

BY: JONATHAN SHORMAN

Democrats sued over President Donald Trump's executive order clamping down on mail ballots on Wednesday, signaling the start of another fight with the White House over elections.

The order, which would create a national list of voting-age American citizens and directs the U.S. Postal Service to place limits on mail-in ballots, constitutes an extraordinary and illegal attempt by Trump to intervene in the voting process, election experts said.

An array of Democratic groups, including the Democratic National Committee, filed a federal lawsuit against the order in the District of Columbia late Wednesday. U.S. Sen. Chuck Schumer of New York, the minority leader, and House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York are also plaintiffs. They are represented by Marc Elias, a prominent progressive voting rights litigator.

The Democrats allege in a 61-page complaint that Trump has tried "again and again" to rewrite election rules for his own advantage. It accuses the president of acting beyond the scope of his authority and unlawfully intruding on the authority of Congress and the states, as well as violating the authority of the U.S. Postal Service.

"The Executive Order's provisions are convoluted and confusing," the complaint reads. "What is clear is that it dramatically restricts the ability of Americans to vote by mail, impinging on traditional state authority."

Several Democratic election officials have also promised to challenge the order.

"The executive order is unconstitutional and I think it is very likely that it will be struck down," Colorado Democratic Secretary of State Jena Griswold said in an interview. She said her state would join litigation against the order.

Arizona Secretary of State Adrian Fontes said he would meet the federal government in court, while

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Nevada Secretary of State Francisco Aguilar said "we look forward to our day in court challenging this illegal action." Maine Secretary of State Shenna Bellows said her state was "not going to obey in advance" because the states, not Trump, are in charge of elections.

Advocacy groups also promised lawsuits. The Campaign Legal Center said it would challenge the order with its partners, the Democracy Defenders Fund, the League of United Latin American Citizens and other organizations.

White House calls for passage of SAVE America Act

Ahead of the Democrats' lawsuit, White House spokesperson Abigail Jackson said in a statement that election integrity has always been a top priority for Trump. She also called on Congress to pass the SAVE America Act, which would require voters to provide documents proving their citizenship to register to vote.

"The President will do everything in his power to defend the safety and security of American elections and to ensure that only American citizens are voting in them," Jackson said.

In Nebraska, Republican Secretary of State Bob Evnen downplayed the possibility of immediate changes to his state's elections, while praising Trump for prioritizing election integrity. Nebraska will hold a primary on May 12.

"Over the coming months, we will continue to monitor and participate in how the implementation of the executive order might impact the November 3rd general election," Evnen told the Nebraska Examiner.

Tens of millions of Americans vote by mail in federal elections, underscoring the stakes of any major restrictions on voting by mail. About 30% of voters cast mail ballots in 2024, according to data gathered by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission.

Another elections challenge

Opponents of Trump's election-related moves have a good track record in court.

Trump's first order on elections, issued just over a year ago, attempted to require voters to prove their citizenship. While Congress is debating the SAVE America Act, which would implement similar requirements, federal courts found that the president had overstepped his authority when he attempted to impose changes unilaterally.

Nearly 30 states are also fighting U.S. Department of Justice lawsuits seeking to force them to turn over copies of voters containing sensitive personal information on voters. Three federal judges have so far ruled against the Trump administration.

State administration of elections is a fundamental feature of American democracy, spelled out in the U.S. Constitution. States run and regulate elections, but Congress — not the president alone — can override states and set national standards.

At a basic level, critics of Trump's executive order argue it tramples on state authority and bypasses Congress.

"Once again, the President is attempting to act beyond his powers and seize control of our elections. Now he is attempting to weaponize the United States Postal Service against the voters. We will not stand for it," U.S. Rep. Bennie Thompson of Mississippi, the ranking Democrat on the House Homeland Security Committee, said in a statement.

'This will help a lot'

Trump cast the executive order as a necessary step in support of election integrity when he signed it during an Oval Office event on Tuesday. He acknowledged it would likely face legal challenges but called it "foolproof."

Trump, who has long called the 2020 election stolen, falsely asserted that elections have been marked by significant fraud, saying the order was aimed at "stopping the massive cheating that's gone on." In fact, instances of noncitizen voting are extremely rare.

"I think this will help a lot with elections," Trump said.

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The order requires the Department of Homeland Security, with help from the Social Security Administration, to compile a list of voting-age U.S. citizens living in each state and then provide that information to state officials at least 60 days before each federal election. The order does not tell states how to use the data, but it instructs U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi to prioritize investigations into state and local officials who issue federal ballots to ineligible voters.

The list of citizens will be drawn from naturalization and Social Security records, according to the order. It will also include data from SAVE, a powerful computer program maintained by Homeland Security that verifies citizenship by checking names against information in federal databases.

The Trump administration has been encouraging states to run their voter rolls through SAVE to identify potential noncitizens, but some election officials say it wrongly flags Americans as noncitizens. Several voting rights and civic groups have sued over Texas' use of SAVE.

The Justice Department confirmed last week that it will share voter data it obtains with Homeland Security. At the same time, DOJ lawyers have been adamant in court that the Trump administration isn't creating a national voter registration list.

"And yet here is an executive order that very overtly and expressly directs DHS to create that national voter database," David Becker, executive director of the nonpartisan Center for Election Innovation & Research, told reporters on Wednesday.

Postal Service involvement questioned

The order directs Postmaster General David Steiner, who was named to the role by USPS's Board of Governors last year, to require every outbound mail ballot be in an envelope that includes a tracking barcode.

At least 90 days before a federal election, states must notify the U.S. Postal Service whether they intend to allow ballots to be sent through the mail. States would then have to submit to USPS a list of voters planning to vote by mail at least 60 days before the election.

"What the president is doing today is he's going to make sure mail-in ballots are safe, secure and accurate," U.S. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick told reporters on Tuesday.

Trump's effort to enlist USPS in election administration goes against the agency's own policies. When the Postal Service updated its rules last year, it noted that it does not establish rules or deadlines for elections, or determine how the mail is utilized for elections.

USPS spokesperson Cathy Purcell said the agency was reviewing the executive order.

The order is a "structural inversion" of how mail voting works, said Pamela Smith, president and CEO of Verified Voting, an organization that promotes the responsible use of technology in elections. USPS delivers mail and isn't involved in distributing ballots, she said.

"It is not up to the Postal Service to have this gatekeeping role over ballot delivery," Smith said.

Under the order, the Justice Department and other federal agencies would be directed to withhold federal funds from states and localities that don't comply with federal laws. It doesn't specify what federal funds would potentially be targeted or whether states could lose election-related dollars.

States receive minimal federal election security grant funding each year from the Election Assistance Commission. During the 2025 fiscal year, the EAC distributed \$15 million total, which can be used for upgrades to voting systems, cybersecurity, training and other needs.

"Even if it were to come to pass," Smith said, "I don't think it would carry much weight as a stick."

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.

US Supreme Court justices skeptical of Trump attempt to end birthright citizenship

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Supreme Court Wednesday seemed poised to reject the Trump administration's attempt to redefine the constitutional right to birthright citizenship, and instead uphold the country's long understanding of citizenship by birth on American soil.

If a majority of Supreme Court justices strikes down President Donald Trump's executive order to end birthright citizenship for children born to parents without legal status or temporary immigration statuses like visas, it will be the second recent major blow to the president via the high court. Earlier this year, a majority of justices struck down his use of sweeping tariffs.

Trump, who signed the executive order aiming to end birthright citizenship as one of his first acts after his inauguration in 2025, came to the courtroom to hear the oral arguments, a first for a sitting president.

'Quirky' administration argument

A majority of the justices during Wednesday's oral arguments were skeptical of Solicitor General D. John Sauer's arguments that the citizenship clause of the Constitution's 14th Amendment was only intended to grant citizenship to the children of newly freed African American slaves, not immigrants.

Chief Justice John Roberts called one of Sauer's key arguments "quirky," and questioned how it could be applied to an entire class of immigrants without legal status.

Sauer argued that the children born to parents without legal status or temporary visitors are not "subject to the jurisdiction of the United States" and are instead subject to the laws of their home country. He cited carve outs in birthright citizenship, such as the children born to foreign diplomats.

"You expand it to a whole class of illegal aliens," Roberts said. "I'm not quite sure how you can get to that big group from such tiny and sort of idiosyncratic examples."

Along with Roberts, the liberal wing of the court and conservative Justices Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett also did not seem swayed by Sauer's argument.

Gorsuch asked Sauer if, under the Trump administration's interpretation of the 14th Amendment, Native Americans would be considered birthright citizens "under your test."

"Uh, I think so," Sauer said.

Indigenous people were granted U.S. citizenship by Congress in 1924, but were not granted citizenship under the 14th Amendment because those children were born to parents who were citizens of tribal governments.

Sauer also contended the 1898 Supreme Court ruling that upheld citizenship based on birth on American soil, *United States v. Wong Kim Ark*, was wrongly decided.

He argued that the *Wong Kim Ark* case did not take into consideration "sojourn travelers," who are temporary visitors in the U.S. and give birth.

Sauer also said the Trump administration was not looking for the justices to overturn that case.

ACLU arguments

Liberal justice Elena Kagan said that Sauer's argument to the court was an effort to create a "revisionist history" of the *Wong Kim Ark* case.

"Everyone took *Wong Kim Ark* to say that, as a result of that, birthright citizenship was the rule," she said. "And I think everybody has believed that for a long, long time."

American Civil Liberties Union lead attorney Cecilia Wang said during oral arguments that when the federal government tried to strip *Ark* of his citizenship, "largely on the same grounds (the Trump administration) raised today," the Supreme Court rejected those efforts.

"This Court held that the 14th Amendment embodies the English common law rule (that) virtually everyone born on U.S. soil is subject to its jurisdiction and is a citizen," said Wang, who is the daughter of

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Taiwanese immigrants.

Her parents were in the U.S. on student visas when she was born in Oregon, meaning that if Trump's executive order were in effect at that time, she would have been denied U.S. citizenship.

"Ask any American what our citizenship rule is and they'll tell you, everyone born here is a citizen alike," Wang said. "That rule was enshrined in the 14th Amendment to put it out of the reach of any government official to destroy."

Birthright citizenship has been a longstanding core principle in the United States, where nearly any child — regardless of their parents' immigration status — born on U.S. soil is automatically granted citizenship.

The text of the clause is: "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside."

Experts have warned that if the constitutional right to birthright citizenship were struck down, it would effectively create a class of millions of stateless people, leaving them without a country to call home.

If the high court determines that Trump violated the Constitution with his executive order, it would be a major block to the president's goal in defining who is American, as Trump has aimed to reshape the country's racial and ethnic makeup through limits to migration and an aggressive immigration campaign of mass deportations.

A decision from the high court on the case, *Trump v. Barbara*, is likely not going to come until the end of the court term, in late June or early July. If the court decides to uphold the executive order, it would go into effect 30 days after the ruling.

New world, old Constitution

Sauer argued that birthright citizenship should not be applied to children of temporary visitors, such as foreigners who partake in what opponents call "birth tourism."

Roberts asked Sauer how much of an issue birth tourism is — the idea that foreign visitors specifically travel to the U.S. for the purpose of giving birth and obtaining citizenship for their soon-to-be born children.

"No one knows for sure," Sauer said, citing media reports that many Chinese tourists travel to the U.S. and give birth.

However, China does not allow its citizens to have dual citizenship.

Roberts seemed skeptical that birth tourism should be considered in Sauer's legal arguments for the purpose of restricting birthright citizenship. He told Sauer that birth tourism "wasn't an issue in the 19th century."

"We're in a new world now," Sauer said. "Where 8 billion people are one plane ride away from having a child as a U.S. citizen."

But Roberts shot back, "Well, it's a new world, it's the same Constitution."

Other countries

Sauer also argued that the U.S. should fall in line with the citizenship laws of other countries.

"Unrestricted birthright citizenship contradicts the practice of the overwhelming majority of modern nations," he said. "It demeans the priceless and profound gift of American citizenship."

Kavanaugh questioned why the U.S. should worry about the citizenship requirements of other countries.

"Obviously we try to interpret American law with American precedent based on American history," Kavanaugh said. "I'm not seeing the relevance as a legal, constitutional interpretive matter necessarily, although I understand it's a very good point."

Shortly after oral arguments ended, Trump took to his social media site, Truth Social, where he falsely said the U.S. is the only country to have birthright citizenship. Argentina, Brazil, Canada and Mexico are among several countries that have birthright citizenship.

"We are the only Country in the World STUPID enough to allow 'Birthright' Citizenship!" he wrote.

Trump left Wednesday's oral arguments after Sauer was finished presenting his argument to the justices, and about a few minutes into arguments from the ACLU's Wang, according to White House pool reports.

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Oral arguments lasted for about two-and-a-half hours.

Earlier decision

This is the second time the Trump administration has brought a birthright citizenship case before the justices.

Last year, after federal judges in Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Washington state struck down the president's executive order, the Trump administration appealed to the Supreme Court, but asked the justices to consider the lower courts' use of universal injunctions, rather than the merits of birthright citizenship.

The justices took up the case, and in a 6-3 vote divided along ideological lines, the use of universal injunctions was curtailed by the conservative wing of the high court.

After the ruling, immigration advocates and the ACLU filed class action suits, which were successful in blocking the birthright citizenship executive order. The suits argued that future children born in the United States without gaining citizenship constituted a nationwide class.

"If you credit the government's theory, the citizenship of millions of Americans past, present and future could be called into question," Wang said.

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

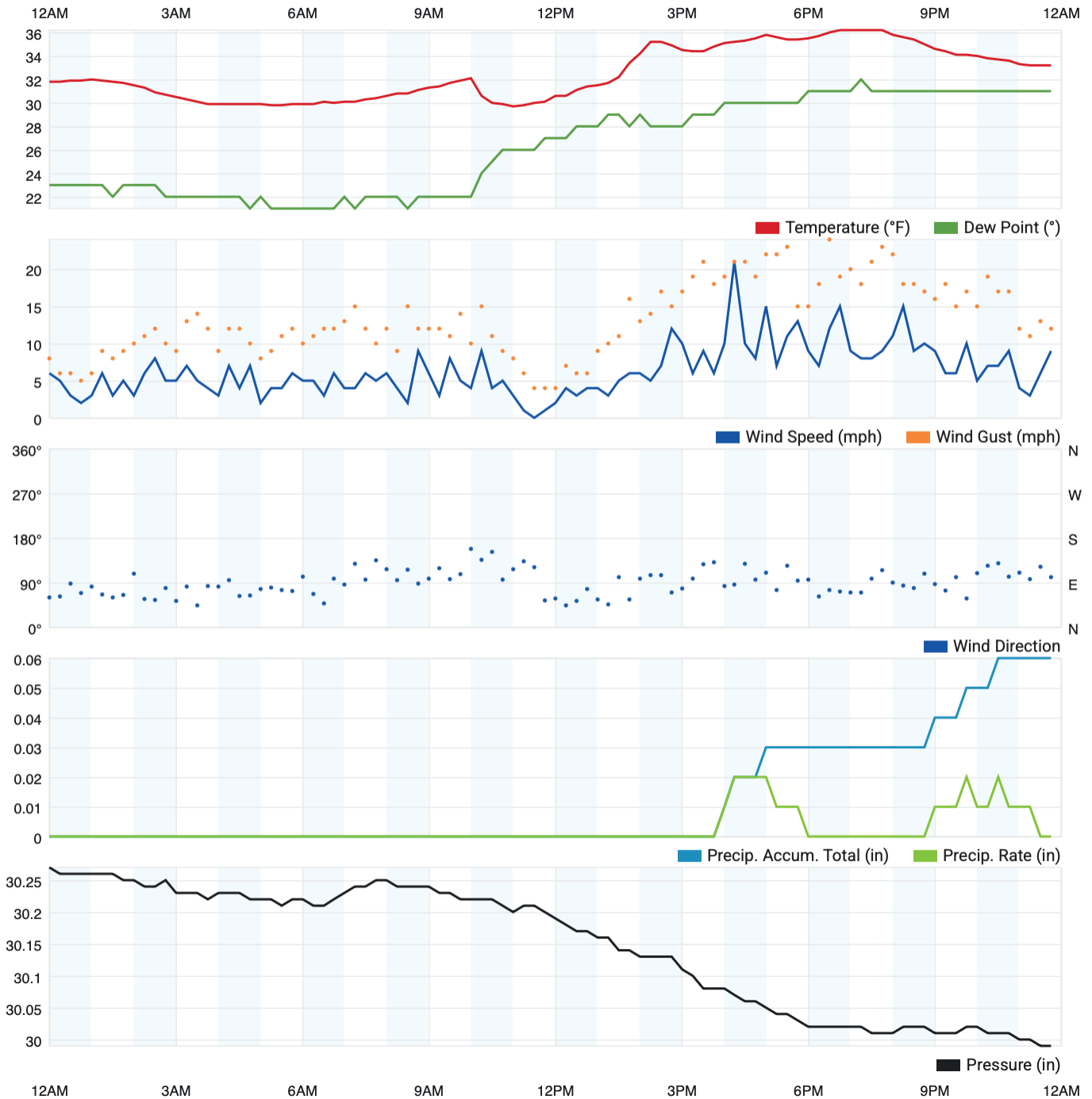
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

April 1, 2026



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Weather Advisory

Thursday



80% → 40%

High: 36 °F

Snow then
Chance Snow

Thursday
Night



40%

Low: 27 °F

Cloudy then
Chance Wintry
Mix

Winter Storm Watch

Friday



90% 100%

High: 32 °F

Wintry Mix
then Snow

Friday Night



100%

Low: 27 °F

Snow

Saturday



60%

High: 35 °F

Snow Likely
and Patchy
Blowing Snow



Two Rounds of Wintry Weather Ahead

April 1, 2026
3:10 PM

Precipitation will mainly be snow with a rain/snow mix possible during the afternoon/evening hours

Key Messages

- First Round of Snow (Today–Thursday): **2 to 5 inches** north of Highway 212 (highest over the Leola Hills and eastern slopes of the Sisseton Hills); **Trace to 2 inches** south of Highway 212.
- **Freezing Rain:** Light freezing rain possible in east-central SD, up to 0.1 inch ice accumulation
- **Precipitation Type: rain vs snow vs freezing rain will be HIGHLY DEPENDENT on temperatures!**
- Winds: East winds gusting 20–30 mph this afternoon. Patchy blowing snow and drifting snow may cause slight visibility reductions (mainly central SD); whiteout conditions unlikely.

What Has Changed

- Winter Storm Watch has been issued for Friday and Saturday.

Next Scheduled Update

- Thursday Morning

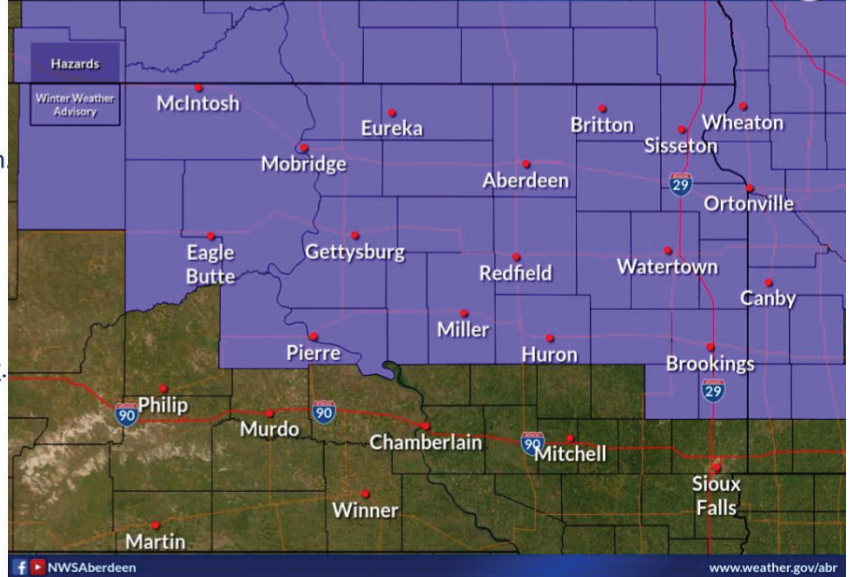
Winter Weather Advisory

Valid through 7 PM CDT Thursday

Weather Forecast Office

Aberdeen, SD

Issued Apr 01, 2026 2:28 PM CDT



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

A Winter Weather Advisory continues for the first round of wintry precipitation through Thursday. Snow with wintry mix/freezing rain will continue through the afternoon into the evening before transitioning back to snow tonight as temperatures cool. This is all highly dependent on how fast the temperatures change. Gusty easterly winds may lead to patchy blowing snow and drifting which would cause slight visibility reductions, but whiteout conditions are unlikely.

