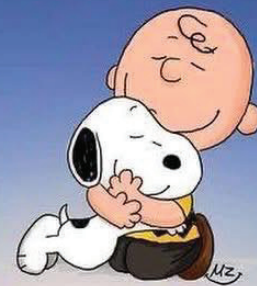


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God's plan is always the best. Sometimes the process is painful and hard. But don't forget that when God is silent, He's doing something for you. Amen!



Saturday, April 4

Pickleball, 9:30 a.m., Elementary Gym
Airport Fundraiser, 6:30 p.m., Groton Legion

Sunday, April 5

Emmanuel Lutheran: Sunrise Service, 7 a.m.; Worship with communion, 9 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m. (1st communion for fifth graders)

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

United Methodist: Worship with communion at Conde, 8:15 a.m.; at Groton, 9:30 a.m.; at Britton, 11:15 a.m.; No Groton Sunday School, 9:30 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 10:30 a.m.

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

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

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

Monday, April 6

NO SCHOOL - Easter break
Senior Menu: Spanish rice with hamburger, broccoli, fruit, Vanilla pudding, whole wheat bread.

Tuesday, April 7

Senior Menu: Bratwurst on bun, tri tater, sauerkraut, fruit.

Track at Ipswich, 2 p.m.

SD Honor Choir Auditions in Huron, 3:30 p.m.

Biogirls, 3:45 p.m., Elementary School

Pickleball, 6 p.m., Elementary Gym

City Council Meeting, 7 p.m., City Hall

United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Ladies Aid LWML, 1:30 p.m.

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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 Hits US Airpower

Iran yesterday shot down two US aircraft in separate incidents, the first such losses in roughly five weeks of war. As of this writing, a search-and-rescue operation is underway for at least one missing crew member.

Two helicopters involved in the rescue effort were also hit by Iranian fire that wounded US personnel on board, but the aircraft safely returned to a US base. The US is racing against Iran's offer to reward any civilian who turns over an "enemy pilot." Iran is also continuing to strike American and Israeli allies in the Persian Gulf, with Kuwait reporting an Iranian strike on a power and water plant yesterday; Iran says Israel is responsible. That infrastructure strike comes after the US struck a highway bridge near Tehran Thursday, reportedly killing eight people.

Meanwhile, the White House is seeking \$1.5T in defense spending from Congress for the 2027 fiscal year, the most in modern US history. Nondefense spending would be cut by 10%, shifting some responsibilities to local and state governments.

US economy adds 178,000 jobs in March, defying expectations.

The hiring market rebounded from the loss of 133,000 jobs in February, according to a Labor Department report published yesterday. That figure is roughly three times what economists had forecast, with the healthcare sector responsible for much of the growth. The unemployment rate also dipped to 4.3% last month, down from 4.4% in February.

NASA shares first images from Artemis II.

One image, taken by mission commander Reid Wiseman, shows a partial view of Earth through a window on the Orion capsule. Another shows Earth in full, with green streaks of aurora, produced when oxygen is excited by electrons. The four-person crew broke free of Earth's orbit Thursday en route to the moon.

US returns suspected drug smuggler to China in rare extradition.

The move, reported yesterday by China's state news agency, marks the first such exchange of a suspected criminal in recent years. It comes ahead of President Donald Trump's visit to China in May. Trump imposed tariffs last year to press Beijing to curb exports of chemicals used to make fentanyl, the leading cause of drug overdose deaths in the US.

Separately, Cuba is pardoning 2,010 prisoners, possibly to appease the Trump administration, which has imposed an effective oil blockade to push political and economic reforms. The prisoners' charges were not clear as of this writing.

Myanmar's coup leader is selected as president by pro-military parliament.

General Min Aung Hlaing has effectively led the Southeast Asian country since a 2021 coup that ousted its democratically elected government and launched a civil war. His appointment follows a landslide victory by a pro-military party earlier this year in the first parliamentary elections since the coup—elections the United Nations has called a sham. (Get background on the conflict in Myanmar here.)

Gucci Mane allegedly kidnapped, held at gunpoint by fellow rappers.

The Justice Department has charged nine people, including rappers Pooh Shiesty and Big30, in connection with an ambush at a Dallas music studio in January. Pooh Shiesty allegedly forced Gucci Mane—whose real name is Radric Davis—to sign paperwork releasing him from a record label contract, while others robbed Davis' entourage at gunpoint. If convicted, each defendant faces up to life in prison.

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Fossils discovered in China rewrite evolutionary timeline.

Complex animals that ventured onto land—ancestors of humans and modern animals—were roaming Earth at least 4 million years earlier than previously thought, according to a study published this week. The finding is based on an analysis of over 700 fossils found in southwest China, many of which had near-symmetrical left and right sides—a hallmark feature of most animal life today.

Humankind(ness)

Today, we're sharing a story from reader Bonita O. in Mandeville, Louisiana.

"I'm currently in relapse with AML, a form of leukemia. I'm living with my sister/caregiver away from my home in Arkansas. I'm lucky to be scheduled for a transplant next month. One thing that I'll need is platelets. I know just a few people in the area. My nephew's wife put out a request for platelet donors ... quickly, people that were total strangers to me have stepped up to donate—not once, but multiple times. It has renewed my faith in humankind at a time when so much of what we hear about is selfishness and greed!"

Update from the Secretary of State's office

Despite state offices being closed, Secretary of State Monae L. Johnson and eight of her staff are volunteering their time to continue working on the remaining five statewide candidate petitions. This is a hands-on time-consuming process. "I am very humbled by the dedication of my staff to the state of South Dakota and the election process," stated Secretary Johnson.

The office is also receiving legislative candidate petitions by registered mail and processing those as quickly as they can.

Challenges may still be filed for legislative and statewide candidate petitions, and these are being reviewed when they are received.

As it is every election cycle, the validating of petitions must be fully completed before county auditors are able to create ballots, proof ballots, print ballots and get ballots delivered for the beginning of Absentee Voting on April 17th.

Need a **Babysitter** or
House Cleaner?

♥ **Babysitting Available!**

House Cleaning Offered!

Text Jeslyn Kosel at (605)-290-7821

I'm in Groton but am willing to drive to nearby towns!



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Artificial intelligence crept into lawmaking in 2026, prompting excitement — and concern

Answers and ideas come more quickly, but need to be checked for errors

BY: JOHN HULT

When he's not at the Capitol, South Dakota state Rep. Al Novstrup helps oversee his amusement parks in Sioux Falls and his hometown of Aberdeen.

He's not an expert on off-label prescription drug use.

The Republican professed as much during a Feb. 5 speech to the House of Representatives, delivered in support of a bill to expand the availability of ivermectin and hydroxychloroquine. The two drugs are championed in certain circles as COVID-19 remedies, but not FDA approved as treatments for the disease.

"I'm not qualified to know the answer," Novstrup said, "but here's some of the things I've learned by just doing some quick artificial intelligence."

Novstrup then proceeded to read parts of an AI-generated summary of a Google search on off-label prescription drug use.

"You've always got to be skeptical," he said of the summary, from Google's AI assistant, Gemini, "but you've also got to give it consideration."

In an interview, the 24-year lawmaker told South Dakota Searchlight he's used Gemini and a handful of other generative AI tools to build arguments for or against bills, likening it to pre-AI internet searches, and to pre-internet sourcing for floor speeches.

"Prior to Google searches, we relied on the Dewey Decimal System," Novstrup said, referencing a cataloging framework used by libraries to sort books and other physical media. "Before that, we relied on our friends and neighbors, or the newspaper or the radio."

The term "generative AI" refers to tools that can produce or summarize content, as opposed to simply finding it. When users search for information on Google, Gemini now places summaries of the content above the links to that content. Gemini can also be used to draft emails in Google's Gmail platform, among other tasks. Tools like ChatGPT, Grok or Claude can return summaries of queries with links to sources, and can also be used to draft emails, write stories, essays, scripts or, during the recently concluded 2026 South Dakota legislative session, draft or refine bills and talking points on bills.

Novstrup said he's aware of the potential pitfalls of generative AI — news coverage of its rapid proliferation are peppered with cautionary tales of factual errors, hallucinated sources or failures to put facts into context when summarizing articles — but he said lawmakers and the public have always had to consider the source of information their lawmakers use to support their arguments.

"The main thing is it's a source," Novstrup said. "Sometimes any one of them can be wrong."

AI proliferates

Several lawmakers interviewed by Searchlight said they'd used some form of artificial intelligence to craft arguments or research talking points.

Others went beyond that. Rep. Kent Roe, R-Hayti, said he runs all his bill drafts through Grok, a generative AI tool developed by the Elon Musk-owned company xAI, to refine his ideas. Asking questions more than once, refining search queries and cross-checking the answers are key to getting trustworthy results, said Roe.

The more human interaction, he said, the better the outcome.

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"You just recycle it 10 times, and if it comes up with 10 different answers, you know it's not working," said Roe, who also uses AI at his day job as an appraiser to speed up reporting on property values. "If you come up with nine out of 10 answers that are very similar, well, then you know it's doing its job."

Roe hasn't used Grok to draft bills from scratch, but said it helps him improve his proposals. Like Novstrup, he sees the use of generative AI as a more evolved version of prior lawmaking practice. Lawmakers have long pulled bill language from other states, or from draft proposals pitched by industry or political interest groups.

"I think it's safe to say there are no original ideas," Roe said.

The speed of generative AI can be a blessing when lawmakers are crunched for time, said Amber Hulse, a Republican state senator and lawyer from Hot Springs.

This legislative session, some of her colleagues on the Senate Judiciary Committee asked her to review other states' laws requiring people to contact authorities when a person threatens suicide. Aberdeen Republican Sen. Carl Perry had drafted a bill that would have criminalized a failure to do so in South Dakota.

She had two days to get the answer. Generative AI summaries told her where to look quickly enough for her to still attend to her other responsibilities as a senator.

"I think it's really helpful when people need to do 50-state surveys of code," said Hulse, whose research helped Perry craft amendments to his bill. "I was paid handsomely in law school to do that type of research for all different types of organizations. And before now, you had to do all that manually, look up every single state's code and dig into the code. And now you can type into ChatGPT and say, 'Hey, what do other states do for this area of law?'"

The bill ultimately failed, but that was because of "policy concerns," Hulse said, not worries about whether the legislation would conflict with other laws or put South Dakota out of step with other states.

AI and bill drafting

Lawmakers like Roe argue that generative AI should help do that kind of work upfront.

Rep. John Hughes, R-Sioux Falls, told the House Taxation Committee on Feb. 12 that, with Roe's help, he'd used Grok to turn his first draft of a bill about a new class of taxable property into a proposal that would square with the state's existing property tax framework.

Like Hulse, Hughes is a lawyer, but his practice doesn't typically involve deep dives on the ins and outs of property tax law.

Roe, Hughes told the committee, "ran this bill through AI and I am just astounded. Astounded," Hughes told the committee. "Wow. It even makes me sound like I think perhaps I might make sense."

The committee rejected Hughes' bill that morning, but shortly thereafter advanced one from Rep. Scott Odenbach that sought to level out countywide property valuations for taxation purposes with multi-year averages.

The Spearfish Republican offered a sheepish admission about AI as he introduced it. Not about his use of it, but about how little he used it.

"I have used a little AI to help me with this, but maybe not enough," Odenbach said.

Roe is a member of the taxation committee. When he asked Odenbach whether he'd done his due diligence to make sure his bill would work within the state's existing tax structure, Odenbach said he "probably should have" run his bill through an AI "constitutional stress test."

The bill was eventually amended and folded into a compromise property tax package between lawmakers and Gov. Larry Rhoden's office near the end of the 2026 legislative session, but failed to earn the support of the state Senate.

AI guardrails

Odenbach is an enthusiastic backer of AI for lawmaking. He's asked Grok to create first drafts of bills, though he said he couldn't recall which ones.

When asked if the public should be concerned about AI writing bill drafts, Odenbach said anyone who

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might be terrified about the prospect will have a lot to be terrified of in the coming years.

"I think that terror can apply to all aspects of our society that are going to be transformed by AI very, very soon, in the next few years," he said. "That terror can be handled by the extent to which we still require a human to interface with it, to have trust in it."

John McCullough, head of the South Dakota Legislative Research Council, sounded similar notes on the topic, but he doesn't share Odenbach's enthusiasm.

The council manages the Legislature's day-to-day operations, helps lawmakers draft bills and is responsible for updating the state's code of laws. No proposal makes it onto the session's list of bills without a review by the council's team of legal experts.

McCullough's not convinced any AI tool can perform trustworthy analysis of a bill's potential conflicts with existing laws, and he doesn't see a future where it replaces the human eyes of trained council staff.

"By design, we publish the law," McCullough said. "Implicit in our mission or duty is to be the caretaker of the law. So you have to have a centralized drafting agency that is attempting to make the law be consistent throughout."

Which is not to say that AI is strictly off-limits at the council in every context. Most legal research tools, including those used by the council, now incorporate AI to help lawyers find what they're after more quickly.

South Dakota has the smallest state legislative staff in the U.S., McCullough said, so "if we can use technology to help us, then we'll use technology to help us."

But the help it can offer has limits, in McCullough's experience. He recently asked a generative AI tool a question about "some obscure legislative issue" and got an answer that cited a South Dakota law that doesn't exist. He told the AI tool as much, and it apologized and told him the law actually came from North Dakota.

That law didn't exist, either.

"It was basically hallucinating," McCullough said.

Concerns, quality standards

The council doesn't have a formal policy on generative AI use. Lawmakers interviewed by Searchlight were largely confident that the legislative process would weed out errors, citing the council's review of proposals and the multiple votes a bill needs to make it to the governor's desk.

One former lawmaker, however, is concerned that might not be enough.

"I think it can be a very significant problem," said R. Shawn Tornow, a Republican former state representative from Sioux Falls. "AI is not obviously old fashioned legal research and reasoned analysis, because one small trigger of incorrect information can greatly skew and make a legal position absolutely incorrect."

Tornow was in Pierre in March to testify, as a private citizen, against bills he felt had been poorly written, which is an issue with human authors he said predates generative AI.

Generative AI, he said, is "at bare level, an inch-deep level starting point" in terms of crafting defensible laws.

Sen. Liz Larson, D-Sioux Falls, said her generative AI use has been largely limited thus far to drafts of communications with constituents and electoral messaging. Even then, she said, the work has to be refined into something that uses her own voice and style before it goes out.

Larson was troubled this year by what she saw as inadequate due diligence before AI conclusions appeared in testimony or in speeches.

"Those standards of rigor have gone down in the past year," Larson said. "People aren't even ashamed to say 'I just looked this up.' If something is on the Senate floor and up for final passage, you probably should've done the research before it got to that point."

John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.

COMMENTARY

First debate in Republican race for governor was like the first pancake off the griddle

by Dana Hess

Maybe gubernatorial debates are like pancakes. The first one is always a little funky. Fortunately, there are a couple more debates scheduled this month. Maybe, like pancakes, they'll get better as the griddle gets hotter.

The first debate from the four candidates seeking the Republican nomination for governor is in the books. There were some things viewers learned from the candidates and some things they didn't.

Dusty Johnson: Has a plan for that

Of all the candidates on the stage, Johnson spent the most time wearing a bullseye because of his role as a member of Congress. Certainly things would be better in South Dakota, the other candidates asserted, if Washington, D.C., weren't so screwed up.

For his part, Johnson somehow managed to defend Congress. He must be thankful he got through the hour without anyone asking him how he's enjoying his two week vacation from Congress while the nation is suffering through the longest partial government shutdown in history.

Johnson seemed to have a "plan" for everything from improving education to the smart way to attract data centers. Too often he seemed like that kid in high school who, late on Friday afternoon, would be the one to remind the teacher that she forgot to assign homework.

Larry Rhoden: Unplugged and unpolished

Perhaps the biggest surprise of the event was how uncomfortable the governor seemed in the debate setting. Kristi Noem didn't pick him to be her lieutenant governor for his debating skills. She chose him because he was a savvy veteran of the Legislature.

In his short time in the governor's office, Rhoden has used those skills to shepherd through a variety of significant bills, and he needs to talk about his successes more. When he tried to talk about them in the debate, he stumbled, saying twice that his administration delivered the largest economic development project in state history but never actually identifying the project.

Jon Hansen: The one-man gang

The speaker of the state House repeatedly made his case as the most conservative candidate in the race to the point where it seemed like his lectern should be leaning to the right.

Listening to Hansen, it was easy to envision that he was the only member of the Legislature as he claimed to "pass" a variety of bills all by himself. It was interesting to see Hansen lay claim to raising the state sales tax as a method to lower property taxes. He did this while dodging criticism from Johnson about South Dakotans facing higher costs after the Legislature and Rhoden endorsed three sales tax increases.

Toby Doeden: Trump 2.0

While all the candidates have, to one degree or another, sucked up to Donald Trump, Doeden has cast himself as the candidate forged in the president's image — a rich guy who will fight for the common man. Trump has been such an inspiration to Doeden that it's easy to believe he would have ridden down a golden escalator if there was one in Aberdeen.

Doeden's claims that he will shake up things in Pierre seem hollow without specifics. He makes charges about corruption and overspending, yet seems to have little understanding of how a state budget is put together. There are probably cuts to be made, but much of the state budget is dependent on matching federal dollars, and Dusty Johnson can only shoulder so much of the blame.

KELO: Hey gang, let's put on a debate!

For the most part, the debate moderators gave up their role as journalists to have questions offered by South Dakota citizens. No one knows how the deeply Republican candidates felt about taking a question from a chamber of commerce executive who was sitting in front of a large historical portrait of a Democrat, Bobby Kennedy.

The moderators did allow one question from Pierre correspondent Bob Mercer. The debate could have used more of Mercer and his insights. As the longest serving political reporter in the state, he has more legislative institutional memory than all four of the candidates on the stage.

When moderators did ask their own question, Johnson was offended by having to assign a letter grade to Noem's tenure as governor. Maybe he's just afraid of the grade he'd get for his time in Congress.

For their part, Rhoden and Doeden made much of how Noem kept the state open during the pandemic with no mention of the fact that the state was often leading the league in per capita COVID-19 deaths.

Whoever scheduled the debate instinctively knew that it wasn't ready for primetime. It's likely KELO schedulers wanted to have the first debate, but didn't want to face the prospect of preempting a March Madness basketball game. At 4 o'clock in the afternoon, all they had to cancel was "Celebrity Bowling" or whatever passes for entertainment at that early hour.

One of these four men will quite likely be the next governor of South Dakota. Let's hope they, and viewers, are better served in the next debates.

Dana Hess spent more than 25 years in South Dakota journalism, editing newspapers in Redfield, Milbank and Pierre. He's retired and lives in Brookings, working occasionally as a freelance writer.

Opponents sue over Forest Service's approval of drilling near Lakota sacred site in Black Hills

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

Opponents filed a lawsuit this week challenging the U.S. Forest Service's approval of a graphite drilling project near Pe' Sla, a site in the Black Hills of western South Dakota that holds cultural and spiritual significance for Native Americans.

The plaintiffs are the Indigenous rights group known as NDN Collective and the Black Hills Clean Water Alliance, both based in Rapid City, and Earthworks in Washington, D.C.

The lawsuit challenges the Forest Service's decision allowing Rapid City-based Pete Lien & Sons to move forward with exploratory drilling for graphite. Graphite is used in electric vehicle batteries, lubricants, pencils and other products.

Pe' Sla, also known as Reynolds Prairie, is a sacred site used for prayer, ceremony and cultural activities. The area is a high-elevation meadow surrounded by forested mountains in the central Black Hills. Pe' Sla is one of the sites in the Black Hills that corresponds with celestial features in traditional Lakota spirituality.

The lawsuit says the Forest Service improperly used a process known as a "categorical exclusion" to bypass environmental and cultural reviews.

"We will not stand for the desecration of our sacred sites, land, and water by extractive mining companies like Pete Lien," said Wizipan Garriott, president of NDN Collective, in a press release. "The laws of the United States are often rigged against us, but we are confident this categorical exclusion was unlawful."

The lawsuit alleges a categorical exclusion was improper because the project includes drilling, road work and other activity near Pe' Sla that goes beyond what a categorical exclusion allows. The plaintiffs also argue that Pe' Sla's religious and cultural importance should have triggered a fuller review rather than the abbreviated process.

Neither Pete Lien & Sons nor the Forest Service immediately responded to requests for comment.

A representative of Pete Lien & Sons previously told Searchlight the company was reviewing the plan's potential impact on sites of cultural and historical significance in the proposed project area, and questions

and concerns should be directed to the Forest Service.

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.

Democratic states sue Trump over mail-in ballot order, joining rush to courts

BY: JONATHAN SHORMAN

President Donald Trump's executive order restricting mail ballots faced a fresh challenge on Friday, as a coalition of Democratic states filed a lawsuit seeking to block an order that experts say is an extraordinary attempt by the president to assert authority over elections.

