

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 1 of 73

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 News Headlines](#)
- [3- Balloon Ad](#)
- [4- Building community through the arts](#)
- [5- Arnold falls short of signatures for governor's race; Secretary of State confirms primary ballot candidates](#)
- [6- Columbia City Advertisement for Bids](#)
- [6- Today on GDILIVE.COM](#)
- [7- Graduation balloons available](#)
- [8- Graduation Cards](#)
- [9- SD SearchLight: Army Corps warns of hydro-power and recreation impacts as drought persists in Missouri River basin](#)
- [9- SD SearchLight: State providing \\$6 million to grow national security jobs, governor announces](#)
- [10- SD SearchLight: Climate experts say spring is coming earlier, affecting agriculture and ecosystems](#)
- [12- SD SearchLight: 2.5 million Americans lost food aid in months after passage of GOP megabill, study finds](#)
- [14- SD SearchLight: A day after Iran-US ceasefire declared, doubts linger amid continuing Gulf strikes](#)
- [16- Weather Pages](#)
- [20- Daily Devotional](#)
- [21- Subscription Form](#)
- [22- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [23- News from the Associated Press](#)

Thursday, April 9

Senior Menu: Spaghetti with meat sauce, green beans, fruit, garlic bread.

Cancelled: Track at Moberge, noon

5th Grade Girls Basketball, Elementary Gym, 4 p.m.

Girls Softball at Deuel, Varsity at 4:30 p.m., JV to follow.

Pickleball, 6 p.m., Elementary Gym.

Groton Lions Club Meeting at 104 N Main, 6 .m.

Friday, April 10

Senior Menu: Breaded chicken on bun, oven roasted potatoes, California blend, fruit.

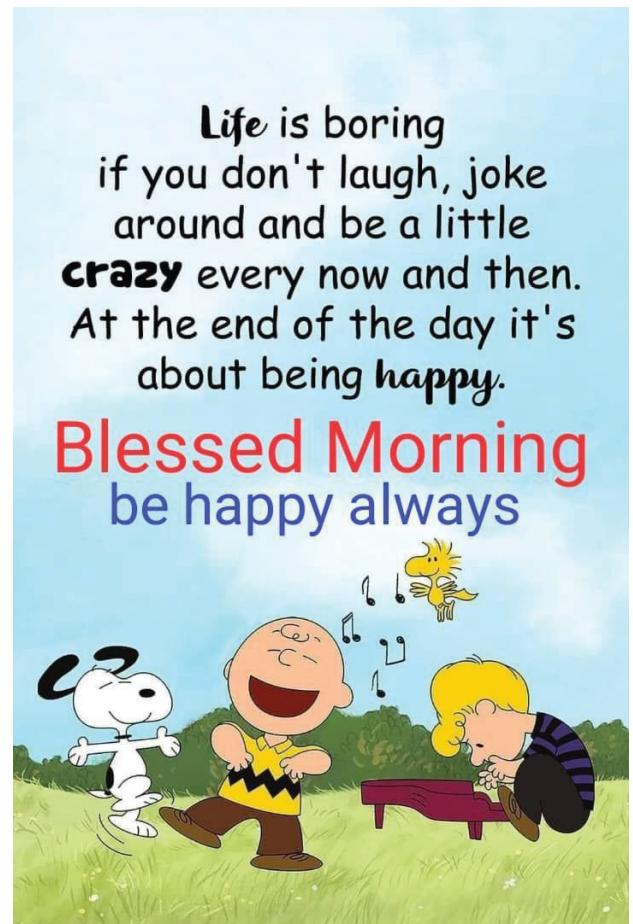
Girls Softball hosts Moberge-Pollock, Nelson Field, Varsity at 4:30 p.m., JV to follow.

Track at Gettysburg, noon

M/H-H/W-W/WS/F High School baseball at Groton, Varsity at 5:30 pm., JV to follow

Saturday, April 11

PGDCWL High School Baseball Varsity at 3 p.m.; JV vs. Redfield at Redfield, 5 p.m.



Sunday, April 12

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

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

United Methodist: Worship at conde, 8:15 a.m.; at Groton, 9:30 a.m.; at Britton, 11:15 a.m.; 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.

JVT Practice, 6 p.m., Arena

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

© 2026 Groton Daily Independent

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 2 of 73

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.

Gilgo Beach Confession

A former architect yesterday admitted to killing eight women from 1993 to 2011, burying their remains in remote areas, mostly along Long Island's Gilgo Beach.

Rex Heuermann, now 62, is expected to be sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole in June on seven counts of murder. He also confessed to an eighth murder for which he was not charged. The lifelong Long Island resident was arrested in 2023, after a roughly 13-year investigation spurred by the discovery of human remains alongside a remote beach highway. Authorities ultimately used a witness description and cellphone data to zero in on Heuermann. Investigators later recovered discarded pizza crusts from his Manhattan workplace; DNA from the crust matched hair found on burlap used to restrain one of the victims.

Public fascination with the murders has inspired several media adaptations, including a Peacock series released last year.

Satoshi Unmasked?

The anonymous inventor of bitcoin may have been unmasked as British cryptographer and computer scientist Adam Back, according to a New York Times report yesterday. The claim—which Back denied—was made by investigative journalist John Carreyrou, whose previous reporting led to the downfall of Theranos founder Elizabeth Holmes.

Bitcoin launched in 2009 alongside a white paper authored under the pseudonym Satoshi Nakamoto; the identity of its creator (or creators) remains a mystery. More than 100 candidates have been suggested, including an Australian computer scientist convicted of fraud for attempting to claim to be Nakamoto. Carreyrou suspected Back based on an analysis of an email trove made public in the Australian case, along with Back's identification with a digital anarchist movement known as cypherpunks.

Whoever Nakamoto is, they have gone to extensive lengths to hide their wealth—they're believed to hold around \$70B in bitcoin, making them one of the world's 30 richest people.

Masters Tees Off

The 2026 Masters Tournament begins today at Augusta National Golf Club. Two-time champion Scottie Scheffler enters as the favorite to become the first golfer to win three Masters in five years since Tiger Woods. Reigning winner Rory McIlroy looks to defend his title.

Founded in 1934 by golfer Bobby Jones and investment banker Clifford Roberts, the Masters is one of the four major golf championships. The tournament, now in its 90th edition (skipped for three years during World War II), is held at the same course each year. It features cheap concessions (the famous pimento cheese and egg salad sandwiches cost \$1.50 each), the Champions Dinner, and the awarding of the green jacket—one of the sport's most recognizable symbols. This year's Masters is the first in 32 years without Woods or his rival Phil Mickelson.

Off the course, Augusta National has quietly built a roughly \$500M real estate empire around its grounds, and its most coveted souvenir, a \$50 lawn gnome introduced in 2016, now resells for hundreds.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 3 of 73

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

"Ketamine Queen," who admitted to selling Matthew Perry the ketamine that killed him, is sentenced to 15 years in prison; she is the third of five people to be sentenced after pleading guilty in connection with Perry's 2023 overdose.

Pittsburgh Pirates sign 19-year-old shortstop Konnor Griffin to a nine-year, \$140M contract less than one week after his MLB debut, marking the largest-ever deal for a baseball rookie.

"Saturday Night Live" reveals Olivia Rodrigo, Matt Damon, and Will Ferrell as the hosts for the final episodes of its 51st season, which concludes May 16.

Science & Technology

Meta launches Muse Spark, the first in a series of new AI models from the company's Superintelligence Labs, founded in July; the model is intended to compete with Google's Gemini and OpenAI's ChatGPT.

Men and women who never marry found 70% and 85% more likely, respectively, to develop cancer than those who marry; researchers cite factors including greater support systems and economic stability.

Mummified reptile that died in Oklahoma roughly 289 million years ago allows scientists to reconstruct the complete breathing system of one of the first species to venture from water onto land (More, w/diagram)

Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +2.5%, Dow +2.9%, Nasdaq +2.8%), oil falls below \$95 per barrel on US-Iran two-week ceasefire.

Paramount President Jeff Shell steps down amid lawsuit accusing him of leaking confidential information about the company's business dealings.

Federal Reserve's March meeting minutes show officials still anticipate one rate cut this year but suggest lengthy Iran war could lead to hikes.

Politics & World Affairs

Israel launches heaviest wave of strikes yet on Lebanon, claiming ceasefire does not extend to its war against Hezbollah, which is based in Lebanon.

Iran accuses the US of violating ceasefire, closes the Strait of Hormuz following Israel's attacks on Lebanon.

Justice Department says Pam Bondi will not comply with a House subpoena to testify on the Epstein files April 14, as she is no longer attorney general.

March 2026 deemed warmest March on record for contiguous US, was also the driest March since 2013.



Mylar & Latex Balloons
Perfect for Every Occasion!

- Birthdays
- Graduations
- Baby Showers
- Anniversaries
- School Events

Huge Selection • Bright Colors • Custom Styles
Stop in or order online today!

Contact **Tina** at **605-397-7285** or **Paul** at **605-397-7460**.
Delivery available in Groton.

Building community through the arts **By Jim Speirs, Executive Director, Arts South Dakota**

Learning, sharing and exchanging ideas are all excellent reasons for participating in the biennial State Arts Conference April 24 and 25 in Rapid City. But even more exciting is the chance to connect with people who share your passion for the arts. That person-to-person contact is the best way to grow our South Dakota creative community. Whether you teach, are an artist, enjoy imaginative entertainment or advocate for more cultural opportunities, it's a revitalizing experience to interact with people who share your enthusiasm! At the State Arts Conference, you'll have the chance to meet and greet arts leaders from the national arts organizations, and the folks like you who work to make the arts happen in their communities. You have a lot to share—and you're invited to the conversation!

The sessions, keynotes and workshops at the State Arts Conference are too numerous to mention here—just check out the list at ArtsSouthDakota.org—but every one of them is packed with information that will improve your ability to advocate, create and enjoy the arts. Why not pick up a few tips, some new strategies and a fresh perspective on the cultural atmosphere of our state and nation? Who knows what ideas will spring from what you hear!

When people get together at happenings like the 2026 State Arts Conference, new lines of communication are formed, innovative alliances are created and the state of South Dakota gets more connected. Your participation in the conference strengthens the statewide network of people who care about the arts, and we grow our creative community.

Please join me in Rapid City to help build the future of the arts across South Dakota and celebrate our unique creative environment. It's going to be a great time to connect—I hope to see you there!

To check out the schedules, performances, speakers and learning opportunities, and to register for the 2026 State Arts Conference—registration closes April 17—visit ArtsSouthDakota.org.



Arnold falls short of signatures for governor's race; Secretary of State confirms primary ballot candidates

PIERRE — Secretary of State Monae L. Johnson announced that Democrat Robert Arnold will not appear on South Dakota's June 2, 2026 Primary Election ballot after failing to submit enough valid petition signatures to qualify for the governor's race.

According to the Secretary of State's Office, a Democratic candidate for governor must submit at least 1,232 valid signatures to earn a place on the primary ballot. Arnold submitted 1,407 signatures, and after a random sample review conducted under South Dakota Codified Law 12-1-36, 79.51 percent of the signatures were found to be valid. Based on that sample, Arnold was credited with 1,119 valid signatures — 113 short of the required threshold.

With Arnold failing to qualify, Democrat Dan Ahlers remains the lone Democratic candidate for governor currently listed on the ballot.

Republican candidates who have qualified for the gubernatorial primary include Larry Rhoden, Jon Hansen, Dusty Johnson and Toby Doeden.

Other statewide and federal candidates currently listed by the Secretary of State's Office for the 2026 primary election include:

United States Senate: Julian Beaudion (DEM), Justin McNeal (REP), Mike Rounds (REP)

United States Representative: Nicole "Nikki" Gronli (DEM), Marty Jackley (REP), James Bialota Jr. (REP)

Legislative candidates currently filed include:

District 1 State Senate: Michael H. Rohl (REP)

District 2 State Senate: David Kull (REP), John Sjaarda (REP)

Manuel Luschas withdrew from the race on Feb. 11, 2026

District 3 State Senate: Carl Perry (REP), Katherine "Katie" Washnok (REP)

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 6 of 73

ADVERTISEMENT FOR BIDS

City Park Lawn Care

Notice is hereby given that sealed bids will be received by the Columbia City Council at the office of the City Finance Officer, 25 Broadway Street N. Columbia SD 57433, until 7:00 o'clock p.m. local time on the 6th day of May 2026, at which time bids will be publicly opened, read and referred to the Columbia City Council of the City of Columbia, at City Hall 25 Broadway N. for the following services:

Mowing services at the City Ball Park located with an address of 260 Broadway St S. Columbia, SD 57433.

Mowing services at the City Park located with an address of 255 Broadway St S. Columbia, SD 57433.

Specifications shall include the following:

Mowing of all grass areas in both locations once per week. Any extra days that require mowing as ordered by the City Council will be pro-rated. Bid should include prices for standard mowing and a price for bagged mowing. String trimming of areas in which a mower cannot reach is required each time the grass is mowed.

Contractor shall furnish all equipment for such tasks listed above.

This will not include the mowing of the actual Ball Diamond (inside the fence).

This contract would be for the 2026 lawn care season. The Columbia City council will entertain additional one-year contracts for up to 5 years.

Bids shall be submitted in accordance with the specifications. All bids shall be plainly marked on the outside of the envelope with the words "City Park Lawn Care". Bids are to be accompanied by a Certificate of Liability Insurance.

Questions can be directed to Jeremy Dosch 605-380-7529.

The Columbia City Council reserves the right to reject any and all bids, waive irregularities and accept the bid it deems most favorable and in the best interest of the City of Columbia after all bids have been examined.

By Order of the Columbia City Council.

Dated this 1st day of April 2026.

By: /s/ Cara Dennert

Cara Dennert

Finance Officer

LIVE WATCH LIVE ON GDILIVE.COM

**GROTON AREA
GIRLS FAST PITCH**

**GROTON AREA
AT DEUEL**

Thursday, April 9
Varsity at 4:30 p.m.
followed by JV

SPONSORED BY
GROTON
Chamber Of Commerce

The advertisement features two baseballs on a dirt field. The larger ball has a tiger logo, and the smaller ball has a cardinal logo. The background is a blurred image of a baseball field.

Celebrate Your Graduate! **Graduation Balloons Available Now**

Make their big day stand out with fun, colorful graduation balloons!



 Available in Groton
 Tina: 605-397-7285
 Paul: 605-397-7460

 Graduation parties

 Delivery available in Groton

Most balloons
\$5.00
Larger balloons priced higher

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 8 of 73

GRADUATION CARDS

DESIGNED & PRINTED
WHILE YOU WAIT!

Have your graduation
cards created at the
Groton Independent Office

**Thank you
Gentry**

for allowing us
to print your
graduation cards!

ONLY \$50 FOR 100 CARDS ★

 Text Paul at **605-397-7460**
to set up your appointment today!

*Celebrate your senior. Shop local.
Get it done the easy way!*





SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Army Corps warns of hydropower and recreation impacts as drought persists in Missouri River basin

BY: OSHUA HAIAR

SIoux CITY, Iowa — The Missouri River basin is in its fourth year of drought, and federal officials say that could affect hydropower production and recreation in the upper basin states.

John Remus is the chief of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Missouri River Basin Water Management Division.

"Through this winter, we saw very little Plains snowpack, and that's pretty much all gone and melted," he said Wednesday. "Our mountain snowpack is well below average. And we just haven't had any precipitation."

The Missouri River basin includes about 530,000 square miles of land that drain into the river in multiple states, including South Dakota, as well as Canada.

Corps officials presented data at a public meeting showing 83% of the basin is abnormally dry and 63% is in drought, and they said drought conditions are likely to persist. Hydropower generation from dams on the river this year is expected to be roughly 20% below average due to low water levels.

Remus said the situation is serious, but not alarming. He said the system of dams and reservoirs managed by the Corps on the river was designed with long droughts in mind.

"It's not as bad as we've seen," Remus said. "We had a long drought in the early 2000s, where we saw, actually, much lower reservoir levels."

Remus said the basin also experiences major swings in conditions, including floods. He pointed to the 2024 Big Sioux River flood as an example of how extreme rainfall and flooding can occur even during a span of years with below-average precipitation.

For the general public, Remus said one of the clearest drought effects on the river could be reduced access for recreation. Lower water levels could leave some boat ramps dry and create access problems at marinas.

"I don't want to call it critical or make it look like we're in some desperate situation, because we're not," Remus said.

The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Commission, which manages many access points along the river, plans to hear a Missouri River outlook presentation during its meeting Thursday and Friday in Pierre.

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.

State providing \$6 million to grow national security jobs, governor announces

Money will help launch South Dakota Defense Institute in Rapid City

BY: SETH TUPPER

BOX ELDER — South Dakota's governor took the next step Wednesday in his effort to make national security the state's "next big industry" by announcing the creation of the South Dakota Defense Institute. Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden, who formerly served in the National Guard, identified national security

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 10 of 73

as a primary economic development focus in his State of the State address three months ago. He made Wednesday's announcement at the Black Hills Defense & Industry Symposium.

"The federal government is looking for partners who can deliver," Rhoden said. "South Dakota is that partner."

Rhoden will provide \$6 million in grants for the institute from the governor-controlled Future Fund for economic development, bringing the fund's unobligated balance down to about \$13 million. The state gets money for the fund by charging a fee to employers. They pay the fee when they submit payroll taxes that support unemployment benefits.

Most of the grant money, \$5 million, will go toward the establishment and operation of the institute for its first five years, including the hiring of three employees. The state will give \$1 million to help Elevate Rapid City, a local economic development group, purchase a building in the city for the institute.

A spokesperson for Elevate said the organization anticipates the institute being a part of the Industry Partners Building planned at 14 St. Joseph St. in eastern downtown Rapid City. In December, the Rapid City Journal reported that Pennington County planned to sell the office building to Elevate for \$5.4 million.

It's unclear what type of entity the institute will be. Bill Even, the governor's commissioner of economic development, said the institute's employees won't work for the state. He said the institute will operate as a "consortium" with industry, government and higher education partners, with the legal structure to be determined.

The mission of the institute, according to a news release, is to "serve as a central hub to coordinate industry, education and government partners" and "support businesses pursuing defense contracting opportunities."

Even said there are "probably over 100" contractors and subcontractors doing defense work in South Dakota. Many are connected to Ellsworth Air Force Base near Rapid City on the west side of the state. On the other side of the state, in Sioux Falls, MMS Products won a \$35 million contract last year to produce drone warheads.

Rhoden said he wants centralized support to bring more defense contracts to South Dakota companies.

"We've already got a number of businesses in South Dakota that have kind of happened at random," Rhoden said. "We're going to be a lot more coordinated and a lot more structured at providing people with the infrastructure and the ability and the communication to get together."

Rhoden is in the midst of a campaign to keep his job. He was elevated from lieutenant governor when his predecessor, former Gov. Kristi Noem, resigned in January 2025 to lead the federal Department of Homeland Security.

Rhoden faces three opponents from his own party in the June 2 primary election: U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, businessman Toby Doeden and state House Speaker Jon Hansen.

Seth is editor-in-chief of South Dakota Searchlight. He was previously a supervising senior producer for South Dakota Public Broadcasting and a newspaper journalist in Rapid City and Mitchell.

Climate experts say spring is coming earlier, affecting agriculture and ecosystems

BY: HÉCTOR ALEJANDRO ARZATE, AG & WATER DESK

COLUMBIA, Mo. — As a row crop farmer in St. Joseph, Mo., Joe Lau said he's noticing more extreme weather these days.

Warmer seasons throughout the year. Quarter-inch predictions of rain stamped out by storms that bring three inches. Increased pressure from pests on his corn. He's also noticed that spring is coming earlier.

The USA National Phenology Network shows that this year spring arrived three to five weeks earlier than the average between 1991 to 2020 in much of the central U.S. and two to three weeks earlier in southern Midwest states.

"I have allergies bad," said Lau, who also grows soybeans. "And this year in particular, it's hit me hard."

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 11 of 73

It's wild that we are talking about allergy issues in winter, but that's technically the reality of it."

Last month, Climate Central, a nonprofit specializing in communicating climate science, published an analysis which found that spring is trending to an earlier arrival from 1981 to 2025 in most of the United States.

On average, leaves now emerge six days earlier than they did in 1981 in 88 percent, or 212 out of 242 major U.S. cities. For example, in Lau's city of St. Joseph, Mo., the spring leaves tend to arrive 2 days earlier.

An earlier spring could have consequences for the agriculture industry, ecology and more.

Where are spring leaves arriving earlier?

Climate Central used open-access data that was collected by the USA National Phenology Network, a group of volunteers and researchers who study seasonal events — like when migratory birds arrive, leaves emerge, and fruit ripens — among plants and animals to determine ecosystem health.

The analysis is based on the NPN's first leaf index maps, which use models to predict the start of spring. To work, the models are fed data like temperature and the start date of the annual "leaf-out" — when leaves first emerge — for the early spring plants of lilacs and honeysuckle, which are found throughout the U.S.

"That very leading edge of spring is drifting earlier and has drifted, in some cases, a whole lot earlier in just that last few decades," said Theresa Crimmins, the NPN's director, in a briefing last month.

Climate Central's analysis found that many Mississippi River basin cities are seeing earlier spring, including Hazard, Ky., which is seeing leaves arrive 11 days earlier. Both Memphis, Tenn. and St. Louis, Mo. are leafing out seven days earlier. New Orleans, La. is two days earlier.

While most of the lower 48 states are experiencing an earlier spring, the report did find an exception in the Northern Rockies and Plains region. There, spring temperatures have either cooled or warmed "relatively slowly" since 1970, according to the report.

Kaitlyn Trudeau, a climatologist with Climate Central, said the differences in how much earlier spring is coming from place to place are likely due to what she calls "climate controls" — such as latitude, elevation, wind patterns, proximity to bodies of water, ocean currents, and topography.

"All of those different factors really dictate what your local climate is like generally," Trudeau said.

What does early spring mean for agriculture and more?

The early arrival of spring can have widespread impacts, said Trudeau. People with seasonal allergies, like Lau, will be exposed to more pollen because plants get more time to produce and release it.

Warmer temperatures can also cause birds to migrate too soon. One of the busiest migratory routes, or flyways, in North America moves along the Mississippi River. Each year, about half of all migratory bird species on the continent follow it to get from as far north as Canada to Central and South America, and then back.

When birds migrate too soon, said Trudeau, they miss out on the peak abundance of food. They can fall out of sync with insects or the flowers they pollinate, which can affect other species, too.

"That can cause this ecological mismatch," Trudeau said.

Earlier springs can also put the agriculture industry at financial risk, she said. Whether it's corn, soybeans, or specialty fruits, these crops can get hit with a hard freeze following an early leaf out — also known as a false spring. It could lead to major economic damage in the agriculture industry, said Trudeau.

In 2017, a hard freeze in the southeastern U.S. destroyed fruit crops like peaches, pears, blueberries, strawberries, and even grass for livestock. It led to more than \$1 billion dollars in losses for the agriculture industry, according to a report from NOAA.

"We are so dependent upon what happens in the natural environment," Trudeau said. "And so when things start to shift and change, it's also going to cause pretty widespread impacts for our lives."

Growers of specialty crops — such as apricot trees or iris flowers — will be particularly vulnerable. Row crop farmers, like Lau, have more technology to aid them. He said seed treatments have allowed soybean farmers to plant earlier and grow longer, increasing their production.

So the effects of an earlier spring have been “minimal” for him.

“From purely a row crop production standpoint, the springs have been very favorable for us,” said Lau. One thing that does have him worried is the bug activity out in his fields — they’ve been plentiful with the warmer weather.

“I raise all non-GMO corn and so I don’t have the insect traits bred into the corn genetically modified and so that does concern me that we’re kind of relying on what nature hands us,” Lau said.

While farmers and communities are doing their part to innovate and adapt to continue producing, Trudeau said addressing the root of climate change is the most urgent need.

“There is no substitute for dramatically reducing our carbon pollution,” she said.

This story is a product of the Mississippi River Basin Ag & Water Desk, an independent reporting network based at the University of Missouri in partnership with Report for America, with major funding from the Walton Family Foundation.

2.5 million Americans lost food aid in months after passage of GOP megabill, study finds

BY: JACOB FISCHLER

At least 2.5 million low-income people quickly lost help affording groceries under a Republican-passed law that added new requirements for the nation’s largest nutrition program and shifted hundreds of millions of dollars in costs from the federal government to states, according to a study the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities published Wednesday.

Some 6% of the 41 million Americans enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, when President Donald Trump signed the One Big Beautiful Bill Act on July 4, 2025, were no longer receiving benefits by the end of the year.

The left-leaning think tank’s report was based on U.S. Department of Agriculture and state agency data from July to December 2025.

Arizona was the largest outlier in the data, with a whopping 47% of people in the program — about 424,000 Arizonans — losing benefits in 2025, according to the think tank, which cited more recent state agency data in addition to last year’s USDA numbers.

Full-year 2025 data from the USDA, which operates the federal side of SNAP, shows an even bigger drop of 3.4 million people, or roughly 8% of the program’s total, CBPP said. SNAP is federally funded and administered by states, though that cost-share will change under the law.

In a late Wednesday email, a USDA spokesperson applauded the drop in SNAP participation, noting the program’s rolls had fallen below 40 million for the first time since the pandemic. The spokesperson said the program would continue “to serve those with the greatest need while also strengthening program integrity.”

“This change reflects several factors, including the most comprehensive work requirement reform since 1996, the One Big Beautiful Bill of 2025, as well as USDA initiatives that expand access to employment services, career and technical education, and case-management support through USDA’s More Than a Job campaign,” the spokesperson wrote.

Incentives for states

The study did not intend to find a cause for the decline, co-author Joseph Llobrera, CBPP’s senior director of research for food assistance, said in an interview. But he noted the law created incentives for states to limit participation in the program.

Under a provision of the law that is not yet in force, the share of the program’s cost that states must shoulder is tied to the state’s “error rate” — the ratio of payments that were made to people who shouldn’t have qualified for benefits.

That motivates states to restrict access to the program, without providing a corresponding reward for expanding access, Llobrera said.

“So the incentive structure that’s in place, it really pushes states to make it harder to get onto the pro-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 13 of 73

gram for people who need that assistance," he said.

The drop in participation happened without improving economic conditions, such as a decline in the unemployment rate, the researchers said.

That indicates people are moving off the rolls due to changes in the program, not because their circumstances have improved to the point they no longer need food assistance, the study said.