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First Round Precipitation Timing & Type

April 1, 2026
3:10 PM

Precipitation will mainly be snow with a rain/snow mix possible during the afternoon/evening hours

Key Messages

- **Precipitation will continue into Thursday morning/afternoon.**
 - As temperatures warm continue to warm this afternoon, the snow will transition to rain/snow mix or freezing rain.
 - Some areas could transition back to snow as temperatures cool tonight while other areas stay a bit warmer.
- **Wintry mix/Freezing rain** possible this afternoon into early Thursday especially for south central and east central SD.
 - East central SD most likely area to see a light glaze to a tenth of an inch of ice from freezing rain.
- There will be a break in precipitation Thursday afternoon into the evening before the second round starts up.

| | 4/1 Wed | | | 4/2 Thu | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|---------|-----|-----|---------|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|--|
| | 3pm | 6pm | 9pm | 12am | 3am | 6am | 9am | 12pm | 3pm | 6pm | 9pm | |
| McIntosh | 65% | 80% | 65% | 65% | 50% | 55% | 60% | 45% | | 45% | 45% | |
| Eureka | 65% | 90% | 95% | 45% | 80% | 80% | 75% | 50% | 25% | | | |
| Mobridge | 70% | 85% | 75% | 45% | 80% | 80% | 65% | 40% | | | | |
| Britton | 40% | 65% | 95% | 60% | 65% | 85% | 85% | 75% | 60% | 35% | 35% | |
| Wheaton | 40% | 75% | 70% | 75% | 80% | 75% | 90% | 80% | 60% | 40% | 40% | |
| Aberdeen | 55% | 90% | 95% | 55% | 80% | 85% | 75% | 60% | 35% | | | |
| Sisseton | 40% | 70% | 90% | 65% | 85% | 85% | 85% | 80% | 60% | 40% | 40% | |
| Eagle Butte | 60% | 60% | 45% | 45% | 70% | 80% | 55% | | | 40% | 40% | |
| Gettysburg | 70% | 90% | 70% | 55% | 90% | 85% | 65% | 30% | | | | |
| Webster | 40% | 75% | 95% | 65% | 90% | 85% | 85% | 70% | 60% | | | |
| Milbank | 45% | 85% | 85% | 75% | 90% | 80% | 90% | 80% | 65% | 30% | 30% | |
| Redfield | 50% | 90% | 95% | 80% | 90% | 90% | 60% | 55% | 25% | | | |
| Clark | 55% | 90% | 95% | 85% | 90% | 85% | 70% | 70% | 45% | | | |
| Watertown | 55% | 90% | 90% | 90% | 90% | 85% | 90% | 70% | 65% | | | |
| Pierre | 60% | 60% | 70% | 60% | 90% | 80% | 40% | | | 30% | 30% | |
| Miller | 65% | 95% | 95% | 75% | 95% | 85% | 40% | 45% | | | | |
| Murdo | 60% | 50% | 75% | 70% | 90% | 75% | 30% | | | 50% | 50% | |
| Chamberlain | 70% | 70% | 85% | 90% | 85% | 85% | 50% | 30% | | 20% | 20% | |

- Rain + - Fz Rain + - Wintry Mix + - Snow +



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD



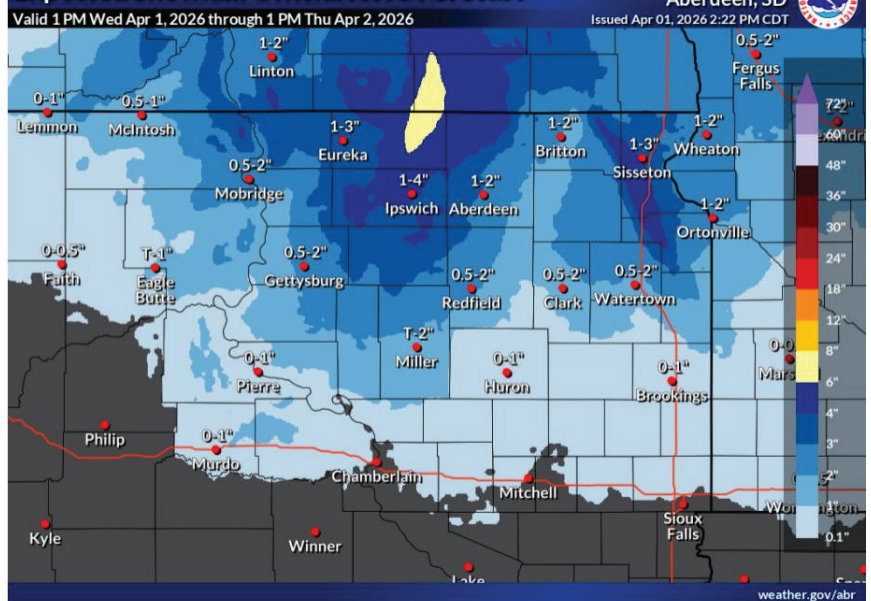
Snowfall Amounts Through Thursday

April 1, 2026
3:10 PM

First round of snowfall continues tonight into Thursday

- **Break in precipitation this afternoon before the snow and wintry mix comes back in later this afternoon into the evening.**
 - ◆ Mixes with rain or a wintry mix into early evening, mainly south of the US Hwy 12/212 corridors, before transitioning back to snow tonight into Thursday.
- **The bulk of the snowfall in this first round will fall in two phases.**
 - ◆ Today into early tonight for Central SD.
 - ◆ Late tonight into Thursday for northeast SD/west central MN.
- **Uncertainty still remains in these amounts.**
 - ◆ Temperatures and precipitation type and transitions times will affect accumulations.
 - ◆ Overcoming dry air in the low/mid layers of the atmosphere will dictate onset time.

Expected Snowfall: Official NWS Forecast



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

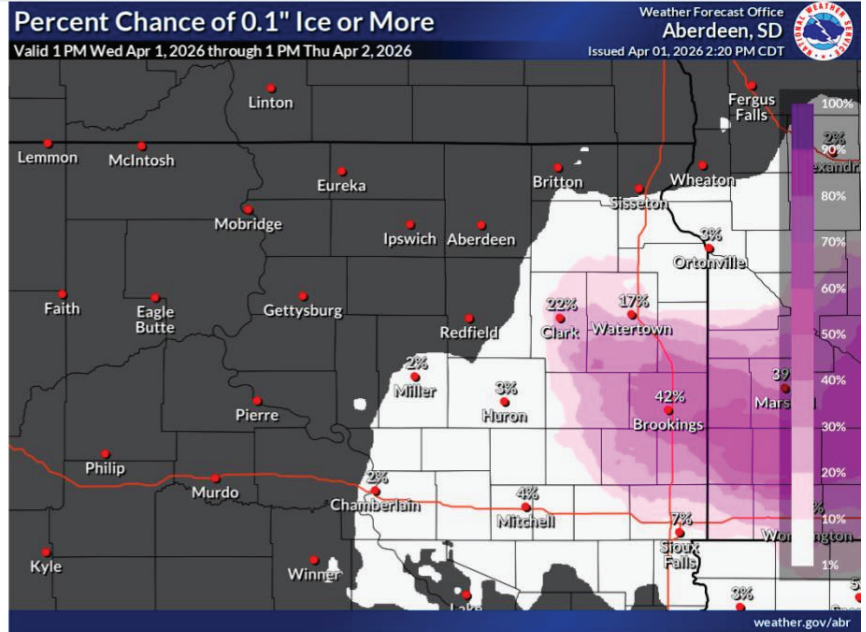


Ice Accumulations Tonight into Thursday

April 1, 2026
3:10 PM

Freezing Rain is expected on the eastern edge of incoming precipitation.

- Highest ice accumulation is expected over east-central South Dakota.
- Up to a **tenth of an inch of ice** accumulation is expected, with locally higher amounts possible.
 - ◆ The heaviest ice accumulation is expected tonight.
- Plan for slippery road conditions.
Hazardous weather could impact the Thursday morning commute.



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

The first round of wintry precipitation moving into the area has the possibility of light freezing rain, with east-central sections of South Dakota have the best chance to see this freezing rain Wednesday night. A light glaze up to 0.1 inch of ice accumulation will be possible in these areas by late tonight into Thursday. This could make roads slick and impact the Thursday morning commute.

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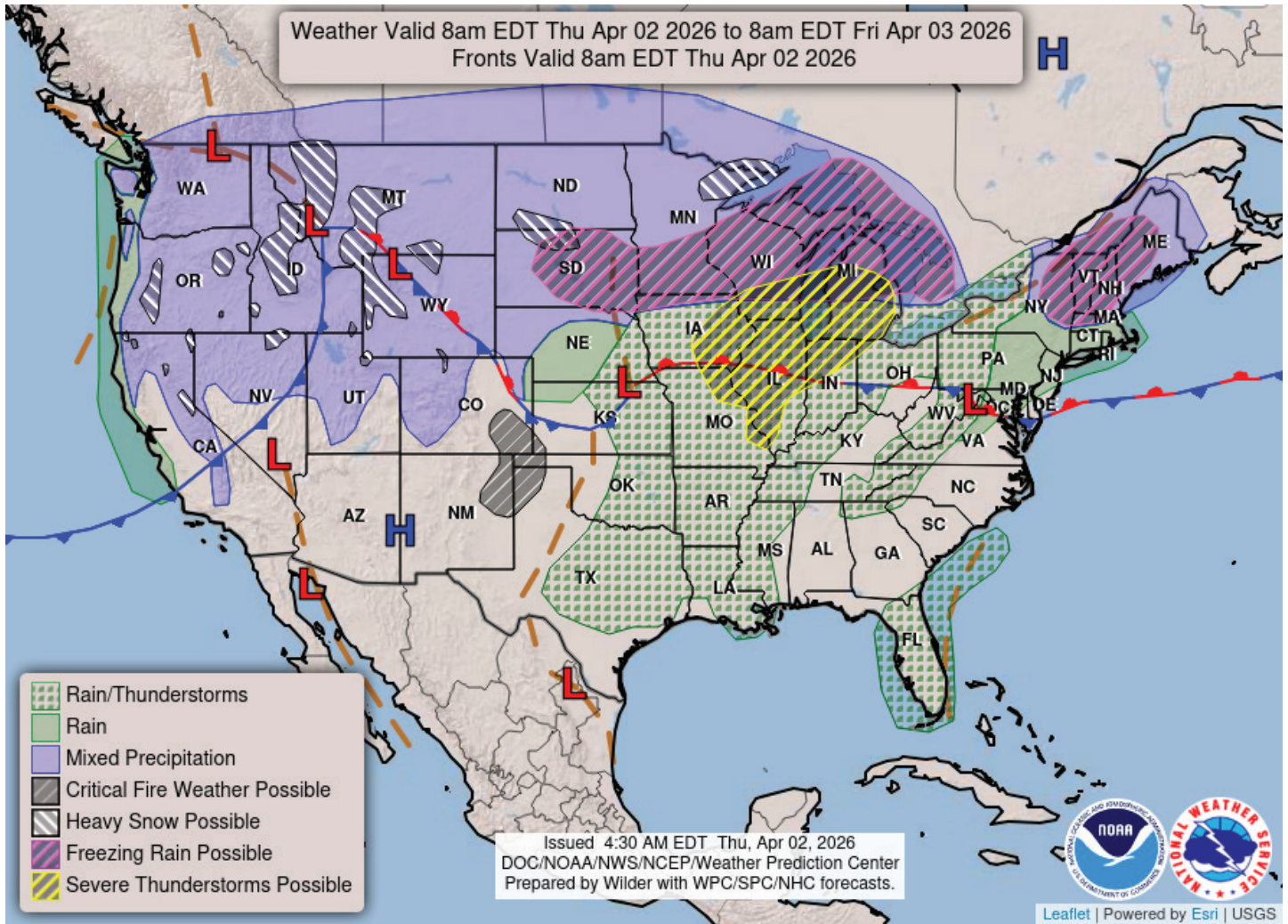
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 36 °F at 6:54 PM
Low Temp: 30 °F at 10:49 AM
Wind: 24 mph at 4:13 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 84 in 1921
Record Low: 3 in 1975
Average High: 51
Average Low: 26
Average Precip in April.: 0.08
Precip to date in April.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 2.14
Precip Year to Date: 1.62
Sunset Tonight: 8:00 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:08 am



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Today in Weather History

April 2nd, 1998: The James River began to flood in early April from Columbia to Stratford. Throughout April and May, it rose to around 1.5 feet above flood stage at Columbia and Stratford. The James River mainly flooded farmland, pastureland, and a few roads near the channel.

April 2nd, 2010: In South Dakota, a band of heavy snow set up across Corson and Dewey counties during the early morning hours of April 2nd. Along with heavy wet snow, northwest winds gusting up to 40 mph developed. By the time the storm ended in the late morning hours, 6 to 8 inches of snow had fallen. The heavy snow and strong winds downed many power poles across the region, making travel treacherous. Some snowfall amounts included 4 inches at Eagle Butte, 6 inches at Timber Lake, McLaughlin, 14 miles north of Isabel, 7 inches at Isabel and 6 miles southeast of McIntosh, and 8 inches southwest of Keldron. Over 400 poles were lost to the heavy snow, leaving approximately 800 people without power. Eighty linemen worked through the Easter weekend in the snow and mud. McLaughlin and Keldron were the hardest hit. Several hundred people were still without power on April 5th.

1975 — The northeastern U.S. was in the grips of a severe storm which produced hurricane force winds along the coast, and two to three feet of snow in Maine and New Hampshire. Winds atop Mount Washington NH gusted to 140 mph. (David Ludlum)

1975 — The biggest snowstorm of record for so late in the season paralyzed Chicago, IL. Up to 20 inches of snow fell in extreme northeastern Illinois, and 10.9 inches of snow closed Chicago's O'Hare Airport. (The Weather Channel)

1982 — Severe thunderstorms spawned fifty-six tornadoes in the central U.S., including seventeen in the Red River Region of Texas and Oklahoma. The tornadoes claimed thirty lives, and injured 383 other persons. A violent tornado near Messer OK left only the carpet tack strips on the slab of a house it destroyed, and carried a motel sign thirty miles. (The Weather Channel) (Storm Data)

1987 — Eleven cities in Florida reported record low temperatures for the date, including Tallahassee with a reading of 31 degrees. The low of 48 degrees at Key West smashed their previous record for the date by 13 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 — Thunderstorms produced up to nine inches of rain around New Orleans LA causing 18 million dollars damage. A tornado caused three million dollars damage at Slidell LA. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 — Strong and gusty winds prevailed from California to Colorado and Wyoming. Winds gusted to 50 mph at Lancaster CA, and reached 85 mph at Berthoud Pass CO. Snow and high winds created blizzard conditions in the Colorado Rockies. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 — Thunderstorms produced severe weather in North Carolina and Virginia during the afternoon and evening. Thunderstorms produced golf ball size hail, and spawned a tornado near Chester VA which caused half a million dollars damage. A storm system produced snow and gale force winds across northern Michigan, with 8.3 inches of snow reported at Marquette. Temperatures in the north central U.S. soared from morning lows in the 20s and 30s to afternoon highs in the 60s and 70s. Eight cities reported record highs for the date, including Havre MT with a reading of 77 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2005 — Heavy rainfall in the Northeast produced flooding in parts of New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Severe flooding along the Delaware River forced the evacuation of 6,000 residents in New Jersey and over 5,700 in Pennsylvania during the weekend of the 2nd-3rd. Around 3,200 homes in New Jersey were damaged, while one fatality was reported in New York (Associated Press).

2006 — Tornadoes and hail as big as softballs ripped through eight Midwestern states, killing at least 27 people, injuring scores and destroying hundreds of homes. In Tennessee, tornadoes killed 23 people, including an infant and a family of four. Severe thunderstorms, many producing tornadoes, also struck parts of Iowa, Kentucky, Arkansas, Missouri, Ohio, Illinois and Indiana. Strong wind was blamed for at least three deaths in Missouri. The weather service's Storm Prediction Center in Norman, Okla., said it had preliminary reports of 63 tornadoes. The worst damage occurred throughout the Tennessee Valley.

2015 — Late night severe storms produced 80 to 100 mph straight-line winds that caused extensive damage from Hutchinson to Newton and Wichita. An 89 mph wind gust was reported at the Kansas Aviation Museum located in southeast Wichita. (NWS, Wichita, KS)

A Heart for God

We love God when we habitually—though imperfectly—align our desires with His.

Acts 13:16-22: 16 Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, ``Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen:

17 ``The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He led them out from it.

18 ``For a period of about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness.

19 ``When He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land as an inheritance-- all of which took about four hundred and fifty years.

20 ``After these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet.

21 ``Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years.

22 ``After He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, `I HAVE FOUND DAVID the son of Jesse, A MAN AFTER MY HEART, who will do all My will.'

God's assessment of David is one of Scripture's highest divine praises. In Acts 13:22, the Lord called David "a man after My heart, who will do all My will."

In other words, a desire to obey God is an essential characteristic of having a heart for Him. King David's life wasn't flawless, but his pattern was to follow God. And when David sinned, he knew what to do—he prayed the Lord would search out any hurtful way in his life and help him get back on track to become the kind of person God intended (Psalms 139:23-24).

David's highest priority was his relationship with the Lord. He delighted in God's law and treasured intimate communion with Him. The Scriptures reveal many examples of how David trusted the Lord in all the challenges of his life. He recognized that any greatness he achieved as king was actually due to God alone.

Becoming a person with a heart for the Lord is a valuable goal. While perfection isn't possible, a growing relationship with our heavenly Father is. In the process, we will discover that our desires and interests increasingly align with God's, and obeying Him will be our great delight.

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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.01.26

1 4 27 31 44 1

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

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 35 Mins 8 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.31.26

18 35 45 60 65 17

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$90,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 20 Mins 8 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.01.26

26 34 39 42 51 5

All Star Bonus: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$21,050,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 35 Mins 8 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.01.26

5 6 9 14 25

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$40,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 50 Mins 9 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.01.26

27 31 47 56 68 14

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 19 Mins 9 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.01.26

4 10 11 52 64 24

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$217,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 19 Mins 9 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Danish warship sunk by Nelson's British fleet discovered after 225 years

By JAMES BROOKS Associated Press

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — More than 200 years after being sunk by Adm. Horatio Nelson and the British fleet, a Danish warship has been discovered on the seabed of Copenhagen Harbor by marine archaeologists.

Working in thick sediment and almost zero visibility 15 meters (49 feet) beneath the waves, divers are in a race against time to unearth the 19th-century wreck of the Dannebrog before it becomes a construction site in a new housing district being built off the Danish coast.

Denmark's Viking Ship Museum, which is leading the monthslong underwater excavations, announced its findings on Thursday, 225 years to the day since the Battle of Copenhagen in 1801.

"It's a big part of the Danish national feeling," said Morten Johansen, the museum's head of maritime archaeology.

A great deal has been written about the battle "by very enthusiastic spectators, but we actually don't know how it was to be onboard a ship being shot to pieces by English warships and some of that story we can probably learn from seeing the wreck," Johansen said. The Associated Press was the only international outlet given access to the site.

In the Battle of Copenhagen, Nelson and the British fleet attacked and defeated Denmark's navy as it formed a protective blockade outside the harbor.

Thousands were killed and wounded during the brutal hourslong naval clash, considered one of Nelson's "great battles." The intention was to force Denmark out of an alliance of Northern European powers, including Russia, Prussia and Sweden.

At the center of the fighting was the Danish flagship, the Dannebrog, commanded by Commodore Olfert Fischer.

The 48-meter (157-foot) Dannebrog was Nelson's main target. Cannon fire tore through its upper deck before incendiary shells sparked a fire aboard.

"(It was) a nightmare to be on board one of these ships," Johansen said. "When a cannonball hits a ship, it's not the cannonball that does the most damage to the crew, it's wooden splinters flying everywhere, very much like grenade debris."

The battle also is believed to have inspired the phrase "to turn a blind eye." After deciding to ignore a superior's signal, Nelson, who had lost sight in his right eye, reportedly remarked: "I have only one eye, I have a right to be blind sometimes."

Nelson eventually offered a truce and a ceasefire was later agreed with Denmark's Crown Prince Frederik.

The stricken Dannebrog slowly drifted northward and exploded. Records say the sound created a deafening roar across Copenhagen.

Marine archaeologists have discovered two cannons, uniforms, insignia, shoes, bottles and even part of a sailor's lower jaw, perhaps one of the 19 unaccounted-for crew members who likely lost their lives that day.

The dig site will soon be enveloped by construction work for Lynetteholm, a megaproject to build a new housing district in the middle of Copenhagen Harbor that is expected to be completed by 2070.

Marine archaeologists began surveying the area late last year, targeting a spot thought to match the flagship's final position.

Experts say the sizes of the wooden parts found match old drawings. Dendrochronological dating, the method of using tree rings to establish the age of wood, match the year the ship was built. They also say the darkened dig site is full of cannonballs, a hazard for divers navigating waters darkened by clouds of silt stirred up from the seabed.

"Sometimes you can't see anything, and then you really have to just feel your way, look with your fingers

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instead of with your eyes," diver and maritime archaeologist Marie Jonsson said.

Chronicled in books and painted on canvases, the 1801 battle is deeply embedded in Denmark's national story.

Archaeologists hope their discoveries may help reexamine the event that shaped the Scandinavian country and perhaps uncover personal stories of those who went into battle on that day 225 years ago.

"There are bottles, there are ceramics, and even pieces of basketry," Jonsson said. "You get closer to the people onboard."

Iran fires missiles at Israel and Gulf neighbors as Trump talks of winding down Mideast war

By JON GAMBRELL, DAVID RISING and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran responded to U.S. President Donald Trump's address to Americans on the war with new missile attacks targeting Israel and the Gulf Arab states Thursday, underlining Tehran's insistence that it rejected Washington's outreach for a ceasefire while maintaining its grip on the Strait of Hormuz.