More than 20 states — led by California, Massachusetts, Nevada and Washington — and the District of Columbia sued in federal court in Massachusetts. They argue the order violates the Constitution, which gives states the responsibility to run elections and allows Congress, not the president unilaterally, the power to override state regulations.

"Though the President may wish he had unlimited power to restrict voting rights, the Constitution gives states — not the White House — the authority to oversee elections," Massachusetts Attorney General Andrea Joy Campbell, a Democrat, said in a statement.

The lawsuit is only the latest in a growing number of legal challenges to the order since Trump signed it on Tuesday.

The Democratic National Committee, top Democrats in Congress and other Democratic groups have sued, along with the American Civil Liberties Union, League of Women Voters, the League of United Latin American Citizens and other voting rights groups.

Friday's state-led challenge marked at least the fifth lawsuit over the order.

"Neither the Constitution nor any act of Congress confers upon the President the authority to mandate sweeping changes to States' electoral systems or procedures," the complaint reads.

The Trump administration has said the order is necessary to ensure the security of elections and crack down on noncitizen voting, which studies have found is extremely rare. Trump acknowledged the order would likely face litigation when he signed it but called it "foolproof."

"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," White House spokesperson Abigail Jackson said in a statement on Wednesday.

List required

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 the U.S. attorney general 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 order also directs the postmaster general 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

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planning to vote by mail at least 60 days before the election.

"The expression 'a solution in search of a problem' came to mind, but this is sort of a quasi-solution in search of a hallucination," said Pamela Smith, president and CEO of Verified Voting, an organization that promotes the responsible use of technology in elections.

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.

"The president's illegal executive order creates a shadow voter eligibility list within the federal government and it threatens to coerce states into disenfranchising voters missing from those lists," Nevada Attorney General Aaron Ford said at a news conference in Las Vegas.

States say they run elections, not feds

The coalition of states argues in the lawsuit that Trump's order would require states to upend existing election administration procedures and spend significant time and resources "mitigating the harms" of its requirements and educating voters about the new rules.

The states joining the lawsuit include Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin, in addition to the District of Columbia and Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro, a Democrat.

Some Republican state officials have backed Trump's efforts. Wyoming Secretary of State Chuck Gray in a statement voiced "complete and total" support for the order.

"I look forward to continuing to work with the Trump Administration, the Department of Homeland Security, the United States Postal Inspection Service, and our county clerks on implementation of this executive order," Gray said.

But the states say the order would require states to act contrary to their own voter roll procedures, systems and voter registration laws, the complaint argues. Arizona Attorney General Kris Mayes, a Democrat, said the Constitution is clear that states run elections.

"Not the President," Mayes said. "And Arizona will not allow the federal government to seize control of our elections."

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.

Reports: US fighter jet downed over Iran, one crew member rescued

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — A U.S. fighter jet went down over Iran Friday and one crew member has been rescued, according to several media reports. Iranian state media reported the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps was responsible.

The attack marks the first time Iran has shot down U.S. military aircraft since the war's start. Reuters and the New York Times have cited U.S. officials confirming the incident. Axios has cited two unnamed sources. Sources told news media the aircraft was an F-15.

Another U.S. combat plane went down into the Persian Gulf, near the Strait of Hormuz, and the single pilot was rescued, according to media reports citing U.S. officials. Whether the A-10 Warthog was downed by enemy fire is unclear. The crash occurred roughly around the same time that the F-15 was attacked.

The Pentagon has not responded to States Newsroom's requests for confirmation of the reports.

A U.S. military search and rescue operation is reportedly underway, according to American officials cited

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in the Times report and Iranian state media.

U.S. Central Command, which posts about the war every day on social media, had not posted information about the downed jet as of 5 p.m. Eastern.

President Donald Trump has not commented on the incidents. At 3:20 p.m. Eastern, he wrote on his social media platform, Truth Social, "KEEP THE OIL, ANYONE?"

The IRGC reportedly downed the jet, which Iranian media said was an F-35, over central Iran and the crew ejected from the plane, according to the Iranian Tasmin News Agency, citing IRGC officials.

Tasmin also claimed U.S. Black Hawk helicopters and a C-130 Hercules aircraft were searching for the pilot. A Black Hawk was hit by fire during the rescue operation but was able to remain in flight and land in Iraq, according to the New York Times, citing U.S. and Israeli officials.

Trump vowed to hit Iran 'extremely hard'

The apparent attack came two days after Trump delivered a formal primetime address telling the nation the U.S. objectives in Iran were "nearing completion" but that American forces would be hitting Iran "extremely hard" over the next two to three weeks.

The U.S. entered the joint war with Israel on Feb. 28, killing the country's late Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and numerous other senior leaders. Khamenei's son, Mojtaba Khamenei, has taken over as the Islamic state's top cleric, according to Iran's government, but he has not been seen in public.

The fighting continues to rock global energy markets after Iran's takeover of the Strait of Hormuz, a major passageway for one-fifth of the world's petroleum and liquid natural gas supply.

A gallon of gas in the U.S. now costs just above \$4 on average, according to AAA, the highest since 2022, when Russia launched its full-scale war on Ukraine. Brent crude oil, the international standard, was trading at \$109 a barrel as of Friday morning.

The war has taken thousands of civilian lives across the Middle East and injured tens of thousands more. Thirteen U.S. troops have been killed.

Energy and other civilian infrastructure has been badly damaged in Iran and across the region. Trump posted a video on Thursday on Truth Social of U.S. strikes destroying a major bridge connecting the country's capital Tehran to Karaj.

Trump has repeated several times over the past week that the U.S. will bomb Iran "back to the stone ages."

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

Trump budget seeks 43% boost in defense spending, cuts in many domestic programs

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration released its fiscal 2027 budget request Friday, asking Congress to increase spending on defense programs by 43% and decrease funding for non-defense accounts by 10%.

The proposal kicks off what will be a monthslong process on Capitol Hill as lawmakers write the dozen annual government funding bills ahead of the Oct. 1 deadline.

Congress rarely adheres to the president's request entirely, and didn't do so last year, rejecting many of the proposed cuts, including to health and education.

Last year's process, the first of President Donald Trump's second term, was considerably rocky, leading to a 43-day shutdown that began in October, a brief partial shutdown that ended in early February and an ongoing shutdown for the Department of Homeland Security.

This budget request proposes Republicans again use the complex budget reconciliation process they

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used last year to enact the "big, beautiful" law to further bolster spending on the Pentagon and DHS.

The Defense Department would have its budget raised to \$1.5 trillion, a \$445 billion increase over its current funding level. The administration proposes lawmakers put \$1.1 trillion of that in the annual spending bill that would require bipartisan support to move through the Senate and place the other \$350 billion in the partisan reconciliation bill.

"America has already begun to strengthen and reinvigorate the military by committing tens of billions of dollars to new and innovative programs such as the Golden Dome for America, and making critical investments in the defense industrial base," the document states. "By continuing to provide the resources necessary to rebuild America's military, the Budget re-establishes deterrence, revives the warrior ethos of America's Armed Forces, and prioritizes investments against the most acute national security threats."

Department-by-department requests

The budget asks that lawmakers also increase spending on:

The Energy Department by \$4.8 billion, or 10%, to \$53.9 billion.

The Justice Department by \$4.7 billion, or 13%, to \$40.8 billion.

The Veterans' Affairs Department by \$11.5 billion, or 9%, to \$144.9 billion in discretionary spending.

The proposal asks Congress to decrease spending on:

The Agriculture Department by \$4.9 billion, or 19%, to \$20.8 billion.

The Commerce Department by \$1.3 billion, or 12.2%, to \$9.2 billion.

The Education Department by \$2.3 billion, or 2.9%, to \$76.5 billion.

The Environmental Protection Agency by \$4.6 billion, or 52%, to \$4.2 billion.

The Department of Health and Human Services by \$15.8 billion, or 12.5%, to \$111.1 billion.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development by \$10.7 billion, or 13%, to \$73.5 billion.

The Interior Department by \$2.3 billion, or 12.9%, to \$15.9 billion.

The Labor Department by \$3.5 billion, or 25.9%, to \$9.9 billion.

The Small Business Administration by \$671 million, or 67%, to \$329 million.

The State Department and other international programs by \$15.5 billion, or 30%, to \$35.6 billion.

The Transportation Department by \$1.6 billion, or 6.2%, to \$26.6 billion.

The Treasury Department by \$1.5 billion, or 12%, to \$11.5 billion.

The budget proposes \$63 billion in funding for the Department of Homeland Security, which doesn't yet have its appropriations bill from the current year for comparison.

Senate Appropriations Committee Chairwoman Susan Collins, R-Maine, said in a statement there are issues with some of its proposals for both defense and domestic spending.

"While there are some improvements over last year's domestic discretionary budget request, including full support for the Pell Grant program, the request has several shortcomings," she said. "For example, the proposal includes unwarranted funding cuts in biomedical research. It would also terminate worthwhile programs like LIHEAP, which helps low-income families and seniors to pay their energy bills during the cold winter and hot summer months, and TRIO, which assists low-income, first-generation students in pursuing higher education."

Collins indicated she may bolster defense spending for a certain type of ship that she views as essential to the country's military.

"The request for just one DDG-51, the workhorse of the U.S. Navy, is insufficient to counter the ever-growing Chinese fleet, which now exceeds the size of the American Navy, as well as other global threats," she said.

Privatizing TSA screening

The president's request asks lawmakers to cut funding for the Federal Emergency Management Agency's non-disaster grant program and to begin the process of offloading security screening at the nation's airports.

"The Budget begins the privatization of TSA's airport screeners by requiring small airports to enroll in

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the Screening Partnership Program, under which TSA pays for private screeners at designated airports," it states. "The airports that already use this program have demonstrated savings compared to Federal screening operations. The move would yield cost savings compared to Federal screening and begin reform of a troubled Federal agency."

The budget asks Congress to provide an increase of \$1.7 billion to the Bureau of Prisons to improve working conditions and pay, with \$152 million of that going to the first year costs to "rebuild Alcatraz as a state-of-the-art secure prison facility." The Bureau of Prisons has been evaluating whether to restore the closed California facility.

The budget proposes increases in funding for Trump's efforts to improve the District of Columbia, including a \$10 billion Presidential Capital Stewardship Program run through the National Park Service and \$403 million for a new Transportation Department program to upgrade security in the Metro system and other local projects.

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration, which launched the Artemis II mission this week to orbit the moon, would receive a \$5.6 billion, or 23%, cut under Trump's budget proposal to a total funding level of \$18.8 billion.

It asks Congress to decrease funding for the International Space Station by \$1.1 billion and "prioritizes the rapid development and deployment of commercial space stations, while also keeping the safe de-orbit of the ISS on track for 2030."

Dems reject 'bleak' budget

Washington Democratic Sen. Patty Murray, ranking member on the Appropriations Committee, wrote in a statement that the budget request was "bleak and unacceptable."

"President Trump wants to slash medical research to fund costly foreign wars," she wrote. "It doesn't get more backward than that, and the only responsible thing to do with a budget this morally bankrupt is to toss it in the trash."

Murray added that she expects Congress to pursue bipartisan spending bills, just as lawmakers did during last year's process, including investments in domestic issues.

"This week, President Trump said that our country cannot afford to help families with child care or health care—but his own budget proves what a ridiculous farce that is," she said. "Imagine how many families we could help if, instead of giving the Pentagon more money than they can even figure out what to do with, we cut people's heating bills in half and made child care affordable for every family in America."

Senate Budget Committee ranking member Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., wrote in a statement the request lacks detail for programs that run outside of the annual budget and appropriations process, like Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security.

"Going back decades, presidents have sent to Congress detailed budgets with 10 years' worth of detailed plans – outlining their approach to tax policy and our growing debt, as well as the solvency of our biggest programs like Medicare and Social Security," he wrote. "This budget doesn't do any of that. It's just an out-of-touch plea for more money for guns and bombs, and less for the things people need, like housing, health care, education, roads, scientific research, and environmental protection."

Minnesota Democratic Rep. Betty McCollum, ranking member on the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, said the Pentagon doesn't have an issue with how much in taxpayer money lawmakers allocate, but "a problem with efficiently spending the funding that Congress has provided them – and accounting for it."

"The President's request for \$1.15 trillion in defense spending is outrageous and unacceptable, especially when President Trump and Congressional Republicans intend to make further cuts to critical services that Americans rely on at home," she said. "Our nation cannot be secure without investments in our country's critical health care, education, nutrition, and infrastructure."

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

Trump's SAVE America Act would end voter registration drives nationwide

BY: JONATHAN SHORMAN

Before Wyoming elections, the state's League of Women Voters tries to get voter registration information into the hands of residents at events and gatherings. But under state law, League volunteers can't sign up voters themselves — only local election officials can do that.

"It's been tough," said Linda Barton, president of the League of Women Voters of Wyoming. She added that her group does its best to offer registration information. "We provide a lot of printed literature that we hand out all over the state."

Congress may take Wyoming's approach nationwide.

The SAVE America Act would effectively ban voter registration drives, a mainstay of college campuses and neighborhood events.

The U.S. Senate began debating a version of President Donald Trump's signature elections measure last month, after the House passed it in February. The legislation would require voters to show photo identification to cast a ballot. It would also require individuals to present documents proving their citizenship, such as a passport or birth certificate, to government officials in person to register to vote.

Trump and Republican members of Congress have cast the proposal as necessary to secure elections and crack down on noncitizen voters ahead of the midterms. Democrats and other critics warn it risks disenfranchising wide swaths of Americans. Studies have shown noncitizen voting is extremely rare.

In many states, civic groups have long provided applications to would-be voters that they can quickly fill out. During the 2024 election cycle, voter registration drives accounted for 3.7% of registrations, according to survey data from the federal Election Assistance Commission. While a small percentage, the figure still represents 2.1 million Americans.

Twenty-four states and the District of Columbia placed no restrictions on voter registration drives as of November 2024, according to the Movement Advancement Project, a Colorado-based think tank. An additional 24 states impose some limits, while Wyoming and New Hampshire prohibit them.

Bill would end registration drives nationwide

Every form of voter registration drive would effectively end under the SAVE America Act as currently drafted in the Senate, said Brian Miller, executive director of NonprofitVOTE, which aids nonprofit organizations in helping individuals vote and participate in the democratic process. Community-based groups, universities, food pantries and others who help register voters would all be affected.

"That's the high school civics teacher who works with his graduating class ... gone, they can't do that anymore," Miller said.

NonprofitVOTE, working with 120 organizations across nine states, engaged 60,000 voters during the 2022 midterm cycle, according to a report by the group. It found that individuals reached by nonprofits were 10 percentage points more likely to cast a ballot than comparable registered voters.

The effect was more pronounced among younger voters. Those ages 18 to 24 who were engaged by nonprofit groups were 12 percentage points more likely to cast a ballot than comparable registered voters.

Hispanic Federation, a nationwide Hispanic and Latino advocacy group, says it has registered 160,000 voters since 2016. Frederick Vélez III Burgos, the federation's senior director for communications and community outreach, said the organization works to register voters because of language and cultural barriers, work schedules and other factors that make the process challenging.

"There's just a group of people and communities that is just very difficult to get registered through normal means," Burgos said.

Top Trump priority

Trump has made clear the SAVE America Act is his top legislative priority and he has urged Congress to

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pass the measure before moving to other business. While Republicans control both chambers of Congress, support for the proposal falls short of the 60 votes needed to break a filibuster in the Senate.

"The SAVE Act would gut tried-and-true methods of voter registration, including registration by mail and registering online," Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat, said earlier this year.

Still, Senate Republican leaders in March kicked off an extended, wide-ranging debate over the bill. It remains unclear when the debate will end. Congress is scheduled to be in recess until mid-April.

GOP proponents have dismissed concerns that the legislation would make registering to vote and casting a ballot difficult. Sen. Chuck Grassley, an Iowa Republican, said on the Senate floor that the bill offers multiple ways to prove citizenship and "gives states the flexibility to create other pathways to show proof of citizenship."

Grassley noted that his mother was one of the first women to cast a ballot after ratification of the 19th Amendment, which guaranteed women the right to vote.

"The SAVE America Act doesn't infringe on these hard-fought voting rights. It would preserve the integrity of every vote cast in a federal election," Grassley said.

Hard-to-reach voters

Third-party voter registration drives date back to voter education and registration efforts by the National American Woman Suffrage Association, according to Joshua Douglas, a University of Kentucky law professor who specializes in voting rights and election law. The association eventually morphed into the League of Women Voters, which helped spearhead registration efforts following the 19th Amendment.

Voter registration drives typically aid voters who may not otherwise have opportunities to register, Douglas wrote in an email to States Newsroom. They may not have a driver's license or may not be thinking about registering.

"There is a long history of civic organizations engaged in voter registration drives and this legislation would make that work harder," Douglas wrote.

Tom Lopach, president and CEO of the nonpartisan Voter Participation Center, an organization that works to register voters from underrepresented populations, said he fears some members of Congress haven't fully read the bill or digested how it would affect voting.

Since VPC was founded in 2003, it has helped register 7 million voters, Lopach said.

"And that's just us," he said. "When you think about the League of Women Voters, when you think about in-person voter registration drives happening in a grocery store parking lot, or knocking doors in a neighborhood, you would have tens of millions of Americans not registered and then not voting."

States trending toward more restrictions

Even if the SAVE America Act doesn't become law, some states have taken steps to make voter registration drives more difficult.

The Center for Public Integrity and NPR found in 2024 that at least six states had passed legislation cracking down on voter registration drives following the 2020 election. Some of the bills imposed massive fines for violations or barred noncitizens from participating.

As recently as March, the North Carolina State Board of Elections announced it would require groups conducting voter registration drives to print their own registration forms. The board cited significant costs, after it provided nearly 1.3 million applications to organizations and government agencies in 2024 at a cost of more than \$269,000.

"Nothing about this temporary tightening of our practice surrounding voter registration drives changes the fact that any North Carolina citizen who wants a voter registration application will always be able to get one simply by contacting their county board of elections or the State Board," Sam Hayes, the board's executive director, told NC Newsline.

Courts have blocked some state-level restrictions. A federal court prohibited Kansas from enforcing a 2021 law that barred out-of-state organizations from distributing advance mail ballot applications to voters and

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prohibited applications that contained personalized voter information. Kansas has appealed the decision.

The Missouri Supreme Court last week ruled against a state law that prohibited groups like the League of Women Voters from using paid workers in voter registration drives. The state's high court also struck down requirements that individuals who solicit more than 10 registration applications must register with the state and be Missouri voters. The law had also prohibited encouraging someone to obtain an absentee ballot.

Kay Park, president of the League of Women Voters of Missouri, called the restrictions "ridiculous" and said that while they were in effect the organization did nothing with absentee ballots — such as suggesting an absentee ballot could be an option for someone with a disability, for instance.

The League of Women Voters of Missouri holds voter registration drives in high schools, Park said. While Missouri residents must be 18 to vote, they can register once they're 17 ½ years old. The SAVE America Act would effectively end those drives.

If the legislation becomes law, Park said the Missouri league would likely focus more of its efforts on helping individuals obtain identification documents and birth certifications — something it's already trying to do.

"It just puts another cog in the wheel," Park said.

Wyoming model

In Wyoming, Barton and her fellow League of Women Voters members are already grappling with a state-level proof-of-citizenship voter registration law passed last year, regardless of whether Congress passes the SAVE America Act.

Residents who want to register to vote must visit a county clerk's office and bring a valid passport or birth certificate. Wyoming also accepts REAL ID-compliant driver's licenses and tribal IDs, as long as they do not indicate the individual is a noncitizen, and a few other documents, such as a naturalization certificate. Individuals may register by mail but must include copies of their documents along with a notarized application.

The new state requirements were championed by Wyoming Secretary of State Chuck Gray, a Republican who is running for the state's U.S. House seat.

"As the chief election official of Wyoming that has experience with these common sense election integrity measures, I can tell you that the SAVE America Act will be easy for states to implement," Gray wrote in a March 17 letter to Senate Majority Leader John Thune, a South Dakota Republican.

Gray didn't respond to questions from States Newsroom.

Barton said without the option to hold voter registration drives, going to events and speaking to clubs and organizations like Rotary are imperative.

"I just think that the only other choice is to be out there, communicating as much as possible," she said.