Many provisions of the law have not yet gone into effect. The error rate penalties, for example, start in fiscal year 2028.

Design, not a bug

In part, though, that restriction is by design, as the law's supporters intended to cut SNAP benefits for recipients who met certain criteria and to control what they portrayed as fraud and waste at the state level.

The cuts in the federal share of SNAP funding helped pay for massive tax cuts and a boost to military spending in other parts of the megabill, which Republicans passed without any Democratic support through a process known as budget reconciliation.

The proponents of the agriculture section of the megabill championed provisions to make beneficiaries report their eligibility more often, boost work requirements, disqualify certain categories of legal immigrants, raise the age of children at which parenting would cease to qualify as work and otherwise tighten the availability of the program.

The provisions would help ensure only those who truly needed the federal assistance would get it, advocates said.

It would also create an incentive for states to control erroneous payments, which was not the case when the federal government took on the entire cost of the program before the bill's enactment.

"It is a disservice to the truly needy to rely on SNAP," House Agriculture Chairman Glenn "GT" Thompson, a Pennsylvania Republican, said as the committee marked up the bill last year. "Clearly, SNAP is not working as Congress intended. We must ensure the proper incentives are in place for states to administer the program more effectively for those it serves."

Llobrera said he understood the rhetoric in favor of increasing restrictions on the program, but that the center at the time was "raising the alarm that the bill was going to hurt people."

A spokesperson for Thompson did not respond to a request for comment Wednesday.

Arizona

The CBPP report included a breakout section on Arizona, where the SNAP enrollment dropped much further than any other state.

As in other states, economic gains did not explain the changes in Arizona, the case study said.

"This dramatic drop cannot be explained by a rapid improvement in people's economic well-being or reduced need for help affording food," the report said, noting that Arizona's unemployment rate rose over the period of the study, while the cost of groceries rose about 4% in 2025.

The state's Democratic governor, Katie Hobbs, and state agency spokespeople have blamed the GOP law for the drastic reduction in benefits, the study said, but the decline goes beyond what would be expected based on the law's provisions.

That suggests that state administrators — even under Democratic leaders — are going beyond the minimum requirements of the law to restrict access, the authors said.

"Thus, it appears that a combination of factors, including the megabill and the state's response to it, are contributing to the sharp decline in the number of Arizona families getting SNAP," they wrote.

Because the law also raises the costs to states of administering the program, in addition to requiring states pay for some portion of benefits, some, including Arizona, cut staff ahead of the law's enactment, Llobrera said.

"With the cuts to the administrative funding for states due to that megabill, those are only just going to accelerate," he said.

Shutdown

Such changes to SNAP rules added to an already tumultuous period for the program's recipients. Over the course of a then-record-long partial government shutdown last year, benefits were constantly turned off and on as the Trump administration said it could not spend SNAP funds during a shutdown and federal courts held that benefits must be paid.

Spokespeople for the White House did not return messages seeking comment Wednesday.

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

A day after Iran-US ceasefire declared, doubts linger amid continuing Gulf strikes

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — The United States and Iran both claimed victory Wednesday, a day after agreeing to a two-week conditional ceasefire, though doubts loomed following continued strikes across the Gulf nations and an indication by Iran that it will continue to control the Strait of Hormuz, a major passage for one-fifth of the world's oil and gas.

Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth said during an early-morning briefing the U.S. achieved an "historic and overwhelming victory," but also troops are "prepared to restart at a moment's notice."

"We'll be hanging around. We're not going anywhere. We're going to make sure Iran complies with this ceasefire, and then ultimately comes to the table and makes a deal," Hegseth said.

Oil prices dropped sharply after news of the ceasefire, with Brent crude, the international standard, sitting at \$95 a barrel before noon Eastern Wednesday. That's down from the previous day's price of nearly \$110 per barrel.

U.S. stocks shot up Wednesday, with the Dow Jones Industrial Average, S&P 500 and Nasdaq Composite all on the rise.

U.S. and Iranian delegations were set to arrive in Islamabad Friday for negotiations, according to Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, who in part brokered the pause in fighting.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters at an afternoon briefing that Vice President JD Vance, special envoy Steve Witkoff and the president's son-in-law Jared Kushner will attend a first round of talks Saturday morning.

Nuclear material

President Donald Trump said early Wednesday morning that the U.S. "will work closely with Iran, which we have determined has gone through what will be a very productive Regime Change!"

"There will be no enrichment of Uranium, and the United States will, working with Iran, dig up and remove all of the deeply buried (B-2 Bombers) Nuclear 'Dust,'" Trump wrote on his platform, Truth Social, referring to Iran's buried enriched uranium following heavy U.S.-Israeli bombing in June.

When pressed at the briefing, Hegseth said of the nuclear material: "We're watching it. We know what they have, and they will give it up, and we'll get it, and we'll take it if we have to. We can do it in any means necessary. So that's something the president is going to solve for."

Hegseth ended the press conference saying the Iranian public has been "oppressed by the previous regime, and they'll have a new opportunity with this regime that remains to be seen," adding that a civilian uprising was "not our objective."

"We wish them the best," Hegseth said.

Hegseth's claim about a civilian uprising directly contradicted Trump's message to the Iranian people on Feb. 28, when the U.S. and Israel began the bombing.

Iran's new supreme leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, is the son of the slain Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who led the Islamic Republic from 1989 until U.S. and Israeli strikes assassinated him hours into the conflict. Experts point to Mojtaba Khamenei as being a conservative hardliner with close ties to the Iranian Revolutionary

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 15 of 73

Guard Corps.

Reports across Iranian state media and Middle East regional news outlets Wednesday quoted the regime's Supreme National Security Council as declaring an "historic and crushing defeat" over the U.S. and Israel.

Calls for invocation of 25th Amendment

Hegseth's victory declaration came after Trump on Tuesday threatened Iran's "whole civilization will die tonight" if the regime did not meet his self-imposed 8 p.m. Eastern deadline to open the Strait of Hormuz.

The comments drew intense criticism, with some — from progressive Democrats to former Trump loyalists — calling for the president's removal under the Constitution's 25th Amendment.

Two Senate Republicans, John Curtis of Utah and Ron Johnson of Wisconsin, denounced Trump's rhetoric and actions in recent days. One House GOP member, Nathaniel Moore of Texas, also joined them Tuesday.

The offices of Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., and House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., did not respond to States Newsroom Tuesday for comment on Trump's remark that he would wipe out Iran's "whole civilization." Neither have posted anything regarding Trump's comments on their X social media feeds, where they regularly communicate to the public.

Others continued to support Trump. Sen. Mike Rounds, R-S.D., told local media Tuesday "I take it with a grain of salt," when asked about Trump's vow to wipe out Iran's civilization.

Leavitt told reporters at the White House briefing Wednesday, "The world should take his word very seriously."

"He said that they would face very grave consequences ... by the 8 p.m. deadline if they did not agree to reopening the Strait of Hormuz. And what did they do last night? They agreed to reopen the Strait of Hormuz," she said.

Roughly 90 minutes before his deadline to order strikes on Iran's power plants and bridges, the president agreed to stop the bombardment for two weeks, after receiving a 10-point plan from Iran that "is a workable basis on which to negotiate," he wrote on his social media platform, Truth Social.

In a statement released early Wednesday morning Tehran time, Iran appeared to retain control of the narrow passage in and out of the Persian Gulf.

"For a period of two weeks, safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz will be possible via coordination with Iran's Armed Forces and with due consideration of technical limitations," the country's foreign minister, Seyed Abbas Araghchi, said in a written statement posted on social media.

Iranian drones and missiles

Strikes continued across the Gulf region, with Kuwait's defense ministry reporting "an intense wave" of Iranian drones and missiles that damaged oil infrastructure, power stations and water desalination plants.

"Violations of ceasefire have been reported at (a) few places across the conflict zone which undermine the spirit of peace process. I earnestly and sincerely urge all parties to exercise restraint and respect the ceasefire for two weeks, as agreed upon, so that diplomacy can take a lead role towards peaceful settlement of the conflict," Sharif warned on X just after 10 a.m. Eastern.

The Pakistani prime minister tagged in the post Trump and numerous administration officials, as well as Iranian leaders.

Israel continued bombardment on southern Lebanon, launching widespread strikes across the region and in the capital city of Beirut Wednesday. By noon Eastern, which is evening in Lebanon, health authorities said 89 people were killed in the strikes and over 700 had been injured. An official with Doctors Without Borders reporting from a large public hospital in Beirut cited a higher death toll.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu claimed on social media early Wednesday that "The two-weeks ceasefire does not include Lebanon."

When asked during the White House press briefing Wednesday, Leavitt echoed Netanyahu.

"Lebanon is not part of the ceasefire that has been related to all parties involved in the ceasefire," she said.

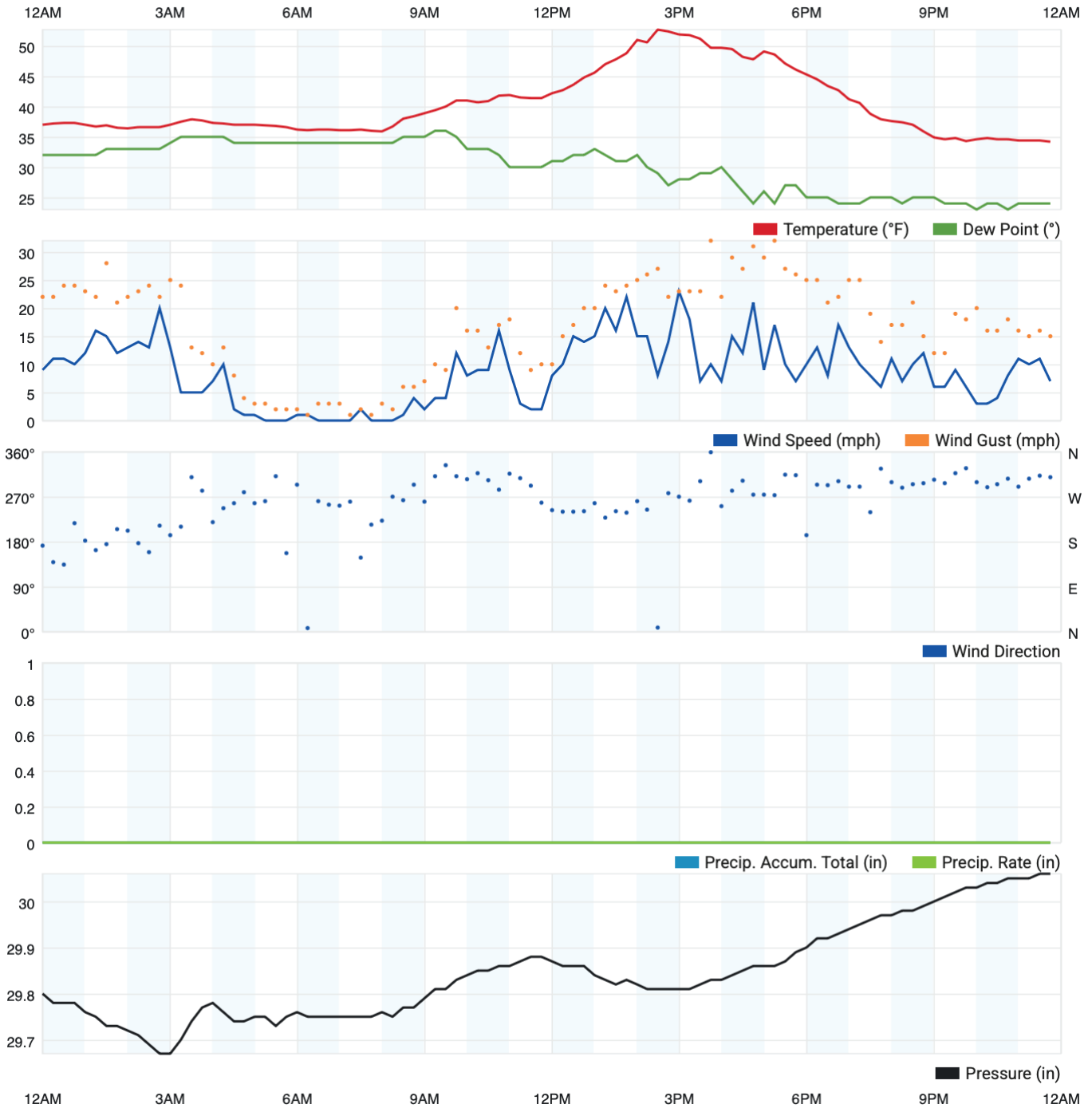
Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 16 of 73

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

April 8, 2026



Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 17 of 73

Today

Tonight

Friday

Friday Night

Saturday



High: 38 °F

Partly Sunny
then
Rain/Snow
Likely



Low: 22 °F

Decreasing
Clouds



High: 54 °F

Sunny



Low: 38 °F

Increasing
Clouds



High: 63 °F

Chance Rain
and Breezy



High Temperatures

Thursday, April 9th - Sunday, Apr 12th

	Thu 4/9	Fri 4/10	Sat 4/11	Sun 4/12
Aberdeen	42	54	61	77
Miller	46	58	67	79
Mobridge	43	57	67	75
Murdo	52	57	77	79
Ortonville	43	54	57	77
Pierre	50	60	72	79
Sisseton	42	54	56	77
Watertown	43	53	59	74

Max Temperature (°F)

Additional Details

Warming Trend:

- High temperatures are expected to increase each day this week, peaking on Sunday.
- Highs on Sunday reach roughly 20-25° above normal, and may threaten daily record highs.
- A cooling trend will begin on Monday of next week after a cold front moves through the area.

Valid: Thu 07 pm CDT - Sun 07 pm CDT

Issued: Wed, Apr 8, 2026, 1 pm CDT



Temperatures are set to increase through the next few days, peaking on Sunday in the mid to upper 70s. These highs are 20 to 25 degrees above normal for this time of year, and may threaten record high temperatures.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 18 of 73

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 53 °F at 2:33 PM

Low Temp: 34 °F at 9:52 PM

Wind: 32 mph at 3:43 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 91 in 1977

Record Low: 8 in 1997

Average High: 55

Average Low: 29

Average Precip in April.: 0.41

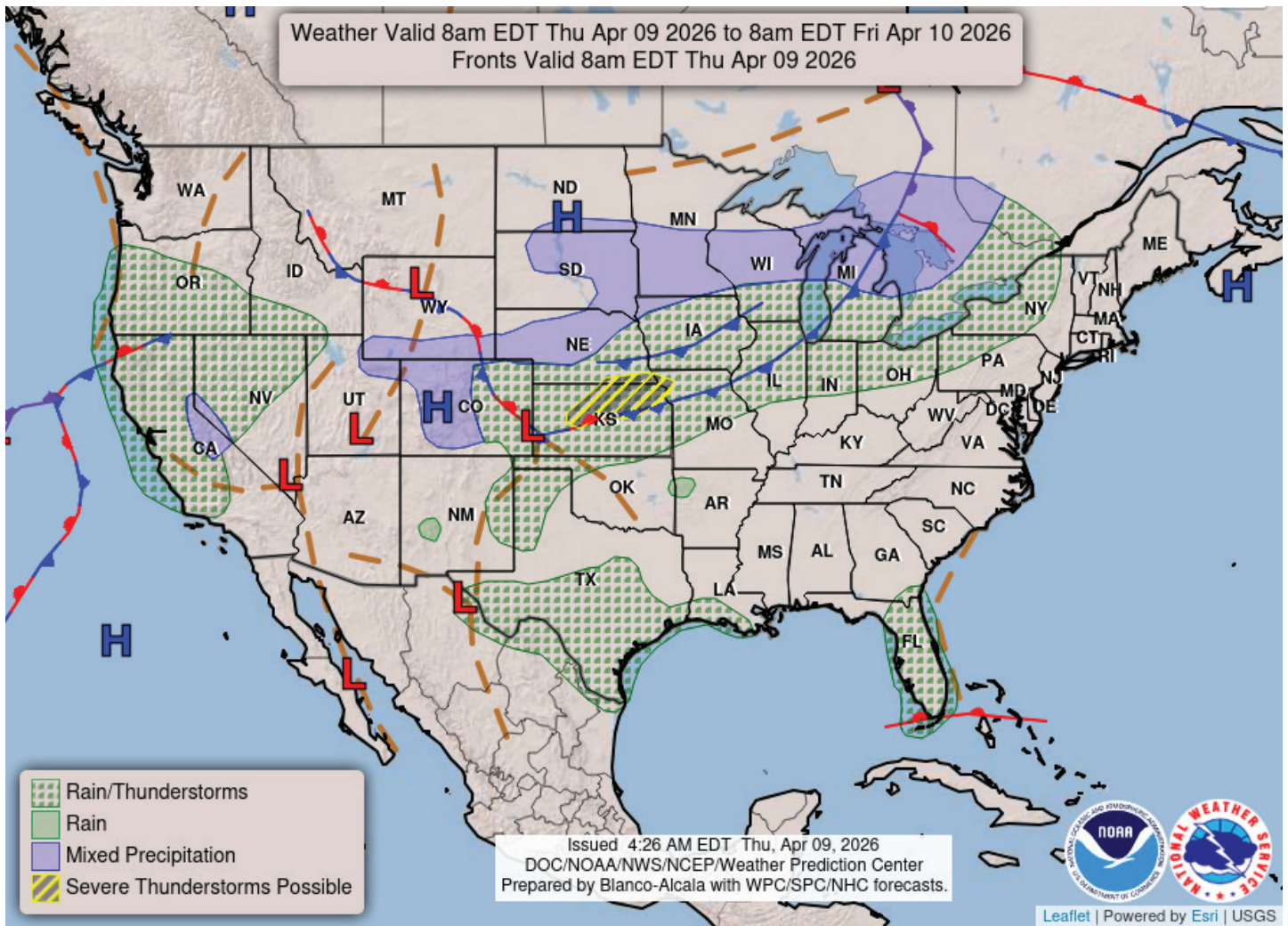
Precip to date in April.: 0.75

Average Precip to date: 2.47

Precip Year to Date: 2.37

Sunset Tonight: 8:09 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:55 am



Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 19 of 73

Today in Weather History

April 9th, 1997: A late-season storm produced snow from the Black Hills through South Central South Dakota. The most outstanding amounts occurred in a 40-mile-wide swath south of Interstate 90. Snowfall amounts included 9 inches at Rapid City, 12 inches at Deerfield, 10 inches at Custer, 11 inches at Mission, and 12 inches at Winner. Outside this swath, snowfall ranged from 3 to 6 inches.

April 9th, 2007: Arctic air moved into central and northeast South Dakota and remained for nearly a week. High temperatures from April 3rd to April 9th were mainly in the 20s to around 30 degrees, with lows in the single digits and teens. The high temperatures were from 20 to 30 degrees below average, and the lows were from 10 to 25 degrees below normal across the area. Some record lows and many record-low maximum temperatures were set throughout the period. The first ten days of April were the coldest on record for Aberdeen. The early spring cold period affected many residents of central and northeast South Dakota, especially farmers and ranchers. Also, many robins died from the cold and lack of food.

1877 — Oregon Inlet, NC, was widened three quarters of a mile by a nor'easter. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1947 — A tornado struck Woodward, OK, during the late evening killing 95 persons and causing six million dollars damage. The tornado, one to two miles in width, and traveling at a speed of 68 mph, killed a total of 167 persons along its 221 mile path from Texas into Kansas, injured 980 others, and caused nearly ten million dollars damage. (David Ludlum) A man looking out his front door was swept by a tornado from his home near Higgins TX and carried two hundred feet over trees. The bodies of two people, thought to be together at Glazier TX, were found three miles apart. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1977 — A storm brought 15.5 inches of rain to Jolo, WV, in thirty hours. (The Weather Channel)

1987 — International Falls, MN, reported their sixth straight record high for the date, with a reading of 77 degrees. A cold front ushering sharply colder weather into the north central U.S. produced wind gusts to 60 mph at Glasgow MT. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 — Residents of Sioux City, IA, awoke to find two inches of snow on the ground following a record high temperature of 88 degrees the previous afternoon. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 — Eighteen cities in the southwestern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 80 degrees at Eureka CA established a record for the month of April. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 — Thunderstorms developing ahead of a cold front produced severe weather from the Central High Plains to Arkansas and northern Texas. Severe thunderstorms spawned five tornadoes, and there were seventy reports of large hail and damaging winds. A tornado injured four persons at Ardmore OK, and thunderstorms produced wind gusts to 70 mph at Kellyville OK, and hail three inches in diameter at Halmstead KS. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2011 — An EF-3 tornado hits Mapleton, IA. Officials estimate more than half the town is damaged or destroyed but none of the 1200 residents were killed. 31 tornadoes were confirmed across Iowa, Kentucky, Tennessee and North Carolina on this day.

The Desires of Your Heart

When we make loving God our highest priority,

He transforms our desires to match His perfect will for us.

Psalms 37:4-7: 4 Delight yourself in the LORD; And He will give you the desires of your heart.

5 Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, and He will do it.

6 He will bring forth your righteousness as the light And your judgment as the noonday.

7 Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who carries out wicked schemes.

God wants to be the passion of every believer's life. If we claim to love the Lord, our connection with Him should have priority over everything else. Yet we often miss the true message of Psalm 37:4 by wrongly assuming the verse means we can get what we want.

In context, that scripture reveals the Lord's principle for purifying our desires, and it issues a call for devotion to Him. To delight in the Lord means to take pleasure in discovering more about Him and following His will. This leads to the Holy Spirit aligning our heart's desires with God's, which always puts us in position to experience His blessings.

When we commit our way to God, we allow our thoughts, goals, and lifestyle to be shaped by His will and the things He loves. In other words, we acknowledge His right to determine whether our longing fits His plan. If we rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him, then we will rely on Him to work out circumstances, even when the desire He's given us seems impossible.

If we make God our first love (Matthew 6:33), our heart will become focused on making His glory known in our life through obedience. And when we're aligned with our Father's will, He'll give us our heart's desires in His time. That's the picture of fulfillment, isn't it? We'll simply have no need for anything else.

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

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 21 of 73

The Groton Independent

Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.2% Sales Tax

- Black & White \$52.00/year
- Colored \$80.00/year
- Colored \$49.00/6 months
- E-Weekly* \$35.00/year

* The E-Weekly is a PDF file emailed to you each week. It does not grant you access to the GDI/Video Archives.

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City _____

State, Zip Code _____

E-mail _____

Phone Number _____

Mail Completed Form to:

Groton Independent

P.O. Box 34

Groton, SD 57445-0034

or scan and email to paperpaul@grotonsd.net

Groton Daily Independent

www.397news.com

Subscription Form

This option will grant you access to the GDI/Video Archives.

- 1 Month \$16.00
- 3 Months..... \$28.00
- 6 Months..... \$38.00
- 9 Months..... \$52.00
- 12 Months..... \$60.00

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City _____

State, Zip Code _____

Phone Number _____

The following will be used for your log-in information.

E-mail _____

Password _____

Pay with Paypal. Type the following into your browser window:

paypal.me/paperpaul

Pay with Venmo: @paperpaul Phone Number to Confirm: 7460

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 22 of 73



WINNING NUMBERS

MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.08.26

6 8 25 56 58 1

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

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 45 Mins 29 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.07.26

5 15 22 33 37 2

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$110,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 30 Mins 28 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.08.26

14 27 40 46 47 2

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$21,520,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 45 Mins 29 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.08.26

2 15 19 27 29

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$46,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 29 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.08.26

4 15 36 45 56 18

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 29 Mins 29 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.08.26

3 16 17 42 52 3

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$35,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 29 Mins 29 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Iran's nuclear agency chief says its right to enrich uranium is 'necessary' for US talks

By JON GAMBRELL and ELENA BECATOROS Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The chief of Iran's nuclear agency said Thursday that protecting Tehran's right to enrich uranium is "necessary" for any ceasefire talks with the United States.

Mohammad Eslami, who leads the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, made the remarks to journalists including one from The Associated Press in Tehran, Iran, during commemorations for the late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

"It is a part of the necessary (things) that nobody speaks about," Eslami said, referring to the U.S. refusal to acknowledge enrichment as one part of Iran's 10-point plan for a permanent ceasefire.

The U.S. and Iran are due to meet in Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan, for talks this weekend.

THIS IS A BREAKING NEWS UPDATE. AP's earlier story follows below.

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — A tentative ceasefire in the Iran war staggered Thursday under the weight of Israel's intense bombardment of Beirut, Tehran's continued chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz, and uncertainty over whether negotiators can find common ground on a range of other differences.

Hours after the ceasefire was announced — amid disagreement over whether it included a pause in fighting between Israel and Hezbollah — Israel pounded Beirut with airstrikes, resulting in the deadliest day in the country since the war began on Feb. 28.

Iran and the U.S. — which both declared victory in the wake of the ceasefire announcement — appeared to try to pressure each other. Semiofficial news agencies in Iran suggested forces have mined the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial waterway for the world's oil whose closure has proved Tehran's greatest strategic advantage in the conflict. President Donald Trump, meanwhile, warned that U.S. forces would hit Iran even harder than before if it did not fulfill the agreement.

But what that agreement is remains in deep dispute. Beyond whether Lebanon is included, there are questions over what will happen to Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium, how and when normal traffic will resume through the strait, and what happens to Iran's ability to launch missile attacks in the future.

Israeli strikes on Lebanon threaten the ceasefire

At least 182 people were killed in Lebanon on Wednesday when Israel intensified its attacks on the Iran-backed Hezbollah militant group, which joined the war in support of Tehran. First responders searched overnight for missing people still under the rubble after the strikes, which hit commercial and residential areas of Beirut.

Israel said Thursday it killed Ali Yusuf Harshi, an aide to Hezbollah leader Naim Kassem. Hezbollah did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has insisted that an end to the war in Lebanon was part of the ceasefire deal, but Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Trump said it was not.

A New York-based think tank warned the deal "hovers on the verge of collapse."

"Even if Lebanon was formally outside the deal, the scale of Israel's strikes was likely to be viewed as escalatory, nonetheless," the Soufan Center wrote in an analysis. "Israel's strikes can be understood both as an effort to drive a wedge between Iran and its proxies and as a response to being allegedly sidelined in the original ceasefire discussions."

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency reported Thursday that an Israeli strike overnight had killed at least seven people in southern Lebanon. The Israeli military did not immediately acknowledge the strike.