Britain planned to hold a call Thursday with nearly three dozen countries about how to reopen the strait, through which 20% of all oil and natural gas traded passes in peacetime. The 35 countries, including all G7 industrialized democracies except the U.S., as well as the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, signed a declaration last month demanding Iran stop blocking the strait. The call will discuss "diplomatic and political measures" that could restore shipping once the fighting is over.

Washington has insisted that Iran allow ships to freely transit the strait, but Trump this week has said it is not up to the U.S. to force it, and in his address encouraged countries that receive oil through Hormuz to "build some delayed courage" and go "take it."

In his address, Trump said the U.S. would hit Iran "extremely hard over the next two to three weeks," while also insisting American "core strategic objectives are nearing completion."

Iran's military said defiantly on Thursday that its armament facilities are hidden and will never be reached by Israeli or American attacks.

"The centers you think you have targeted are insignificant," said Lt. Col. Ebrahim Zolfaghari, a spokesman for the Iranian military's Khatam Al-Anbiya Central Headquarters.

Just before Trump began his nearly 20-minute address on Wednesday, explosions were heard in Dubai as air defenses worked to intercept an Iranian missile barrage. Less than a half hour after the president was done, Israel said its military was working to intercept incoming missiles.

Sirens sounded in Bahrain, home to the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet, immediately after the speech.

Nearly three dozen nations, but not US, to talk about securing Hormuz strait

Following a joint statement in March condemning Iranian attacks on unarmed commercial vessels that called upon Iran to "cease immediately its threats, laying of mines, drone and missile attacks and other attempts to block the strait," the 35 signatories were to hold a virtual meeting Thursday hosted by British Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper.

Though the oil and gas that typically transits the Strait of Hormuz primarily is sold to Asian nations, Japan and South Korea were the only two countries from the region that were joining.

"Trump's message was that the United States can sustain its own economic and energy ecosystem, while countries dependent on regional exports will either have to buy from the United States or manage the Strait themselves," the New York-based Soufan Center think tank wrote after the address.

"While Trump explicitly thanked U.S. allies in the Persian Gulf for their cooperation and allyship, an expedited U.S. withdrawal without securing the strait will leave many of these countries, whose economies are dependent on energy exports, in the lurch."

No country appears willing to try and open the strait by force while the war is raging. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said the group "will assess all viable diplomatic and political measures we can take to restore freedom of navigation, guarantee the safety of trapped ships and seafarers and to resume the

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movement of vital commodities.”

Bahrain, which now holds the presidency of the United Nations Security Council, has been working to get the world body to address the crisis as well.

Oil prices rise again even as Trump suggests American objectives 'nearing completion'

Though Iran has allowed a trickle of ships through the strait, it remains largely closed. Iran has also been repeatedly attacking Gulf Arab energy infrastructure, sending oil prices skyrocketing and giving rise to broader economic problems worldwide.

Following Trump's speech, Brent crude, the international standard, rose again and was at \$108 in early spot trading, up nearly 50% from Feb. 28 when Israel and the U.S. started the war with their attacks on Iran.

The rising energy prices and stock market jitters have been putting increasing domestic pressure on Trump, who used his address to offer a defense of the war while also suggesting it was close to winding down.

He acknowledged American service members who had been killed and said: "We are going to finish the job, and we're going to finish it very fast. We're getting very close."

The U.S. has presented Iran with a 15-point plan for a ceasefire, but Trump didn't say anything about the diplomatic efforts or bring up his April 6 deadline for Iran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz or face severe retaliation from the U.S.

Death toll continues to rise

More than 1,900 people have been killed in Iran during the war, while 19 have been reported dead in Israel. More than two dozen people have died in Gulf states and the occupied West Bank, while 13 U.S. service members have been killed.

More than 1,200 people have been killed in Lebanon and more than 1 million displaced, according to authorities. Ten Israeli soldiers have also died there.

Oil rises 6% and Asian stocks fall after Trump says US will hit Iran hard and 'finish the job'

By CHAN HO-HIM AP Business Writer

HONG KONG (AP) — Oil rose more than 6% and Asian stocks fell after U.S. President Donald Trump said in his first national address since the Iran war began that the U.S. will continue to hit Iran very hard.

Trump also said in his Wednesday night speech that the United States will "finish the job" in Iran soon as "core strategic objectives are nearing completion" and military operations could wrap up soon.

"We are going to hit them extremely hard over the next two to three weeks. We're going to bring them back to the Stone Ages, where they belong," Trump said in his address.

Trump did not mention a looming deadline he set for Iran to open the Strait of Hormuz, the critical waterway for global oil and gas transport, after he threatened Iran earlier with U.S. attacks on its energy infrastructure if the strait was not reopened. He did not offer a clear path to end the supply disruptions that have sent energy prices soaring.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 was down 2.4% to 52,463.27 on Thursday. South Korea's Kospi lost 4.5% to 5,234.05, also after government data showed consumer prices in March rose 2.2% from a year earlier on soaring fuel costs.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng fell 1.3% to 24,965.07, the Shanghai Composite index was down 0.9% to 3,913.88.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 dropped 1.1% to 8,579.50.

Taiwan's Taiex was trading 1.8% lower, while India's Sensex lost 1.9%.

U.S. futures were down more than 1.2%.

Oil prices were sharply higher following Trump's remarks. Brent crude, the international standard, jumped 6.9% to \$108.15 per barrel. Benchmark U.S. crude rose 6.4% to \$106.55 a barrel.

"The market has shown disappointment because the speech President Trump made was far less than what the market expected," said Takashi Hiroki, chief strategist at Monex in Tokyo. "There were no con-

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crete details about the end of the hostilities with Iran.”

“What the market wants is a clear outline for the ceasefire,” he said.

Gold and silver prices fell. Gold’s price was down 4% to \$4,621.30 per ounce, falling below the \$4,700 mark. Silver lost 7.3% to \$70.53 an ounce.

Renewed optimism on Wednesday for a possible end to the Iran war pushed world stocks higher, after Trump said late Tuesday the U.S. military could end its offensive in two to three weeks.

On Wednesday, the S&P 500 added 0.7% to 6,575.32. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 0.5% to 46,565.74, and the Nasdaq composite climbed 1.2% to 21,840.95.

Shares of Eli Lilly jumped 3.8% after the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved its GLP-1 pill for weight loss. Nike plunged 15.5% despite better-than-estimated quarterly profit on expectations of weaker sales.

In other dealings early Thursday, the U.S. dollar rose to 159.35 Japanese yen from 158.82 yen. The euro was trading at \$1.1534, down from \$1.1589.

Earthquake off Indonesia topples buildings, kills 1 person and sets off small tsunami

By GRACEY WAKARI and MOHAMMAD TAUFAN Associated Press

MANADO, Indonesia (AP) — An undersea magnitude 7.4 earthquake toppled buildings in parts of northern Indonesia, sent people fleeing from their homes, killed at least one person and generated a small tsunami Thursday.

Strong shaking lasting 10 to 20 seconds was felt in Bitung in North Sulawesi province as well as in Ternate city in neighboring North Maluku province, according to the Disaster Management Agency. The provinces border the Molucca Sea, where the quake was centered.

Initial assessments showed light to severe damage in parts of Ternate, including a church and two houses. In Bitung, damage assessments were still underway, the agency said.

“We had just woken up and suddenly the earthquake hit... we all ran out of the house,” Bitung resident Marten Mandagi said. “The shaking was very strong,”

Indonesia’s Search and Rescue Agency reported a 70-year-old woman died in a building collapse in North Sulawesi’s Manado city and another resident was injured. At least three injured people were hospitalized in Ternate.

Videos released by the rescue agency showed damaged structures and flattened houses, while television stations broadcast scenes of people rushing outside and gathering in streets to avoid the risk of collapsing buildings.

Dozens of aftershocks followed, including one of 6.2 magnitude. Authorities are continuing to gather information on damage and possible victims from multiple areas, particularly remote villages, as they work to assess the scope of the disaster.

Tsunami waves up to 75 centimeters (30 inches) above normal tides were recorded at several monitoring stations around the Molucca Sea coast. Indonesia’s meteorological agency lifted its tsunami warning hours after the quake, and the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology said there was no destructive threat to the country, which is north of the quake’s epicenter.

Indonesia, a vast archipelago of more than 280 million people, sits on major seismic faults and is frequently hit by earthquakes and volcanic eruptions.

Iraq’s oil hub slows to a crawl as Strait of Hormuz shutdown strangles exports

By SAMYA KULLAB and QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA Associated Press

BASRA, Iraq (AP) — Iraqi oil fields once alive with the buzz of workers are nearly deserted. Ports that pulsed with the churn of cargo have fallen still, the din of commerce replaced by the soft rhythm of waves.

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A month after the war in Iran started, workers at ports and oil fields in the province of Basra, where almost all of Iraq's crude is produced and exported, have grown accustomed to rockets streaking across the sky, aimed at U.S. air bases and other strategic facilities.

The war, which began with U.S.-Israeli strikes, is dealing a heavy blow to Iraq's economy. Iraq relies on oil revenues for roughly 90% of its budget, and most of its oil is exported through the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf where Iran has effectively stopped cargo traffic during the conflict. The war also has led to a sharp reduction in the volume of imported goods reaching southern Iraq's ports, while attacks have halted traffic at the border it shares with Iran.

Unlike other countries in the Middle East touched by the war, Iraq hosts both entrenched Iran-aligned forces and significant U.S. interests, leaving it exposed to attacks from both sides. Since the war started, oil production in southern Iraq, where Basra is located, has fallen by more than 70% and the volume of imported goods reaching the country's ports has been cut in half. Drone and missile attacks have targeted American companies and military bases. Iran's allied Iraqi militias also have struck oil fields and energy infrastructure. Many foreign workers have left.

The Iraqi government should have enough funds to get through mid-May without new oil sales, according to experts, but then it will have to borrow money.

"After that, the government would resort to issuing bonds," said Ahmed Tabaqchali, an expert in Iraq's economy. "But not without consequences."

Oil production suspended

Across southern Iraq, the closure of the Strait of Hormuz has prompted oil fields to scale back production and focus on domestic needs, while oil prices around the globe have risen. Basra's Zubair oil field, once producing around 400,000 barrels per day, has seen output drop to roughly 250,000, officials said.

Iran has offered assurances that Iraqi crude can safely transit the strait, said Bassem Abdul Karim, the head of the state-run Basra Oil Company, which oversees production in the province. However, because Iraq lacks its own tanker fleet and depends on chartered vessels, shipments ultimately hinge on whether tanker owners are willing to accept the heightened risks of making the journey. Most are not.

At a degassing station in Zubair, where crude is processed, production has also slowed dramatically. "It's quiet now because of the reductions," said chief engineer Ammar Hashim. "Of course we are worried."

The downturn in Zubair reflects a broader decline in Basra. Output has dropped from 3.1 million barrels per day to roughly 900,000 across the province, according to Abdul Karim.

"Exports are currently completely halted. At the moment, we are considering alternative loading areas, but none are fully operational," he told The Associated Press.

That morning, a drone crashed in the Majnoon oil field north of Basra without detonating. A security official said it's an increasingly common occurrence, adding that the drone was likely headed toward U.S. bases in Kuwait. Production at the field has been suspended due to the frequency of these events. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not permitted to speak to news media.

Hundreds of employees from American, British, Italian, French and other international oil companies have left Iraq due to the war. The departures accelerated after a March 6 drone strike hit the Burjisiya complex in Basra, a key logistics hub for Iraq's oil industry used by numerous companies. The attack targeted U.S. oil services company KBR, striking its chemical storage facility.

Another drone struck the British-Petroleum operated Rumaila oil field, prompting some foreign workers there to leave, said Abdul Karim. The field is still operating, he said. On Wednesday, multiple drones attacked a fuel warehouse linked to BP in northern Iraq.

Efforts to reroute Iraq's oil face major constraints: The country doesn't have the capacity to boost exports via its northern pipeline, and trucking through Jordan and Syria is costly and inefficient, said Abdul Karim.

Shipping lanes closed

Umm Qasr, Iraq's primary deep-water port, was once so noisy with imported cargo that it could give you a headache, workers there said.

Now, with the Strait of Hormuz closed, large mother ships bringing shipments to Iraq can no longer get

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to the port. Instead, they dock in the United Arab Emirates, where the cargo is carried by trucks and then smaller ships to get to Umm Qasr, a costly workaround.

The port's jetties are running well below their former capacity, with volumes halved by the war, according to port director Mohammed Tahir Fadhil.

When the AP visited, just one cargo ship from the U.A.E. had docked.

The threat to shipping lanes escalated after Iran destroyed two tankers on March 11 in Iraqi waters, the Marshall Islands-flagged Safesea Vishnu and the Malta-flagged Zefyros.

"Today, our only gateway for goods is the United Arab Emirates," said Farhan Fartousi, director of the Iraqi Ports Company.

Trade disrupted

On Sunday morning, Haidar Abdul-Samad, deputy director of Basra's Shalamcha border crossing with Iran, was on the phone with an Iranian official, complaining about electricity cuts that had halted trade, urging a quick resolution. The power cuts followed an airstrike that hit the Iranian side of the crossing.

Such disruptions, local officials say, have become routine.

Before the war, the crossing saw constant movement, reflecting strong familial and commercial ties between Iranians and Iraqis in the area. It is also a key transit point for traders and pilgrims heading to Shiite holy sites in central Iraq.

That morning, trucks were backed up for miles.

"Priority is given to food supplies to prevent price increases," Abdul-Samad said. "Passenger movement is not at the same level as before; activity has declined due to the war in Iran."

Once electricity was restored, 30-year-old Iranian trader Atefa Al-Fatlawi arrived with her husband and young son. She buys goods at lower prices in Basra to sell back home.

"We are scared because of the bombings," she said. "Shalamcha was targeted. Today, there were no transport vehicles at the garage because of the attack."

It's International Fact-Checking Day. Refresh your AI identification skills

By MELISSA GOLDIN and BARBARA WHITAKER Associated Press

AI-generated content is everywhere these days, making it increasingly difficult to separate fact from fiction, particularly when it comes to breaking news.

Look no further than the Iran war. Since the U.S. and Israel attacked Iran on Feb. 28, researchers have identified an unprecedented number of false and misleading images that were generated using artificial intelligence and have reached countless people around the world. Among them, fake footage of bombings that never happened, images of soldiers who were supposedly captured and propaganda videos created by Iran that depict President Donald Trump and others as a blocky, Lego-like miniatures.

Today, the 10th annual International Fact-Checking Day, provides a good opportunity to look at these evolving challenges.

Misinformation created with AI is being shared with unprecedented speed from an endless number of sources. From the outset of the Iran war, accounts from all sides of the conflict promoted such content.

The Institute for Strategic Dialogue, which tracks disinformation and online extremism, has been examining social media posts around the Iran war. Among their findings was a group of X accounts that regularly post AI-generated content and collectively gained more than one billion views since the conflict began. This was done by roughly two dozen accounts, many of which had blue check verification.

Here are some tips for distinguishing AI-generated content from reality in an online world where that continues to get harder.

Look for visual cues

When AI-generated images first began spreading widely online, there were often obvious tells that could identify them as fabricated. Perhaps a person had too few — or too many — fingers or their voice was out of sync with their mouth. Text may have been nonsensical. Objects were frequently distorted or miss-

ing key components. As the technology continues to evolve, these clues aren't as common as they once were, but it's still worth looking for them. Watch for inconsistencies such as a car that is in a video one moment and gone the next or actions that aren't possible according to the laws of physics. Some images may also be overly polished or have an unnatural sheen.

Seek out a source

AI-generated images get shared over and over again. One way to determine their authenticity (or lack thereof) is to hunt for their origin. Using a reverse image search is a simple way to do this. If you're looking at a video, take a screenshot first. This can lead to a social media account that specifically generates AI content, an older image that is being misrepresented, or something entirely unexpected.

Listen to the experts

Look for multiple verified sources that can help authenticate the image. For example, that can mean a fact-check from a reputable media outlet, a statement from a public figure, or a social media post from a misinformation expert. These sources may have more advanced techniques for identifying AI-generated content or access to information about the image that is not accessible by the general public.

Make use of technology

There are many AI detection tools that can be a helpful place to start. But be wary, as they are not always correct in their assessments. Images that have been generated or altered with AI using Google's Gemini app include an invisible digital watermarking tool called SynthID, which the app can detect. Other AI creation tools have added visible watermarks to content they generate. They are often easy to remove though, meaning the absence of such a watermark is not proof that an image is genuine.

Slow down

Sometimes it's just about going back to basics. Stop, take a breath and don't immediately share something you don't know is real. Bad actors are often counting on the fact that people let their emotions and existing viewpoints guide their reactions to content. Looking at the comments may provide clues about whether the image you're looking at is real or not. Another user might have noticed something you didn't or been able to find the original source. Ultimately though, it's not always possible to determine with 100% accuracy whether an image is AI-generated so remain alert to the possibility it might not be real.

See something that looks false or misleading? Email us at FactCheck@ap.org.

UK gathers more than 30 countries to plot ways of reopening the Strait of Hormuz

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Almost three dozen countries will meet Thursday in an effort to exert diplomatic and political pressure to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, a vital shipping route that has been choked off by the U.S.-Israeli war against Iran.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said the virtual meeting chaired by Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper "will assess all viable diplomatic and political measures we can take to restore freedom of navigation, guarantee the safety of trapped ships and seafarers and to resume the movement of vital commodities."

Iranian attacks on commercial ships, and the threat of more, have halted nearly all traffic in the waterway that connects the Persian Gulf to the rest of the globe's oceans, shutting a critical path for the world's flow of oil and sending petroleum prices soaring.

The U.S. is not among the countries attending Thursday's meeting. Trump has said securing the waterway is not America's job, and told U.S. allies to "go get your own oil."

No country appears willing to try and open the strait by force while fighting rages and Iran can target vessels with anti-ship missiles, drones, attack craft and mines. But Starmer said Wednesday that military planners from an unspecified number of countries will meet soon to work on how to ensure security for shipping "after the fighting has stopped."

In the meantime, 35 countries including the U.K., France, Germany, Italy, Canada, Japan and the United Arab Emirates have signed a statement demanding Iran stop its attempts to block the strait and pledging

to "contribute to appropriate efforts to ensure safe passage" through the waterway.

Thursday's meeting is considered a first step, to be followed by "working-level meetings" of officials to hammer out details.

Starmer said resuming shipping "will not be easy," and will require "a united front of military strength and diplomatic activity" alongside partnership with the maritime industry.

The international effort idea has echoes of the international "coalition of the willing" that has been assembled, led by the U.K. and France, to underpin Ukraine's security after a future ceasefire in that war. The coalition is, in part, an attempt to demonstrate to the Trump administration that Europe is stepping up to do more for its own security.

The urgency of stronger continental defenses has been reinforced by Trump's renewed suggestion that the U.S. could pull out of NATO.

Republican plan to fund Homeland Security could get first test vote on Thursday

By KEVIN FREKING and JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate is expected to try quickly passing a measure Thursday that would fund most of the Department of Homeland Security, though it's unclear how soon the House will follow to largely end the longest partial government shutdown in history.

House Speaker Mike Johnson and Senate Majority Leader John Thune announced a plan Wednesday to fully fund the Department of Homeland Security as part of a two-step process. The agreement puts the leaders on the same page for ending the impasse after they pursued separate plans that resulted in Congress leaving Washington last week without a fix.

Johnson and Thune announced a return to the bipartisan Senate plan worked out with Democrats that funds most of the department, with the exception of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and U.S. Border Patrol. Republicans would then try later to fund those agencies on their own through party-line spending legislation that could take months to finish.

Neither outcome is guaranteed, and the strategy could potentially still face opposition from the GOP's own ranks even though President Donald Trump has given his support.

"We appreciate and share the President's determination to once and for all bring an end to the Democrat DHS shutdown," said Johnson, R-La., and Thune, R-S.D.

House Republicans refused to go along with the Senate plan last week excluding ICE and Border Patrol, instead changing the bill to fund all of DHS for 60 days.

The DHS shutdown reached its 47th day on Wednesday. Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said in a statement, "Republican divisions derailed a bipartisan agreement, making American families pay the price for their dysfunction."

The two top Republicans hope to win over skeptical GOP colleagues, but the most conservative lawmakers are likely to seek full funding for all of Trump's immigration and deportation operations.

"Let's make this simple: caving to Democrats and not paying CBP and ICE is agreeing to defund Law Enforcement and leaving our borders wide open again," Rep. Scott Perry, R-Pa., posted on X. "If that's the vote, I'm a NO."

The Senate meets for an early pro-forma session Thursday. Those generally last just a few minutes as the vast majority of senators are not present. Senators could take up the measure they passed just last week through a unanimous consent request, allowing it to pass if no senator objects. The Senate's action would then send the bill back to the House, which is also holding a pro-forma session later in the morning.

Meanwhile, the narrow budget package that Trump wants prepared for later this year is expected to fund ICE and Border Patrol through the remainder of Trump's term, as a way to try to ensure those agencies are no longer at risk from Democrats objecting to the president's immigration enforcement agenda. Trump said he wants that legislation on his desk by June 1.

