

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 1 of 80

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 News Headlines](#)
- [3- Balloon Ad](#)
- [4- School Board Agenda](#)
- [5- South Dakota CDL Holders Must Update Medical Certification Before July 1](#)
- [6- Columbia City Advertisement for Bids](#)
- [6- Today on GDILIVE.COM](#)
- [7- Graduation balloons available](#)
- [8- April Students of the Month](#)
- [9- Graduation Cards](#)
- [10- SD SearchLight: Calendar quirk and law change have South Dakota election officials worried about deadlines](#)
- [11- SD SearchLight: Land, water and outdoor heritage concerns deserve attention in governor race](#)
- [12- SD SearchLight: Trump administration targets bison on federal grazing lands](#)
- [17- SD SearchLight: Debate over US war crimes, illegal military orders returns with Trump threats against Iran](#)
- [19- SD SearchLight: US House Democrats call for Congress to come back into sessi](#)
- [20- SD SearchLight: How Trump's SAVE America Act could make it harder for married women to vote](#)
- [23- Weather Pages](#)
- [28- Daily Devotional](#)
- [29- Subscription Form](#)
- [30- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [31- News from the Associated Press](#)

Friday, April 10

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

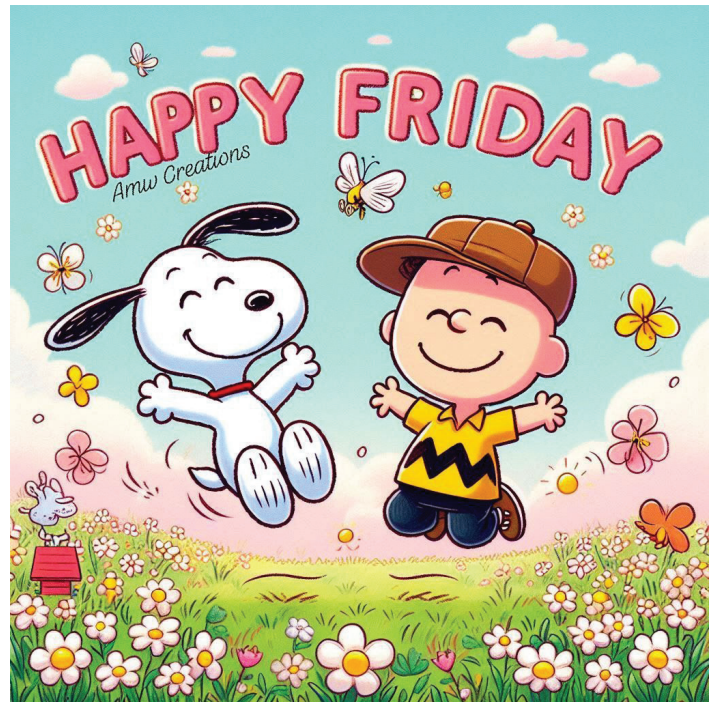
Girls Softball hosts Mobridge-Pollock, Nelson Field, Varsity at 4:30 p.m., JV to follow.

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

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 2 of 80

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.

Ceasefire Under Strain

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said yesterday he is seeking direct talks with Lebanon to disarm Iranian-backed Hezbollah militants. The announcement came a day after Israeli airstrikes in Lebanon killed more than 300 people and followed repeated requests from Beirut. Talks between the two countries are expected to begin next week in Washington, DC.

Israel's military said it targeted over 100 sites, including Hezbollah headquarters and command-and-control centers. The bombardment has strained a two-week US-Iran ceasefire brokered Tuesday, which Israel says does not cover its operations in Lebanon. More than 1 million people in Lebanon have been displaced since last month, and at least 1,500 people have been killed, per Lebanon's health ministry. European leaders yesterday called for Lebanon to be included in the ceasefire.

Meanwhile, traffic in the Strait of Hormuz remains restricted, with Iran continuing to block vessel passage as the US-Iran ceasefire hangs in the balance. Vice President JD Vance is expected to travel to Pakistan this weekend for peace talks with Iran.

Hot Niño Summer

An El Niño is expected to usher in warmer-than-usual global temperatures and fewer-than-average Atlantic hurricanes, according to meteorological reports released yesterday.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration estimates a 61% chance that an El Niño will develop between May and July. The natural climate pattern—characterized by warmer ocean surface temperatures in the central and eastern Pacific—amplifies winds in the Atlantic, which disrupts developing storms. A separate Colorado State University report predicts Atlantic hurricane activity will fall to 75% of the long-term average, with six this year. Two are anticipated to be Category 3 or higher, with sustained winds of at least 111 mph. Last year saw five hurricanes, including three Category 5 (winds of 157 mph or higher) and one Category 4 (130 to 156 mph winds).

Some computer models suggest the incoming El Niño could be unusually strong, with ocean temperatures rising 2 degrees Celsius or more above the long-term average. Meteorologists say this could make 2027 the warmest year on record.

America's Baby Bust

The US fertility rate hit another record low in 2025, falling from 53.8 to 53.1 births per 1,000 women ages 15 to 44, according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data released yesterday. The decline extends a nearly two-decade slide and reflects a broader shift toward later childbearing and smaller families.

Provisional data shows 3,606,400 total births last year, down 1% from 2024. Teen fertility dropped 7% to 11.7 births per 1,000 females ages 15 to 19, while births to that group fell 8% to 125,933. Rates for younger teens ages 15 to 17 and older teens ages 18 to 19 also reached record lows, while the rate for women ages 30 to 34 rose 3%. Since 2007, the overall birth rate has fallen 23%.

The news follows a global trend of declining fertility, with most nations now falling short of the roughly 2.1 children per woman needed for stable populations. Final CDC data is due later in 2026.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 3 of 80

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Justice Department opens investigation into the NFL over how many subscription fees fans must pay to watch games across multiple streaming platforms.

Cannes Film Festival lineup is roughly 65% composed of films from France, Japan, and Spain, with one film representing the US.

Women dominate Academy of Country Music Awards, with Megan Moroney earning nine nods.

"Malcolm in the Middle" revival airs today on Hulu; the last episode of the original series aired nearly 20 years ago.

Bestselling "The Housemaid" author, who used a pseudonym and wore a wig and glasses, reveals her identity.

Science & Technology

Leading conservation authority declares emperor penguins and Antarctic fur seals endangered species as sea ice melts and traditional food sources dwindle.

Changing a single DNA letter, out of about 2.8 billion, causes female mouse embryos to develop male reproductive organs; the same DNA region helps determine human sex, offering insights into human sex development disorders.

Map of human placenta and uterus reveals novel cell subtype unique to pregnancy that appears involved in linking the placenta to the maternal blood supply.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close up (S&P 500 +0.6%, Dow +0.6%, Nasdaq +0.8%) ahead of US-Iran talks.

Core personal consumption expenditures price index—excluding food and energy—rose 3% year over year in February, staying above Federal Reserve's 2% target; figure is in line with economist forecasts.

Disney expected to lay off as many as 1,000 employees; comes after new CEO Josh D'Amato took the reins.

Politics & World Affairs

Melania Trump denies allegations of close ties to Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell, urges Congress to let victims testify in rare news conference.

American man arrested by Bahamian authorities in connection with the disappearance of his wife during a dinghy ride.

Florida officials open probe into OpenAI's role in deadly Florida State University shooting last year.

The US to enforce automatic registration into the military draft beginning in December for most male citizens ages 18 to 26; Trump administration last month said it had no plans to enact a draft.



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.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 4 of 80

GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT #06-6

School Board Meeting

April 13, 2026 – 6:00 PM – GHS Conference Room

AGENDA:

1. Call to Order with members present. Approve agenda as proposed or amended.

POTENTIAL CONFLICTS DISCLOSURE PURSUANT SDCL 23-3

CONSENT AGENDA:

1. Approve of minutes of March 9, March 23, March 26, April 1, and April 2 school board meetings as drafted.
2. Approve of March 2026 Financial Report, Custodial Accounts, and Investments.
3. Approve of March 2026 District bills for payment.
4. Approve of March 2026 School Lunch Report.
5. Approve of March 2026 School Transportation Report.
6. Authorize the Business Manager to pay district bills up to \$75,000 in advance, using the custodial advance payment account to be approved by the board for reimbursement at the following regular board meeting.

OLD/CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. Open Forum for Public Participation...in accordance with Board Policy & Guidelines.
2. Discussion regarding ongoing Facilities Master Planning process.
3. Second reading and approval of recommended policy changes: DFG Insufficient Funds & No Account Checks, EBBA First Aid, DJC Bidding Requirements
4. Administrative Reports: (a) Superintendent's Report; (b) Principal's Reports; (c) Business Manager Report

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Curriculum Review Presentation – Language Arts
2. Approve 2025-2026 school calendar amendments and make-up days.
3. Adopt resolution authorizing membership in the SDHSAA for the 2026-2027 school year.
4. Approve Associated School Boards Protective Trust Agreements
 - a. Protective Trust Joint Powers Agreement and Bylaws
 - b. Health Fund Participation Agreement and Plan Options
 - c. Worker's Compensation Renewal Agreement
5. Approve District Membership Agreement for the North Central Special Education Cooperative.
6. Authorize Participation in Statewide Title III Consortium for the 2026-2027 school year.
7. Approve hiring Madisyn Neiber, Business Manager, beginning July 1, 2026.
8. Approve hiring Maria Martens, Opportunity Coordinator, for the 2026-2027 school year.
9. Approve retirement of Don Donley at the end of the 2025-2026 school year.
10. Approve resignation of Chantel Duerre at the end of the 2025-2026 school year.
11. Approve resignation of Jaimie Mitchell, effective May 8, 2026.
12. Approve resignation of Shaun Wanner, Head Football Coach.
13. Authorize Business Manager to create Track and Field custodial account.
14. Executive session pursuant SDCL 1-25-2.1 for personnel issues and SDCL 1-25-2.4 for negotiations.
15. Consider 2026-2027 Extra-Curricular stipends schedule.
16. Approve 2026-2027 Negotiated Agreements: Groton Teachers Association (GTA) and Groton Auxiliary Staff Association (GASA).
17. Issue 2026-2027 Teacher Contracts with return date of Friday, April 24, 2026.
18. Issue 2026-2027 Auxiliary Staff Work Agreements with return date of Friday, April 24, 2026.
19. Issue administrative 2026-2027 administrative contracts with return date of Friday, April 24, 2026.

ADJOURN

South Dakota CDL Holders Must Update Medical Certification Before July 1

PIERRE, S.D. – Effective July 1, 2026, the State of South Dakota will adopt federal regulation 49 CFR 391.11, which requires most Commercial Driver License (CDL) holders to maintain a valid Medical Examiner's Certificate (medical card). This change removes the previous Excepted Intrastate (EA) state exception, identified by the K Restriction, that allowed certain drivers to indicate they were not required to hold a Medical Certificate.

Drivers must update their medical certification status with the South Dakota Driver Licensing Program before that deadline to keep their CDL valid.

To help CDL drivers with the Excepted Intrastate (EA) designation meet the requirement, Driver Licensing will open several exam stations on select Saturdays over the next three weeks in addition to regular weekday hours so CDL holders can update their certification status and complete the required paperwork. The Saturday hours will only be available for CDL processing.

Driver Exam Stations:

Brookings, Huron, Mitchell, Rapid City, and Sioux Falls (One Stop)

Saturday, April 11 – 7 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Saturday, April 18 – 7 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Saturday, April 25 – 7 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Spearfish

Saturday, April 11 – 8 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Monday, April 27 – 8 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Pierre

Saturday, April 18 – 7 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Saturday, April 25 – 7 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Drivers who do not update their certification status by July 1 will have their CDL downgraded, though they may still retain a non-commercial license.

Farmers and Agriculture CDL holders with Excepted Interstate (EI) may still qualify for Excepted Interstate under the following conditions: Beekeepers, custom harvesters, government employees, and certain farm vehicle drivers and qualifying covered farm vehicle operators. (See the federal regulations for a full list of excepted categories.) You will need to go to the driver exam station before July 1 to update your CDL and remove the "K" restriction and receive a new license.

More information about CDL medical certification requirements and how to update your status can be found on the CDL pages of the Driver Licensing website at SD.gov/dps.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 6 of 80

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

**MOBRIDGE-POLLOCK
AT GROTON AREA**

Friday, April 10
Varsity at 4:30 p.m.
followed by JV

SPONSORED BY

DACOTAH BANK
*Here for you.*SM

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

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 8 of 80

Groton Area April Students of the Month



In back, left to right, are Liam Johnson, Keegen Tracy, Jordan Schwan and Drake Dosch; in front, left to right, are Calvin Locken, McKenna Tietz, Andi Iverson and Mia Tvinnereim. (Courtesy Photo)

Groton Area School works to ensure that all levels of academic instruction also include the necessary life skills teaching, practicing, and modeling that encourages essential personal life habits that are universally understood to facilitate helping our students become good human beings and citizens.

It is learning with our heads, hearts, and hands to be caring and civil, to make healthy decisions, to effectively problem solve, to be respectful and responsible, to be good citizens, and to be empathetic and ethical individuals.

Students are selected based on individual student growth in the areas of: positive behavior, citizenship, good attendance, a thirst for knowledge, and high academic standards.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 9 of 80

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>

Calendar quirk and law change have South Dakota election officials worried about deadlines

County auditors rush to get ballots before early voting, while dealing with new citizenship registration law

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER

Election officials in South Dakota are worried about a possible delayed start for early and absentee voting as they rush to prepare ballots for the June 2 primary, and they're also navigating changes to registration requirements signed into law by Gov. Larry Rhoden last month.

Lincoln County Auditor Sheri Lund said South Dakota voters should check their registration status and party affiliation as soon as possible. New voters should register soon as well, in case there are processing delays because of missing documentation required by a new law.

The new law, which went into effect on March 26, requires new voters to provide documentation of their U.S. citizenship with a driver's license or identification card issued after July 1, 2025, a tribal ID, or a legible photocopy of a birth certificate, U.S. passport, consular report of birth abroad from the U.S. Department of State, or certificate of naturalization.

"If you're a first-time registering voter in South Dakota, do not procrastinate," Lund said. "Do it now, and make sure it goes through the right way."

South Dakotans can check their registration status on the Secretary of State's Office website. The voter registration deadline for the primary election is May 18.

Kayla Delfs, election coordinator with the Lincoln County Auditor's Office, said the office had received 10 voter registration applications as of March 7 that were missing the necessary documentation to prove U.S. citizenship as required by the new law.

One person emailed proof of citizenship, but Delfs said she has not received documentation yet from the others after mailing notification of the problem to them. Those voters will be registered as federal only voters until they provide proper documentation — a new voter status signed into law in 2025. Federal only voters can vote in presidential and congressional races, not state and local races.

Pennington County Auditor Sabrina Green expects problems with missing U.S. citizenship documentation to dwindle over the next several years, as South Dakota driver's licenses and identification cards expire and get renewed. Last July, the state began requiring newly issued cards to display the licensee's citizenship status.

As county auditors and their staffs work to inform new voters of the changes, they're also grappling with a quickly approaching start to early and absentee voting.

Prospective candidates from political parties had to file nominating petitions by the last Tuesday in March to make the ballot for the June 2 primary. Through a quirk of the calendar, that fell on March 31 this year, which shortened the time between the filing of those petitions and the printing of ballots for early and absentee voting.

Lawmakers this year reacted to complaints about that by changing the nominating petition deadline to the third Tuesday in March. But they were concerned about changing the deadline for a petition process that was already underway, so they made the change effective for future elections, not the current one.

Early and absentee voting for the primary election begins on April 17. On Tuesday, the Secretary of State's Office drew the order in which candidates will appear on ballots, giving county auditors eight business days to prepare, proofread and order ballots.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 11 of 80

Green said her office will alert county residents if early voting is delayed, adding that she is “nervous” about the approaching deadline.

“I would rather our ballots are done correctly, proofed and without errors instead of rushing to meet the deadline,” Green said.

Early and absentee voting is required by state statute to begin “no later” than 46 days before the election, and ballots must be printed 48 days before. Auditors considered allowing voters to use sample ballots, like they’re allowed to on Election Day if a polling place runs out of ballots, but auditors decided against it, Delfs said.

“We’ve got our hands tied,” Delfs said. “What law do we break here?”

Lund said it’ll be a “hard push” to ensure early voting starts on time, but she is hopeful it will. The Secretary of State’s Office is allowing auditors to order early and absentee ballots separately from their Election Day ballots, which will speed up the process because there will be fewer ballots to print and ship so soon.

“I have my fingers crossed,” Lund said.

Makenzie Huber is a lifelong South Dakotan who regularly reports on the intersection of politics and policy with health, education, social services and Indigenous affairs. Her work with South Dakota Searchlight earned her the title of South Dakota’s Outstanding Young Journalist in 2024, and she was a 2024 finalist for the national Livingston Awards.

COMMENTARY

Land, water and outdoor heritage concerns deserve attention in governor race **by Brad Johnson**

South Dakota doesn’t lack defining issues in the race for governor. Property taxes, economic growth and landowner rights dominate the debate — as they should.

Yet a far more urgent crisis is being ignored: the accelerating collapse of our land, water and outdoor heritage.

Wildlife habitat, water quality and public access form the bedrock of South Dakota’s economy, culture and quality of life. Ignore them, and we mortgage our children’s future for short-term convenience.

Grasslands are vanishing at breakneck speed. Native prairie across eastern South Dakota is relentlessly plowed under for row crops. Grassland bird populations have declined more than 40% since 1970.

Monarch butterfly populations have plunged dramatically since the 1990s. The web supporting pheasants, waterfowl, pollinators — and agriculture itself — is unraveling.

Prairie pothole wetlands are disappearing even faster. More than half the state’s original wetlands have been drained, with losses exceeding 90% in some eastern counties.

These are not expendable puddles. They are the nurseries for ducks, the filters for our waters, and the last strongholds for birds and butterflies clinging to survival.

The 2023 Sackett v. EPA ruling stripped federal protections from 93% of wetland acreage and 99% of individual wetlands. With zero state safeguards in place, this green light for unchecked drainage threatens the nurseries for ducks and natural filters for our waters.

Water quality is in free fall. The 2026 Integrated Water Quality Report is damning: A crushing majority of assessed lakes and streams fail to support fishing, swimming or aquatic life. Only 27% of streams and 17% of lakes meet all standards.

Agricultural nutrient runoff — excess nitrogen and phosphorus — fuels toxic algae blooms and oxygen-starved water. Vanishing wetlands only worsen the pollution. This isn’t handwringing; it’s a direct assault on public health, tourism, lakeside property values and downstream communities forced to pay the cleanup bill.

Aquatic invaders are spreading rapidly and inflicting irreversible harm. Zebra mussels, first detected in 2018, have now infested 32 water bodies, with five new detections in 2025 alone. Broader aquatic invasive species plague more than 50 lakes, sloughs and rivers. Invasive carp muddy waters and destroy vegetation.

Shockingly, once zebra mussels establish in a lake or river, South Dakota has no effective mitigation plan.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 12 of 80

Studies show zebra mussels increase the concentration of mercury in our prized walleye and perch, and the clear water they create results in massive plant growth because of excessive agricultural pollution.

Last legislative session, the Department of Game, Fish and Parks, under the leadership of Gov. Larry Rhoden, opposed calls for developing a more comprehensive strategy. When these pests take hold, damage to fisheries, infrastructure, recreation and water quality becomes permanent. Half-measures equal surrender.

Public access also faces growing challenges. In our private-land state, most habitat relies on voluntary landowner partnerships.

Out-of-state hunters and anglers fund roughly 33% of the Game, Fish and Parks wildlife budget — nearly double resident contributions. This tilts priorities toward tourism revenue and commercialized hunting over local families.

Meanwhile, out-of-staters are snapping up or leasing farmland for private hunting retreats, pulling land from public access programs and squeezing opportunities for South Dakotans. Without bold action to protect resident priorities, our hunting and fishing traditions will wither.

These threats are linked. Plowing grasslands and draining wetlands strips nature's filters, flooding waters with pollution that feeds algae and invasives. Dirty water weakens fisheries. Shrinking access locks families out. Every land-use decision either accelerates the damage or begins the repair — especially with federal wetland protections now gone.

What's shocking is the silence by our political leaders.

These measurable, worsening crises have barely surfaced in the governor's race. Voters are left guessing where candidates stand on the issues that will define South Dakota's livability for generations.

This is not about ideology. It's about honest leadership — now.

How will South Dakota balance intensive agriculture with the clean water, healthy grasslands, and remaining wetlands our wildlife and economy desperately need?

What aggressive action will confront aquatic invasives — including a real mitigation plan for zebra mussels — and replace lost wetland protections?

How do we incentivize habitat conservation on working lands without punishing producers?

And how do we secure genuine public access so every South Dakotan — not just out-of-state interests — can enjoy our outdoor birthright?

South Dakota residents demand stewardship of land, water and wildlife. It's time candidates prove they share that commitment. Bring these issues into the race. Give voters the clarity they deserve.

Our lakes, streams, birds, butterflies, wetlands and current and future generations of South Dakotans deserve it.

Brad Johnson is a certified general real estate appraiser and longtime journalist. He is past president of South Dakota Lakes and Streams Association, president of the South Dakota Wildlife Federation, a member of the National Wildlife Federation's board of directors, and served 16 years on the South Dakota Board of Water and Natural Resources. He lives in Rapid City and Watertown.

Trump administration targets bison on federal grazing lands

An Interior Department proposal would cancel BLM grazing leases for American Prairie's buffalo in Montana, but it could affect tribal and private herds across the West

BY: BLAINE HARDEN, INSIDE CLIMATE NEWS

This article originally appeared on Inside Climate News, a nonprofit, non-partisan news organization that covers climate, energy and the environment. Sign up for their newsletter here.