Oil prices remain high amid uncertainty over the Strait of Hormuz

Semiofficial news agencies in Iran published a chart Thursday suggesting the country's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard put sea mines into the strait during the war — a message that may be intended to pressure the U.S.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 24 of 73

The chart, released by the ISNA news agency and Tasnim, showed a large circle marked "danger zone" in Farsi over the route ships take through the strait, through which 20% of all traded oil and natural gas once passed.

Only a trickle of ships have passed through the strait since the war began after a few were attacked and Iran threatened to hit any that it deemed connected to the U.S. or Israel. Ships appeared to continue to avoid the strait Wednesday, despite the ceasefire: Data from Kpler showed only four vessels with their trackers on passed through.

The chart suggested ships travel through waters closer to Iran's mainland near Larak Island, a route that some ships were observed taking during the war. It was dated from Feb. 28 until April 9, and it was unclear if the Guard had cleared any mines since then.

Iran's deputy foreign minister, Saeed Khatibzadeh, told the BBC on Thursday that his country will allow ships to pass through the strait in accordance with "international norms and international law" once the United States ends its "aggression" in the Middle East and Israel stops attacking Lebanon.

The strait's de facto closure has caused oil prices to skyrocket — raising, in turn, the cost of gasoline, food and other basics far beyond the Middle East. Oil prices fell on news of the ceasefire Wednesday, but began to climb as uncertainty over the deal grew.

The spot price of Brent crude, the international standard, was around \$98 Thursday — up about 35% since the war began.

Trump warned that U.S. warships and troops will remain around Iran "until such time as the REAL AGREEMENT reached is fully complied with."

If it is not, "then the 'Shootin' Starts,' bigger, and better," Trump wrote in a social media message.

Peace talks expected in Pakistan

The White House said that Vice President JD Vance would lead the U.S. delegation for talks in Islamabad aimed at ending the war, which are set to start Saturday.

There appear to be many points of disagreement to address, including whether Iran will be allowed to formalize a system of charging ships to use the strait that it has instituted. That would upend decades of precedent treating it as an international waterway that was free to transit.

The fate of Iran's missile and nuclear programs — the elimination of which were major objectives for the U.S. and Israel in going to war — also remained unclear. The U.S. insists Iran must never be able to build nuclear weapons and wants to remove Tehran's stockpile of highly enriched uranium, which could be used to build them, should it choose to pursue the bomb. Iran insists its program is peaceful.

Trump said Wednesday that the U.S. would work with Iran to remove the buried uranium, though Iran did not confirm that. In one version of the deal that Iran published, it said it would be allowed to continue enrichment.

Oil prices rise again and world shares retreat on the fragile Iran ceasefire

By CHAN HO-HIM AP Business Writer

HONG KONG (AP) — Oil rose again and world shares were mostly down Thursday on skepticism over a fragile ceasefire between the U.S. and Iran.

Investors were closely watching whether a two-week ceasefire between the United States and Iran was already slipping after a round of intense Israeli strikes on Lebanon that killed and injured hundreds. Iran again closed the Strait of Hormuz, in response to the attacks in Lebanon.

In early European trading, Britain's FTSE 100 fell 0.3% to 10,572.73. France's CAC 40 dropped 0.8% to 8,198.77, while Germany's DAX lost 1.3% to 23,771.68.

Asian shares closed mostly lower. Tokyo's Nikkei 225 dropped 0.7% to 55,895.32, while South Korea's Kospi lost 1.6% to 5,778.01. Hong Kong's Hang Seng fell 0.5% to 25,752.40. The Shanghai Composite index was down 0.7% to 3,966.17. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 edged up 0.2% to 8,973.20. Taiwan's Taiex was 0.3% higher, while India's Sensex dropped 1.6%.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 25 of 73

U.S. futures were down more than 0.4%.

Oil prices were up Thursday, reversing an earlier plunge on optimism over the temporary ceasefire agreement. Brent crude, the international standard, was up 3.5% to \$98.09 per barrel. Benchmark U.S. crude was 3.6% higher on Thursday at \$97.83 a barrel.

Uncertainties over global energy supply remained. The Strait of Hormuz, a chokepoint for energy transport where a fifth of the world's oil typically passes, was largely closed even though the U.S. repeatedly demanded that it must be reopened.

"(Oil) prices rebounded as fighting in the Middle East continued, and the ceasefire outlook deteriorated, keeping uncertainty around the Strait of Hormuz firmly in focus," ING Bank analysts Ewa Manthey and Warren Patterson wrote in a note Thursday.

Talks to pursue a permanent end to the war could start in Pakistan on Saturday, and Vice President JD Vance is expected to lead the U.S. delegation. President Donald Trump posted on his Truth Social media platform that U.S. military will remain around Iran "until such time as the REAL AGREEMENT reached is fully complied with."

Wall Street closed higher Wednesday following Trump's announcement of a two-week ceasefire with Iran late Tuesday.

The S&P 500 jumped 2.5% to 6,782.81. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 2.9% to 47,909.92. The Nasdaq composite was up 2.8% to 22,635.00.

Following renewed hopes over de-escalation of the war, shares of United Airlines surged 7.9% on Wednesday, American Airlines was up 5.6%, while cruise ship operator Carnival jumped 11.2%, trimming losses since the Iran war began on concerns over rising fuel costs.

In other dealings, gold and silver prices fell. Gold's price dropped 0.6% to \$4,750.20 an ounce. The price of silver fell 1.7% to \$74.08 per ounce.

The U.S. dollar rose to 158.95 Japanese yen from 158.57 yen. The euro was trading at \$1.1675, up from \$1.1663.

At least 182 killed as Israel strikes central Beirut after saying Iran truce doesn't apply there

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB and ABBY SEWELL Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Israeli strikes hit busy commercial and residential areas in central Beirut without warning on Wednesday, hours after a ceasefire was announced in the U.S.-Israeli war with Iran. Lebanon said at least 182 people were killed and hundreds were wounded, making it the deadliest day in the latest Israel-Hezbollah war.

U.S. President Donald Trump told PBS News Hour that Lebanon was not included in the deal because of the Lebanese militant Hezbollah group. When asked about Israel's latest strikes, he said, "That's a separate skirmish." Israel had said the agreement does not extend to its war with the Iran-backed Hezbollah, although Iran and mediator Pakistan said it does.

The fleeting sense of relief among Lebanese after the ceasefire announcement turned into panic with what Israel's military called its largest coordinated strike in the current war, saying it had hit more than 100 Hezbollah targets within 10 minutes in Beirut, southern Lebanon and the eastern Bekaa Valley.

Black smoke towered over several parts of the seaside capital, where a huge number of people displaced by war have taken shelter. Explosions interrupted the honking of traffic on what had been a bustling, blue-sky afternoon. Ambulances raced toward open flames. Apartment buildings were struck.

Associated Press journalists saw charred bodies in vehicles and on the ground at one of Beirut's busiest intersections in the central Corniche al Mazraa neighborhood, a mixed commercial and residential area. Using forklifts, rescue workers removed smoldering debris and sifted through ruins for survivors.

There was no sign of Hezbollah launching strikes against Israel in the first couple of hours after the attacks.

In response to the attacks on Lebanon, Iran later Wednesday said it was again halting the movement of oil tankers in the Strait of Hormuz, the country's state-run media reported.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 26 of 73

A deadly midday barrage

Central Beirut has been targeted before, but not by so many strikes at once and in the middle of the day. Israel had rarely struck central Beirut since the outbreak of the latest Israel-Hezbollah war on March 2 but has regularly struck southern and eastern Lebanon and Beirut's southern suburbs.

Lebanon's Minister of Social Affairs, Haneen Sayed, in an interview with The Associated Press condemned Israel's wide range of strikes, calling it a "very dangerous turning point."

"These hits are now at the heart of Beirut ... Half of the sheltered (internally displaced people) are in Beirut in this area," she said, adding that she had just driven by areas hit.

She said Lebanon's government is ready to enter into negotiations with Israel for an end to hostilities, an offer that the Lebanese president previously made. Israel has not responded. "There are calls and efforts being made as we speak," Sayed said.

Prime Minister Nawaf Salam in a statement accused Israel of escalating at a moment when Lebanese officials were seeking to negotiate a solution, and of hitting civilian areas in "utter disregard for the principles of international law and international humanitarian law — principles it has, in any case, never respected."

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun called the Israeli attacks "barbaric." Lebanon's health ministry said that along with the 182 killed, at least 890 people were wounded in the strikes. Altogether, 1,739 people have been killed and 5,873 wounded in Lebanon in just over five weeks since the outbreak of the war.

Israel's military said it had targeted missile launchers, command centers and intelligence infrastructure. It accused Hezbollah fighters of trying to "blend into" non-Shiite Muslim areas beyond their traditional strongholds.

Residents and local officials denied that the buildings hit were military sites.

"Look at these crimes," said Mohammed Balouza, a member of Beirut's municipal council, at the scene of a strike in Corniche al Mazraa. An apartment building behind a popular shop selling nuts and dried fruit had been hit. "This is a residential area. There is nothing (military) here."

An Israeli warning and a defiant Hezbollah

As the smoke rose Wednesday, Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz warned Hezbollah leader Naim Kassem that "his turn will come." In 2024, Israel killed Hezbollah's previous leader, Hassan Nasrallah, with an airstrike.

Katz called Wednesday's strikes the largest blow against Hezbollah since the attack that caused pagers used by hundreds of its members to explode almost simultaneously in September 2024.

Before the new strikes, a Hezbollah official told the AP that the group was giving a chance for mediators to secure a ceasefire in Lebanon, but "we have not announced our adherence to the ceasefire since the Israelis are not adhering to it." He spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to comment publicly.

The Hezbollah official said the group will not accept a return to the pre-March 2 status quo, when Israel carried out near-daily strikes in Lebanon despite a ceasefire being nominally in place since the last full-blown Israel-Hezbollah war ended in November 2024.

"We will not accept for the Israelis to continue behaving as they did before this war with regards to attacks," he said.

Hezbollah had fired missiles across the border days after the United States and Israel attacked Iran on Feb. 28, sparking a regional war. Israel responded with widespread bombardment of Lebanon and a ground invasion.

The Israeli military chief of staff, Lt Gen. Eyal Zamir, said the attacks are to protect Israel's northern residents, who have come under heavy fire.

The Israeli military has said it has killed hundreds of Hezbollah fighters. More than 1 million people have been displaced in Lebanon.

Early Wednesday, after the Iran ceasefire was announced and before Israel struck, many displaced people sleeping in tents on the streets of Beirut and the coastal city of Sidon had begun packing their belongings in preparation to return home.

Families at a sprawling displacement camp on Beirut's waterfront later expressed confusion and despair. "We can't take this anymore, sleeping in a tent, not showering, the uncertainty," said Fadi Zaydan, 35. He and his parents had prepared to head back to the southern city of Nabatieh. Instead, they decided to wait things out in Sidon, a bit closer to home.

Protesters rally against planned Maryland immigration detention facility that's now paused

By REBECCA SANTANA and HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press

HAGERSTOWN, Md. (AP) — Horns blared and protesters screamed "Stop ICE!" outside a meeting on the western edge of Maryland where county officials were discussing mundane issues like the solid waste budget.

It's been like this ever since the Department of Homeland Security bought an 825,000-square-foot (76,645-square-meter) building in Washington County as part of a plan to transform warehouses across the U.S. into detention facilities for tens of thousands of immigrants.

"This is a facility built for packages, not people," Patrick Dattilio, the founder of an anti-Immigration and Customs Enforcement group called Hagerstown Rapid Response, said as he stood outside the county commission meeting.

The federal government has faced fierce opposition in communities where it spent a total of \$1.074 billion for 11 warehouses under a plan that Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin is reviewing. Washington County is the most welcoming community — a place where officials said they supported ICE, albeit amid whistles and jeers. The processing center there was supposed to be one of the first to open in a facilities project hatched under Mullin's predecessor, Kristi Noem.

But now DHS' plan for the Washington County building is paused — mired in a court battle like some of the other warehouse-to-detention projects across the U.S. Questions swirl about whether Mullin will move ahead with the facilities project or chart another course as he pursues President Donald Trump's mass deportation agenda.

County commissioners proclaimed their 'unwavering support' for ICE

The sprawling blue-and-white warehouse in Washington County has been the subject of intense debate in part because of the way commissioners voiced their support for ICE.

While repeatedly insisting that their hands were tied because the federal government already bought the building, the commissioners also approved a proclamation during their Feb. 10 meeting declaring their "unwavering support" for DHS and ICE.

The proclamation, which didn't specifically mention the warehouse purchase, was met with so much booing and yelling that the commission president cleared the room.

The county wanted something, too. It forwarded the proclamation to Noem the next day in an email identifying hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of sewer, airport and highway upgrades that it said were needed, according to a public records request received by local resident Ethan Wechtaluk, who's running for Congress in the district that includes the warehouse.

ICE, flush with cash from a massive congressional appropriation, has since signed a contract worth \$113 million to renovate the building for 500 to 1,500 detainees, but a judge temporarily halted work after Maryland's attorney general sued. A hearing is scheduled for April 15.

County commissioners did not respond to email or telephone requests for comment. County administrator Michelle Gordon in a statement said the commissioners were declining all interview requests.

Many residents of the county — a place Civil War buffs come to visit the Antietam battlefield before making their way to nearby Gettysburg — are outraged both because they have moral objections to the facility and because they didn't find out about the purchase beforehand.

"We have had no voice in this," Carroll Sager said over the din of protesters and honking cars. Behind her, the sheriff's department had cordoned off part of the county building with crime scene tape to deter

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 28 of 73

protesters. Two deputies watched the demonstrators.

During the meeting, Sager sat quietly, holding a sign that read: "Disenfranchised in Washington County."

Other communities across the US have also balked at DHS' plans

The pushback in other communities has included a New Jersey lawsuit that alleges an "utter lack of communication" and a lawsuit in Michigan questioning why DHS didn't look at using empty state prisons. Officials in Salt Lake City and Pennsylvania have threatened to withhold or limit water. In Georgia, the town of Social Circle placed a lock on the water meter at a warehouse DHS purchased.

Meanwhile, questions also have come up about how much DHS paid for some warehouses. It paid double what the New Jersey warehouse was valued at in tax records and nearly five times more than the assessed value of the Social Circle warehouse.

Mullin was pressed during his confirmation hearing about whether he would continue Noem's policy of turning these warehouses into detention facilities. Without committing to anything, Mullin said the department wanted to "be good partners" with communities.

Days after he was sworn in, DHS paused the purchase of new warehouses intended to house immigrants. It's scrutinizing all contracts signed under Noem.

The federal government also said in a recent court filing in Maryland's lawsuit that "ICE is reconsidering the plans and scope of the warehouse."

Asked whether any changes were afoot for the Maryland facility, DHS said in a statement: "As with any transition, we are reviewing agency policies and proposals."

Washington County residents are waiting to see what happens

The plan was to turn the Maryland warehouse into an ICE processing facility that would hold recently arrested immigrants before they go to other facilities for long-term detention.

ICE officials have said the Washington County warehouse would serve the Baltimore ICE office's needs for detention space. State lawmakers have expressed concerns about the George H. Fallon Federal Building that houses ICE detainees in downtown Baltimore in part because a bacteria that causes Legionnaires' disease was found in the water.

Activists and people who live near the Washington County warehouse are watching.

For nearly three decades Nica Sutch has had a home in the rolling hills of western Maryland, where she raised children and entertained grandchildren.

When the warehouse was built a few years ago to meet the demand for distribution centers, fueled by a growth in online shopping, she rationalized that it could be an economic boon for the region.

Now that ICE has purchased the building, she's eyeing a move.

"I love the area," she said during an interview in her backyard. "I love everything. This has been my home for 28 years."

Russia's internet crackdown leads to a spring of growing discontent

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

Several dozen people lined up outside a presidential administration building on a sunny spring weekend in central Moscow as police stood nearby and watched them closely.

The people were lodging complaints about the government's intensifying crackdown on the internet that has seen regular shutdowns of cellphone internet connections, blocked popular messaging apps and cut access to thousands of other websites and digital services.

It was the latest sign of the growing anger and frustration over the restrictions that have disrupted the daily lives of Russians, hurt businesses and drawn criticism even from Kremlin supporters.

Knowing that any unauthorized demonstrations are harshly suppressed, activists have tried to organize authorized rallies, plastered posters on walls and notice boards, and filed lawsuits. Industry leaders pleaded with authorities to repeal the measures.

Even the leader of Armenia delivered a not-so-veiled barb at Russia during a televised meeting with

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 29 of 73

President Vladimir Putin on April 1. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan noted that in Armenia, "our social media, for example, is 100% free. There are no restrictions whatsoever."

An unsmiling Putin stared at Pashinyan with slightly raised eyebrows.

The clampdown not only serves to control what websites Russians can see, but also has thrown digital life into disarray, making it difficult to order taxis and deliveries, pay for goods and services electronically, and stay in touch with friends and family.

Politician and Kremlin critic Boris Nadezhdin spoke for many Russians who are upset about the internet clampdown when he said in an interview with The Associated Press: "This infuriates a huge number of people."

Moves toward internet control

For years, Russia has sought to take the internet under total government control and potentially cut it off from the rest of the world, blocking tens of thousands of websites, messaging apps and social media platforms that refuse to cooperate with the authorities.

Internet users have gotten used to circumventing the restrictions by using virtual private networks, or VPNs, even as the government has been actively blocking those, too.

But last year, the restrictions reached a whole new level: sweeping shutdowns of cellphone internet connections — and sometimes broadband, too — leaving only a handful of websites and apps on government-approved "white lists."

Officials claimed the drastic measures were needed to thwart Ukrainian drones relying on Russian cellphone internet for navigation as Kyiv tries to strike back during Moscow's 4-year-old full-scale invasion.

But the shutdowns hit remote regions that have never been targeted by Ukraine's drones, with ordinary people and businesses decrying the measures as detrimental.

The Kremlin has gone after the country's two most popular messaging apps — WhatsApp and Telegram — while simultaneously promoting a state-backed "national" app called MAX, widely seen as a surveillance tool.

At first, voice and video calls on WhatsApp and Telegram were blocked. Then, sending messages became effectively impossible, too, without using a VPN.

Last week, Digital and Communications Minister Maksut Shadayev said his ministry received orders to further decrease the use of VPNs. Unconfirmed media reports said his ministry proposed a flurry of new measures against VPNs. The ministry did not respond to a request for comment sent by AP.

Lawyer Sarkis Darbinyan, co-founder of the RKS Global digital rights group, told AP the goal of the authorities is to drive internet users into a "digital ghetto" of Russian, government-controlled apps and platforms.

"The internet is no longer this universal digital good," he said.

Business leaders seek moderation

In recent weeks, a growing number of business leaders in Russia have voiced concern about the sweeping restrictions and urged authorities to take a more moderate approach.

Alexander Shokhin, head of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, told Putin at a recent forum of the group that cellphone internet shutdowns "made life difficult for both businesses and citizens."

"Given the high level of mobile technology penetration in our lives, we hope that a systemic, balanced solution will be found," said Shokhin, a government minister in the 1990s and a member of the ruling United Russia party since the 2000s.

Putin was onstage with Shokhin and spoke immediately after him but didn't address the issue.

A similar plea came from CEOs of two of Russia's four cellphone operators at a telecommunications conference last week. Sergei Anokhin of Beeline and Khachatur Pombukhchan of Megafon said that instead of cellphone internet shutdowns, operators could just identify suspicious users and restrict them, the Russian news agency Interfax reported.

"This would make life significantly easier for people, for clients," Pombukhchan said.

Prominent IT entrepreneur Natalya Kasperskaya lambasted Roskomnadzor, blaming its intensifying efforts to block VPNs for a brief outage last weekend of banking and other services.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 30 of 73

"There's no technical way to block VPNs without disrupting the entire internet," she wrote in a post on Telegram. "So, comrades, take screenshots of interesting websites, withdraw as much cash as possible, and get ready to listen to radio reports about foreign enemies who have blocked our once-beloved RuNet," — referring to the Russian internet.

Roskomnadzor denied involvement, and Kasperskaya later apologized in a separate post, but she called for dialogue between the authorities and the IT sector, stressing that "technical decisions sometimes cause downright shock and a desire to at least get an explanation."

Cautious steps toward protest

Activists from Moscow to Vladivostok in the Far East have tried to organize rallies against internet restrictions since late February.

Knowing that unauthorized demonstrations are harshly suppressed and government critics are routinely jailed, they acted cautiously and sought authorization for the gatherings in accordance with strict protest laws. In most cases, those were rejected, and some activists were even arrested on various charges.

But people managed to hold small pickets in a few cities. In others, activists plastered flyers and banners on walls and public notice boards decrying the restrictions.

Opposition politician Nadezhdin, his supporters and other activist groups have filed for permission to hold rallies in dozens of cities on April 12, when Russia marks Cosmonautics Day, honoring the 1961 flight of Yuri Gagarin, the first human in space.

"We're filing for authorization (and saying) we're marking Cosmonautics Day," Nadezhdin says with a subtle smile. "Our slogans will be (about the fact that) cosmonautics is impossible without science, technology and progress, and progress, science and technology development is impossible without connectivity, without communication, without the internet."

Nadezhdin says he is determined to increase pressure on authorities despite the crackdown. Public frustration over the restrictions is "enormous," and people are ready to take part in protests that are authorized and safe, he added.

Moscow-based opposition politician Yulia Galyamina echoed his sentiment in a video she recorded last weekend near the presidential administration, where she and others filed their formal complaints, saying the discontent "is truly widespread."

"The more there is public outcry over the blocking of the internet, Telegram in particular, and depriving us of the possibility to communicate with each other, interact, express our political position, the bigger the effect will be," she said.

Pro-Iran groups have used AI to troll Trump and try to control the war narrative

By SAM McNEIL Associated Press

Pro-Iran groups have used artificial intelligence to create slick internet memes in English to try to shape the narrative during the war against the U.S. and Israel and foster opposition to it.

Analysts say the memes appear to be coming from groups linked to the government in Tehran and are part of a strategy of leveraging its limited resources to inflict damage on the U.S., even indirectly. That includes how Iran has used attacks and threats to control the flow of traffic through the Strait of Hormuz and maintain a stranglehold on the world's economy. A ceasefire raised hopes Wednesday of halting hostilities, but many issues remained unresolved.

"This is a propaganda war for them," Neil Lavie-Driver, an AI researcher at the University of Cambridge, said, referring to Iran. "Their goal is to sow enough discontent with the conflict as to eventually force the West to cave in, so it is massively important to them."

It's not the first time memes have been used in a conflict, and they have evolved to include AI images in recent years. AI imagery bombarded Ukrainians after the Russian invasion in 2022. Last year, the term "AI slop" became widely used to describe the glut of imperfect images posted online during the Israel-Iran war to try to destroy the country's nuclear program.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 31 of 73

In the conflict that began Feb. 28 with joint U.S.-Israel strikes, the memes have used well-honed cartoons that lambast U.S. officials.

The memes are steeped in American culture

The memes are fluent not just in English but in American culture and trolling. Published on various social platforms, they are racking up millions of views — though it's not clear how much influence they have had.

They have portrayed U.S. President Donald Trump as old, out of step and internationally isolated. They have referenced bruising on the back of Trump's right hand that prompted speculation about his health; infighting in Trump's MAGA base; and U.S. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth's fiery confirmation hearing, among other things.

"They're using popular culture against the No. 1 pop culture country, the United States," said Nancy Snow, a scholar who has written more than a dozen books on propaganda.

The pro-Iran images circulating online include a series that uses the style of the "Lego" animated movies. In one, an Iranian military commander raps, "You thought you ran the globe, sitting on your throne. Now we turning every base into a bed of stone," as Trump falls into a bullseye built of "Epstein files," the U.S. government's investigative records on disgraced financier and convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

Analysts believe groups making the memes are cooperating with the government

The animations show levels of sophistication and internet access that indicate ties to government offices, said Mahsa Alimardani, a director of WITNESS, a human-rights group working on AI video evidence.

"If you're able to have the bandwidth needed to generate content like that and upload it, you are officially or unofficially cooperating with the regime," she said — pointing to severe restrictions Iran has imposed on the internet as part of a crackdown on nationwide protests earlier this year.

State media has reposted some of the memes, including some from the account behind the "Lego"-style videos, Akhbar Enfejari, which means Explosive News.

Akhbar Enfejari described themselves as Iranians producing and uploading from within Iran in an effort to disrupt decades-long dominance of Western control of the airwaves.

"They've long dominated the media landscape and, through that power, imposed narratives on many nations," the group told The Associated Press on the messaging app Telegram. "But this time, something feels different. This time, we've disrupted the game. This time, we're doing it better."

After the ceasefire was announced, Akhbar Enfejari posted: "IRAN WON! The way to crush imperialism has been shown to the world. Trump Surrendered."

In addition to the memes coming from pro-Iran groups, Iranian government accounts have trolled the U.S., including in a post Wednesday from Iran's Embassy in South Africa that said, "Say hello to the new world superpower," with a picture of the Iranian flag. Both the U.S. and Iran declared victory after agreeing to a ceasefire.

Analysts say the deep grasp of U.S. politics and culture is the fruit of more old-school methods of propaganda: a decades-long Iranian government program to promote narratives against the U.S. and Israel.

"This meme war comes from institutions that are very aware what the American public is aware of and pop cultural references that can appeal to them," Alimardani said.

Messaging from the US and Israel

Analysts say the U.S. and Israel do not appear to be engaging in the same kind of campaign — and given the restrictions Iran has put on internet access in the country, getting such messages to ordinary Iranians would be difficult.

Early in the war, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu released a video that used AI to make it seem like he was speaking in Farsi, in which he urged Iranians to overthrow their government. The White House has published a steady stream of memes, but those are aimed at a U.S. audience and feature clips from American TV shows and sports.

The U.S. government-run Voice of America, which for decades beamed news reports to many countries that had no tradition of a free press, does still broadcast in Farsi, though it is has been operating with a skeleton staff since Trump ordered it shut down.

"This world order is really changing overnight and the U.S. is not going to end up necessarily as the state that everybody listens to," Snow said.

Finland's plan to bury spent nuclear waste carries risk to future generations

By JAMES BROOKS and STEPHANIE LIECHTENSTEIN Associated Press

OLKILUOTO, Finland (AP) — With the push of a button, the elevator descends hundreds of meters in seconds into the dark depths of Onkalo.

"We are now at about minus 430 meters (1,411 feet)," muttered geologist Tuomas Pere as he steered a car through a labyrinth of man-made tunnels. "We are driving through 1.9-billion year old bedrock."