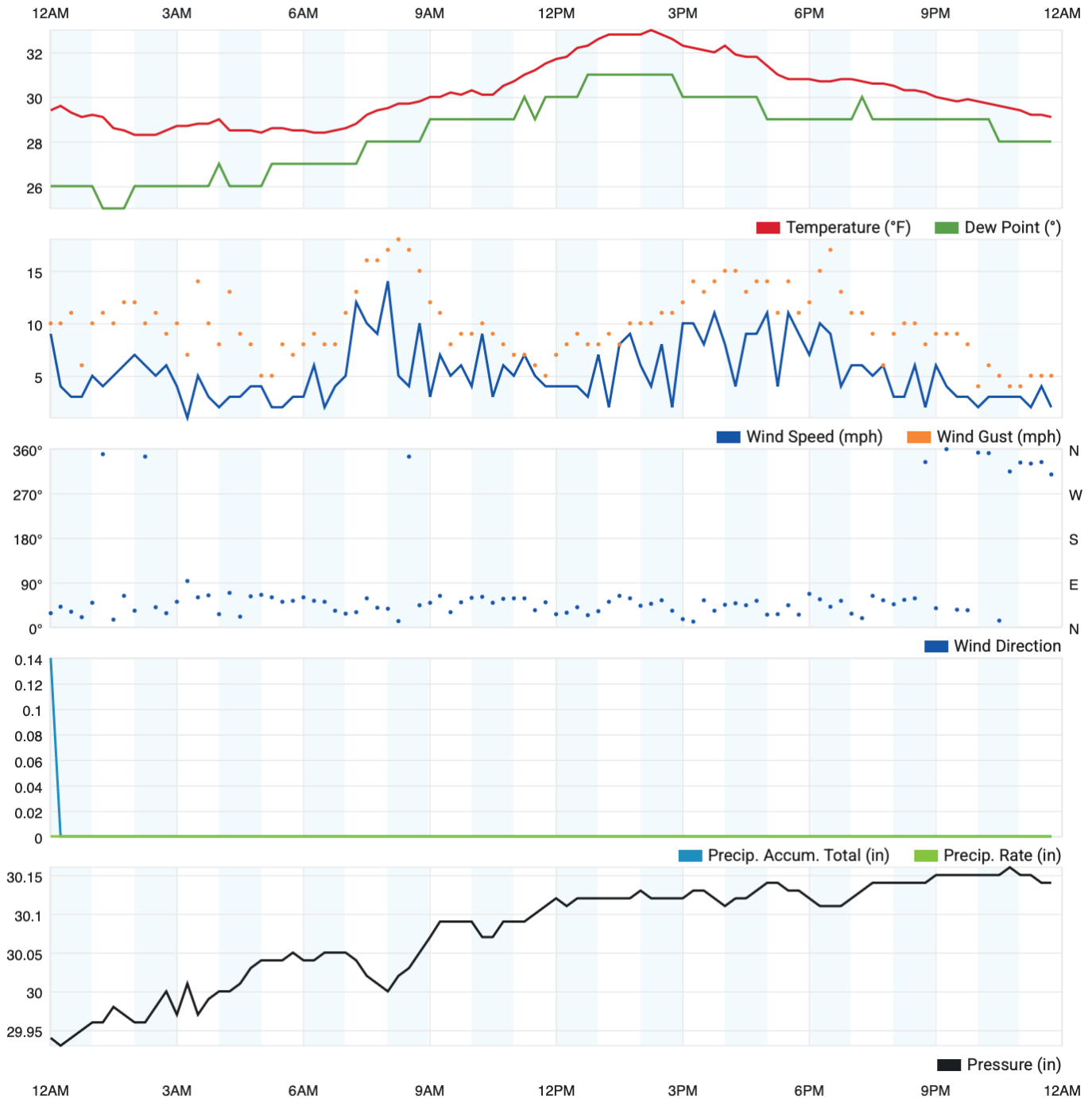
Jonathan Shorman covers democracy for States Newsroom. Based in Kansas City, his coverage area includes elections and voting rights, fights over state and federal power, civil liberties and more. An alumnus of the University of Kansas, he previously covered politics for The Kansas City Star.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

April 3, 2026



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Winter Storm Warning

Today



90 % → 30 %

High: 35 °F

Snow and
Patchy
Blowing Snow

Tonight



Low: 24 °F

Partly Cloudy

Sunday



High: 40 °F

Mostly Sunny

Sunday Night



Low: 21 °F

Partly Cloudy

Monday



High: 31 °F

Mostly Sunny



Snow Exits Today

April 4, 2026
3:23 AM

Key Messages:

- Today: Wraparound snow pushes east this morning ending from west to east by early evening.
 - Additional Snow: 1-2 inches across north central SD; 2-5 inches in far northeast SD and west central MN
- **Snowfall amounts will be HIGHLY DEPENDENT on if temperatures at the surface will be warm enough to melt the snow as it falls.**
- Northwest winds increase with gusts between 25 and 35 mph. Winds may cause blowing or drifting snow especially where snow is still falling.

What Has Changed

- No significant changes

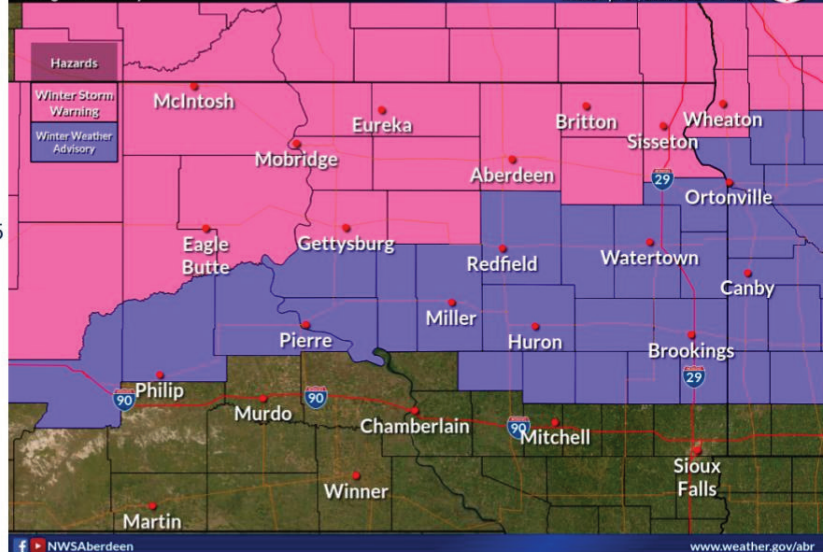
Next Scheduled Update

- No further updates planned

Winter Weather Headlines

Through 7 PM Today

Weather Forecast Office
Aberdeen, SD
Issued Apr 04, 2026 2:12 AM CDT



National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Winter storm warnings and advisories continue this morning. Snow ends from west to east by this evening.

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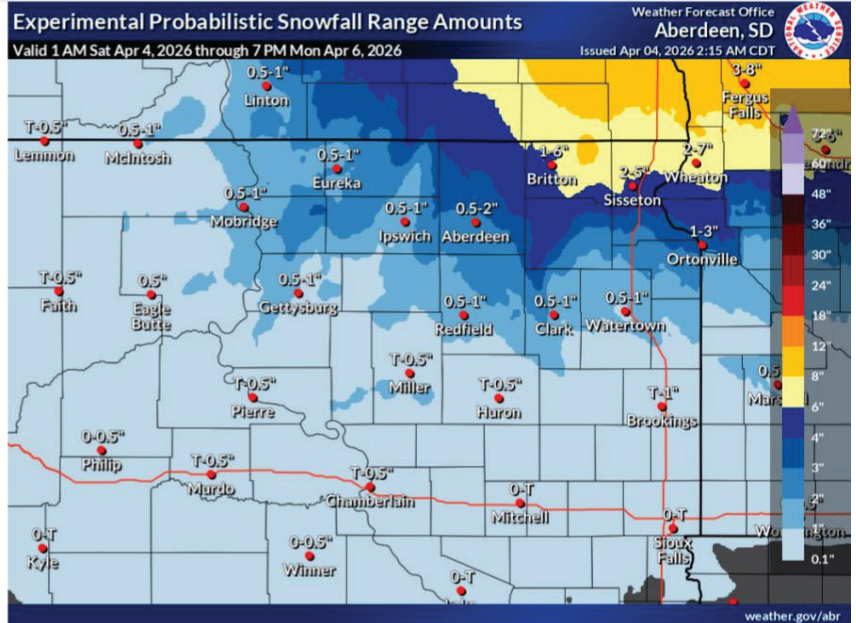


Additional Snow Accumulations Today

April 4, 2026
3:28 AM

Highest additional snow totals expected over far northeastern SD and west central MN

- Snow continues to circulate around the low early this morning. The back edge will push east through the day, exiting by this evening.
- The highest additional snowfall accumulation today is expected across far northeast SD and west central MN.
- Warm ground temperatures will continue to help melt the snow, potentially pushing the area towards lower end values.



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD



Winds Increasing Today

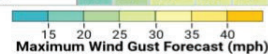
April 4, 2026
3:32 AM

Blowing and drifting snow possible

- Winds and wind gusts will increase this morning, peaking in the late morning to early afternoon hours.
 - Gusts between 25-35 mph will be possible.
 - The strongest wind gusts are expected over central South Dakota this morning and over northeastern South Dakota this afternoon.
- Patchy areas of blowing and drifting snow will be possible Saturday as these winds pick up
 - **Minor visibility reductions could occur in areas where the falling snow and strong wind gusts come together**

Maximum Wind Gust (mph) Forecast

	4/4 Sat					Gust Max
	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	
Aberdeen	25	30	31	30	25	31
Britton	21	28	30	30	25	30
Chamberlain	29	35	35	33	26	35
Clark	26	32	35	35	30	35
Eagle Butte	32	32	30	28	22	32
Eureka	29	32	31	29	22	32
Gettysburg	31	32	32	31	23	32
McIntosh	29	29	28	24	18	29
Milbank	20	26	29	31	29	31
Miller	29	35	35	32	26	35
Mobridge	28	28	26	24	20	28
Murdo	32	36	35	32	26	36
Pierre	28	29	29	29	22	29
Redfield	28	35	36	35	28	36
Sisseton	20	28	32	32	30	32
Watertown	22	30	33	33	30	33
Webster	23	30	32	31	29	32
Wheaton	17	24	29	29	28	29



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

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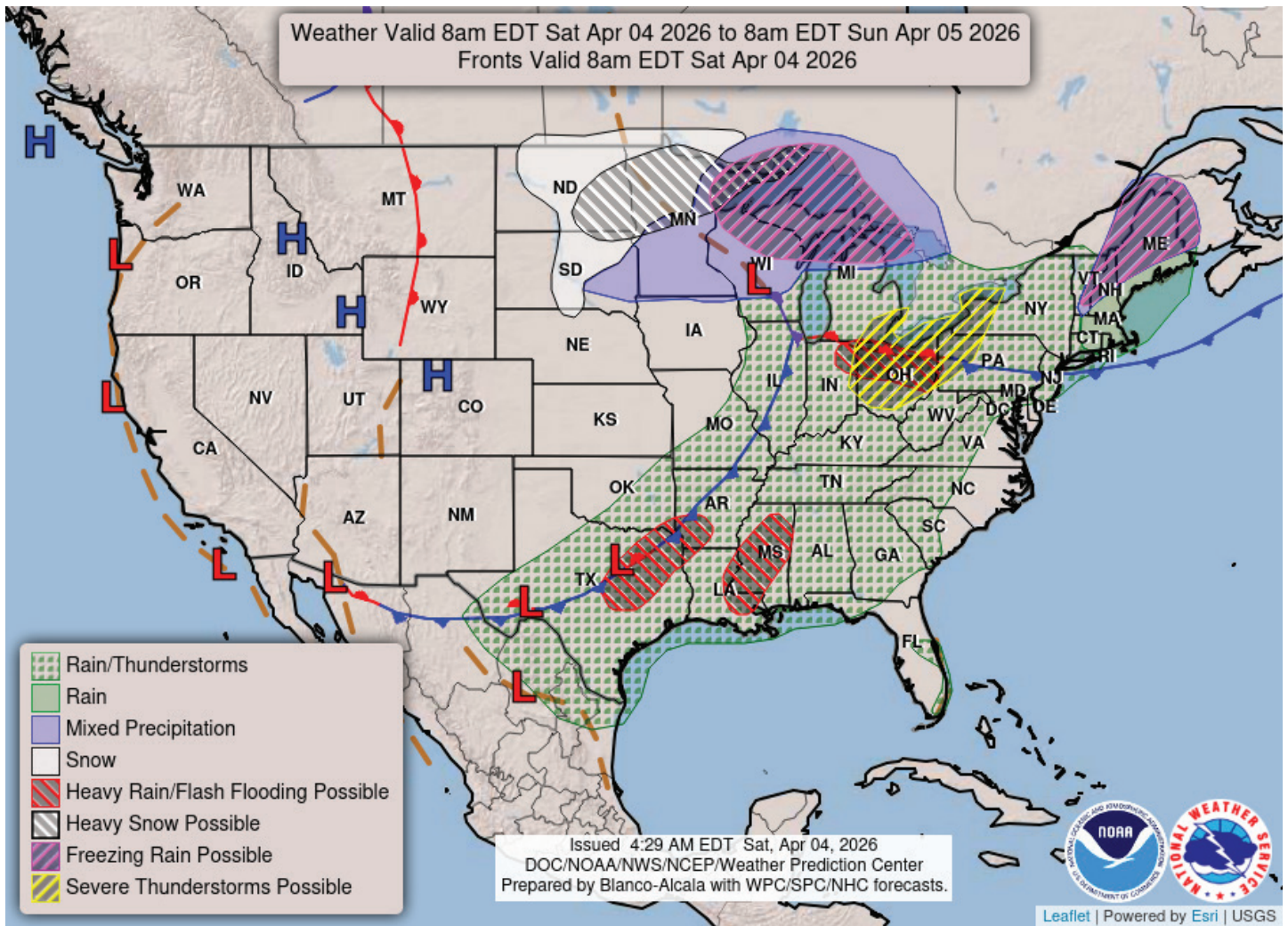
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 33 °F at 2:14 PM
Low Temp: 28 °F at 2:20 AM
Wind: 19 mph at 6:18 PM
Precip: : Few inches of snow

Today's Info

Record High: 90 in 1921
Record Low: -6 in 2018
Average High: 52
Average Low: 27
Average Precip in April.: 0.17
Precip to date in April.: 0.14
Average Precip to date: 2.23
Precip Year to Date: 1.76
Sunset Tonight: 8:03 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:04 am



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Today in Weather History

April 4th, 1961: High 40-60mph winds and 80-90mph gusts affected Central and Western South Dakota. The most extensive property damage occurred in the Pierre area. A new motel's roof was blown off, and one wall was damaged. One trailer home was blown over, numerous windows and large signboards were destroyed, and roofs sustained damage in Pierre.

1804 — A large tornado crossed six Georgia counties killing at least eleven persons near Augusta. (David Ludlum)

1933 — Pigeon River Bridge, MN, reported 28 inches of snow, which established the state 24 hour snowfall record. (4th-5th) (The Weather Channel)

1973 — Sandia Crest, NM, reported a snow depth of 95 inches, a record for the state of New Mexico. (The Weather Channel)

1983 — Colorado was in the midst of a three day winter storm. Buckhorn Mountain, located west of Fort Collins, received 64 inches of snow. (Storm Data)

1987 — Rains of five to eight inches drenched eastern New York State, and ten persons were killed in a bridge collapse over Schoharie Creek. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — Sunny and warm weather prevailed across the nation. Fort Smith AR reported a record high of 90 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 — Thunderstorms produced severe weather from the Lower Mississippi Valley to the Southern Appalachians. The thunderstorms spawned seventeen tornadoes, including one which caused two million dollars damage at Baldwin AL. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 90 mph at Bremen GA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 — A deep low pressure system in northern New York State brought heavy snow to parts of western and central New York during the day. The snowfall total of 5.8 inches at Buffalo was a record for the date, and 9.5 inches was reported at Rochester. Snowfall totals ranged up to 11 inches at Warsaw. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

Victory Over the Grave

Christ's triumph over the grave guarantees our forgiveness and provides an eternal home with God.

1 Corinthians 15:12-19: 12 Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised;

14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.

15 Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised.

16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised;

17 and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.

18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

19 If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

We live in a fallen world, and death is an inescapable reality. As believers, however, we have hope because we serve a risen Savior. But have you ever wondered how things would be different if there had been no resurrection? What despair and hopelessness!

To help us appreciate Christ's victory over the grave, let's consider what the outcome of life and death would be without the resurrection. First of all, Jesus would still be dead. That means our faith in Him would be worthless and our message to the world would be a lie. What's more, Jesus Himself would be proved false since He claimed that He would rise from the dead.

There would be no forgiveness of our sins, no possibility of reconciliation with God, and no hope of heaven. All believers throughout history would have truly perished. Without the resurrection, there would be nothing positive for anyone to anticipate, no end to our brokenness and separation from the Lord.

Thank God, not one of these scenarios is true. Our Savior lives (Revelation 1:18), our sins are forgiven, death has been defeated, and believers in Christ have assurance of eternity in heaven with Him. After considering how hopeless we would be without the beautiful truth of the resurrection, let's rejoice all the more in the greatness of our salvation.

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:
04.03.26

8 16 37 45 53 3

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

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 17 Mins 5 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.03.26

31 45 62 63 68 15

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$100,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[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: 15 Hrs 17 Mins 5 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.01.26

5 6 9 14 25

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$40,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 32 Mins 5 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.01.26

27 31 47 56 68 14

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 1 Mins 5 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: 16 Hrs 1 Mins 5 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Historic restoration project shines light on Canton Lutheran Church in South Dakota

By MOLLY WETSCH/South Dakota News Watch South Dakota News Watch

When the light hits right on a sunny morning, Canton Lutheran Church glows. Circles of multicolored light dance across rich wooden pews, and one can't help but appreciate the beauty of a place that fully embodies the history of the community it occupies.

That's because of the dozens of intricate, vibrant stained glass windows that decorate its century-old sanctuary. And just before one of its holiest days of the year – Easter Sunday – the rural church got some very good news about those pieces of art.

The South Dakota State Historical Society and city of Deadwood are granting the Canton Lutheran Church a total of \$22,500 from gaming proceeds for the church's Restoring Radiance project, which aims to completely restore the windows.

That funding will wrap up the church's campaign for the project, which had a target of more than \$500,000.

Canton Lutheran also recently received a grant from the National Trust for Sacred Places, which is a collaborative program between the National Trust for Historic Preservation and Partners for Sacred Places. More than \$185,000 was awarded to the church's project, which requires a dollar-for-dollar match from other community fundraising. It's the first South Dakotan organization to ever receive an award from the program.

Landmark building in Canton

The church, which was established in 1868 and built its current space in 1908, is a fixture of the 3,000-person town's historic core. The Gothic Revival building, constructed mostly with the area's signature pinkish Sioux Quartzite rock, stands tall among other landmarks like the Lincoln County Courthouse and Kennedy Mansion, built in 1889, and 1917, respectively.

Melinda Larson is a congregation member who has been working on the project since conversations about restoration began years ago.

The church started collecting donations in earnest about a year and a half ago, she told News Watch. Since then, the massive south-facing window has been removed and transferred to Windom, Minnesota, where it is being restored by Willet Stained Glass Studios. The congregation hopes the project will be finished in its entirety by the summer of 2027.

Larson, who was involved in multiple grant applications, said that some of the church's success in accessing that grant funding comes from how engaged the community has been in the project.

"(The National Trust for Sacred Places) application focused a lot on community involvement and community service, and Canton Lutheran is very community involved," Larson said. "But also, the community of Canton is a collaborative community in terms of working together to meet community needs. The churches work together."

Historical value of churches comes to forefront

The church's recent award from the SDSHS was one of three given to rural churches in this grant cycle. Immanuel Lutheran Church in Perkins County received \$5,000 for steeple repair and Saint Wenceslaus Church in Tabor received \$10,000 for porch repair. All three churches are over a century old.

Garry Guan, South Dakota's historic preservation officer, said that historic churches are a key part of South Dakota's cultural fabric, especially in rural areas.

"Historic churches are evaluated using the same criteria as other buildings, such as age, architectural integrity and historical associations. But they often carry additional layers of meaning. In many rural communities, churches historically served multiple roles," he told News Watch in a statement.

"They were not only places of worship but also spaces for schools, meetings and social gatherings. In some cases, they were among the first or most enduring buildings in a town. Because of their central role,

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churches are often among the most intact historic structures we encounter.”

Jon Splichal-Larson, pastor of Canton Lutheran, said the community in Canton has embraced the church’s history – even those outside of the congregation – and that the decision to pursue the project came from encouragement that the community would step up.

“As people of faith, you simply take the next faithful step. And I’ve really clung to that in the midst of all of these things. And you’re trying to take faithful steps that honor the heritage and the people that have come before us,” Splichal-Larson said.

And the people that came before them were rugged builders of their own. Most of the woodwork seen in the sanctuary was done by members of the congregation in the beginning of the 20th century.

“It was the pioneers, Norwegian pioneers, that established this church,” Splichal-Larson said. “We’re not all Norwegians anymore, and we don’t emphasize that heavily, but I think it ties right into that. It’s this resiliency of “You just do it.”

How rural churches can avoid decline in religious affiliation

When Canton Lutheran’s current building was constructed in 1908 after the town’s two Norwegian congregations blended, it was done without building a center aisle through the sanctuary. That was intentional, to illustrate how the two communities would come together as one in the space.