PHILLIPS COUNTY, Mont. — The American buffalo — those ornery, hairy prairie beasts that reign as the official mammal of the United States — have joined wind turbines, electric cars and climate researchers in the cross hairs of the Trump administration.

Acceding to anti-bison grumbling from cattle ranchers and Republican politicians in Montana, Interior Secretary Doug Burgum in January proposed canceling leases for buffalo grazing on federal land managed

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 13 of 80

by the Bureau of Land Management.

The BLM is part of the Department of the Interior, which, for more than a century, has celebrated its role in heading off the extinction of buffalo, which were killed by the tens of millions during white settlement in the West. The Interior Department still sports a buffalo on its official seal.

But the BLM, long nicknamed the "Bureau of Livestock and Mining," has traditionally prioritized leasing the rangelands it oversees for cattle grazing.

Now, in the MAGA era, with Interior reversing the Biden administration's determination that conservation is a use of BLM land on par with grazing and resource extraction, Burgum has ruled that since bison here in north-central Montana are not being raised for "production-oriented purposes," they have no legal right to roam, wallow or munch grass on land leased from the bureau.

If the ruling becomes final, which may occur this spring, more than 950 buffalo will be evicted from tens of thousands of acres of federal land, some of which they have been grazing on, behind stout electric fences and without major incident, for 20 years.

Cows will then mosey on in, and their owners will benefit from the hugely discounted grazing leases available from the BLM. It charges a per-animal fee that is about 90 percent cheaper than fees charged for grazing livestock on privately owned land in this state.

Montana Governor Greg Gianforte, a friend of Secretary Burgum and a fellow Trump-supporting tech multimillionaire, gave voice to the joy that the prospect of buffalo banishment has generated among cattle ranchers who drive Montana's agricultural economy and Republicans who dominate politics in the state.

"For years, we have raised serious concerns about the federal government's failure to listen to the folks who live and work the land," Gianforte said in a statement. "By proposing to cancel these [bison lease] permits, BLM is finally acknowledging that federal overreach cannot come at the expense of our local communities and the production agriculture that feeds our nation."

Bristling at Bison Ban

Interior aimed its proposed decision at seven federal lease allotments held by American Prairie, a well-heeled nonprofit foundation that has long been a bête noire of local cattle ranchers and Montana Republicans. American Prairie—often with large donations from wealthy coastal environmentalists—has been buying ranches here in the depopulated outback of eastern Montana for nearly a quarter century. The foundation wants to revive the grassland ecosystem to create an "American Serengeti," chock full of sage grouse, prairie dogs and charismatic megafauna like bison, pronghorn, elk, wolves and grizzly bears.

The anti-buffalo wording of Bergum's proposed decision, however, is resounding far beyond this lonesome precinct of Montana. It is raising alarm and outrage from the Great Plains to California, where there are about half a million bison, many of which are raised for conservation and human consumption. Buffalo are grazing behind fences on scores of Indian reservations and on BLM allotments in Colorado, New Mexico, the Dakotas and elsewhere in Montana—and have been doing so without legal objection from Interior for more than four decades, until this year's order overturning BLM's 2022 decision to allow American Prairie to graze bison on seven allotments in Phillips County.

Particularly alarmed is the Coalition of Large Tribes (COLT), which manages 25,000 buffalo and represents more than 50 tribes, accounting for about 95 percent of Indian Country and half the Native American population in the U.S.

"Interior's proposed ruling would put a chokehold on us being able to increase our buffalo herds," said OJ Semans Sr., executive director of the tribal coalition and a member of the Rosebud Sioux in South Dakota. "We should not have the federal government saying only cattle get affordable BLM leases. It is just so stupid the way they are doing this. It is DEI for cows."

Coalition tribes run bison on reservation land but plan to shift some of their growing herds to BLM grazing lands, which total about 155 million acres. Much of this land is threaded through and around large reservations. Tribes raise buffalo for spiritual, ecological and nutritional purposes—and sell buffalo meat (about 25 percent leaner than beef) for profit. Two tribes in California, the Pit River Tribe and the Fort Bidwell Indian Community, are actively seeking BLM grazing leases for their bison.

In a blistering notice of protest to Interior, the coalition's lawyers said that "as the proposed decision

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 14 of 80

is currently written, it is unlikely that any tribal government or tribal citizen buffalo herd would ever be eligible for BLM grazing leases.”

Non-tribal buffalo ranchers with federal land leases are also up in arms. Colton Jones, an owner of the Wild Idea Buffalo Company in Hermosa, South Dakota, said he fears that his lease for bison grazing on 26,000 acres of U.S. Forest Service land, which is part of the Department of Agriculture rather than Interior, will be the next target of “politics and pressure from the current administration.”

“This action is not only unnecessary and politically motivated, but it also sets a deeply troubling precedent that threatens the livelihoods of family-owned bison operations like ours and the many ranchers with whom we maintain longstanding business relationships,” Jones said in a letter to the BLM state office in Montana.

Protest letters from American Prairie, the Coalition of Large Tribes and private buffalo operations accuse Burgum’s Interior Department of concocting anti-bison language that distorts the meaning and purpose of the Taylor Grazing Act, a Dust Bowl-era law that governs livestock grazing on BLM land.

That 1934 law, written by members of Congress at a desperate time when wind-born topsoil from the Great Plains was raining down on Washington, D.C., was intended to halt catastrophic damage to public lands from overgrazing, restore the health of the prairie ecosystem and stabilize the livestock industry.

Interior’s primary rationale for booting buffalo off BLM land, according to its proposed decision, is that leases under the Taylor Grazing Act are “limited to cases where the animals to be grazed are domestic and will be used for production-oriented purposes.”

Pro-bison lawyers point out that the words “production-oriented purposes” do not appear in the grazing act and that Congress has never defined the words “domestic” or “livestock” to exclude buffalo. State law in Montana explicitly defines bison as livestock.

A novel argument made by Interior in its proposed buffalo ban hinges on “intent.” Burgum’s decision argues that American Prairie’s buffalo “are intended to be released into the wild or integrated into a wild herd in the future”—and therefore should not be “properly considered ‘domestic livestock.’”

Lawyers for buffalo interests mock this interpretation, arguing that nowhere in federal grazing law, agency regulations or case law is there an “intent standard” as regards the raising of buffalo. They also said that buffalo run wild nowhere in the U.S. outside of Yellowstone National Park and a handful of other national parks and reserves.

Like cows, bison live and die behind fences, and many are slaughtered for human consumption. As the Coalition of Large Tribes explains, buffalo are “actively managed, marketed, sold, and traded like other livestock, and offered for commercial hunting.”

A Home Where Buffalo Roam

Nineteen years ago, when I first wrote in the Washington Post about American Prairie and its frosty relations with some of its ranching neighbors, the foundation’s leaders rhapsodized about vast open spaces where buffalo would run free—and where fences and cows would go away. American Prairie told the Department of the Interior that its mission was to develop the largest, most genetically diverse conservation bison herd in North America.

“This thing is huge,” Sean Gerrity, then-president of American Prairie, told me in 2006, “it will affect a tremendous number of people, and it will last a long time.”

Since then, American Prairie has indeed expanded. Its bison herd is up from 19 to 952; its land holdings have grown from about 60,000 acres to more than 600,000 acres, including property purchased outright and land leased from the state of Montana and the BLM. The foundation says it wants to buy more land and envisions eventually having about 1.7 million acres that, combined with the Charles M. Russel National Wildlife Refuge and the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument, would provide the amount of land researchers believe is required for a fully functioning prairie ecosystem. It would continue to expand its buffalo herd as a keystone of that habitat.

But the sobering realities of life in Montana have also set in, especially as the state’s politics have shifted in recent years from purple to hard-right red. Dozens of local ranchers have placed “negative bison easements” on future sales of their property that would prevent buffalo from grazing on them. The foundation has sued the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, claiming it has slow-walked

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 15 of 80

the processing of American Prairie's applications for leases that allow buffalo grazing on state land.

American Prairie has had to adapt.

It now has more than eight times as many cattle as buffalo on its land. And the buffalo herd is managed much like bison operations across the West, with \$350,000 worth of BLM-approved fences, disease inoculations, ear tags and regular harvests for human consumption. Of the 2,000 bison that have grazed on American Prairie land in the past two decades, about half have been slaughtered for meat or shipped away to tribal buffalo herds, breeding programs or zoos. There is a building on the property for slaughtering buffalo.

"We are largely an operation like a ranch," said Scott Heidebrink, director of landscape stewardship for American Prairie, as he drove me among bison herds on the foundation's land and offered me snacks of buffalo jerky.

"Cows are not going away," said Heidebrink, a South Dakota native who has worked on this land for a decade and has a degree in wildlife and fisheries science from South Dakota State University. "We have fences and roads and buildings, and of our 606,000 deeded and leased acres, only 46,000 acres do not have cattle on them."

Big Hopes for Bison, Big Worries for Ranchers

Phillips County, home to American Prairie and the focus of BLM's proposed buffalo ban, is one of the more inhospitable places in the continental United States for making a living from agriculture. Rain is scarce, winters long, summers scorching and the soil is poor. Prairie grasses and sagebrush do well; row crops often do not.

Numerical proof of how hard it is to scratch out a living in Phillips County—a Connecticut-sized expanse of prairie lying between the Canadian border and the Missouri River—is the relentless decline in its number of human inhabitants. The high point was 1920, when the Census counted 9,311 residents lured in during the first two decades of the twentieth century by a series of increasingly generous homestead acts and by railroad advertisements promising that rain would follow the plow.

Census records show that since 1920, the population of Phillips County has declined every ten years for an entire century. The 2020 census counted 4,217 residents; three people have died or otherwise departed the county since then.

What can and do thrive in Phillips County are cows—and bison. Before they were killed off, researchers believe that millions of buffalo roamed what became Phillips County.

Now, cattle ranching is the county's dominant economic engine, usually producing about two-thirds of its total agricultural income. Cows outnumber humans by about 11 to one in what is one of Montana's top cattle-producing counties.

But to raise cattle profitably, ranchers here—as across the Great Plains—have had to get bigger. They do so by buying out their neighbors. Purchase of more land usually comes with below-market grazing privileges on thousands of acres of adjacent BLM land. About half of the land in the county is federal- or state-owned.

As a result, fewer ranchers are raising more cattle per ranch—part of a nationwide trend. For the most part, management of these cattle has been sustainable, avoiding the destructive grazing practices that created the Dust Bowl.

Still, there is a growing body of scientific evidence showing that bison would be far better for the prairie ecosystem of Phillips County than cattle.

A Kansas State University study found that sustainably managed buffalo are twice as effective as cattle at increasing the diversity of native plants. Bison, which tend to move farther and faster while grazing, do less concentrated trampling of the land and spread seeds more widely, thus increasing the resiliency of grasslands to droughts, which have increased in severity with climate change.

Bison are less stressed by hot weather than cattle and spend less time lingering at ponds and wetlands, decreasing soil erosion and giving other animals access to water. In winter, buffalo slow their metabolism to conserve energy and eat less, while cattle increase their metabolism and eat more. And bison can survive on lower-quality forage than cattle.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 16 of 80

Buffalo herds also increase the diversity of birds, amphibians, elk, deer, coyotes, wolves and bears on the prairie.

Deanna Robbins, a third-generation cattle rancher and activist critic of American Prairie, is not persuaded by research that shows the benefits of buffalo over cattle.

"They romanticize the bison," she said. "Their claim that bison are some kind of magical animal that grazes different is just ridiculous."

She said research funded by stockgrowers shows that properly managed cattle are just as eco-friendly as bison.

Robbins, though, said that buffalo themselves are not at the top of her list of worries.

"My biggest concern is American Prairie's planned takeover of federal grazing with their bison, and then the growth of the American Serengeti, which would bring in more apex predators," she said. "If they surround me with those things [wolves and grizzly bears], it doesn't matter what land I own. I am not going to have an economically successful ranch."

To stop American Prairie, Robbins and other local ranch women created Save The Cowboy, which has placed anti-buffalo billboards and banners across Phillips County and neighboring Fergus County, where Robbins has her ranch. The organization, created nine years ago, objects to American Prairie's non-profit status and to its moneyed coastal donors who "have no idea of what life is like here in Montana."

While Save The Cowboy has drawn support from Montana's governor and congressional delegation, its concerns were largely dismissed by the Biden administration, which, in 2022, granted American Prairie's request to graze buffalo on land leased from the BLM. Bison would be good for the land, water quality and wildlife, the administration stated.

All that's changed during President Donald Trump's second term. To the delight of Robbins and other supporters of Save The Cowboy, Interior's proposed decision would void Biden's bison leases and put cattle first.

"What the Trump administration did was understand what the rules really are for managing this land," said Robbins. "We definitely feel like we are being heard. These are different times."

Finding Middle Ground on the Range

Dusty Emond is a fourth-generation cattle rancher whose family has owned land in Phillips County for 107 years. For the past 15 of those, his herds have grazed across a fence—within easy snorting distance—of growing herds of bison managed by American Prairie.

Emond, 53, was opposed to American Prairie when its land agents first began sniffing around the county, searching for ranches to buy. He supports the Trump administration's proposed cancellation of grazing leases for American Prairie bison on BLM land.

"The biggest problem I have with them is their money," Emond said. "We can't compete with it. When a ranch comes up for sale, they have unlimited money. They buy at the top of the market. The more land they buy, the less there is for farm families around here."

Emond worried, when buffalo first moved in as close neighbors, that they would infect his cattle with brucellosis, an infectious bacterial disease that induces abortion in pregnant cattle, elk and bison—and can infect humans. Billions of dollars have been spent in the United States to eradicate the disease, yet it persists in some buffalo and elk in Yellowstone National Park. Montana ranchers and politicians often issue ominous warnings about the heightened risk of brucellosis to the state's cattle whenever they complain about buffalo on BLM land. American Prairie says that's just a scare tactic.

Emond said that when it comes to the buffalo next door, he worried too much, and brucellosis has turned out to be a non-issue.

American Prairie has "done a better job than I thought they would" in tending to the health of buffalo, Emond said. There have been no cases of buffalo transmitting the disease to his cattle, nor from any managed buffalo herd to cattle anywhere in the country, according to the National Park Service.

American Prairie, for all his initial trepidation, has turned out to be a good neighbor, he said. So much so that he's gone into business with the foundation, leasing about 20,000 acres of its deeded and allotted

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 17 of 80

BLM land for his cattle.

"It hasn't been a problem for me," he said, referring to the day-to-day proximity of his cows and their buffalo. "I can think of about four times in the past 15 years that their bison have gone across the fence into my herds. It has been very minor—no worse than any other neighbors. And when I call them, they are right there to come get the buffalo."

Emond said he's learned that cattle and buffalo separated by strong fences can get along just fine. He would prefer that the buffalo herds not grow larger, but he believes they will over time and that his ranch will survive.

"I'm a realist," he said. "I have accepted the fact that they are here, and I know they are not going anywhere. I'm willing to work with them."

Scott Heidebrink, the American Prairie land manager, acknowledged that the Trump administration may soon force a major cutback in herd size.

If Interior's proposed ban on leasing BLM land becomes final, he said, several hundred buffalo could be culled or shipped elsewhere. In the process, he said, cattle and the remaining bison will be shuffled around on American Prairie's holdings.

"If we lose, we have deeded land where buffalo can go," he said, while cattle now grazing on that private land would move to land leased from the BLM. The bison and their keepers will bide their time—and wait for a new president to reopen federal land.

"It is very evident that this administration is anti-bison," Heidebrink said. "But we are here and we are not going away."

Blaine Harden is a contributor to Inside Climate News, the oldest and largest dedicated climate newsroom in the nation.

Debate over US war crimes, illegal military orders returns with Trump threats against Iran

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump's threats to destroy power plants and bridges in Iran before saying he was prepared for a "whole civilization" to die have renewed questions about what constitutes an illegal order and what, if any, repercussions officials could face for committing war crimes.

The issue originally surged to the forefront last year when the Trump administration repeatedly struck boats in the Caribbean officials alleged were carrying illegal drugs. Democratic lawmakers with backgrounds in the military and intelligence community then published a video reminding troops they "can" and "must refuse illegal orders."

"No one has to carry out orders that violate the law or our Constitution. We know this is hard and that it's a difficult time to be a public servant," they said. "But whether you're serving in the CIA, in the Army, or Navy, or the Air Force, your vigilance is critical."

The issue of legal versus illegal military orders surfaced again this week when Trump escalated his threats against Iran, leading to bipartisan condemnation from members of Congress before he gave that country's leaders two more weeks to negotiate.

But what exactly violates international law or rises to the level of a war crime is often murky, as is who would be willing to prosecute U.S. troops, according to experts interviewed by States Newsroom.

Rachel E. VanLandingham, professor of law at Southwestern Law School in Los Angeles and a former judge advocate in the U.S. Air Force, said that "at the end of the day, the law of war does allow for a great deal of violence and a great deal of civilian suffering."

But several of the threats Trump has made, including to destroy power plants and bridges in Iran, would likely violate the law if the military were to carry them out, she said.

"Under no stretch of interpretation would that be lawful, right? Because that just fails to distinguish whatsoever the civilian objects versus lawful military objectives, even if we stretch the definition of what's a lawful military objective," VanLandingham said.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 18 of 80

The boat strikes in the Caribbean, including the decision to order a second strike on two survivors, could also have been illegal, she said.

VanLandingham doesn't expect the Trump administration will hold anyone accountable for actions the military has already taken or may take. But she noted there is no statute of limitations on the charges that would likely apply under the Uniform Code of Military Justice for military members or the War Crimes Act for anyone not subject to the military justice system.

"The next administration could come in and investigate our service members for alleged war crimes. And they should, to demonstrate renewed fidelity to U.S. law, to the law of war," she said.

Congress doesn't have the authority to prosecute anyone for violating the law, but could hold oversight hearings with Defense Department officials, a scenario that would become more likely if one or both chambers return to Democratic control following the November midterm elections.

"They can have public, open hearings and drag in every single military member that was involved in the chain of command of orders for striking Iran, if they wanted to," VanLandingham. "That's not a criminal prosecution, but it's transparency."

Lawmakers could also provide more funding and require the Pentagon to reinstitute the Civilian Harm Mitigation Program, which she said "the Trump administration has gutted."

Geneva Conventions

Leila Sadat, the James Carr Professor of International Criminal Law at WashU Law School in St. Louis, Missouri, said that in a situation where the president directs the military to violate the laws of war, it's highly unlikely military commanders or the Department of Justice would then turn around and prosecute those actions.

Even if a prosecutor were to try, Trump would likely be insulated from any domestic prosecution for "official acts." And as president he could issue preemptive pardons for any military members he believes could face future prosecution, either in the military or civilian justice system.

Trump has a history of absolving military members accused of violating military law, including in 2019, when he pardoned two officers in the Army for actions in Afghanistan and restored the rank of a Navy SEAL who had been demoted for his conduct in Iraq. Trump later pardoned four contractors for killing more than a dozen Iraqi civilians in 2007.

But those protections only apply within the United States.

The Geneva Conventions' provision on universal jurisdiction would apply internationally and any country could choose to prosecute.

"Now you still have to catch them, you have to get the evidence, but every state in the world is a party to the Geneva Conventions," Sadat said. "So committing violations of the Geneva Conventions by attacking civilian objects, by attacking marketplaces, or hospitals, or schools, or electrical infrastructure, those kind of crimes can be prosecuted by every country in the world. So people should think about it before they do it."

France, Germany and Sweden have all used the principle of universal jurisdiction to prosecute Syrians for crimes they committed during the war in their home country, she said.

"The one debate is, do you have to have the person on your territory before you can go forward? Or can you do an investigation even if the person is not on your territory?" Sadat said. "And many have argued that you can do the investigation even if the individual is not on your territory. Different countries have different rules on whether they accept trials in absentia."

Sadat said that gets a bit more complicated when the Status of Forces Agreements that give the U.S. jurisdiction over alleged wrongdoing by U.S. troops in dozens of countries come into play.

Sadat, who was a special adviser on Crimes Against Humanity to the International Criminal Court Prosecutor from 2012 through 2021, said if the U.S. military were to carry out some or all of the threats Trump posted to social media, that could have led countries to reconsider those agreements.

"It could create a huge security problem for the United States eventually. And that's why I hope calmer heads are prevailing. Saying, 'You know, there's an entire complex web of treaties and agreements,'" she

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 19 of 80

said.

Trump would also likely pressure countries not to try U.S. military members for violating international law, but he may not always be successful, she said.

"Eventually there's going to be a country in which that's not going to work," Sadat said. "And so that's why you really do have to think of this a little bit differently, because there are external forces and external actors that could decide we're going to enforce the law, even if the United States is not going to enforce the law."

Investigating US forces

Susana Sacouto, director of the War Crimes Research Office at American University's Washington College of Law, said the Geneva Conventions require the U.S. to "investigate and ... deal with alleged violations of the law of war by its own forces."

How well that works in practice has "varied over time," she said.

"The problem is, we have an architecture, but those cases, particularly the criminal cases, are really exceptional, and they're really exceptional, especially regarding senior officials," Sacouto said. "So there's been a lot of criticism about whether that architecture that exists is actually functioning to routinely investigate our own military actions for potential war crimes or (international humanitarian law) violations."

There is the possibility a future presidential administration may have defense officials or the Department of Justice look into allegations that emerge during the Trump administration. But Sacouto said, "past history with respect to accountability for U.S. officials, especially senior officials, is not very encouraging."

Congressional investigations into the Central Intelligence Agency's use of torture in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks is one example Sacouto pointed to of a long-term investigation that did not lead to any high-level prosecutions.

"Even then, no senior officials were really ultimately held accountable for their role in that program," she said. "There were lower-level Abu Ghraib prosecutions, but no senior-level folks were found accountable."