After decades of construction, the world's first facility for permanently disposing spent nuclear fuel is set to begin operations in Finland, becoming a final resting place for tons of dangerous radioactive waste.

Construction of Onkalo — which means "cave" in Finnish — began on the west coast in 2004. It sits on the secluded island of Olkiluoto, in a dense wooded area. The closest town is Eurajoki, about 15 kilometers (9.3 miles) inland, which is home to about 9,000 people. Many work at the nuclear power plant or storage facility.

The 1 billion euro (\$1.2 billion) project could soon become operational, with authorities expected to grant a license within months.

The Associated Press took a tour of the facilities where humans soon will not be allowed to tread.

'Isolated from civilization'

Pere said the site — near three of Finland's five nuclear reactors — was chosen for its migmatite-gneiss bedrock, which is known for its high stability and low risk of earthquakes.

"It's the isolation from civilization and mankind on the surface that's important," he said, standing in a darkened disposal tunnel, soon to be sealed from humanity. "We can dispose of the waste more safely than by storing it in facilities located on the ground."

Using unmanned machinery at a nearby encapsulation plant, radioactive rods will be sealed in copper canisters and then buried deep in tunnels over 400 meters underground, then packed in with "buffer" layers of water-absorbing bentonite clay.

Posiva, the company responsible for the long-term management of Finland's spent nuclear fuels, says Onkalo can store 6,500 tons of spent nuclear fuel.

The final disposal canisters are designed to remain sealed "long enough for the radioactivity of spent fuel to decrease to a level not harmful to the environment," it said.

"The solution that we have, it's the missing point for sustainable use of nuclear energy," said Posiva communications manager Pasi Tuohimaa.

Finnish nuclear power companies are paying for the project, he said, adding that they have saved money for decades for that purpose.

Posiva estimate it will take hundreds of thousands of years before the radioactivity falls to normal, background levels.

According to a 2022 report by the International Atomic Energy Agency, almost 400,000 tons of spent fuel have been produced globally since the 1950s, with two-thirds remaining in temporary storage and one third being recycled in a complex process.

The world's spent nuclear fuel is currently temporarily stored inside spent nuclear fuel pools at individual reactors and at dry cask storage sites above ground.

There is currently no permanent underground disposal facility for commercial nuclear waste operational anywhere in the world. Sweden began building a repository in Forsmark — about 150 kilometers north of Stockholm — last year, but it's not expected to open until the late 2030s. France's Cigéo project is yet to begin construction and has seen opposition.

The Onkalo facility is expected to operate until the 2120s, when it will be permanently sealed.

'There are uncertainties'

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 33 of 73

But Edwin Lyman, director of nuclear power safety at the Union of Concerned Scientists, an American nonprofit organization, warned that geologic disposal of nuclear waste is still fraught with "uncertainties."

"My view of nuclear waste disposal is that there's no good option, but it's important to find the least bad option, and geologic disposal in general is going to be the least bad option among a range of, you know, bad options," he said.

Lyman said that the copper canisters that contain the spent nuclear fuel will eventually corrode, adding that there are different scientific opinions about how fast that could happen.

"The hope is that is such a slow process that most of the radioactive material will have decayed away by then. But again, there are uncertainties," he said.

Still, Lyman said that permanently storing spent nuclear fuel deep underground is better than "leaving it on the surface of the Earth forever," because nuclear material kept above ground "is vulnerable to sabotage."

"For many decades after spent fuel is discharged from a reactor, it's so radioactive that it makes transporting and reprocessing very difficult," Lyman said. But eventually the main radioactive component will decay, he added, making it less risky to handle.

"So over time the plutonium becomes more accessible either to terrorists or to a country that may want to use it," he said, adding that the only way a terrorist -- or a state -- could theoretically use the material for a nuclear bomb would be if they had "an off-site reprocessing capability."

During reprocessing, spent nuclear fuel is separated to recover uranium and plutonium to recycle it for use in new fuel. The process also carries proliferation risks because the separated plutonium could potentially be diverted to build a nuclear weapon.

Overall, the risks associated with nuclear waste repositories will mainly affect "future generations," Lyman concluded.

To deal with this challenge, an interdisciplinary field of study called nuclear semiotics has been established that looks into developing warning signs about nuclear waste repositories that can be understood by humans 10,000 years from now — or much longer given that it takes hundreds of thousands of years before nuclear waste is no longer dangerous.

For reference: the first humans lived around 300,000 years ago. The earliest writing system was developed in Mesopotamia roughly 5,200 to 5,400 years ago. Stonehenge in Britain is around 5,000 years old, while the Giza pyramids in Egypt are approximately 4,500 years old.

'Nuclear message'

Austrian artist and inventor Martin Kunze has led an expert group on long-term information preservation at the Nuclear Energy Agency of the Paris-based Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. He has developed a system that he calls the "nuclear message" — crucial information for future generations that is printed on a solid ceramic plate below a hard glazed surface.

Kunze said that the ceramic plates are "inexpensive and very robust" and should ideally be buried "in large numbers" in the area around the repository as well as "inside the foundations" of every house in the community. The goal should be to distribute as many ceramic plates in the area as possible.

Finnish officials say the Onkalo nuclear repository reflects the country's long-term approach to nuclear energy policy.

A 1994 act required radioactive waste generated in Finland to be handled, stored and permanently disposed of within the country's borders.

"Back then... some of the waste was still exported, but we wanted to take care of it ourselves," said Sari Multala, Finland's environment minister. "We also stick to the decisions, unlike many other countries."

Multala did not rule out eventually accepting limited amounts of nuclear waste from other countries. "In the small scale there could be some kind of possibilities, as long as it is allowed by the international regulators," she said.

Hawaii doctor accused of trying to kill his wife convicted of attempted manslaughter

By JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — A Hawaii anesthesiologist who was accused of trying to murder his wife on a scenic cliffside hike with ocean views last year has been convicted of the lesser charge of attempted manslaughter.

A Honolulu jury returned the verdict against Gerhardt Konig, 47, on Wednesday after a day of deliberations. He was convicted of attempted manslaughter based on extreme mental or emotional disturbance, which carries up to 20 years in prison. Sentencing was set for Aug. 13.

Thomas Otake, his attorney, said he planned to appeal. Nevertheless, Otake said the defense respected the jury's verdict.

"We are thankful that they did not convict him of attempted murder, which would have been life in prison," Otake said. "We look forward to an appeal related to some of the judge's rulings throughout the case."

EDITOR'S NOTE: This story includes discussion of domestic violence. If you or someone you know needs help, please call the national domestic violence hotline: 1-800-799-7233 in the U.S.

Distraught over her relationship with a coworker, Konig planned to kill his wife, Arielle Konig, during a weekend trip to Honolulu for her birthday in March 2025, prosecutors said. They said he tried to push her off a cliff and stab her with a syringe, and when that didn't work, he struck her with a rock. The attack was interrupted by two hikers who heard her cries for help.

The defendant testified that it was his wife who first hit him with a rock, and he hit her back in self-defense. Konig stood as the jury's foreperson announced the verdict, then closed his eyes and lowered his face. His parents declined to comment to reporters afterward. Arielle Konig was not in court.

Jurors explain conviction on lesser charge

Jury foreperson Makalapua Atkins said deliberations focused on what transpired on the trail. She said jurors examined the testimony of those who were at the scene to see where they matched up and where there were inconsistencies.

"At the end of the day when it comes down to it, she was hit in the head. And a head injury can be serious. And that's a very deadly part of the body," Atkins told reporters after the verdict was read.

Jurors believed the relationship Arielle Konig had with a coworker was sufficient to cause "an emotional disturbance" and this affected their verdict, she said.

Under Hawaii law, if jurors believe a defendant committed attempted murder but was under the influence of an extreme mental or emotional disturbance at the time, they must reduce the charge to attempted manslaughter if they believe there was a reasonable explanation for the disturbance.

The defense's arguments

During closing arguments, the doctor's lawyer repeatedly sought to cast doubt on Arielle Konig's account. If Gerhardt Konig had wanted to kill his wife and had access to a syringe in a remote area, attorney Thomas Otake suggested to jurors during closing arguments, wouldn't he have drugged her and then thrown her from the cliff, rather than having started a scuffle before attempting to fill the syringe as he was wrestling with her?

"You would use the syringe first," Otake said. "It makes no sense."

The trial started last month, nearly a year after Gerhardt and Arielle Konig went on a hike on the Pali Puka trail in Honolulu that ended with her bloodied and screaming that he had tried to kill her.

Their two young sons stayed home on Maui while the Konigs were on the trip.

The Pali Puka trail has long been closed by the state of Hawaii due to its danger but social media sites feature it. People trespass on state land to take in its views and snap photos. Arielle Konig described it as having "narrow ridge sections with steep drop-offs on both sides."

Gerhardt and Arielle Konig testify

The trial, with testimony livestreamed by Court TV, has aired the couple's marital problems leading up

to the hike, along with their versions of what happened on the trail.

Gerhardt Konig testified that his wife was having an affair, which he confirmed by unlocking her phone while she slept. The relationship, which Arielle Konig characterized as an "emotional affair" involving flirty messages with a coworker, came up during the hike.

Arielle Konig testified that her husband grabbed her and moved her toward the cliff's edge, but she threw herself on the ground in an attempt to hold on. He straddled her and had a syringe in his hand, she said, but she batted it away. She bit his forearm and squeezed his testicles in an attempt to get him off her, she said.

Her husband denied pushing her toward the edge and testified that she hit him with a rock on the side of his face. He wrestled the rock away and hit her with it twice in self-defense, he said.

Gerhardt Konig also denied having any syringes on the mountain or trying to stab his wife. His defense attorney said no syringe was found at the scene because he never had one.

Otake said Gerhardt Konig was not someone who would try to commit murder, but someone who was struggling with infidelity and trying to do his best. Otake quoted from a heart-shaped birthday card Gerhardt Konig had written to his wife, calling her "the heart of our family" and saying, "The kids and I hit the jackpot with you."

Gerhardt Konig testified that as he watched his wife crawl away, he believed his marriage and career were over, and he decided to jump to his death. But first, he called his adult son from a previous marriage. The son told authorities that his father said he "tried to kill your stepmom" — a confession Gerhardt Konig denied having made.

Konig testified that he called his son to say good-bye.

During that call, the defendant made no reference to having struck his wife in self-defense, deputy prosecutor Joel Garner said.

He spent about eight hours hiding on the mountain before deciding to come down, and even then, he tried to flee when confronted by police, Garner said.

His wife has since filed for divorce.

Democratic presidential prospects flock to New York to court activists at Al Sharpton's conference

By MATT BROWN and STEVE PEOPLES Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The Democratic Party's most ambitious politicians are courting African American activists in New York this week as the party's unofficial 2028 presidential nomination contest takes shape at an annual conference led by Rev. Al Sharpton.

Up first was Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro, who warned that "everyone is less safe" because of President Donald Trump's leadership and blamed him for a nationwide surge in antisemitism, Islamophobia, racism and bigotry.

"There's more chaos, there's more cruelty in our world," Shapiro said. "Even if we disagree on health care policy or tax policy or whatever, we should at least, at a baseline, have an honorable president of the United States. We do not have that right now."

The Democratic governor, already considered a top-tier 2028 presidential prospect with a clear path to reelection in his battleground state this year, delivered a scathing criticism of the Republican president on the opening day of the National Action Network's four-day conference. More than a half-dozen potential candidates are speaking here to make inroads among Black leaders, one of Democrats' most powerful voting blocs.

The presidential primary is already underway

The presidential primary season won't begin in earnest until after November's midterm elections, but this week's conference is showcasing a collection of Democrats already jockeying for position in what promises to be a crowded primary fight.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 36 of 73

For now, at least, there is no clear early favorite.

"Everybody's talking about who may run for president," said Sharpton, the National Action Network's founder and president. "I want to first know what their vision is now, and what they're doing now. So I've invited all of the people that could run."

In addition to Shapiro, the speaking program features Maryland Gov. Wes Moore, Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker, former Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear, Rep. Ro Khanna of California, and Arizona Sens. Mark Kelly and Ruben Gallego.

Former Vice President Kamala Harris, the last Democratic presidential nominee, is also scheduled to speak. California Gov. Gavin Newsom, another likely contender, won't be in attendance because of a previously scheduled family commitment, his team said, noting that he met with Sharpton earlier in the year.

Black voters have critical influence

One doesn't have to look far to see the outsized influence that Black voters wield in Democratic nomination contests.

In 2020, Buttigieg was a top vote-getter in the Iowa caucus and scored a strong second place in New Hampshire — both overwhelmingly white states — before Joe Biden dominated South Carolina on the strength of the Black vote.

Biden's long-established relationship with the African American community, backed by his perceived electability advantage, ultimately helped him beat back a strong push by progressive favorite Sen. Bernie Sanders.

All of the 2028 prospects are quick to criticize Trump, although there is broad agreement that Democrats also need to highlight what they stand for — instead of solely what they're against.

The White House did not respond to a request for comment about the conference.

Khanna, a Sanders ally who also addressed activists on Wednesday, told The Associated Press that progressive candidates in 2028 could make greater inroads with Black voters "by speaking to the Civil Rights tradition and offering a vision rooted in Black history."

"A 2028 contender needs to articulate and run on a new moral vision for America," Khanna said. Any presidential candidate's platform, he added, "must be as much inspired by the greats of Douglass and King" — referring to abolitionist Frederick Douglass and Civil Rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. — while "offering a new vision for racial justice, economic justice, peace in the world, against militarism, against racism, against wealth inequality."

Shapiro, who was a finalist in Harris' search for a running mate in 2024, highlighted both his electability and his commitment to African American priorities while on stage.

He described Pennsylvania as "the ultimate swing state," while defending diversity, equity and inclusion programs and insisting that police must be "held to account" if they do something wrong.

He also went after Trump again and again, suggesting that the looming midterm elections should be "a national referendum on Donald Trump and on what is happening in Washington, D.C."

Ashley Sharpton, Rev. Sharpton's youngest daughter, said she was surprised by the audience's enthusiasm and engagement while Shapiro and Khanna were on stage on the conference's first day. She said she's looking forward to hearing from Moore, Harris and Buttigieg.

"That's why people come," she said. "They want to get some of that energy, that consistency, that base."

Takeaways from the Gilgo Beach case as Rex Heuermann pleads guilty to 7 murders and admits to an 8th

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

RIVERHEAD, N.Y. (AP) — A Long Island man who carried out a series of murders known as the Gilgo Beach killings pleaded guilty to murder charges this week, bringing finality to the long-unsolved case more than 30 years after the first killing.

Rex Heuermann, an architect who led a secret life as a serial killer, pleaded guilty Wednesday to three

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 37 of 73

counts of first-degree murder and four counts of intentional murder in the killings of seven women between 1993 and 2010.

Heuermann, 62, appeared unemotional and did not look back at the packed gallery of victims' relatives as he entered the pleas and also admitted to killing an eighth woman.

He will be sentenced in June to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

Here are some key takeaways from the case:

Heuermann admits to an 8th killing

The discovery of numerous sets of human remains along Long Island's South Shore beginning in late 2010 set off a search for a potential serial killer that drew global interest. Families of the victims grew doubtful that their killer would ever be caught as the investigation dragged on for more than a decade.

Heuermann was arrested in 2023 after a DNA match.

He admitted Wednesday that he strangled eight female victims and dismembered some of them before dumping their bodies along remote stretches of New York coastline. Many of his victims were sex workers.

Heuermann admitted that he killed Karen Vergata in 1996, although he hasn't been charged in her death.

Remains of six victims — Melissa Barthelemy, Maureen Brainard-Barnes, Amber Lynn Costello, Valerie Mack, Jessica Taylor and Megan Waterman — were found along Ocean Parkway near Gilgo Beach. The remains of another, Sandra Costilla, were found more than 60 miles (100 kilometers) away in the Hamptons. Vergata's remains were found on Fire Island, more than 20 miles (32 kilometers) west, in 1996, and then near Gilgo Beach in 2011.

DNA lifted from discarded pizza crust

Detectives identified Heuermann as a suspect in 2022 using a vehicle registration database to connect him to a pickup truck that a witness had reported seeing when one of the victims disappeared in 2010.

Police pulled cellphone data that showed Heuermann was in contact with some victims just before they disappeared, investigators said. His internet search history also showed a keen interest in the Gilgo Beach killings.

A surveillance team tailed him in Manhattan, where he worked, and watched as he discarded a box of partially eaten pizza crusts into a sidewalk garbage can. They rushed to grab the box and sent it to the crime lab, which matched the DNA from a hair found on burlap used to restrain one of the victims.

Suffolk County District Attorney Ray Tierney described Wednesday how investigators worked to keep the probe quiet so as not to let Heuermann know they were onto him. "We wanted the one person who mattered, the murderer, to think it's business as usual," Tierney said.

As part of his guilty plea, Heuermann agreed to cooperate fully with the FBI's behavioral analysis unit to help catch other serial killers.

Victims' families express relief

Several family members of the victims were present in court Wednesday, and some wept as Heuermann detailed the murders.

Among them was Taylor's mother, Elizabeth Baczkziel. Her 20-year-old daughter was living in Manhattan when she went missing in 2003. Taylor's remains were discovered later that year, 45 miles (72 kilometers) east of Gilgo Beach in Manorville.

"I am glad that this is over as far as him pleading guilty," Baczkziel said. "It took a big chunk of stress off of me and my family."

Melissa Cann, the sister of victim Brainard-Barnes, said she was grateful to finally get justice for her sister, whose body was found in 2010.

"This has been a long journey of hope — hope that one day we would stand here and say her name with justice beside it," Cann said at a news conference after the hearing. "Today, that long, painful journey brings us to this moment."

Heuermann's ex-wife, Asa Ellerup, and their daughter were also in court as he entered the guilty pleas. Ellerup said her thoughts were with the victims' families and she asked for privacy for her own family. Ellerup and her daughter, Victoria, had no knowledge of or involvement in the killings, said their lawyer, Robert Macedonio.

States are struggling to meet their clean energy goals. Data centers are to blame

By JESSICA HILL Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Nevada's largest utility says it will need three times the electricity required to power Las Vegas just to handle proposed data centers — and it probably can't do that without fossil fuels.

That means the utility could miss Nevada's clean energy targets requiring 50% renewable power by 2030.

"I can't remember a time in the history of the industry where we've seen as much interest in adding load, which is primarily driven by data centers," said Shawn Elicequi, senior vice president of regulatory and resource planning for NV Energy, which provides electricity to 90% of the state.

It's one of many utilities across the country grappling with how to meet the exploding electricity demand for data centers to power artificial intelligence without sacrificing long-term plans to move away from fossil fuels in favor of renewable and zero-carbon sources.

In North Carolina, which is also seeing a surge of data centers, the largest utility is revising its long-term plans to delay the retirement of coal plants and to build more natural gas plants. Legislators removed an interim goal for utilities to cut carbon emissions, spurring concern from environmentalists that the state might miss its goal of zero carbon emissions by 2050.

NextEra Energy, which serve commercial electricity in over a dozen states, completely dropped its goal to reach zero emissions by 2045 due to the "demand for all forms of power generation," the company said in a recent business filing.

The Trump administration has encouraged states to use coal to meet the demands from manufacturing and data centers. Tech companies are also slowing down on their own climate goals to meet the consumer demands for artificial intelligence.

"It's very alarming, and it's probably the single largest natural resource issue of our time," said Olivia Tanager, director of the Sierra Club's Toiyabe chapter covering Nevada.

Nevada is one of the fastest-growing data center markets in the U.S. thanks to its lack of a corporate income tax, cheap land and tax breaks for data centers. There are dozens already with more on the way. Now lawmakers are eyeing more regulations and debating how to balance both the state's clean energy goals with the economic benefits data centers bring.

Some data centers say they want to be part of the solution; the industry was responsible for half of all corporate clean energy procurement in 2024, said Dan Diorio, vice president of state policy for the Data Center Coalition.

But renewable energy's contribution to the power grid is not growing fast enough. Nationally, orders for gas turbines are backlogged and processing renewable energy projects take time, industry experts say.

One Vegas data center built its own solar fields

South of the Las Vegas Strip, the Switch data center stretches for nearly a square mile (kilometer). It's the largest data center in Southern Nevada, and it runs entirely on renewable energy, according to Jason Hoffman, chief strategy officer. Unlike other data centers, Switch is licensed to build its own sources of renewable energy at the scale of a utility company. It has built 1 gigawatt of solar energy and is in the process of building more solar fields, he said. The company only uses NV Energy's grid for the delivery of electricity, and it sources its own power from third-party suppliers.

Inside of the massive buildings, hundreds of servers hum within gigantic soundproof and waterproof chambers. They contain vital information for Switch's clients, including major banks, streaming services, online shopping websites, casinos and state and local governments.

During the summer heat, when more energy is required to keep the equipment cool, Switch can remove itself from the grid and be self-sufficient, Hoffman said. The data center is designed to require minimal air conditioning during the rest of the year.

Many other utilities and tech companies are turning to gas-fired generation to power data centers, including the controversial xAI data center near Memphis that is using mobile gas turbines strapped to semitrucks."

Tanager, of the Sierra Club, said multiple proposed data centers in Northern Nevada would use hundreds of low-quality diesel-powered backup generators that will worsen air quality. Data centers have backup generators in case the power goes out and are not used often.

At a recent seven-hour legislative meeting, Nevadans complained to lawmakers about the noise data centers produce, and their worries about how the centers will affect water supply and energy bills. Residents of Boulder City, home of the Hoover Dam, are also opposing a proposed center for similar concerns.

State provides financial incentives for clean power

NV Energy requires data center developers to agree to fund their own infrastructure and energy needs — but it doesn't have to be renewable.

Nevada designed a volunteer funding model that allows companies to put up money for NV Energy's clean energy development then count it toward their corporate energy goals. It was the first such model of its kind in the country and led to the development of a geothermal plant in Northern Nevada with Google as a partner.

Environmental groups want the state to make that model mandatory, but still worry it wouldn't bring enough clean energy to meet demand. They also worry NV Energy could expand its reliance on fossil fuel without the guarantee that all the proposed data centers will be built.

NV Energy will require companies to sign contracts ensuring their commitment to the state before energy is built, Elicegui said. The utility's philosophy is that "growth is welcomed," but that companies need to be responsible for power load added on their behalf "whether they show up or not."

The public utilities commission in Nevada may impose a fine, grant an exemption or take some other action if it determines NV Energy failed to meet the state's clean energy goals. The utility is set to publish a report with more specifics by the end of the month.

Democratic Assemblymember Howard Watts of Las Vegas said it is "unacceptable" to bring forward projects that will threaten the state's renewable energy portfolio. Watts wants to see it required that data centers take on the costs of clean energy development. While many companies are already taking those steps, putting those guardrails in statute is necessary, he said.

"Building more gas plants seems like going in the exact opposite direction of what we need to do as a state," he said, noting the state has "tremendous solar and geothermal energy potential."

Republican fears grow as Democrats keep notching election victories ahead of midterms

By SCOTT BAUER, JEFF AMY and JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

MADISON, Wisc. (AP) — The bluntest assessment of Republican failures during this week's elections in Wisconsin came from one of their own.

"We got our butts kicked," said U.S. Rep. Tom Tiffany, who is running for governor.

He was referring to Democratic victories in campaigns for the Wisconsin Supreme Court and the mayor's office in Waukesha, a conservative suburb outside of Milwaukee. But some Republicans were also rattled by a Georgia special election, where their candidate to replace Marjorie Taylor Greene in Congress won by a much slimmer margin than the party enjoyed in the past.

Taken together, the swings from red to blue added more data points to an increasingly clear picture of Democratic momentum heading into the November midterms, when control of the U.S. House, U.S. Senate and state governments around the country are up for grabs.

"In rural, urban, red, blue, Democrats have overperformed everywhere," said Jared Leopold, a Democratic consultant whose clients include Keisha Lance Bottoms, a candidate for Georgia governor. "That is a significant canary in the coal mine about what November of '26 is going to look like."

Some Republicans insisted there was no need to panic, and their fundraising remains stronger than Democrats. Stephen Lawson, a Georgia strategist, said "the sky is not falling."

But he also said his party is running behind where it has been in the past, and Republicans need to be "looking at these results carefully."

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 40 of 73

'A red alarm for Republicans'

Special elections can be notoriously unreliable as political benchmarks, but Democrats have consistently demonstrated surprising strength. They flipped a Texas state Senate district. They won a Florida state House seat in a district that includes President Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort in Palm Beach.

Then they gained ground on Tuesday in the race to replace Greene, who resigned from Congress in January after a falling out with Trump.

Clay Fuller, the Republican candidate, prevailed by 12 points. Two years ago, Greene won by 29 points and Trump carried the district by almost 37 points.

"That's a red alarm for Republicans," said Democratic strategist Meredith Brasher.

Fuller defeated Shawn Harris, who plans to challenge him again in November.

Jackie Harling, the district's Republican chairwoman, said she believed that Greene's resignation energized Democrats while her party is suffering from "election fatigue."

"Marjorie Taylor Greene was like a freight train that you couldn't stop, and when she pulled out, it gave Democrats hope and it gave them a shot at winning something they believed was unwinnable," Harling said.

'Slightly bluer side of purple'

Georgia has key races this year, including an open contest for the governor's office. Sen. Jon Ossoff, a Democrat, is trying to defend his seat as well.

There's reason to think that simmering discontent could boomerang back on Republicans just two years after Trump harnessed voters' anger with his comeback presidential campaign.

In November, Democrats defeated two Republican incumbents in statewide races for seats on the Public Service Commission, which regulates utilities. Rising electricity rates have been a fault line in recent campaigns, especially as enormous data centers are built to power artificial intelligence.

But Georgia Democratic Party Chair Charlie Bailey is trying to maintain modest expectations.

"We could cement ourselves, put ourselves, on the slightly bluer side of purple," he said. "We're not going to overnight turn into Colorado."

'A very clear sign of momentum'

Wisconsin holds statewide elections for supreme court seats, and liberals expanded their majority with a 20-point blowout victory on Tuesday.

Democrats saw gains in red, blue and purple counties when compared to another judicial race last year, which was also won by the liberal candidate.

"This to me was a very clear sign of momentum and enthusiasm for Democrats in the fall," said Wisconsin Democratic Party Chairman Devin Remiker.

The state has its own open race for governor this year, and Democrats are hoping to take control of the state legislature and oust Republican U.S. Rep. Derrick Van Orden.