The church takes the same approach to unity today: Every Wednesday, congregation members gather together for a meal before splitting into groups for age-related programming. The meal, which allows congregation members to gather outside of services, also reflects Canton Lutheran’s hope to meet community members where they’re at, Splichal-Larson said.

“Our world is a busy world. Sometimes people think cities are busier than rural places, and that’s not always the case,” he said. “In Canton, you have a number of people who work in Sioux Falls. That adds another layer of being busy. And this church has a really wide variety of professions in it, and some of those are very time-consuming. And so you have a family, whether it’s one or two parents, to feed them on a Wednesday night makes a huge difference.”

Part of meeting the community where it’s at is about accepting changing faith behaviors.

A recent Gallup poll found that fewer than half of American adults said religion is “very important” in their lives, which is down from 58% in 2012 and, in the past, has been as high as 75%. Splichal-Larson said that he now considers “regular” attendance to be bimonthly, rather than weekly.

Julie Verley, a past president of the congregation, told News Watch that Splichal-Larson’s approach to youth ministry has not only increased engagement among that demographic but given the older members of the congregation hope for the future of the church.

“What I have appreciated is what (Splichal-Larson) does to engage young people. He really has them be part of the worship service itself,” Verley said. “That’s so important for them, but it’s also important for us as adults that we see young people in those roles.”

It is especially important as, nationally, fewer and fewer younger people identify with religion. In that same Gallup poll, just 33% of Americans ages 18-29 said religion is very important in their life, compared to 47% in 2005.

Numerous churches have closed in the past few years, as the COVID-19 pandemic decimated congregations and more and more people move away from religion. Lifeway Research, an evangelical research firm that advises churches, found that Protestant church closures eclipsed openings in 2024 through an analysis of U.S. Religion Census data.

Canton congregation still thriving

But, at least in this sanctuary, those issues are not yet fully manifesting.

Canton Lutheran claimed a total of 886 baptized members in its 2025 annual report. Some of those people come from areas outside of Canton – including Sioux Falls, where there are at least 21 Lutheran churches, according to the South Dakota Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The church runs summer Bible camps, middle and high school weekly programming and sees quite a few young families, according to Verley.

So why are they choosing Canton Lutheran, and what is the key to the church’s continued success?

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There may not be one answer that solves problems churches may be facing, Splichal-Larson said. But the stained glass project has been a reminder of what still works.

"God calls us to be a part of beauty and to create beauty with God. And that is these stained glass windows. These are the images of the story of Jesus, and that's what people are coming to churches to hear and see," Splichal-Larson said.

Splichal-Larson also said that thinking of younger demographics as a monolith or a problem to be solved can often take away from what is the most successful method to bringing people to church – connection.

"When you're talking about young adults, it's not, like, a code to crack. It's just personal," Splichal-Larson said.

The rural and historic nature of the church means that some families – like Verley's – have been attending for as many as four generations. That means something to the community, Larson said, especially when they have the opportunity to give back to what has become their gathering place and foundation.

"One of the advantages of a small congregation is that you have the opportunity to be seen," Larson said. "The other thing I think most people want is they want to be needed and to think that there's a place for them to serve. And, frankly, in a small church, we can't keep going unless people are serving."

And while the church's historic nature will always be a crucial part of how its congregation worships, they have been working to blend in modern elements as well. Splichal-Larson occasionally brings up an acoustic guitar to the chancel, and a full drum kit sits to the left side of the sanctuary, next to hundred-year-old pews. That contrast is maybe one of the most prescient examples of how the face of faith is changing, even as historic preservation efforts continue.

"You realize all that these people left for us, and we're stewards of that. It's that beauty, and it's what was left before us, and we're called to retain that. These folks have been here for generations," Larson said.

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Tribes in Montana lose millions after USDA kills farm grants

By NORA MABIE/Montana Free Press Montana Free Press

Kim Paul, executive director of the Piikani Lodge Health Institute, a nonprofit on the Blackfeet Reservation that promotes health and well-being, saw the email notification flash across her computer screen as she was working late last week.

It was the U.S. Department of Agriculture saying a nearly \$9 million grant contract with Piikani Lodge had been terminated.

"The U.S. Department of Agriculture has determined that awards under this program involved discriminatory preferences based on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and wasteful spending that did little to further lawful agricultural land purchases," the USDA wrote.

Paul was stunned. Piikani Lodge had planned to use the grant to improve operations for Native and non-Native farmers and ranchers in the region. The nonprofit had already separately acquired 600 acres on the Blackfeet Reservation, and planned to use the USDA funds to build a training hub for food producers and support about 300 farmers and ranchers in Glacier and Pondera counties.

Paul said she became short of breath when she saw the email. She dreaded sharing the news with her team.

"It was horror," she said. "The horror of losing stability for our community."

Funded through the Biden-era American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, the Increasing Land, Capital and Market Access Program was designed to support "underserved" farmers and ranchers. It awarded about \$300 million to 50 grantees in 2023. Forty-nine of those grants were terminated last week.

At least two additional projects in Montana were affected by the cancellations: a Chippewa Cree Tribe project to purchase land and train young farmers and ranchers how to manage it; and one run by South Dakota-based Four Bands Community Fund that would have trained and financially supported at least 25

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low-income agricultural producers in North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming and Montana.

Montana-based awardees called the terminations "devastating." They also say the grant cancellations were based on a false presumption that tribal initiatives fall under the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) rubric, and that USDA claims of wasteful spending are baseless.

Asked for comment, a USDA spokesperson said Thursday the agency "has worked to clean up the mess left for us by the last Administration. To no surprise, a peek behind the curtain of this Biden-era program revealed the egregious misuse of taxpayer dollars."

Piikani Lodge Health Institute leaders say they will have to restructure budgets and reconfigure staffing to keep some semblance of their project going. The Chippewa Cree Tribal project may be halted altogether. Four Bands Community Fund did not respond to an interview request by publication deadline. Awardees say the terminations hinder economic progress, not just in their communities, but across the state.

MONTANA PROJECTS CUT

The Chippewa Cree Tribe in north-central Montana was awarded a grant of nearly \$6 million for a land acquisition project.

Chippewa Cree planning director Neal Rosette said the tribe planned to purchase agricultural land on and around the reservation and train prospective farmers and ranchers how to manage it.

Though reservation land can be used for farming and ranching, Rosette said, land prices can keep people from entering the industry. The Rocky Boy's Reservation is home to almost 3,400 people, about 35% of whom live below the poverty line, according to U.S. Census data. The median household income on the reservation is \$49,550, almost \$26,000 less than the state's average.

"We are trying to give opportunities to our young folks to make a living," Rosette said.

Rosette said people working on the project had been trying to close on a 320-acre reservation property for months. The land costs about \$400,000, but according to Rosette the tribe has received only about \$50,000 of the nearly \$6 million grant since 2023. The tribe, he said, asked USDA repeatedly to release the funds, but received minimal communication from the federal agency.

"They drug their feet, drug their feet, and then finally they pulled the rug out from under us," he said.

Rosette has written many grants for the tribe in the past. He said receiving the termination letter from USDA marked "the first time I've ever got to the point where I felt like crying."

"It's so, so, so cruel," he said. "It's the worst feeling in the world. It was devastating for everybody. We were so proud of this project. We were so happy that we were finally going to be able to recover some lands for the benefit of our young people. And now it's gone."

Micaela Young, development director at Piikani Lodge Health Institute, said the canceled grant will delay construction on the community training center on the Blackfeet Reservation.

The Piikani Lodge project included building an industrial community kitchen where agricultural producers could prepare and process products like jams and jerky.

In its termination letter to Piikani Lodge, the USDA cited a "\$20,000 allocation for a barbeque smoker" as an example of funding for items "outside the program's mission of increasing land access." The USDA has also mentioned a "\$20,000 barbeque smoker" in statements to other media outlets as an example of "inappropriate spending."

Paul said the characterization is hurtful.

"We did all this work, we spent so many years on this," she said. "To say this was built on fraud? It's a travesty. This was going to be five years of jobs for our people. Can you imagine the economic development that would come from that?"

'DEI IS THE NEW BUZZWORD IN D.C.'

Paul and Rosette both took issue with the USDA's assertion that programs benefiting tribes fall into the category of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI). It's well established in federal law that tribal citizenship is a political classification, not a racial one. In a May 2025 memorandum, Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins acknowledged the distinction, writing, "the Department's unique government-to-government relationship" with tribes and their members "are legally distinct from policy-based Diversity, Equity and

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Inclusion programs.”

“We are a sovereign nation,” Rosette said of the Chippewa Cree Tribe. “We have a political relationship with this government.”

Democratic state Sen. Jonathan Windy Boy, a citizen of the Chippewa Cree Tribe who is running for Congress in Montana’s eastern district, called the agriculture department’s DEI reasoning “ludicrous.”

“DEI is the new buzzword in D.C.” he said. “Why isn’t our delegation protecting the sovereign status of the tribes? The bottom line is we don’t have representation in D.C.”

Asked for comment on the grant terminations, a spokesperson for incumbent eastern district U.S. Congressman Troy Downing said his “office is aware of the rescinded grants and welcomes input from community members regarding their impact.” A spokesperson for Sen. Steve Daines said the senator “is looking into the grant cancellations and will always work to support Montana’s tribal communities.”

Sen. Tim Sheehy and Rep. Ryan Zinke did not respond to requests for comment.

Walter Schweitzer, president of the Montana Farmers Union, said that as land, livestock and equipment prices increase, and as more farms are purchased by corporate entities, it becomes increasingly hard for young people to enter the agriculture industry.

“The average age of a farmer or rancher is somewhere around 60,” he said. “We need to encourage and incentivize any way we can to get young people involved in agriculture. And having diversity in who gets into agriculture is a positive thing because they bring a diverse set of ideas.”

Micaela Young, of Piikani Lodge Health Institute, said ag producers living on tribal land additionally face unique challenges. A patchwork of historical and sometimes conflicting federal policies have congealed over the course of more than a century into an unwieldy system of property ownership on reservations. Banks have not learned to effectively navigate the legal, bureaucratic and financial peculiarities of that system, making it difficult for prospective producers to access the capital necessary to enter the agricultural industry. Tribes, Young said, are also often located far from markets where they could sell their products.

“These kinds of projects that bring capital into Native communities can really help revitalize their main streets, increase public safety, there’s the opioid crisis, the suicide crisis in tribal communities, and people are really looking for hope,” Young said. “People are looking for jobs. Families need that income. So this kind of work really does lift up our Native communities to strengthen the overall state.”

WHAT’S NEXT?

Piikani Lodge leaders said they plan to file an appeal through the National Appeals Division, which reports directly to the Secretary of Agriculture, before the 30-day deadline.

Andrew Berger, director of agriculture and climate adaptation at Piikani Lodge, said the organization is drafting a petition urging restoration of the funds.

“We’re still wrapping our heads around this,” he said. “(The grant) supported salaries and internships and all kinds of things. So we need to fill those gaps with other funding.”

Rosette isn’t sure whether the Chippewa Cree Tribe will file an appeal — an action he said requires time and resources. He said the tribe plans to ask the USDA to reconsider its decision.

“Whether they will listen?” he said. “Who knows.”

‘Wow!’ The eye surgery marathon that restored sight for some South Africans

By MICHELLE GUMEDE Associated Press

TSAKANE, South Africa (AP) — Gladys Khoza had missed being able to see her family. Not because they couldn’t visit, but because the 84-year-old had vision problems.

Now that has changed. Khoza is one of 133 people whose sight was restored during a “marathon” of free cataract surgeries conducted by doctors in South Africa at two hospitals over two weekends last month.

“Wow!” a delighted Khoza whispered as a nurse peeled back a bandage a day after her operation, and the world came back into view.

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"Can you see me?" the nurse asked. "Very well," Khoza replied, a big grin on her face.

Patients in South Africa's public health service can be on waiting lists for years for the simple 15-20-minute cataract operation. Officials said some of those who were selected from hospital waiting lists for the surgeries had been waiting since 2019 to see properly again.

Cataracts are a common, often age-related condition in which the eye's lens becomes clouded, and they are the leading cause of curable blindness. The surgeries insert a new artificial lens.

For Khoza, who said she couldn't see anything out of one eye because of a cataract and had long had issues with the other, the simple surgery equates to a major boost for her quality of life.

"I just wanted to be able to see," she said. Now, after nearly a year of waiting, some of her favorite things — seeing loved ones, reading her Bible and watching late-night soap operas — are all possible again.

Dr. Tebogo Fakude, one of the doctors who volunteered to perform the operations at two regional hospitals near Johannesburg, said his mother was blind and that having sight restored is "beautiful."

"It's beautiful because it alleviates depression," Fakude said adding that the sense of being a burden was also eased.

Globally, more than 2 billion people suffer from some kind of vision impairment, according to the World Health Organization. For half of them, the problem could have been prevented, or they are still waiting for treatment.

Nearly 100 million people are affected by cataracts, and half of them still need access to surgery, according to the WHO. In Africa, that figure rises to 75% of people without surgery, according to a study published in March by the Lancet medical journal.

Surgery backlogs are a significant problem in South Africa, where government-run hospitals serve more than three-quarters of the population of 62 million people. Limited resources mean emergency procedures and more serious operations are prioritized over elective surgery.

The Health Department-led surgical marathons were first staged on Mandela Day in 2023 to commemorate the legacy of the country's first Black president, Nelson Mandela. They have developed into a public-private partnership that takes place several times a year to increase access to care.

The ministry has vowed to use surgical marathons as a means of eliminating backlogs. Previous ones have addressed prostate, cleft palate and stomach issues.

Cataracts became the latest focus. Around 300,000 new cases are diagnosed every year in South Africa, Fakude said.

Health groups say South Africa faces a backlog of over 240,000 people waiting for cataract operations. Over 35,000 people in the most populous province of Gauteng — where the surgery marathon was performed — have cataract-related blindness.

WHO says eye cataract operations are "one of the most cost-effective medical procedures," and a powerful tool to restore someone's independence, dignity and opportunities.

During the three-day surgery marathon at Pholosong Regional Hospital, a new patient was brought into the operating theater about every 30 minutes. Soothing gospel music played on speakers to keep up doctors' morale.

Looking through a microscope, the eye specialists made tiny incisions for each operation, removed the cloudy lens and replaced it with an artificial one. At one point, two surgeons worked concurrently on separate patients to quicken the pace. They completed 60 surgeries on the last weekend of the marathon.

Molefe Mokoena, 72, said he was looking forward to regaining his independence after suffering from a cataract for four years.

"I want to see my great-grandchildren," he said. "I want to drive my car, and I'm happy about this."

Ye attempts a comeback with sold-out LA-area concert, support from Lauryn Hill

By RYAN PEARSON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The artist formerly and possibly again known as Kanye West reveled in support

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from one of his musical idols, Lauryn Hill, as he staged a sold-out Southern California concert meant to mark a comeback from years of controversy.

Eleven months after releasing a song titled "Heil Hitler" and just over two months after publishing an apology letter for his antisemitism, Ye let two decades of hits — and 70,000 screaming loyal fans — speak the loudest on Friday night at SoFi Stadium.

"I want to thank y'all for sticking by me all these years. Through the hard times, through the low times," he told the crowd. "I love you for that."

Hill joined Ye on a stage for the first time ever for an energetic rendition of his 2004 hit "All Falls Down," which originally sampled her voice. Ye left the stage as she performed "Lost Ones" and "Doo Wop (That Thing)" before rejoining for his 2021 "Doo Wop"-sampling song "Believe What I Say." They hugged as she exited.

Travis Scott, CeeLo Green and Ye's tween daughter North West also strapped on safety harnesses to join Ye high above the stadium floor atop a striking half-orb stage, which alternately depicted a moon, a rotating Earth and a smoking sphere throughout the two hours-plus livestreamed performance.

A loud singalong of "Heartless" midway through the more than 40-song Good Friday show seemed to boost Ye's spirits: "That's what 80,000 people sound like, ladies and gentlemen. ... They said I'd never be back in the States. Two sold-out concerts, baby!"

The first SoFi show Wednesday, his first major U.S. performance in nearly five years, turned out to be more of a warm-up as Ye was tentative in his rapping and drew attention to technical mishaps.

Fans at that show said they separated the 48-year-old performer's personal beliefs and public statements from his music — and were ready to forgive after his January apology letter.

"You gotta back your family no matter what," said Vince Da Prince, a rapper from Downey, Calif. "He's a part of our fam since we were little kids."

Added fan Yovani Contreras: "I don't really bring into politics or the way someone's personal opinion are. I'm into the music artistry ... Like, I just, to me, Ye is always gonna be Ye. Kanye is always gonna be Kanye."

Luis Velasquez said he'd been a longtime fan and had been put off by controversies in recent years, but felt the apology was sincere.

"Yeah he did apologize," he said. "He's taking the medication I think is what he mentioned. ... For me as a fan that's, like, respect, right? Like I think that's cool enough to bridge that gap."

Ye released his latest album, "Bully," under both the names Ye and Kanye West, at the end of March. He dominated hip-hop and pop charts in the 2000s and early 2010s, winning 24 Grammy Awards despite public outbursts and a polarizing personality. He lost nearly all his major business partnerships and many fans after a string of controversies in the last several years including antisemitic remarks and social media posts.

He closed Friday night's show with his "toast to the douchebags" hit "Runaway," and walked out of the stadium behind his wife Bianca Censori and two of his children.

As Trump orders UFO data released, a question hangs: If aliens exist, what would they think of us?

By COREY WILLIAMS Associated Press

For generations, human beings have wondered: What would alien life from another planet be like? But we rarely ask the opposite: What would they think of us?

It's a question that can produce some, well, uncomfortable answers if you happen to be an earthling.

"If I were looking at Earth from a distance, I would be pretty disappointed," theoretical physicist Avi Loeb says. "Most of our investing is dealing with conflicts to prevent other people from killing us or us killing others. Look at the Ukraine war over a little bit of territory. That is not a sign of intelligence."

The debate on whether little green men or UFOs are among us escalated in February when former President Barack Obama, responding to a podcaster's question, said aliens are "real," but he "hasn't seen them" and "they're not being kept at Area 51." President Donald Trump later announced on social media

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that he was directing release of government files because of "tremendous interest."

Stepped-up interest in UFOs also is swirling as the United States heads back toward the moon with Wednesday's launch of NASA's Artemis II mission. The four astronauts aboard will do a fly-around of the moon before returning to Earth.

In a world riven by war, civil unrest, climate change and divisiveness, it's easy to wonder what newcomers to Planet Earth might make of us and our struggles. Whatever the case, well over a majority of Americans echo the sentiment of the slogan from "The X-Files": "The truth is out there."

A 2021 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center showed about two-thirds of Americans said their best guess is that intelligent life exists on other planets. About half of U.S. adults said UFOs reported by people in the military are "definitely" or "probably" evidence of intelligent life outside Earth.

"We don't want to think this is the only place in this extraordinarily and incomprehensibly large universe where life and intelligence and even technology have emerged," says Bill Diamond, president and chief executive of the SETI Institute in Mountain View, California.

"It sort of says about humans, 'We don't want to be alone.'"

Something is up there. But what?

Americans have been fascinated by the thought of life outside this planet following the recovery of debris in 1947 near Roswell, New Mexico. The military initially said the material was from a flying disc, only to reverse course and tell the public it was from a weather balloon.

Hollywood ran with it. Flying saucers, little green men and eventually humanoid gray aliens became part of popular culture. April 5 even is celebrated annually throughout the iconic "Star Trek" franchise as "First Contact Day" to mark the date in 2063 when humankind, in "Trek" canon, first made contact with Vulcans.

Much in the popular culture suggests any aliens might be aggressive. Priscilla Wald, who teaches about science fiction at Duke University, has a theory as to why.

"It seems to me it's a reflection on who we are, that we're projecting onto aliens the way we treat each other," Wald says. "So the aliens are coming down, they want to conquer us, they're violent. Who does that sound like? It sounds like us."

In 2024, the Pentagon released hundreds of reports of unidentified and unexplained aerial phenomena. However, that review gave no indications that their origins were extraterrestrial.

On two separate occasions, Debbie Dmytro saw things in the sky over Michigan's southern Oakland County. The greenish object Dmytro says she saw March 1 in the sky over Royal Oak, Michigan, looked like neither plane nor helicopter. Dmytro, a 56-year-old medical professional, acknowledges that it could have been some type of commercial or delivery drone.

What she saw in 2023 in the same general area north of Detroit is not so easily explained.

"Four yellow lights, yellowish golden lights and they were all flying very, very low," Dmytro remembers. She says the lights were about 100 feet (30 meters) up at their nearest.

"I've never seen anything so low without any noise and flying in complete uniformity," she says. "Is it something man-made? Is it something that's not manmade? Who knows?"

Who knows indeed? UFOs, the term for unidentified flying objects, has in recent years given way to UAP — unidentified aerial phenomena or unidentified anomalous phenomena.