"We are going to work as fast, and as focused, as possible to replenish funding for our Border and ICE

Agents, and the Radical Left Democrats won't be able to stop us," Trump said.

House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries released a statement after Johnson and Thune sent out their announcement, saying, "It's time to pay TSA agents, end the airport chaos and fully fund every part of the Department of Homeland Security that does not relate to Donald Trump's violent mass deportation machine."

The vast majority of Homeland Security workers continue to report to work during the shutdown, but many thousands have been going without pay. That led to more Transportation Security Administration agents calling out from work, causing frustrating security lines at some of the nation's biggest airports. Those bottlenecks appeared to be clearing this week as agents began receiving backpay, per an executive order from Trump.

Trump says US forces will 'finish the job' soon in first prime-time speech since starting Iran war

By WILL WEISSERT, JON GAMBRELL and DAVID RISING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said U.S. forces will "finish the job" in Iran soon as "core strategic objectives are nearing completion," offering a full-throated defense of the war Wednesday night in his first national address since the conflict began more than a month ago.

He used his platform before a wide audience to tout the success of the U.S. operations and argue that all of Washington's objectives have so far been met or exceeded, but said Iran would continue to face a barrage of attacks in the short term.

"We are going to hit them extremely hard over the next two to three weeks," Trump said. "We're going to bring them back to the Stone Ages, where they belong."

But Trump also spent much of an address that lasted just under 20 minutes repeating many things he had already said in recent weeks and providing few new details. The speech appeared unlikely to move the needle of public sentiment at a time when polling shows many Americans feel the U.S. military has gone too far in Iran and as gas and oil prices remain high.

The effect on global financial markets was more immediate, with oil rising more than 4% and Asian stocks falling after Trump's comments about the U.S. continuing to hit Iran hard.

"Tonight, I'm pleased to say that these core strategic objectives are nearing completion," Trump said. He also acknowledged American service members who had been killed and added: "We are going to finish the job, and we're going to finish it very fast. We're getting very close."

The president didn't mention the possibility of sending U.S. ground troops into Iran. Nor did he reference NATO, the trans-Atlantic alliance he has railed against for not helping the U.S. secure the critical Strait of Hormuz, where a chokehold by Iran has sent energy prices soaring.

He also didn't say anything about negotiations with Iran or bring up his April 6 deadline for Iran to reopen the waterway or face severe retaliation from the U.S.

Trump encourages other countries to take the Strait

Trump ticked through a timeline of past American involvement in conflicts and noted that the ongoing war in Iran had lasted just 32 days, seeming to appeal to the public for more time to achieve the mission.

"World War I lasted one year, seven months and five days," he said. "World War II lasted for three years, eight months and 25 days." Trump, who was referring to the time the U.S. was involved in those wars, also added references to Korea, Vietnam and Iraq.

He also noted that in "these past four weeks, our armed forces have delivered swift, decisive, overwhelming victories on the battlefield." He said U.S. military action had been "so powerful, so brilliant" that "one of the most powerful countries" is "really no longer a threat" — even as Iran kept up its attacks on Israel and Persian Gulf neighbors early Thursday.

Trump also seemed to suggest he had ruled out going into Iran to get its enriched uranium.

"The nuclear sites that we obliterated with the B-2 bombers have been hit so hard that it would take

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months to get near the nuclear dust," he said. "And we have it under intense satellite surveillance and control. If we see them make a move, even a move for it, we'll hit them with missiles very hard again."

The president encouraged countries reliant on oil through the Strait of Hormuz to "build some delayed courage" and go "take it."

Hours before the speech, Trump said, 'We could just take their oil'

Trump's comments in his address were more measured than some of his previous remarks, including earlier Wednesday at a White House Easter lunch.

Of Iran, he told his assembled guests: "We could just take their oil. But you know, I'm not sure that the people in our country have the patience to do that, which is unfortunate."

"Yeah, they want to see it end. If we stayed there, I prefer just to take the oil," Trump said. "We could do it so easily. I would prefer that. But people in the country sort of say: 'Just win. You're winning so big. Just win. Come home.' And I'm OK with that, too, because we have a lot of oil between Venezuela and our oil."

The media was not permitted to watch the president's remarks at the lunch, but the White House uploaded video of the speech online before taking it down. The White House did not return requests for comment from The Associated Press on the video and why it was taken down.

In the lunch — unlike in the subsequent speech — the president also reiterated some of his complaints about NATO allies for their reluctance to get involved in securing the Strait of Hormuz while suggesting that Asian countries could also step up to reopen the waterway.

"Let South Korea, you know, we only have 45,000 soldiers in harm's way over there, right next to a nuclear force -- let South Korea do it," Trump said of efforts to reopen the strait. "Let Japan do it. They get 90% of their oil from the strait. Let China do it."

In a social media post Wednesday morning, meanwhile, Trump also wrote that "Iran's New Regime President" wanted a ceasefire. It wasn't clear to whom the U.S. president was referring since Iran still has the same president. Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Esmail Baghaei, called Trump's claim "false and baseless," according to a report on Iranian state television.

Hours before Trump's address, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian posted a lengthy letter in English on his X account appealing to U.S. citizens and stressing that his country had pursued negotiations before the U.S. withdrew from that path. "Exactly which of the American people's interests are truly being served by this war?" he wrote.

Trump's objectives have shifted since the war started

Since the war began on Feb. 28, Trump has offered shifting objectives and repeatedly has said it could be over soon while also threatening to widen the conflict. Thousands of additional U.S. troops are currently heading to the Middle East, and speculation abounds about why. Trump has also threatened to attack Iran's Kharg Island oil export hub.

Adding to the confusion is what role Israel — which has been bombing Iran alongside the U.S. — might play in any of these scenarios.

Trump has been under growing pressure to end the war that has been pushing up the cost of gasoline, food and other goods. The price of Brent crude, the international standard, is up more than 40% since the start of the war.

Takeaways from Trump's address: No end date for Iran war and few details on strategy ahead

By LISA MASCARO, MATTHEW LEE and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump sought Wednesday to explain his rationale for the war against Iran at a pivotal moment at home and abroad, but he offered few new details as he amasses extraordinary executive authority to prosecute the military operation.

Notably missing from Trump's primetime address was his oft-repeated assertion that negotiations with Iran were underway. He softened his insults against NATO allies and did not indicate he was preparing to send in ground troops, particularly to retrieve Iran's enriched uranium. But he gave no definitive end

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date for the conflict.

The war is fast becoming a signature of his second-term agenda, and the speech was a capstone to a remarkable day flexing presidential power.

Trump started the morning as the first sitting president to show up for a U.S. Supreme Court hearing, a stunning reach of the executive into the affairs of the judicial branch. He ended with his first address from the White House about a war he launched on his own, bulldozing past Congress.

On a night when many Americans may have been looking upward as Artemis II astronauts lifted off for NASA's return to the moon, Trump gave a nod to that historic milestone. Then he quickly refocused attention back to him — and to the conflict with Iran that has killed more than a dozen U.S. service members and appears to have no easy exit in sight.

"America, as it has been for five years under my presidency, is winning — and now winning bigger than ever before," Trump said.

"We're going to finish the job and were going to finish it very fast," he added.

Trump tries to sell Americans on the war

The president said he wanted to "discuss why Operation Epic Fury is necessary for the safety of America and the security of the free world."

He aimed to show that one goal of Wednesday's speech was to take on the confusion that has persisted as the administration shifted its reasons for launching the war.

But over the course of nearly 20 minutes, Trump did not offer any new explanations.

He maintained that Iran cannot have a nuclear weapon, calling such a prospect "an intolerable threat," and said the country was building a vast arsenal of ballistic missiles that were a threat to America's homeland.

While he said Iran's ballistic missile capacity was greatly reduced, he didn't explain how the operation had headed off Iran's nuclear ambitions. He and his administration had previously insisted that the U.S. and Israel "obliterated" Iran's nuclear program in strikes last summer.

And as he painted the threats from Iran generally as having been wiped away, Trump didn't back up that assertion, especially as multiple competing factions of power remain within Iran's theocracy.

Iran long has insisted its nuclear program was peaceful. It had, however, been enriching uranium up to 60% purity, a short, technical step away from weapons-grade levels.

Before the war, U.S. intelligence agencies assessed that Iran had yet to begin a weapons program, but had "undertaken activities that better position it to produce a nuclear device, if it chooses to do so."

Trump provides little information about next steps

Thousands of additional U.S. troops are heading to the Middle East. Gulf allies are urging Trump to finish the fight, arguing that Tehran hasn't been weakened enough.

And yet Trump days ago predicted the U.S. will be done "within maybe two weeks." On Wednesday, he said the U.S. would hit Iran "extremely hard over the next two to three weeks." Then oil prices rose.

He said the "core strategic objectives are nearing completion" and did not signal any preparations for a ground invasion by American troops — to retrieve Iran's enriched uranium or help secure the Strait of Hormuz, where a chokehold by Iran has sent energy prices soaring.

In fact, he said the nuclear sites bombed last year would be difficult for Iran to access and that the U.S. has them under satellite surveillance.

"If we see them make a move, even a move for it, we'll hit them with missiles very hard," he said.

Trump is fast approaching the 60-day mark when he must seek approval from Congress under the War Powers Act to continue any military operations.

He did not discuss any diplomatic efforts to work toward a ceasefire and seemed to suggest the war would end after the U.S. finished hitting its targets. After days of Trump insisting that positive talks with Iran were happening, the omission was noticeable. Iran has denied the negotiations were taking place.

Trump avoids renewed threats to NATO allies

Despite having started the week with a torrent of abuse directed at NATO allies and other U.S. partners for not participating in the conflict, which included several direct threats to withdraw from NATO, Trump

was unusually restrained in his comments.

He did not mention NATO at all and said merely that countries depending the most on global oil shipments usually transported through the Strait of Hormuz need to take the lead in protecting the key waterway once the war is over.

"The countries of the world that do receive oil through the Hormuz Strait must take care of that passage," he said in his address. "They must cherish it. They must grab it and cherish it."

Trump said those countries should "build up some delayed courage," but he did not call specific allies out by name as he has previously.

"Go to the strait and just take it," he said. "The hard part is done, so it should be easy."

Trump faces political ramifications and economic worries at home

Trump, who ran as the "America First" president vowing not to drag the country into endless wars, has yet to fully address the political pushback he faces from his own base of supporters over the Iran conflict.

In the most explicit terms yet, he acknowledged that many Americans are concerned about gas prices and called them a "short-term increase."

But the president insisted the U.S. has become "the hottest country anywhere in the world" with Americans benefitting from what he calls the "big beautiful bill" he signed into law last year.

In fact, the U.S. economy is roiling, the financial markets are swinging with Trump's various pronouncements about the war — including after his address — and Americans are facing pain at the pump as the cost of living rises.

He didn't offer any new measures to try to address economic concerns and sought to persuade people that it was a cost to bear for a greater future cause.

He recounted the long wars in Korea and Vietnam and vowed the U.S. would be better off because of this one.

"This is a true investment for your children and your grandchildren's future," he said.

Artemis II astronauts bound for moon after rocketing away on NASA's first lunar voyage in decades

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Four astronauts embarked on a high-stakes flight around the moon Wednesday, humanity's first lunar voyage in more than half a century and the thrilling leadoff in NASA's push toward a landing in two years.

Carrying three Americans and one Canadian, the 32-story rocket rose from NASA's Kennedy Space Center where tens of thousands gathered to witness the dawn of this new era. Crowds also jammed the surrounding roads and beaches, reminiscent of the Apollo moonshots in the 1960s and '70s. It is NASA's biggest step yet toward establishing a permanent lunar presence.

"On this historic mission, you take with you the heart of this Artemis team, the daring spirit of the American people and our partners across the globe, and the hopes and dreams of a new generation," launch director Charlie Blackwell-Thompson told the crew right before liftoff. "Good luck, Godspeed Artemis II. Let's go."

Artemis II set sail from the same Florida launch site that sent Apollo's explorers to the moon so long ago. The handful still alive cheered this next generation's grand adventure as the Space Launch System rocket thundered into the early evening sky, a nearly full moon beckoning some 248,000 miles (400,000 kilometers) away.

Five minutes into the flight, Commander Reid Wiseman saw the team's target: "We have a beautiful moonrise, we're headed right at it," he said from the capsule. On board with him are pilot Victor Glover, Christina Koch and Canada's Jeremy Hansen. It is the most diverse lunar crew ever with the first woman, person of color and non-U. S. citizen riding in NASA's new Orion capsule.

"NASA is back in the business of sending astronauts to the moon," NASA Administrator Jared Isaacman told reporters following liftoff, calling the half-century hiatus a brief intermission.

Tensions high in the hours leading up to launch

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Tensions were high earlier in the day as hydrogen fuel started flowing into the rocket. Dangerous hydrogen leaks erupted during a countdown test earlier this year, forcing a lengthy flight delay.

To NASA's relief, no significant hydrogen leaks occurred. The launch team loaded more than 700,000 gallons of fuel (2.6 million liters) into the 32-story Space Launch System rocket on the pad, a smooth operation that set the stage for the Artemis II crew to board.

Then NASA had to overcome a flurry of last-minute technical issues — bad battery sensors and an inability to get commands through to the rocket's flight termination system. In both cases, the issues were quickly resolved, allowing the launch to proceed.

What's on tap for 10-day test flight?

The astronauts will stick close to home for the first 25 hours of their 10-day test flight, checking out the capsule in orbit around Earth before firing the main engine that will propel them to the moon.

They won't pause for a stopover or orbit the moon like Apollo 8's first lunar visitors did so famously on Christmas Eve 1968, reading from Genesis. But they stand to become the most distant humans ever when their capsule zooms past the moon and continues another 4,000 miles (6,400 kilometers) beyond, before making a U-turn and tearing straight home to a splashdown in the Pacific.

Once settled in a high orbit around Earth, the astronauts assumed manual control and practiced steering their capsule around the rocket's detached upper stage, venturing as close as 33 feet (10 meters). NASA wants to know how Orion handles in case the self-flying feature fails and the pilots need to take control.

Crew has an amazing sight in store

During Monday's lunar flyby, the moon will appear to be the size of a basketball held at arm's length. The astronauts will take turns peering through Orion's windows with cameras. If the lighting is right, they should see features never before viewed through human eyes. They'll also catch snippets of a total solar eclipse, donning eclipse glasses as the moon briefly blocks the sun from their perspective and the corona is revealed.

All of NASA's moon plans — a surge in launches over the next several years leading to a sustainable moon base for astronauts assisted by robotic rovers and drones — hinge on Artemis II going well.

It's been more than three years since Artemis I, the only other time NASA's SLS rocket and Orion capsule have soared. With no one aboard, the Artemis I capsule lacked life-support equipment and other crew essentials like a water dispenser and toilet.

These systems are now making their space debut on Artemis II, ratcheting up the risk. That's why NASA is waiting a full day before committing Wiseman and his crew to a four-day trip to the moon and four-day journey back.

The capsule's toilet is already acting up. Koch informed Mission Control that it shut down seconds after she activated it. Mission Control advised her to use a handheld bag-and-funnel system for now — CCU, short for Collapsible Contingency Urinal — while engineers pondered how to deal with the so-called lunar loo.

"There's always been a lot riding on this mission," NASA's Lori Glaze said ahead of launch. But the teams are even more "energized" now that the space agency is finally accelerating the lunar launch pace and laser-focusing on surface operations — seismic changes recently announced by Isaacman.

Artemis offers a fresh beginning

With half the world's population not yet born when NASA's 12 moonwalkers left their boot prints in the gray lunar dust, Artemis offers a fresh beginning, NASA's science mission chief Nicky Fox said earlier this week.

"There are a lot of people who don't remember Apollo. There are generations who weren't alive when Apollo launched. This is their Apollo," said Fox, who was 4 when Apollo 17 closed out the era.

NASA is in it for the long haul this time. Unlike Apollo, which focused on fast flags and footprints in a breakneck race against the Soviet Union, Artemis is striving for a sustainable moon base elaborate enough to satisfy even the most hard-core science fiction fans. But make no mistake: Isaacman and the Trump Administration want the next boot prints to be made by Americans, not the Chinese.

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Until Isaacman's program makeover, Artemis III was crawling toward a moon landing no sooner than 2029. The billionaire spacewalker slid in a new Artemis III for 2027 so astronauts could practice docking their Orion capsule with a lunar lander in orbit around Earth. Astronauts' momentous landing near the moon's south pole shifted to Artemis IV in 2028 — two years before an anticipated Chinese crew's arrival.

Like Apollo 13 — astronauts' only moon landing miss — Artemis II will use a free-return, lunar flyby trajectory to get home with gravity's tug and a minimum of gas. The gravity of both the moon and Earth will provide much if not most of the oomph to keep Orion on its out-and-back, figure-eight loop.

There are inherent dangers

The danger is right up there for Artemis II. NASA has refused to release its risk assessment for the mission. Managers contend it's better than 50-50 — the usual odds for a new rocket — but how much more is murky.

The SLS rocket leaked flammable hydrogen fuel during ground tests, a recurring problem that engineers still do not completely understand. The hydrogen leaks and unrelated helium blockages stalled the flight for two months, coming on top of years of vexing delays and cost overruns. Both problems also thwarted Artemis I, whose capsule returned with excessive heat shield damage. To NASA's relief, Wednesday's countdown was leak-free.

Beating the Soviet Union to the moon made the huge risks acceptable for Apollo, said Charlie Duke, one of only four surviving moonwalkers.

"I'm cheering you on," Duke said in a note to Wiseman and his crew before their flight.

During a weekend news conference, Koch stressed how humanity's path to Mars goes through the moon, the proving ground for points beyond.

"It is our strong hope that this mission is the start of an era where everyone, every person on Earth, can look at the moon and think of it as also a destination," she said.

Added Glover: "It's the story of humanity. Not Black history, not women's history, but that it becomes human history."

New DNA testing confirms serial killer Ted Bundy killed a Utah teen in 1974

By HANNAH SCHOENBAUM and REBECCA BOONE Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — The late Ted Bundy, one of the most famous and prolific serial killers in U.S. history, has claimed another victim.

New DNA testing confirmed Bundy was responsible for the 1974 killing of a 17-year-old Utah girl who disappeared after leaving a party alone on Halloween night, the local sheriff's office said Wednesday.

Laura Ann Aime was found dead on the side of a highway in American Fork Canyon about a month after her abduction. She was bound, beaten and without clothing.

Investigators long suspected that Bundy killed her — police said he confessed without providing any details before his execution in Florida in 1989 — but the case remained open until they could be certain.

"It's really quite amazing that people are even still interested in Laura's case," her sister, Michelle Impala, said at a news conference Wednesday. "Know I speak for my family when I thank you, and thank you media, too, for even caring."

Bundy was linked to the deaths of at least 30 women and girls across several states in the 1970s. His murders — which occurred in sorority houses, parks and elsewhere — set the nation on edge. Bundy's arrest drew widespread fascination, in part because many considered him to be charming and handsome.

Investigators had carefully preserved the evidence from Aime's case, and forensic analysts were able to identify portions that seemed most likely to have usable DNA samples, Utah Department of Public Safety Commissioner Beau Mason said.

The state crime lab got new technology in 2023 that allows investigators to extract DNA from samples even if they are small, degraded from age or contain DNA from multiple people, he said. That technology

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allowed them to identify a single male DNA profile, which they submitted to a national law enforcement database.

Bundy's DNA was a match, Mason said.

That profile can now be used by other law enforcement agencies who have long suspected Bundy of additional unsolved killings, he said, adding that more families could get similar closure.

"Laura Aime is the quintessential daughter of Utah County," Sgt. Mike Reynolds said. "We felt the pain the family feels when she was taken. We felt the pain that you felt this whole entire time, and we've had the desire to deliver to you some type of healing."

Impala was only 12 when her older sister died. Even with a five-year age gap, she said they were very close and did everything together. They shared a bedroom on the family's farm in Fairview, Utah, about 50 miles (80 kilometers) southeast of Provo.

Impala reminisced Wednesday about riding horses with her sister and watching Aime feed her horse red licorice nibs.

"When she died, he would not eat those anymore," she said.

It's not known when Bundy first began his attacks, but by 1974, young women — many of them college students — began disappearing in Washington state. Authorities were still investigating those cases when Bundy moved to Salt Lake City and began killing in Utah, Idaho and Colorado.

At the time of Aime's killing, Bundy was studying law at the University of Utah.

In August 1975, he was arrested for the first time in connection with the attacks. Police pulled him over and found incriminating items in his vehicle including rope, handcuffs and a ski mask.

He was found guilty the following year of kidnapping and assaulting a teen in Utah who had managed to get away. Bundy was sentenced to 15 years in prison for that crime, and while imprisoned he was charged in connection with the earlier death of a nursing student.

He was brought to Aspen, Colorado, for a hearing in that case in 1977, and he escaped custody by climbing out a second-story courthouse window when he was left alone for a time. He was caught after about a week, but escaped again six months later by breaking through the ceiling of a jail.

Bundy fled across the country, eventually making his way to Tallahassee, Florida. On Jan. 15, 1978, he entered the Chi Omega sorority house at Florida State University, bludgeoning two women to death with a large branch and leaving two more badly injured. He then went to another house nearby, badly injuring another woman.