"It's time for us to put this thing in overdrive," said Mandela Barnes, a Democratic former lieutenant governor who is running for governor.

Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley, another Democratic candidate for governor, said it's clear that "people are really upset with the Republican Party and their brand right now."

"But that doesn't mean that they're automatically going to come over to the Democrats," Crowley said. "And that's why we have to continue to focus on the issues and speak to the values of all the voters here in the state of Wisconsin."

'A lot of anxiety'

Tiffany, the Republican candidate for governor in Wisconsin, cautioned against reading too much into Tuesday's results.

He said "every election is unique," and he wasn't making any changes to his campaign. He said the key to winning will be to "paint that clear contrast of how we are going to help everyday Wisconsinites."

But Democrats seemed to be making inroads, including in Waukesha. The city is located outside of Milwaukee in the Republican stronghold of Waukesha County.

Democrat Alicia Halvensleben, president of the city's Common Council, defeated Republican Scott Allen, one of the most conservative members of the state Assembly.

She said Trump came up "a lot" when she was campaigning, although she thinks her victory came down to local issues and how the state legislature wasn't addressing them.

"There's so much uncertainty at the national level," Halvensleben said. "I think that level of uncertainty is causing people a lot of anxiety, all the way down to the local level."

Trump promised to cut electric costs in half. Bills in energy-rich West Virginia now top mortgages

By MARGIE MASON Associated Press

RAINELLE, W.Va. (AP) — Every month, Rebecca Michalski takes a deep breath before opening her electric bill. She lives on a fixed income, and heating her small house this winter has been staggering: Her February charge was \$940.08 — more than her check.

It makes no sense. She turns the lights off during the day and only burns one lamp with an energy-efficient bulb in the living room at night, but she keeps falling further behind on payments. In desperation, she took out a loan after getting a cut-off notice during an extended arctic blast that kept the state's heaters cranking when temperatures regularly dipped below zero.

"Every time you see that power bill, you're just sick," Michalski said, rifling through a stack of statements totaling thousands of dollars. "I already know before I open it. I just dread seeing how much."

She's taken to social media, demanding answers alongside thousands of other West Virginians who have been posting screenshots of their monthly charges. They are angry and perplexed over soaring utility costs that are surpassing rents and mortgages in one of the most energy-rich, yet poorest, corners of America, where some families have been forced to choose between paying for food or heat.

President Donald Trump, as part of his campaign pitch to "make America affordable again," promised to cut Americans' electricity bills by half during his first year to 18 months in the White House.

"And if it doesn't work out, you'll say, 'Oh well, I voted for him, I still got them down a lot,'" he said. "You will never have had energy so low as you will under a certain gentleman known as Donald J. Trump." It hasn't worked out.

Instead, electricity increased 4.8% in February nationwide and piped natural gas prices rose 10.9%, both compared with a year earlier, according to the Labor Department's Consumer Price Index. That surpassed inflation even before the attacks on Iran by the U.S. and Israel sent energy costs ballooning.

It's becoming an increasingly aggravating issue for some voters. Rising electricity bills emerged as a campaign issue in recent elections, including during gubernatorial races won by Democrats in New Jersey and Virginia. Cost concerns are expected to surface during midterms this fall, and an analysis by the nonprofit PowerLines found residents are not likely to get a break any time soon because new gas and electricity rate hike requests could affect more than 80 million Americans. An AP-NORC poll conducted in March also found 35% of U.S. adults were "extremely" or "very" concerned about being able to afford electricity in the next few months.

"It's breaking me. And there's nothing that can be done for it, unless the president does something," Michalski said about her skyrocketing power bills, adding she no longer supports Trump. "And I don't see him doing it. He's had plenty of time."

Increased demand, extreme weather and events, upgrading and maintaining aging infrastructure and rising natural gas prices are pushing electricity bills higher. Rising energy costs — including gas pump sticker shock now topping an average \$4 per gallon nationally — could further be exacerbated by the war in Iran along with the Trump administration's push to export higher volumes of liquefied natural gas — which, in turn, depletes domestic supply. Ratepayers are also wary as more power-gobbling data centers for artificial intelligence and cloud computing are being built or warmly embraced by politicians in places like West Virginia — where residents deep in Trump country have gone from having the cheapest electricity rate nationwide in 2005, to experiencing one of the fastest increases in the country, far outpacing the national average, according to data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

All in a place where people are living atop vast deposits of coal, oil and gas.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 42 of 73

King Coal

Coal remains king here, but it wears a pricey crown. The state is an outlier nationwide because of its stubborn resistance to adopting cleaner, cheaper sources of energy, such as nuclear power, natural gas — even though it's one of the nation's top producers — and renewables like wind and solar. Instead, West Virginia clings to aging coal-fired electric plants more than anywhere else in the country — about 87% of all production. Its supermajority Republican-led government — there are only 11 Democrats in the House and Senate — has doubled down on this reliance, blaming past Democratic administrations for a war on coal fueled by increased federal regulations and restrictions, while Trump poses for photo ops with coal miners at the White House and regularly touts "beautiful, clean coal."

"Lowering electricity prices is a top priority for President Trump," said White House spokeswoman Taylor Rogers, blaming former President Joe Biden for the problem. "He is aggressively unleashing reliable energy sources like coal and natural gas."

Trump has forced unprofitable coal-powered plants to remain open, rolled back pollution standards for them and provided hundreds of millions of dollars in funding to improve them. He's also streamlined permitting and regulations to push for mining expansion when coal mines have been shutting down in the state, including several operations this year that eliminated more than 700 jobs.

"If you're not 100% in on coal, then you're a traitor. ... It's like a measure of patriotism," said Jamie Van Nostrand, policy director at the nonprofit Future of Heat Initiative and a former West Virginia University professor who wrote a book about the state's reliance on coal energy. "I think if you went to the average West Virginian and said, 'Yeah, we understand you want to support the coal industry, but do you want to support it to the extent that you're OK paying twice as much as you should be for electricity?'"

The state's average household electricity rate per kilowatt-hour has surged 73%, natural gas has increased 51% per 1,000 cubic feet and water has risen 45% per 1,000 gallons from 2015 to 2025, according to West Virginia's Public Service Commission, a three-member panel. It includes a former power company lobbyist and the former head of the state coal association — appointed by the governor and charged with approving rate hikes.

Even though monthly bills remain higher in other states, salaries in West Virginia have simply not kept pace — it's the only place in the country where the median inflation-adjusted household income was lower in 2023 than it was in 1970, according to the Urban Institute. That means residents are seeing larger chunks of their paychecks going to utilities compared to people in other places.

Michalski, who's disabled and uses a walker to get around, said she tries not to run anything in her house that can suck electricity, including her air conditioning in summer. But she simply can't turn off the heater. During the past year, her statements totaled over \$5,000. She asked family for help paying the bill this winter, but said she's now out of options.

She knows what's next.

"They come and cut off your power. Then you're sitting in the dark. And I see that happening," she said. "And I think for a lot of other people, it's gonna happen too."

"It only makes the rich richer"

Isolated by its beautiful, rugged mountains, West Virginia sits entirely within Appalachia and has long been listed at the bottom of a laundry list of failings, including poor health and a lack of education. Many residents from rural areas have lived on the same land for generations, watching a cycle of outside companies profit from extracting the state's resources — from timber to coal and oil and gas — only to pollute and abandon communities afterward. Its people are known for being fiercely independent and proud despite their hardships, including a lack of clean drinking water that has persisted for decades in some areas, forcing residents in the southern coal fields to ferry jugs to and from roadside springs or abandoned mines while spending up to \$250 a month for bottled water to cook with and drink. They also pay for public water piped into their homes that often runs black, yellow and brown.

Some, including those living in scenic areas where tourism is a major revenue driver, are protesting Big Tech companies rushing to build enormous data centers, fearing they could lead to the next cycle of

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 43 of 73

outsiders taking advantage of the state's resources. They have been loud over a lack of public input and transparency around plans to build the complexes, questioning noise pollution, huge water consumption and the effect on ratepayers' electricity prices.

"We just roll back regulations and we keep being promised that deregulating and privatizing our systems is gonna fix everything, and it never does," said Caitlin Ware, a pastor who advocates for clean water in southern West Virginia — her thoughts briefly interrupted as the electricity abruptly went off in her Sandyville United Methodist Church. "It only makes the rich richer, and it only puts us in a worse situation."

In February, Gov. Patrick Morrisey proudly announced plans to build a data center on nearly 550 acres in Berkeley County.

"This \$4 billion investment is a historic win that proves West Virginia can compete at the highest level for the global tech economy," he said in a statement. It did not explain where the water or electricity would come from to run the 600 megawatt, 1.9 million square foot facility.

Morrisey's office did not respond to a request for comment.

Skyrocketing electricity costs and the growth of data centers, which can use enough power to run 100,000 homes, faced voter backlash in Georgia last fall where Democrats ousted two Republicans on the state's utility regulatory commission for the first time in nearly two decades. Trump recently tried to ease Americans' concerns by announcing a "ratepayer protection" pledge at the White House with Big Tech companies promising to bear the cost and produce their own energy, though it's not clear how that would be enforced.

The reasons behind nationwide utility price hikes are complex and vary among regions. They include adding new transmission, distribution lines and power poles; increased brutal high and low temperatures; extreme weather events such as hurricanes and wildfires; and volatility in fuel costs such as surging gas prices during the war in Ukraine.

These all play a huge role in rising bills that have left some 80 million Americans struggling to pay their monthly gas and electric bills, said Charles Hua, founder of consumer advocacy organization PowerLines that found investor-owned gas and electric utility companies asked for nearly \$31 billion in increases last year nationwide, double the amount requested a year earlier. He said utility costs have become the new affordability issue akin to soaring egg prices that previously enraged consumers, making it a possible player in this fall's elections to control Congress.

"Electric bills have gone up 40% over the last five years," he said. "This is likely to continue to rise. This is definitely something that the Trump administration and President Trump are very concerned about."

In West Virginia, all 55 counties voted for Trump in 2024. But it was a Democratic stronghold for decades prior to the switch when coal mines were the lifeblood, and unions were virtually unbreakable. The state has struggled immensely under both parties: It has experienced a major brain drain, a devastating opioid epidemic, a growing elderly population and its coveted coal industry jobs have dried up with nothing to replace them. That leaves people who work minimum wage jobs, those on fixed incomes and even college-educated middle-class families with two paychecks being pushed to the breaking point with affordability issues, including rising car insurance, grocery bills, health care and housing.

Ashley Nicole Dixon of Danese works as a manager at a Dollar General store and has a teenage daughter at home and another in college. She flipped through bills on her phone totaling more than \$5,000 charged last year for electricity in her house that's just over 1,000 square feet, even though her air conditioner didn't work last summer. She voted for Trump, but said she's done with him because he and other Republican politicians in West Virginia's Capitol aren't looking out for her interests.

"I love West Virginia because it's beautiful. But anymore, it's just a sham from the local government all the way up to Charleston," she said, adding she believes the state's Public Service Commission should be elected, and Trump should send her a check since he promised to cut electricity bills in half.

"I have no choice. It has to be paid," she said. "And that's what makes me sick because now I'm going to have to go ... take more money out of my savings account just to keep the lights on."

"Why is this so high?"

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 44 of 73

The coldest winter months were the hardest. Some people confined themselves to one room with small space heaters or used generators when they got behind on their electricity bills and were disconnected. Others were forced to choose between food, medicine and warmth, with some turning their thermostats down to 60 degrees and bundling up or coming out of retirement to take part-time jobs.

For some, the spiral began in November when their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, benefits were put on hold due to the federal government shutdown. United Way's Central West Virginia helpline saw more than a 1,300% increase during that time, and calls for help paying utilities were second only to housing last year.

More than one in three West Virginia households is considered energy burdened, spending more than 6% of their income on electricity and other fuel costs. Of those, about 20% are low-income residents who shoulder some of the highest energy costs in the state.

Last year, Trump fired the staff of a federal program that assists millions of low-income Americans with heating bills in the winter and proposed eliminating all of its funding in his budget — a move repeated this year. Congress allocated money for it, but billions of dollars were delayed due to the shutdown. However, many West Virginians falling behind on bills are not eligible to apply because they make just a little too much money.

Jennifer Brown of Kingwood lands in that category. She's employed at West Virginia's federally funded Head Start program for low-income children and her husband is a postal worker. They have four kids and during the winter months, their combined utilities can climb to \$1,000 a month, eclipsing their \$798 mortgage. They were on a payment plan for their gas this winter after receiving a shut-off notice, and she said they were still paying off a water bill from their previous home.

"Every month we get our utility bills, I'm so angry. I'm like, 'Why is this so high?'" she said, adding it's not unusual to pay \$200 to \$300 for electricity and the same for water, sewage and garbage combined every month. "And we can't figure it out. Nothing seems to be wrong ... and we're not wasteful."

Bills introduced that would have temporarily frozen electricity rates in West Virginia or helped those who are most vulnerable went nowhere this year in the state legislature even though increased energy costs are often passed on to ratepayers. The Public Service Commission has approved a flurry of rate hikes in recent years as private utilities grapple with maintaining profits while improving infrastructure in a mountainous, sparsely populated state.

It's been a particularly tough burden for some small businesses to carry. In the western town of Ravenswood, just across the river from Ohio, some shop owners were forced to shut down this winter because they couldn't pay their electric bills.

Heather Santee said the power at her bakery was abruptly terminated just ahead of Valentine's Day. She was behind on her bill, but said she would have been able to pay the necessary chunk of the \$4,000 she owed if she could have stayed open long enough to fulfill the holiday orders. Instead, the shut-off forced her out, leaving the tenants living in apartments upstairs without heat too.

"Once I started getting those high electric bills in the winter, I was like, 'This will be what closes me down,'" she said, adding the bakery was her dream and the loss has her thinking maybe it would be better to just leave the state altogether. "West Virginia is holding back a lot of people because they are allowing these bills to be so high."

She's not alone. Just a couple blocks down the street, Anthony Carihfield Jones packed up his overstock retail shop, JCD Bargain and Trade, moving inventory to another warehouse because he can no longer afford to pay thousands of dollars in electricity charges for his home and businesses.

Even though he still supports Trump, after leaving the Democrats to vote Republican, he's becoming increasingly concerned that neither party cares about struggling people in America.

"All I heard was ... 'Drill, baby, drill,'" he said, repeating Trump's popular catch phrase to encourage domestic energy production. "OK. Well, they're drillin'. Why's my bill the same?"

Trump's Iran war widens rift with European nationalists once viewed as MAGA allies

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI and JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

BUDAPEST, Hungary (AP) — When President Donald Trump returned to the White House last year, he was eager to pick up where he left off by strengthening ties with Europe's right wing. But now many of those same factions are expressing open revulsion at the Iran war, rupturing relationships that were supposed to usher in a new international order.

Although Vice President JD Vance campaigned for Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán this week, such a display has become the exception rather than the rule among conservatives and far-right leaders in Europe.

Italian prime minister Giorgia Meloni refused to let the United States use an air base in Sicily to launch attacks on Iran. France's National Rally leader Marine Le Pen described his war goals as "erratic." And the head of Germany's Alternative for Germany party called for American troops to leave their bases in the country.

Even with a fragile ceasefire in place with Iran, Trump's support for Orbán may not work out for the autocratic Hungarian leader, who faces a tough election this weekend. He's long been an icon for the global right and many American conservatives who have hoped the Trump administration could replicate the Hungarian leader's effort to choke off immigration and restructure government to ensure his Fidesz party stays in power.

That longstanding connection could insulate Orbán from some of the anti-Trump blowback rattling the rest of Europe, but that's not guaranteed, said Charles Kupchan, a professor of international relations at Georgetown University and a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

"Getting a blessing from Donald Trump is now a mixed blessing," he said.

Iran adds to friction over Greenland

The backlash over the war follows European broad revulsion at Trump's threats earlier this year against NATO ally Denmark over his demand that the country give Greenland to the United States.

Trump tied the two issues together on Wednesday, complaining that NATO didn't help more in recent weeks.

"NATO WASN'T THERE WHEN WE NEEDED THEM, AND THEY WON'T BE THERE IF WE NEED THEM AGAIN," he wrote on social media. "REMEMBER GREENLAND, THAT BIG, POORLY RUN, PIECE OF ICE!!!"

Daniel Baer, a former ambassador and State Department official in President Barack Obama's administration, said the latest round of tension with Europe's far right shows the limits of Trump's hope of helping nationalist leaders worldwide.

"Building some sort of international coalition around national chauvinism is very difficult," said Baer, now with the Carnegie Endowment for Peace. "It's clear the majority of people in these countries, if not anti-American, have turned anti-Trump."

Orbán has stood out for not shifting with the anti-Trump political tide in Europe.

In an interview with conservative British broadcaster GB News last month, Orbán argued that when it came to the war with Iran, "the question is whether (Trump) has started a war or a peace."

"It hasn't (been) decided yet, historians will make a decision on that," Orbán said. "I think we need some time to understand whether we are moving to the peace by these strikes, or just the opposite. It's too early to say."

Orbán's caution toward raising any critical word toward Trump goes beyond shared ideology. The Hungarian leader has for years sought to convince voters that his close ties with Trump — as well as with other global figures such as Russian President Vladimir Putin — make him uniquely suited to represent Hungary's interests abroad.

Consequently, he has played up Trump's praise of him to his base, and campaigned for reelection by assuring Hungarians that his alliance with Trump's administration is a guarantee of security and prosperity.

Orbán risks backlash with Trump ties

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 46 of 73

Orbán reveled in the attention from Vance this week. The vice president slammed Orbán critics in the European Union for what he called “foreign interference” in the election, even as he stumped for the Hungarian leader.

On Wednesday, Vance briefly discussed what he called a “fragile truce” in the Iran war during an appearance at an elite higher education institution in Hungary, which has received generous funding from Orbán’s government and is run by the prime minister’s political director.

Vance praised the school for being “an institution that tries to build up the foundations of Western civilization.” The Trump administration has tried to exert more influence over elite universities in the U.S., echoing Orbán’s agenda in Hungary.

Some analysts are unconvinced of Orbán’s strategy, noting that perceptions of the current U.S. administration have been turning more negative even in Hungary.

“Vance’s visit could have the opposite effect on Orbán’s popularity than the one intended,” said Mario Bikarsku, senior Europe analyst at risk intelligence company Verisk Maplecroft.

Kupchan said most European far-right parties have established political staying power independent of any American influence, and may not have an incentive to go along with Trump’s agenda.

“Trump’s effort to create a transnational movement of far-right populists may affect the margins, but the main reason you’re seeing Reform U.K. and AfD and National Rally and other far-right parties prosper has little to do with Trump and more to do with national factors,” he said.

Part of that is a global backlash against any party in power. In Europe, that’s mainly benefited the out-of-power far-right. But in Hungary, that’s put Orbán’s future in jeopardy — he’s been in power for 16 years.

“We’re living in an age,” Kupchan said, “where being an incumbent sucks.”

‘Climate change is kicking our butts.’ March smashes heat records for continental US

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — March’s persistent unseasonable heat was so intense that the continental United States registered its most abnormally hot month in 132 years of records, according to federal weather data. And the next year or so looks to turn the dial up on global warmth even more, as some forecasts predict a brewing El Niño will reach superstrength.

Not only was it the hottest March on record for the U.S., but the amount it was above normal beat any other month in history for the Lower 48 states. March’s average temperature of 50.85 degrees Fahrenheit (10.47 degrees Celsius) was 9.35 F (5.19 C) above the 20th century normal for March. That easily passed the old record of 8.9 F (4.9 C) set in March 2012 as the most abnormally hot month on record — regardless of the month of the year — according to records released Wednesday by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The average maximum temperature for March was especially high at 11.4 F (6.3 C) above the 20th century average and was almost a degree warmer than the average daytime high for April, NOAA said.

Six of the nation’s top 10 most abnormally hot months have been in the last 10 years. This February, which was 6.57 F (3.65 C) above 20th century normal, was the tenth highest above normal.

“What we experienced in March across the United States was unprecedented,” said Shel Winkley, a meteorologist with Climate Central, a nonprofit science research group.

“One reason that’s so concerning is just the sheer volume of records, all-time records that were set and broken during that time period,” Winkley said. “But also this is coming on the heels of what was the worst snow year. And the hottest winter of record.”

Records keep being broken

April 2025 to March 2026 was the warmest 12-month period on record in the continental United States, according to NOAA.

On March 20 and 21, about one-third of the nation felt unseasonable heat that would have been virtually impossible without human-caused climate change, Climate Central calculated.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 47 of 73

More than 19,800 daily temperature records were broken for heat across the country, according to meteorologist Guy Walton, who analyzes NOAA data. More than 2,000 places set monthly records for heat — harder to break than daily records — Walton calculated. That's more March heat records set just last month than in entire decades in the past.

All those broken records "tells us that climate change is kicking our butts," said meteorologist Jeff Masters of Yale Climate Connections.

"January through March period was the driest on record for the contiguous U.S. So not only was it hot, it was record dry as well," Masters said. "And that's a bad combination for water availability, for agriculture, for river levels, for navigation."

Here comes a whopping El Nino

The European climate and weather service Copernicus and NOAA are both forecasting a "super" strong El Niño to form in a few months and intensify into the winter. Meteorologists expect that to increase already warm temperatures across the globe, likely pushing past the hottest year mark set by 2024.

An El Niño is a natural temporary and cyclical warming of parts of the central Pacific that alters weather across the planet. An El Niño is formed when a specific part of the ocean is 0.5 degrees Celsius (0.9 F) warmer than normal. It is considered moderate at 1 degree Celsius and strong at 1.5 degrees Celsius. Both NOAA and the Europeans are forecasting this one to be well above 2 degrees Celsius into an area that is informally called super sized and perhaps rivaling records set in 2015 and 2016.

An El Niño releases heat stored in the upper ocean into the air, which causes global temperatures to rise, but with a few months lag time, said Northern Illinois University meteorology professor Victor Gensini.

"A strong El Niño could plausibly push global temperatures to new record levels in late 2026 and into 2027," Gensini said.

El Nino could alter weather patterns for years

Super-sized El Niños often trigger a "climate regime shift," which pushes normal conditions into a different pattern for years or decades, according to a study last December in the journal Nature Communications. The study said after the 2015-2016 El Niño, the Gulf of Mexico jumped to a new sustained level of warmth that may have contributed to stronger hurricanes along the Gulf Coast in the years after.

Growing research seems to indicate that a warming world from the burning of coal, oil and natural gas could be making El Niños stronger, but climate scientists said that's not quite a consensus yet.

"Global warming is supercharging El Niños and the atmospheric warming they drive," said University of Michigan environment dean and climate scientist Jonathan Overpeck. "We saw this in 2016 and more recently in 2023. We're likely to see another jump in global temperatures if a strong El Niño develops later this year as being predicted."

El Niños tend to tamp down hurricane activity in the Atlantic, but ramp it up in the Pacific and could help ease the southwestern drought, Masters said.

Ceasefire is threatened as Israel expands Lebanon strikes and Iran closes strait again

By BASSEM MROUE, JON GAMBRELL, SAMY MAGDY and SAM METZ Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — A ceasefire deal to pause the war in Iran appeared to hang by a thread Wednesday after the Islamic Republic closed the Strait of Hormuz again in response to Israeli attacks in Lebanon. The White House demanded that the channel be reopened and sought to keep peace talks on track.

The U.S. and Iran both claimed victory after reaching the agreement, and world leaders expressed relief, even as more drones and missiles hit Iran and Gulf Arab countries. At the same time, Israel intensified its attacks on the Hezbollah militant group in Lebanon, hitting commercial and residential areas in Beirut. At least 182 people were killed Wednesday in the deadliest day of fighting there.

The fresh violence threatened to scuttle what U.S. Vice President JD Vance called a "fragile" deal.

Parliament speaker accuses US of breaking Iran's conditions

The Iranian parliament speaker said planned talks were "unreasonable" because Washington broke three

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 48 of 73

of Tehran's 10 conditions for an end to the fighting. In a social media post, Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf objected to Israeli attacks on Hezbollah, an alleged drone incursion into Iranian airspace after the ceasefire took effect and U.S. refusal to accept any Iranian enrichment capabilities in a final agreement.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi insisted that an end to the war in Lebanon was part of the ceasefire deal, but Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and U.S. President Donald Trump said the truce did not cover Lebanon. When the deal was announced, Pakistan's prime minister, whose country served as a mediator, said in a social media post that it applied to "everywhere including Lebanon and elsewhere."

Lebanon's health ministry said Israeli strikes killed 182 people on Wednesday, the highest single-day death toll in the Israel-Hezbollah war.

"The world sees the massacres in Lebanon," Iran's Araghchi said in a post on X. "The ball is in the U.S. court, and the world is watching whether it will act on its commitments."

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said the closing of the Strait of Hormuz, reported in Iranian state media, was "completely unacceptable." She repeated Trump's "expectation and demand" that the channel be reopened.

U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said American and Israeli forces had achieved a "capital V military victory" and that the Iranian military no longer posed a significant threat to U.S. forces or the region. The Iranian military said the country forced Israel and the U.S. to accept its "proposed conditions and surrender."

Much about the agreement was unclear as the sides presented vastly different visions of the terms.

Iran said the deal would allow it to formalize its new practice of charging ships passing through the strait, a crucial transit lane for oil. The White House said Trump is opposed to tolls for ship passage through the strait.

Only 11 vessels moved through the strait Wednesday, roughly the same as in prior days, according to Windward, a maritime intelligence firm. Iran was requiring shippers to pay tolls of up to \$1 a barrel for outbound oil, it said. The largest supertankers carry up to 3 million barrels of crude.

The fate of Iran's missile and nuclear programs — the elimination of which were major objectives for the U.S. and Israel in going to war — also remained unclear. Trump said the U.S. would work with Iran to remove buried enriched uranium, though Iran did not confirm that.

White House looks ahead to peace talks

Trump initially said Iran proposed a "workable" plan that could help end the war that the U.S. and Israel launched on Feb. 28. But when a version in Farsi emerged indicating Iran would be allowed to continue enriching uranium — key to building a nuclear weapon — Trump called it fraudulent.

Leavitt said a plan that Iran presented Tuesday could "align with our own" proposal for peace.

The White House said Vance would lead American negotiators at upcoming peace talks, which could begin in Pakistan as soon as Friday.

Iran's demands for ending the war include a withdrawal of U.S. combat forces from the region, the lifting of sanctions and the release of its frozen assets.