"Absolutely, there are such things" as UAPs and UFOs, says Diamond, whose SETI — Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence — seeks to explore, search and understand the nature of life and intelligence in the universe.

"People observe things in the sky that they can't immediately identify or recognize as either human engineering such as planes or drones or helicopters, or animals, such as birds, and therefore they don't know what they are," Diamond says.

Time for the truth

Like so many, Dmytro wants to know what the government knows. "I think there's more information out there. I'm open to learning more," she says. "I have an open mind. It's always about scientific proof."

Retired Rear Adm. Timothy Gallaudet says evidence clearly shows there are UAP zipping around the airspace and in the oceans.

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"The nonhuman intelligence that operates them or controls them are absolutely real," Gallaudet says. "We've recovered crashed craft. We don't know if they're extraterrestrial in origin."

Gallaudet worked as acting administrator for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. He participated in a 2024 congressional hearing on UAP disclosure and says the release of government files promised by Trump is something people find of interest. He just hopes the president follows through.

There are billions of galaxies in the universe and each has billions of stars, so the likelihood life developed elsewhere is fairly high, according to University of Michigan Astronomy Professor Edwin Bergin, who teaches about looking for life elsewhere. He believes that if intelligent beings navigated vast distances to reach Earth they would make themselves known — despite humanity's penchant for creating chaos.

"I would think that they would look at us like we were crazy ... but they would come out," he says. "I mean, why come here otherwise unless you're going to sit and observe."

Loeb, director of the Institute for Theory & Computation at Harvard and head of the university's Galileo Project for the Systematic Scientific Search for Evidence of Extraterrestrial Technological Artifacts, believes in the likely existence of extraterrestrials.

"They might be laughing at us," he says. "They might be watching us ... to make sure we will not become predators, that we will not become dangerous to them."

In the interest of national security

Much of the government's secrecy around UFOs and UAP is tied to national security concerns, according to Diamond.

"We have pretty advanced technologies, satellite, ground-based that are for various purposes mostly national security and defense that are pointing at the sky or things on board aircraft," Diamond says. "Sometimes these pick up objects. The technology behind it is sensitive and protected."

Government data, including a "trove" of UAP video the Navy is sitting on, should be shared with scientists for research and a better understanding of the characteristics of the objects, says Gallaudet, who spent 32 years in the Navy and viewed classified UAP video.

"When you look at these things in our airspace having near collisions with our aircraft, that's a real valid concern," he says. "We are just not sure of what they are and what they intend to do with their interaction with humanity. That could be a national security threat, or not."

"When has ignorance ever been a good national strategy?" Gallaudet asks. "Whether it be scary, harmful or not, or a mix, I think seeking the truth is in our best interest."

Meanwhile, Diamond doesn't think any "true alien encounter could be kept secret."

"If any civilization has mastered interstellar travel, they have technology and capabilities beyond our wildest comprehension," he says. "If they want to interact, they will; if they don't, they won't. If they want to be seen, they will be, and if not, they won't be!"

Moms for Liberty wanted a seat on the school board. Trump gave them a voice in the White House

By COLLIN BINKLEY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When President Donald Trump signed an executive order against transgender athletes last year, he took a moment to thank Tina Descovich, co-founder and CEO of Moms for Liberty.

Descovich was back at the White House a few months later, seated alongside CEOs of Google and IBM to weigh in on artificial intelligence and education policy.

Last month, when first lady Melania Trump hosted a global technology summit in Washington, Descovich was there, too.

Her presence at the White House underscores the meteoric rise of a group that made its name in local politics, fighting to win school board seats and end "wokeness" in U.S. schools. What started as a fringe of far-right mothers has seen its interests collide with a presidential administration that embraces and amplifies their message, launching the group into a new level of influence in public policy.

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In an interview with The Associated Press, Descovich said she has a voice in discussions around transgender sports bans, AI in education, the dismantling of the Education Department and a campaign to end diversity, equity and inclusion.

"We have a seat at the table in so many policy discussions throughout the administration," Descovich, who lives in Florida, said during a recent visit to Washington. "We're invited to participate in discussions and meetings where some of these things are hashed out."

Supporters say the group's trajectory speaks to the power of its "parental rights" agenda, which has become a plank of conservative politics. Critics are alarmed by its presence at the White House, saying the group promotes extreme views and undermines public schools.

Alliance with Trump offers a new lifeline after ups and downs

Founded five years ago in Florida, the organization became known for challenging classroom instruction it deemed inappropriate for children, often involving sex, race or LGBTQ+ themes. It later turned to state capitols, securing legislation like Florida's "Don't Say Gay" law.

It claims more than 300 chapters, with sharply growing revenue flowing in from groups like the Heritage Foundation and conservative megadonors, including Richard Uihlein.

By some measures, however, its influence had appeared to be waning. School board candidates endorsed by the group struggled in elections, and rival liberal groups rose up to compete for power in America's suburbs.

A series of missteps fueled ridicule among opponents, including an incident in which an Indiana chapter quoted Adolf Hitler in a parent newsletter in 2023.

Yet when Trump returned to office, the group's political fortunes swung upward. His administration charges into the same cultural battles Moms for Liberty staked its name on, including a push to keep transgender athletes out of girls' sports.

By her count, Descovich has been to the White House about a dozen times this administration.

Descovich was in attendance when Trump signed an order to overhaul the foster care system. She brought more than a dozen members to an event honoring Women's History Month in March. Co-founder Tiffany Justice was there when Trump signed an order to dismantle the Education Department.

For the Trump administration, Moms for Liberty appears to be playing a role that's often filled by groups like the National PTA, said Rick Hess, director of education policy at the conservative American Enterprise Institute think tank. As those establishment groups shy away from Trump, he said, Moms for Liberty has stepped up.

"Moms for Liberty speaks to a very active part of the MAGA community, and education has been a big part of what the administration has been focused on for the last 15 months," he said.

Behind the scenes, Descovich has been a tipster for agencies that investigate schools over transgender sports and bathroom policies. After meeting with Justice Department officials, she delivered more than 250 complaints, she said.

"We really are this grassroots team that's working hand-in-hand with helping move forward President Trump's agenda," she said.

The group is carrying the momentum to Capitol Hill

Asked about its relationship with Moms for Liberty, the White House declined to offer specifics but said Trump is "the most pro-family President in history," citing his child tax credit among other initiatives.

The White House "is proud to tout these great accomplishments for American families alongside many leaders," spokesperson Olivia Wales said in a statement.

Moms for Liberty hopes to carry its momentum to Congress, too.

On a recent March morning, more than 100 members fanned out across Capitol Hill, delivering home-made cookies to lawmakers and their offices. Some brought their children, including a boy sporting a suit and red tie like Trump's.

House Speaker Mike Johnson stopped for a photo with a few parents, and Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., posted a photo to social media of himself giving a thumbs-up alongside a Moms for Liberty member.

Members of the group call themselves "joyful warriors," a moniker that critics say disguises their anti-

LGBTQ rhetoric and aggressive tactics. The group has been accused of harassing teachers and school board leaders, calling its opponents "groomers" and "predators."

Descovich dismisses the criticism. "Our motto has been, from Day One, we're joyful warriors, because we knew we needed to advocate in a way that was OK for our children to watch," she said.

Yet she doesn't shy away from a fight. The group has a deep feud with the Southern Poverty Law Center, which in 2023 labeled the parent group as "extremist."

Late last year, Descovich led a letter urging the federal government to cut ties with the SPLC. The FBI agreed to do so soon after, echoing language from her letter.

Critics say an extreme voice is getting a platform

The presence of Moms for Liberty has gained at the White House is both unsettling and unsurprising, said Seth Levi, chief program strategy officer for the SPLC.

It's "further evidence that they are more interested in platforming extremist voices and policies rather than listening to the American people, who are demanding solutions to make their lives easier and more affordable," Levi said.

The leap up to federal policy marks a new chapter in the group's evolution, said Maurice Cunningham, a former political science professor at the University of Massachusetts-Boston who tracks the organization and its relationships.

Yet he sees the group's influence as political advocacy rather than parental input. He identifies the group as a close cousin to groups like the Heritage Foundation, which has been influential in Trump's second term.

"They're in the White House, there's no question," he said. "But they are there as a voice of the organized institutional right wing."

Descovich said the relationship with Trump took root at a 2023 convention where Republican presidential candidates jostled for the group's endorsement. When Trump took the stage, he called Moms for Liberty "the best thing that's ever happened to America."

Moms for Liberty threw its weight behind Trump, and Descovich said she stayed close with his team.

The organization's latest concern is AI in the classroom, which Moms for Liberty sees as a threat to parental control over education. At a White House meeting, Descovich pushed for guardrails to ensure humans guide instruction, not algorithms.

It's also expanding its national presence with a new online training program called M4L Academy, featuring videos on "critical race theory" and other topics the group sees as taboo. And while its first trip to Congress was mostly seen as an introduction, it's gearing up for more.

"We're not really doing any lobbying for any specific bills at the federal level yet," Descovich said. "That will come next year."

US military aircraft hit in Iran war are first shot down by enemy fire in over 20 years

By BEN FINLEY and JESSE BEDAYN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Iran shooting down two American military aircraft marks an exceedingly rare assault for the U.S. that has not happened in more than 20 years and shows the Islamic Republic's continued ability to hit back despite President Donald Trump asserting it has been "completely decimated."

The attacks came five weeks after U.S. and Israeli strikes first pounded Iran, with Trump saying earlier this week that Tehran's "ability to launch missiles and drones is dramatically curtailed."

Iran shot down a U.S. F15-E Strike Eagle fighter jet Friday, with one service member getting rescued and the search still underway for a second, U.S. officials say. Iranian state media also said a U.S. A-10 attack aircraft crashed after being hit by Iranian defense forces.

The last time a U.S. fighter jet was shot down in combat was an A-10 Thunderbolt II during the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, said retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Houston Cantwell, a former F-16 fighter pilot.

But, he said, that's because the U.S. had largely been fighting insurgents who didn't have the same

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anti-aircraft capabilities. The fact that there have not been more fighter jets lost in Iran, Cantwell said, is a testament to the capabilities of U.S. forces.

"The fact that this hasn't happened until now is an absolute miracle," said Cantwell, who served four combat tours and is now a senior resident fellow at the Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies. "We're flying combat missions here, they are being shot at every day."

Shoulder-fired missile likely used, experts say

U.S. Central Command said in a statement Wednesday that American forces have flown more than 13,000 missions in the Iran war while striking more than 12,300 targets.

After more than a month of punishing U.S.-Israeli airstrikes, a degraded Iranian military nonetheless remains a stubborn foe. Its steady stream of strikes against Israel and Gulf Arab neighbors have been causing regional upheaval and global economic shock.

When it comes to American dominance over Iran's airspace, there's still a distinction between air superiority and air supremacy, said Behnam Ben Taleblu, Iran program senior director at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a hawkish Washington think tank.

"A disabled air defense system is not a destroyed air defense system," he said. "We shouldn't be shocked that they're still fighting."

American planes have been flying missions at lower altitudes, which makes them more vulnerable to Iran's missiles, Taleblu said. It's possible that Iran fired at the F-15 with a surface-to-air missile, but it's more likely that a portable, shoulder-fired missile was used, he said. Those are much harder to detect and reflect how Iran is "weak but still lethal."

"This is a regime that is fighting for its life," he said.

Mark Cancian, a retired Marine colonel and a senior defense adviser with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, agreed that a shoulder-fired missile was likely used against the fighter jet.

Nonetheless, the American air war against Iran has been a "tremendous success" so far, he said.

To put things in perspective, he said the loss rate for American warplanes flying over Germany during World War II was 3% at one point, which would equal about 350 warplanes in the U.S. war against Iran.

"But then there's the political side — you have a American public that is accustomed to fighting bloodless wars," Cancian said. "Then a large part of the country doesn't support the war. So to them, any loss is unacceptable."

Pilots are trained on what to do if their plane is hit

The last U.S. jet shot down in combat was struck by an Iraqi surface-to-air missile over Baghdad on April 8, 2003. The pilot safely ejected and was rescued, according to the Air Force.

In high-threat environments like missions over Iran, Cantwell, the retired general, said an aviator's blood pressure goes up and they become highly alert to incoming missiles. Those are typically either infrared- or radar-guided missiles, he said, requiring different evasive tactics.

If they are hit and need to eject from their aircraft, they are trained on what to do next, he said.

Pilots learn to check for wounds after a violent ejection and the shock of a missile explosion and, most crucially, how they are going to communicate their location so rescuers can find them.

At the same time, he said, the enemy is likely working to intercept the communications or even spoof the location.

Helicopters are more at risk than other aircraft

The planes that went down Friday were not the first crewed American aircraft to be lost overall in Iran. A military helicopter and airplane exploded in 1980 during an aborted mission to rescue several dozen American hostages at the U.S. embassy in Tehran, according to the Air Force Historical Support Division.

After a series of setbacks, including severe dust storms and mechanical failures, the mission was called off. As the aircraft took off, the rotor blades of one of the RH-53 helicopters collided with an EC-130 aircraft full of fuel and both exploded, killing eight.

More U.S. helicopters have been shot down in recent decades, including a MH-47 Army Chinook helicopter that was struck by a rocket-propelled grenade in Afghanistan in 2005, killing 16. Helicopters are more dangerous because "the lower and the slower, the more susceptible you are," Cantwell said.

That's why those who went out on this week's rescue missions, likely in helicopters, he said, did "such a brave and honorable act."

Crews battle fast-growing wildfire in windy Southern California that's forced some to evacuate

RIVERSIDE, Calif. (AP) — Crews battled a smoky and fast-growing wildfire Friday in windy Southern California that forced some residents to evacuate and a community college to temporarily close its doors.

The Springs Fire broke out around 11 a.m. Friday and by the evening had grown to about 6.5 square miles (16.8 square kilometers). The cause of the fire east of Moreno Valley in Riverside County is under investigation. It was not immediately known how many households were under evacuation warnings or orders.

With hundreds of people battling the blaze — using helicopters, engines and water tenders — crews started to contain the blaze by Friday night.

The fire was burning in a populated — but not densely so — unincorporated part of Riverside County in a recreational area near the city of Moreno Valley, which has a population of roughly 200,000. The city is 10 miles (16 kilometers) southeast of Riverside and 64 miles (103 kilometers) east of Los Angeles.

"It's windy out there," said Maggie Cline De La Rosa, a public information officer for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection in Riverside County.

Alex Izaguirre, a spokesperson for the Cal Fire Riverside County, said the wind is "spreading the smoke," prompting concerned calls from residents in neighboring cities who can see and smell it.

Moreno Valley College's main campus was shuttered Friday and Saturday due to the fire impacting the air quality.

"All students, faculty, and staff are being directed to leave campus immediately," the school said in a post on Instagram.

California U.S. Rep. Raul Ruiz said in a social media post that he was closely monitoring the blaze.

"If you are under an evacuation order, please leave immediately," he said.

The National Weather Service issued a wind advisory for San Bernardino and Riverside County valleys through Saturday afternoon, with gusts of up to 50 mph (80 kph) expected.

"Tree limbs could be blown down and a few power outages may result," the advisory read.

As freed prisoners celebrate in Cuba, human rights groups demand clarity and release of protesters

By MILEXSY DURÁN and ANDREA RODRÍGUEZ Associated Press

HAVANA (AP) — Katia Arias buzzed with hope on Friday morning as she gathered at the gates of a prison on the outskirts of Havana, waiting with other families for their loved ones to be freed in one of the biggest prison releases by the Cuban government in years.

When her 20-year-old son Emilio Alejandro Leyva walked out of the doors of the detention facility with dozens of other prisoners, bags and a small release document in hand, she wrapped her arms around her son, who was detained for a robbery, for the first time in years.

"It has been so difficult, but today God has given me so much joy," said Arias, 43, breaking down in tears. "Today, I feel so happy. This is how all mothers who will have their children released today should feel."

The outpouring of joy from families comes the day after Cuba's government said it was going to release 2,010 prisoners in what it said was "humanitarian gestures" ahead of Holy Week. But the releases were quickly met with criticisms by human rights groups who said they hadn't seen evidence that those who were released included any of the 1,214 people they have registered as being imprisoned for political reasons.

The government denies holding political prisoners. With very little information provided by the government, it wasn't immediately clear how many people were released on Friday.

The release comes as the Cuban government navigates extreme pressure and a crippling oil blockade

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by the Trump administration, which has openly expressed its desire for regime change and the release of those arrested for protesting.

Uncertainty over released prisoners

On Friday, detainees in the La Lima prison on the rural outskirts of Havana said they were woken up at 6 a.m. and heard their names called out. Hours later they were walking into the arms of loved ones awaiting them in front of blue prison gates.

The prisoners interviewed Friday by The Associated Press were not serving time for political charges. It's uncertain how many of those released were protesters — often charged with public disorder, contempt or terrorism. Many of the more than one thousand people the activist organization Prisoners Defended has registered as detained for political reasons were protesters from the 2021 mass demonstrations on the island, which were met with widespread arrests by the government.

Sporadic protests have broken out in recent months as the island sinks into a deeper crisis. In one March incident, protesters burned the headquarters of the communist party in central Cuba, leading to five arrests.

The lack of information over releases on Friday fueled frustration among human rights and opposition groups, who said the releases were a good sign, but fell short of real change.

"The government presents it as a humanitarian gesture toward prisoners, not as the release of political prisoners," said Manuel Cuesta Morúa, leader of the Council for Democratic Transition in Cuba, the island's main opposition platform. "By doing so, it mixes things up to avoid giving the impression that it recognizes political imprisonment in Cuba."

The group has demanded a government amnesty law and says that people who were previously freed are often placed under house arrest or live under conditions where they can't speak freely.

During a previous release of 51 people in March, organizations monitoring prisons in Cuba noted that 22 had political motives in their cases.

The nongovernmental organization Justicia 11J wrote in a statement Friday that no partial release can be considered progress "as long as the criminalization of the exercise of fundamental rights persists."

"Although every release represents immediate relief, especially for families, in a context marked by the severity of conditions in the country's prisons ... we warn that this gesture does not constitute a change in the repressive policy of the Cuban state," the organization said.

US pressure on Cuba

The releases come as U.S.-Cuban tensions are running high. The Trump administration has suffocated the island by imposing an oil blockade, pushing the already stricken island to the brink, crippling hospitals and increasing the number of islandwide blackouts.

Cubans were offered a brief moment of relief this week when U.S. President Donald Trump said the government allowed a Russian ship carrying a nine to 10 day supply of fuel to the island. It wasn't clear if the Cuban or Russian governments made any concessions to allow the shipment to go through. A second Russian tanker is on the way.

Cuba periodically frees prisoners at key moments.

In January 2025, Cuba's government released 553 prisoners as part of talks with the Vatican, a day after the Biden administration announced its intent to lift the U.S. designation of the island nation as a state sponsor of terrorism.

Cuba's government said Friday's release marked the fifth since 2011, and that it has freed more than 11,000 people.

Despite ongoing uncertainty, scenes of hope emerged outside the La Lima prison on Friday as families wrapped their arms around each other and a father planted a kiss on the head of his child swaddled in pink.

Damián Fariñas, 20, who has served the majority of his 2-year prison sentence for a robbery, was greeted by three beaming friends waiting for him on the street.

"This is freedom, a pardon, owing nothing to anyone. I'm heading out into the world," he said.

Bondi struggled to prosecute Trump foes. But will a new attorney general make a difference?

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pam Bondi is out of her job after failing to deliver criminal cases against President Donald Trump's political enemies.

But there's no guarantee her successor will have any better success at placating the president.

Over the last year, Bondi's Justice Department has encountered resistance from judges, grand jurors and its own workforce in trying to establish criminal conduct by one Trump foe after another. A new attorney general will confront not only Trump's demand for political prosecutions — a constant dating back to his first term in the White House — but also the same skeptical court system, and factual and legal hurdles, that have impeded efforts to deliver the sought-after results.

"At the end of the day, it's not like there were some magic steps that Pam Bondi could have taken to make bad cases look good to grand juries or judges," Peter Keisler, a former acting attorney general in President George W. Bush's administration, said in an email. "The problem is that the president is demanding that prosecutions be brought when there's no evidence and no valid legal theory. A new Attorney General won't change that."

Bondi was just the latest Trump attorney general pressed to meet the president's demands of loyalty and desire for retribution. Trump in his first term called for Jeff Sessions to investigate Democrat Hillary Clinton and ultimately pushed him out over his recusal from the Russia election interference investigation. He berated another attorney general, William Barr, over Barr's refusal to back his false claims of election fraud in the 2020 contest. Barr resigned soon after.

Bondi arrived at the Justice Department 14 months ago seemingly determined to remain in Trump's good graces unlike her predecessors, heaping praise on him, offering unflinching support and embarking on investigations into Democrats and the president's adversaries — even amid concerns from career prosecutors about the sufficiency of evidence.