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

US House Democrats call for Congress to come back into session for Iran war debate

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — House Democrats on Capitol Hill Thursday slammed President Donald Trump's rhetoric on Iran as "beyond the pale" and urged House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., to reconvene Congress and rein in the president's war powers.

The eight Democrats, who represent districts in California, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Washington state, made a largely symbolic attempt to bring a War Powers Resolution to the House floor during the morning's pro forma session — a short, routine meeting that occurs when Congress is out of session. The House is not scheduled to return until April 14.

"The pro forma speaker ignored us, which was a tragedy, but we will keep fighting," Rep. Don Beyer, D-Va., said.

Efforts to limit Trump's military actions in Iran failed last month in both the House and Senate.

Rep. Glenn Ivey, D-Md., who led a press conference afterward on the steps outside the House of Representatives, said Trump's war with Iran is on "the wrong track."

"He's been terrible at the wheel. The threats of total annihilation were beyond the pale. It's time for Congress to step in and take control of the wheel," Ivey said.

Threats and then a ceasefire

Trump threatened Tuesday to wipe out Iran's "whole civilization" if the regime did not open the Strait of

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 20 of 80

Hormuz, a major maritime passageway for one-fifth of the world's oil and liquid natural gas.

The United States and Iran entered a tenuous two-week ceasefire agreement roughly 90 minutes before Trump hit his self-imposed deadline to begin bombing civilian infrastructure, likely a war crime.

One day into the ceasefire Wednesday, the pause in fighting was punctuated by Iranian drones and missiles striking Gulf nations. Israeli forces reported launching 100 strikes in Lebanon in 10 minutes. The wave of intense bombardment killed roughly 300 and injured just over 1,100, according to health officials cited by the United Nations.

Trump's post urging violence on his social media platform, Truth Social, followed his Easter Sunday profanity-laced message threatening to bomb Iran's power plants and bridges unless they lifted their blockade on the strait.

The regime has for weeks only allowed a trickle of tankers and cargo ships from certain friendly countries to pass, routing the traffic through Iranian waters and reportedly charging steep tolls. Islamic Republic officials told the Financial Times Wednesday that they planned to charge tankers \$1 per barrel of oil, to be paid in cryptocurrency, going forward.

Prior to the war, roughly 140 ships a day flowed freely through the strait. The chokepoint has rocked the global oil market.

Ivey called the situation "out of control."

"In fact, Iran's in a better place with respect to the strait than they were before this war started," he said.

Pentagon reports 380 injured troops

The war has claimed thousands of lives across the Middle East, and scores of civilians have been injured. Thirteen U.S. service members were killed in the fighting, and as of Thursday the Pentagon reported 380 injured.

"Look at us now in a war of his choosing, egged on by Mr. (Benjamin) Netanyahu for his purposes, a war that has proved deadly to 13 members of the American military," said Mary Gay Scanlon, D-Pa., referring to the Israeli prime minister.

"The speaker must live up to his constitutional responsibilities. Call us back in, consider the War Powers Resolution, let the American people and their representatives in Congress weigh in. The words and actions of this president have proved that he is unhinged and unwell," Scanlon said.

Johnson's office did not immediately respond for comment.

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

How Trump's SAVE America Act could make it harder for married women to vote

BY: JONATHAN SHORMAN

Millions of women could face new challenges to voting under President Donald Trump's SAVE America Act, which would require voters to prove their citizenship before casting a ballot.

The federal legislation would mandate that most Americans show a birth certificate or passport to register to vote. But people with names that don't match their birth certificate in some instances could have to produce additional documents like a marriage certificate or divorce decree linking their past and current identities.

The proposal holds potentially outsized consequences for millions of married and divorced women, transgender individuals and others who have changed their names.

As many as 69 million American women have birth certificates that don't match their current name, according to an analysis by the liberal Center for American Progress.

"The fact that the majority of women upon marriage do change their name already means that this is going to be completely unequal in how the law is applied," said Letitia Harmon, senior director of policy

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 21 of 80

and research at Florida Rising, a racial and economic justice nonprofit.

Harmon, 43, has personal experience with the issue because of state proof-of-citizenship laws, which have become more common in recent years.

The Florida resident used to live in Kansas, which required individuals to show documents like a birth certificate or passport to register to vote until federal courts struck down the law as unconstitutional. Ahead of the 2014 election, Harmon was unable to locate her birth certificate before the registration deadline and couldn't vote.

More recently, Florida, Mississippi, South Dakota and Utah have all enacted proof-of-citizenship measures this year, in addition to Wyoming in 2025. Florida Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis signed the Florida SAVE Act last week.

A dozen years later, Harmon worries she could again face additional hurdles to voting — this time because of multiple name changes. Harmon, who changed her name when she married but later divorced and changed it back, voiced concern that if election officials ever check her registration, it will be flagged.

"It's heartbreaking and it's infuriating. It feels like we're going backwards," Harmon said.

Debate in D.C.

In Washington, the U.S. Senate has been debating the SAVE America Act, Trump's signature elections initiative, after a version of the legislation passed the House. The bill doesn't appear to have enough support to survive a filibuster, but Trump and his allies have pressured senators to end the filibuster to pass it before the midterm elections.

Supporters of the bill describe it as an election integrity measure and say it's necessary to prevent noncitizen voting, though studies have shown that's extremely rare. The measure reflects a long-running effort by Trump to assert more federal control over elections that includes a campaign by the Department of Justice to obtain sensitive state voter data and an executive order signed last week restricting mail-in voting.

Opponents condemn the legislation as unneeded and poorly drafted. If enacted, the bill would take immediate effect, throwing the election process into chaos in a midterm election year as millions of people registering to vote attempt to prove their citizenship. The new requirements would risk disenfranchising American voters struggling to obtain the documents they need in time.

Disproportionate effect on married women

Critics have especially focused on the disproportionate effect the legislation could have on women. Eighty-four percent of women in opposite-sex marriages take either their husband's last name or hyphenate their name, according to a 2023 Pew Research Center survey. By contrast, less than 6% of men took their wife's last name or hyphenated their name.

"Given that 85% of American women change their name when they get married, the impact on women is going to be huge and it's going to be very problematic," Maine Secretary of State Shenna Bellows, a Democrat, said in a February interview.

The House-passed version of the bill says that when individuals applying to register have names that don't match the name on their proof-of-citizenship documents, they could provide "additional documentation as necessary to establish that the name on the documentation is a previous name of the applicant" or sign an affidavit affirming that the name on the documents is their previous name.

According to the bill, each state would establish a process to carry out this provision, in line with guidance from the federal Election Assistance Commission, a bipartisan independent commission that aids election officials.

Affidavit provision unclear

Some election and legal experts have said the affidavit provision is unclear. It comes immediately before another provision that allows individuals without proof-of-citizenship documentation to register if they sign

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 22 of 80

an attestation that they are a citizen and an election official signs an affidavit saying the person has sufficiently established citizenship. The Election Assistance Commission would create a uniform affidavit for use in that situation.

"Who knows what sort of process they'll say," said Alison Gill, director of nominations and democracy at the National Women's Law Center, a progressive legal advocacy group. "So there is language there, but it's still very vague and conflictual."

Because states would be responsible for setting procedures to vet those with different names on their documents, Gill said some states would probably try to make the process easier than others. But election officials would likely err on the side of strict enforcement because they could be prosecuted for registering individuals who don't provide citizenship documents.

"Ultimately, this puts the burden on election officials, who face criminal and civil liability under the bill, potentially to decide whether to risk registering a person with mismatching documents," Gill said.

'Frankly insulting'

White House officials and some congressional Republicans have denied that individuals who change their name would face greater difficulty registering to vote. White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said in March that there was "zero validity" to claims that the legislation would stop women from voting or make it harder for them to vote.

Married women who have changed their name and are already registered to vote would be unaffected by the legislation, Leavitt said. She added that for the "small fraction" of individuals who go on to change their name or their address, they would have to go through their state's process to update their documentation.

"I think it's frankly insulting that the Democrats are saying that there are certain groups of people in this country who aren't smart enough to update their documentation to allow them to vote," Leavitt said.

But Alaska Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski has raised concerns about how the SAVE America Act would affect married women. Murkowski, who opposes the bill, said in a floor speech that an estimated 155,000 female citizens in Alaska age 15 and older have names that don't match their birth certificates.

"Again, is it impossible? No," Murkowski said. "Is it going to be really challenging? Absolutely, yes."

Lawsuits ensured

The SAVE America Act would almost certainly face legal challenges if it became law and the Supreme Court would come under immense pressure to weigh in because of the sweeping, nationwide changes in the legislation.

Some federal courts have ruled against proof-of-citizenship voter registration requirements. In 2020, the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals struck down Kansas' law, finding that it violated federal voting laws as well as the Constitution's equal protection clause. The Supreme Court at the time declined to take the Kansas case.

The provisions on name changes alone could face their own legal challenges.

Tracy Thomas, a constitutional law professor at the University of Akron School of Law in Ohio, said opponents could argue the bill's impact on people who change their name amounts to voting discrimination in violation of the 14th Amendment, which guarantees equal protection under the law.

Courts have affirmed some election restrictions, like requirements to show a photo ID at the polls, as acceptable rules that don't overly burden voters. However, Thomas suggested the SAVE America Act may go too far if it delays people from registering, requires multiple steps and forces them to pay for needed documents.

"That starts to sound like more than minimal inconvenience," Thomas said.

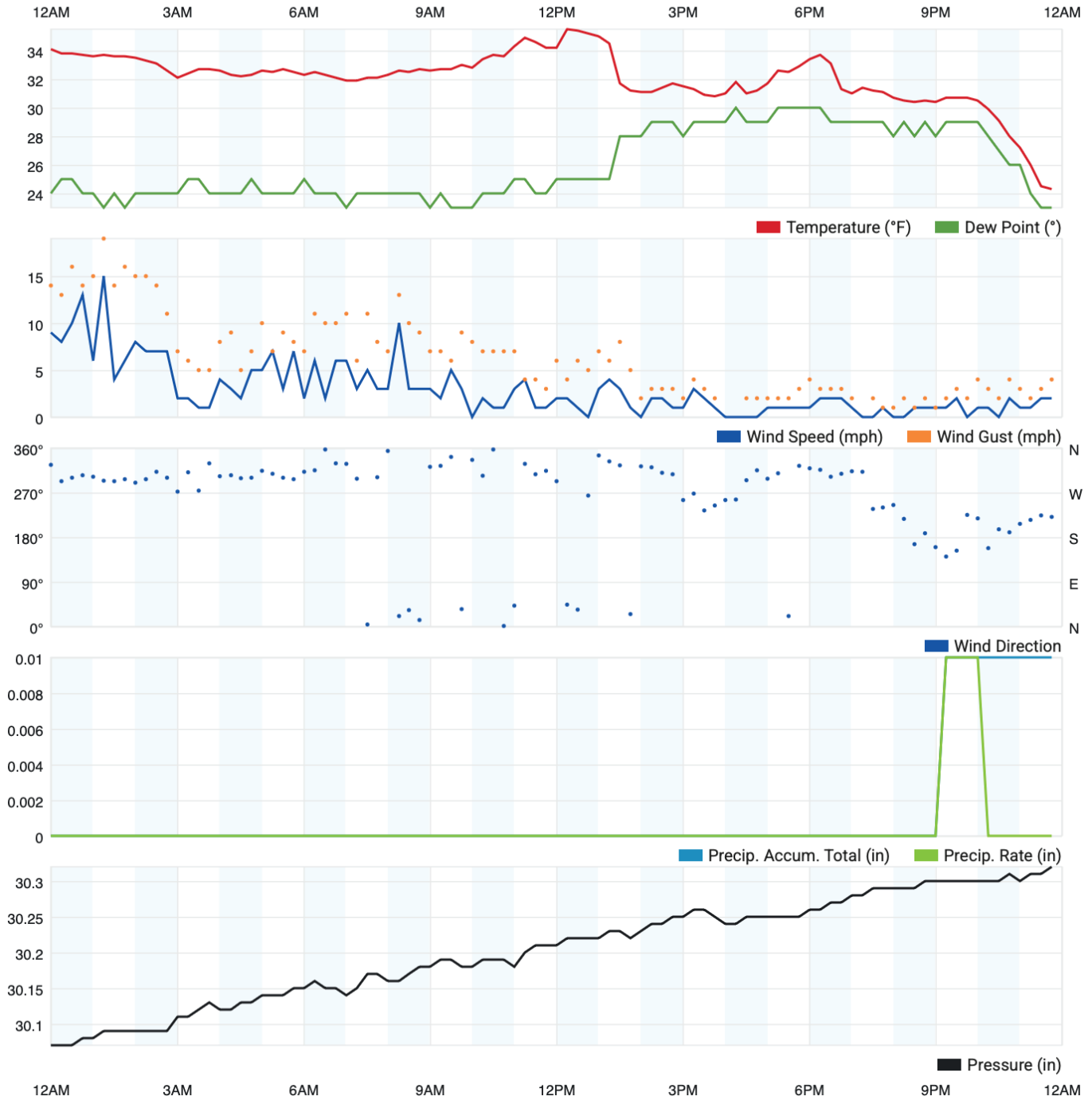
Jonathan Shorman covers democracy for States Newsroom. Based in Kansas City, his coverage area includes elections and voting rights, fights over state and federal power, civil liberties and more. An alumnus of the University of Kansas, he previously covered politics for The Kansas City Star.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 23 of 80

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

April 9, 2026



Broton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 24 of 80

Today

Tonight

Saturday

Saturday Night

Sunday



High: 55 °F

Low: 38 °F

High: 60 °F

Low: 51 °F

High: 77 °F

Areas Freezing Fog and Areas Fog then Sunny

Increasing Clouds

Chance Showers and Breezy

Slight Chance Showers

Slight Chance Showers and Breezy



Winds increasing overnight

April 10, 2026
3:16 AM CDT

Strongest winds out of the south-southeast late Saturday morning into Saturday afternoon

Wind Gust (mph) Forecast

	4/10 Fri					4/11 Sat					4/12 Sun										
	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm
Murdo	12↑	17↑	24↑	28↑	30↑	32↑	32↑	31↑	33↑	35↑	33↑	29↑	25↑	25↑	26↑	28↑	29↑	30↑	29↑	21↑	15↓
Mobridge	9↑	13↑	17↑	18↑	21↑	26↑	29↑	30↑	31↑	32↑	29↑	23↑	21↑	18↑	15↑	15↑	20↑	24↑	26↑	22↑	15↓
Pierre	6↑	13↑	18↑	22↑	24↑	26↑	28↑	26↑	30↑	31↑	31↑	24↑	22↑	20↑	18↑	18↑	21↑	24↑	26↑	18↑	10↓
Miller	10↑	12↑	15↑	18↑	21↑	24↑	28↑	30↑	35↑	37↑	37↑	31↑	29↑	30↑	29↑	25↑	28↑	31↑	31↑	23↑	14↑
Aberdeen	10↑	14↑	14↑	14↑	14↑	18↑	23↑	26↑	31↑	35↑	33↑	29↑	24↑	23↑	22↑	20↑	21↑	26↑	29↑	23↑	16↑
Watertown	7↑	10↑	12↑	8↑	9↑	15↑	20↑	23↑	29↑	31↑	32↑	30↑	30↑	30↑	29↑	26↑	28↑	29↑	30↑	24↑	16↑
Sisseton	14↑	16↑	14↑	9↑	8↑	13↑	17↑	22↑	28↑	31↑	32↑	29↑	24↑	24↑	23↑	23↑	24↑	26↑	29↑	24↑	17↑
Ortonville	8↑	12↑	12↑	9↑	8↑	12↑	16↑	18↑	24↑	28↑	29↑	28↑	25↑	23↑	23↑	22↑	22↑	24↑	26↑	23↑	17↑



Highs in the 50s



Highs in the Upper 50s to 70s (warmest west of the Missouri River)



Highs in the 70s and 80s



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

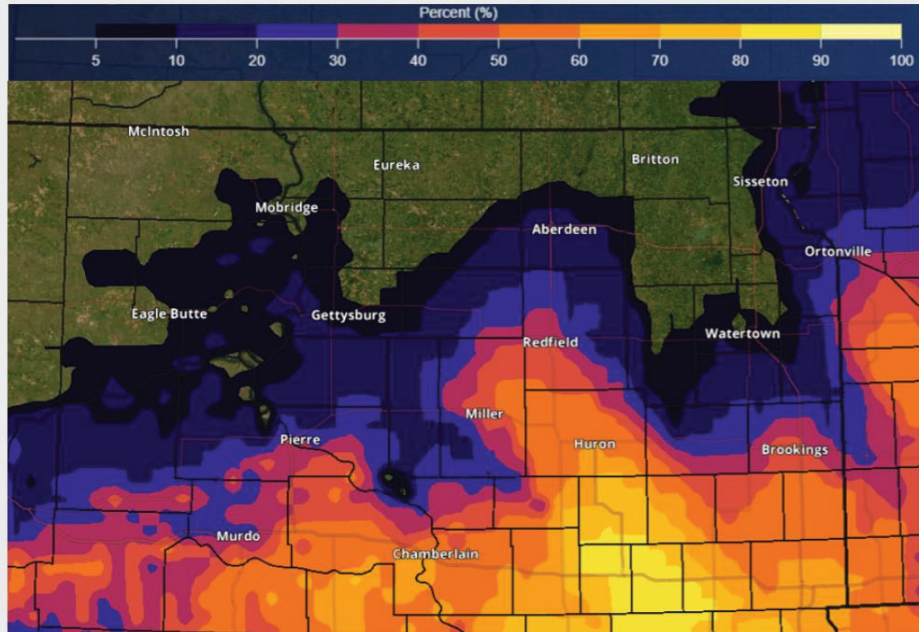
Winds will increase overnight, and be strongest late Saturday morning through Saturday afternoon, out of the south to southeast with gusts of 30 to near 40 mph. Highs today will be in the 50s. Temperatures Saturday will range from the upper 50 to 70s with the warmest air setting up west of the Missouri River. There is a 40-60% chance of light rain showers mainly east of the James River Saturday morning. The warmest day will be Sunday, with highs in the 70s and 80s.

Very Warm Sunday!

Highs in the 70s and 80s

- mainly dry
- winds out of the west gusting 25 to 35 mph
- elevated fire weather concerns over central SD

Chance of reaching 80° or higher



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

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

Very warm, to near record high temperatures will settle in for Sunday, with highs in the 70s and 80s. Expect mainly dry conditions with winds out of the west gusting 25 to 35 mph. The combination of dry conditions and gusty winds will result in elevated fire weather concerns, especially over portions of central South Dakota. There is generally a 50 percent or higher chance of temperatures reaching 80 degrees or more Sunday afternoon south of a line from around Pierre to Redfield and Brookings.



Watch for Patchy to Dense Fog

at midnight it was around the Aberdeen area



Freezing fog occurs when it's 32°F or below and water droplets touch a surface, upon which they can freeze.



Any object the freezing fog touches will become coated with ice!



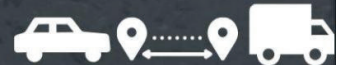
Use caution while driving- black ice may be present on roads



Be careful walking outdoors on sidewalks/stairs as surfaces may be icy



Don't use your high-beam headlights! Use your low-beams or fog lights if you're able



Leave plenty of distance between you and the vehicle in front of you

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 26 of 80

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 36 °F at 12:35 PM

Low Temp: 25 °F at 11:27 PM

Wind: 19 mph at 1:11 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 88 in 1977

Record Low: 16 in 1997

Average High: 55

Average Low: 29

Average Precip in April.: 0.46

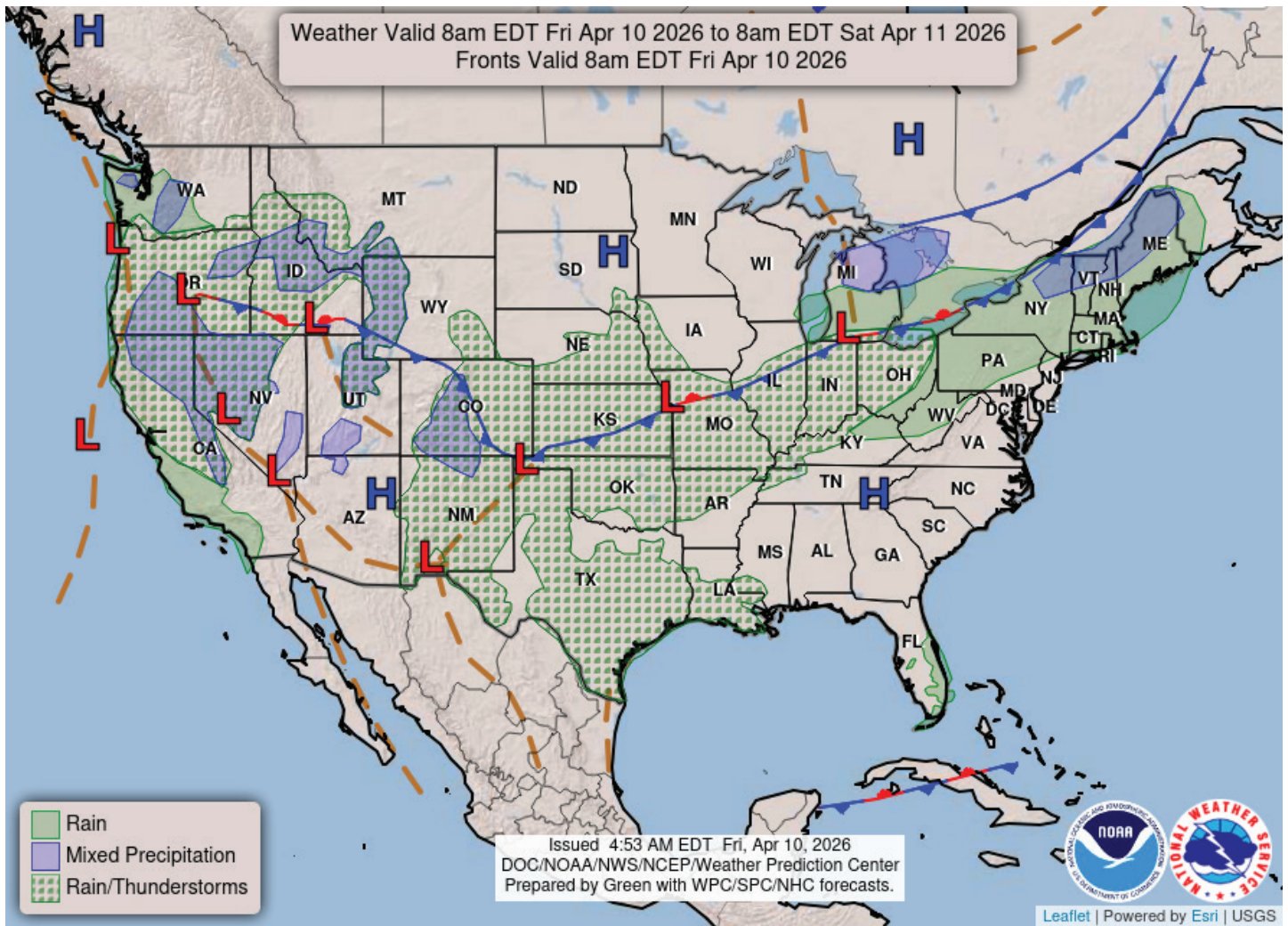
Precip to date in April.: 0.75

Average Precip to date: 2.52

Precip Year to Date: 2.37

Sunset Tonight: 8:11 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:53 am



Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 27 of 80

Today in Weather History

April 10, 1965: Severe Thunderstorms in the afternoon and early evening resulted in severe hail reports throughout much of Clark County. Hail up to 2.00 inches in diameter was recorded 30 miles northeast of Huron around 2:40 PM. At about 6:30 PM, hail 0.75 inches in diameter fell near Garden City on a flock of wild geese in flight, killing 25 of them.