Meanwhile, Israeli Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Eyal Zamir said Israel will continue to "utilize every operational opportunity" to strike Hezbollah. The Israeli military said it struck more than 100 targets within 10 minutes Wednesday across Lebanon, the largest wave of strikes since March 1.

Arab League chief Ahmed Aboul Gheit accused Israel of "persistently seeking to sabotage" the ceasefire deal.

Hezbollah has not confirmed if it will abide by the ceasefire, though the group has said it was open to giving mediators a chance to secure an agreement.

Early on Thursday Hezbollah said it had fired rockets at northern Israel and would continue doing so "until the Israeli-American aggression against our country and our people ceases."

Iran and Oman could collect shipping fees in Strait of Hormuz

Iranian attacks and threats deterred many commercial ships from using the strait, through which 20% of all traded oil and natural gas passes in peacetime. That roiled the world economy and raised the pressure on Trump both at home and abroad to find a way out of the standoff.

The ceasefire may formalize a system of charging fees in the strait that Iran instituted — and give it a

new source of revenue.

That would upend decades of precedent treating the strait as an international waterway that was free to transit. Such a shift would likely be unacceptable to the Gulf Arab states, which also need to rebuild after repeated Iranian attacks targeting their oil fields.

Iran's nuclear and missile threats survive

U.S.-Israeli strikes have battered Iran and its leadership, but they have not eliminated the threats posed by Tehran's nuclear program, its ballistic missiles or its support for regional proxies, like Hezbollah. The U.S. and Israel said addressing those threats was a key justification for going to war.

Trump said the U.S. would work with Iran to "dig up and remove" enriched uranium. There was no confirmation from Iran.

Hegseth told a Pentagon briefing Wednesday that the U.S. would do "something like" last June's joint strikes with Israel on Iranian nuclear sites if Iran refuses to surrender its enriched uranium voluntarily.

Netanyahu warned in a televised address that Israel was "ready to return to fighting at any time. Our finger is on the trigger."

Tehran has insisted for years that its nuclear program was peaceful, although it has enriched uranium up to 60% purity, a short, technical step from weapons-grade levels.

Airstrikes reported despite ceasefire announcement

Shortly after the ceasefire announcement, Bahrain, Israel, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates all issued warnings about incoming missiles from Iran. That fire stopped for a time, then hostilities appeared to restart.

An oil refinery on Iran's Lavan Island came under attack, according to Iranian state television. A short time later, the UAE's air defenses fired at an incoming Iranian missile barrage.

More than 1,900 people had been killed in Iran as of late March, but the government has not updated the toll for days.

In Lebanon, more than 1,700 people have been killed, and 1 million people have been displaced. Twelve Israeli soldiers have died.

In Gulf Arab states and the occupied West Bank, more than two dozen people have died, while 23 have been reported dead in Israel, and 13 U.S. service members have been killed.

Appeals court rebuffs Anthropic in latest round of its AI battle with the Trump administration

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal appeals court on Wednesday refused to block the Pentagon from black-listing artificial intelligence laboratory Anthropic in a decision that differed from the conclusions reached in another judge's ruling on the same issues.

The U.S. Court of Appeals in Washington, D.C., rejected Anthropic's request for an order that would shield the San Francisco company from the fallout stemming from a dispute over how the Pentagon could deploy its Claude chatbot in fully autonomous weapons and potential surveillance of Americans while the panel is still collecting evidence about the case.

But the setback in Washington came after Anthropic already had prevailed in separate case focused on the same issues in San Francisco federal court. In that case, a judge forced President Donald Trump's administration to remove a label tainting the company as a national security risk.

Anthropic filed the two separate lawsuits in San Francisco and the Washington appeals court last month, asserting the Trump administration was engaging in an "unlawful campaign of retaliation" because of its attempt to impose limits on how its AI technology can be deployed. The Trump administration blasted Anthropic as a liberal-leaning company trying to dictate U.S. military policy.

In the San Francisco case, U.S. District Judge Rita Lin ruled that the Trump administration had overstepped its bounds by labeling Anthropic a supply chain risk unqualified to work with military contractors and issuing other directives that could cripple a company locked in a race for AI supremacy against rivals such as ChatGPT maker Open AI and Google.

That decision prompted the Trump administration to remove the stigmatizing labels from Anthropic and take other steps clearing the way for government employees and contractors to continue using Claude and other chatbots, according to court filing made in San Francisco earlier this week.

The appeals court in Washington didn't see things the same way, even though it conceded the company would "likely suffer some degree of irreparable harm" if it's deemed a supply chain risk. But the appeals court didn't see sufficient reason to issue its own order revoking the Trump administration's actions, partly because "the precise amount of Anthropic's financial harm is not fully clear."

Further evidence in the case is scheduled to be presented before the appeals court in a hearing scheduled for May 19.

"We're grateful the court recognized these issues need to be resolved quickly and remain confident the courts will ultimately agree that these supply chain designations were unlawful," Anthropic said in a statement.

Matt Schruers, the CEO of the technology trade group Computer & Communications Industry Association, expressed worries that the conflicting court decisions issued so far in the standoff between Anthropic and the Trump administration will muddle the business landscape at a pivotal time.

"The Pentagon's actions and the DC Circuit's ruling create substantial business uncertainty at a time when U.S. companies are competing with global counterparts to lead in AI," Schruers said.

Legendary mountaineer Jim Whittaker, the first American to summit Mount Everest, dies at 97

By GENE JOHNSON and MARTHA BELLISLE Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — The celebrated mountaineer Jim Whittaker, the first American to summit Mount Everest, has died. He was 97.

Whittaker, who also served as the first full-time employee of the outdoor retailer REI and later as its president and CEO, died Tuesday at his home in Port Townsend, Washington, according to a statement from his family.

"Whether at home, in the mountains, or at sea, he sought to share adventure, joy, and optimism with those around him," said the statement, which was emailed by Leif Whittaker, one of his sons. "His warmth, humility, and belief in the power of nature to bring people together left an enduring legacy of care for our planet and for one another."

Whittaker's 1963 ascent of Everest alongside Nawang Gombu came 10 years after the pioneering climb of Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay. The feat helped spawn interest — and an industry — in mountaineering in the U.S., and it made the once-shy, rangy climber an instant celebrity. He was featured on magazine covers and in demand for public appearances.

Whittaker had been working for REI since 1955, when he was hired by the co-op's co-founder, Lloyd Anderson. The company's popularity surged after Whittaker's Everest climb, and Whittaker went on to lead the business from 1971 to 1979. Its membership grew from nearly 250,000 to more than 900,000 during his tenure, REI noted in a statement Wednesday.

The co-op credited his congressional testimony and other efforts with helping to establish North Cascades National Park and the Pasayten Wilderness in Washington, as well as and Redwood National Park in California.

"Long before outdoor advocacy was commonplace, Jim gave his voice — and his leadership — to protecting the places we love, reminding us that wild places endure only if we choose to care for them," the statement said.

Whittaker's celebrity also brought him into the orbit of the Kennedy clan, and he became a close friend of Robert Kennedy, with whom he climbed a 14,000-foot (4,267 meters) Canadian peak. The peak was later named Mount Kennedy after the presidential contender's murder in 1968.

Whittaker was at Kennedy's bedside when he died and was devastated by the assassination.

Whittaker grew up in Seattle and began climbing with his twin brother Lou Whittaker in the 1940s with

the Boy Scouts. At 16, they summited 7,965-foot (2,428-meter) Mount Olympus, the highest peak in the Olympic Mountains west of Seattle, Jim Whittaker recounted in his memoir, "A Life on the Edge." When they reached the town of Port Angeles on their way home, they found cars honking and people celebrating: World War II had ended.

Jim Whittaker once reflected that the beauty and danger of his sport sharpened the senses: "When you live on the edge, you can see a little farther," he once reflected.

His achievements on the remote, snowy slopes of Mount Everest and nearby K2, the world's second-tallest peak, assured him a niche in the record books. He was shocked when Lou decided to skip the 1963 Everest expedition in favor of opening a sporting goods store in Tacoma.

But Lou Whittaker wrote in his own book, "Lou Whittaker: Memoirs of a Mountain Guide," that he still got to share in some of his twin's glory by filling in when Jim got tired of attending parades or other events in his honor.

"Only our families and closest friends ever knew the difference," he wrote.

Lou Whittaker died in 2024 at age 95.

Jim Whittaker led many additional climbs, including the 1990 Mount Everest International Peace Climb, which brought together climbers from the U.S., the Soviet Union and China "to demonstrate what could be accomplished through cooperation and goodwill," the family statement said.

"Jim was a lifelong advocate for peace and believed deeply in the ability of shared challenges in the natural world to unite people across borders and ideologies," it said.

Whittaker himself said one of his proudest moments came in 1981, when he led 10 handicapped climbers up 14,410-foot Mount Rainier. For them, he said later, "that was Mount Everest."

Whittaker scaled Mount Rainier more than 100 times but did not take its familiar flanks for granted. The caprices of the weather, even on a comparatively modest mountain, "can turn a good climber into a beginner" in a matter of hours, he once noted.

Former Washington Gov. Jay Inslee called Whittaker's legacy "just as impressive, and just as lasting, as Mount Rainier itself."

"He pulled many a climber up the peak," Inslee wrote in a social media post Wednesday. "He did the same for all our spirits. He still does."

After years of risk on the world's most dizzying pinnacles, Whittaker said in a 1980 interview that he hoped to "die in my sleep with the television on."

He is survived by his wife of 52 years, Dianne Roberts; sons Bob, Joss and Leif Whittaker; three grandchildren; and one great-grandchild.

Guatemalan man pleads guilty in federal court after truck crash in Mexico killed over 50 migrants

LAREDO, Texas (AP) — A Guatemalan man pleaded guilty Wednesday in federal court to a felony offense and acknowledged his involvement in an attempt to illegally smuggle migrants to the U.S. when a jampacked tractor-trailer truck crashed in Mexico in 2021, killing more than 50 migrants.

Daniel Zavala Ramos, 42, faces a possible sentence of life in prison following his guilty plea in U.S. District Court in Laredo, Texas, to a single charge of conspiring to bring migrants without documents from Guatemala through Mexico to the U.S. and placing lives in jeopardy and causing serious injury and deaths, the U.S. Department of Justice said.

Sentencing is set for July 7.

Ramos was among six Guatemalans charged over the crash of the semitrailer truck and the first to be convicted. The other five have a final pretrial conference on June 3, according to court records. Ramos' attorney did not immediately return an email Wednesday evening seeking comment.

At least 160 migrants, many from Guatemala, were packed into the truck that hit the support base for a pedestrian bridge on Dec. 9, 2021, and overturned, authorities said. At least 53 people were killed and more than 100 were injured, officials said, and video footage at the time of the crash showed dead and

injured migrants in a jumbled pile inside the truck's collapsed freight container.

The Justice Department statement said the dead included unaccompanied children.

The crash occurred on a highway leading toward the Chiapas state capital, some 160 miles (260 kilometers) from Mexico's border with Guatemala and about 1,400 miles (2,300 kilometers) south of the Mexican border with Texas.

Authorities announced the arrests of Ramos and the five other defendants in Guatemala and Texas in 2024, on the third anniversary of the accident. Ramos was extradited in 2025 from Guatemala to face charges, the DOJ statement said.

Prosecutors said the Guatemalans conspired to smuggle migrants from Guatemala through Mexico to the U.S. for payment. In cases of unaccompanied children being smuggled, the defendants would provide scripts of what to say if they were apprehended, authorities said.

The smugglers would move migrants on foot, inside minibuses, cattle trucks and tractor trailers and use Facebook Messenger to request and deliver identification documents to the migrants to get them into the U.S., according to authorities.

Trump complains NATO 'wasn't there when we needed them' after talks with alliance leader Rutte

By MICHELLE L. PRICE and COLLIN BINKLEY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump repeated his complaint about NATO after a closed-door meeting with the alliance's Secretary-General Mark Rutte on Wednesday for discussions that had been expected to be aimed at soothing Trump's anger with the military alliance over the Iran war.

Ahead of the private meeting, Trump had suggested the U.S. may consider leaving the trans-Atlantic alliance after NATO member countries ignored his call to help as Iran effectively shut the the Strait of Hormuz, a vital shipping waterway, and sent gas prices soaring.

Afterward, he issued an all-caps comment on social media suggesting he remained aggrieved. "NATO WASN'T THERE WHEN WE NEEDED THEM, AND THEY WON'T BE THERE IF WE NEED THEM AGAIN," Trump said in his post. The White House did not immediately offer any further updates.

The Republican president has had a warm relationship with Rutte in the past, and the meeting came after the U.S. and Iran late Tuesday agreed to a two-week ceasefire that includes the reopening of the strait. The nascent ceasefire was struck after Trump said he would strike Iran's power plants and bridges, threatening that "a whole civilization will die tonight."

Earlier Wednesday, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt acknowledged that Trump had discussed leaving NATO. "I think it's something the president will be discussing in a couple of hours with Secretary-General Rutte," Leavitt said.

Congress in 2023 passed a law that prevents any U.S. president from pulling out of NATO without its approval. Trump has been a longtime critic of NATO and in his first term had suggested he had the authority on his own to leave the alliance, which was founded in 1949 to counter the Cold War threat posed to European security by the Soviet Union.

The crux of the commitment its 32 member countries make is a mutual defense agreement in which an attack on one is considered an attack on them all. The only time it has been activated was in 2001, to support the United States in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks on New York and Washington.

Despite that, Trump has complained during his war of choice with Iran that NATO has shown it will not be there for the U.S. On Wednesday, he also seemed to be angry about NATO's stance on Greenland, a semi-autonomous territory of NATO member Denmark. Trump had pressed for U.S. control over Greenland earlier this year before backing off after talks with Rutte.

"REMEMBER GREENLAND, THAT BIG, POORLY RUN, PIECE OF ICE!!!" Trump posted Wednesday.

There is a law barring a president from pulling out of NATO

It's unclear if the Trump administration would challenge the law barring a president from pulling out of NATO. When the law passed, it was championed by Trump's current secretary of state, Marco Rubio, who

at the time was a senator from Florida.

Rubio met separately with Rutte on Wednesday morning at the State Department ahead of the White House talks. In a statement, the State Department said Rubio and Rutte had discussed the war with Iran, along with U.S. efforts to negotiate an end to the Russia-Ukraine war and "increasing coordination and burden shifting with NATO allies."

Ahead of Trump's meeting, Sen. Mitch McConnell, a Kentucky Republican, issued a statement Tuesday night in support of the alliance, noting, "Following the September 11th attacks, NATO allies sent their young servicemembers to fight and die alongside America's own in Afghanistan and Iraq." McConnell, who sits on a committee overseeing defense spending, urged Trump to be "clear and consistent" and said it's not in America's interest to "spend more time nursing grudges with allies who share our interests than deterring adversaries who threaten us."

The alliance was already rattled over the past year as Trump returned to power and reduced U.S. military support for Ukraine in the war against Russia and threatened to seize Greenland from ally Denmark.

But Trump's badgering of NATO intensified after the Iran war began at the end of February, with the president insisting that securing the Strait of Hormuz was not America's job but the responsibility of countries that depend on the flow of oil through it.

"Go to the strait and just take it," Trump said last week.

Trump was also angered as NATO allies Spain and France forbade or restricted use of their airspace or joint military facilities for the U.S. in the Iran war. They and other nations, however, agreed to help with an international coalition to open the Strait of Hormuz when the conflict ends.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who has been a particular source of Trump's frustration, was set to travel Wednesday to the Gulf to support the ceasefire. The U.K. has been working on developing a post-conflict security plan for the strait, a narrow waterway between Iran and Oman through which about one-fifth of the world's oil passes.

Trump has previously threatened to leave NATO and often said that he would abandon allies who don't spend enough on their military budgets. Former NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, in his recent memoir, said he feared that Trump might walk away from the alliance in 2018, during his first term as president.

How Trump went from threatening Iran's annihilation to agreeing to a 2-week ceasefire with Tehran

By AAMER MADHANI, WILL WEISSERT, JOSH BOAK and FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump, over the course of a single day, went from threatening Iran with "annihilation" to proclaiming that the battered Islamic Republic's leadership had presented a "workable" plan that led him to agree to a 14-day ceasefire that he hopes will pave the way to end the nearly six-week war.

The dramatic shift in tenor came as intermediaries led by Pakistan worked feverishly to head off a further escalation. Even China, Iran's biggest trading partner and America's most significant economic competitor, quietly pulled strings to find a path toward a ceasefire, according to two officials briefed on the matter who were not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

"The reason for doing so is that we have already met and exceeded all Military objectives, and are very far along with a definitive Agreement concerning Longterm PEACE with Iran, and PEACE in the Middle East," Trump said in a social media post Tuesday announcing the temporary ceasefire. It came about 90 minutes before his deadline for Tehran to open the critical Strait of Hormuz or see its power plants and other critical infrastructure obliterated.

But even as the White House was celebrating the moment as a victory, the fragile ceasefire appeared in danger of falling apart as the U.S., Iran and Israel offered differing statements on Wednesday on what was included in the deal less than 24 hours after it was brokered.

Iran insisted that an end to the Israeli war in Lebanon was part of the ceasefire agreement with the

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 54 of 73

U.S. But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Trump said the truce did not cover Lebanon and the Israeli operations there continued.

The U.S., meanwhile, demanded that Iran make good on reopening the strait after the Islamic Republic closed the waterway in response to Israel's intensifying attacks against the Hezbollah militant group in Lebanon.

Vice President JD Vance, who is set to lead a U.S. delegation to Pakistan later this week for mediated talks with Iran aimed at finding a permanent agreement to end the conflict, downplayed the setbacks, saying "no ceasefire ever goes without a little bit of choppiness."

"We're seeing evidence that things are going in the right direction, but it's going to take a little time," Vance told reporters as he wrapped up a visit to Hungary.

Trump to hold talks with NATO secretary-general

The president also met at the White House with NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte on Wednesday. Trump has been angry that NATO member countries ignored his call to help reopen the vital waterway as gas prices soared during the war.

As the Trump deadline for Iran to open the strait neared, Democratic lawmakers decried Trump's threat to wipe away an entire civilization as "a moral failure." Pope Leo XIV warned that strikes against civilian infrastructure would violate international law and said the Republican president's comments were "truly unacceptable."

In the end, Trump may have backed down because of a simple truth: Escalation could risk involving the United States in the sort of "forever war" that had bedeviled his predecessors in the White House and that he had vowed he would keep the U.S. out of if voters elected him again.

Controlling the strait would have been long and costly

As Trump boasted about U.S. and Israeli military success over the past six weeks, he appeared to be working from the premise that he could bomb Iran into capitulation.

Starting with the killing of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in the opening salvos, he seemed to discount that the Iranian leadership could opt for a long and bloody war.

The Islamic Republic over the past 47 years has shown it is willing to dig in, even when it appears to America to be working against its own self-interest.

The clerical leadership held Americans hostage for 444 days, from late 1979 to early 1981, at the cost of the country's international standing. The mullahs allowed the Iran-Iraq war to go on for years, leaving hundreds of thousands dead. Iran stood by Hamas after the Oct. 7, 2023, attack that ultimately defanged the Iran-backed group in Gaza as well as Hezbollah in Lebanon, and created the conditions that led to the collapse of Bashar Assad's government in Syria, an authoritarian rule supported by Tehran.

Iran's leadership exuded confidence that it could bog down the world's superpower in a costly and extended conflict even if it might not defeat the U.S. military.

Defense analysts largely agreed that the U.S. military could quickly take control of the narrow Persian Gulf waterway between Iran and Oman through which roughly 20% of the world's oil flows on any given day. But maintaining security over the strait would require a high-risk, resource-intensive operation that could be a yearslong American commitment.

Ben Connable, executive director of the nonprofit Battle Research Group, said securing the strait would require the U.S. military to maintain control of about 600 kilometers (373 miles) of Iranian territory, from Kish Island in the west to Bandar Abbas in the east, in order to stop Iran from firing missiles at passing ships. It is a mission that Connable said would likely require three U.S. infantry divisions, roughly 30,000 to 45,000 troops.

"This would be an indefinite operation — so, you know, think: be ready to do this for 20 years," said Connable, a retired Marine Corps intelligence officer. "We didn't think we were going to be in Afghanistan for 20 years. We didn't think we're going to have to be in Vietnam as long as we were, or Iraq."

The two-week ceasefire includes allowing both Iran and Oman to charge fees on ships transiting through Hormuz, a regional official said. The official said Iran would use the money it raised for reconstruction.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt on Wednesday noted that Trump has considered the idea of a toll for vessels passing through the strait. But in the near term, his priority "is the reopening of the strait without any limitations, whether in the form of tolls or otherwise."

Vance played a bigger role close to the deadline

The White House confirmed that Vance will lead the U.S. negotiating team in talks with Iran aimed at finding a permanent end to war.

The delegation is also expected to include special envoy Steve Witkoff and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner. The talks are expected to begin Friday in Pakistan's capital, Islamabad.

"Vice President Vance has played a very significant and a key role in this since the very beginning," Leavitt said.

Trump's deadline was nearing with no resolution in sight when Vance, who has long pushed for restraint in U.S. military intervention overseas, got roped into the conversation, according to an official from one of the mediating countries who was briefed on the matter and spoke on the condition of anonymity to share sensitive diplomatic discussions.

Vance expressed measured confidence that a permanent deal could be reached if the Iranians act in good faith.

"I encourage the Iranians to come to the table seriously," Vance said. "We've seen some signs that they're going to do that, we've seen some signs of bravado. Fundamentally, we're in a good spot."

Fired Universities of Wisconsin President Jay Rothman tells AP he was 'blindsided' by his ouster

By SCOTT BAUER Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Fired Universities of Wisconsin President Jay Rothman told The Associated Press on Wednesday in his first interview since the ouster that he was "blindsided" by the move but has no hard feelings and is unlikely to sue.

Rothman was fired on Tuesday night in a unanimous vote by the board of regents following a roughly 30-minute closed-door discussion. Regents have not given a reason for firing Rothman, who was in the job for just under four years.

"Absolutely I was blindsided," Rothman told the AP. He said he has still not been given a reason for his firing.

"I really don't know," Rothman said. "I asked for reasons why. They were not able to articulate any."

But Rothman, who came to the job in 2022 after serving as chair and CEO of a Milwaukee-based law firm with more than 1,000 attorneys, said he is unlikely to file a lawsuit over his firing.

"We'll have to see how circumstances develop," Rothman said. "I don't think it's likely that I would go in that direction. That's not who I am."

The AP was the first to report on April 2 that the regents had asked Rothman, 66, to retire or resign or face being fired. Rothman said on Wednesday that he considered retiring, but since regents gave him no reason, he decided against it.

Regent President Amy Bogost said in a statement before the firing that the decision was "about the future" of the 13-university system, including the flagship Madison campus, that educates about 165,000 students.

"The Universities of Wisconsin must be led with a clear vision that both protects and strengthens our flagship, supports our comprehensive universities and ensures we are meeting the evolving needs of our students, workforce and communities across all 72 counties," Bogost said.

She did not immediately return a message on Wednesday seeking comment.

Rothman did not criticize any regent by name, but he did express frustration generally with the board.

"For a board to be functional, it needs to be able to provide clarity to the management team," he said. "Not 18 different voices with different opinions and pet projects. There has to be board leadership that is

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 56 of 73

able to consolidate that, build a consensus and provide clear direction.”

Rothman said his performance objectives were not even discussed in his last review in August, which he said was “astonishing.”

Rothman spent his time as president lobbying Republican legislators to increase state aid for the system in the face of federal cuts, navigating free speech issues surrounding pro-Palestinian protests, and grappling with declining enrollment that has forced eight branch campuses to close. Overall enrollment across the system has remained steady under his leadership.

Rothman brokered a deal with Republicans in 2023 that called for freezing diversity hires and creating a position at UW-Madison focused on conservative thought in exchange for the Legislature releasing money for UW employee raises and tens of millions of dollars for construction projects across the system.

Rothman said Wednesday he didn’t know if any of those particular issues contributed to his being fired, but conceded they could have.

“When you come in to effect change and you try to move an organization forward, you have to make difficult decisions,” Rothman said. “And when you make difficult decisions, you can upset some people.”

Sen. Patrick Testin, the Republican president of the Wisconsin state Senate, called Rothman’s firing a “blatant partisan hatchet job.”

The state Senate’s committee that oversees higher education scheduled a hearing for Thursday for 10 regents whose appointments by Evers have yet to be confirmed. Testin called for the Senate to reject all 10, which would mean they could no longer serve as regents.

Rothman said he wasn’t going to speculate on why he was cut loose.

“I am disappointed with the board’s action, but I’m not angry,” he said. “This is not about retribution. I’m concerned about the future of the Universities of Wisconsin.”

Oil plunges below \$95 as the Dow surges 1,300 in a worldwide rally following a ceasefire with Iran

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Oil prices plunged below \$95 per barrel, and stock markets surged worldwide Wednesday after President Donald Trump pulled back from his threat to destroy Iran.

The S&P 500 leaped 2.5% after Trump announced a two-week ceasefire with Iran, less than 90 minutes before a deadline Trump had set for it to open the Strait of Hormuz and allow oil tankers to exit the Persian Gulf. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rallied 1,325 points, or 2.8%, and the Nasdaq composite soared 2.8% following even bigger gains in European and Asian stock markets.

To be sure, stock prices are still below where they were before the war. And oil prices are still higher because of the threat of a resumption to the war. The ceasefire already looks precarious, and Iran closed the Strait of Hormuz again Wednesday in response to Israeli attacks in Lebanon.

Such uncertainty caused some of the euphoria that fueled financial markets in the morning to fade as Wednesday’s trading progressed, and financial markets have been prone to sharp and sudden reversals since the war began.

“There is a reason to be optimistic, but it is still too early to tell, because, as you know, after all, it is Trump,” said Takashi Hiroki, chief strategist at MONEX.

So far in the war, Trump has set several deadlines for Iran to open the Strait of Hormuz, a main thoroughfare for oil to reach customers worldwide from the Persian Gulf, and has threatened big repercussions if Iran doesn’t, only to delay them.

It’s similar to a year ago, when Trump threatened stiff tariffs on imports from other countries on “Liberation Day.” After a couple delays, his administration eventually negotiated lower tariffs with many countries, though still higher than from before his second term. That led some investors to allege Trump “always chickens out,” or “TACO,” if financial markets show enough pain.