Days after Trump implored Bondi via social media last September to prosecute former FBI Director James Comey and New York Attorney General Letitia James, the Justice Department did just that, securing indictments in Virginia.

But the win was short-lived: A judge weeks later dismissed the cases after finding that the prosecutor who filed them, Lindsey Halligan, was illegally appointed. Grand juries have since refused to bring new mortgage fraud charges against James and the Comey case is mired in a thorny evidentiary dispute and statute of limitations concerns. Both Comey and James have vigorously denied any wrongdoing and called the cases against them politically motivated.

Since then, a federal grand jury in Washington refused to return an indictment against Democratic lawmakers in connection with a video in which they urged U.S. military members to resist "illegal orders." And a federal judge has quashed Justice Department subpoenas issued to the Federal Reserve as part of an investigation into testimony last June by Chair Jerome Powell about a \$2.5 billion building renovation.

The judge, James Boasberg, said that the government has "produced essentially zero evidence to suspect Chair Powell of a crime" and called its justifications for the subpoenas a "thin and unsubstantiated" pretext to force Powell to cut interest rates. A prosecutor on the case subsequently conceded in court that the investigation had not found evidence of a crime.

An additional investigation into a Trump enemy remains underway with prosecutors in Florida scrutinizing former CIA Director John Brennan over testimony to Congress related to Russian interference in the 2016 election. That investigation has been open for months, but has not produced charges and it's not clear that it will. Brennan's lawyers have similarly called the investigation baseless.

One high-profile Trump critic who could face trial in the years ahead is his former national security adviser, John Bolton, though the investigation that produced that indictment and examined Bolton's handling of classified documents began before Trump took office.

For now, the Justice Department will be led by Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche, who has a

longstanding relationship with Trump after having served as one of his personal lawyers. Several people familiar with the matter told The Associated Press on Thursday that Lee Zeldin, a Trump loyalist and head of the Environmental Protection Agency, has been privately mentioned by Trump as a possible pick.

Whoever holds the job in the long term will almost certainly be expected to carry out Trump's retribution campaign with more success, said Jimmy Gurulé, a former Justice Department official and law professor at Notre Dame. Blanche appeared to acknowledge as much in a Thursday evening interview with Fox News, saying, "I think the president is frustrated, everybody is frustrated" and "what we saw happen for the past four years is unforgivable and can never happen again."

"If she was fired because Trump did not think that she was moving quickly enough in bringing criminal cases against his political enemies, then you would expect that the person that would replace her would probably agree to escalate those efforts," Gurulé said.

China aims to show global leadership with Iran war diplomacy. US appears uninterested

By DIDI TANG, FARNOUSH AMIRI and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — China is stepping up its diplomacy on the Iran war, putting forward a five-point proposal with Pakistan, rallying support from Gulf countries and opposing a United Nations proposal to use any force necessary to open the Strait of Hormuz.

It is China's latest push for a more prominent role in global affairs, though it may prove to be more rhetorical than substantive, with the U.S. appearing uninterested in Beijing's efforts.

"The war with Iran is the priority of all countries in and outside the region," said Sun Yun, director of the China program at the Stimson Center, a Washington-based think tank. "It is an opportunity China will not miss to demonstrate its leadership and diplomatic initiative."

Danny Russel, a former senior U.S. diplomat, described China's diplomacy as "performative" and compared the five-point proposal for ending the Iran war with its 12-point plan for Ukraine in 2023, which was "filled with platitudes but never acted on."

"Its narrative is that while Washington is reckless, aggressive and heedless of the cost to others, China is a principled and responsible champion of peace," said Russel, a distinguished fellow at the Asia Society Policy Institute. "What we are seeing from China is messaging, not mediation."

China has been working "tirelessly for peace" since the outbreak of the war, said Liu Pengyu, spokesperson for the Chinese Embassy in Washington.

How the US views China's diplomacy

The Trump administration appears to have little enthusiasm for the prospect of China's mediation, according to U.S. officials.

The U.S. has soured on third-party mediation efforts, and it has little interest in boosting China's international stature or giving it an opening to claim success in the Middle East, said three U.S. officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly discuss potential diplomatic options.

One of the officials described the administration's position on the Chinese-Pakistani effort as "agnostic," neither endorsement nor rejection, but all three stressed that could change if President Donald Trump weighs in before his planned summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

For Beijing, there could be an incentive to see the war subside before Trump travels to China in mid-May. Citing demands of the war, Trump postponed the trip initially set for the end of March.

"There is no guarantee that Trump may not delay the trip to China again if the war rages on," Sun said.

The war saw a major escalation Friday when Iran shot down two U.S. military aircraft, a first since the war began five weeks ago. Trump told NBC News that it would not impact negotiations with Iran, just days after declaring in a national address that the U.S. has "beaten and completely decimated Iran."

Beijing is calculating the pain from the closure of the Strait of Hormuz

For now, China is more insulated from the disruption in the Strait of Hormuz than other countries after

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diversifying its energy sources and reducing dependence on fossil fuels.

China relies on Iran for only about 13% of its oil imports, and Beijing is working with Tehran to allow the passage of Chinese-flagged vessels through the critical waterway, where Iran's stranglehold has sent energy prices soaring. China also maintains a large strategic petroleum reserve.

While China has positioned itself to cushion short-term shocks, analysts say Beijing is worried about a protracted war and has an interest in trying to bring it to an end.

"An escalation of the conflict will start to harm Chinese interests," Russel said. "Because China's growth model is so export-heavy, prolonged energy shocks and shipping disruption will mean costlier inputs and weaker global demand that damage its vulnerable economy."

Besides not wanting to see a long war, China "welcomes the opportunity to suggest that it is helping mitigate a crisis of America's making, especially as the Trump administration's lack of a considered strategy for containing the fallout becomes more apparent," said Ali Wyne, a senior research and advocacy adviser on U.S.-China relations at the International Crisis Group.

China has undertaken a flurry of diplomacy

After the war began, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi spoke with counterparts from Russia, Oman, Iran, France, Israel, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. He told Iran that China cherished its friendship, urged Israel to cease military actions and expressed that China would be willing to play a role in seeking peace.

This past week, Wang hosted his Pakistani counterpart in Beijing to hash out their five-point proposal, calling for an end to hostilities and the reopening of the strait.

He has held more than 20 phone calls with regional foreign ministers, and a special envoy has visited several countries in the region, aiming to promote peace and deescalate tensions, Liu said.

Wang sought support for China's plan from the European Union's foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas, telling her it represented "broad, international consensus," the Chinese foreign ministry said. Wang told Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan that halting the fighting was the most urgent matter.

Wang also spoke this week with Bahrain's foreign minister, Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani, to explain why China opposed Bahrain's U.N. proposal to allow military force to open the Strait of Hormuz. Wang said actions by the U.N. Security Council should help ease tensions "rather than endorse illegal acts of war, still less add fuel to the fire."

China and Russia argued that the U.S. or other countries could exploit a U.N.-backed mechanism to escalate the deadly war, according to a U.N. diplomat, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss diplomatic conversations.

Both countries appear to have less immediate need to see the strait fully open. While China has been able to pay to get some of its ships through, Russia is benefiting from the high price of oil, its main export.

Hoping to avoid a veto, Bahrain significantly watered down its proposal to authorize defensive — but not offensive — action to ensure vessels can safely transit the strait. A vote was pushed back until next week.

To solve the problem of the strait, China says a ceasefire is needed. But its plan with Pakistan has been met with mostly silence from the U.S.

One of the U.S. officials said the plan is difficult to assess because it is less of a roadmap to peace than a vague appeal for respect for international law and the importance of diplomacy and the U.N.'s role.

Trump budget seeks \$1.5T in defense spending alongside cuts in domestic programs

By LISA MASCARO and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump has proposed boosting defense spending to \$1.5 trillion in his 2027 budget released Friday, the largest such request in decades, reflecting his emphasis on U.S. military investments over domestic programs.

The sizable increase for the Pentagon, some 44%, had been telegraphed by the Republican president even before the U.S.-led war against Iran. The president's plan would also reduce spending on non-defense

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programs by 10%.

"President Trump promised to reinvest in America's national security infrastructure, to make sure our nation is safe in a dangerous world," wrote Budget Director Russell Vought.

The president's annual budget is considered a reflection of the administration's values and does not carry the force of law. The massive document typically highlights an administration's priorities, but Congress, which handles federal spending issues, is free to reject it and often does.

This year's White House document is intended to provide a road map from the president to Congress as lawmakers build their own budgets and annual appropriations bills to keep the government funded. Vought spoke to House GOP lawmakers on a private call Thursday.

Trump, speaking ahead of an address to the nation this week about the Iran war, signaled the military is his priority, setting up a clash ahead in Congress.

"We're fighting wars. We can't take care of day care," Trump said at a private White House event Wednesday.

"It's not possible for us to take care of day care, Medicaid, Medicare — all these individual things," he said. "They can do it on a state basis. You can't do it on a federal."

Money for immigration enforcement, air traffic controllers and national parks

Among the priorities the White House called for:

—Supporting the Trump administration's immigration enforcement and deportation operations by eliminating aspects of a refugee resettlement aid program, maintaining Immigration and Customs Enforcement funds at current year levels and drawing on last's year's increases for the Department of Homeland Security funds to continue opening detention facilities, including 100,000 beds for adults and 30,000 for families.

-- A 13% increase in funding for the Department of Justice to focus on violent criminals and the president's promise to stop what the White House calls migrant crime.

-- A \$10 billion fund within the National Park Service for "construction and beautification" projects in Washington, D.C.

-- A \$481 million increase in funding to enhance aviation safety and support an air traffic controller hiring surge.

Cuts to green energy, housing and health programs

— Cancels more than \$15 billion from the Biden-era bipartisan infrastructure law, including funds for renewable energy projects and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, or NOAA, grants.

— A 19% cut in the Department of Agriculture, ending certain university grants, a 13% cut for the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and about a 12% decrease to the Health and Human Services department, including cuts to a low-income heating assistance program.

The White House is touting cuts of what it calls "woke programs" that often direct federal investments toward low-income communities. The budget used the word "woke" 34 times

For example, the administration is looking to cut Community Services Block Grants, which funds activities such as financial and job counseling and helping people obtain adequate housing. The administration says its cuts would target grants "hijacked by radicals" to promote equity-building and green energy initiatives.

The president also seeks to cut \$106 million in funding from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, which it says has "pushed radical gender ideology onto children."

Supporters and detractors

The Republican chairmen of the House and Senate Armed Services committees applauded Trump's request for defense spending, saying the money would ensure the country's military remains the most advanced in the world while confronting growing threats from China, Russia, Iran and others.

"America is facing the most dangerous global environment since World War II," said Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., and Rep. Mike Rogers, R-Ala.

The top Democrat on House Budget Committee, Rep. Brendan Boyle of Pennsylvania, said the president was demanding a massive increase in defense while cutting billions from health care, housing and more.

"This budget represents 'America Last,'" Boyle said.

Debt, deficits and tough choices ahead

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With the nation running nearly \$2 trillion annual deficits and the debt swelling past \$39 trillion, the federal balance sheets have long been operating in the red.

About two-thirds of the nation's estimated \$7 trillion in annual spending covers the Medicare and Medicaid health care programs, as well as Social Security income, which are essentially growing — along with an aging population — on autopilot.

It's the rest of the annual budget where much of the debate in Congress takes place, as Democrats over the years have insisted that changes in the level of spending for defense and non-defense need to be equitable.

The GOP's big tax breaks bill that Trump signed into law last year boosted his priorities beyond the budget process — with at least \$150 billion for the Pentagon over the next several years, and \$170 billion for Trump's immigration and deportation operations at the Department of Homeland Security.

The administration is counting on its allies in the Republican-led Congress to push part of president's beefed up defense spending through its own budget process, as it was able to do last year.

It suggests \$1.1 trillion for defense would come through the regular appropriations process, which typically requires support from both parties for approval, while \$350 billion would go in the budget reconciliation process that Republicans can accomplish on their own, through party-line majority votes.

Congress still fighting over 2026 spending

The president's budget arrives as the House and Senate remain tangled over current-year spending and stalemated over DHS funding, with Democrats demanding changes to Trump's immigration enforcement regime that Republicans are unwilling to accept.

Trump announced Thursday he would sign an executive order to pay all DHS workers who have gone without paychecks during the record-long partial government shutdown that has reached 49 days.

Last year, in the president's first budget since returning to the White House, Trump sought to fulfill his promise to vastly reduce the size and scope of the federal government, reflecting the efforts of billionaire Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency.

However, while Trump had sought a roughly one-fifth decrease in non-defense spending, Congress kept such spending relatively flat.

Sen. Patty Murray, the top Democrat on the Senate Appropriations Committee, called Trump's new budget "morally bankrupt."

"Trump wants to build a ballroom," Murray said, referring to the White House renovation. "I want to build more affordable housing, and only one of us sits on the Appropriations Committee."

Artemis II's moonbound astronauts capture Earth's brilliant blue beauty as they leave it behind

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — The Artemis II astronauts have captured our blue planet's brilliant beauty as they zoom ever closer to the moon.

NASA released the crew's first downlinked images Friday, 1 1/2 days into the first astronaut moonshot in more than half a century.

The first photo taken by commander Reid Wiseman shows a curved slice of Earth in one of the capsule's windows. The second shows the entire globe with the oceans topped by swirling white tendrils of clouds. A green aurora even glows, according to NASA.

"It's great to think that with the exception of our four friends, all of us are represented in this image," said NASA's Lakiesha Hawkins, an exploration systems leader. She added the mission was going well.

As of late Friday afternoon, Wiseman and his crew were more than 110,000 miles (180,000 kilometers) from Earth and were quickly gaining on the moon with another 150,000 miles (240,000 kilometers) to go. They should reach their destination on Monday.

The three Americans and one Canadian will swing around the moon in their Orion capsule, hang a U-turn and then head straight back home without stopping. They fired Orion's main engine Thursday night

that set them on their course.

After Mission Control shifted the position of their capsule, the entire Earth complete with northern lights filled their windows.

"It was the most spectacular moment, and it paused all four of us in our tracks," Wiseman said in a TV interview.

They're the first lunar travelers since Apollo 17 in 1972.

2 US aircraft shot down as war in Iran escalates. At least 1 crew member is missing

By SAM MEDNICK, KONSTANTIN TOROPIN and SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Iran shot down two U.S. military planes in separate attacks Friday, with one service member rescued and at least one missing, in a dramatic escalation since the war began nearly five weeks ago.

It was the first time U.S. aircraft have been downed in the conflict and came just two days after President Donald Trump said in a national address that the U.S. has "beaten and completely decimated Iran" and was "going to finish the job, and we're going to finish it very fast."

One fighter jet was shot down in Iran, officials said. A U.S. crew member from that plane was rescued, but a second was missing, and a U.S. military search-and-rescue operation was underway.

Neither the White House nor Pentagon released public information about the downed planes. In a brief telephone interview with NBC News, Trump declined to discuss the search-and-rescue efforts but said what happened would not affect negotiations with Iran.

"No, not at all. No, it's war," he said.

Separately, Iranian state media said a U.S. A-10 attack aircraft crashed in the Persian Gulf after being struck by Iranian defense forces.

A U.S. official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss a sensitive military situation said earlier that it was not clear if the aircraft crashed or was shot down or whether Iran was involved. Neither the status of the crew nor exactly where it went down was immediately known.

Those incidents came as Iran fired on targets across the Middle East on Friday, keeping the pressure on Israel and its Gulf Arab neighbors despite U.S. and Israeli insistence that Iran's military capabilities have been all but destroyed.

Second service member's status unknown

Neither the White House nor the Pentagon released public information about the downed planes. But the Pentagon notified the House Armed Services Committee that the status of a second service member from the fighter jet was not known.

In an email from the Pentagon that obtained by The Associated Press, meanwhile, the military said it received notification of "an aircraft being shot down" in the Middle East, without providing more details.

Iran's attacks on Gulf energy infrastructure and its tight grip on the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's oil and natural gas transits in peacetime, have roiled stock markets, sent oil prices skyrocketing, and threatened to raise the cost of many basic goods, including food.

Downed jet could mark a new level of pressure on the US

Prior to word of the rescue, social media footage showed American drones, aircraft and helicopters flying over the mountainous region where a TV channel affiliated with Iranian state television said earlier that at least one pilot bailed out of the fighter jet.

An anchor urged residents to hand over any "enemy pilot" to police and promised a reward.

It was the first time the U.S. has lost aircraft in Iranian territory during the conflict and could mark a new level of pressure on the U.S. military.

Throughout the war, Iran has made a series of claims about shooting down piloted enemy aircraft that turned out not to be true. Friday was the first time that Iran went on television urging the public to look

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for a downed pilot.

Iranian state media said in a post on the social platform X that the military shot down a U.S. F-15E Strike Eagle. The aircraft is a variation of the Air Force fighter jet that carries a pilot and weapons system officer.

Alan Diehl, a former investigator for the Air Force Safety Center, said the Strike Eagle has an emergency locator beacon in a survival kit that can be set to activate automatically or manually.

Iran targets a desalination plant and a refinery

News about the downed planes came after Iran attacked Kuwait's Mina al-Ahmadi oil refinery. The state-run Kuwait Petroleum Corp. said firefighters were working to control several blazes.

Kuwait also said an Iranian attack caused "material damage" to a desalination plant. Such plants are responsible for most of the drinking water for Gulf states, and they have become a major target in the war.

Also sirens sounded in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia said it destroyed several Iranian drones and Israel reported incoming missiles.

Authorities in the United Arab Emirates shut down a gas field after a missile interception reportedly rained debris on it and started a fire.

Activists reported strikes around Tehran and the central city of Isfahan, but it was not immediately clear what was hit.

In Lebanon, where Israel has launched a ground invasion in its fight with the pro-Iranian Hezbollah militant group, an Israeli drone strike on worshippers leaving Friday prayers near Beirut killed two people, according to the state-run National News Agency

More than 1,900 people have been killed in Iran since the war began on Feb. 28 with U.S. and Israeli strikes. In a review released Friday, the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data, a U.S.-based group, said it found that civilian casualties were clustered around strikes on security and state-linked sites "rather than indiscriminate bombardment" of urban areas.

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

More than 1,300 people have been killed and more than 1 million displaced in Lebanon. Ten Israeli soldiers have also died there.

Iran keeps a chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz

World leaders, meanwhile, have struggled to end Iran's stranglehold on the waterway, which has had far-reaching consequences for the global economy and has proved to be its greatest strategic advantage in the war.

The U.N. Security Council was expected to take up the matter Saturday.

Trump has vacillated on America's role in the strait, alternately threatening Iran if it does not open the strait and telling other nations to "go get your own oil." On Friday he said in a post on social media that, "With a little more time, we can easily OPEN THE HORMUZ STRAIT, TAKE THE OIL, & MAKE A FORTUNE."

Spot prices of Brent crude, the international standard, were around \$109, up more than 50% since the start of the war, when Iran began restricting traffic through the strait.

Pope Leo XIV carries cross for full Good Friday procession, the first pontiff to do so in decades

By COLLEEN BARRY and TRISHA THOMAS Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Leo XIV carried a wooden cross for all of the 14 stations of the Way of the Cross at the Colosseum on his first Good Friday as pontiff, marking the first time in decades that a pope carried the cross to every station.

"I think it will be an important sign because of what the pope represents, a spiritual leader in the world today, and for this voice, that everyone wants to hear, that says Christ still suffers," Leo told reporters this week outside of the papal retreat at Castel Gandolfo. "I carry all of this suffering in my prayer."

Inside the Colosseum, Leo lifted the cross and began the rite flanked by two torchbearers, who accompanied him throughout the hour-long procession from inside the Colosseum, through the crowd outside

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and up steep stairs to the Palatine Hill where he gave the final blessing.

At the first station, marking the moment Jesus was condemned to death, the meditation prepared especially for Leo's first Good Friday underlined that those with authority will have to answer to God for how they exercise their power.

"The power to judge; the power to start or end a war; the power to instill violence or peace; the power to fuel the desire for revenge, or for reconciliation," read the meditation written by Rev. Francesco Patton, who was custodian of the Holy Land 2016-25, charged, among other things, with looking after sacred sites.

Some 30,000 faithful gathered outside the pagan monument, following the stations as they were recited over loud speakers.

They included Sister Pelenatita Kieoma Finau from Samoa and a member of the Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary.

"We have been part of our parish stations of the cross, but this is so exciting. It is very meaningful to have the experience of being with the people of Rome on this special occasion," she said.

Past processions

John Paul II carried the cross for the entire procession from his first Good Friday as pontiff in 1979 until his hip surgery in 1995, when he carried it just part of the way, according to AP reports at the time.

For the first two years of his papacy, Benedict XVI carried the cross for the first station inside the Colosseum, then followed other bearers in the procession that ends on a platform on the Palatine Hill.

Pope Francis never carried the cross, but participated in the procession until his health worsened. He died after a long illness last year on Easter Monday, which fell on April 21.