April 10, 1969: The Elm River in Westport was the highest of all time at 22.11 feet, 8.11 feet above flood stage.

April 10, 2005: Thunderstorm winds caused widespread damage in Menno, in Hutchinson County. Numerous trees, including several large trees, were uprooted. Numerous homes were damaged, some directly by the wind and others by trees and other debris. Garages were especially hard hit, including at least one destroyed garage. A grain elevator was damaged, with a catwalk and conveyor being blown over. A historical post office addition to a log building was damaged, doors and part of the roof of a flour mill were blown down, and doors were blown off several other buildings. Many homes and other buildings had broken windows and damaged siding. A few small storage buildings were destroyed, and others were damaged or blown over. Several farms were heavily damaged, with machine sheds, at least one hog barn, and several other small structures destroyed. Several vehicles were damaged, including one pickup, which was pushed partly onto the porch of a house. Power lines and poles were blown down, resulting in a power outage in Menno.

April 9-10, 2013: A large, slow-moving upper-level low-pressure area moving across the region brought several rounds of heavy snow to much of central and northeast South Dakota. Snowfall amounts from 6 to as much as 22 inches occurred over the several-day periods. Travel became difficult, if not impossible, with some roads closed for a time. Interstate 90 closed on the evening of the 9th. Many schools were also closed across the region. Additionally, a 66-year-old suffered a heart attack and passed away while shoveling the snow in front of his house in Aberdeen.

1894 — A heavy late season snow blanketed parts of the northeastern U.S. Heavier snowfall totals included 31.5 inches at Salem Corners PA, 30 inches at LeRoy NY, 26 inches at York PA, 14 inches at Waterbury CT, and 9 inches at Providence RI. (The Weather Channel)

1935 — Severe dust storms across Iowa and Kansas closed schools and highways. Dodge City KS experienced its worst dust storm of record, with dense dust reported from the morning of the 9th until after sunset on the 11th. The sky was almost as dark as night at times during the daylight hours. The thick dust suspended traffic on highways and railroads, and also suspended most business in town. (The Weather Channel)

1979 — A massive tornado smashed into Wichita Falls, TX, killing 43 persons and causing 300 million dollars damage. Another tornado struck Vernon TX killing eleven persons. (David Ludlum) (Storm Data)

1987 — Blustery northwest winds prevailed across the Northern Plains Region. Winds in Wyoming gusted to 65 mph. Temperatures in North Dakota were only in the 20s and 30s, following afternoon highs in the 70s the previous day. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 — Strong northerly winds, gusting to 53 mph at Albuquerque, NM, ushered cold arctic air into the south central U.S. The temperature at Albuquerque plunged from 82 degrees to 29 degrees overnight. Thirty-three cities in the central U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date, including Goodland KS with a reading of 4 degrees above zero. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 — Thunderstorms produced severe weather from the Central Gulf Coast Region to western sections of the Carolinas during the afternoon and evening. Evening thunderstorms over western South Carolina produced wind gusts to 98 mph which injured four persons at Holly Springs, and wind gusts to 100 mph which injured one person and caused half a million dollars damage north of Dacusville. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2005 — Heavy snow affected the Colorado Rockies during April 10-11, as up to 30 inches of snow affected the mountains around Denver. In the Denver metro area, 10-15 inches of snow accumulated.

Walking With Jesus in a Storm

Unrealistic expectations can keep us from seeing Jesus' faithful love and tender care.

Matthew 14:22-33: 22 Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away.

23 After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone.

24 But the boat was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary.

25 And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea.

26 When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear.

27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid."

28 Peter said to Him, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water."

29 And He said, "Come!" And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

30 But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!"

31 Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

32 When they got into the boat, the wind stopped.

33 And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "You are certainly God's Son!"

It was night. There were high winds and crashing waves. For the disciples, who were on the sea in a small boat, the situation had become a crisis—and Jesus was not with them. He was on the mountainside praying.

In the storm, perhaps the disciples thought Jesus had forgotten them. But He knew exactly where they were and what they were experiencing. Since Jesus is omniscient, He knows our situation at every moment. No darkness can hide us; no trial can obscure His vision. We are always seen, known, and understood!

Jesus sought out the disciples, and He will do the same for us. At first, however, the Twelve didn't realize who it was they saw walking on water. Jesus often does not come in the way that we expect. Our ideas of how He works can make us wonder where He might be and blind us to how near He actually is.

Experiencing Jesus' presence in hard times can teach us precious truths. During an earlier experience on the water, the disciples saw both Jesus' trust in God and His authority over nature (Matthew 8:23-26). Through the storms, they learned who Jesus was and what He could do. Let's pray for spiritual eyes to discern the Lord's presence. Then, may we listen for His voice and obey (John 10:27).

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

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 29 of 80

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

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 30 of 80



WINNING NUMBERS

MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.09.26

17 34 45 47 56 4

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

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 1 Mins 49 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.07.26

5 15 22 33 37 2

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$110,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 46 Mins 49 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: 1 Days 16 Hrs 1 Mins 49 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.08.26

2 15 19 27 29

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$46,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 16 Mins 49 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.08.26

4 15 36 45 56 18

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 45 Mins 49 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: 1 Days 16 Hrs 45 Mins 49 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Judge rejects plea agreement in case of missing Navajo elder Ella Mae Begay

By SAVANNAH PETERS and JACQUES BILLEAUD Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — A federal judge in Phoenix has rejected a plea agreement that would have allowed a man who admitted to beating a Navajo elder and leaving her for dead to avoid more prison time.

Preston Henry Tolth, 26, now will face trial on charges of carjacking and assault in relation to the 2021 disappearance of Ella Mae Begay. A trial date hasn't been set.

Under the agreement, Tolth would have been released on a sentence of three years of time served in exchange for acknowledging his role in the crime and pleading guilty to a single count of robbery.

Known as a gifted weaver of pictorial rugs, Ella Mae Begay was 62 years-old when she vanished from Sweetwater, Arizona, the small community on the northern part of the Navajo Nation where she was raised and later brought up her own three children.

Begay's disappearance received national media attention and helped highlight the broader crisis of Indigenous people who go missing or are killed at disproportionate rates. Nearly five years after she disappeared, Begay has not been found.

The rare decision to reject a plea agreement followed anguished testimony from Begay's family members who told the court Tolth should not walk free without revealing Begay's location.

Seraphine Warren described her aunt as a warm and sweet person who opted for "hugs instead of handshakes," and implored the judge not to "give up on her" by accepting a plea agreement that Warren said offered no justice to the grieving family.

"Accountability is not time served," Warren told the judge tearfully. "It's about truth, and we still don't have the truth."

Gerald Begay, Ella Mae's son, said, "I feel like the justice system has failed me."

Tolth, whose father was dating Begay's sister, was identified as a person of interest within days of Begay's disappearance. He initially denied involvement but in a later interrogation, confessed to stealing Begay's truck with her in it, punching her repeatedly and leaving her on the side of the road.

Tolth was set to face trial in 2024, but a federal judge dealt prosecutors a major blow by ruling his confession inadmissible, saying Tolth had been unlawfully coerced by an FBI agent who lied about evidence that law enforcement had against him after Tolth had invoked his right to remain silent.

The U.S. Attorney's office for Arizona and Tolth's public defenders declined to comment on the judge's rejection of the plea agreement.

Tolth did not speak at Thursday's hearing. His attorney asked the judge to consider his unstable childhood and history of homelessness and substance abuse, calling his three years in federal custody a reasonable sentence.

A federal prosecutor said the suppression of Tolth's confession weakened the government's case and that the plea agreement would provide Begay's family with more certainty and finality than a trial with sparse evidence. Begay's family members disagree.

"We want to see this go to trial because we have nothing to lose," Warren said. "If we lose, at least we fought."

US and Iran prepare for ceasefire talks as Netanyahu authorizes negotiations with Lebanon

By JON GAMBRELL and SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Negotiators from Iran and the U.S. prepared for high-level talks with their ceasefire still shaky Friday, as Israel and Hezbollah traded fire and Tehran maintained its stranglehold

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 32 of 80

on the Strait of Hormuz.

There remain many issues that could derail the truce — as well as negotiations for broader deal to permanently end the war.

Iran's semiofficial Tasnim news agency, close to the Revolutionary Guard, claimed that talks set for Saturday wouldn't happen unless Israel stopped its attacks in Lebanon. And U.S. President Donald Trump complained that Iran was "doing a very poor job" by not allowing the free flow of ships through the strait, through which 20% of the world's traded oil once passed.

Kuwait, meanwhile, said it faced a drone attack Thursday night that it blamed on Iran and its militia allies in the region. Though Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard denied launching any assault, it has carried out attacks across the Mideast in the past that it did not claim.

And yet, preparations for the talks between Iran and the U.S. in Pakistan appeared to move forward, with U.S. Vice President JD Vance set to take off from Washington. Negotiations between Israel and Lebanon, meanwhile, are expected to begin next week in Washington, according to a U.S. official and a person familiar with the plans, who spoke on condition of anonymity due to the delicacy of the matter.

Israel and Lebanon will have direct negotiations

Israel's insistence that the ceasefire in Iran does not include a pause in its fighting with Hezbollah, which joined the war in support of its backer, Iran, has threatened to scupper the deal.

The day the truce was announced, Israel pounded Beirut with airstrikes, killing more than 300 people, according to Lebanon's Health Ministry. It was the deadliest day in the country since the war began Feb. 28.

Trump said Thursday that he has asked Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to dial back the strikes. Early Friday, Israel's military said it hit approximately 10 launchers in Lebanon that had fired rockets toward northern Israel a day earlier.

Iran's parliament speaker, Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, warned Thursday that continued Israeli attacks on Hezbollah would bring "explicit costs and STRONG responses."

Netanyahu, meanwhile, said that he authorized the negotiations with Lebanon "as soon as possible" aimed at disarming Hezbollah militants and establishing relations between the neighbors, which have technically been at war since Israel was established in 1948.

The Lebanese government had not responded as of early afternoon Friday. The timing and location of the talks was first reported by Axios.

Two days after Israel's intense barrage, people sifted through the wreckage of their homes, trying to salvage whatever furniture and personal mementos they could find in the rubble. Some expressed gratitude that they lost only their homes and belongings, not their loved ones, as others had.

"There is no substitute for family," said Wissam Tabila, 35. "Everything else can be replaced."

The Strait of Hormuz remains a sticking point

Iran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz has sent oil prices skyrocketing, driven stocks down and roiled the world economy. Tehran's control over the waterway has proved its biggest strategic advantage in the war.

The spot price of Brent crude, the international standard, was around \$97 Friday, up more than 30% since the war started.

Before the conflict, over 100 ships passed through the strait each day — many carrying oil to Asia. With the ceasefire in place, only 12 have been recorded passing through.

Underscoring the precarious situation, a Botswana-flagged liquefied natural gas tanker attempted to travel out of the Persian Gulf via a route ordered by the Revolutionary Guard, but suddenly turned around early Friday, ship-tracking data showed.

The head of the United Arab Emirates' major oil company, Sultan al-Jaber, said some 230 ships loaded with oil were waiting to get through the strait and must be allowed "to navigate this corridor without condition."

U.S. President Donald Trump complained about that situation, writing on his social media platform: "Iran is doing a very poor job, dishonorable some would say, of allowing Oil to go through the Strait of Hormuz." "That is not the agreement we have!" Trump wrote of the trickle of ships Iran has allowed to pass.

The ceasefire deal is still fragile

Questions also remain over the fate of Iran's missile and nuclear programs — which the U.S. and Israel

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 33 of 80

sought to eliminate in going to war.

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 make them. Iran insists its program is peaceful.

Trump has said that the U.S. would work with Iran to remove the uranium, though Tehran has not confirmed that.

The chief of Iran's nuclear agency, Mohammad Eslami, said Thursday that protecting Tehran's right to enrich uranium is "necessary" for any ceasefire talks.

World shares mostly higher and oil gains ahead of planned US-Iran ceasefire talks

By CHAN HO-HIM AP Business Writer

HONG KONG (AP) — World shares were mostly up Friday tracking Wall Street gains while oil prices also rose on the fragile Iran war ceasefire and ahead of Iran-U.S. talks in Pakistan.

In early European trading, Britain's FTSE 100 was up 0.2% to 10,627.69. France's CAC 40 also gained 0.2% to 8,265.80, while Germany's DAX rose 0.2% to 23,844.89.

Asian stocks ended mostly higher Friday. South Korea's Kospi climbed 1.4% to 5,858.87. Tokyo's Nikkei 225 jumped 1.8% to 56,924.11. Shares of Fast Retailing, parent of Japanese clothing retailer Uniqlo, surged 12% after the group raised profit expectations for the year.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng gained 0.6% to 25,893.54, while the Shanghai Composite index was 0.5% higher at 3,986.22. China on Friday reported that its consumer price index — a main inflation gauge — was up 1% in March compared with a year ago, lower than what analysts had expected and down from the 1.3% increase in February.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 lost 0.1%, while Taiwan's Taiex rose 1.6%.

Talks between the U.S. and Iran in Pakistan's capital, Islamabad, for a possible permanent ceasefire agreement in the Iran war are expected to take place starting Saturday, with U.S. Vice President JD Vance leading the delegation for the United States.

But ahead of the talks, deadly Israeli strikes on Lebanon on Wednesday raised questions whether the two-week ceasefire in the Iran war is still intact, while the Islamic Republic maintained control over the Strait of Hormuz, which is largely closed despite demands from the U.S. to reopen the waterway critical for global oil and gas transport.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he had authorized talks with Lebanon, with negotiations said to be expected in Washington next week.

Oil was up on Friday. Brent crude, the international standard, was 1.8% higher at \$97.68 per barrel. Benchmark U.S. crude was up 1.9% to \$99.76 a barrel.

For oil prices, "\$65-70 a barrel is not coming back," Ajay Rajadhyaksha of Barclays wrote in a recent research note, referring to the pre-Iran war oil price levels. The bank predicts that Brent crude could remain at around \$85 per barrel on average for this year.

"A ceasefire is not a refund," he wrote. "Ceasefires end wars; they don't undo them."

On Thursday, Wall Street gained on hopes of the Iran war ceasefire. The S&P 500 added 0.6% to 6,824.66. The Dow Jones Industrial Average climbed 0.6% to 48,185.80, while the Nasdaq composite gained 0.8% to 22,822.42.

Shares of Constellation Brands, which sells Modelo and Corona beers in the U.S., jumped 8.5% following better-than-expected quarterly results. Cloud services provider CoreWeave was 3.5% higher after announcing an expanded deal with Meta Platforms through 2032. Meta was up 2.6%.

In other dealings, gold and silver prices fell. Gold's price lost 1.1% to \$4,765.60 an ounce, while silver prices dropped 1.7% to \$75.13 per ounce.

The U.S. dollar rose to 159.31 Japanese yen from 158.96 yen. The euro was trading at \$1.1685, down from \$1.1699.

Taiwan's opposition leader meets China's Xi Jinping as both sides call for peace

By HUIZHONG WU and HAN GUAN NG Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Taiwan's opposition leader met Friday with Chinese President Xi Jinping at Beijing's Great Hall of the People, the first such encounter in over a decade, with both sides affirming the need for maintaining peace around the self-ruled island that China claims as its territory.

Both Xi and Cheng Li-wun, the head of the Beijing-friendly Kuomintang Party, reiterated they wanted to move toward a peaceful reunification of Taiwan and the mainland, though it remains unclear how they would achieve it. China hasn't ruled out the use of force and has stepped up its military exercises around Taiwan, sending warships and fighter jets closer toward the island and steadily poaching Taiwan's few remaining diplomatic allies.

Xi welcomed Cheng and her party's representatives in the Great Hall of the People, where he usually meets world leaders, to a round of applause from both sides. "The larger trend of compatriots on both sides of the strait walking nearer, closer, and together will not change. This is a historical necessity. We have full confidence in this," he said.

"Although people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait live under different systems, we will respect each other and move towards each other," Cheng said, adding: "We will seek systemic solutions to prevent and avoid war."

She arrived in Beijing on Tuesday after visiting Shanghai and Nanjing.

Cheng has previously described herself as a promoter of peace between Taiwan and China. She has opposed large increases in Taiwan's defense spending and her party continues to block President Lai Ching-te's special defense budget for arms purchases, including building an air defense system with interception capabilities called the Taiwan Dome.

Taiwan has been governed separately from China since 1949, when a civil war brought the Communist Party to power in Beijing. Defeated Kuomintang forces fled to Taiwan, where they set up their own government.

Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te did not directly address Cheng's China visit, but issued a statement Friday morning urging for the KMT to approve his special defense budget. He said that "history tells us that compromising with authoritarian regimes only comes at the cost of sovereignty and democracy, and will not bring freedom or peace."

Cheng had said she would push for a "framework for peace" between China and Taiwan, but did not offer any specifics when asked by reporters in Beijing after her meeting with Xi. She said she raised the issue of increasing Taiwan's international profile, such as participation in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership free trade agreement, and that Xi responded "positively."

Cheng said both parties will work to make sure "the Taiwan Strait will no longer be a flash point with the possibility of conflict, and will not become a chess piece played by the outside world."

"Her speech is not like that of a Taiwanese politician," said Weihao Huang, a professor of political science at National Sun Yat-sen University in Taiwan, saying she didn't mention the public. "You can't see the public's mindset from her words. It's either her words are being restricted by China or that she was willing for China to restrict it."

Both Xi and Cheng said they would uphold the 1992 Consensus and opposed Taiwan's independence.

The 1992 Consensus is a tacit agreement, never formally enshrined as a document, that Taiwan and China all belong to one China. However, while the KMT said the 1992 Consensus means they belong to "One China" with separate interpretations of what China means, the Communist Party has never acknowledged that.

"This visit is more significant to Xi than to Cheng," said Ma Chun-wei, an expert in China-Taiwan relations at Taiwan's Tamkang University. "At the local level, the KMT's grassroots members didn't really want Cheng to visit China at this time" ahead of local elections later this year.

But for Xi, this visit is a chance to have a grip on China-Taiwan relations with Cheng, Ma said, as there's

been no official contact between the governments since the Democratic Progressive Party came into power. Further, Xi can tell the U.S. to not interfere as "he has a channel and the ability to deal with the Taiwan issue."

Man who killed a deputy serving an eviction notice was run over, California sheriff says

PORTERVILLE, Calif. (AP) — A man fatally shot a central California sheriff's deputy Thursday morning as he was being served an eviction notice, prompting a standoff that ended with authorities fatally running him over with a vehicle after he fled the home.

Tulare County deputies were serving the notice to a 60-year-old man in Porterville when he opened fire on them, the sheriff's department said. Porterville is about 150 miles (240 kilometers) northeast of Los Angeles in the state's Central Valley.

The man barricaded himself inside the home with a rifle for several hours. At one point, authorities deployed gas into the home as the man continued to fire at law enforcement. The standoff ended around 6 p.m. when the man left the home and moved through the yards of nearby homes, Sheriff Mike Boudreaux said at an evening news conference.

Boudreaux said a Kern County SWAT team drove an armored car into the yard where the man was laying on the ground and he started firing at them. The team drove the car over the man, killing him.

Boudreaux said the man had failed to pay rent for 35 days and had been expecting law enforcement to arrive to serve a final notice for eviction. Boudreaux said he "laid in wait" and immediately shot at officers when they arrived.

The man's family was in contact with him and urged him to come out peacefully, but he refused, Boudreaux said.

The deputy who was killed was part of a group of officers that arrived to help after gunfire began, Boudreaux said. Bystander video shot from a driveway and posted by the Visalia Times-Delta showed several armed deputies crouched on the road in a residential neighborhood when a series of shots rang out. Some of the deputies began running away. The gunman cannot be seen from the video. Additional video showed someone being carried into an emergency medical vehicle.