Less than a month later, he abducted, sexually assaulted and killed a 12-year-old girl in Lake City, Florida. Kimberly Leach was believed to be his last victim before he was arrested again and executed by electric chair years later.

US-Europe rift widens as Trump lashes out at NATO allies over Mideast war

By JILL LAWLESS, JAMEY KEATEN and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. President Donald Trump has been fuming about NATO, musing about leaving the alliance, ratcheting up his criticism of European leaders and exposing a wider rift in the trans-Atlantic alliance — this time over the Iran war.

"NATO treated us very badly, and you have to remember it because they'll be treating us badly again if we ever need them," Trump said Wednesday at a private White House lunch for the upcoming Easter holiday that was posted online by a Business Insider reporter.

The president also suggested in an interview to The Telegraph newspaper in the U.K., published Wednesday, that he could potentially try to leave the alliance.

Yet in his televised Wednesday evening address to the American people about the Iran war, Trump chose not to mention NATO by name, suggesting only that countries that depend on oil flowing through the Strait of Hormuz "must grab it and cherish it" because the U.S. would not.

Trump's tension over NATO reflects the potentially dangerous consequences of breaking up the alliance,

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the limits on his own power to do so and the careful mending of the relationship performed by fellow world leaders. But one certainly is that Trump's displeasure with NATO appears to be a feature of his presidency, rather than an issue that can be easily settled.

Congress passed legislation in 2023 that would prevent any president from pulling out of NATO without its approval. The Trump administration, during his first term, had insisted the president had such authority on his own. It's unclear whether Trump would challenge in any way the new law, which is the first of its kind and with the NATO provision specifically championed at the time by Trump's secretary of state, Marco Rubio, who was a Florida senator at the time.

There are efforts under way to reinforce America's relationship with NATO, with its secretary-general, Mark Rutte, scheduled to visit Washington next week. The visit by Rutte was confirmed by a White House official who was not authorized to comment on the yet to be formally announced visit and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer said his government was "fully committed to NATO" and called it "the single most effective military alliance the world has ever seen."

Before a Trump speech later Wednesday, U.S. Sen. Mitch McConnell, a Kentucky Republican, and Sen. Chris Coons, a Delaware Democrat, said in a joint statement that "NATO is the most successful military alliance in history" and stressed that the Senate "will continue to support the alliance for the peace and protection it provides" the United States, Europe and the world.

Many European leaders have felt political pressure over the war, which faces opposition in their countries and has sent petroleum prices soaring as Iran has effectively shut the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow waterway between Iran and Oman through which about one-fifth of the world's oil passes.

The U.K. is working on plans that could help assuage Trump, and Starmer said military planners will work on a postwar security plan for the Strait.

On Thursday, British Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper will host a virtual meeting of 35 countries that have signed up to help ensure security for shipping in the Strait — after the fighting ends.

Iulia-Sabina Joja, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute, alluded to Trump's exhortation Tuesday for allies to "go get your own oil" in a social media post insisting it wasn't America's job to secure the Strait.

"The Europeans are not keen to go into an active warfare situation, to so-called 'get' their energy out of the Strait," said Joja, a former deputy project manager at NATO Allied Command Transformation in Virginia.

Time to 'reexamine the relationship,' Rubio says

As energy prices have spiked, Trump has called NATO allies "cowards" for not sending their military ships to the strait. It's an amplification of his message since his first term that European partners should assume greater responsibility for their own security.

Speaking Tuesday on Fox News, Rubio said, "I do think, unfortunately, we are going to have to reexamine whether or not this alliance that has served this country well for a while is still serving that purpose."

Rubio raised questions with interviewer Sean Hannity about whether NATO has "become a one-way street where America is simply in a position to defend Europe — but when we need the help of our allies, they're going to deny us basing rights and they're going to deny us overflight."

The fraying of NATO could weaken the alliance's deterrence, particularly with Russia: It seeks to limit conflict by having Russian President Vladimir Putin believe that NATO would retaliate if he decides to one day expand Moscow's war in Ukraine.

The backdrop

NATO is built on Article 5 of its founding treaty, which pledges that an attack on any one member will be met with a response from them all.

As the Iran war has spread, missiles and drones have been fired toward NATO member Turkey and a British military base on Cyprus, fueling speculation about what might prompt NATO to trigger its collective security guarantee and come to their rescue.

The alliance hasn't intervened or signaled any plan to do so. Rutte — who has voiced support for Trump and Washington's role in the alliance — has been focusing mostly on the Russia-Ukraine war since Ukraine borders four NATO countries.

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NATO operates uniquely by consensus. All 32 countries must agree for it to make decisions, so political priorities play a role. Even invoking Article 5 requires agreement among the allies. Turkey or the U.K. can't trigger it alone.

Vocal opposition

European leaders have called for the Middle East conflict to stop and want the U.S. and Iran to return to negotiations over Tehran's nuclear program, which Washington and Israel see as a threat.

The vocal opposition in Europe to Trump's war against Iran has started to turn into action.

Spain has closed its airspace to U.S. planes involved in the war.

Early last month, France agreed to let the U.S. Air Force use a base in southern France after receiving a "full guarantee" from the United States that planes not involved in carrying out strikes against Iran would land there.

The government of Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni, long seen as one of the European Union leaders with the best personal ties to Trump, denied permission for U.S. bombers to land at the Sigonella air base in Sicily for one mission related to the Middle East.

Franco Pavoncello, a professor of political science at Rome's John Cabot University, said that decision might cost Meloni a lot of her political capital in Washington.

But he said, "The Italian government could not be seen by the European allies as too submissive to American interests, as it would have very negative repercussions both at home and in the EU."

U.S. relations with Europe had already soured in recent months over Trump's call for Greenland — a semiautonomous territory of stalwart NATO ally Denmark — to become part of the United States, prompting many EU countries to rally behind Copenhagen.

DHS boss rescinds restrictive \$100,000 approval process, giving hope to FEMA relief efforts

By GABRIELA AOUN ANGUEIRA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin on Wednesday rescinded a rule that DHS expenditures over \$100,000 be personally approved by his office, ending a widely criticized policy implemented by his predecessor Kristi Noem that critics said put a particular burden on the Federal Emergency Management Agency's work aiding disaster response and recovery.

The decision marks the first major action by the new Homeland Security leader, sworn in last week, to change a policy implemented by Noem, whom President Donald Trump fired in March.

Mullin's move is expected to ease a spending bottleneck that lawmakers and states said delayed disaster response and recovery funds, though those impacts are unlikely to be widely felt until after the end of the DHS shutdown, now in its 47th day.

A DHS spokesperson confirmed that Mullin rescinded the rule Wednesday, telling The Associated Press the secretary "re-evaluated the contract processes to make sure DHS is serving the American taxpayer efficiently." CBS News first reported Mullin's decision.

The spokesperson said Mullin's action will streamline the contracting process and allocate aid more efficiently.

The International Association of Emergency Managers praised Mullin's decision. "We appreciate Secretary Mullin's common-sense approach to this matter, and we look forward to working with him," said Josh Morton, president of IAEM-USA.

Noem issued a directive last June requiring that she personally approve any Department of Homeland Security expenditure over \$100,000. Critics said the rule undermined FEMA in particular, an agency that routinely issues contracts and reimbursements well over that amount in its work preparing for and responding to natural and manmade disasters across the U.S.

The policy created "an untenable situation for emergency managers," Morton said, and a bottleneck that also hindered mitigation and preparedness programs, "putting Americans at increased risk from disasters."

A recently released report by Democratic members of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental

Affairs Committee found the approval rule had delayed at least 1,000 FEMA contracts, grants or disaster reimbursements by September.

The policy came under scrutiny after news reports linked it to unstaffed call centers and delays deploying FEMA Urban Search and Rescue teams to Texas during deadly floods last July, and brought sharp rebuke from some state officials and lawmakers, especially Republican Sen. Thom Tillis of North Carolina, whose state is still recovering from devastation wrought by Hurricane Helene in 2024.

"You've failed at FEMA," Tillis told Noem at a Senate hearing two days before she was fired.

About \$2.2 billion in recovery and mitigation dollars were in the DHS approval queue Wednesday, according to FEMA data seen by the AP.

"It's got a great mission, and I think people at FEMA want to do their job," Mullin told lawmakers at his March confirmation hearing, sparking cautious hope that he would ease the tumult experienced at the agency under Noem.

Mullin said he would keep the agency "adequately staffed" after it lost over 2,400 employees last year, and said he was already considering nominees for a permanent FEMA administrator, which the agency still lacks.

Trump has repeatedly floated the idea of eliminating FEMA, saying as recently as Tuesday that the agency is "very expensive and it really doesn't get the job done."

Michael Coen, FEMA chief of staff during the Obama and Biden administrations, said, "Hopefully this a step toward transparency and stability between FEMA and states."

DHS is reviewing other policies across the agency, pausing the purchase of new warehouses for immigration detention this week as it reviews contracts signed under Noem.

Lifting the spending approval rule will not necessarily mean a rapid flow of FEMA reimbursements to states, tribes and territories, as the agency is still impacted by the DHS fund impasse, now the longest government shutdown in U.S. history.

While FEMA disaster response and recovery activities are paid out of a non-lapsing Disaster Relief Fund, that money is running low, a FEMA official warned lawmakers in a House hearing last week, with about \$3.6 billion remaining. The DHS appropriations bill would add just over \$26 billion to the fund.

Republican lawmakers on Wednesday signaled an agreement to end the shutdown could be reached in the coming days.

Republican leaders in Congress announce plan to end Homeland Security shutdown

By KEVIN FREKING and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Speaker Mike Johnson and Senate Majority Leader John Thune announced a plan Wednesday to fully fund the Department of Homeland Security, moving past a split between the two Republican leaders that resulted in Congress leaving Washington last week without a fix to a record-setting partial government shutdown.

They said in a joint statement that "in the coming days" Republicans in Congress will pursue a two-track approach. The first track returns to the Senate plan to fund most of the department, with the exception of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and U.S. Border Patrol. On the second track, Republicans would try later to fund those agencies through party-line spending legislation.

Neither outcome is guaranteed, and the strategy could potentially still face opposition from the GOP's own ranks even though President Donald Trump has given his support.

"We appreciate and share the President's determination to once and for all bring an end to the Democrat DHS shutdown," said Johnson, R-La., and Thune, R-S.D.

The plan represents a do-over of what senators had in mind when they passed a bipartisan funding agreement through unanimous consent last Friday. The Senate could approve that same legislation again as soon as Thursday morning, but even if that happens, it's unclear how quickly the bill could move through the House. It will likely take several months for Republicans to act on the second part of Trump's plan and

pass budgeting legislation to fund ICE and Border Patrol.

House Republicans refused to go along with the Senate last week, instead changing the bill to fund all of DHS for 60 days.

As a result, the shutdown continued as lawmakers left for their home states and congressional districts for a two-week recess. The DHS shutdown reached its 47th day on Wednesday.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer credited Democratic unity for the GOP's new strategy, saying, "for days, Republican divisions derailed a bipartisan agreement, making American families pay the price for their dysfunction."

The announcement from the GOP leaders showed that for now, Thune and Johnson are on the same page. Their working relationship experienced a rupture late last week when Johnson — at the urging of many House Republicans — rejected Thune's plan.

The top Republicans hope the path ahead will win over skeptical GOP colleagues, but the most conservative lawmakers are likely to seek full funding for all of Trump's immigration and deportation operations.

"Let's make this simple: caving to Democrats and not paying CBP and ICE is agreeing to defund Law Enforcement and leaving our borders wide open again," Rep. Scott Perry, R-Pa., posted on X. "If that's the vote, I'm a NO."

It is uncertain whether Johnson could find enough support from the House to recall lawmakers back to Washington before their spring recess ends in mid-April.

Meanwhile, the narrow budget package being prepared for later this year is expected to fund ICE and Border Patrol through the remainder of Trump's term, as a way to try to ensure those agencies are no longer at risk from a funding lapse due to Democrats objecting to the president's immigration enforcement agenda.

Earlier Wednesday, Trump weighed in on the shutdown, using a social media post to call on Republicans to fund the immigration portions of DHS through a bill that would not require Democratic support. He said he wanted the legislation on his desk by June 1.

"We are going to work as fast, and as focused, as possible to replenish funding for our Border and ICE Agents, and the Radical Left Democrats won't be able to stop us," Trump said.

House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries released a statement saying, "It's time to pay TSA agents, end the airport chaos and fully fund every part of the Department of Homeland Security that does not relate to Donald Trump's violent mass deportation machine."

The vast majority of Homeland Security workers continue to report to work during the shutdown, but many thousands have been going without pay. That led to more Transportation Security Administration agents calling out from work, causing frustrating security lines at some of the nation's biggest airports. Those bottlenecks appeared to be clearing this week as agents began receiving backpay, per an executive order from Trump.

Tiger Woods turns down Ryder Cup captain's job and seeks treatment out of country

By DOUG FERGUSON AP Golf Writer

Tiger Woods formally turned down the Ryder Cup captaincy Wednesday as he steps away from golf activities, and a Florida judge approved his motion to leave the country to seek treatment.

The developments come one day after Woods entered a not guilty plea to suspicion of driving under the influence when his SUV clipped the back of a trailer and flipped on its side last week on a residential road near his home on Jupiter Island, Florida.

Woods posted a statement Tuesday night saying that he was stepping away indefinitely "to seek treatment and focus on my health."

A motion filed Wednesday by his attorney, Douglas Duncan, asked a judge that Woods be allowed to travel outside the country to begin "comprehensive inpatient treatment."

Duncan said the recommendation from Woods' doctor was based on the golfer's "complex clinical

presentation and the urgent need for a level of care that cannot safely or effectively be done within the United States as his privacy has been repeatedly compromised.

"Ongoing medical scrutiny and public exposure create significant barriers to his care and would result in setbacks and an inability to fully engage in treatment."

Martin County Court Judge Darren Steele approved the motion, which did not say where the inpatient treatment facility was located.

Woods sought treatment at an inpatient facility in Mississippi clinic in January 2010 after he was caught in a series of extramarital affairs, and his agent said he sought treatment at another inpatient clinic after his 2017 DUI arrest.

"I'm committed to taking the time needed to return in a healthier, stronger, and more focused place, both personally and professionally," Woods said in his statement.

The Ryder Cup decision by the PGA of America was not a surprise given the last five chaotic days involving Woods dating to his Friday arrest.

"The PGA of America stands in full support of Tiger Woods as he steps away to focus on his health and well-being," the statement said. "We commend Tiger for prioritizing his long-term health and deeply respect the courage it takes to make such a personal decision."

It said Woods "has shared with us" that he will not be captain.

Woods also turned down an offer to be Ryder Cup captain last time, waiting until the early summer of 2024 to tell the PGA of America that he did not have the time. That led to Keegan Bradley being selected just over a year before the 2025 matches on New York's Long Island, which Europe won.

The Associated Press reported in February that the PGA of America set a soft deadline for the end of March for Woods to decide so the process would not drag on.

The PGA of America said in its statement that it would share further updates "when appropriate."

The AP reported Saturday that the Ryder Cup committee had a plan in place should it not work out with Woods — a short list of as many as four candidates.

Whatever discussions and interviews take place likely would wait until after the Masters.

Three players on the Ryder Cup committee — Justin Thomas, Jordan Spieth and Bradley — are playing in the Masters, the first major of the year.

Luke Donald already has agreed to captain a third straight time for Europe, which has won the last two Ryder Cups. No captain has ever won three straight.

Pioneer women's basketball powers fade into the shadows full of pride as money reshapes the game

By DOUG FEINBERG and ALANIS THAMES AP Sports Writers

When fans walk into Immaculata's gym they are immediately reminded of the team's glorious past, when the Mighty Macs ruled women's basketball nearly a half-century ago.

Championship trophies are proudly displayed near the entrance while Hall of Fame banners honoring some of the school's icons, including former coach Cathy Rush, adorn the walls.

Powerhouses in this weekend's Final Four like UConn and South Carolina stand on the shoulders of schools like Immaculata, Queens College, Wayland Baptist and Delta State. During the early years of the women's basketball poll that debuted in 1976, those programs set the foundation, dominating the now dissolved Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW).

But during the 50 years of the women's poll, those pioneering programs haven't been able to sustain the dynasty-level success that shaped women's hoops in the 1970s.

"You can look back and say, 'Well, it's been a few years since we won a national championship,'" said Delta State athletic director Mike Kinnison, who was a student when the school won consecutive national titles from 1975-1977. "And that's true. But, you know, they don't give those away. You don't buy them at Walmart. You've got to earn them."

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The game has professionalized as money reshaped the sports landscape, and competitive advantages shifted to big schools with seemingly unlimited budgets when the NCAA took over the sport in 1982.

The Lady Statesmen were the first No. 1 team when the women's basketball poll debuted 50 years ago. Wayland Baptist was second, Immaculata third and Queens ninth. Delta State will be recognized during "The AP Top 25 Fan Poll Experience" being held Thursday-Saturday at Arizona State's First Amendment Forum in the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

The poll has served as a road map for the rise of the sport but a lot of things have happened since 1982. "The whole landscape of NCAA and Division II has changed," Kinnison said. "Women's basketball has just exploded. And so it's hard to dominate that space."

'Incredible' changes to women's basketball

Immaculata won three consecutive AIAW titles from 1972-1976 in front of sellout crowds that were a rarity in women's basketball at the time. Delta State won the next three under trailblazing coach Margaret Wade. The Lady Statesmen vaulted to the national spotlight, traveling the country and defeating larger schools — with much bigger budgets — like LSU and Tennessee.

Title IX helped fuel rapid growth in women's sports in the 1970s, but as the women's game grew, the NCAA took over and added full scholarship allotments and started facilities arms races that smaller colleges could not compete with.

Amid the shift, Immaculata moved down to Division III, which does not offer athletic scholarships. Queens College and Delta State dropped to Division II while Wayland Baptist is in the NAIA.

The shift in women's sports is both gratifying and bittersweet for players and coaches from the pioneering schools that helped spark this current growth. Women's basketball in recent years has seen skyrocketing ticket demand, attendance, media coverage and television ratings behind recent stars like Caitlin Clark, Angel Reese and Paige Bueckers.

"Women and girls were playing this game at a different level all over the country and no one knew about it," former Queens College coach Lucille Kyvallos said. "What happened here was we garnered national attention. Now look what's happened. It's incredible."

Winning titles requires 'significant investment'

The current revenue sharing model that allows schools to directly pay athletes has added a greater financial hurdle for small schools to overcome.

"If you want to be nationally competitive, if you want to win national championships, there's a very significant investment involved," said Big East Commissioner Val Ackerman, "because you're paying top dollar for your coach. You're paying for all the amenities. ... And then you've got to, now you've got to acquire players, and to do that you need money, because they have options. And smaller schools aren't going to have the same (financial) wherewithal as the big football school has."

The 68-team women's NCAA tournament field, for example, had 12 schools from the Big Ten, 10 from the SEC and nine ACC schools. The Big 12 had eight. There were only one at-large team from outside the Power 4 Conferences and the Big East.

"Is that a bad thing?" Ackerman added. "No — I think it's just the reality of the world we're in right now."

Kinnison, who coached baseball at Delta State for 23 seasons before becoming athletic director in 2019, said he wants the school's teams to be able to compete nationally and recapture some form of sustained success. That has been difficult, he added, and the school has faced tough financial decisions to make that happen.

"More and more, we rely on private sources, donations, alumni," he said in his office on Delta State's campus in Cleveland, Mississippi. "We're in a town here of 11,000 people, and that's not the density of a town that has 100,000 or 150,000 people. Some of our corporate options are a little less, so it's challenging."

Pioneers battle against becoming afterthoughts

The Delta State AD, along with others at Queens College and Immaculata, remain hopeful that their programs won't be forgotten.

The court at Queens College is named after Kyvallos, the women's basketball Hall of Famer and advocate

who built the Knights into pioneers in the AIAW era.

At Delta State, there are similar tributes in the arena's concourse: championship trophies and the preserved netting, the name of former coach Lloyd Clark is painted on the floor of the court named after him, honoring the period in which he won three Division II titles and guided 16 of his teams to the NCAA Tournament.

"You have to be a steward of that history, you have to tell those stories and talk about those individuals because it was crazy to think about what they had to go through," current Queens coach Travis Ponton said.

Current Immaculata coach Brittany Whalen is very familiar with the history of the program. She played there from 2011-15 and was on the court at Madison Square Garden when the team played Queens College in her senior year — four decades after the two programs played the first women's basketball game at MSG.

"It felt like being a celebrity," Whalen said. "To tie in to that part of the history and that being the first-ever game played there it was just so cool to be a part of."

Whalen, who has led the team to its first 20-win season since 1976-77 at 24-3, gives tours of the facility to perspective players.

"This is the same building they played in back in the 70s and not much has changed," she said. "We talk about it in the preseason how you're here because of the women who paved the way before you. If you're going to be a Mighty Mac and be a part of the program, you need to know the history of it."

Current Delta State coach Tracy Stewart-Lange has a similar appreciation for her program's history.

There's a photo in her phone that reminds her of those days. Former Delta State star and basketball pioneer Lusia Harris is captured mid-layup, and behind her fans are sitting courtside, pressed against the railings and anywhere else they could find a spot.

Games are much quieter now that the school has faded from national prominence, and Stewart-Lange often wonders if that will change.