Pope John Paul II was just 58 when he became pope, and was known as a hiker and outdoorsman. His two successors were in their late 70s when they began their papacies, and Francis was missing part of a lung due to a pulmonary infection as a young man.

The Way of the Cross commemorates the final hours of Jesus' life, from his death sentence to taking up the cross to his crucifixion, death and burial. The procession ends outside the Colosseum atop the Palatine Hill.

"The Way of the Cross is not intended for those who lead a pristinely pious or abstractly recollected life," Patton wrote in his introduction. "Instead, it is the exercise of one who knows that faith, hope and charity must be incarnated in the real world."

At 70, Leo is physically fit and an avid tennis player and swimmer. Before becoming pope, Leo would work out regularly at a gym near the Vatican, with a plan befitting a man in his early 50s, according to his former trainer.

The pope's Holy Week activities

On Holy Saturday, the pontiff will preside over a late night Easter vigil, during which he will baptize new Catholics, and lead Roman Catholics into Christianity's most joyous celebration marking Christ's resurrection.

On Easter Sunday, the pope will celebrate an open-air Mass in St. Peter's Square before delivering his Easter message and offer the traditional "Urbi et Orbi" blessing to the city of Rome and the world.

US employers added a surprisingly strong 178,000 jobs last month, rebounding from a weak February

By PAUL WISEMAN and ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Business Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — American employers added a surprisingly strong 178,000 new jobs last month, rebounding from a dismal February. And the unemployment rate dipped to 4.3%.

The Labor Department reported Friday that hiring marked a turnaround from the loss of 133,000 jobs in February. The job gains were about three times what economists had forecast. But uncertainty surrounding the war with Iran — and its impact on energy prices — is clouding the outlook for the labor market.

The unemployment rate was down from 4.4% in February. That is partly because the labor force — those working and looking for work — dropped by 396,000 in March so fewer people were competing for jobs. In fact, the percentage of people in the labor force dropped to 61.9% last month, the lowest since

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November 2021.

Health care companies added 76,400 jobs last month, boosted by the return of 31,000 Kaiser Permanente employees to work after the end of a strike in February. Factories added 15,000 jobs last month but have still shed jobs for 14 of the last 16 months. Construction companies added 26,000 jobs, probably partly because of warmer weather last month.

Average hourly wages were up 0.2% from February. Compared to March 2025, they were up 3.5% — the smallest gain since May 2021 and one consistent with the Federal Reserve's 2% annual inflation target.

Labor Department revisions shaved 7,000 jobs off combined January and February payrolls.

The U.S. job market has been in a slump over the past year. Most economists say the impact of the war and higher energy prices was probably not fully reflected in the March jobs numbers.

"The data is mostly backward-looking, and likely does not incorporate any impact from the recent rise in energy prices, or other risks related to the war in Iran," Thomas Simons, chief U.S. economist with the investment firm Jefferies, wrote in a commentary.

Diane Swonk, chief economist at the accounting firm KPMG, said that the economy is getting a lift from big tax refunds made possible by President Donald Trump's 2025 tax cuts. "But those are now being eaten up by higher energy costs," she said.

Last year, employers added an average of just 9,700 jobs a month, the weakest hiring outside a recession since 2002. Businesses have been reluctant to bring on new workers partly because of uncertainty arising from President Donald Trump's tariffs on imports and crackdown on immigration. One measure released by the Labor Department on Monday showed the weakest hiring since April 2020 — in the middle of COVID-19 lockdowns.

But firms have also been reluctant to let go of their existing employees, creating what economists describe as a "no-hire, no-fire" scenario that locks young applicants out of the job market. At the same time, there are growing worries that artificial intelligence is taking entry-level jobs.

New jobs are heavily concentrated in health care and social assistance (which includes day care and vocational rehabilitation centers). That combined category accounted for more than half the jobs created last month. The trend reflects an aging U.S. population. A graying Japan saw the same thing in the early 2010s, Vanguard economist Adam Schickling wrote in a commentary ahead of Friday's jobs report.

"The larger-than-expected rebound in nonfarm payrolls in March mainly reflects a reversal of the strike and weather effects that weighed on hiring in February, rather than being a sign that the labor market is rapidly gaining momentum," said Stephen Brown, chief North America economist at Capital Economics. Citing higher oil prices, he warned of the risk that "the hit to consumers' purchasing power will weigh on demand and therefore hiring in the near term."

March's unexpectedly strong hiring is likely to ease pressure on the Fed policymakers to cut interest rates right away to help the job market, giving them time to assess what impact higher energy prices are having on overall inflation.

Worries about the fallout from the war are likely to limit job gains for awhile. "It's the nature of uncertainties," said Olu Sonola, U.S. head of research at Fitch Ratings. "Companies typically respond by holding back" on hiring decisions.

A lot will depend on how long the conflict lasts and what happens to oil prices. The price of benchmark American crude oil closed just below \$112 a barrel Thursday. "If that's \$140 next month," Sonola said, "God knows what's going to happen."

Mai Truong is the founder of Bo & Mei, which makes games and puzzles designed to celebrate Asian heritage. She's currently preparing for this year's holiday shopping season and assessing her hiring plans — but she's facing lots of unknowns.

The Brooklyn, New York-based company, which had sales of under \$500,000 last year, had to pay tens of thousands of dollars in tariffs last year. Truong is not sure what her tariff bill will be this year and whether she will be able to get a refund after the Supreme Court struck down some of Trump's tariffs. The Iran war is also creating unforeseen costs including higher shipping expenses.

Truong is her company's only full-time employee. But she typically hires a couple of contractors, who

work in operations, marketing and other areas, to help in the months heading to Christmas.

"It makes everything feel very uncertain," she said. "On the other hand, there's so little you can do with the volatility. You just have to stay the course and kind of deal with the variables as they become more clear."

Trump's Iran war leaves Republicans adrift ahead of midterms

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Politics Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — This is not the run-up to the midterm elections that Republicans wanted.

A year and a half after winning the White House by promising to lower costs and end wars, Donald Trump is a wartime president overseeing surging energy costs and an escalating overseas conflict.

The war in Iran was largely unpopular even before an American fighter jet was shot down in Iran, a development that dominated headlines on Friday and contradicted Trump's claim that Tehran's military capabilities have been all but destroyed. One crew member has been rescued.

Earlier in the week, the Republican president offered little clarity to a nation eager for answers during a prime-time address from the White House, his first since the U.S. and Israel attacked Iran more than a month ago, simultaneously suggesting that the war was ending and expanding.

"Thanks to the progress we've made, I can say tonight that we are on track to complete all of America's military objectives shortly, very shortly," Trump said. "We're going to hit them extremely hard over the next two to three weeks."

Trump's comments come roughly six months before voters across the nation begin to cast ballots in elections that will decide control of Congress and key governorships for Trump's final two years in office. For now, Republicans, who control all branches of government in Washington, are bracing for a painful political backlash.

"You're looking at an ugly November," warned veteran Republican pollster Neil Newhouse. "At a point in time when we need every break possible to hold the House and Senate, our edge is being chipped away."

Republicans confront evolving political landscape

It's hard to overstate how dramatically the political landscape has shifted.

At this time last year, many Republican leaders believed there was a path to preserve their narrow House majority and easily hold the Senate. Now they privately concede that the House is all but lost and Democrats have a realistic shot at taking the Senate.

Republicans are also struggling to coalesce around a clear midterm message on Iran.

The Republican National Committee has largely avoided the war in talking points issued to surrogates over the last month. The leaders of the party's campaign committees responsible for the House and Senate declined interview requests. Many vulnerable Republican candidates sidestep the issue, unwilling to defend or challenge Trump publicly.

The president remains deeply popular with Republican voters, and he has vocal supporters like Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina.

"That was the best speech I could've hoped for," he wrote on social media after Trump's address on Wednesday evening. Graham said Trump "gave the American people a clear and coherent pathway forward."

Trump made little effort to sell the conflict to Americans before the initial attack. Five weeks later, at least 13 U.S. service members have been killed and hundreds more injured. Thousands more troops have converged on the region, and the Pentagon requested \$200 billion in new funding.

The Strait of Hormuz, a key passage for a fifth of the world's oil, remains closed. The average price for a gallon of gasoline in the U.S. was \$4.08 on Thursday, according to AAA, almost a full dollar higher than on President Joe Biden's last day in office.

On Wednesday, Trump insisted that gas prices would fall quickly once the war concluded but offered no solution for reopening the Strait of Hormuz. Instead, he invited skeptical U.S. allies to do it themselves.

He insisted that the war would be worth it.

"This is a true investment in your grandchildren and your grandchildren's future," Trump said. "When

it's all over, the United States will be safer, stronger, more prosperous and greater than it has ever been before."

Former Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, a Georgia Republican who was once among Trump's most vocal allies in Congress, lashed out against his Iran policy.

"I wanted so much for President Trump to put America First. That's what I believed he would do. All I heard from his speech tonight was WAR WAR WAR," she wrote on social media. "Nothing to lower the cost of living for Americans."

Time is not on Trump's side

About 6 in 10 U.S. adults say the U.S. military action in Iran has "gone too far," according to AP-NORC polling from March. Roughly a third approve of how he's handling Iran overall.

The possibility of sending U.S. forces into Iran also appears politically unpalatable.

About 6 in 10 adults are "strongly" or "somewhat" opposed to deploying U.S. troops on the ground to fight Iran. That includes about half of Republicans. Only about 1 in 10 favor deploying troops.

At the same time, Trump's approval ratings have remained consistently weak. About 4 in 10 Americans approve of how he's handling the presidency, roughly in line with how it's been throughout his second term.

Republican strategist Ari Fleischer, a senior aide in former President George W. Bush's administration, acknowledged that Trump has not received the polling bump in this war that Bush got after invading Iraq.

Bush, of course, worked to build public backing for the Iraq War before going in. Immediately after the 2003 invasion, Bush's popularity soared, as did the stock market.

Public sentiment and the economy soured only after the conflict stretched on. It ultimately spanned more than eight years, spawning a generation of anti-war Republicans — and sowing the seeds of Trump's "America First" foreign policy.

"My hope is that the Trump experience is the exact opposite of the Bush experience," Fleischer said.

He said Trump must win the war decisively and quickly to avoid a further backlash, saying there could be a "very significant political upside if things end well, oil comes down and markets rally."

Fleischer added that Trump's actions will matter much more than his words.

"Ultimately, he is not going to get judged on his persuasion or his explanations or his assertions, he's going to get judged on results," he said.

Descendants of Choctaw code talkers gather in Fort Worth for historical marker unveiling

By DAVID MORENO/Fort Worth Report Fort Worth Report

Nuchi Nashoba grew up looking at a photograph of her great-grandfather Ben Carterby inside her grandmother's Oklahoma home. But, she didn't know much about the man in the frame other than that he was a World War I veteran.

It wasn't until 1989 — when Nashoba was in her late 20s — that she learned a deep secret about her ancestor.

Carterby was one of the Choctaw code talkers — a group of 19 Native American soldiers who used their language to transmit encrypted messages to the Allies during campaigns in northern France. The soldiers were sworn to secrecy and hid details of their service from families for decades.

Over the past 20 years, Nashoba has led advocacy efforts to spotlight the group's hidden legacy as president of the Choctaw Code Talkers Association. Now, the soldiers' contributions are recognized in Fort Worth through a new plaque at the city's Veterans Memorial Park.

The Choctaw Code Talker Historical Marker was unveiled during an April 1 ceremony hosted by the Oklahoma tribe, the Texas Historical Commission and the city's parks and recreation department. Several descendants of the Native soldiers attended.

"Seeing the marker really brings me a lot of joy," Nashoba said. "This is what preserves the history for generations to come."

Choctaw code talkers' ties to Fort Worth

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Members of the Choctaw code talkers were men who volunteered to fight for the U.S. in World War I at a time when Native Americans were not recognized as citizens. Indigenous communities wouldn't receive citizenship until 1924.

While in the battlefields in France, some of these men were overheard speaking their Choctaw language and were trained to use their words as "code." They were placed on front lines and command posts so that messages could be transmitted to headquarters.

The soldiers shared words like "tanampo chito" for artillery and "tvshka" for warriors, according to the historical marker. The Germans famously failed to decipher these Choctaw transmissions within 24 hours throughout the war.

The Choctaw group is widely considered to be the first Native American code talkers to serve in the U.S. military. Their work paved the way for the Navajo code talkers during World War II.

"Their story is a testament to the resilience and patriotism of the Choctaw Nation," Col. Brent Kemp, commander of the 56th Infantry Brigade Combat Team of the National Guard, said at the unveiling. "Their ingenuity and bravery reminds us of the power of cultural heritage and the importance of preserving Indigenous languages."

The Native American soldiers were in the 36th Infantry Division at Camp Bowie, a westside training site for more than 100,000 soldiers during World War I.

Council member Macy Hill, who represents Camp Bowie, said it was only fitting for Fort Worth to honor the legacy of the code talkers since they walked on the site's grounds.

"This is where the Choctaw code talkers were initially trained and where they will forever be remembered," she said.

Descendants carry the torch

As Ta'Na Alexander — the great-great-granddaughter of Carterby — watched the marker's unveiling in Fort Worth, she couldn't help but feel proud that her family's history is slowly spreading across the U.S.

"It's pretty monumental to realize that more people are starting to recognize the significant part of these men who were sworn to secrecy," said Alexander, who is Nashoba's daughter. "This marker connects the past to the future."

She credits her mother's leadership for widespread education about the work of Native soldiers.

Last May, the Choctaw Code Talkers Association led the charge to place a bronze sculpture honoring the group at the Choctaw Cultural Center in southern Oklahoma. The artwork depicts three soldiers in the middle of battle.

The organization also advocated for 23 Oklahoma bridges to be renamed after the code talkers and other Native veterans.

The Fort Worth marker was the group's first venture into Texas, Nashoba said. The group is exploring other statewide recognitions, she added.

For now, Alexander invites Fort Worth residents to stroll through the memorial park to learn that her ancestors' stories aren't just about being Native. They're about what it means to be American, she said.

"You might not be Native or Choctaw, but what we do share in common is that we have the right to vote," she said. "We have a voice. We have a freedom that exists here that doesn't exist anywhere else."

What to know about Tiger Woods' rollover crash in Florida and the aftermath

By JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

For Tiger Woods, another arrest on charges of driving under the influence has put golf on hold.

There will be no chance of a return to the Masters next week. No Ryder Cup captaincy in 2027. Golf is being pushed to the side while Woods seeks treatment following his crash a week ago in Florida.

Authorities say Woods had pain pills in his pocket and showed signs of impairment following the crash — his fourth since 2009.

Here's what to know about the events of the past week:

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Traveling at 'high speeds' when Woods crashed SUV

Woods was driving at "high speeds" on March 27 along a beachside, residential road in Jupiter Island not far from his home, when he clipped the trailer of a pressure cleaning truck, authorities said.

His Land Rover rolled onto its side, but he managed to crawl out without any injuries. Woods told a deputy that he was looking down at his phone and changing the radio station when he hit the trailer.

Woods denied drinking alcohol or taking any illegal substances, a deputy said.

Showing signs of impairment after crash

A Martin County Sheriff's deputy wrote that Woods was sweating profusely and moving lethargically and that his eyes were bloodshot and glassy.

The deputy said she had to repeat instructions to Woods several times while conducting field sobriety tests, and that he didn't perform some of the exercises correctly. She wrote that he was not in a condition to drive.

Woods told the deputy he takes a few prescription medications and that he had seven back surgeries and more than 20 operations on his leg.

Talking 'to the president' before being handcuffed

Shortly after the crash, body camera footage shows Woods telling a deputy, "I was just talking to the president."

It wasn't clear if Woods was referring to President Donald Trump, whose former daughter-in-law, Vanessa Trump, is dating Woods. Trump said on the day of the golfer's arrest that he considers Woods a close friend.

The White House did not say whether Trump spoke to Woods that day.

The footage released Thursday also shows that Woods appeared to be astonished as he was handcuffed. In a video from the back of a patrol car, he could be seen hiccupping, yawning and nodding off while handcuffed during the ride to jail.

Pleading not guilty after being released from jail

Woods was released from jail on bail hours after the crash and pleaded not guilty on Tuesday.

He took a breath test that showed no signs of alcohol but declined to submit to a urine test, according to the sheriff's office. His refusal can be prosecuted under Florida law. A legal expert told the AP that lab results aren't needed to build a DUI case against Woods.

Stepping away from golf to seek treatment outside the U.S.

Woods announced in social media posts on Tuesday that he was putting golf on hold to "prioritize my well-being and work toward lasting recovery."

A Florida judge approved his request to leave the country to seek treatment.

Woods' attorney said the golfer would begin "comprehensive inpatient treatment" and that it needed to take place outside the U.S. to protect his privacy.

Missing the Masters for a second straight year

Woods has not played an official event since the 2024 British Open, but he remains one of golf's most influential figures.

While it was unlikely he would be in shape for this year's Masters before the crash, he said just days earlier that he had hopes of playing even though his body doesn't recover like it once did.

Woods also won't be joining Masters chairman Fred Ridley to celebrate the opening of a refurbished municipal course that involved Woods, or for the prestigious Masters Club dinner for champions.

On Wednesday, Woods formally turned down the Ryder Cup captaincy for 2027.

Russian strikes on Ukraine kill 8 as Kyiv holds door open for Easter truce

By VOLODYMYR YURCHUK Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian strikes killed at least eight people across Ukraine on Friday, including in a "massive" missile and drone attack near the capital, local authorities reported.

Ukrainian officials claim the Kremlin is changing its tactics to increase civilian suffering, shifting to daytime

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barrages and preparing to target more key infrastructure.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has signaled Kyiv's openness to a potential Easter truce. The holiday is celebrated on April 12 in Ukraine and Russia.

Zelenskyy also said that Ukraine is preparing for a shift in Russian aerial tactics, with intelligence indicating that future attacks will move beyond energy infrastructure.

Russia's Defense Ministry said 192 Ukrainian drones were shot down overnight across Russia and occupied Crimea.

'I have no words'

"The Kyiv region is once again under a massive Russian missile and drone attack," said Mykola Kalashnyk, head of the regional military administration, in a Telegram post on Friday.

Kalashnyk said one person died and at least eight others were wounded in strikes on three of Kyiv's satellite towns — Bucha, Fastiv and Obukhiv. Earlier in the week, residents of Bucha marked the fourth anniversary of atrocities committed in the town by Russia's invading forces.

Obukhiv resident Lesia Podoriako, 37, told The Associated Press she was at work with her child when she learned her building had been struck.

"I found out about it through Telegram channels. Then all my friends and acquaintances started calling me, telling me that our building was attacked. I have no words. The main thing is that everyone is alive and healthy," she said.

Another person was killed in Ukraine's northern Sumy region after a Russian guided aerial bomb struck an apartment block, local Gov. Oleh Hryhorov reported. Authorities in the Kherson, Zhytomyr, Kharkiv and Donetsk regions also reported casualties from Friday's attacks.

Ukrainian officials highlighted what they said were increased daytime attacks by Russia, which they said could lead to more civilian deaths. For months, Moscow pummeled Ukraine with nighttime missile and drone strikes that could involve hundreds of drones at a time.

Ukraine's Foreign Minister, Andrii Sybiha, said in a post on X that "almost half a thousand drones and cruise missiles" attacked Ukraine overnight.

"This is how Moscow responds to Ukraine's Easter ceasefire proposals — with brutal attacks," Sybiha said.

Kyiv floats an Easter ceasefire

Zelenskyy on Thursday signaled Kyiv's continued openness to a potential truce on Easter, which falls next week according to the Julian calendar followed by Orthodox churches in Ukraine and Russia.

Zelenskyy told reporters that the proposal had been communicated to Moscow through U.S. channels. He added that the Kremlin's response remains unclear.

Zelenskyy has previously offered a ceasefire for the Easter period — but Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said earlier this week that Moscow wants a lasting peace settlement, not a temporary truce.

President Vladimir Putin unilaterally declared a 30-hour ceasefire last Easter, but each side accused the other of breaking it.

A change in Russian tactics?

Meanwhile, Ukrainian officials said Russia was increasingly striking the country during the day, an apparent departure from months of nighttime barrages.

Andrii Kovalenko, head of the Center for Countering Disinformation within Ukraine's defense ministry, said that the daytime strikes aimed to "increase civilian casualties."

"That is why the combined attack is carried out on a working day, using a large number of drones and missiles," Kovalenko wrote on Friday in a Telegram post.

Zelenskyy told reporters on Thursday that Ukraine is preparing for Russian aerial attacks that could target water systems, logistics and other critical networks. After months of sustained strikes on power facilities, Kyiv now expects increased pressure elsewhere.

"According to intelligence documents we have received, the Russians will target logistics — railways and other infrastructure. They will also target the water supply," Zelenskyy said at a press briefing.