Boudreaux later identified the slain deputy as Detective Randy Hoppert, a veteran of the U.S. Navy who joined the sheriff's department in 2020.

"This is senseless," Boudreaux said.

Residents in the neighborhood were evacuated by SWAT teams or urged to shelter in place for several hours, and nearby schools were on lockdown.

Miguel Ibarra, whose 82-year-old mother lives across the street from the gunman, said it was surreal to see his parents' house on TV in what is normally a quiet, boring neighborhood.

"The police did a really good job keeping us informed and keeping us in the know of what's going on," he said.

Zelenskyy says Ukrainian forces shot down Shahed drones in Middle Eastern countries during Iran war

By VOLODYMYR YURCHUK and HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian military personnel have shot down Iranian-designed Shahed drones in multiple Middle Eastern countries during the Iran war, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, describing the operations as part of a broader effort to help partners counter the same weapons used by Russia in Ukraine.

Zelenskyy made his first public acknowledgment of the operations Wednesday in remarks to reporters that were embargoed until Friday. He said Ukrainian forces took part in active operations abroad using domestically produced interceptor drones proven in countering Iranian-designed Shahed drones used by Russia in Ukraine.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 36 of 80

"This was not about a training mission or exercises, but about support in building a modern air defense system that can actually work," Zelenskyy said.

Ukraine took part in the defensive operations before the tentative ceasefire in the Middle East was reached among Iran, the United States and Israel this week.

Zelenskyy did not identify the countries involved but said Ukrainian personnel operated across several nations, helping strengthen their air defense systems. He previously said that 228 Ukrainian experts were deployed in the region.

In exchange, Ukraine is receiving weapons to protect its energy infrastructure, along with oil, diesel and, in some cases, financial arrangements, he said.

The Ukrainian leader said the agreements would bolster Ukraine's energy stability and described the partnerships as something that would "be marketed" as Kyiv seeks to formalize and expand its defense export role.

"We are helping strengthen their security in exchange for contributions to our country's resilience," he said. "This is far more than simply receiving money."

Ukraine will face more pressure

The disclosure comes amid concerns that conflict in the Middle East could divert Western military support from Ukraine, particularly air defense supplies.

But Zelenskyy said that partners were continuing to supply missiles for Patriot systems, adding that a new batch had arrived in recent days and that Ukraine was working with all partners to ensure its air defense remained in place.

He warned that the coming spring and summer would be difficult for Ukraine, with growing political and battlefield pressure as the United States turns to domestic politics and elections.

Zelenskyy said he had urged U.S. envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner to visit Kyiv and proposed a trilateral format with Moscow. It remains unclear whether they will come or if talks will instead take place in a third country.

U.S.-led talks have made no progress on key issues, as Washington's attention shifts to the Middle East conflict while Russian and Ukrainian forces remain locked in fighting along the roughly 1,250-kilometer (800-mile) front line.

Separately, Zelenskyy said he expects Western allies to restore full sanctions on Russian oil, warning that any easing could allow Moscow to sustain its war effort and offload key energy assets. Russia has been profiting from a surge in global energy prices, brought on by damage to oil and gas infrastructure in the Gulf and Iran's blocking of the Strait of Hormuz, a vital sea route for global oil supplies.

Ukraine has stepped up strikes on Russian energy sites to cut oil revenues as prices rose and U.S. sanctions eased. Zelenskyy said partners had urged Kyiv to scale back attacks during Iran's disruption of the Strait of Hormuz, but he argued Russian oil has a limited impact on global markets.

"I won't say who asked us to do this. But partners did ask — it's a fact. They asked at different levels, from political to military leadership."

Putin declares Easter truce and Ukraine ready to reciprocate

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Ukraine is ready to mirror any ceasefire steps after Russian President Vladimir Putin announced a temporary Easter truce.

"We proposed a ceasefire during the Easter holidays this year and will act accordingly", Zelenskyy said Friday on X. "People need an Easter free from threats and real movement toward peace, and Russia has a chance not to return to strikes after Easter as well".

Putin on Thursday declared a 32-hour ceasefire over the Orthodox Easter weekend, ordering Russian forces to halt hostilities from 4 p.m. Saturday until the end of Sunday.

Previous ceasefire attempts have had little impact, with both sides accusing each other of violations.

A country-by-country glance at Pope Leo XIV's trip to Africa

By The Associated Press undefined

Pope Leo XIV's four-nation, 11-day trip to Africa is so dizzying in its complexity it recalls some of the globetrotting odysseys of St. John Paul II in his early years.

Themes Leo is expected to raise include Christian-Muslim coexistence, the over-exploitation of the region's natural and human resources, corruption and migration.

Here's a country-by-country look at each destination and highlights of the itinerary:

ALGERIA: April 13-15

The Algeria stop clearly carries the most personal importance for Leo, given his ties to St. Augustine, the inspiration of his religious order who lived and died there. Leo will visit Annaba, the modern-day Hippo where the 5th century saint was a bishop.

Migration and Christian-Muslim coexistence are expected to be other top themes in Algeria, a former French colony which is a majority Sunni Muslim nation on North Africa's Mediterranean coast. Leo will pay homage to migrants killed in shipwrecks trying to reach Europe and will visit the Great Mosque in Algiers.

Last year, Algerian legislators voted to declare France's colonization of the North African country a crime, approving a law that calls for restitution of property taken by France during its 130-year rule, among other demands seeking to redress historical wrongs.

CAMEROON: April 15-18

One of the highlights of Leo's visit to Cameroon will be a "peace meeting" he will lead in the north-west city of Bamenda on April 16, featuring testimony of a Mankon traditional chief, a Presbyterian moderator, an imam and a Catholic nun.

Cameroon's western regions have been plagued by fighting since English-speaking separatists launched a rebellion in 2017 with the stated goal of breaking away from the French-speaking majority and establishing an independent English-speaking state. The conflict has killed more than 6,000 people and displaced over 600,000 others, according to the International Crisis Group, a think tank.

The country is also plagued by fighting involving Boko Haram militants in the north, as the Islamic extremist group's insurgency in neighboring Nigeria has spilled over into Cameroon.

Cameroon sits atop significant reserves of oil, natural gas, cobalt, bauxite, iron ore, gold and diamonds. The extractive sector accounts for nearly a third of the country's exports, according to the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative.

But rights groups and the Catholic Church have raised alarms that revenues from extraction rarely reach the rural and indigenous communities that live closest to mining and drilling operations, while foreign companies and a small national elite capture most of the profits.

While French and English companies have long dominated the extraction industry in Cameroon, Chinese companies have moved heavily into the country in recent years, particularly in the gold mining regions of the east.

Last year, United Nations experts reported severe human rights and environmental harms resulting from mercury use in gold mining operations in eastern Cameroon.

The gold mining rush in eastern Cameroon has also led hundreds of children to abandon school to dig for gold, risking their lives at makeshift mines for a dollar's worth of ore sold on the local black market, according to UNICEF.

ANGOLA: April 18-21

In Angola, where around 58% of the population is Catholic, Leo will pray at the Sanctuary of Mama Muxima, a Marian shrine that has become one of the most important Catholic pilgrimage sites in Angola.

The church was first built around the end of the 16th century by the Portuguese after they established a fortress at Muxima. It became a key point in the Portuguese trans-Atlantic human trade as a place where enslaved people were baptized before they were sent on ships to the Americas.

Angola today is the fourth largest oil producer in Africa and among the world's top 20 producers, according to the International Energy Agency. It's also the world's third biggest diamond producer and has significant deposits of gold and highly sought after critical minerals.

But despite its varied natural resources, the World Bank estimated in 2023 that more than 30% of the

population lived on less than \$2.15 a day.

The country of around 38 million gained independence from Portugal in 1975, but still bears the scars of a devastating civil war that began straight after independence and raged on and off for 27 years before finally ending in 2002. More than half a million people are believed to have been killed.

In Angola, Leo will address young people especially to offer a message of hope and healing, the Vatican said.

EQUATORIAL GUINEA: April 21-23

The discovery of offshore oil in the mid-1990s transformed Equatorial Guinea's economy virtually overnight, with oil now accounting for almost half of its GDP and more than 90% of exports, according to the African Development Bank.

Yet more than half of the authoritarian petrostate's population still live in poverty, the World Bank reported last year.

The former Spanish colony is run by Africa's longest-serving president, Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, who has been in power since 1979 and is accused of widespread corruption and authoritarianism.

Several rights groups, including Human Rights Watch, have documented how revenues have enriched the ruling Obiang family rather than the broader population, where at least 70% of the country's nearly 2 million people live in poverty.

The country's government also faces rampant accusations of harassment, arrest and intimidation of political opponents, critics and journalists.

In addition to the negative impacts of the extraction industries, Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni said Leo would raise issues of corruption and the proper role of governing authorities during the trip.

Too young for the MMR shot, babies become 'sitting ducks' in measles outbreaks

By DEVI SHASTRI and LAURA UNGAR Associated Press

LANDRUM, South Carolina (AP) — With baby Arthur too young for the measles vaccine and a sibling due in June, the Otwells grew nervous when the threat of the highly contagious virus started factoring into their grocery run.

"We go to the Costco that was kind of a hotbed," said John Otwell, who knew about the state health department's warnings of public exposures at the store. "A lot of people just don't get it; they think it's just a cold. It's not."

By Arthur's 9-month checkup, the South Carolina outbreak had exploded into the nation's worst in more than 35 years, surpassing last year's in Texas. That meant that under state guidance, Arthur could get his first dose of the MMR vaccine — for measles, mumps and rubella — earlier than the usual 12 to 15 months old. Their new baby won't be able to get the shot until at least 6 months — a prospect that worries parents of infants wherever measles spreads.

Babies too young to be vaccinated are among the most vulnerable in a measles outbreak. The disease can wreak havoc on their fragile bodies, making them so sick they stop eating and drinking. They can develop pneumonia or brain swelling, and sometimes die.

Babies depend entirely on herd immunity — at least 95% of a community must be vaccinated to prevent measles outbreaks. But dropping vaccination rates have eroded protection in South Carolina and across the nation. In Spartanburg County, the outbreak's epicenter, less than 90% of students have gotten required vaccines.

"Babies become sitting ducks," said Dr. Deborah Greenhouse, a Columbia pediatrician. "The burden is on all of us to protect all of us."

But increasingly, some policymakers and officials push a view of vaccination as an issue of individual freedom and parents' rights, rather than one of public health to safeguard the population as a whole.

At the federal level, Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., a longtime anti-vaccine crusader, has sought to remake vaccine policy and oversaw billions in public health cuts. And though a temporary ruling from

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 39 of 80

a federal judge has slowed his momentum, a raft of bills has been introduced in states, including South Carolina, that threaten to further reduce vaccination rates.

South Carolina's measles outbreak, totaling about 1,000 cases, has slowed. But measles is spreading in many states, with 17 outbreaks this year and 48 last year, and the U.S. on the verge of losing its status as a country that has eliminated measles.

Doctors work to protect the youngest against measles

Dr. Jessica Early never thought she'd have to deal with measles, but the pediatrician feared for her patients and her own baby when it popped up in her Greer community. She and other doctors began offering an approved infant MMR dose as early as 6 months old. Her practice also started giving the second MMR dose — usually for ages 4 to 6 years old — early.

To the chagrin of many doctors, no one knows how many South Carolina infants have gotten measles or been hospitalized by it.

State officials will disclose only that 253 of the 997 cases were among children 4 and younger; they say they won't break cases down further for confidentiality reasons. It's not uncommon to group statistics this way.

Officials also don't know exactly how many infants were hospitalized with the virus because, as in some other states, hospitals aren't required to report measles-related admissions.

Across the state, doctors said they got many questions about whether it was safe to bring infants to waiting rooms or day care.

Thomas Compton — regional director of Miss Tammy's Little Learning Center, a child care network operating across the outbreak region — said 18 parents pulled children out of his facilities, though they had no confirmed cases. Some abandoned deposits days before their kids were scheduled to start, forcing the company to lay off a teacher.

Although licensed day cares must require vaccines under state law, families can easily get religious exemptions. About a fifth of Miss Tammy's 300 children have vaccine waivers.

When measles surged, Compton said state officials gave little guidance. His staff scrubbed down surfaces, as they did when COVID-19 was raging; tracked local measles cases on Facebook; and relied on Google for information about the disease.

"A lot of parents were really stressed out," Compton said. "Anytime that we had a little sickness going on or something, they were like, 'Do you think it's the measles?'"

State legislation would prohibit vaccines for children under 2

Last year, an Associated Press investigation found that Trump administration officials were directing activists to push anti-science legislation in statehouses. Nationally, around 350 anti-vaccine bills were introduced as of late October, AP found, including at least eight in South Carolina.

This year, a state bill would prohibit requiring vaccines for children under 2.

"In other words, it would get rid of those requirements in the day cares," pediatrician Greenhouse said. "And for people like me, that is a gut punch that is terrifying."

In a subcommittee discussion, Republican State Sen. Carlisle Kennedy said his bill aims to protect parents' rights. His baby was born in August without working kidneys and got vaccines on a personalized schedule, in coordination with doctors.

"We didn't want to put vaccines in his body before his body was able to survive them," he said.

Opponents countered that herd immunity protects children in these situations.

The Senate subcommittee advanced the legislation. Greenhouse fears it has momentum.

"In the climate that we are currently living in, I think any bill potentially could have legs," she said. "It is our job to do our absolute best to make sure that those legs don't go anywhere."

Whether the bill becomes law, doctors say this sort of legislation fuels vaccine skepticism and confusion. While the American Academy of Pediatrics advises giving babies all the vaccines they've gotten for years, some parents tell Greenhouse they know the government has called for fewer.

"They don't actually know who they can trust," she said.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 40 of 80

South Carolina, like other states, has made nonmedical vaccine exemptions easier to get, noted Dr. Martha Edwards, president of the state's American Academy of Pediatrics chapter. In the outbreak's epicenter, religious exemptions have more than doubled since 2020. Statewide, 4% of school-age students have such exemptions in 2025-26.

"Parental choice is a big buzzword in a lot of the Southern states," Edwards said. But the choice not to vaccinate, she said, impacts other parents' rights to keep their children safe.

Nationwide, protection fades as measles spreads

Doctors expect things will only get worse.

In the first three months of 2026, the U.S. logged 1,671 measles cases. That's 73% of the total from 2025, the worst year for the virus in more than three decades. In November, international health officials will determine whether measles is still considered eliminated in the U.S.

National MMR vaccination rates – which dropped to 92.5% among kindergartners in the 2024-25 school year, from 95.2% in 2019-20 – obscure much lower rates in certain communities. At one Spartanburg County school, 21% of kids received all required vaccines.

Doctors worry it's just a matter of time before all sorts of vaccine-preventable diseases threaten lives like they did a century ago.

"The whole concept of immunization is one of the best things that has ever happened to medicine," Greenhouse said. "To see that we are actually going backwards is just confounding."

Helen Kaiser, who lives in the outbreak area, vaccinated her twin 2-year-old boys early to protect them and the community.

"I would never forgive myself," she said, "if I knew that my son had gotten another baby very sick and it was something I could have prevented."

Trump's tenuous Iran exit plan isn't healing Republican rifts exposed by the war

By STEVEN SLOAN, STEVE PEOPLES and MEG KINNARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's search for an off-ramp from the war with Iran is getting bumpy inside his Republican Party.

In the decade since Trump's "America First" movement rose to power by rejecting military intervention, his coalition has rarely been tested the way it is now. Trump's exit efforts — first through threats of annihilation, then with a ceasefire that is proving precarious — are doing little to paper over tensions that have festered since the war began six weeks ago.

Laura Loomer, a conservative activist close to the president and often one of his top boosters, rejected the notion of brokering a deal with Iran. In an interview, she knocked Vice President JD Vance for being "in charge" of talks expected to start Saturday in Pakistan, as he takes on a larger diplomatic role ahead of a potential 2028 White House run.

"I support President Trump," Loomer said in an interview. "I just don't believe in negotiating with Islamic terrorists."

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

Former Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia, a Trump supporter-turned-critic, called for the president to be removed from office through the Constitution's 25th Amendment after he said earlier this week that a "whole civilization will die tonight" unless Iran made a deal. Megyn Kelly, the former Fox News anchor who now hosts a podcast, unloaded on Trump with a profane critique and asked, "Can't he just behave like a normal human?"

During a recent taping of "The Charlie Kirk Show," the host wondered what would end first, their episode or the ceasefire deal.

Despite the growing criticism, Republican leaders in Congress were largely silent. Many were privately uncomfortable with Trump's threats on social media and were concerned about how the war would play out, especially in an election year. But with Congress on recess for the opening two weeks of April, House

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 41 of 80

Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., and Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., have offered little public reaction to Trump's moves.

Some said the developments were simply unfolding too quickly.

"How do you go up and give a presentation or speech in a situation where every 12 hours, the baseline story has a new gradient?" Rep. Dave Schweikert, an Arizona Republican who is running for governor, said in an interview. "In many ways, it is the sin of arrogance thinking you can go out and talk about something when the story is still unfolding."

A factor in the midterms?

That leaves Republicans in an uncertain position, much like the state of the war. The party already faces fierce headwinds ahead of the November midterms, and some say its best bet is for voters to forget about Iran by then.

"My hope is that it will be long behind us by the time votes are cast," said Chris Wilson, a veteran Republican strategist. "Fortunately for the GOP, foreign policy flare-ups rarely decide midterm elections on their own, especially when voters are far more focused on the economy and prices at home."

For now, Trump and his White House are expressing confidence. Trump hailed a "big day for World Peace" after the ceasefire was first announced. White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt heralded a "victory for the United States of America that the president and our incredible military made happen."

In a social media post, Trump dismissed his detractors, including podcasters such as Kelly, as "stupid people" who will "say anything necessary for some 'free' and cheap publicity."

Some of the president's supporters in Congress are pushing back at the suggestion that Trump has become too entangled overseas at the expense of domestic priorities.

"Part of America First is making sure that the homeland stays safe and Iran is a factor in our safety," Rep. David Kustoff, R-Tenn., said in an interview. "We are all hopeful that the ceasefire does hold and that Iran lives up to their side of the agreement."

Recent elections are cause for GOP concern

Any president's party typically loses seats in Congress during a midterm election year and races this week offered a fresh reason for concern for Republicans.

Republican Clay Fuller won Greene's district by about 12 percentage points. She had a 29-percentage-point win two years earlier, and Trump carried the district by almost 37 percentage points. In Wisconsin, the liberal majority on the state Supreme Court grew this week when a Democratic-backed candidate won by a double-digit margin.

That follows strong performances for Democrats in other recent races, including the Florida state legislative district that is home to Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort.

Only about 4 in 10 U.S. adults approved of how Trump was handling his job as president, according to Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research polling last month. That share is largely unchanged since he returned to office in January 2025. But it is also roughly where Trump was at this point in his first term, when Democrats went on to gain 40 House seats in the 2018 midterms.

While Trump still has deep support from Republicans, there are signs that he risks frustrating his supporters if the U.S. becomes involved in a prolonged war. Although 63% of Republicans back airstrikes against Iranian military targets, the March survey found, only 20% back deploying American ground troops. Rising gas prices could pose a problem, with about 6 in 10 Republicans saying they are at least "somewhat" concerned about affording gas in the next few months, though they are less worried than the rest of the country.

'People are willing to endure some short-term pain'

Republicans who have spent time with voters over the recess say they believe the party has political breathing room to navigate the war.

Kustoff said constituents across his rural northwestern Tennessee district seemed "generally supportive" of Trump's actions in Iran, even when they have been accompanied by higher prices at the pump.

"My takeaway is that people are willing to endure some short-term pain as it relates to gas prices if the

situation with Iran is resolved," he said.

But as they return to Washington next week, Republicans face a series of difficult choices.

At the outset of the war, some GOP lawmakers said Trump would need to seek approval from Congress if the conflict lasted longer than 60 days, a deadline that would approach near the end of April if the ceasefire did not hold. The administration is seeking billions of dollars in additional spending for the war, setting up a vote that could put budget-conscious Republicans in a difficult spot before the fall campaigns.

Democrats are also moving to force another vote on a war powers resolution that would curb Trump's options in Iran. A similar effort failed last month, but another vote could add pressure on Republicans, depending on how the ceasefire plays out.

Schweikert described the war powers vote as the "dance of parties."

"Their job is to try to embarrass us and our job as the majority is to try to make things work," he said. "It's just the job."

A president and a pope: The world's most influential Americans are at odds over Iran

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

Donald Trump is accustomed to criticism from coast to coast — Democrats, disaffected Republicans, late-night comedians, massive protests. Yet in his second presidency, Trump's most influential American critic doesn't live in the country but at the Vatican.

It's an unprecedented situation, with the first American pope directly assailing the American president over the war in Iran, where a fragile ceasefire took hold this week. The announcement came after Pope Leo XIV declared that Trump's belligerence was "truly unacceptable."

Never before has the relationship between Washington and the Vatican revolved around two Americans — specifically, a 79-year-old politician from Queens and a 70-year-old pontiff from Chicago. They come from the same generation and share some common cultural roots yet bring jarringly distinct approaches to their positions of vast power. And the relationship comes with risks for both sides.

"They're two white guy boomers but they could not be any more different in their life experiences, in their values, in the way they have chosen to live those values," said theology professor Natalia Imperatori-Lee of Fordham University. "This is a very stark contrast, and I think an inflection point for American Christianity."

Polar positions on Iran among U.S. Christians

Experts on the Catholic Church emphasized that Leo's opposition to the war reflects established church teachings, not the reflexive politics of the moment.

"For the last five centuries, the church has been involved in a project of helping develop strong international norms," including the Geneva Conventions in recent centuries, said Catholic University professor William Barbieri. "It is a very long-standing tradition rooted in Scripture and theology and philosophy."