"We want to fill these seats," she said. "We're trying to figure out can that still be done."

SpaceX files initial paperwork to sell shares to the public and likely make Musk a trillionaire

By BERNARD CONDON and KEN SWEET AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — Elon Musk's space exploration company has filed preliminary paperwork to sell shares to the public, according to two sources familiar with the filing, a blockbuster offering that would likely rank as the biggest ever and could make its founder the world's first trillionaire.

A SpaceX IPO promises to be one of the biggest Wall Street events of the year, with several investment banks lining up to help raise tens of billions to fund Musk's ambitions to set up a base on the moon, put datacenters the size of several football fields in orbit and possibly one day send a man to Mars.

The sources spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk publicly about the confidential registration with the Securities and Exchange Commission.

SpaceX did not respond immediately to a request for comment.

Exactly how much SpaceX plans to raise has not been disclosed but the figure is reportedly as much as \$75 billion. At that level, the offering would easily eclipse the \$29 billion that Saudi Aramco raised in its IPO in 2019.

The offering, coming possibly in June, could value all the shares of SpaceX at \$1.5 trillion, nearly double what the company was valued in December when some minority owners sold their stakes, according to research firm Pitchbook, before an acquisition that increased its size.

Musk owns 42% of the SpaceX now, according to Pitchbook, though that figure will change with the IPO when new owners are issued shares. In any case, he is likely to pierce the trillion dollar mark because he is already close. Forbes magazine estimates Musk's net worth at roughly \$823 billion.

In addition to making reusable rockets to hurl astronauts and hardware into orbit, SpaceX owns Starlink, the world's largest satellite communications company. The company also recently brought under its roof

two other Musk businesses, social media platform X, formerly Twitter, and artificial intelligence business, xAI, in a controversial transaction because both the seller and the buyer were controlled by him.

SpaceX has become the biggest commercial launch company in its industry, responsible for sending payloads into orbit for customers across the globe, but has also benefited from big taxpayer spending. That has raised conflicts of interest issues given that Musk was the biggest donor to President Donald Trump's campaign and is still a big backer.

In the past five years, SpaceX won \$6 billion in contracts from NASA, the Defense Department and other U.S. government agencies, according to USAspending.gov.

Among current SpaceX owners is Donald Trump Jr, the president's oldest son. He owns a shares through 1789 Capital. That venture capital firm made him a partner shortly after his father won the presidency for a second time and has been buying up federal contractors seeking to win taxpayer money ever since.

The White House and Trump himself have repeatedly denied there are any conflicts of interest between his role as president and his family's businesses.

To fix a patient's irregular heartbeat, doctors first tested its digital 'twin'

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Scientists created virtual replicas of patients' diseased hearts so precise that blocking a dangerous irregular heartbeat in these digital "twins" showed doctors how to better treat the real thing.

One of the first clinical trials of these custom models suggests it might improve care for ventricular tachycardia, a notoriously difficult-to-treat arrhythmia that is a major cause of sudden cardiac arrest, blamed for about 300,000 U.S. deaths a year.

The study, by researchers at Johns Hopkins University, was a small first step. The Food and Drug Administration allowed the digital twin technology to guide treatment for just 10 patients, and much larger studies will be needed.

But the results reported Wednesday in the New England Journal of Medicine come as doctors increasingly are exploring how a technology long used in aerospace and other industries might be harnessed for better health, too.

Dr. Jeffrey Goldberger, a heart specialist at the University of Miami who wasn't involved with the study, experimented with more rudimentary iterations 15 years ago and praised the new findings. "This is what we envisioned," he said.

Doctors have long used 3D models, both physical and computer-generated ones, to simulate disease and practice techniques. But Hopkins biomedical engineer Natalia Trayanova said true digital twins predict how a real organ can react to different treatments. Her lab is pioneering colorful interactive models developed with an advanced MRI scan and other data from each patient.

"We treat the twin before we treat the patient," Trayanova said. "Did it work? And if it did, are there new things that arise" that will require more or different care?

The heart's electrical system powers our heartbeat. Ventricular tachycardia is a super-fast heartbeat triggered when an electrical wave short-circuits in the organ's bottom chambers, the ventricles, and prevents them from pumping blood out to the body.

"You see this heart that is basically quivering," Trayanova said.

Medication can help but the main treatment is ablation, when doctors thread catheters to the heart to burn misfiring tissue. But it's a bit trial-and-error, as patients spend hours under anesthesia while doctors determine where to aim. Repeat ablations are common, and many patients have an implanted defibrillator as backup.

Enter Trayanova's digital twins of patients' ventricles. Colors swirl on a computer screen – blue, green, yellow and orange – showing how the heart's electrical wave moves across the chamber's healthy areas before getting stuck on damaged tissue. It's trapped in a circular motion that she compares to the swirl

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of a hurricane.

"It allows me to recreate the functioning of the patient's organ and then predict what is the best way to ablate," she said.

The technology locates a dysfunctional region where the electrical wave repeatedly hits. Virtually ablating it will show if that solves the problem or if another arrhythmia forms that also will need zapping. "Then we poke it again," she explained.

Trayanova's team created customized ablation targets for each of the 10 study participants. Cardiologists transferred them to a mapping system they use as a guide and aimed just at those targets instead of hunting their own.

More than a year later, eight patients had no arrhythmias while two experienced only a single brief episode while they were healing -- better than the treatment's typical 60% success rate, said Dr. Jonathan Chrispin, a Hopkins cardiologist and the study's lead author. All but two also stopped their anti-arrhythmia medicine.

More importantly, cardiologists may burn away less tissue by targeting "specifically the areas that we think are critically important," Chrispin said. "We could potentially make these procedures shorter, safer, more effective."

The Hopkins team hopes to study the digital twin approach in a larger study with other hospitals, and has begun a trial using it to treat a more common type of irregular heartbeat called atrial fibrillation. Other researchers are studying digital twins for cancer care.

Stocks rally worldwide as oil prices ease on hopes for a possible end to the Iran war

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Stocks rushed higher worldwide, and oil prices eased Wednesday as hopes built that the war with Iran could end soon. That's even though some of the signals investors saw as hopeful are already under dispute, and several earlier bouts of optimism in financial markets quickly got undercut by continued, fierce fighting in the war.

The S&P 500 rose 0.7% and added to its leap from the day before, which was its best since last spring. That followed even bigger gains for stock markets across Europe and Asia, including an 8.4% surge in South Korea, which were catching up to Wall Street's rally from Tuesday.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average climbed 224 points, or 0.5%, and the Nasdaq composite rallied 1.2%.

Oil prices also fell back toward \$100 per barrel after President Donald Trump said late Tuesday that the U.S. military could end its offensive in two to three weeks.

That added to optimism following a couple tenuous signals of hope from earlier Tuesday that Wall Street latched onto, including a news report quoting Iran's president as saying that it has "the necessary will to end the war" as long as certain requirements are met, including "guarantees to prevent a recurrence of aggression."

The worry on Wall Street has been that the war may last a long time and keep oil and natural gas from the Persian Gulf out of global markets, which could create a brutal blast of inflation.

But hope has been quick to reverse to doubt on Wall Street, triggering manic swings back and forth for financial markets since the war with Iran began. Trump has also made statements that lifted markets, only to see the gains quickly disappear after increasing his military threats.

Shortly before Wall Street began trading on Wednesday, Trump claimed in a post on his social media network that Iran "has just asked the United States of America for a CEASEFIRE!"

"We will consider when Hormuz Strait is open, free, and clear. Until then, we are blasting Iran into oblivion or, as they say, back to the Stone Ages!!!"

But Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Esmail Baghaei, quickly called that claim "false and baseless," according to a report on Iranian state television.

Oil prices also remain high, even if they've eased recently. The price for a barrel of Brent crude oil, the

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international standard, was sitting around \$101 following its declines, which is still up from roughly \$70 before the war began.

U.S. gasoline prices rose again overnight to a national average of \$4.06 per gallon, according to the auto club AAA.

Iran, meanwhile, hit an oil tanker off the coast of Qatar and Kuwait's airport on Wednesday while air-strikes battered Tehran as the fighting continued. Iran also continues to hold a grip on the Strait of Hormuz, where a fifth of the world's traded oil passes during peacetime.

"De-escalation hopes have given markets a lift, but we think the effects of the war would, in many cases, persist even if the war did end soon," Thomas Mathews, head of markets, Asia Pacific at Capital Economics, said in a research note Wednesday.

"It's worth thinking through how markets might fare if the war were to end 'very soon,'" he wrote. "Do markets have further to recover if sentiment continues to improve? The answer is almost certainly yes."

The White House said Trump will deliver a public address Wednesday evening on the Iran war.

On Wall Street, three out of every five stocks within the S&P 500 rose as Big Tech powered the move higher. Gains of 3.4% for Alphabet and 0.8% for Nvidia were two of the strongest forces lifting the S&P 500.

Eli Lilly rallied 3.8% after U.S. regulators approved its GLP-1 pill for weight loss.

Such gains have pulled the S&P 500, which sits at the heart of many 401(k) accounts, back to within 5.8% of its all-time high set early this year. Just on Monday, the index briefly neared a 10% drop from its record, a steep-enough fall that professional investors have a name for it: a "correction."

Nike sank 15.5% even though it reported a stronger profit for the latest quarter than expected. Analysts said it gave some lackluster financial forecasts.

Oil companies also fell with the price of crude. Exxon Mobil slumped 5.2%, and Chevron dropped 4.6%.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 46.80 points to 6,575.32. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 224.23 to 46,565.74, and the Nasdaq composite climbed 250.32 to 21,840.95.

In stock markets abroad, indexes leaped more than 2% in France and Germany. Asian markets had even bigger gains.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 jumped 5.2% after a survey showed business sentiment for major Japanese manufacturers improved despite worries about the Iran war.

In the bond market, Treasury yields held relatively steady after a report said U.S. retailers made more money in February than economists expected. A separate report said U.S. manufacturing growth last month was slightly faster than economists expected.

The 10-year Treasury yield rose to 4.32% from 4.30% late Tuesday.

Supreme Court seems poised to reject Trump's birthright citizenship limits as he attends arguments

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court seemed poised Wednesday to reject President Donald Trump's restrictions on birthright citizenship in a momentous case that was magnified by his unparalleled presence in the courtroom.

Conservative and liberal justices questioned whether Trump's order declaring that children born to parents who are in the United States illegally or temporarily are not American citizens comports with either the Constitution or federal law.

Arguments lasted more than two hours in a crowded courtroom that included not only Trump, the first sitting president to attend arguments at the nation's highest court, but also Attorney General Pam Bondi and Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, and in seats reserved for the justices' guests, actor Robert De Niro.

The case frames another test of Trump's assertions of executive power that defy long-standing precedent for a court with a conservative majority and a robust view of presidential power, which has largely ruled in the Republican president's favor. In the notable exceptions when the court has not, Trump has

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responded with starkly personal criticisms of the justices. A definitive ruling is expected by early summer.

Trump, the media-savvy president, spent just over an hour inside a courtroom that prohibits cameras and all electronic devices for arguments made by the Republican administration's top Supreme Court lawyer, Solicitor General D. John Sauer. The president departed shortly after lawyer Cecilia Wang began her presentation in defense of broad birthright citizenship.

After court adjourned, Trump posted on Truth Social: "We are the only Country in the World STUPID enough to allow 'Birthright' Citizenship!" Actually, about three dozen countries, nearly all of them in the Americas, guarantee citizenship to children born on their territory.

Justices ask about the Trump order's legal basis

Trump heard Sauer face one skeptical question after another. Justices asked about the legal basis for the order and voiced more practical concerns.

"Is this happening in the delivery room?" Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson asked, drilling down into the logistics of how the government would actually figure out who is entitled to citizenship and who is not.

Chief Justice John Roberts suggested that Sauer was relying on quirky exceptions to citizenship to make a broad argument about people who are in the country illegally. "I'm not quite sure how you can get to that big group from such tiny and sort of idiosyncratic examples," Roberts said.

Justice Clarence Thomas sounded the most likely among the nine justices to side with Trump.

"How much of the debates around the 14th Amendment had anything to do with immigration?" Thomas asked, pointing out that the purpose of the amendment was to grant citizenship to Black people, including freed slaves.

Several courts have blocked the citizenship restrictions

The justices heard Trump's appeal of a lower-court ruling from New Hampshire that struck down the citizenship restrictions, one of several courts that have blocked them. The restrictions have not taken effect anywhere in the country.

The birthright citizenship order, which Trump signed on the first day of his second term, is part of his Republican administration's broad immigration crackdown.

Birthright citizenship is the first Trump immigration-related policy to reach the court for a final ruling. The justices previously struck down global tariffs Trump had imposed under an emergency powers law that had never been used that way.

Trump reacted furiously to the late February tariffs decision, saying he was ashamed of the justices who ruled against him and calling them unpatriotic.

He issued a preemptive broadside against birthright citizenship and the court on Sunday on his Truth Social platform, referring to "dumb judges and justices" and saying wealthy pregnant women from China and elsewhere come to the U.S. to give birth so their newborns will have American citizenship.

What would Trump's order do?

Trump's order would upend the long-standing view that the Constitution's 14th Amendment, ratified in 1868, and federal law since 1940 confer citizenship on everyone born on American soil, with narrow exceptions for the children of foreign diplomats and those born to a foreign occupying force.

The 14th Amendment was intended to ensure that Black people, including former slaves, had citizenship, though the Citizenship Clause is written more broadly. "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside," it reads.

In a series of decisions, lower courts have struck down the executive order as illegal, or likely so, under the Constitution and federal law. The decisions have invoked the high court's 1898 ruling in Wong Kim Ark, which held that the U.S.-born child of Chinese nationals was a citizen.

The Trump administration argues that the common view of citizenship is wrong, asserting that children of noncitizens are not "subject to the jurisdiction" of the United States and therefore are not entitled to citizenship.

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

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Appearing before the court, Sauer said unrestricted citizenship encourages illegal immigration and also "birth tourism."

Roberts asked Sauer how significant "birth tourism" is.

No one knows for sure, he said, adding, "but of course, we're in a new world now" where 8 billion people are a plane ride away "from having a child who's a U.S. citizen."

The chief justice replied, "It's a new world. It's the same Constitution."

Justice Neil Gorsuch, a Trump appointee, also revealed his skepticism of Sauer's position when the solicitor general said the 1898 Supreme Court case should be read to endorse Trump's view of citizenship. "I'm not sure how much you want to rely on Wong Kim Ark," Gorsuch said.

Yet another conservative justice appointed by Trump, Brett Kavanaugh, suggested to Wang that the court could resolve the case in Wang's favor either with a "short opinion" saying that the Wong Kim Ark case was correctly decided and it means Trump's order is unconstitutional.

Or, he said, the justices could avoid constitutional questions and find that the order is illegal under federal law.

No court has accepted the Trump administration's argument, and lawyers for pregnant women whose children would be affected by the order said the Supreme Court should not be the first to do so, Wang told the justices.

Questions about the word 'domicile'

The most difficult questions Wang faced, from several justices, dealt with the repeated use of the word "domicile" in Wong Kim Ark, which the administration says indicates that the court's view of birthright citizenship excluded people in the country temporarily or illegally.

Roberts said the word is used 20 times in the 1898 decision. "Isn't it at least something to be concerned about?" he asked.

Wang says it's true that the Chinese parents in that case were domiciled in the U.S., but that the decision did not turn on that fact.

Generally, though, the intensity of the justices' questions dropped off during her presentation, often a signal of where the court will come out.

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.

From TMZ to Trump, pressure grows to bring Congress back during partial shutdown

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — TMZ built its brand tracking celebrities. Now it is turning its attention to Congress, chasing down paparazzi-style shots of lawmakers on break from Washington during a record-long partial government shutdown.

Videos and photos posted by the tabloid website showing lawmakers in airports, Las Vegas and even Disney World have racked up millions of views and led to a growing backlash. With travel disruptions persisting and some federal workers going without pay, pressure is mounting on Congress to cut short its regularly scheduled recess.

Beyond TMZ, President Donald Trump also wants lawmakers to come back, even hinting he might invoke rarely used powers to call Congress into session.

On Wednesday, he directed them to fully fund the Department of Homeland Security, and House Speaker Mike Johnson and Senate Majority Leader John Thune issued a joint statement saying they would work together in the coming days to do that.

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The basic framework would be similar to a bipartisan funding deal previously passed by the Senate and rejected by the House last week. But even if the bill once again quickly clears the Senate, its path through the House could be complicated and potentially require members to return to Washington.

On recess — and on camera

As lawmakers headed out of Washington last week, the celebrity-gossip outlet TMZ put out a call.

"TMZ is on the hunt for photos of politicians on vacay as TSA officers suffer!" the outlet said in a social media post.

The focus from TMZ, an outlet known more for capturing unflattering footage of celebrities than for digging into the nuances of federal policy, was the latest example of how politics is being fueled by viral images and populist sentiment.

Videos quickly followed, showing senators moving through airports — often attempting to shield themselves from cameras — with provocative headlines layered on top. The clips racked up millions of views.

The outlet didn't stop there. Photos of lawmakers on vacation soon followed, including viral images of Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., at Disney World, with captions such as: "Lindsey Graham lives it up at Disney World during the partial government shutdown!"

Graham said that he had been in Florida for a meeting with Trump administration officials and had made a stop at Disney World with a friend. He also blamed Democrats for the shutdown.

Another widely shared post showed Rep. Robert Garcia, D-Calif., in Las Vegas.

"Actually I don't mind what TMZ is doing here," Garcia posted in response, adding that he was visiting his father. "Like I said a few days ago, Speaker Mike Johnson should have never sent us all home."

The effort grew out of frustration, said TMZ executive producer Harvey Levin, after the outlet interviewed a TSA worker struggling due to missed paychecks during the shutdown.

"It outraged us so much we wanted to use our platforms to show how Congress — Dems AND Republicans — have betrayed us," Levin said in a statement.

He added that lawmakers shouldn't expect the coverage to end anytime soon.

"Several months ago we decided to amp up our presence and our voice," Levin said. "We now have a producer and a photog circulating in the Capitol, showing the intersection between politics and pop culture."

Beyond the internet, pressure has also ramped up from the White House. Trump spoke with Thune on Sunday and Monday, and White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said he has urged leadership to cancel recess "repeatedly."

"He'll host a big Easter dinner here at the White House if Congress will come back," she added.

Unions are also added to that pressure.

"To leave Washington while tens of thousands of workers are going without pay shows a clear lack of respect for the essential employees tasked with keeping our nation safe," said Hydrick Thomas, president of the American Federation of Government Employees TSA Council 100.

Although vacation snapshots have stirred outrage, recess is also an opportunity for lawmakers to reconnect with constituents back home. Some hold town hall events. Others go on trips abroad, such as joining a delegation to Taiwan.

GOP leaders say they will pursue end to shutdown in 'coming days'

The joint statement from Thune and Johnson came in the face of the enormous pressure that had built, after the two leaders had appeared to be on separate pages.

"In the coming days, Republicans in the Senate and House will be following through on the President's directive by fully funding the entire Department of Homeland Security on two parallel tracks," they said.

The plan relies on funding most of the department through an agreement with Democratic senators, while leaving out money for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and U.S. Border Patrol. Republicans would try later to fund those agencies through party-line budgeting legislation.

Thune and Johnson hope the path ahead will win over skeptical Republicans, especially since Trump himself has given his support for the emerging strategy.

Trump on Wednesday appeared to endorse that approach, saying on social media that Republicans were "going forward" to fund ICE and Border Patrol without Democratic votes. He set a June 1 deadline

for Congress to act.

But the most conservative GOP lawmakers are still likely to demand full funding for all of Trump's immigration and deportation operations, likely setting up the House for an early return to Washington.

Gas prices are high. But do the numbers support suspending state gas taxes?

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

With the average price of a gallon of gas topping \$4 nationally, some federal and state officials have talked of temporarily reducing motor fuel taxes to provide relief to motorists.

So far, Georgia and Utah are the only states to suspend all or part of their gas taxes as the war in Iran has pushed fuel prices higher. Others are considering it. But there are a variety of reasons that policymakers may not relax gas taxes, including concerns about government finances, doubts about the action's effectiveness and uncertainty about how long the war will last.

Here's a look, by the numbers, at the debate:

2 states

The two states to suspend gas taxes this year took significantly different approaches. Georgia's 60-day suspension of its 33-cent-a-gallon gas tax took effect once Republican Gov. Brian Kemp signed it into law on March 20, making it the first state to act since the war started. Three days later, Republican Utah Gov. Spencer Cox signed a law temporarily trimming 6 cents off the state's 38-cent-a-gallon fuel tax. But the six-month reduction won't begin until July 1.

38 cents

Retail gas stations have charged consumers an average of 38 cents per gallon above wholesale prices over the past five years, according to Jeff Lenard, a spokesperson for the National Association of Convenience Stores. Their profits after expenses often are less than half that, he said. Meanwhile, the daily price for a barrel of oil has swung dramatically during the war with Iran — sometimes by the equivalent of around 40 cents a gallon, Lenard said.

Why do those numbers matter? They highlight the complexity of setting gas prices. When a gas tax is suspended, motorists may not see an equivalent reduction in retail prices. That's made Republican Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis hesitant to repeat a gas tax suspension he approved when prices last spiked in 2022.