“Is it just kicking of the can down the road, moving the goalposts, TACO Tuesday, or whatever metaphor we’d like, to only to have tempers flare and bombs drop again?” Brian Jacobsen, chief economic strategist

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 57 of 73

at Annex Wealth Management, asked about the two-week ceasefire with Iran. "Who knows? But it's good enough for now to elicit a positive response from the markets."

The price for a barrel of benchmark U.S. crude oil plunged 16.4% to settle at \$94.41 after almost dropping to \$91 earlier in the morning.

Brent crude, the international standard, tumbled 13.3% to \$94.75 per barrel. It had briefly topped \$119 when worries about the war with Iran were at their highest, but it's still above its roughly \$70 price from before the war.

The next moves for oil prices will depend on how many oil tankers can start exiting the Strait of Hormuz and how easy their passage is. Despite claims from the White House on Wednesday about an uptick in ships transiting the strait, independent analysts say they have seen no change in traffic through it.

Windward, a maritime intelligence firm that tracks international shipping, said all ships transiting the strait must still coordinate safe passage with Iranian authorities, who are requiring hefty tolls of up to \$1 a barrel for outbound oil, paid in cryptocurrency. The largest supertankers carry up to 3 million barrels of crude.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said the closing of the strait reported in Iranian state media was "completely unacceptable." She repeated Trump's "expectation and demand" that the channel be reopened.

In Asia, where countries are more reliant on oil from the Middle East, South Korea's Kospi stock index surged 6.9%. Japan's Nikkei 225 leaped 5.4%, and Hong Kong's Hang Seng jumped 3.1%.

European stock indexes rose nearly as much. Germany's DAX returned 5.1%, and France's CAC 40 rallied 4.5%.

On Wall Street, companies with big fuel bills rallied to trim some of the sharp losses taken on worries about oil prices staying high.

United Airlines soared 7.9% and cut into its loss for the year, which came into the day at 20.1%. Cruise ship operator Carnival climbed 11.2%.

Delta Air Lines rose 3.7% after it reported stronger results for the latest quarter than analysts expected. CEO Ed Bastian said demand for flights remains strong, and it's making moves to make up for higher fuel bills. Delta on Tuesday became the latest airline to raise its fees for checking bags.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 165.96 points to 6,782.81. The Dow Jones Industrial Average jumped 1,325.46 to 47,909.92, and the Nasdaq composite rallied 617.15 to 22,635.00.

In the bond market, Treasury yields dropped as hopes built that easing oil prices could let the Federal Reserve resume its cuts to interest rates later this year.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury fell to 4.29% from 4.33% late Tuesday. Lower Treasury yields give a boost to prices for stocks, bonds and all kinds of other investments. They should also ease some of the recent rise in rates for mortgages and other loans taken out by U.S. households and businesses.

When oil prices were screaming higher because of the war, some traders were betting on the possibility that the Fed would have to raise interest rates to keep a lid on inflation. Now, they're seeing a nearly 25% chance that the Fed could resume its cuts to rates in 2026, according to data from CME Group.

'Ketamine Queen' gets 15 years in prison for selling Matthew Perry the drugs that killed him

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A federal judge on Wednesday handed down a sentence of 15 years in prison to a woman who pleaded guilty to selling actor Matthew Perry the ketamine that killed him in 2023.

"You're going to have to show some epic resilience," Judge Sherilyn Peace Garnett said to Jasveen Sangha, echoing the defendant's words earlier in the hearing about her self-improvement.

Citing the unique role Sangha admitted to playing in Perry's death and her broader drug-dealing business, the judge gave the 42-year-old a sentence that will almost certainly be more than all four of her co-defendants combined.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 58 of 73

The hearing Wednesday in a Los Angeles courtroom was in many ways the pinnacle of the 2 1/2-year investigation and prosecution that followed the overdose death of the 54-year-old actor, whose role as Chandler Bing on NBC's "Friends" in the 1990s and 2000s made him one of the biggest television stars of the era.

Keith Morrison, Perry's stepfather and correspondent for NBC's "Dateline," told the judge that he and Perry's mother, Suzanne, feel a "daily, grinding sadness and sorrow."

"There was a spark to that man I have never seen anywhere else," Morrison said. "He should have had another act. Two more acts."

Just before she was sentenced, Sangha told the judge she wears her shame "like a jacket."

"These were not mistakes. They were horrible decisions," Sangha said, which "shattered people's lives and the lives of their family and friends."

Prosecutors secured the exact sentence they asked for after casting Sangha as a "Ketamine Queen" who had an elaborate drug operation catering to high-end clients to give herself a jet-setting lifestyle.

Sangha's attorneys argued the time she has spent in jail since her August 2024 indictment should be sufficient, pointing to her good behavior behind bars and lack of prior arrests.

Perry was found dead in the hot tub at his Los Angeles home in October 2023. The medical examiner ruled that ketamine, typically used as a surgical anesthetic, was the primary cause of death — and drowning was a secondary cause.

Mark Geragos, Sangha's attorney, said "pernicious" addiction was truly responsible for Perry's death, not his client.

"There was nobody who was going to stop Mr. Perry from doing what he was going to do," Geragos said.

In September, Sangha became the last of five co-defendants to plead guilty, admitting to one count of using her home for drug distribution, three counts of distribution of ketamine, and one count of distribution of ketamine resulting in death.

Geragos denounced the prosecution's use of the moniker "Ketamine Queen," blaming it on E. Martin Estrada, the U.S. attorney when the case was filed.

"That was not her name, that was his very clever name to draw media attention this case," Geragos said.

Perry had been using the drug through his regular doctor as a legal off-label treatment for depression. But he sought more than the doctor would give him. That at first led him to Dr. Salvador Plasencia, who admitted to illegally selling Perry ketamine and was sentenced to 2 1/2 years in prison. And, days before his death, it led Perry to Sangha, and a \$6,000 cash buy that included the lethal dose.

Another doctor, who admitted to providing Plasencia the ketamine he sold to Perry, was sentenced to eight months of home detention. Perry's assistant and his friend, who admitted acting as the actor's middlemen, are awaiting sentencing.

The judge said she was trying to carefully calibrate the sentences for the five defendants. She expressed concern about the balance during the hearing, asking lawyers why Sangha deserved so much more time than Plasencia or Perry's assistant, Kenneth Iwamasa, who obtained and injected the drugs at Perry's request and injected them into him.

Geragos seized on this and said the disparity was outrageous.

"The person who supplies the ammunition, they're more culpable than the person who pulls the trigger?" he asked.

But before sentencing, Garnett said the size of Sangha's drug business, the years she spent dealing and her long list of clients clearly made her more culpable. And she said she believed Sangha's lack of a criminal history was underrepresented.

The judge also cited Sangha's continued dealing after learning through a text message from his sister that one of her customers, 33-year-old Cody McLaury, had died in 2019.

The sister, Kimberly McLaury, spoke in court.

"Had you stopped selling ketamine when I texted you, we wouldn't be here today," she said.

Perry's stepmother Debbie Perry told Sangha she had caused pain for "hundreds, maybe thousands" of people.

The judge commended Sangha for the “countless” letters of support she got from family and friends touting her decency and loving nature. Many of them were there in court, sitting on the opposite side from Perry’s family.

“There’s no joy in this process,” Garnett told the victim’s family members. “Maybe at the end of the day you will feel a sense of justice.”

Rex Heuermann pleads guilty to murder charges and admits he killed 8 women in the Gilgo Beach case

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

RIVERHEAD, N.Y. (AP) — A Long Island architect who led a secret life as a serial killer pleaded guilty on Wednesday to murdering seven women and admitted he killed an eighth in a string of long-unsolved crimes known as the Gilgo Beach killings.

Rex Heuermann, 62, entered the pleas in a courtroom packed with reporters, police and victims’ relatives, some of whom wept as he detailed his murders. He will be sentenced in June to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

Heuermann’s guilty pleas — to three counts of first-degree murder and four of intentional murder — bring finality to a case that bedeviled investigators, tormented victims’ families and tantalized a true-crime obsessed public for years. Although he wasn’t charged in her death, he also admitted that he killed Karen Vergata in 1996.

“This has been a long journey of hope — hope that one day we would stand here and say her name with justice beside it,” Melissa Cann, the sister of victim Maureen Brainard-Barnes, said at a news conference hours after the hearing as she fought back tears. “Today, that long, painful journey brings us to this moment.”

In court, Heuermann admitted that he strangled all eight victims and dismembered some of them before dumping their bodies.

Wearing a black suit coat and white button-down shirt, Heuermann appeared matter-of-fact and unemotional as he answered questions from Suffolk County District Attorney Ray Tierney and the judge. He never looked back at the packed courtroom gallery.

The women, many of them sex workers, were killed over a 17-year span.

Prosecutor credits the victims’ families and investigators

“This defendant walked among us play-acting as a normal suburban dad when in reality, all along, he was obsessively targeting innocent women for death,” Tierney said at the post-hearing news conference.

He thanked the victims’ relatives, including some standing alongside him, for helping bring their loved ones’ stories to life. And he praised members of the Gilgo Beach Homicide Investigation Task Force, which cracked the case with the help of clues that included DNA lifted from a discarded pizza crust.

Gloria Allred, an attorney for some of the victims’ families, described several of the women as young mothers who were just trying to earn extra money to support their children.

“Little did they know that the defendant, Rex Heuermann, did not care about their hopes and dreams, or that they had families and friends who loved them,” Allred said at the news conference.

Elizabeth Baczkziel, whose daughter Jessica Taylor was murdered by Heuermann, said: “I am glad that this is over as far as him pleading guilty. It took a big chunk of stress off of me and my family.”

Killer’s ex-wife calls it a ‘difficult time’

Heuermann’s ex-wife, Asa Ellerup, and their daughter attended the hearing and were mobbed by reporters as they entered and left the courthouse. Ellerup said her thoughts and prayers were with the victims’ families and she asked for privacy for her own family during what she called a “very difficult time.”

Ellerup and her daughter, Victoria, had no knowledge of or involvement in the killings, said their lawyer, Robert Macedonio.

Heuermann’s attorney, Michael Brown, said it was Heuermann’s decision to plead guilty, in part because he wanted to spare victims’ relatives and his family from the ordeal of a trial.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 60 of 73

Asked by a reporter whether Heuermann was sorry, Brown responded, "I would hope so. ... I would expect at sentencing he would have something to say."

As part of his guilty plea, Heuermann agreed to cooperate fully with the FBI's behavioral analysis unit as part of an academic and scientific exercise.

A shocking find

The discovery of numerous sets of human remains along Long Island's South Shore beginning in late 2010 set off a search for a potential serial killer that attracted global interest and spawned a Hollywood movie.

Remains of six victims — Melissa Barthelemy, Brainard-Barnes, Amber Lynn Costello, Valerie Mack, Taylor and Megan Waterman — were found in the scrub along Ocean Parkway near Gilgo Beach. The remains of another, Sandra Costilla, were found more than 60 miles (100 kilometers) away in the Hamptons.

Police also identified the remains of Vergata, which were found on Fire Island, more than 20 miles (32 kilometers) west, in 1996, and near Gilgo Beach in 2011.

But despite the attention, including a documentary series and the 2020 Netflix film, "Lost Girls," the investigation dragged on for more than a decade, punctuated by fleeting leads and dashed hopes.

A fresh look yields results

In 2022, six weeks after a new police commissioner formed the Gilgo Beach task force, detectives identified Heuermann as a suspect by using a vehicle registration database to connect him to a pickup truck that a witness reported seeing when one of the victims disappeared in 2010.

Heuermann lived for decades in Massapequa Park, about a 25-minute drive from where the women's remains were found. Some of the victims were believed to have disappeared from that community and their cellphones were found to have pinged towers in the area, authorities said.

After the truck discovery, a grand jury authorized more than 300 subpoenas and search warrants, allowing the task force to dig in to Heuermann's life.

Detectives collected billing records for burner phones he used to arrange meetings with the victims, retested DNA found with the bodies and scoured Heuermann's internet search history, which showed that he had viewed violent torture pornography and exhibited an intense interest in the Gilgo Beach killings and the renewed investigation. Cellphone data showed Heuermann was in contact with some victims just before they disappeared, investigators said.

To obtain Heuermann's DNA, a task force surveillance team tailed him in Manhattan, where he worked, and watched as he threw the remnants of his lunch — a box of partially eaten pizza crusts — into a sidewalk garbage can.

Investigators rushed in, grabbed the box, and sent it to the crime lab, which matched DNA from the crust to a male hair found on burlap used to restrain one of the victims. He was arrested in July 2023.

On his computer, investigators said, they found what they described as a "blueprint" for the killings, including a series of checklists with reminders to limit noise, clean the bodies and destroy evidence.

Eight states, three time zones and a ton of history: Take a trip down Route 66 as it turns 100

By SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — If you've ever planned to motor west and take the highway that's the best, this might be the time: Route 66 turns 100 this year.

The Mother Road, as author John Steinbeck dubbed it, has evolved over the years from an escape for poor farmers fleeing the devastating dust storms of the 1930s to perhaps the quintessential American road trip that's still delivering kicks.

Although there have been faster and more direct routes between the nation's second- and third-largest cities for some time, Route 66's neon still burns brightly and its vintage signs beckon travelers to restored motor lodges, classic diners and roadside attractions.

Each stop turns the wheels of the imagination, leaving travelers to contemplate what life was like for the people and communities that have made the road hum over the years.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 61 of 73

Illinois

Chicago has long been one of the country's economic engines, with access to international waters and railroads that linked all corners of the country. In the 1920s, Oklahoma businessman Cyrus Avery, known as the Father of Route 66, knew it wouldn't be long before automobiles would dominate the transportation landscape, and the Windy City would be the perfect place to start the journey he envisioned.

A member of the federal highway board appointed to map the U.S. highway system, Avery opted to go with the number 66. He knew those double digits were ripe for marketing and could be seared into the minds of motorists.

For some travelers, the journey is fueled more by the food than the scenery, and there's plenty to choose from — slices of homemade pie, thick shakes, cheeseburgers and an assortment of fried delights.

The Cozy Dog Drive In in Springfield, the Illinois capital, is one of the many diners that sprang up along Route 66, and its breaded hot dogs on a stick have stood the test of time. Third-generation owner Josh Waldmire says the recipe is a secret.

Waldmire's grandfather, Ed, saw the concoction's potential as fast and convenient road food and developed a system for frying the dogs vertically.

Missouri

Route 66 has its share of twists and turns, and it's no surprise that a highway famous for its quirky roadside attractions would cross the nation's most famous river on one of the more peculiar bridges known to modern engineering.

As the road nears St. Louis, the mile-long (1.6-kilometer-long) Chain of Rocks Bridge hovers more than 60 feet (18 meters) above the Mississippi River.

Engineers eventually built a straighter, higher-speed option, and a poor resale market spared the original bridge from the scrap heap. Today it's reserved for pedestrians and cyclists.

A median in Missouri is home to St. Robert Route 66 Neon Park, which features orphaned neon signs that once beckoned travelers to stop at certain sites and businesses along the highway. Often handcrafted, they weren't only markers for motels, cafes and gas stations, but were also folk art and symbols of local culture.

Kansas

The Sunflower State hosts only a short stretch of Route 66, but it packs a punch with the Kan-O-Tex Service Station in Galena. A classic example of roadside fare, the station served as inspiration for the animated 2006 Pixar film "Cars."

Director John Lasseter and his crew took road trips along the route, digging into history and looking for elements that could bring the project to life. It was in Galena where they spotted the old boom truck that served as the basis for the character Tow Mater. The plot wasn't far off, as so many once bustling towns — like the fictional Radiator Springs — nearly faded away after being bypassed by an interstate.

Kansas also is home to the Brush Creek Bridge, otherwise known as the Rainbow Bridge. It's on the National Register of Historic Places and is one of few remaining examples of the concrete arched bridges designed by James Barney Marsh.

Oklahoma

There was a real danger for some who traveled the road, particularly Black motorists passing through inhospitable and segregated areas during the Jim Crow era. The Green Book — a guide first published in 1936 by Victor Hugo Green — listed hotels, restaurants and gas stations that would serve Black customers.

The Threatt Filling Station near Luther wasn't listed in The Green Book, but it was a safe haven — not only for getting fuel, but for barbecue and baseball. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, it was the only known Black-owned and operated gas station along Route 66.

Route 66 is littered with abandoned buildings and faded signs, but one example of the highway's resilient spirit stands tall in Sapulpa, near Tulsa. The restored Tee Pee Drive-In Theater offers a step back into the 1950s, when the booming car culture helped spawn thousands of drive-in theaters nationwide.

Built in 1949, the drive-in officially opened in the spring of 1950 with a screening of John Wayne's "Tycoon." It was one of the few drive-ins at the time to have paved pathways. Over the years, it survived a

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 62 of 73

tornado, a fire that destroyed the concession stand and break-ins before being shuttered for more than 20 years. It reopened in 2023.

Texas

Blink and you might miss it, but a stop at the Cadillac Ranch in Amarillo is a must for any Route 66 journey. For decades, visitors have been spray-painting the 10 vintage Cadillacs at the site and mulling the transitory nature of time as Bruce Springsteen did in his 1980 song of the same name.

It's not a ranch, but rather a public art installation created in 1974 by the art and architecture collective Ant Farm. At first, the cars — which were half-buried front-down at a 60-degree angle — were used for target practice. Others would scratch their initials into the metal. The spray painting started later.

Arrive in Adrian and you're halfway through your trip. Steps from a white line marking the midpoint of Route 66 is the Midway Cafe, where the "ugly pies" are anything but.

If you're still hungry, head back to Amarillo for a 72-ounce (2 kilogram) steak and all the sides at The Big Texan. If you can finish the meal in an hour or less, it's free.

New Mexico

More than half of Route 66 cuts through sovereign Native American lands, often tracing routes used by tribes long before settlers arrived. Much like the railroad in the 1800s, the highway opened the door to a new era of commerce, but it also fueled stereotypes about cultures along the way.

There are still faded and crumbling references to tipis and feathered headdresses at some stops along the historic highway. The symbols were easily appropriated for marketing by roadside vendors but weren't indicative of the separate and distinct Native American cultures in the area.

Today, tribes are telling their own stories and showcasing their creations, whether it be pottery, fruit pies or poems.

Albuquerque boasts the longest intact urban stretch of Route 66. Those 18 miles (29 kilometers) pass through several neighborhoods and business districts, from historic Old Town to Nob Hill.

Some of the old motor lodges and neon signs along what is now Central Avenue have been restored. Other signs are being reimaged using hubcaps, elaborate lowrider-inspired paint jobs and New Mexico's classic yellow and red license plates in a nod to the car culture that is very much still alive in the city.

Arizona

Musician Jackson Browne was taking his own road trip in the early 1970s when his car left him stranded in Winslow. The experience inspired the lyrics to the Eagles' hit "Take it Easy." But it's certainly not the only song that is a must-have for a Route 66 playlist.

Bobby Troup created a classic American road anthem in the 1940s with "(Get Your Kicks on) Route 66." Nat King Cole, Chuck Berry, The Rolling Stones and Depeche Mode carried it through the decades, each covering the song with their own flair.

While standing on a corner in Winslow, don't be surprised if someone saunters up with a guitar and starts strumming favorites from their own road trip playlist.

Before leaving the state, the one-time gold mining town of Oatman features a Wild West atmosphere, daily staged shootouts and beloved burros. Oatman was a destination along one of the original alignments of Route 66 via a treacherous path through the Black Mountains, but it was later bypassed as part of improvements made in the 1950s.

California

Once a desert oasis, Roy's Motel & Café in Amboy is a quintessential Route 66 landmark. The towering neon sign is one of the most photographed spots along the road. Inside, foreign currency left by international visitors lines one wall. Across the street, a clothing post decorated with shoes, shirts and other items juts up from the desert floor.

This stretch of the highway through the Mojave Desert offers a special kind of solitude. The pavement gets rough in spots and the landscape takes charge, showing off Joshua trees, wide-open spaces and the remnants of ancient volcanic activity.

Much of the area is undeveloped, meaning it looks a lot like it would have when Route 66 was commissioned in 1926.

After making it through oft-congested Los Angeles, the iconic Santa Monica Pier marks the end of the line, and it's nothing short of a perpetual party with a steady stream of spectators and performers. Although many stretches of Route 66 have lapsed into decay, the breathtaking views of the Pacific Ocean are a reminder of the pursuits made possible by the road over the last century.

California Supreme Court orders GOP sheriff to pause election probe and preserve seized ballots

By TRÂN NGUYỄN Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — The California Supreme Court on Wednesday ordered a county sheriff who seized more than half a million 2025 election ballots to pause his probe into election fraud allegations while the judges review the legal challenge against it.

The order came after California Attorney General Rob Bonta, a Democrat, last month asked the court to step in, arguing the sheriff has no authority over election materials. A voting rights group is also challenging the ballot seizure.

The dispute started earlier this year and escalated last month when Riverside County Sheriff Chad Bianco seized 1,000 boxes of election materials to investigate a complaint from a local citizens group about the ballot count from a November 2025 special election on redistricting. Local election officials told the county Board of Supervisors that the complaint was unfounded. After Bonta ordered Bianco to halt his probe, the sheriff seized another 426 boxes of ballots.

Bianco and his office "are hereby ordered to pause the investigation into the November 2025 special election and preserve all seized items," the order reads.

Bonta said the Wednesday order is essential to stop the sheriff's probe.

"What the Sheriff says and what he does are often two different things," Bonta said in a statement. "Today's decision by the California Supreme Court reins in the destabilizing actions of a rogue Sheriff, prohibiting him from continuing this investigation while our litigation continues."

Bianco's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Bianco is also one of two prominent Republican gubernatorial candidates in the state. He previously defended his investigation, noting it was approved by a county judge. The sheriff last week said he's paused the probe because of mounting legal challenges.

The ballot investigation came as President Donald Trump has repeatedly disputed the results of the 2020 election, citing unsubstantiated instances of fraud. His administration recently seized ballots and other documents from an election office in Georgia. Some Republicans have mirrored Trump's rhetoric on voting in their states.

Takeaways from AP's story on how oil drilling is fueling a migrant surge in Brazil's Amazon

By GABRIELA SÁ PESSOA Associated Press

OIAPOQUE, Brazil (AP) — Oiapoque, a remote city in Brazil's northern state of Amapa, is already experiencing several impacts from an anticipated oil-driven economic boom. Since Petrobras, the country's state oil company, began exploratory drilling off the coast of the Amazon rainforest, thousands of migrants have moved to the city, clearing forest for makeshift housing as they wait for jobs they believe could result from eventual oil production.

Here are takeaways from AP's story:

Forest clearing and unplanned growth in Oiapoque

Oiapoque's local economy depends largely on fishing, illegal gold mining and cross-border visitors from neighboring French Guiana. Rapid, unplanned urban growth is already straining the city's fragile infrastructure, residents say.

According to Tiago Vieira Araújo, an Oiapoque councilman, seven new neighborhoods have emerged, some of them in areas where pristine rainforest stood a year ago. Frequent complaints among locals in-

clude overcrowded schools and the city's only hospital operating at full capacity.

Renata Lod, a representative on Oiapoque's Indigenous council, said that "Petrobras arrived in the city with strong political backing, promising progress as if we would go to sleep one way and wake up like Dubai." The reality, she said, is a completely disorganized population growth and invasion of Indigenous lands.

For migrants like Reginaldo Nunes Fonseca, the hope of opportunity was enough to get them to move. He moved from the northeastern state of Maranhao after seeing a television report in January about Petrobras getting license to do exploratory drilling.

There are fears of environmental impacts

Environmental groups warn that an oil spill could devastate fisheries and wetlands, while Indigenous leaders fear the project could endanger their lands and way of life.

Federal prosecutors also asked Brazil's environmental regulator to annul or suspend the environmental license, arguing that Petrobras' studies are insufficient and that the company is concealing the full extent of the environmental impact. No ruling has been issued.

Petrobras said it conducted spill modeling to secure the license and has been deploying drifting devices to monitor ocean currents since it began exploration in October.

In January, Petrobras reported a drilling-fluid leak that briefly halted operations. IBAMA, the environmental regulator, fined the company 2.5 million reais (\$470,500).

Pushing to phase out fossil fuels while promoting oil exploration

When Brazil hosted the annual U.N. climate summit, known as COP30, last year, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and the country's negotiators sought to advance a global road map for phasing out fossil fuels, which are the primary drivers of global warming.

However, the reality in places like Oiapoque highlights a broader dilemma for much of the developing world. Some countries, including Brazil, have committed to curb greenhouse gases emissions like carbon dioxide, which are released from the burning of oil and cause climate change. At the same time, many residents hope that revenues from fossil fuels lift their economies.

Expanding oil drilling to Amazon region, even in an offshore project like this one, also raises questions about Lula's campaign pledge to protect the rainforest.

'I'm going there.' Oil drilling fuels a migrant surge in isolated city in Brazil's Amazon

By GABRIELA SÁ PESSOA Associated Press

OIAPOQUE, Brazil (AP) — On a recent morning, Reginaldo Nunes Fonseca smoked cigarettes from the porch of his friend's wooden shack, watching the rain come down hard in an area now known as Nova Conquista — New Conquest — where pristine rainforest in Brazil's Amazon stood a year ago.

The rain meant he couldn't work on building his own house or do odd jobs for others in the area, but the weather wasn't the only thing holding him back. Like thousands of others who have moved to the small city of Oiapoque, in Brazil's northern state of Amapa, Fonseca is waiting for an economic boom that may or may not come.

The area is experiencing a rush of migrants since Petrobras, Brazil's state-run oil company, last year secured environmental licensing for offshore drilling in the Equatorial Margin near the mouth of the Amazon River, about 180 kilometers (112 miles) off Amapa's coast.

"I thought, well, that's good — the city is going to grow, there will be a lot of job opportunities," said Fonseca, who saw a television report about the licensing in January and decided to move from the northeastern state of Maranhao. "So I started calling friends and said: 'I'm going there because here I'm unemployed and not doing anything.'"

Amapa is one of Brazil's poorest and underdeveloped states. Oiapoque's economy relies on fishing, illegal gold mining and visitors from neighboring French Guiana, who cross daily and spend euros, which hold their value better than the Brazilian real. While the prospect of economic opportunities is bringing hope, the impacts of unplanned urban growth in a city with already poor infrastructure are being felt.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 65 of 73

The oil-fueled optimism highlights a broader dilemma for developing countries: how to curb their emissions of greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide, which are released from the burning of oil and cause climate change, while relying on such revenue to transform local economies.