Yet the U.S. administration, which has close ties to conservative evangelical Protestant leaders, has claimed heavenly endorsement for Trump's war on Iran.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth urged Americans to pray for victory "in the name of Jesus Christ." When Trump was asked whether he thought God approved of the war, he said, "I do, because God is good — because God is good and God wants to see people taken care of."

The Rev. Franklin Graham, son of iconic Baptist evangelist Billy Graham, said of Trump that God "raised him up for such a time as this." And Graham prayed for victory so Iranians can "be set free from these Islamic lunatics."

Leo countered in his Palm Sunday message that God "does not listen to the prayers of those who wage war, but rejects them." He referenced an Old Testament passage from Isaiah, saying that "even though you make many prayers, I will not listen — your hands are full of blood."

While it's not unusual for popes and presidents to be at cross purposes, it's exceedingly rare for the leader of the Catholic Church to directly criticize a U.S. leader, and Leo later named Trump directly and expressed optimism that the president would seek "an off-ramp" in Iran.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 43 of 80

An even stronger condemnation came after Trump warned of mass strikes against Iranian power plants and infrastructure, writing on social media that “an entire civilization will die tonight.” Leo described that as a “threat against the entire people of Iran” and said it was “truly unacceptable.”

Experts: Leo doesn't see himself as a Trump rival

Imperatori-Lee said Leo's direct criticism stands out from the church's more general critiques of political and social systems. For example, Pope Francis urged U.S. bishops to defend migrants without specifically mentioning Trump or his deportation agenda. Leo also previously called for humane treatment of migrants.

“Popes have critiqued unfettered capitalism before, very robustly. The popes have critiqued the Industrial Revolution, right? Things that the U.S. has been at the forefront of,” Imperatori-Lee said, “but it's never been this specific and localized.”

She said Leo's commentary resonates in the U.S. — with Catholics and non-Catholics — because he is a native English speaker.

“There's no question about his inflection and meaning,” she said. “It removes any ambiguities.”

Trump welcomed Leo's election last May as a “great honor” for the country, and he hasn't responded to the latest criticisms. The White House did not respond to a request for comment.

“What Pope Leo and Donald Trump have in common is they both lived through the post-war polarization,” including the political upheaval of the Civil Rights Movement and Vietnam War, said Steven Millies, a professor at Chicago's Catholic Theological Union, one of the pope's alma maters.

He noted that Leo is a subscriber to The New York Times, plays the “Wordle” game, keeps up with U.S. sports and talks regularly with his brothers, including an avowed Trump supporter.

“In some ways he's just like us,” Millies said, someone “who understands where our domestic political crisis came from,” unlike the Argentinian Francis, “who did not fully understand the peculiarities of the United States” even as he offered implicit criticism.

Barbieri said Leo's American savvy still does not change an underappreciated reality of Catholicism and the papacy. “The Catholic Church doesn't neatly fit into either right or left boxes as they're understood in U.S. politics,” he said.

Leo's global focus vs. Trump's ‘transactional’ politics

Leo spent much of his pre-papal ministry, including all his time as a bishop and cardinal, outside the U.S.

He was educated in Rome as a canon lawyer within the church. He was a bishop in poor, rural swaths of Peru. He led the Augustinian order and served as Francis' prefect for recommending bishop appointees around the world.

Imperatori-Lee said that global reach gave him a first-hand perspective on how Washington's economic and military policies — including backing dictators in Latin America — have negatively affected less powerful nations and their citizens.

His varied experiences made then-Cardinal Robert Prevost uniquely suited to be elected pope despite the College of Cardinals' traditional skepticism toward the U.S. and its superpower status. Millies argued that Trump and his advisers, even Vice President JD Vance, a Catholic convert, may not appreciate those distinctions.

“This is an administration that seems to think only in terms of transactional politics — who's for us and who's against us,” he said.

Polarization poses risks for Leo and Trump

Relations between Washington and the Vatican have become so strained that a report of an allegedly contentious meeting involving Pentagon and Catholic Church officials sent shockwaves through both cities.

According to the report in The Free Press, a member of Trump's administration warned the church in January not to stand in the way of U.S. military might.

The U.S. Embassy to the Holy See rejected the report, writing on social media that “deliberate misrepresentation of these routine meetings sows unfounded division and misunderstanding.”

Millies, meanwhile, questioned whether anything the pope or U.S. bishops say can sway individual Catholics. Trump is likely to lose support among Catholics as he loses support across the broader elector-

ate, Millies said, but that's not necessarily because members of Leo's flock are applying church doctrine. "Partisan preferences always trump the religious commitments," Millies said, describing a "disconnect" between church leaders and many parishioners who look to other sources, politicians included, when shaping their views of faith and politics.

"The icon of Catholicism in American politics now is JD Vance, and it's more about winning an argument," he said. "It's a very different emphasis, but it's one that may suit the Trump administration very well."

Vance sets off to Pakistan to lead talks with Iran as war's ceasefire remains shaky

By MICHELLE L. PRICE and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump is tasking the member of his inner circle who has seemed to be the most reluctant defender of the conflict with Iran to now find a resolution to the war that began six weeks ago and stave off the U.S. president's astonishing threat to wipe out its "whole civilization."

Vice President JD Vance, who has long been skeptical of foreign military interventions and outspoken about the prospect of sending troops into open-ended conflicts, sets off Friday to lead mediated talks with Iran in the Pakistani capital of Islamabad.

It comes as a tenuous, temporary ceasefire appears to be on the precipice of collapsing. The chasm between Iran's public demands and those from the U.S. and its partner Israel seem irreconcilable. And in the U.S., where Vance might ask voters in two years' time to make him the next president, there is growing political and economic pressure to wrap it up.

Vance is joined by Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, who took part in three rounds of indirect talks with Iranian negotiators aimed at settling U.S. concerns about Tehran's nuclear and ballistic weapons programs and its support for armed proxy groups in the Middle East before Trump and Israel launched the Feb. 28 war against Iran.

The White House has provided scant detail about the format of the talks — whether they will be direct or indirect — and has not provided specific expectations for the meeting.

But the arrival of Vance for negotiations marks a rare moment of high-level U.S. government engagement with the Iranian government. Since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the most direct contact had been when President Barack Obama in September 2013 called newly elected Iranian President Hassan Rouhani to discuss Iran's nuclear program.

The two sides face a steep climb in making headway

Almost immediately after the White House and Iran announced a temporary ceasefire Tuesday evening, the sides found themselves at odds over terms of the truce.

Iran insisted that an end to the Israeli war in Lebanon was part of the ceasefire. 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 of Hormuz. The Islamic Republic had closed the critical shipping waterway in response to Israel's intensifying attacks against the Hezbollah militant group in Lebanon.

Trump on Thursday night said Iran was "doing a very poor job" of allowing oil tankers to pass through, writing on social media, "That is not the agreement we have!"

White House spokeswoman Anna Kelly said Vance, Witkoff, Kushner and Secretary of State Marco Rubio "have always been collaborating on these discussions" and said Trump was optimistic that a lasting deal can be reached during the two-week ceasefire. "President Trump has a proven track record of achieving good deals on behalf of the United States and the American people, and he will only accept one that puts America first," Kelly said.

High stakes for peace — and for politics

It's the highest-stakes moment thus far for Vance, who spent much of last year as more of a background

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 45 of 80

player in the Trump White House, especially as others like Elon Musk and Rubio took turns as ever-present advisers for the president.

But Vance's portfolio is fattening fast, first with a mission to root out fraud in government programs at home and now to help solve a U.S. war in the Middle East, where complicated doesn't even begin to describe things.

Vance, who served in the Iraq War while in the Marines, spent two years as a U.S. senator and a little more than one as vice president, has little diplomatic experience.

On Wednesday, he dismissed speculation that the Iranians requested that he join the talks, telling reporters: "I don't know that. I would be surprised if that was true. But, you know, I wanted to be involved because I thought I could make a difference."

Jonathan Schanzer, a former Treasury Department official who is now executive director of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a hawkish Washington think tank, said Vance, with little experience on Iran policy, is an interesting choice to lead the delegation.

Trump has noted his vice president was "less enthusiastic" than other top senior officials in the Republican administration, making Vance an intriguing interlocutor for the Iranian side, Schanzer said.

"I think they probably prefer him knowing that his perspective on foreign intervention is one of skepticism," Schanzer said of the Iranians. "I do think that he's going to need some help. I don't think he's ever been engaged in negotiations with this kind of weight, this kind of seriousness. This is as serious as it gets."

The White House has not detailed who will be in the negotiations besides Vance, Witkoff and Kushner, but Kelly said officials from the National Security Council, State Department and Pentagon "will also play a supportive role."

During early rounds of indirect nuclear talks with the Iranians before the war, Democrats and some nuclear experts questioned whether Kushner and Witkoff had enough technical knowledge. The White House has not said whether the pair, whom Trump has entrusted with some of his most difficult negotiations since returning to office, had a nuclear expert with them for those talks.

Negotiating peace is a tall order for any vice president

It's not unusual for vice presidents to take on important negotiating roles for the president, said Joel Goldstein, a professor of law at Saint Louis University who is an expert on the history of the vice presidency.

But, he said, "I don't recall a situation where a vice president has been sent to negotiate a ceasefire or peace in connection with a war the United States was involved with."

Vance and Rubio are seen as the Republican Party's strongest potential 2028 presidential contenders, though neither has given a clear answer about whether he intends to run.

The vice president's team is not thinking about the negotiations with an eye to future political considerations, according to a person familiar with discussions who was not authorized to speak publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

As vice president, Vance inherently would carry any baggage of the administration if he eventually does run for president, Goldstein said. But stepping in to lead negotiations even further identifies him with the conflict.

"The fact that he's involved in the negotiations in a very visible way, that means that, if things go south, that people will be pointing fingers at him," Goldstein said.

At the same time, Goldstein said, "If things go well, then it will be something that he could point to."

Venezuelan lawmakers approve a sweeping mining bill to lure foreign investors

By REGINA GARCIA CANO Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Venezuelan lawmakers on Thursday approved a bill to regulate the country's mining as it seeks to attract leery foreign investors to a once-private industry that has long been exploited by criminal groups with ties to the government.

It is the latest legislative initiative by acting President Delcy Rodríguez since the self-proclaimed socialist

government that has ruled Venezuela for 26 years came under pressure from the Trump administration in January, when the U.S. military deposed then-President Nicolás Maduro.

The lengthy bill will now undergo a review by the country's high court to determine if it is constitutional.

The bill regulates mineral rights, establishes small, medium and large-scale mining categories, and allows for independent arbitration of disputes, which foreign investors view as key to guard against the government seizing their assets. It also bans the president, vice president, ministers, governors and others from holding mining titles.

The bill is a "vehicle for the construction of future prosperity" and an "instrument that protects" mining workers across the country, National Assembly president Jorge Rodríguez told lawmakers after the measure was approved.

The approval came a day after the acting president asked public and private sector workers, whose wages have long not allowed them to afford basic necessities, for patience as her government works to improve the country's economy. She promised them a wage increase on May 1 but did not disclose the amount.

On Thursday, as workers protested for better wages in the capital, Caracas, Delcy Rodríguez arrived in Grenada on her first official international trip as acting president.

Two decades ago, many foreign firms in the mining and oil sectors saw their assets seized by the Venezuelan government. However, as crucial oil revenues plummeted, Maduro's government in 2016 designated more than 10% of Venezuela's territory as a mining development zone stretching across the central area of the country.

Since then, mining operations for gold, diamonds, copper and other minerals have proliferated. Many of these sites are informal, unlicensed mines operating under brutal conditions and the presence of criminal groups.

Homicides, human trafficking, fuel smuggling and other crimes are commonplace in mining areas, but ordinary Venezuelans continue to flock there in hopes of getting rich quick and escaping poverty.

Officials and members of the military take cuts from the illegal mining revenue in exchange for allowing the operation of mines.

"The mining and subsequent sale of gold has proven to be a lucrative financial scheme for some well-connected Venezuelans and senior officers within the National Bolivarian Armed Forces, which profits from charging criminal organizations for access and inputs, such as fuel," the U.S. State Department reported to Congress last year.

"The estimated market value of gold mined in Venezuela is difficult to confirm, but well-respected sources estimate that it averaged \$2.2 billion annually over the past five years."

The newly approved bill sets royalties and taxes and caps mining concessions at 30 years, with the possibility of renewal. It also establishes prison penalties for those who participate in illegal activities and those who cause environmental damages, and allows for the seizure of illegally obtained minerals.

Netanyahu authorizes direct talks with Lebanon in potential boost to ceasefire efforts

By JON GAMBRELL, ELENA BECATOROS and MIKE CORDER Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — In a potential boost to Middle East ceasefire efforts, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Thursday that he has authorized direct negotiations with Lebanon "as soon as possible" aimed at disarming Iranian-backed Hezbollah militants and establishing relations between the neighbors.

Israel and Lebanon have technically been at war since Israel was established in 1948, and Netanyahu later stressed that there was no ceasefire between them. In a video statement, he said Israel will keep striking Hezbollah until security is restored in northern Israel.

There was no immediate response from Lebanon. But Israel-Lebanon negotiations were expected to begin next week at the State Department in Washington, according to a U.S. official and a person familiar with the plans, who spoke on condition of anonymity due to the delicacy of the matter.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 47 of 80

The prospect of talks appeared to bolster the tentative ceasefire in the Iran war that has staggered under the weight of Israel's bombardment of Beirut, Tehran's continued chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz and uncertainty over whether talks can find common ground.

However later Thursday, U.S. President Donald Trump appeared to cast doubt on the effectiveness of the ceasefire, writing on his social media platform: "Iran is doing a very poor job, dishonorable some would say, of allowing Oil to go through the Strait of Hormuz."

"That is not the agreement we have!" Trump wrote of the trickle of ships Iran has allowed to pass through the crucial waterway.

Meanwhile, Kuwait accused Iran and its proxies of launching drone attacks targeting it on Thursday despite the ceasefire, as Saudi Arabia said recent attacks damaged a key pipeline in the kingdom. The accusation from Kuwait's Foreign Ministry put new pressure on the ceasefire ahead of planned talks between the U.S. and Iran this weekend.

Saudi Arabia's state-run Saudi Press Agency, quoting an anonymous official, said its crucial East-West pipeline, which carries oil out to the Red Sea and avoids the Strait of Hormuz, was damaged in the recent attacks.

Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard denied launching attacks on Persian Gulf states after Kuwait's announcement.

Such an assault would mirror the continuing pressure campaign Tehran is waging on the U.S. and its allies, particularly amid efforts to secure a ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah.

Israel's announcement of negotiations with Lebanon comes amid disagreement over whether the ceasefire deal included a pause in fighting between Israel and Hezbollah, and a day after Israel pounded Beirut with airstrikes, the deadliest day in Lebanon since the war began Feb. 28.

The launch of direct peace talks between the neighboring nations is a significant achievement, though reaching an agreement will be difficult after decades of hostilities, Hezbollah's continued presence and longstanding disagreements over the countries' shared land border.

The talks in Washington are expected to be handled on the American side by the U.S. ambassador to Lebanon, Michel Issa, and on the Israeli side by the Israeli ambassador to the U.S., Yechiel Leiter, according to the person familiar with the planning.

It was not immediately clear who would represent Lebanon. The timing and location of the talks was first reported by Axios.

Pressure on ceasefire continues

After declaring victory with the ceasefire announcement, both Iran and the U.S. have appeared to apply pressure on each other. Semiofficial news agencies in Iran suggested forces have mined the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial waterway for oil that Tehran has closed. Trump warned that U.S. forces would hit Iran harder than before if it did not fulfill the agreement.

Underlining Iran's continued control of the strait, a Botswana-flagged liquified natural gas tanker attempted to travel out of the Persian Gulf via a route ordered by the Revolutionary Guard, but suddenly turned around and headed back early Friday, ship-tracking data showed.

Questions also remained over what will happen to Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium at the heart of tensions, how and when normal traffic will resume through the strait, and what happens to Iran's ability to launch future missile attacks and support armed proxies in the region.

Israel vows to continue striking Hezbollah in Lebanon

Iran's parliament speaker, Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, warned in a social media post Thursday that continued Israeli attacks on Hezbollah in Lebanon would bring "explicit costs and STRONG responses."

Qalibaf has been discussed as a possible negotiator who could meet U.S. Vice President JD Vance this weekend in Islamabad. The White House has said Vance would lead the delegation for talks starting Saturday.

Iran had said Israel's ongoing attacks on Hezbollah were violating the ceasefire agreement. Netanyahu and Trump have said they were not.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 48 of 80

Trump said Thursday that he has asked Netanyahu to dial back the strikes in Lebanon.

Lebanon's health ministry said more than 300 people were killed and more than 1,100 wounded Wednesday by Israeli strikes on central Beirut and other areas of Lebanon that Israel said targeted Hezbollah, which joined the war in support of Tehran.

Early Friday morning, Israel's military said it struck approximately 10 launchers in Lebanon that had fired rockets toward northern Israel on Thursday.

Israel also said Thursday it killed Ali Yusuf Harshi, an aide to Hezbollah leader Naim Kassem. There was no Hezbollah comment.

Threat of mines looms over the strait

Four tankers and three bulk carriers crossed through the strait Thursday, bringing the total number of ships passing through since the ceasefire to at least 12, according to the data firm Kpler.

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

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.

The head of the United Arab Emirates' major oil company, Sultan al-Jaber, said some 230 ships loaded with oil were waiting to get through the strait and must be allowed "to navigate this corridor without condition."

The strait's de facto closure has caused oil prices to skyrocket — affecting the cost of gasoline, food and other basics far beyond the Middle East. The spot price of Brent crude, the international standard, was around \$98 Thursday, up about 35% since the war began.

Fate of Iran's enriched uranium remains a question

The fate of Iran's missile and nuclear programs — which the U.S. and Israel sought to eliminate in going to war — was 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. Iran insists its program is peaceful.

Trump said Wednesday that the U.S. would work with Iran to remove the uranium, buried in last year's U.S. and Israeli strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities, though Tehran did not confirm that. In one version of the ceasefire deal that Iran published, it said it would be allowed to continue enrichment.

The chief of Iran's nuclear agency, Mohammad Eslami, said Thursday that protecting Tehran's right to enrich uranium is "necessary" for any ceasefire talks.

Immigration board denies Mahmoud Khalil's appeal, bringing activist one step closer to deportation

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — An immigration appeals board has denied Mahmoud Khalil's latest bid to dismiss his deportation case, a largely expected ruling that brings the former Columbia University graduate student and Palestinian activist one step closer to re-arrest and possible expulsion.

The Board of Immigration Appeals issued the final order of removal on Thursday, according to Khalil's lawyers. The board's rulings are not public, and an inquiry to the U.S. Department of Justice was not immediately returned.

Khalil said he was not surprised by the ruling, which he called "biased and politically motivated." His attorneys said he cannot be lawfully detained or deported as he pursues a separate case in the federal court system.

"The only thing I am guilty of is speaking out against the genocide in Palestine — and this administration has weaponized the immigration system to punish me for it," Khalil said in a statement.

The Board of Immigration Appeals sets precedent in the byzantine immigration court system, which is controlled by the Department of Justice — and increasingly under the influence of the Trump administration.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 49 of 80

Khalil, a 31-year-old legal permanent resident, was the first person whose arrest became publicly known during the federal crackdown on noncitizens who publicly criticized Israel and its actions in Gaza.

The government has claimed that Khalil's efforts as a leader of pro-Palestinian protests at Columbia were "aligned to Hamas." They have not presented evidence of any connection to the terrorist group, and Khalil has adamantly denied allegations of antisemitism.

After his arrest last March, Khalil spent 104 days in an immigration jail, missing the birth of his first child, before he was ordered released by a federal judge in New Jersey.

Khalil suffered a significant setback in his federal case earlier this year, with a U.S. appeals panel ruling the judge in New Jersey overstepped his authority by releasing him. In a 2-1 decision, the panel found that law requires the case to fully move through the immigration courts before Khalil can challenge the decision in federal court.

Khalil's lawyers are requesting the full appeals panel reconsider the decision. Earlier this month, they asked one of the appellate panel's judges to step aside because of his previous role as a top Justice Department official involved in investigating student protesters.

Khalil was born in Syria to a Palestinian family and holds Algerian citizenship through a distant relative. He has said that he could be targeted, and even killed, if he is deported.

Hip-hop pioneer Afrika Bambaataa dies at age 68

By SAFIYAH RIDDLE Associated Press

Afrika Bambaataa, a man widely considered one of the main pioneers of hip-hop, died in Pennsylvania of prostate cancer on Thursday, according to his lawyer. He was 68.

Bambaataa's sudden death was met with an outpouring of condolences from friends, family and fans across the world, who paid tribute to his profound and unmistakable impact on one of the world's most popular and politically influential music genres. But others have said that his impact was overshadowed in recent years after numerous men who knew Bambaataa when they were boys accused him of sexual abuse.

The rapper and producer is best known for breakthrough tracks like 1982's "Planet Rock" and for founding the Universal Zulu Nation art collective.

"Hip Hop will never be the same without him -- but everything hip hop is today, it is because of him. His spirit lives in every beat, every cypher and every corner of this globe he touched," his talent agency, Naf Management Entertainment, wrote in an emailed statement on Tuesday.

The birthplace of hip hop

Bambaataa was Lance Taylor born in 1957 in the South Bronx, and he came of age at a time when the New York City neighborhood was rapidly deteriorating after intensifying segregation and years of economic neglect. By the 1970s and 1980s, landlords were burning apartment buildings to collect insurance money instead of investing in repairs, leaving low-income mostly Puerto Rican and Black families without socioeconomic opportunity.

Bambaataa had Jamaican and Barbadian heritage, and he was raised in a low-income public housing complex by his mother, according to an interview he gave Frank Broughton in 1998. He was exposed to music at an early age through his mother's vinyl record collection.