"Our ability to influence the fuel prices are really marginal at best," DeSantis said in March, adding: "I don't think the consumer really felt relief."

61 cents

California charges a nationally high gas tax of 61 cents per gallon, with additional fees on top of that. The tax contributes to California's highest-in-the-nation gas prices, which averaged \$5.89 a gallon on Wednesday, according to AAA. Several Democratic and Republican gubernatorial candidates have called for suspending the gas tax. But the proposal hasn't gained traction in the Democratic-led Legislature, where some are concerned about how to make up for the lost revenue.

\$100 million

Republicans in Maryland pushed for a 30-day gas-tax suspension. But their attempts were rejected by the Democratic-led General Assembly. A spokesperson for Democratic Gov. Wes Moore said a one-month suspension could have blown a \$100 million hole in the state's transportation budget even as officials already were cutting spending and shifting money to make up for a projected shortfall in the state's overall budget.

A better approach would be to end the war, said Moore spokesperson Ammar Moussa, adding: "The best way to bring prices down is to address the source of the pain."

Since the war began on Feb. 28, Trump has repeatedly said it could be over soon while also threatening to widen the conflict.

\$330 million

Whether states have the money to make up for lost fuel taxes is a pivotal question. Georgia is dipping

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into its surplus. In Connecticut, Democratic state Senate leaders have suggested that Gov. Ned Lamont could tap into the roughly \$330 million remaining in an emergency fund meant to respond to federal government actions to help offset a proposed one-month suspension of the state's 25-cent-a-gallon gas tax.

"The fund was created precisely for situations like this: when federal actions create hardship for Connecticut families," Senate President Pro Tem Martin Looney and Majority Leader Bob Duff said in a statement.

A spokesman for the Democratic governor said Lamont is willing to work with lawmakers on "a smart and strategic pause to the state's gas tax."

\$800 million

Gas taxes generally pay for building, expanding and repairing roads and bridges. Unless funds are shifted from elsewhere, suspending a gas tax means less money for transportation projects, including some that may already have been budgeted.

In South Carolina, the state gas tax provides about \$800 million yearly, helping to fund nearly \$7 billion of projects ranging from safety improvements on two-lane roads to a massive overhaul of interstate interchanges. Republican Gov. Henry McMaster worries that major projects would take longer and cost more if tax revenue were cut. He dismissed the suspension of gas taxes as a "sort of knee-jerk reaction."

"We'd like them all to be lower and lower," McMaster said, "but that's one we should not take any money out of."

FDA grants speedy approval to Eli Lilly's weight-loss pill for obesity

By JONEL ALECCIA AP Health Writer

Federal regulators on Wednesday approved Eli Lilly's new weight-loss pill, a second daily oral medication to treat obesity and other weight-related conditions.

The Food and Drug Administration granted expedited approval to orforglipron, a GLP-1 drug that works like widely used injectable medications to mimic a natural hormone that controls appetite and feelings of fullness.

The drug, which will be branded as Foundayo, is expected to begin shipping Monday. The company said people with insurance may be able to get the drug starting at \$25 per month with a Lilly discount card. Prices for people paying cash will range between \$149 per month to \$349 per month, depending on the dose.

The new pill joins drugmaker Novo Nordisk's oral Wegovy pill, which has spurred more than 600,000 prescriptions in the United States since it was approved in December.

The FDA authorized Eli Lilly's drug as part of a new program aimed at cutting drug approval times. The agency said it reviewed the company's application in 50 days.

In a clinical trial of more than 3,000 adults with obesity, participants who received the highest dose of orforglipron, 36 milligrams, lost 11.2% of their body weight — about 25 pounds on average — over more than 16 months. That compared with a 2.1% weight loss, or less than 5 pounds, in patients who received a placebo, or dummy pill, according to the New England Journal of Medicine.

Both the Lilly and Novo Nordisk pills resulted in less weight loss than the average achieved with Lilly's injectable Zepbound, which results in a 21% average weight loss, or Novo Nordisk's injectable Wegovy, which averages about 15%.

Both once-daily pills promise convenience, but orforglipron is a small-molecule GLP-1 drug that can be taken without restrictions. The Wegovy pill, a peptide, must be taken with a sip of water in the morning on an empty stomach, with a 30-minute wait before eating or drinking.

Users of orforglipron also saw improvements in waist circumference, blood pressure, triglyceride levels and cholesterol levels, the study found.

Side effects, mostly gastrointestinal issues, led between 5% and 10% of participants in the orforglipron study to discontinue treatment, compared with nearly 3% in the placebo group.

About 1 in 8 people in the U.S. have used injectable GLP-1 drugs, according to a survey from KFF, a nonprofit health policy research group. But many more have trouble affording the costly shots.

The pill from Indianapolis-based Lilly will be included in a Trump administration deal to lower prices on GLP-1 drugs.

Shares of ELi Lilly and Company rose more than 4% in trading Wednesday afternoon.

Retail sales rose in February before the Iran war, which threatens to derail spending

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Shoppers increased their spending in February before gasoline prices spiked because of the attacks on Iran by the U.S. and Israel.

Retail sales rose a better-than-expected 0.6% in February, from a revised 0.1% decline in January, the Commerce Department said Wednesday.

Retail analysts say it was a strong showing given that inflation has rattled American households, but that the war in Iran may have dented the psyche of consumers with spending on gasoline racing higher over the past five weeks.

"While the overall numbers are good and suggest a continued trajectory of reasonable expansion for retail, they do not reflect the problems that have arisen since the start of the Iran conflict," wrote Neil Saunders, managing director of GlobalData. "Since the start of March our own numbers show that consumer sentiment has soured and that rising gas prices are starting to spook consumers."

This week the average price for a gallon of regular gasoline eclipsed \$4, the first time it's done so since 2022, and it jumped another 4 cents overnight to \$4.06, according to motor club AAA.

Yet before the Iran war began, sales at motor vehicle and auto parts dealerships rose a solid 1.2% in February. Excluding that sector, retail sales rose 0.4%

Business at clothing and accessories stores rose 2%, while sales at electronics and appliance stores were up 0.5%. Sales at online retailers rose 0.7%. And business at health and personal care stores were up 2.3%

The snapshot offers only a partial look at consumer spending and doesn't include things like travel and hotel stays. But the lone services category – restaurants – registered an increase of 0.4%.

"This was a solid report," Ksenia Bushmeneva, economist at TD Bank Group, wrote in a report published on Wednesday.

He noted that higher gas prices at the pump will likely lift overall sales in March since the government retail sales figures are not adjusted for inflation. But he said "real spending might take a hit as consumers look to offset higher fuel costs with reduced spending discretionary items, with spending on travel and recreation the most likely areas to be cut."

The Iran war began Feb. 28 and has shut down the Strait of Hormuz, cutting off one-fifth of the world's oil supply. The price for a barrel of Brent crude, the international standard, is up more than 45% since the start of the war. The cost of diesel fuel has risen faster than gasoline, driving up the cost of transportation for companies. Economists expect a related bump in inflation, potentially as soon as this month.

Economists had believed that an unusually large jump in tax refunds would kick start spending at the start of the year. But spiking gas prices will take a bite of that money.

"The hit to real incomes from higher gas prices is especially regressive, hurting lower-income households disproportionately, while the lift from tax refunds is more evenly spread," Samuel Tombs, chief economist at Pantheon Economics, wrote in a recent report. "Moreover, refunds will slow to a trickle by late April, providing little protection if high prices persist."

Patrick De Haan, an analyst at GasBuddy, which tracks fuel prices, noted that the way to gauge the impact of gas prices is how much gas expenditures account for a shopper's income. He said that gas prices are approaching 3% of household medium income.

"When that gets up to about 4, 4 1/2, 5%, that's really when people really start trimming back on some of their discretionary purchases," he said.

Some retailers are already warning of the impact on their customers if gas prices keep rising.

Daniel Erver, CEO of Hennes & Mauritz, said last week that the Swedish fast fashion chain expects energy

prices will have a "significant impact on the consumer behavior" if the war is prolonged.

And Darren Rebelez, CEO of the convenience store chain Casey's General Stores, told investors last month that a significant pullback in customer spending is unlikely unless gas approaches \$5 per gallon.

AP Exclusive: Pakistan and Afghan Taliban officials meet in China for ceasefire talks

By MUNIR AHMED, ELENA BECATOROS and ABDUL QAHAR AFGHAN Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Pakistan and Afghanistan held the first round of peace talks on Wednesday, with China mediating to broker a durable ceasefire after weeks of fighting, two Pakistani officials said.

But even as the talks were held, Afghanistan accused Pakistan of firing mortars into its territory.

Representatives from the two countries were meeting in Urumqi, in northern China, the officials told The Associated Press, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief the media. The first round of talks concluded on Wednesday afternoon and were expected to continue on Thursday, they said.

China has not commented. Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs neither confirmed nor denied the talks were taking place.

An Afghan official said the five-member Afghan delegation in Urumqi consisted of two officials from the foreign ministry and one each from the defense and interior ministries and from the country's intelligence agency. The official provided the information on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to disclose details to the press.

The talks in Urumqi are seen as a potential relief for millions of people in Pakistan and neighboring Afghanistan, the sources in Pakistan said, adding they may last for days and were only the beginning of a peace process between the two sides.

Farid Dehqan, a police spokesman for the eastern Afghan province of Kunar, said Pakistan had fired mortars into Afghan territory late Wednesday, killing two civilians and wounding six others, including four children. He said the shelling was ongoing two hours after it started.

The Pakistani army did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

'Verification mechanism'

According to the sources, the latest round of talks began after both sides accepted China's offer to mediate to end the fighting. The two sides will continue their talks on Thursday.

China has urged both sides to resume dialogue since late February, and its special envoy, Yue Xiaoyong, met his Pakistani counterpart, Mohammad Sadiq, last month after visiting Kabul.

Pakistan accuses Afghanistan of providing a safe haven for militants who carry out attacks inside Pakistan, especially for the Pakistani Taliban. The group is separate but allied with the Afghan Taliban, which took over Afghanistan in 2021 in the wake of the chaotic withdrawal of U.S.-led troops. Kabul denies the charge.

Pakistan's former special envoy for Afghanistan, Asif Durrani, expressed hope that the talks, if officially confirmed, would lead to substantive progress.

"If both sides reach an agreement as a result of reported talks, the critical issue will be a verification mechanism to ensure Afghan territory is not used for attacks against Pakistan," he said.

The fighting since February has been the most severe between Afghanistan and Pakistan in decades. Shortly after clashes began, Pakistan declared it was in "open war" with Afghanistan, with repeated cross-border clashes as well as airstrikes inside Afghanistan, including several in the Afghan capital Kabul.

Afghanistan said a Pakistani airstrike last month hit a drug-treatment center in Kabul, killing more than 400 people. The death toll could not be independently confirmed. Pakistan has disputed the claim and denied targeting civilians, saying it struck an ammunition depot.

Pakistan's Information Minister Attaullah Tarar told the AP at the time that Pakistan had "only targeted terrorist infrastructure" in Kabul, not any hospital, saying: "We have just gone after the Afghan Taliban regime, their military setups, their terrorist infrastructure, and all the setups which are supporting or pro-

moting terrorists.”

Qatari-mediated ceasefire

Although the two sides agreed to a temporary truce during the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr, fighting later resumed at a lower intensity compared with the heavy clashes seen in February and March, when Pakistan’s air force repeatedly targeted what it said were Pakistani Taliban positions and Afghan military sites. Afghanistan has said the airstrikes hit civilian areas.

The two sides have a long history of tense relations, but the recent violence has alarmed the international community, particularly because militant groups such as al-Qaida and the Islamic State group, remain present in the region and have sought to regroup.

The latest fighting also undermined a Qatari-mediated ceasefire reached in October, which had halted earlier clashes that killed dozens of civilians, security personnel and militants. The two sides dispute casualty figures. Another recent round of talks in Saudi Arabia remained inconclusive.

Previous peace talks held in Istanbul in November failed to produce a lasting agreement.

It remains unclear who is representing Pakistan and Afghanistan in the latest round of talks in China, according to the officials.

Good Friday is a unique and solemn day for Christians, with ancient prayers and fervent processions

By GIOVANNA DELL’ORTO Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Good Friday is a unique — and uniquely solemn — day in the Christian calendar.

It commemorates the crucifixion and death of Jesus, ahead of what’s a central tenet of faith for believers — his resurrection two days later on Easter Sunday, according to the Gospels.

This year, it falls on April 3 for Catholics and Protestants, and April 10 for Orthodox Christians.

Across Christian denominations, Good Friday services are unlike those on most other days. They often include centuries-old, once-a-year traditions both during the liturgy and out in the streets, where elaborate processions and other rituals of fervent popular piety are held.

While Catholics gather, it’s the only day without an actual Mass, because there’s no sacrament of the Eucharist, which is the transformation of bread and wine into Jesus’ body and blood according to the church. Orthodox Christians don’t celebrate the Eucharist either on what they call Great and Holy Friday.

Most mainline Protestant denominations and Evangelicals also hold unique services, like the Lutheran devotion focused on the biblical accounts of Jesus’ last words on the cross, though they are not as strict on fasting as Catholics and Orthodox Christians.

Church services tend to last more than an hour, usually starting at 3 p.m., when tradition says Jesus died. But even though it’s not a day of obligation, and it’s a workday in the United States, churches tend to be packed.

“The time leading up to Good Friday is a big reflection on sacrifice — what he did for me and what I am doing in return,” said Manuel León, 22.

A member of Miami’s Corpus Christi Catholic Church youth group, he will carry a grimly realistic statue of Jesus crucified in procession through a hip central neighborhood on Good Friday.

“Pushing that statue from the back and seeing how torn up he is, what he did for us really becomes real,” León added.

Ancient forms of liturgy mark Good Friday

Some of the most ancient liturgical practices define Good Friday service for Catholics, said the Rev. John Baldwin, a professor of historical and liturgical theology at Boston College.

“The most solemn days tend to retain the oldest ceremonies,” he added, including as example the fact that the priests and ministers prostrate themselves in front of the altar at the beginning of the service.

Another ancient tradition is the extensive prayers of the faithful, interspersed with genuflections, which today include intentions as varied as praying for the pope, for the Jewish people, and for those who do

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not believe in God.

Up until Holy Week reforms introduced by the Vatican in the 1950s, Communion wasn't distributed on Good Friday, though now it is with hosts consecrated a day earlier on Holy Thursday, Baldovin said.

But the highlight of the ceremony is the adoration of the cross, which in many cases is held up near the altar as the faithful line up to kiss it or touch it in reverence.

Among the earliest documents of this practice is the diary of pilgrim who in the 4th century went from what's today Spain to Jerusalem, Baldovin said. There, at the present-day Church of the Holy Sepulchre, a bishop held up the cross for several hours as the faithful venerated it.

Processions with sacred images make Jesus' passion real for global faithful

Life-sized statues of Jesus crucified, the weeping Virgin Mary, and representations of scenes from the Gospels' accounts of Jesus' torture and death on a cross are carried in large processions in different parts of the world.

Some of the oldest and most awe-inspiring are in southern Spain's Seville, where tens of thousands of people watch much-venerated images of Jesus and Mary being carried in hourslong processions throughout Holy Week.

"Not all of us have the ability to look at the sky and feel fulfilled. Others like me need the images," said Manolo Gobeia.

He moved from Seville to Miami three decades ago and now heads the brotherhood that organizes the Good Friday procession starting from Corpus Christi church and winding its way through the graffiti-splashed neighborhood of Wynwood.

As the main, Seville-made statues exit the palm-fringed church, they're carried over intricate carpets made of colored sawdust and flowers. That's a nod to another tradition that's perhaps most exuberantly followed in the colonial city of Antigua, Guatemala, where miles of these carpets are created for Holy Week — twice on Good Friday.

"On Good Friday, we feel the pain of Mary, Jesus' pain, his surrender for love," said Silvia Armira, as she prepared the carpet drawings for the procession in Miami, where she arrived from Guatemala in the 1990s. "It's the great love of God, who gave up his only son for us."

Faithful's devotion sees past Good Friday's pain to Easter joy

Solemn and popular rituals on Good Friday vary from the pope's traditional "way of the cross" in Rome to a trek to the adobe sanctuary of Chimayo in New Mexico to self-flagellation and even crucifixion in the Philippines.

For many priests, they are all opportunities to take faith out of church and into streets to evangelize — and to point out that the gruesome death on the cross isn't the end of the story.

"Our procession is a cry to the world — 'get out, look at what is the way, the truth, the life,'" said the Rev. José Luis Menéndez.

"May your entire attitude be a living prayer," the Cuban-born, Spanish-raised pastor at Corpus Christi in Miami told more than 100 faithful at the last rehearsal for this year's procession.

Carefully watching over the SUV-sized float covered in silver-plated ornaments, flower vases and candlesticks, Gobeia said the main appeal of Good Friday celebrations is that they lead from death to Easter joy.

"To the weeping Mary, we put flowers, we sing hymns, and that's because we know how it ends — which is the resurrection," he said.

Advocacy groups urge YouTube to protect kids from 'AI slop' videos

By KAITLYN HUAMANI AP Technology Writer

Advocacy groups and experts condemned YouTube for serving up low-quality artificial intelligence-generated videos to its most vulnerable audience: children.

In a letter to YouTube CEO Neal Mohan and Sundar Pichai, the CEO of YouTube's parent company Google, children's advocacy group Fairplay expresses "serious concern" about the spread of AI-generated videos

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on both YouTube and YouTube Kids. The letter, which was sent on Wednesday morning, was signed by more than 200 organizations and individual experts such as child psychiatrists and educators.

"This `AI slop` harms children's development by distorting their sense of reality, overwhelming their learning processes and hijacking their attention, thereby extending time online and displacing offline activities necessary for their healthy development," the letter reads. "These harms are particularly acute for young children." The letter calls on YouTube to clearly label all AI-generated content and ban any AI-generated content on YouTube Kids. They also propose barring AI-generated videos from being recommended to users under 18 and implementing an option for parents to turn off AI-generated content even if their child searches for it.

The letter is signed by 135 organizations including the American Federation of Teachers and the American Counseling Association, and around 100 individual experts like "The Anxious Generation" author Jonathan Haidt. The letter is part of a larger campaign from Fairplay that also includes a petition.

Much of this AI-generated content is fast-paced with bright colors, lively music and clickbait titles that work to grab the attention of young viewers, the letter outlines. There has been a growing movement online against AI-generated content, particularly when it looks or feels low quality or leans into the meaninglessness of "brainrot."

Spokesperson Boot Bullwinkle said in a statement that YouTube has "high standards for the content in YouTube Kids, including limiting AI-generated content in the app to a small set of high-quality channels."

"We also provide parents the option to block channels. Across YouTube, we prioritize transparency when it comes to AI content, labeling content from our own AI tools, and requiring creators to disclose realistic AI content," Bullwinkle said. "We're always evolving our approach to stay current as the ecosystem evolves."

YouTube's current policy regarding AI-generated content requires creators to disclose when content that's "realistic" is made with altered or synthetic media, including generative AI. Creators are not required to disclose when generative AI is used to create content that is clearly unrealistic, including animated videos and those with special effects.

YouTube said it is actively working on developing labels for YouTube Kids.

In its letter, Fairplay argues that voluntary disclosure policy and what it sees as an "extremely limited" definition of altered and synthetic content mean kids still see a flood of AI-generated videos that are not labeled as such. They also argue that many children who watch YouTube videos are not yet able to read or to comprehend something like an AI disclosure. That leaves children "to fend for themselves or their parents to play whack-a-mole," the letter reads.

Fairplay's campaign comes shortly after Google's AI Futures Fund invested \$1 million into Animaj, an AI animation studio that makes videos for kids and draws in staggeringly high viewership numbers, according to Bloomberg.

The campaign follows a landmark verdict in a social media addiction trial in which a California jury found that YouTube designed its platform to hook young users without concern for their well-being. Meta was also found liable on the same counts as YouTube in the same case.

"Pushing AI slop onto young children is just another testament to how YouTube and YouTube Kids are designed to maximize children's time online — including babies. AI slop hypnotizes young children, making it hard for them to get off their screens and move onto essential activities like play, sleep and social interaction," said Rachel Franz, the director of Fairplay's Young Children Thrive Offline program, in a statement. "What's more, YouTube's algorithm makes it impossible for kids to avoid AI slop."

Earlier this year, YouTube head Mohan listed out "managing AI slop" as one of the company's priorities for 2026. In a January blog post, he wrote that the company was "actively building on our established systems that have been very successful in combatting spam and clickbait, and reducing the spread of low quality, repetitive content."

A speech from a British monarch returns to Capitol Hill as US-UK tensions simmer

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — King Charles III will deliver an address to Congress during his visit to Washington in late April, becoming the first British monarch to give a speech to a joint meeting of U.S. lawmakers in more than three decades.

The joint address was announced on Wednesday by congressional leaders, who said it was part of the 250th anniversary of the U.S. declaring independence from Britain. The speech also comes at a time of friction between the two nations, which have since become close allies.

President Donald Trump's "America First" foreign policy has called into question the U.S. commitment to European allies, and Britain has declined to support the U.S. involvement in the war in Iran.

Still, congressional leaders emphasized the close relationship between the U.S. and Britain.