Around midday on Friday, Russian forces dropped five aerial bombs on the city of Kramatorsk, in eastern Ukraine. At least two people were killed and three were injured, according to a Telegram update by Vadym

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Filashkin, who heads the regional military administration.

Elsewhere in Ukraine on Friday, a Russian drone strike damaged a bus in the southern city of Kherson, leaving the driver seriously wounded and at least eight passengers hurt, according to regional officials.

Separately, authorities reported sustained attacks on Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, beginning on Thursday and continuing into early Friday. Drone strikes near the city center caused several injuries. Two people later died in hospital, local Gov. Oleh Syniehubov wrote in separate Telegram updates.

Bohdan Hladykh, head of Kharkiv's Department of Emergency Situations, said Russia struck the city at least 20 times during the day on Thursday with explosive drones.

Zelenskyy says battlefield situation has stabilized

Meanwhile, Zelenskyy told reporters that the battlefield situation has stabilized, with recent intelligence assessments pointing to the most favorable conditions for Kyiv in months. While fighting remains intense across eastern sectors, Ukrainian forces have disrupted Russian offensives in recent weeks and regained limited ground.

"On Wednesday I received a report from our intelligence and an analysis from British intelligence. I received MI6's assessment of the situation at the front: right now, it is the best situation for Ukraine in the past 10 months," the Ukrainian leader said at a press briefing Thursday.

Zelenskyy added that Ukraine has invited U.S. negotiators to visit Kyiv, as part of ongoing discussions on security guarantees and a broader framework for ending the war. Recent talks have involved senior American officials as well as NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte, with Ukraine seeking clearer commitments on long-term defense support and responses to any future Russian aggression.

Ukrainian drones target Russia

Two people were hospitalized on Friday following a Ukrainian drone strike on Russia's Leningrad region, over 1,100 kilometers (684 miles) from the border, said regional Gov. Alexander Drozdenko reported, who added that the drones also set fire to an "unoccupied" building within the Morozov industrial zone.

The settlement of Morozov houses a state-owned plant that makes explosives and components for ammunition, including solid fuel used in Topol-M missile systems. The plant was put under U.S., EU and other Western sanctions following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Twelve people, including at least three Russian soldiers, were injured in a Ukrainian drone strike late Thursday on Russia's Belgorod region, which borders Ukraine, local Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov reported.

Four drones were downed during the night on the approach to Moscow, mayor Sergei Sobyenin reported Friday. He did not reference any casualties or damage.

Duke freshman forward Cameron Boozer named The Associated Press men's national player of the year

By AARON BEARD AP Basketball Writer

Cameron Boozer was at the center of everything for Duke this season.

The 6-foot-9, 250-pound forward proved tough enough to score through physical play. Rangy enough to space the floor and shoot from outside. Deft enough as a passer to find teammates, whether against constant double teams coming for him as the top name on every scouting report or while running the entire offense from up top.

"You just want to affect winning in whatever way you can," Boozer said.

The high-end NBA prospect did that all season for a team that won 35 games, reached No. 1 in the AP Top 25 poll, claimed the top overall seed for March Madness and reached the NCAA Tournament's Elite Eight. Now he's The Associated Press men's college basketball national player of the year, only the fifth freshman to earn the honor and the second in a row for a Duke program that keeps adding to the longest list of winners in the country.

"It just goes to show more about what our team has done, just because I think that really helps awards like this, having great team success," Boozer told the AP. "It's really just not me."

Boozer, named unanimous first-team AP all-American last month, received 59 of 61 votes from AP Top

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25 voters in results released Friday. BYU freshman AJ Dybantsa, another potential top NBA pick, received the other two votes after averaging a national-best 25.5 points per game.

A short list

Boozer, son of Duke and longtime NBA player Carlos Boozer, ranked averaged 22.5 points (ninth in Division I) and 10.2 rebounds (12th) while finishing tied for the national lead with 22 double-doubles. He also averaged 4.1 assists while posting efficient shooting numbers at 55.6% overall and 39.1% from 3-point range.

He joins fellow Blue Devils star Cooper Flagg last year, another Duke player in Zion Williamson (2019), Kentucky's Anthony Davis (2012) and Texas star Kevin Durant (2007) as freshmen to win the AP award. Each went No. 1 or No. 2 in the NBA draft that year.

"I'm very grateful just that I'm even in those (NBA) conversations," Boozer said. "I think a lot of people dream of being where I am. Sometimes you've got to take a step back and just remember that once upon a time, you were a kid dreaming to be here. So I think it's very special."

His coaches think the same of him.

"We've been fortunate enough the last two years to have two of the best freshmen to ever play in college basketball back to back," Duke associate head coach and former Blue Devils player Chris Carrawell said. "And Cam is right up there."

Boozer is Duke's ninth AP winner, each coming from a different player. UCLA is the next closest with five winners, though that included Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (1967 and 1969) and Bill Walton (1972 and 1973) as two-time selections.

UCLA, Ohio State and Duke rival North Carolina are the only other programs with as many as three different players to win the award.

Big-game successes

Boozer arrived at Duke alongside twin brother Cayden after the two led Miami's Columbus High to four straight state championships. By late February, the Blue Devils were starting a four-week reign atop the AP Top 25 that would carry to March Madness. Boozer — who said he looks at winning as a skill — routinely posted top performances in Duke's biggest games, including during a rugged nonconference slate.

He matched a season high with 35 points in a November win against Arkansas. He followed with 29 points against defending national champion Florida. He also had big performances at Michigan State (18 points, 15 rebounds) and flirted with a triple-double (18 points, 10 rebounds, seven assists) in a February win against Michigan.

Along the way, he pushed through bumps and shoves. He closed Sunday's season-ending loss to UConn with 27 points and his right eye swollen from a first-half blow.

"There's no agenda other than figuring out a way to win," Wolverines coach Dusty May said. "I've seen him play a number of times this year where there's six guys in the paint, and it's not as if he's jumping 40, 50 inches off the floor. His desire to rebound the ball, to set physical screens, to play to his advantages, is as impressive as any freshman that I can recall."

Managing pressure

The other challenge was managing the scrutiny that comes from expectations for greatness. A missed shot. A turnover. The 3-for-17 shooting while battling rising frustration and Virginia shot-blocker Ugonna Onyenso in the ACC title game.

"He does a great job of flushing it and not letting it dwell on him too much," Cayden said. "That's something he's always been able to do since we were younger. Obviously I talk to him when he needs me to. And I sometimes just understood that, hey, he's going through something, give him some space for a little bit and he'll figure it out."

Cameron said getting away for time alone and putting down the phone helps. He points to prayer and even a recent effort to read more.

The rest of the time, though, he'll throw himself into becoming a better player. There's comfort in that routine, the results yet to fail him.

"I think just being prepared alleviates pressure," Cameron said. "Being ready for a game, watching film, working out, knowing you put your time in, being confident in yourself — I think all that takes away a lot

of the pressure that people talk about. At the end of the day, pressure really is what you put on yourself."

After crash, Tiger Woods told deputy he was 'talking to the president,' body camera shows

By R.J. RICO Associated Press

After crashing his SUV last week in Florida, Tiger Woods took out his phone and told a deputy, "I was just talking to the president," according to body camera footage released Thursday showing Woods' arrest on a DUI charge.

The phone conversation was not captured on video, but Woods could be heard saying, "Thank you so much," as he hung up and the deputy approached. It wasn't clear if Woods was referring to President Donald Trump, whose former daughter-in-law, Vanessa Trump, is dating Woods.

Shortly after the golfer's March 27 arrest, Trump was asked about Woods and told reporters: "I feel so badly. He's got some difficulty. Very close friend of mine. He's an amazing person. Amazing man. But, some difficulty."

The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment on whether Trump spoke to Woods after the crash.

The footage also shows how Woods appeared to be astonished as he was handcuffed after failing a sobriety test and a video from the back of the patrol car shows the handcuffed golfer hiccupping, yawning and repeatedly appearing to nod off during the 15-minute ride.

Woods told authorities he was looking at his phone and changing the radio station when his speeding Land Rover clipped the back of a truck and rolled onto its side on a residential road on Jupiter Island. No one was injured.

"I looked down at my phone, and all of a sudden — boom," Woods told an officer as he knelt on a lawn, prior to his arrest.

Body camera footage shows Martin County Sheriff's Deputy Tatiana Levenar then conducting a roadside sobriety test and telling Woods: "I do believe your normal faculties are impaired, and you're under an unknown substance, so at this time you're under arrest for DUI."

"I'm being arrested?" Woods responded.

"Yes, sir," Levenar said.

After handcuffing Woods, authorities searched his pockets and found two white pills.

"That's a Norco," Woods said after an officer pulled out the pills, referring to a painkiller that contains acetaminophen and the opioid hydrocodone. Authorities would later confirm that Woods was in possession of hydrocodone.

In the body camera footage, Woods told Levenar that he had not drunk any alcohol and that he had taken "a few" medications earlier in the day, though Woods' words are muted in the released video as he describes some of the drugs.

At the sheriff's office complex, after Woods was escorted into the "DUI room" where drivers are tested for being under the influence, Woods said, "I'm not drunk. I'm on a prescription medication," according to a supplemental sheriff's office report released Thursday.

Woods, 50, pleaded not guilty on Tuesday to suspicion of driving under the influence. He posted a statement Tuesday night saying that he was stepping away indefinitely "to seek treatment and focus on my health."

Woods agreed to a Breathalyzer test that showed no signs of alcohol, but he refused a urine test, authorities said. Under a change to Florida law last year, refusing an officer's request to take a breath, blood or urine test became a misdemeanor, even for a first offense.

During the field sobriety test, deputies noticed Woods limping and that he had a compression sock over his right knee. Woods explained he had undergone seven back surgeries and over 20 surgeries on his right leg, and that his ankle seizes up while walking.

Woods, who was hiccupping during questioning, continuously moved his head during one of the sobriety

tests and deputies had to tell him several times to keep his head straight, according to an arrest report. "Based on my observations of Woods, how he performed the exercises and based on my training, knowledge, and experience, I believed that Woods normal faculties were impaired, and he was unable to safely operate the motor vehicle," Levenar wrote.

Woods is the most influential figure in golf and has become as recognizable as any athlete in the world. The first person of Black heritage to win the Masters in 1997, he has captivated golf fans with records likely never to be broken.

His injuries have kept him from accomplishing more, including from a 2021 Los Angeles car crash that damaged his right leg so badly he said doctors considered amputation. He has not played an official event since the 2024 British Open. He was recovering from a seventh back surgery in October and was trying to return at the Masters, where he is a five-time champion.

Wall Street closed for Good Friday, but US futures inch lower following strong March jobs report

By YURI KAGEYAMA and MATT OTT AP Business Writers

U.S. futures were trading modestly lower early Friday following surprisingly strong jobs data from the federal government.

Equities markets are closed for Good Friday, but futures markets were trading into Friday morning, albeit quietly.

Futures for S&P 500 dipped 0.3%, futures for the Dow Jones Industrial Average lost 0.2% and Nasdaq futures were down 0.4%.

American employers added a surprisingly strong 178,000 new jobs last month, rebounding from a dismal February that saw 133,000 job losses. The unemployment rate dipped to 4.3% from 4.4%.

Energy markets were closed Friday following big price surges the day before on fears that the Iran war will drag on longer than expected. U.S. benchmark crude rose 11.4% to \$111.54 a barrel on Thursday. The price of Brent crude, the international standard, jumped 7.8% to \$109.03 per barrel.

U.S. President Donald Trump late Wednesday vowed the U.S. will continue to attack Iran and failed to offer a clear timetable for ending the conflict in the Middle East.

"A more extended conflict raises the threat to physical infrastructure, extends disruptions through the Strait of Hormuz, and will entail a longer postwar recovery period, with price impacts spilling over later into the year," according to a report from BMI, a unit of Fitch Solutions.

The U.S. relies on the Persian Gulf for only a fraction of the oil it imports, but oil is a commodity and prices are set in a global market.

The situation is very different in Asia. Japan, for example, needs access to the Strait of Hormuz for much of the nation's oil imports or would need alternative routes. But some analysts say Japan and other nations are counting on an agreement with Iran to allow fuel to be transported through the strait.

Trading was closed in France, Germany and Britain for the Good Friday holiday.

In Asia, Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 gained 1.3% to finish at 53,123.49. South Korea's Kospi jumped 2.7% to 5,377.30. The Shanghai Composite sank 1.0% to 3,880.10. Trading was closed in Hong Kong, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Indonesia and India for the Good Friday holiday.

NYC Mayor Zohran Mamdani wants to crack down on 'bad landlords.' First he has to find them

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — On a recent weeknight, three tenants of an aging Bronx building were trading apartment horror stories inside a packed ballroom lined with city bureaucrats.

The occasion was the third in a series of "rental rip-off hearings," a new forum launched by New York

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Mayor Zohran Mamdani for disgruntled renters to air their complaints directly to housing officials — and in some cases, the mayor himself.

As she waited in line, Gulhayo Yuldosheva said she worried that noxious mold in her apartment had worsened her child's asthma. Nearby, her downstairs neighbor, Marina Quiroz, was showing a video of rats scurrying through her kitchen to a representative of the city's tenant protection office.

Ann Maitin, a longtime resident of the same building, had just met with the mayor.

"He let me go over my three minutes," she said, holding up a spiral notebook's worth of grievances.

Mamdani, a democratic socialist swept into office on a promise of zealous tenant advocacy, framed the event as a struggle session for renters, assuring the standing room only crowd that their stories would guide the city's efforts "to actually hold landlords accountable when they don't follow the law."

To the residents of 705 Gerard Avenue, this raised a practical problem: No one seemed to know who actually owned their building.

"It feels like such a basic question," said Maitin, a retired Verizon technician who recently organized the building's tenant association. "You'd think we'd have the right to that information."

Their situation is hardly unique. As corporate owners and investor groups have grown their share of the rental market in New York City, they are increasingly shielding their identities behind limited liability companies, or LLCs.

The practice, which has also been spreading nationally, is legal. But experts warn it could complicate Mamdani's promised crackdown, making it harder for the city and tenants to track the chronically negligent owners whose buildings the mayor has vowed to target and even seize.

"There are these big slumlords that everyone knows are doing predatory investment, but pinning them down is going to be difficult, for the LLC reason," said Oksana Mironova, a housing policy analyst at the Community Service Society. "That's a problem for the administration, and it's even worse for tenants."

'They treat us the same as the rats'

For Yuldosheva and her neighbors, finding their landlord is one of many problems afflicting their six-story building near Yankee Stadium.

Heat and hot water outages are regular enough that some tenants keep a thermometer on their fridge and the city's complaint hotline on speed dial. Common areas are often filthy, and increasingly populated by drug users. Getting help with an urgent maintenance issue "feels like waiting for Christmas in July," said Maitin.

During a monthslong elevator outage, a tenant who uses a wheelchair, Tommy Rodriguez, said he was forced to "slide down the steps, like a kid." Calls to the building management about a repair timeline went unanswered, he said.

Growing up in the building in the 1980s, Rodriguez recalled the previous landlord as a friendly and responsive neighborhood presence.

"This felt like a home before," Rodriguez said. "Now they treat us the same as the rats."

A large rodent had recently chewed a hole through his couch cushion. He handled the extermination himself, with a two-by-four.

A distressing breakthrough

Recently, tenants received a clue about their landlord, following the partial collapse of another Bronx building. The man identified in news stories as the owner of that building, David Kleiner, shared a Brooklyn office with their building manager, Binyomin Herzl.

A handful of tenants visited each of the building's 72 units, logging an array of decrepit conditions and unusual alterations.

"We didn't want to become the next news story," said Yuldosheva, pointing to a crack in the wall of a bedroom shared by her three children — a result, she feared, of the subway that rumbles just below her windows.

Lawsuits show that Herzl has been ordered to pay more than \$100,000 for violations across at least six Bronx buildings, several of which were found by a judge to pose an imminent hazard.

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Reached by phone, Herzl said he didn't own any of those properties, but simply acted as a middleman between tenants and the true owners, whom he declined to list. "There's no one landlord," he said. "It's a group of investors."

Kleiner, who was previously featured on the city's "worst landlord" list, confirmed his partial ownership of 705 Gerard in a brief phone call, but declined further comment.

Herzl, meanwhile, attributed the tenants' complaints to "normal wear and tear" of a nearly century old building. He said Mamdani should focus on improving the city's public housing, rather than going after private landlords.

"Our buildings look like five star hotels against his," he added.

From fines to seizures

When landlords refuse to address a serious violation, like heat or hot water outages, the city can step in and order repairs, then bill the owner directly.

In the last three years, inspectors have ordered emergency repairs at 38 buildings that list either Herzl or Kleiner as an owner, according to records provided by the city's housing department. The men have been billed \$446,521 for those repairs.

Mamdani has proposed using such fines as a vehicle to bring distressed rental properties under city stewardship, by aggressively pursuing liens on delinquent landlords and buying up their portfolios through foreclosure auctions.

Just as the city can shut down unsanitary restaurants, Mamdani has said, landlords that "repeatedly put New Yorkers at risk will not be allowed to operate in New York City — with no exceptions."

In reality, the process is resource-intensive and legally fraught. It is made more complex by the nest of LLCs often used by landlords to obfuscate the full scope of their portfolios, according to Cea Weaver, director of the Mayor's Office to Protect Tenants.

"It'd be great to have a better sense of who owns the buildings that we are regulating and overseeing," she said.

State legislation that would have made it easier to identify LLC owners was recently vetoed by New York Gov. Kathy Hochul amid pressure from landlords.

New Yorkers vs. Bad Landlords

Kenny Burgos, the CEO of the New York Apartment Association, a landlord lobbying group, said Mamdani's tenant proposals — including freezing the rent for regulated tenants — would force landlords to cut back on maintenance and services.

"That's going to take away from the elevator budget, the boiler budget, the heating budget," he said. "It's a question of math: These buildings are crumbling because of policy, not because of bad landlords."

He characterized the rental rip-off hearings as "show trials" that took a "tribal approach" to the city's affordable housing crisis.

Despite the combative branding — "New Yorkers vs. Bad Landlords," blares one promotion — the Bronx event mostly resembled a standard constituent service night: City officials fielded questions about local laws, helped residents with paperwork and connected them to service providers.

Maitin left feeling "glad to be heard by someone who can actually do something about the problem," but felt it was too early to tell "if it's all talk."

The next morning, she was surprised to find the building's superintendent applying a fresh coat of paint to a staircase. Outside, workers were removing scaffolding that had been in front of the building for years.

"I think they caught wind of the rental rip-off," Maitin said. "They're scared."

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Today in History: April 4

Martin Luther King Jr. assassinated in Memphis

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Saturday, April 4, the 94th day of 2026. There are 271 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On April 4, 1968, civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., 39, was shot and killed while standing on a balcony at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee. King's death triggered a wave of unrest in cities across the United States that killed 43 people and injured more than 3,000.

Also on this date:

In 1841, President William Henry Harrison succumbed to pneumonia one month after his inauguration, becoming the first U.S. chief executive to die in office; Harrison's vice president, John Tyler, was sworn in as president two days later.

In 1949, 12 nations, including the United States, signed the North Atlantic Treaty in Washington, D.C., establishing NATO.

In 1973, the twin towers of New York's World Trade Center were officially dedicated.

In 1975, Bill Gates and Paul Allen founded Microsoft in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

In 1991, Republican Sen. John Heinz of Pennsylvania and six other people, including two children, were killed when a helicopter collided with Heinz's plane over a schoolyard in Merion, Pennsylvania.

In 2002, a ceasefire accord was signed by the Angolan government and UNITA, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, clearing the way for achieving a final settlement to end a 27-year civil war that devastated much of the southern African nation at a cost of hundreds of thousands of lives.

In 2012, a federal judge sentenced five former New Orleans police officers to prison for the deadly Danziger Bridge shootings in the chaotic days following Hurricane Katrina. (The verdicts in the case were later set aside by the judge, who cited prosecutorial misconduct; the officers pleaded guilty in 2016 to reduced charges.)

In 2023, Donald Trump surrendered at a Manhattan courthouse and pleaded not guilty to charges stemming from hush-money payments made on his behalf during his 2016 campaign to bury allegations that he had extramarital sexual encounters. He was convicted in May 2024 on all 34 counts but didn't receive any punishment and is now appealing the verdict.

Today's Birthdays: Recording executive Clive Davis is 94. Golf Hall of Famer JoAnne Carner is 87. Actor Craig T. Nelson is 82. Actor Christine Lahti is 76. Football Hall of Famer John Hannah is 75. TV writer-producer David E. Kelley is 70. TV host-comic Graham Norton is 63. Actor David Cross is 62. Actor Robert Downey Jr. is 61. Singer Jill Scott is 54. Magician David Blaine is 53. Baseball Hall of Famer Scott Rolen is 51. Hockey Hall of Famer Roberto Luongo is 47. Actor Natasha Lyonne is 47. Actor-comedian Eric André is 43. Actor-singer Jamie Lynn Spears is 35.