The ability to repurpose and mix old hits became one of his signatures at the parties he began to throw in community centers across the neighborhood in the early 1970s, Bambaataa said in the interview. He was deeply inspired by the work of Kool Herc, who is often deemed the father of hip-hop.

Bambaataa and the parties where he DJ'ed swelled in popularity throughout the decade and well into the 1980s, when he released a series of electro tracks that helped shaped the burgeoning hip-hop and electro-funk music movements. He also was one of the first DJs to use beat breaks, incorporating the iconic Roland TR-808 drum machine.

"We was playin' everything, everything that was funky," he said. He later added that what set his parties apart was that "other DJs would play they great records for fifteen, twenty minutes. We was changing ours every minute or two. I couldn't have no breakbeat go longer than a minute or two."

At that time, Bambaataa said in previous interviews that he was able to leverage his affiliation with the

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 50 of 80

local street gang the Black Spades in order to form a group he called the Zulu Nation, a nod to a South African ethnic group that he drew inspiration from. His slogan eventually became known as "peace, love, unity and having fun," and he said that he sought to use hip-hops' ballooning popularity to resolve local gang conflicts.

Later, Bambaataa changed the name to the Universal Zulu Nation to signal the inclusion of "all people from the planet earth."

"At the core our music made people feel like they belong to a movement and not a moment, our music offered Hope something positive to believe in, it gave people identity, unity, and a way out," Ellis Williams, a producer known as Mr. Biggs, wrote in an email to the AP. Mr. Biggs was a member of the group Afrika Bambaataa and Soulsonic Force that included Bambaataa.

Accused of sexual abuse

In recent years, numerous people have accused Bambaataa of sexual abuse.

In 2016, Bronx political activist and former music industry executive Ronald Savage accused Bambaataa of abusing him in 1980, when he was Savage was a young teen.

"I was scared, but at the same time I was like, 'This is Afrika Bambaataa,'" Savage told the AP in 2016. At the time he recalled, in detail, that encounter and four others that he said followed.

Bambaataa has vehemently denied those allegations.

After Savage went public with his claims, numerous other men came forward to share similar experiences about Bambaataa. In June 2016, the Universal Zulu Nation released a public letter apologizing to "the survivors of apparent sexual molestation by Bambaataa" saying that some members of the group knew about the abuse but "chose not to disclose" it.

"We extend our deepest and most sincere apologies to the many people who have been hurt," organization wrote.

Federal judge finds Pentagon is violating court order to restore access to reporters

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN and DAVID BAUDER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal judge on Thursday ruled that the Defense Department is violating his earlier order to restore access to the Pentagon for reporters, a setback in the administration's efforts to impede the work of journalists.

U.S. District Judge Paul Friedman sided with The New York Times for the second time in a month. He had earlier said the Pentagon's new credential policy violated journalists' constitutional rights to free speech and due process. On Thursday, he said Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's team had tried to evade his March 20 ruling by putting in new rules that expel all reporters from the building unless guided by escorts.

"The department simply cannot reinstate an unlawful policy under the guise of taking 'new' action and expect the court to look the other way," Friedman wrote.

Friedman had ordered Pentagon officials to reinstate the press credentials of seven Times reporters and stressed that his decision applies to "all regulated parties." The Pentagon building serves as the headquarters for U.S. military operations.

Defense Department spokesperson Sean Parnell said it disagrees with the ruling and intends to appeal. Parnell said in a social media post that the department has "at all times" complied with judge's orders, reinstating journalists' credentials and issuing "a materially revised policy that addressed every concern" identified by the judge.

"The Department remains committed to press access at the Pentagon while fulfilling its statutory obligation to ensure the safe and secure operation of the Pentagon Reservation," he wrote.

Times attorney Theodore Boutros said Thursday's ruling "powerfully vindicates both the Court's authority and the First Amendment's protections of independent journalism."

A dispute brewing since October

In October, reporters from mainstream news outlets walked out of the building rather than agree to the new rules. The Times sued the Pentagon and Hegseth in December to challenge the policy.

President Donald Trump has fought against the press on several levels since returning to his second term, suing The Times and Wall Street Journal, and cutting funding for public radio and television because he did not like their coverage. At the same time, he frequently talks to the media and responds to reporters who call him on his cell phone.

In a series of briefings on the Iran War, Hegseth has frequently ignored or insulted legacy media reporters let in to cover the events, while concentrating on questions from friendly conservative media.

Times attorneys accused the Pentagon of violating the judge's March 20 order, "both in letter and spirit" with its revised policy. The newspaper said that Pentagon was also trying to impose unprecedented rules dictating when reporters can offer anonymity to sources.

Friedman said that the access the Pentagon made available to permit holders "is not even close to as meaningful as the broad access" they previously had.

Government lawyers said the Pentagon's revised policy fully complies with the judge's directives. Pentagon spokesperson Sean Parnell has said the administration would appeal Friedman's March 20 decision.

The Pentagon Press Association, which includes Associated Press reporters, said the Pentagon's interim policy preserves provisions that Friedman deemed to be unconstitutional while also adding new restrictions on credential holders.

"In effect," Justice Department attorneys wrote, "Plaintiffs ask this Court to expand the Order to prohibit the Department from ever addressing the security of the Pentagon through a press credentialing policy with conditions that may address similar topics or concerns as the enjoined conditions. The Order does not say that, and this Court should not read it to say that."

Current Pentagon press corps agreed to policy

The current Pentagon press corps is comprised mostly of conservative outlets that agreed to the policy. Journalists from outlets that refused to consent to the new rules, including from the AP, have continued reporting on the military from outside the Pentagon.

Friedman, who was nominated to the bench by Democratic President Bill Clinton, said recent U.S. military operations in Venezuela and Iran underscore the need for public access to information about government activities.

"Those who drafted the First Amendment believed that the nation's security requires a free press and an informed people and that such security is endangered by governmental suppression of political speech. That principle has preserved the nation's security for almost 250 years. It must not be abandoned now," the judge wrote last month.

Friedman said the challenged policy is clearly designed to weed out "disfavored journalists" and replace them with those who are "on board and willing to serve" the administration.

"That," he wrote, "is viewpoint discrimination, full stop."

Melania Trump delivers statement at the White House denying knowledge of Jeffrey Epstein's crimes

By COLLIN BINKLEY and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — First lady Melania Trump is denying ties to Jeffrey Epstein and knowledge of his sex crimes, saying Thursday that the "stories are completely false" and calling accusations that she was somehow involved "smears about me."

Reading an extraordinary statement at the White House, Melania Trump said she and her attorneys were fighting back against "unfounded and baseless lies" in regards to her connections to the late financier, a convicted sex offender who leveraged connections to the rich, powerful and famous to recruit his victims and cover up his crimes.

"The lies linking me with the disgraceful Jeffrey Epstein need to end today," she said. "The individuals lying about me are devoid of ethical standards, humility and respect. I do not object to their ignorance,

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 52 of 80

but rather I reject their mean-spirited attempts to defame my reputation.”

The seemingly out-of-the-blue message came as her husband, President Donald Trump, and his administration had finally seemed to move past more than a year of controversy surrounding Epstein, especially as the Iran war had become all-consuming in Washington.

The first lady’s comments almost assuredly will serve to push the story back into the political spotlight even as the president urged the public and media to move on from the case.

Nick Clemens, a spokesperson for the first lady, said the West Wing was aware beforehand that she was making a statement. But he deferred to the West Wing on whether the content of what Melania Trump planned to say was known. The White House press office did not respond to requests for comment.

Calls for a congressional hearing for Epstein victims

The first lady spoke for about five minutes, reading her statement in the Grand Foyer, then walked away without taking questions. She did not go into detail on the accusations against her, but said they came from “individuals and entities looking to cause damage to my good name.”

She added that they were financially and politically motivated.

Melania Trump also called on Congress to hold a public hearing centered on survivors of Epstein’s crimes, with a chance to testify before lawmakers and have their stories entered into the congressional record.

“Each and every woman should have her day to tell her story in public if she wishes,” she said. “Then, and only then, we will have the truth.”

Two of Epstein’s accusers, Maria and Annie Farmer, said in a subsequent statement: “What we want is accountability, transparency, and justice.”

Former Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, a Georgia Republican and onetime fierce Trump supporter who resigned from Congress after a public falling out with the president, posted on X, “I am grateful to the First Lady for her brave statement today about Epstein and his victims.”

Democrats, meanwhile, jumped on Melania Trump’s comments, saying they agreed with her call for a congressional hearing. In a social media post, Rep. Robert Garcia, the top Democrat on the House Oversight Committee that is investigating Epstein, called on the Republican chair of the committee, Rep. James Comer, to schedule a public hearing “immediately.”

Rep. Thomas Massie, R-Ky., who sponsored a bill prompting the release of millions of Epstein documents, turned attention back to the Justice Department, saying it’s the attorney general’s job to bring in survivors for testimony. Massie, who has pressed for more arrests in the Epstein case, ended a social media post with a call to “PROSECUTE!”

Questions about Epstein’s reach have loomed over the administration and divided Republicans, driving a wedge into Trump’s MAGA base as some pressed for the government to release more files and prosecute figures linked to the financier.

The issue has dogged Trump and fractured some of his alliances, including the one with Greene. Trump dismissed the issue as a “Democrat hoax” but later signed a bill to release files from Epstein’s case.

It was not clear what prompted the first lady to revive the issue. She noted that several individuals and organizations have had to apologize for their “lies about me.” Of the examples she cited, the most recent was in October.

In that case, book publisher HarperCollins UK apologized to the first lady and retracted passages from a book suggesting Epstein played a role in introducing her and Donald Trump.

Melania Trump mentioned her husband several times in her comments. She said Epstein did not introduce her to Trump, and that she met her future husband at a New York City party in 1998.

Email to Maxwell was ‘trivial’

The first lady brought Epstein back to the forefront months after federal authorities released millions of pages of documents under the Epstein Files Transparency Act, the law enacted after months of public and political pressure that requires the government to open its files on the late financier and his confidant and onetime girlfriend, Ghislaine Maxwell.

Lawmakers complained when the Justice Department made only a limited release last month, but of-

ficials said more time was needed to review additional documents that were discovered and to ensure no sensitive information about victims was released.

Melania Trump said Thursday that she was not friends with Epstein or Maxwell, but was in overlapping social circles in New York and Florida. She described an email reply she sent to Maxwell as "casual correspondence" without elaborating.

"My polite reply to her email doesn't amount to anything more than a trivial note," she said.

Among the documents released by the Justice Department was a brief email from 2002 with the sender and recipient blacked out. It begins, "Dear G!" and ends "Love, Melania," and compliments the recipient on a magazine article about "JE."

"I know you are very busy flying all over the world," it says. "How was Palm Beach? I cannot wait to go down. Give me a call when you are back in NY."

That email was sent the same month that a New York Magazine article was published about Epstein in which Trump called him a "terrific guy."

Among other documents released was an image from Epstein's home showing a series of photographs along a credenza and in drawers. In that image, inside a drawer among other photos, was a photograph of Trump, alongside Epstein, Melania Trump and Maxwell.

Epstein killed himself in 2019 while awaiting trial on sex trafficking charges in New York. Maxwell was convicted in 2021 of luring teenage girls to be sexually abused by Epstein and was sentenced to 20 years in prison.

Dave Chappelle helps keep Ohio radio station rooted in hometown with restored building

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. AP Entertainment Writer

YELLOW SPRINGS, Ohio (AP) — Comedian Dave Chappelle stood on the front lawn of a newly restored 19th-century schoolhouse Thursday, joining neighbors and local officials as a small-town radio station secured its future in the community he calls home.

The ribbon-cutting ceremony marked two historic moments: Chappelle's restoration of the Union Schoolhouse and WYSO's relocation of its new broadcast facility inside it, bringing together distinct efforts to keep the station rooted in Yellow Springs at a time when local media outlets face mounting challenges.

"It's like our lifeblood in the community," Chappelle told The Associated Press about the station, recalling how its possible departure to nearby Dayton would have been "a crushing blow" for Yellow Springs.

More than 200 people gathered outside the former Union Schoolhouse, where Chappelle attended along with his wife, mother, station leaders and village officials, including Yellow Springs Mayor Steve McQueen and Dayton Mayor Shenise Turner-Sloss, to celebrate the opening the schoolhouse and the 68-year-old station into its next chapter.

The Union Schoolhouse was originally built in 1872 and once served as one of the village's earliest integrated schools before later housing municipal offices and small businesses. After sitting vacant for years, it was purchased in 2020 by Chappelle's real estate company, Iron Table Holdings.

The property has since been transformed into a modern, multiuse space, with WYSO occupying the lower floors, while Chappelle's offices will be based on the top floor.

For Chappelle, the investment was as much about preservation as development.

"If you have the opportunity like I did, to invest in your community, then it's one of the greatest investments I've ever made," he said. "In some ways it feels dutiful. Other times I feel proud. ... but ultimately, I'm doing it because I want to, not because I have to."

The move comes at a time when local media outlets across the country face shrinking resources, shifting audiences and increased competition from digital platforms.

Chappelle said stations like WYSO serve as a stabilizing force. He described it as "a beacon for sanity," offering "a solid baseline of truth in context" in an increasingly fragmented information landscape.

"I grew up listening to WYSO since high school, and they've always been here connecting to the people,"

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 54 of 80

said Mark Willis, a Yellow Springs resident. "They're not out of a big city. They're not subject to censorship by a sponsor. They tell the truth, they tell the stories, and it's rare these days. To see them growing instead of shrinking is beautiful."

Rather than simply donate funds, Chappelle financed the redevelopment of the building itself, allowing the station to remain locally rooted while maintaining editorial independence.

"Dave has never made a suggestion about our programming," said Luke Dennis, general manager at WYSO. He said the new facility transforms how the station connects with the public, offering performance space, gathering areas and expanded capacity for programming.

"We belong to the community," Dennis said.

Public radio stations in smaller markets have faced mounting pressure in recent years, from funding challenges to audience fragmentation.

Dennis said the investment positions WYSO differently. "We're in a place of strength," he said.

Yellow Springs has long been central to Chappelle's life. Though he grew up in Maryland, he spent summers in the village, where his late father worked as the dean of students at Antioch College.

Now living on a 39-acre farm with his wife and their three children, Chappelle has become deeply embedded in the town. He has invested in local properties, opened a comedy club in the downtown area and hosted events that draw national attention, including performances in a nearby cornfield during the pandemic.

Chappelle has also taken an active role in local affairs, speaking at town meetings and supporting community initiatives.

As residents gathered and later filtered through the restored building, the moment marked more than a ribbon-cutting.

"I'm more determined and inspired that these institutions flourish and stay of the people," Chappelle said after the ceremony. "The only way they can do that is the people supporting them. I'm hopeful more than worried."

Travelers face higher costs and fewer flight options as jet fuel prices swing

By RIO YAMAT AP Airlines and Travel Writer

A new reality is setting in for travelers worldwide: rising fares and fees, fewer flight options and difficult decisions about whether a trip is worth the cost.

The culprit is volatile oil and jet fuel prices, which have spiked sharply since the war in the Middle East began and fighting near the Strait of Hormuz created a chokepoint for global oil supplies.

"Volatility is the real story here," said Shye Gilad, a former airline captain who now teaches at Georgetown University's business school. "Right now, the airlines are trying to make bets on what they think will happen in the future."

Airlines are responding cautiously, trimming schedules and adjusting prices in ways that experts say will ripple unevenly across the market but ultimately affect nearly every type of traveler.

Budget airlines and the customers who rely on them are likely to feel the pinch first and most acutely, experts say, but even travelers in premium cabins won't escape the higher prices and less convenient schedules.

Oil prices have swung wildly in recent weeks, briefly topping \$119 a barrel at one point, plunging Wednesday below \$95 on news of a two-week ceasefire that temporarily reopened the Strait of Hormuz, and then climbing back toward \$100 on Thursday as uncertainty over the fragile deal grew. Iran again closed the key artery for global oil shipments in response to Israeli strikes Wednesday in Lebanon.

"When prices move quickly in both directions, it's very hard for airlines to make predictions," Gilad said.

In other words, even when oil prices drop, travelers may not see relief right away.

"At this level of fuel, it's hard to call anything temporary," Delta Air Lines CEO Ed Bastian told reporters this week after the Atlanta-based carrier raised its checked baggage fees.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 55 of 80

Global squeeze, local effects

Bastian said Wednesday as Delta kicked off the earnings season for U.S. airlines that the higher fuel prices are expected to add \$2 billion in operating expenses in the second quarter alone. United Airlines CEO Scott Kirby said in a recent memo to staff that if fuel prices stay elevated, it could add \$11 billion in annual costs.

"For perspective," Kirby wrote, "in United's best year ever, we made less than \$5B."

According to the International Air Transport Association, the average global jet fuel price rose to \$209 per barrel last week, up from roughly \$99 at the end of February when the war started. Travelers from the U.S. to Hong Kong and New Delhi are paying the price.

U.S. carriers are embedding the higher operating costs into ticket prices and add-on fees. Delta, United, American Airlines, Southwest Airlines and JetBlue have all increased checked baggage fees.

Both United and American are also moving beyond add-ons to adjust pricing. United said last week it is bringing the "pay for what you want" approach already standard in economy to its premium cabins, turning perks like advanced seat selection and fully refundable tickets into optional extras.

American announced Thursday that passengers in basic economy will have to pay extra to pick their seat beginning May 18, including elite-tier loyalty members. And later this year, basic economy passengers without elite status or an eligible co-branded credit card will be assigned to boarding Group 7, while those with higher status will still board earlier even when purchasing the lowest fare.

Hong Kong's Cathay Pacific recently bumped fuel surcharges by roughly 34% across all routes, while Air India on Monday added up to \$280 in fees to some flights. Emirates, Lufthansa and KLM have also adjusted fees or fares to keep pace with the price volatility.

Experts say flexibility and careful planning can help offset these costs. Fare-tracking sites can alert travelers to price changes and help them compare multiple options in one place. Booking early and checking nearby airports can lock in better prices, while refundable tickets make it easier to cancel and rebook if fares drop. Traveling light with just a carry-on can also help avoid the rising bag fees.

Flight cuts to cut costs

For business travelers, the costs are already shaping their decisions. Bill Moorehouse, a solutions director who flies for work every four to six weeks, said the uncertainty may keep him closer to home for now.

"When you have business trips and you have a carefully coordinated schedule, you don't want unknowns and disruptions. And right now, it just feels like it's more likely that things could go wrong and throw your trip off course," the Cupertino, California, resident said.

Richard Groberg, an investment banker from Las Vegas who visits clients around the U.S., said he plans to book as early as possible to lock in the best fares.

"There's sometimes no substitute for in-person meetings and building relationships," he said. "As travel becomes more expensive, that becomes a tougher decision to make those investments."

Even family visits are on his mind. Groberg's brother hopes he'll stop in Vermont next time he's in New York for work, but Groberg admits, "I start thinking maybe I should drive instead because this is getting so expensive."

Airlines, meanwhile, are also adjusting how much they fly.

BNP Paribas estimates that global schedules for April have been cut roughly 5% compared with earlier plans. Most reductions are in the Middle East, the global investment bank said, though smaller cuts were also emerging in Europe, Asia and North America.

United Airlines is cutting about 5% of its planned flights in the near term, trimming less profitable routes and suspending some international service temporarily rather than "burning cash" on trips that can't absorb the more expensive fuel costs. The airline's CEO said the cuts will target redeye flights and routes on historically slower travel days such as Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday.

Delta is scrapping plans to add more flights and seats in June, leaving about 3.5% fewer seats than originally planned.

Travel plans upended

These moves show why major carriers are better positioned to weather the spike in fuel prices than budget carriers, whose “no frills” model leaves them with less flexibility. Bigger airlines can lean on dynamic pricing, sell more seats at higher fares or swap in larger planes on certain routes, letting them cut flights without losing overall capacity.

“Leisure travelers and budget conscious travelers are going to absolutely feel it first because it may make the difference between going and not going,” Gilad said.

It’s already made the difference for Anna Del Vecchio. The 36-year-old Seattle resident has made it an annual springtime tradition to visit family in Philadelphia before flying to Paris to see friends she’s known since she was a teenager.

Her credit card points typically cover the roundtrip flight, but ticket prices now hover around \$1,400 — about double what she has paid in past years.

“It wasn’t even scratching the surface for the flight this time,” she said, “so I decided to delay the trip.”

But if airfare tops \$1,500, she might not be able to make a journey she hasn’t missed in years.

“It might be the kind of thing where it just ends up being that I have to travel less.”

Former NYPD officer gets 3 to 9 years in prison for throwing a cooler that caused fatal crash

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A former New York City police sergeant was sentenced Thursday to three to nine years in prison for tossing a picnic cooler full of ice and drinks at a fleeing suspect, who then crashed his motorized scooter and died.

Erik Duran, 38, was convicted of manslaughter in the 2023 death of 30-year-old Eric Duprey. The ex-sergeant said he was trying to protect other officers from the approaching scooter. He is the first former NYPD officer sentenced to prison for an on-duty death in at least two decades.

“I took this job to save lives. I felt terrible once I saw Eric Duprey crash,” Duran told a Bronx judge, saying he “did everything he could” to attend to the man’s injuries.

“I never wanted this to happen,” he added, apologizing to Duprey’s family in Spanish as a court interpreter translated.

Duprey’s mother, Gretchen Soto, wept as Duran spoke. Earlier, she told the court: “There are no words to express what I feel.”

Judge Guy Mitchell said he did not accept the ex-sergeant’s defense that his actions were justified, concluding that Duran hurled the cooler because he “was upset that Mr. Duprey was getting away.” If there was no cooler, the judge said, Duprey “would have driven by” Duran and “could’ve been captured another day.”

Duran was immediately taken into custody after sentencing. His lawyer, Arthur Aidala, said he will ask a court to free Duran on bail while he appeals.