It also raises questions about President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's campaign commitment to protecting the environment. He has made stopping deforestation an important part of his government and last year Brazil hosted the U.N. climate summit known as COP30.

"We don't want to pollute a single millimeter of water, but no one can stop us from lifting Amapa out of poverty if there is oil here," Lula said last year during a visit to Amapa.

There is a surge of speculation ahead of drilling

On March 10, about 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) from Fonseca's home, Petrobras met with politicians, business owners and community leaders to present its operation plans.

Company representatives said drilling for an exploratory well began in October and would last about five months. If large quantities of oil are found and the company wants to begin extracting it, that would require further government permits, a process that can take months or even years.

Environmental and Indigenous groups have sued the Brazilian government and Petrobras to halt exploration, arguing the licensing process failed to properly consult traditional communities, underestimated spill risks and did not adequately assess climate impacts. Federal prosecutors also asked IBAMA to annul or suspend the environmental license, arguing that Petrobras' studies are insufficient and that the company is concealing the full extent of the environmental impact. No ruling has been issued.

During the meeting, officials also said Oiapoque was serving mostly as a helicopter base for offshore crews, as it's the closest land point. Administrative operations related to the drilling were based out of Belem, a major city in the neighboring state of Para.

Despite open questions about future extraction and Oiapoque's limited role in Petrobras' operations, speculation has already reshaped the city.

The city's population was 27,482 in 2022, according to census data, but a new count has yet to be taken, so it's unclear how many people there are.

"In the past 18 months, Oiapoque has seen significant population growth," said Tiago Vieira Araújo, an Oiapoque councilman who stood up and voiced concerns during the meeting. "There are already seven new neighborhoods, and social problems have come with them."

Urban infrastructure in Oiapoque is already precarious. Less than 2% of households have adequate sewage systems, and only 0.2% are on properly structured streets, according to Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics.

In the new settlements — known locally as "invasions" — conditions are worse. Residents have cleared public rainforest, creating informal plots and erecting makeshift homes. Freshly cut tree stumps, wooden stakes and rough shacks rise from mud and have only the basics: a kitchen, a bed and a rudimentary bathroom.

"We know it's not right to clear the forest. Everyone knows it's wrong," Fonseca said. "But space is limited."

Some locals see Dubai as a model for the area's development

Yuri Alesi, 34, a lawyer who advocates for land rights in new settlements and a former city councilman, is running for vice mayor in a special election set for April. He envisions Oiapoque as an "Amazonian Dubai," fueled by oil revenues.

"Dubai is in the middle of a desert, an unlikely place to grow," he said. "The industry that drove its development was oil."

Brazil's offshore Equatorial Margin, from the Suriname border to the country's northeast, is believed to hold significant oil and gas reserves. Preliminary estimates suggest they could hold up to 10 billion barrels, with a potential value of about 3.8 trillion reais (\$719.7 billion). Alesi said royalties could generate roughly 100 million reais (\$19 million) a month for Oiapoque, about the equivalent of the city's total goods and services produced each year, according to Brazil's statistics institute.

The Amazon, which is crucial to regulating the global climate because forests store carbon dioxide, is constantly under pressure from deforestation driven by agriculture, cattle ranching and mining. That

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 66 of 73

pressure has been less intense in Amapa, where about 82% of the land remains forested, according to MapBiomass, a nonprofit that tracks land use.

The state's isolation, bordered by rivers and the sea and lacking road connections to the rest of Brazil, has helped protect it from the deforestation seen in the southern Amazon.

Previous booms have not ended in prosperity

While some point to Dubai as a model for Oiapoque's future, nearby cities that once benefited from oil offer a warning for Oiapoque.

Petrobras has explored oil and gas in the state of Coari, also part of the Amazon, since the 1980s. Yet the city ranks among Brazil's poorest, with about 72% of its residents living in extreme poverty, according to a recent study by Agenda Publica, a nonprofit focused on public policy.

Other cities in Amapa have also seen boom and decline cycles tied to mining. Pedra Branca, about 280 miles from Oiapoque, grew between 2007 and 2014 during an iron ore boom.

Prosperity in Pedra Branca drew Selma Soares, 46, who moved from Maranhao to Amapa in 2008 and opened a grocery store.

In 2013, a collapse at a port operated by mining company Anglo American killed six workers and disrupted iron ore production. India's Zamin Ferrous later took over the mine and suspended operations.

"People who had shopped with us for years struggled to eat," Soares said.

In the past few years, she heard growing rumors that Oiapoque was booming. After visiting the city last year, she moved with her husband and son. The family now runs a small supermarket on the outskirts of town. Soares said many others have followed.

"People are waiting for drilling to begin," she said. "They believe everything will improve."

Amid enthusiasm there is also concern

At the river separating Oiapoque from French Guiana, a small port hums with boats linking Brazil, its neighbor and nearby communities. Green-and-yellow stickers read: "Oil yes! Development yes!," a message promoted by local politicians.

Just 20 minutes away by boat, members of the Indigenous Galibi Kali'na community are wary. Some see economic opportunity, but leaders oppose exploration, warning of environmental risks and threats to their way of life.

"Petrobras arrived with strong political backing, promising progress as if we would go to sleep one way and wake up like Dubai," said Renata Lod, a representative on Oiapoque's Indigenous council. "But what we have actually seen is completely disorganized population growth, invasions of Indigenous lands."

Lod listed several frequent complaints among Oiapoque residents, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, including overcrowded schools and the city's only hospital operating at full capacity.

There is also fear of potential oil spills.

"Most Indigenous lands are flooded wetlands. How do you clean a wetland? Once oil enters the rivers, there's no way to remove it," Lod said.

An oil spill could quickly carry pollutants to nearby coasts and rivers, threatening ecosystems and communities that depend on fishing and mangroves. Petrobras said it conducted spill modeling to secure the environmental license and has been deploying drifting devices to monitor ocean currents since it began exploration in October.

In January, Petrobras reported a drilling-fluid leak that briefly halted operations. IBAMA, the environmental regulator, fined the company 2.5 million reais (\$470,500).

At the community meeting, Petrobras officials sought to ease concerns, defending the safety of its operations. They also pointed to everyday items, from clothing to air conditioning, to underscore oil's economic importance.

"People here see Petrobras as an economic remedy," said Araújo, the city councilman. "But even a remedy has side effects. And we're already experiencing the side effects before seeing any of the benefits."

Here's where things stand after a tentative, 2-week Iran ceasefire took effect

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The ceasefire reached Wednesday has raised hopes of halting hostilities between Iran, Israel and the United States, but many issues remain unresolved.

Reaching a permanent deal will be key to ending a war that's shaken the Middle East and global energy markets. But there are vast differences between U.S. President Donald Trump and Iran's surviving leaders, and America's ally Israel has its own interests.

Here's where things stand.

Iran's government

Trump has suggested there has been "regime change" in Iran after U.S. and Israeli strikes killed the 86-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on the first day of the war and a slew of other top officials and military leaders thereafter.

But Khamenei was succeeded by his son, Mojtaba, who is close to the country's Revolutionary Guard and seen as even more hostile toward the U.S. He is believed to have been wounded in the strike that killed his father and has not been seen or spoken in public since the start of the war.

The political class devoted to maintaining Iran's Shiite theocracy remains intact. Many Iranians are angry at their leaders, but there has been no sign of an uprising since authorities crushed mass protests in January, before the war.

Iran's nuclear program

All of Iran's highly enriched uranium remains in the country, likely entombed at enrichment sites bombed by the U.S. during a 12-day war last June. Iran hasn't enriched since then but maintains it has the right to do so for peaceful purposes and denies seeking nuclear weapons.

Trump said Wednesday that the U.S. would work with Iran to "dig up and remove" the uranium — though Iran did not confirm that.

Trump, along with Israel, has called for Iran to completely dismantle its nuclear program. Iran rejected that in its 10-point proposal for ending the war.

Iran's missile program

Since the war began Feb. 28, Iran has launched more than 5,000 drones, over 2,100 ballistic missiles and over 50 cruise missiles, according to statistics from the Washington-based Jewish Institute for National Security of America, which has close ties to the Israeli military.

Before the war, JINSA estimated Iran's arsenal to be between 8,000 to 10,000 ballistic missiles of various ranges. No public estimate exists of Iran's drone stockpile.

The U.S. and Israel say they destroyed or buried many of Iran's missile launchers. Israel says it also greatly reduced Iran's ability to produce and launch missiles but did not eliminate the threat — and Iran continued launching attacks.

Iran's military

The U.S. military's Central Command said it destroyed over 150 ships — effectively sinking the Iranian navy. Multiple Iranian warplanes, helicopters and other equipment were destroyed, along with military installations and missile factories.

That didn't stop Iran from effectively closing the Strait of Hormuz, the waterway through which around a fifth of the world's traded oil passes, and erecting a virtual toll booth to charge countries for using it.

Iran's 'Axis of Resistance'

Israel mauled Iran's allied militant groups across the region in wars sparked by Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack out of the Gaza Strip.

Lebanon's Hezbollah, the strongest such group, is still battling Israel, fighting that Israel says will continue despite the ceasefire. Yemen's Houthi rebels, targeted by Israeli and U.S. airstrikes in recent years, only fired on Israel a few times during the war and left Red Sea shipping alone. Hamas still controls around half of Gaza and has yet to disarm under a U.S.-brokered ceasefire.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 68 of 73

Israel wants Iran to end its support for such groups, something Tehran has refused to do and did not mention in its peace proposal.

The Strait of Hormuz

Before the war, ships freely passed through the Strait of Hormuz, in the territorial waters of Iran and Oman. Since the war, Iran reportedly has been charging as much as \$2 million a vessel to allow them to pass.

Iran and Oman are working on a proposal to split fees in the waterway, and Tehran insists it will maintain military control there, potentially granting itself a new source of revenue in the face of international sanctions.

Trump says America will be "hangin' around" to ensure traffic passes. The U.S. and other countries are likely to oppose the new system, setting up a potential flashpoint.

Gulf Arab countries

Gulf Arab nations can't be happy about how the war has turned out.

Iranian attacks caused widespread damage to oil and gas facilities, airports and other sites, piercing their carefully cultivated image as stable business and tourism hubs. Qatar, one of the world's top natural gas producers, has said it will take years to restore its output.

Gulf countries' distrust of Iran has never been deeper and their faith that the U.S. will defend them has been shaken. U.S. bases across the region suffered direct strikes, but there's no indication of any American withdrawal, as Iran has demanded.

More tactical gains for Israel, but no knockout blow

Israel was repeatedly targeted by Iranian fire but its advanced air defenses and extensive network of bomb shelters provided significant protection.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says Israel inflicted major losses on Iran, but the U.S. and Israel fell short of eliminating its nuclear or missile programs. His hoped-for uprising that would topple the Islamic Republic has yet to materialize.

Israel says it has assurances the U.S. will address Iran's nuclear and missile programs in negotiations. But many Israelis are likely to be disappointed by yet another inconclusive war, which could weigh on Netanyahu ahead of elections later this year.

North Korea fires missiles toward sea after ridiculing South's hopes for better ties

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea fired multiple short-range ballistic missiles toward the sea Wednesday in its second launch event in two days, South Korea's military said, hours after a senior North Korean official released crude insults against Seoul's hopes for warmer relations.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said several missiles lifted off from North Korea's eastern coastal Wonsan area on Wednesday morning and flew about 240 kilometers (150 miles) each in a direction toward the North's eastern waters.

It said an additional North Korean ballistic missile fired later Wednesday traveled more than 700 kilometers off the North's east coast. Japan's Defense Ministry said it assesses that the missile fell in waters outside the country's exclusive economic zone.

South Korea's military said it maintains a readiness to repel any provocations by North Korea under a solid military alliance with the United States. It earlier said it detected the launch of an unidentified projectile from North Korea's capital region on Tuesday.

South Korean media reported the projectile, also likely a ballistic missile, disappeared from South Korean military radars after displaying an abnormal development in the initial launch stage. This indicated the launch ended in failure, according to the reports.

The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command said in a statement that the North Korean launches had not posed any

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 69 of 73

immediate threat to U.S. personnel or territory, or to allies.

The back-to-back launches came after North Korea made it clear that it has no intentions of improving ties with South Korea, whose liberal government has steadfastly expressed its hopes to restore long-dormant dialogue.

South Korea would always remain North Korea's "most hostile enemy state," Jang Kum Chol, first vice minister at Pyongyang's Foreign Ministry, said on Tuesday. He derided South Korea as "world-startling fools" engaged in wishful thinking over a recent statement by Kim Yo Jong, the influential sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

After South Korean President Lee Jae Myung expressed regret over alleged civilian drone flights into North Korea, Kim Yo Jong on Monday praised him for what she called honesty and courage, but reiterated a threat to retaliate if such flights recur. South Korean officials responded by describing Kim's statement as meaningful progress in relations.

Jang said her statement was intended as a warning. He cited Kim Yo Jong as calling South Korea "the dogs affected by mange that blindly bark to the tune of neighboring dogs" as she criticized it for recently co-sponsoring of a U.N. resolution on the North's purported human rights violations.

North Korea has refused to return to talks with South Korea and the U.S. and pushed to expand its nuclear arsenal since Kim Jong Un's diplomacy with U.S. President Donald Trump collapsed in 2019. North Korea has instead sought to strengthen ties with Russia, China and other countries embroiled in confrontations with the U.S. Last September, Kim Jong Un traveled to Beijing to attend a military parade alongside other foreign leaders and held his first summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping in six years.

North Korean media reported on Wednesday that Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi will visit North Korea on Thursday for a two-day trip.

Earlier this week, North Korea said Kim Jong Un had observed a test of an upgraded solid-fuel engine for weapons and called it a significant development boosting his country's strategic military arsenal.

Missiles with built-in solid propellants are easier to move and conceal their launches than liquid-fuel weapons, which in general must be fueled before liftoffs and cannot last long.

South Korea's spy agency told lawmakers Monday the engine test was likely related to an effort to build a more powerful solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missile that can carry multiple nuclear warheads, according to lawmakers who attended the meeting.

Experts say North Korea wants multi-warhead missiles to penetrate U.S. missile defenses, but they doubt Pyongyang has mastered the technology needed to acquire such a weapon.

Route 66, a quintessential American road trip heavy on kitsch and history, turns 100

By SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — There are faster ways to get from Chicago to Los Angeles, but none have the allure or cultural cachet of Route 66.

To John Steinbeck, it was the Mother Road that led poor farmers from Dust Bowl desperation to sunny California. To Native Americans along the route, it was an economic boon that also left scars. To Black travelers, it offered sanctuary during segregation. And to music fans, it was the place to get their kicks.

Route 66 marks its 100th anniversary this year. Despite losing its status decades ago as one of the nation's main arteries, people from around the world still flock to it to take perhaps the quintessential American road trip and soak in its neon lights, kitschy motels and attractions, and culinary offerings.

Each town has its own history and magic, said Sebastiaan de Boorder, a Dutch entrepreneur who, with his wife, breathed new life into The Aztec Motel in Seligman, Arizona.

"It's an essential part of American culture and history," he said of the highway. "The historical aspect is just a very big important part of American culture, with its influence and its character."

The dream

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 70 of 73

Route 66, which runs for roughly 2,400 miles (3,860 kilometers) from Chicago through Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico and Arizona before ending in Santa Monica, California, was stitched together a century ago from a collection of Native American trading routes and old dirt roads with the goal of linking the industrial Midwest to the Pacific coast.

Oklahoma businessman Cyrus Avery, known as the Father of Route 66, saw it as more than just a way to cross the country efficiently. It was a chance to connect rural America and create new pockets of commerce.

Avery knew the number 66 would be ripe for marketing and could be seared into drivers' minds, and he was right: Route 66 has been immortalized in movies, books, including Steinbeck's "The Grapes of Wrath" and Jack Kerouac's "On the Road," and songs such as Bobby Troup's "(Get Your Kicks on) Route 66," which served as an anthem for post-World War II optimism and mobility.

Waves of migration

Since its November 1926 designation as one of the nation's original numbered highways, the onetime Main Street of America has embodied the promise of prosperity.

It became a literal path of hope for migrants escaping drought-ravaged farms and poverty during the 1930s Dust Bowl and the Great Depression. And during World War II, it was used to move troops, equipment and workers out West.

The postwar boom of the 1940s and 1950s were Route 66's heyday, as it became a popular vacation route. Cars became more affordable, disposable income increased, and people began chasing freedom on the open road.

"People generally have a sense of adventure, a sense curiosity. And you can find that on Route 66. This is the road of dreams," author and historian Jim Hinckley said.

Going mainstream

Roadside diners and motels thrived, as crafty entrepreneurs dreamed up ways to part motorists from their money. There were rattlesnake pits, totem poles, trading posts, caverns where Old West outlaws purportedly hung out, and modern engineering marvels like St. Louis' gleaming steel arch.

Barns were painted with larger-than-life ads, billboards teased local attractions, and neon was everywhere. The cherry on top? The food.

There were places to grab and go, but also to sit down and relish a slice of home. The Cozy Dog Drive In — famous for its breaded hot dogs on a stick — has fit both bills since 1949. Inside the dining room in Springfield, Illinois, travelers tell tales of life on the highway.

"The road wouldn't be alive without the stories of all the places along it that kept it going from town to town," third-generation owner Josh Waldmire said. "We just survive off each other. The road feeds us, and as long as we put our feelings and love back into the road, it will reverberate with the travelers and the stories of the people."

A divided highway

Route 66 was an economic boon to the Native American tribes along the way. But although it brought tourists, it also left scars of eminent domain across tribal land and perpetuated stereotypes.

More than half of the highway crossed through Indian Country, and vendor signs often made casual references to tipis and feathered headdresses — symbols easily appropriated for marketing but not always representative of the distinct cultures found along the route.

At Laguna Pueblo west of Albuquerque, restaurants and service stations sprang up, some operated by military veterans from the pueblo who were masters at fixing everything from flat tires to busted radiators.

Pueblo women adapted too, turning utilitarian pottery vessels into works of art coveted by tourists. Homemade bread and pies sealed the deal.

Laguna leaders have long considered the road — or he-ya-nhee' in the tribe's language of Keres — as "the corridor of commerce," said businessman and tribal member Ron Solimon. Capitalizing on that potential, the tribe has built a multimillion-dollar empire of casinos, burger stands and other businesses.

There were also dangers along the route, particularly during the Jim Crow era, when Black travelers had

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 71 of 73

to rely on guides like the Green Book to find safe lodging and services.

"Especially for long-distance travel, segregation was a fact of life," said Matthew Pearce, state historian for the Oklahoma Historical Society. "And so Black motorists needed to know a safe place to go."

The Threatt Filling Station near the central Oklahoma community of Luther wasn't listed in the Green Book, but it did serve as a safe haven between two sundown towns, where people who weren't white needed to leave by sunset. The station offered barbecue and even baseball.

Edward Threatt, whose grandparents opened the station around 1933, recalled a TV program about travelers getting their kicks on 66. "By and large, the Black traveler didn't get a lot of kicks on Route 66," he said. "And if they got some kicks, it wasn't the kind you would think of."

A new direction

President Dwight Eisenhower's vision for a modern interstate highway system eventually led to Route 66 being decommissioned as a federal highway in 1985. Some towns along the route died, and it fell to local governments, state historical societies, and private businesses to preserve their sections of the famed road.

A driving force was Angel Delgadillo, a barber who lobbied the Arizona Legislature to designate the road as a historic highway. He saved Seligman from turning into a ghost town and set the bar for preservation elsewhere.

In New Mexico, original sketches for neon signs have been preserved, Route 66-themed murals abound and developers in Albuquerque have restored motor lodges along the longest urban stretch of the road still intact.

More than 90% of the road is still drivable in California. Cadillac Ranch in the Texas Panhandle offers the chance to spray-paint half-buried cars. And at the Mississippi River, travelers can walk or bike across the old Chain of Rocks Bridge.

More than 250 of the route's buildings, districts and road segments are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. But it's more than bricks and asphalt that fuel the fascination.

"Some of the most interesting and fun things that happen to people when they travel the route is running into somebody they know or some happenstance thing that comes totally unexpected," said author and historian Jim Ross. "And that's a great part of the Route 66 experience."

Taiwan opposition leader arrives in China on what she calls a 'journey to peace'

By E. EDUARDO CASTILLO and SIMINA MISTREANU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Taiwan opposition leader Cheng Li-wun arrived in China on Tuesday at the invitation of President Xi Jinping, in what she's calling a "journey for peace" as Beijing pushes for the self-ruled island to come under its control.

The visit is the first by a Taiwanese opposition leader in a decade and comes ahead of a meeting in Beijing between Xi and U.S. President Donald Trump scheduled to take place in May.

Meanwhile, Taiwan's opposition-controlled parliament has stalled attempts by its government to pass a \$40 billion special defense budget, expected to fund arms deals with the United States and the development of Taiwan's indigenous defense industry.

China claims the self-ruled island as its own territory and has not excluded the use of force to take it. Beijing has been ramping up its military pressure by sending warplanes and naval vessels around the island almost daily, while its military occasionally stages live-fire drills nearby, the latest in December.

The U.S. State Department said such activities "increase tensions unnecessarily" and called on Beijing to cease military pressure against Taiwan.

Before leaving the capital, Taipei, the chairwoman of the Kuomintang party told reporters that Taiwan must spare no effort to prevent war and seize any opportunity to promote peace.

A few dozen supporters and detractors of Cheng showed up at Taipei's airport, chanting and holding signs.

"The purpose of this visit to mainland China is precisely to show the world that it is not just Taiwan that

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 72 of 73

unilaterally hopes for peace," Cheng said.

"I believe that through this journey for peace, everyone is even more eager to see the sincerity and determination of the CPC Central Committee to use peaceful dialogue and exchange to resolve all possible differences between the two sides," she added, referring to the initials of the Communist Party of China.

China takes issue with US arms sales to Taiwan

A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson said Tuesday relations with Taiwan were part of China's internal affairs.

"China's opposition to military ties between the U.S. and Taiwan is consistent and clear," spokesperson Mao Ning said.

Beijing has repeatedly criticized U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, in particular a massive deal announced by the Trump administration in December, valued at more than \$11 billion, that includes medium-range missiles, howitzers and drones.

China prohibits all its diplomatic partners, including the U.S., from maintaining formal ties with Taipei. The U.S. is the island's strongest informal backer and arms provider, and the arms sale is expected to be discussed at the Xi-Trump summit.

In a call in February between Xi and Trump, the Chinese leader said that "Taiwan will never be allowed to separate from China," according to a Chinese government statement about the conversation released at the time. "The U.S. must handle the issue of arms sales to Taiwan with prudence," it added.

Beijing also said that the "Taiwan question is the most important issue in China-U.S. relations."

Taiwan's ruling and opposition parties hold different stances toward Beijing

It was not clear if Cheng was going to meet with Xi as part of her six-day trip to China, which started in the eastern metropolis of Shanghai and is set to conclude in Beijing.

The KMT, as Taiwan's main opposition party, is not in a position to strike agreements with Beijing that would affect the entire island; however, Cheng might sign party-to-party cooperation agreements with the Communist Party to reinstitute regular dialogue or boost ties at a municipal level between KMT-controlled localities and Chinese cities, said Wen-Ti Sung, a fellow with the Atlantic Council, an American think tank.

Cheng's visit "may sideline the Taiwan Strait tension issue from the Xi-Trump summit, thus enabling the U.S.-China summit to focus on business areas of common interest rather than geostrategic points of contention," Sung said.

The KMT has proposed a smaller defense budget and criticizes the governing Democratic Progressive Party's larger budget as a "blank check" for arms purchases.

Cheng's visit contrasts sharply with Beijing's treatment of Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te, with whom China does not engage, labeling him a "separatist."

Taiwan has been governed separately from China since 1949, when a civil war brought the Communist Party to power in Beijing. Defeated KMT forces fled to Taiwan, where they set up their own government.

Lai's party views Taiwan as a sovereign country, not a subordinate to China. The KMT, meanwhile, officially recognizes only one China, which it interprets as the Republic of China that before 1949 included the mainland and today is Taiwan's official name.

Today in History: April 9, Robert E. Lee surrenders to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, April 9, the 99th day of 2026. There are 266 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On April 9, 1865, Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered his Army of Northern Virginia to Union Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant at the village of Appomattox Court House in Virginia, effectively ending the American Civil War. (Remaining Confederate units elsewhere would formally surrender by early June of 1865, closing out the bloodiest conflict on American soil without further major combat.)

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 09, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 308 ~ 73 of 73

Also on this date:

In 1939, Marian Anderson performed at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., after the Black singer was denied the use of Constitution Hall by the Daughters of the American Revolution.

In 1940, during World War II, Germany invaded Denmark and Norway.

In 1942, during World War II, some 75,000 Philippine and American soldiers surrendered to Japanese troops, ending the Battle of Bataan in the Philippines. The prisoners were subsequently forced to march 65 miles (105 kilometers) to POW camps in what is now known as the Bataan Death March; thousands died or were killed en route.

In 1959, NASA introduced the "Mercury Seven," its first seven astronauts: Scott Carpenter, Gordon Cooper, John Glenn, Gus Grissom, Wally Schirra, Alan Shepard and Donald "Deke" Slayton.

In 1968, funerals, private and public, were held for the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. at the Ebenezer Baptist Church and at Morehouse College in Atlanta, five days after the civil rights leader was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee.

In 2003, Baghdad fell to American troops during the Iraq War after six days of fighting.

In 2005, Britain's Prince Charles married Camilla Parker Bowles, who took the title Duchess of Cornwall.

In 2023, a five-story residential building exploded and collapsed near the port of Marseille in France, leaving at least six people dead and others missing. The predawn collapse occurred in the old quarter of central Marseille, France's second-largest city.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Michael Learned is 87. Drummer Steve Gadd is 81. Actor Dennis Quaid is 72. Fashion designer Marc Jacobs is 63. Model-actor Paulina Porizkova is 61. Actor Cynthia Nixon is 60. Actor Keshia Knight Pulliam is 47. Actor Jay Baruchel is 44. Actor Leighton Meester is 40. Singer-songwriter Jazmine Sullivan is 39. Actor Kristen Stewart is 36. Actor Elle Fanning is 28. Rapper Lil Nas X is 27. Actor Isaac Hempstead Wright is 27. Singer Jackie Evancho (ee-VAYN'-koh) is 25.