"The American experiment endures in no small part because of the British tradition from which it sprang," said House Speaker Mike Johnson, House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries, Senate Majority Leader John Thune and Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer in a letter addressed to Charles. "We believe an Address to Congress will provide a unique opportunity to share your vision for the future of our special relationship and reaffirm our alliance at this pivotal time in history."

In Britain, some members of Parliament have called on Prime Minister Keir Starmer to cancel the state visit by Charles in retaliation for Trump lashing out at them for declining to support the U.S.-Israeli war with Iran. Starmer decided to proceed with the state visit, which could potentially ease the tensions caused by the war.

The pomp and circumstance of state visits by the British monarch have been used for years to bolster relations with countries around the world. Queen Elizabeth II was the last British monarch to deliver a joint address to Congress, in 1991.

But some lawmakers also want to use the occasion to press forward their investigation into sexual abuse by New York financier Jeffrey Epstein. Democratic Rep. Ro Khanna wrote to Charles to request a meeting between him and survivors of abuse from Epstein and his former girlfriend Ghislaine Maxwell.

"I respectfully ask that you privately meet with survivors of Jeffrey Epstein's and Ghislaine Maxwell's abuse, so they may speak to you directly about the ways powerful individuals and institutions failed them. Survivors want this meeting," Khanna said in the letter.

In Britain, there has been intense scrutiny of Epstein's ties to powerful figures in the British government. Last year, Charles stripped the former Prince Andrew, his brother, of his royal titles and evicted him from his royal residence after weeks of pressure to act over his relationship with Epstein.

Some U.S. lawmakers have bemoaned the fact that the reckoning over Epstein has extended further in Britain and other parts of Europe than it has in the U.S.

Epstein died in a New York jail cell in 2019 while awaiting trial. Maxwell was convicted of sex trafficking but has sought to be freed from her 20-year prison sentence, saying new evidence proves constitutional violations spoiled her trial.

The former Prince Andrew, now known simply as Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, has repeatedly denied committing any crimes.

Rubio's and Vance's differing postures on Iran war highlight their challenges ahead of 2028 election

By MICHELLE L. PRICE and STEVE PEOPLES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As President Donald Trump assembled his Cabinet last week, he asked Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Vice President JD Vance to give an update on the Iran war.

Rubio, known for his hawkish views, gave an impassioned defense of the war, calling it "a favor" to the United States and the world.

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Vance, who has long pushed for restraint in U.S. military intervention overseas, was more sedate. He said that the U.S. now has "options" it didn't have a year ago and that it is important Iran does not get a nuclear weapon — before redirecting his remarks toward wishing the troops a happy Easter.

The exchange was a distillation of their diverging postures toward the war that their boss has launched in Iran. And it comes as some would-be Republican presidential candidates begin quietly courting officials in key states like New Hampshire in the early stages of the GOP's next nomination fight.

With Vance and Rubio seen as the party's strongest potential candidates in a 2028 primary, the two have to balance their roles in the Trump administration with their future political plans.

"It's very obvious from the way that Rubio talks about Iran and the way that Vance talks about Iran that they are of different casts of mind," said Curt Mills, the executive director of "The American Conservative" magazine and a vocal critic of the war. The Cabinet meeting episode was telling, he said, because it seemed as though Vance, discussing Easter, was "literally trying to talk about anything else other than the war."

The White House addressed the Rubio-Vance relationship on Wednesday in an unsolicited statement after the initial publication of this article.

"President Trump has full confidence in both Vice President Vance and Secretary Rubio, who continue to be trusted voices within the administration," said White House spokesperson Anna Kelly. "He values both the vice president and the secretary's opinions and wealth of expertise."

It's too soon to forecast how Republican voters might feel about the war next spring, when the 2028 contest is expected to begin in earnest, but the risks for both Vance and Rubio are acute. Rubio's full-throated support for the war could come back to haunt him depending on how the conflict develops. Vance, meanwhile, would risk accusations of disloyalty if he were to stray too far from Trump, but struggles to square an appearance of support for the war with his past comments.

Vance's restrained comments stand in contrast to Rubio's full defense

Vance, who served in the Marines in the Iraq war, has said that Iran cannot have a nuclear weapon, but he's long been skeptical of foreign military interventions.

Trump seemed to allude that Vance may have held onto that position in private discussions about Iran, telling reporters that Vance was "philosophically a little bit different than me" at the outset of the conflict.

"I think he was maybe less enthusiastic about going, but he was quite enthusiastic," Trump said.

Though Vance has been careful in how he speaks about the war, what he's not saying has been conspicuous. On a March 13 trip to North Carolina, he was twice asked by reporters if he had concerns about the conflict. Each time, he said it was important that Trump could have conversations with advisers "without his team then running their mouths to the American media."

A few days later at the White House, when Vance was again asked if he had concerns, he accused the reporter of "trying to drive a wedge between members of the administration, between me and the president."

For Rubio, long before he became the country's chief diplomat, he voiced support for muscular foreign policy and American intervention abroad.

Days into the war, he told reporters that it was "a wise decision" for Trump to launch the operation, that there "absolutely was an imminent threat" from Iran and that the operation "needed to happen."

State Department spokesperson Tommy Pigott pointed to last week's Cabinet meeting as evidence that "the entire administration is in lockstep behind President Trump."

"Secretary Rubio is proud to be on the team implementing President Trump's policies, and he has a great relationship, both professionally and personally, with the entire team," Pigott said.

Fractures are emerging in the GOP

The apparent split between Rubio and Vance on the Iran war is emblematic of the divide starting to cleave within the Republican Party. A recent survey from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found some divisions within the GOP on Iran, with about half of Republicans saying the U.S. military action has been "about right." Relatively few Republicans, about 2 in 10, say military action has not gone far enough, while about one-quarter say it's gone too far.

While some conservatives have described the war as a betrayal, many other Republicans have cheered

on the president's actions.

Alice Swanson, a 62-year-old who attended Vance's event in North Carolina, said she wants Vance and Rubio to run together in 2028 but favors the vice president.

"I think he fully believes and supports exactly what his convictions are," Swanson said.

Swanson acknowledged, nonetheless, that Vance has been an outspoken opponent of interventionist policy but has been quieter on the subject since the war. "I can see both sides," Swanson said after expressing full support for Trump's decisions.

Tracy Brill, a 62-year-old from Rocky Mount, spoke highly of Rubio, but declared, "I love JD Vance."

She made it clear she sides with the president, calling the course he's taken "spot on." But she defended the vice president if he seems at odds with his past statements, noting politicians do it frequently. "They've all changed their positions at one point or another," she said.

However, Joe Ropar, attending the Conservative Political Action Conference last week, said Rubio's unequivocal support for the Iran war helped crystallize his preference for the secretary of state for 2028.

"I'm not looking at JD Vance for president, and it's for stuff like that," said Ropar, a 72-year-old retired military contractor from McKinney, Texas. "I don't 100% trust him."

Benjamin Williams, of Austin, Texas, said at CPAC that both Trump and Vance are "tied to this war." The 25-year-old marketing specialist for Young Americans for Liberty is looking elsewhere for a candidate.

The political risks might not be known until the field fills out

Whether the war becomes a political problem for Vance and Rubio depends on who ultimately enters the GOP's next presidential primary.

While Vance and Rubio are currently considered the overwhelming front-runners, former New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu expects a half dozen high-profile Republicans to enter the contest.

Sununu and former RNC Committeewoman Juliana Bergeron told The Associated Press that multiple Republican presidential prospects have reached out to them in recent weeks to discuss the political landscape in the state that traditionally hosts the opening presidential primary; they declined to name them.

Republican strategist Jim Merrill, a top New Hampshire adviser for Rubio's 2016 presidential bid, predicted that Iran would become a flashpoint in 2028 — just as the Iraq war was for Democrats in 2004 and 2008.

"If for some reason things don't go as anticipated, there will be contrasts drawn," he said.

Still, Sununu is doubtful that Iran would become a meaningful dividing line in a prospective Vance-Rubio matchup given their status as prominent members of the Trump administration. Both will likely take credit if the conflict ends well, and both would look bad if it does not, he predicted.

"They're tied together with the success or failure of Iran. It doesn't really separate one versus the other, at least I don't think that's how the electorate will see it," Sununu said.

Russia claims full control of Ukraine's Luhansk region but Kyiv denies it ahead of US envoy talks

By The Associated Press undefined

Russia's armed forces have taken control of the entire Luhansk region of Ukraine, the Russian Defense Ministry claimed Wednesday, but a Kyiv military official denied the claim as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy prepared for talks with U.S. envoys trying to mediate an end to Moscow's invasion.

"Units of the Group of Forces West have completed the liberation of the Luhansk People's Republic," the Russian Defense Ministry said in a statement.

However, the spokesperson for Ukraine's Joint Forces grouping, Viktor Trehubov, said there were no changes to report in that region.

"Unfortunately, we only hold small patches there (in Luhansk), but those positions have been held by 3rd brigade for a long time," Trehubov told The Associated Press by phone.

Russian claims of battlefield progress have in the past shown discrepancies. The Moscow-appointed head of Luhansk announced its full capture last June.

Ukrainian officials have in the past said that Moscow makes false claims of advances to persuade U.S.

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negotiators that a Russian victory in Ukraine is inevitable.

U.S.-led diplomatic efforts over the past year to stop the fighting, now in its fifth year, have so far failed to break the deadlock on key sticking points, and Washington's attentions are currently focused on the Iran war.

Zelenskyy said he would hold a video call later Wednesday with U.S. President Donald Trump's envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner to discuss the possibility of further trilateral negotiations.

Russia illegally annexed four eastern regions of Ukraine — Luhansk as well as Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia — in September 2022, but it never fully controlled them.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said last October that Ukrainian forces still held 0.13% of Luhansk. He has demanded that Ukrainian troops withdraw from the four eastern regions as a key condition for a peace deal. Ukraine has rejected that demand.

Zelenskyy said Wednesday that front-line combat is fierce amid a Russian spring offensive, but claimed that Ukrainian forces are holding their ground.

"The situation on the frontline is currently quite tense — the Russian army is trying to step up its assault activity," he said on X.

It was not possible to independently verify either side's battlefield claims.

The Institute for the Study of War said Ukrainian tactics are likely disrupting efforts to advance by Russia's bigger army.

The Washington-based think tank also said late Tuesday that in recent months Ukrainian forces have made "their most significant gains on the battlefield" since an incursion into Russia's Kursk region in August 2024 and a 2023 counteroffensive.

Russia's invasion has also taken a heavy toll on Ukrainian civilians, with more than 15,000 killed in the war so far, according to the United Nations.

A Russian drone strike killed four people in Ukraine's central Cherkasy region Wednesday, regional governor Ihor Taburets said. The attack hit an open area in Zolotonosha, some 150 kilometers (90 miles), southeast of the capital.

Russian drones also damaged sites in western Ukraine near the Polish border early Wednesday, including an industrial facility in the city of Lutsk, some 400 kilometers (250 miles) west of Kyiv.

Mayor Ihor Polishchuk said a postal sorting center and food distribution site were damaged, while falling drone debris also set fire to a residential building. Emergency services reported no casualties.

Ukraine's air force said it downed 298 drones — mostly Iranian-designed Shahed drones and cheaper variants — in overnight attacks launched from multiple areas in western Russia and Crimea, while 20 drones hit 11 sites nationwide.

Ukraine has developed advance drone technology to counter Russian barrages and is offering to help Gulf countries block Iranian drone attacks.

Zelenskyy said Wednesday on X that Ukraine is "engaged in substantive cooperation" with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar amid the Middle East conflict.

Officials are also in consultations with Jordan and are in contact with Bahrain, Kuwait, and Iraq, he said.

A messy California governor's race raises Democratic fears of potential loss

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD AP Political Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Democrats have run California for years, but in a nationally critical election the party is being confronted by the limits of its own power: the race for governor is out of control.

Barely a month before the start of mail-in voting, Democratic leaders are openly dreading the possible loss of a statewide election for the first time in two decades. As candidates jockey in a crowded field, the contest has degenerated into finger-pointing over debate eligibility, identity politics and 2025 ballot counting, issues distant from voters struggling with the soaring cost of gas and groceries.

"Squabbles about debates or other inside baseball politics are likely under the radar for most voters and

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seem almost absurd, given what's facing us," Kim Nalder, director of the Project for an Informed Electorate at California State University, Sacramento, said in an email.

Candidates agree that a large number of voters remain undecided on the question of who should take charge of the nation's most populous state that, by itself, represents the world's fourth-largest economy. There are more than 50 candidates on the ballot — including eight established Democrats and two leading Republicans.

Dominant Democrats contend with uncertainty

For the first time in a generation the governor's contest is being defined by uncertainty, not inevitability — former Gov. Jerry Brown and outgoing Gov. Gavin Newsom coasted through their elections. How do Democrats reassert their political clout and regain control of the race in a state where the party holds every statewide office, dominates the legislature and outnumbers registered Republicans by nearly 2-to-1?

"I have no idea and anybody who tells you they do, they don't know either," said veteran Democratic consultant Dan Newman, who is not involved in the race.

For Democrats, the party's dicey chances in the June 2 primary stem from the state's unpredictable "top two" primary system that puts all candidates on one ballot, with only the top two vote-getters advancing to November, regardless of party. The fear is the party's 24 listed candidates will undercut each other and divide the Democratic vote into small fractions, clearing the way for the two leading Republicans — Riverside County Sheriff Chad Bianco and conservative commentator Steve Hilton, both supporters of President Donald Trump — to advance.

While affordability is a top issue around the country, the race for governor has detoured into messy personal attacks and squabbles that have given the campaign a chaotic aura. A major televised debate was canceled after an uproar over the selection criteria that resulted in six white candidates qualifying for the stage while Black, Latino and Asian candidates were snubbed.

The University of Southern California, where the debate was to be held, said the dispute "created a significant distraction from the issues that matter to voters." The school's decision to cancel the event followed accusations of discrimination by candidates of color who were not invited.

The scratched debate came shortly after state Democratic Chair Rusty Hicks pleaded with lagging candidates to drop out of the race. Meanwhile, Rep. Eric Swalwell, one of the leading Democrats, accused Trump of trying to influence the contest after reporting that administration officials ordered FBI agents to gather documents about a decade-old investigation into the congressman's ties to a suspected Chinese spy. The probe did not result in criminal charges.

Earlier this week, Bianco, after seizing more than half a million 2025 election ballots, said he paused a probe into election fraud allegations, citing mounting legal challenges from the state and a voting rights group.

A ripple effect down the ticket?

Elsewhere in the country, Democrats have been heartened by victories in a string of races — even on Trump's home turf — that they see as promising signs ahead of this year's midterm elections, when control of Congress will be in play. Democratic officials in California fear a vacancy at the top of the ticket in November could depress turnout in critical U.S. House races.

Such a scenario could "imperil Democrats' chances to retake the House," Hicks, the state Democratic chair, has warned.

The contest to succeed Newsom is playing out with Trump the ubiquitous foil for Democratic candidates — California is regarded as the home of the so-called Trump resistance. Simultaneously the state is beset with a long-running homeless crisis, commonplace seven-figure home prices and projected future budget shortfalls, while residents contend with some of the nation's highest gas prices, taxes and utility bills.

Polling in early February by the nonpartisan Public Policy Institute of California found the field had broken into two distinct groups, with Bianco, Hilton and three Democrats — Swalwell, former Rep. Katie Porter and billionaire climate activist Tom Steyer — in close competition, with other candidates trailing.

The volatile race has recalled the surprise outcome in 1998 — the last wide-open race for governor — when underdog Democrat Gray Davis surged past two leading Democrats in the primary who relentlessly

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attacked each other, with Davis going on to win in November.

The rules have changed in the attention economy, where candidates must compete with digital platforms and content creators to connect with distracted voters.

"Normally people would be paying attention," Newman said. "The whole campaign has been in slow motion."

Today in History: April 2, Pope John Paul II dies at 84

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, April 2, the 92nd day of 2026. There are 273 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On April 2, 2005, John Paul II, the Polish pope born Karol Józef Wojtyła, died in his Vatican apartment at age 84. The first non-Italian pope in over 450 years, John Paul II became one of the most influential leaders of the late 20th and early 21st centuries while playing a crucial role in the fall of communism in Europe and the former Soviet Union.

Also on this date:

In 1792, Congress passed the Coinage Act, which authorized establishment of the U.S. Mint.

In 1865, Confederate President Jefferson Davis and most of his Cabinet fled the Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia, after Union troops broke through Confederate lines in the Third Battle of Petersburg.

In 1917, President Woodrow Wilson asked Congress to declare war against Germany, saying, "The world must be made safe for democracy." (Congress declared war four days later.)

In 1982, Argentine troops seized the disputed Falkland Islands from the United Kingdom, sparking the Falklands War.

In 1992, mob boss John Gotti was convicted in New York of murder and racketeering; he was later sentenced to life in prison without parole. (Gotti died in prison in 2002.)

In 2007, in its first case on climate change, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Massachusetts v. Environmental Protection Agency*, ruled 5-4 that carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases were air pollutants under the Clean Air Act.

In 2012, a gunman killed seven people at Oikos University, a Christian school in Oakland, California. (The gunman, One Goh, died in 2019 while serving a life prison sentence.)

In 2014, a soldier opened fire on fellow service members at Fort Hood in Texas, killing three people and wounding 16 others before taking his own life. (More than a dozen people were killed at the same base in a 2009 attack by an Army major and psychiatrist who was sentenced to death in 2013 for the shootings.)

In 2021, a U.S. Capitol Police officer was killed after a man rammed a car into two officers at a barricade outside the Capitol in Washington, D.C. Authorities fatally shot the man when he got out of the car with a knife and began running at the officers.

Today's Birthdays: Disc jockey Dr. Demento is 85. Actor Linda Hunt is 81. Musician Emmylou Harris is 79. Actor Christopher Meloni is 65. Tennis Hall of Famer Todd Woodbridge is 55. Actor Pedro Pascal is 51. Actor Adam Rodriguez is 51. Actor Michael Fassbender is 49. Country musician Chris Janson is 40. Actor Jesse Plemons is 38. Rapper Quavo is 35. Country musician Zach Bryan is 30. Actor Emma Myers is 24. Singer-songwriter Daniel Seavey is 27.

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**...WINTER WEATHER ADVISORY REMAINS IN EFFECT UNTIL 7 PM CDT THIS EVENING...
...WINTER STORM WATCH REMAINS IN EFFECT FROM FRIDAY MORNING THROUGH
SATURDAY EVENING...**

Traverse-Brown-Marshall-Roberts-Day-

Including the cities of Sisseton, Webster, Aberdeen, Wheaton, and Britton

223 AM CDT Thu Apr 2 2026

* WHAT...For the Winter Weather Advisory, snow and patchy blowing snow. Additional snow accumulations between 1 and 3 inches. For the Winter Storm Watch, heavy mixed precipitation and patchy blowing snow possible. Total snow and sleet accumulations between 6 and 9 inches and ice accumulations up to one tenth of an inch possible. Winds could gust as high as 35 mph.

* WHERE...In Minnesota, Traverse County. In South Dakota, Brown, Day, Marshall, and Roberts Counties.

* WHEN...For the Winter Weather Advisory, until 7 PM CDT this evening. For the Winter Storm Watch, from Friday morning through Saturday evening.

* IMPACTS...Travel could be very difficult. The combination of falling snow and winds may lead to periods of blowing snow that may briefly reduce visibility. The hazardous conditions could impact the Thursday morning and evening commutes.

PRECAUTIONARY/PREPAREDNESS ACTIONS...

Slow down and use caution while traveling. In Minnesota, the latest road conditions can be obtained at 511mn.org, or by calling 5 1 1.

In South Dakota, the latest road conditions can be obtained by calling 5 1 1.

Monitor the latest forecasts for updates on this situation.

Hazardous Weather Outlook

Hazardous Weather Outlook

National Weather Service Aberdeen SD

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MNZ039-046-SDZ003>011-015>023-033>037-045-048-051-030815-Traverse-Big Stone-Corson-Campbell-McPherson-Brown-Marshall-Roberts-Walworth-Edmunds-Day-Dewey-Potter-Faulk-Spink-Clark-Codington-Grant-Hamlin-Deuel-Stanley-Sully-Hughes-Hyde-Hand-Jones-Lyman-Buffalo-

315 AM CDT Thu Apr 2 2026 /215 AM MDT Thu Apr 2 2026/

This Hazardous Weather Outlook is for west central Minnesota, central South Dakota, north central South Dakota and northeast South Dakota.

.DAY ONE...Today and tonight.

Fog is possible through the morning as snow continues mainly along and east of the Missouri River. Snow will diminish southwest to northeast across the region later on this morning through late this afternoon. Additional snow accumulations of 1 to 4 inches expected mainly over the James Valley and eastward through west central MN. Light icing, up to a tenth of an inch, remains possible over portions of east central SD.

.DAYS TWO THROUGH SEVEN...Friday through Wednesday. Increasing confidence on a more potent system affecting the region Friday and Saturday. Snow amounts in excess of 6 inches is possible

over the northern portions of SD. Confidence is also increasing on the freezing rain potential where icing amounts between a tenth to potentially a quarter of an inch is possible, with the highest amounts over portions of central through east central SD.