“Nobody’s above the law,” a woman shouted in a courthouse hallway after the sentence was announced.

Afterward, Soto and Duprey’s partner, Pearl Velez, said they did not accept Duran’s apology.

“How you gonna say sorry now?” Velez said.

Duran’s union, the Sergeants Benevolent Association, said thousands of officers signed an online petition calling for him to be spared prison.

“Today will forever be the darkest day of our profession,” union president Vincent Vallelong said. Duran’s prison sentence, he said, “puts in the back of a police officer’s mind that they can lose their freedom” for making a split-second decision.

Officers in NYPD jackets packed the courtroom gallery, while a couple dozen protesters outside demanded justice for Duprey.

Duran’s sentence, less than the maximum of five to 15 years, matched what prosecutors with state Attorney General Letitia James’ office had sought. Prosecutor Joseph Bianco said the ex-sergeant recklessly caused Duprey’s death and attempted to cover up his actions.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 57 of 80

Defense lawyer Andrew Quinn argued for no prison time, calling Duprey's death the "unintended and tragic consequences" of a "reckless decision" Duran made in a span of 2.5 seconds.

Duran grew up in the Bronx and led a "model, exemplary life" prior to Duprey's death. A married father of three, he joined the NYPD because he wanted to make the borough "cleaner and safer for the kids who came after him," Quinn said.

"He is now the cooler cop," Quinn said.

Duran was part of a narcotics policing unit that conducted a "buy-and-bust" operation in the Bronx on Aug. 23, 2023. Police said Duprey sold drugs to an undercover officer, then tried to flee on a scooter.

Surveillance video showed Duprey driving the motorized scooter on a sidewalk toward a group of people. As he approached, the then-sergeant — who wasn't in uniform — picked up a bystander's cooler and threw it.

The container struck Duprey, who lost control of the scooter, slammed into a tree and crashed onto the pavement. Duprey was not wearing a helmet. He sustained fatal head injuries and died almost instantly, according to prosecutors.

They argued Duran had enough time to warn others to move, but instead hurled the cooler because he was angry.

Duran, however, testified at his trial that he made a quick decision to keep other officers safe from the scooter speeding toward them.

"He was gonna crash into us," Duran said then, adding "all I had time for was to try again to stop or to try to get him to change directions."

Duran opted to have Judge Mitchell, not a jury, decide the case.

Duran worked for the NYPD for 13 years before the crash, which spurred his suspension. He was fired after his conviction in February.

Duprey was a delivery driver and had three young children. Soto, who said she was on a video call with him right before he died, has disputed the police claims that he sold drugs and fled from officers.

She told the judge Thursday her son "is not just a name, not just one more case."

"It is an unjust incident," Soto said through a Spanish interpreter. "As a mother, I have to miss him now every day."

Appeals court judges raise questions about severity of Sean 'Diddy' Combs' four-year prison sentence

By LARRY NEUMEISTER and MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Federal appeals court judges questioned during oral arguments Thursday whether a roughly four-year prison term given to Sean "Diddy" Combs for the hip-hop mogul's conviction on prostitution-related charges was too harsh.

The three-judge panel of the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Manhattan did not immediately rule after hearing two hours of arguments.

At the conclusion, Circuit Judge William J. Nardini called it an "exceptionally difficult case" that raises questions of first impression "not only for this court but for any federal court in the country."

Throughout the arguments, judges questioned whether a judge improperly considered elements of acquitted charges to sentence Combs to what his lawyer, Alexandra Shapiro, said was the most prison time ever given someone convicted of the same charges with a similar criminal history.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Christy Slavik, arguing for the government, challenged Shapiro's claim, saying the four-year, two-month prison term given to Combs was below what federal sentencing guidelines called for and was in line with similar convictions in the 2nd Circuit.

Combs, currently in federal prison in New Jersey, is challenging his conviction and prison sentence. He was convicted last July under the federal Mann Act, which bans transporting people across state lines for any sexual crime.

But he was acquitted of sex trafficking and racketeering charges that carried the potential for a life sentence.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 58 of 80

In sentencing Combs, Judge Arun Subramanian said: "Mr. Combs, you're being sentenced for the offenses of conviction, NOT the crimes he was acquitted of. However, under law, the court 'shall consider' the nature of the offense and characteristics of the defendant."

The judge also cited law which states that no limitation shall be placed on the "background, character and conduct" that a judge can consider.

During Thursday's arguments, Shapiro asked the appeals panel for a speedy decision.

Combs, 56, has been behind bars since his September 2024 arrest. The Federal Bureau of Prisons says he is scheduled for release in April 2028.

His attorneys say Combs' conviction should be reversed, or he should at least be freed and resentenced to less time.

Despite extensive written arguments on the subject, there was no discussion Thursday about claims by Combs' lawyers that his conviction should be reversed on grounds that the First Amendment protects sexual encounters between his girlfriends and male sex workers because they were sometimes filmed and amounted to "amateur pornography."

There was extensive discussion, though, about his lawyers' arguments that Subramanian wrongly considered evidence of fraud and coercion that they said the jury rejected as it exonerated him on the most serious charges.

Combs' trial last year exposed the sordid private life of one of the most influential figures in music. The case featured harrowing testimony about violence, drugs and sexual performances that witnesses said he called "freak-offs" or "hotel nights."

He did not testify. His defense team acknowledged that he could be violent but argued that prosecutors were straining to make a federal crime out of his personal life.

What to know about the ongoing war between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon

By ABBY SEWELL Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — In the hours after the U.S. and Iran announced a tentative ceasefire, Israel dramatically escalated its attacks in Lebanon against the Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah.

The burst of strikes in central Beirut and other parts of the country killed more than 300 people and wounded 1,150 others, according to health officials.

The Israeli military said that it had targeted sites affiliated with the Hezbollah militant group and announced that it had killed an aide to the group's leader, Naim Kassem. But the strikes, which hit densely packed residential and commercial districts at rush hour, also killed more than 100 women, children and older people, according to health officials.

Hezbollah retaliated to the heavy strikes — which prompted an international outcry — by launching missiles into Israel, though no serious casualties have been reported.

The latest war between Israel and Hezbollah erupted after the U.S. and Israeli launched airstrikes against Iran on Feb. 28. Since the ceasefire announced by the U.S. and Iran earlier this week, a heated debate has ensued over whether it applies to the fighting between Israel and Hezbollah. Iran says it does, while the U.S. and Israel say it doesn't.

The lead-up to the latest conflict

Israel and Hezbollah have fought multiple wars since the militant group was formed in the 1980s as a guerrilla force resisting Israel's then occupation of southern Lebanon.

On March 2, two days after Israel and the U.S. attacked Iran, Hezbollah launched missiles toward Israel. It said that the salvo was in retaliation for the killing of Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and for "repeated Israeli aggressions" in Lebanon.

The resumption of fighting came 15 months after a U.S.-brokered ceasefire halted their previous war. That conflict started a day after the deadly Hamas-led attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023.

Hezbollah, an ally of Hamas, began firing on Israel after it launched its blistering counteroffensive against

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 59 of 80

Hamas in Gaza. What began as a low-level conflict along the Israel-Lebanon border region erupted into a full-scale war in September 2024.

After a ceasefire was reached in November 2024, Israel kept up near-daily airstrikes in Lebanon, saying that it aimed to stop Hezbollah from regrouping. Israeli troops also continued to occupy five hilltops on the Lebanese side of the border.

Hezbollah, meanwhile, was under domestic and international pressure to surrender its remaining arsenal. The group stayed largely quiet and didn't enter the fray during last summer's 12-day war between Israel and Iran. Many believed that the group was too weakened to fight after suffering heavy losses in the 2024 conflict, and so were surprised when it entered the war following U.S.-Israeli attacks on Iran.

More than 1 million Lebanese displaced

As of Thursday, 1,888 people had been killed and more than 6,092 had been wounded by Israeli strikes in Lebanon since March 2, according to the country's health ministry. It's not clear how many of those were civilians, but they include hundreds of women, children and health workers. Wednesday's strikes killed 30 children, 71 women and nine people over the age of 65, the health ministry said.

More than 1 million people have been displaced in Lebanon. Israel has issued a series of blanket warnings for residents to leave wide swaths of the country, often followed by bombardment of those areas. Many are sleeping in cars, on the streets or in overcrowded schools turned into shelters.

The Israeli military says Hezbollah has launched more than 2,000 missiles and drones across the border, but that most have been intercepted or fallen in open areas. The Israeli army says 12 soldiers have been killed in southern Lebanon and more than 400 others have been wounded.

There have also been a small number of civilian fatalities in northern Israel, including one man killed by a rocket strike and another who was accidentally killed by Israeli army artillery fire during fighting along the border. The steady stream of missiles and drones has residents on edge in northern Israel. Many are angry that the government hasn't offered to pay to evacuate them as it did during the last war.

The Israeli army has also launched a ground invasion of southern Lebanon. Fierce battles have erupted with Hezbollah militants in the border area and U.N. peacekeeping forces have at times been caught in the middle. Three members of the U.N. force have been killed.

Some Israeli officials have called for their military to occupy southern Lebanon up to the Litani River, about 30 kilometers (20 miles) north of the border. Israeli forces have demolished homes in villages along the border line. Many displaced Lebanese fear that Israel plans to create a depopulated buffer zone and they will never be able to return to their homes.

Questions about the endgame

Lebanese officials have sought to directly negotiate with Israel to halt the fighting. On Thursday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that Israel had agreed to enter into talks that would focus on disarming Hezbollah and a possible peace deal.

When the U.S. and Iran announced a tentative ceasefire agreement on Wednesday, Pakistan's prime minister, whose country served as a mediator, said in a social media post that it applied to "everywhere including Lebanon."

Hezbollah has said that it won't abide by the ceasefire unless Israel does.

Joe Macaron, a Middle East analyst, said that the ensuing negotiations will be "a test of how much the Iranian regime is committed to help Hezbollah." It's unlikely Israel will agree to — or be forced by the U.S. to accept — a full ceasefire and withdrawal from Lebanon, he said.

While the U.S. might pressure Israel to halt strikes in central Beirut, a "long war of attrition" is likely to unfold between Israel and Hezbollah in the south, he said. The Israeli military isn't capable of controlling the entire area south of the Litani River, Hezbollah isn't capable of forcing Israeli troops out of southern Lebanon, and neither Israel nor the Lebanese state can forcibly disarm the group, he said.

The only resolution will have to be a negotiated settlement, Macaron said.

Olympic hero Jack Hughes has new chiclets as NHL dentists get a moment in the spotlight

By STEPHEN WHYNO AP Hockey Writer

Jason Schepis was at home with his kids in New Jersey watching the gold medal men's hockey game at the Olympics when he saw some of his handiwork get scattered all over the ice late in the third period of a thriller.

Jack Hughes, the 24-year-old forward for Team USA, had just taken a stick to the mouth from Canada's Sam Bennett and, as he explained later, saw at least one full tooth and shards of others laying on the ice.

Schepis knew those teeth, too. In fact, as the New Jersey Devils team dentist, he had repaired those very same chompers before after Hughes took a high stick in the playoffs a few years ago.

"We did the root canals, fixed it up," Schepis recalled. "Those were his teeth."

Hughes, like hockey players tend to do, shook off the injury, and he went on to score in overtime for a 2-1 win and America's first gold in men's hockey since 1980. His gap-toothed grin became the picture-perfect encapsulation of a sport where missing teeth is a badge of honor and "spittin' chiclets" is so ingrained in the lexicon that it's the name of a popular hockey podcast, not just the candy-coated chewing gum pieces that are somewhat tooth-sized.

To say that hockey players need dentists is something of an understatement. Every team has one and these specialists join team doctors and other medical staff at every single NHL game, ready to jump into action when the need arises.

"When there is an injury to the mouth, our physicians are like, 'Oh yeah, we're so happy you're here because we would not have been able to do that,'" San Jose Sharks dentist Mark Nishimura said. "Sometimes we're really not busy, and other times, when it's bad, it's bad."

It was bad when Nishimura was handed Joe Pavelski's teeth following a puck to the players' jaw during in the 2019 playoffs, though that resulted in a goal. Later that year, Keith Yandle lost nine teeth, returned to the game and played 168 more in a row.

Brent Burns took a wayward stick to the face in 2013 that knocked out three pearly whites, and since returning he has skated in more than 1,000 games in a row. When a puck ramped off his own stick into his mouth in 2006, Chris Clark needed three hours of surgery involving braces, screws and a cadaver bone.

Hockey dentistry is about triage

Clark calls hockey dentists "triage doctors," learning about that from his own tooth-losing, palate-fracturing experience with the Washington Capitals.

Longtime Capitals dentist Tom Lenz was there that game and has seen it all, including driving players to his office at night when time is of the essence. Because a puck or a stick to the mouth almost always causes damage different than the general population, he got nervous in his early days more than two decades ago.

"You never know till you get back there, so you always have to be ready to just jump in and take care of it," Lenz said. "It can be a simple chipped tooth. It can be teeth knocked out. It can be jaw fractures. ... We try to get them stable, out of discomfort — whatever that takes."

That includes dealing with lacerations elsewhere on the faces of players, officials and even coaches. The home dentist, at least in the regular season, is responsible for the visiting team, too, and consults with the other doctors in the building, like when Schepis in early 2024 ruled out Chicago's Connor Bedard because of a broken jaw.

The playoffs are different, so Schepis was there on the road when Hughes took a stick to the mouth from Jordan Staal in the series opener between the Devils and Carolina Hurricanes in May 2023.

"They're snapped in half, the nerves are hanging out, the ice is cold (and) he can't breathe because the nerves are hanging," Schepis said. "Just numb him right at the end of the first, did the root canals right there, pulled the nerves out. The orthopedic surgeons think it's like miracle work."

Smile, you're a hockey player

When Alex Ovechkin took a stick to the mouth in October 2007 that knocked out one of his front teeth, Lenz put in an implant that's also known as a "flipper" with the plan to make a permanent fix once his career is over.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 61 of 80

Lenz said Ovechkin wanted it immediately, then lost the implant and his smile without the tooth became part of his look, even if his mother did not approve. Ovechkin is now league's leading career goal-scorer and still playing at age 40.

"Had one made within a day or so because he was so adamant about, 'I can't go around like this,'" Lenz said. "It's so him now that it's going to be strange to see him with all his teeth up there."

Not Hughes, who told Jimmy Fallon that missing teeth definitely won't become his look long term. He has already been fixed up.

Now in his 14th full season in the league, Brenden Dillon wore a mouthguard playing as a kid because he needed braces three times from hockey-related incidents. After going without one with the minors, he got popped in the mouth in his first NHL fight and has worn one since.

"Not a fun part of it," Dillon said. "I don't think basketball, football — maybe baseball, a ball here and there maybe — but way more in hockey. Sticks, pucks, the glass, ice — the whole nine yards. It feels like once a game at least somebody's getting dinged up with something."

Hockey players have a high pain tolerance

Schepis, Lenz and other NHL team dentists work in other sports. Lenz said many of the NBA players he works on have never had sutures before.

"Hockey players sometimes will even go, 'How many is it going to be?'" Lenz said. "If it's like two or three or so, a lot of the guys will just go: 'Then just suture it. No anesthetic, I don't want to take that. Just suture it and I want to get back out there.'"

Nishimura remembers being asked, "Do you want to put these back in?" when Pavelski lost those teeth off a shot from Burns, his teammate at the time. The Sharks beat Vegas 5-2, and it became part of his courageous career.

"Pavs went back, we numbed him up, sutured him," Nishimura said. "He went back out and finished the game. It's incredible. Hockey players, they don't quit. They are a special breed of human being."

Dillon, now with New Jersey, has had a couple of root canals, a couple of chipped teeth and realizes he should wear his mouthguard in practices, too. Lenz has noticed a decline in facial injuries since visors were made mandatory; only four players, grandfathered in, are skating without one.

Clark wore a visor sparingly in his playing days but is glad to see the current generation widely adopt it, much like helmets became required equipment, because sticks and pucks to the mouth are such a regular occurrence.

"It's sort of part of the deal," Clark said.

So is having a hockey dentist on call. Schepis says he once did a root canal on Jaromir Jagr at 1 a.m. and put in 30-plus sutures for another player when the puck caused damage all the way through his mouth.

"There's a lot of little nuances to sports dentistry vs. regular dentistry because it's just not standard," Schepis said. "You have to move fast and you have to always move with the player's best intention. But we know they want to be out there. We know the team wants them out there. You always have to be available any time of night."

US stocks rise and oil prices trim their gains on hopes for the ceasefire with Iran

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. stocks rose Thursday, even though oil prices did too, as financial markets moved more modestly a day after surging on optimism about a ceasefire in the war with Iran.

The morning began with moderate losses for Wall Street following drops for Asian and European stocks. But the S&P 500 erased its dip and finished with a 0.6% gain after Israel's prime minister authorized direct negotiations with Lebanon. That eased worries that the two-week ceasefire announced late Tuesday may already be in trouble because of Israel's bombardment of Lebanon.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 275 points, or 0.6%, and the Nasdaq composite climbed 0.8% after both indexes likewise recovered from early losses.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 62 of 80

Crude oil prices pared some of their gains, but they nevertheless remained higher for the day on uncertainty about when oil tankers can start fully flowing through the Strait of Hormuz. The narrow waterway has been at the center of President Donald Trump's demands of Iran, and blockages there have kept oil and natural gas stuck in the Persian Gulf and away from customers worldwide.

The price for a barrel of benchmark U.S. crude rose 3.7% to settle at \$97.87 after briefly nearing \$103 in the morning. Brent crude, the international standard, added 1.2% to \$95.92 per barrel.

Given how far apart the United States and Iran seem to be in their demands, upward pressure on oil prices may be "here to stay for a while" according to strategists at Macquarie led by Thierry Wizman. Risks remain for renewed fighting, which could cause customers worldwide to hoard whatever oil supplies they do get. That could itself keep oil off the market, much like actual fighting targeting pipelines or oil tankers.

Oil prices have been swinging through sharp and sudden reversals for weeks with hopes rising and falling for the Strait of Hormuz to fully reopen and allow production of oil and natural gas to kick back into gear. Brent oil has gone from roughly \$70 per barrel before the war in late February to more than \$119 at times.

Despite all the swings, the U.S. stock index at the heart of many 401(k) accounts isn't far from its all-time high. The S&P 500 is just 2.2% below its record set in January.

Constellation Brands climbed 8.5% for one of the index's biggest gains on Thursday after reporting stronger results for the latest quarter than analysts expected. The company, which sells Modelo beer and Robert Mondavi wines, said it saw encouraging trends heading into its new fiscal year. But it pulled its financial forecasts for the following fiscal year because of "limited near-term visibility" and other factors.

CoreWeave rose 3.5% after announcing an expanded, \$21 billion deal with Meta Platforms to provide AI cloud capacity through December 2032. Meta climbed 2.6%.

On the losing end of Wall Street was Simply Good Foods, which sank 18.1% after reporting a worse drop in revenue than analysts expected. CEO Joe Scalzo called the results unsatisfactory and said the company behind the Quest and Atkins brands is making immediate changes to turn around its performance.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 41.85 points to 6,824.66. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 275.88 to 48,185.80, and the Nasdaq composite climbed 187.42 to 22,822.42.

Mixed reports on the U.S. economy also helped keep Wall Street in check. One said an underlying measure of inflation the Federal Reserve considers important was slightly hotter in February than economists expected. It decelerated before the war with Iran began, but not by as much as economists expected.

A separate report said that more U.S. workers applied for unemployment benefits last week than economists expected. The number was not very high compared with history, but it could indicate an acceleration in layoffs.

Treasury yields swiveled up and down in the bond market following the reports before pulling near where they were the day before.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury edged down to 4.28% from 4.29% late Wednesday. It's still well above its 3.97% level from before the war, which has sent rates higher for mortgages and other kinds of loans going to U.S. households and businesses.

If oil prices stay high and keep upward pressure on inflation, the Federal Reserve would have a tough time resuming its cuts to interest rates to help the slowing economy, even if the job market weakens. A growing number of Fed officials seem to be considering the possibility of a hike in rates, according to minutes of their latest meeting released on Wednesday.

In stock markets abroad, South Korea's Kospi fell 1.6%, and Germany's DAX lost 1.1% for two of the world's biggest moves.

Artemis II astronauts describe their lunar voyage as surreal and profound ahead of Earth return

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

HOUSTON (AP) — Drawing ever closer to Earth, the Artemis II astronauts tidied up their lunar cruiser

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 63 of 80

for the upcoming “fireball” return and reflected on their historic journey around the moon, describing it as surreal and profound.

As the next-to-last day of their flight dawned Thursday, humanity’s first lunar explorers in more than half a century were less than 150,000 miles (240,000 kilometers) from home with the odometer clicking down.

“We have to get back. There’s so much data that you’ve seen already, but all the good stuff is coming back with us. There are so many more pictures, so many more stories,” said pilot Victor Glover, adding that “riding a fireball through the atmosphere is profound as well.”

Being cut off from all of humanity for nearly an hour while behind the moon was especially “surreal,” according to commander Reid Wiseman.

“There’s a lot that our brains have to process ... and it is a true gift,” Wiseman said late Wednesday during the crew’s first news conference since before liftoff.

While out of contact behind the moon Monday, Wiseman, Glover, Christina Koch and Canada’s Jeremy Hansen became the most distant humans ever, clocking in at a record 252,756 miles (406,771 kilometers) from Earth before heading back. As they emerged from behind the moon, they experienced a wondrous total solar eclipse as the orb blocked the sun from their perspective.

Launching from Florida on April 1 diminished the amount of illumination on the lunar far side, Glover noted, but the eclipse was the consolation prize “and it was one of the greatest gifts.”

While acknowledging anxiety over Friday’s return, NASA Associate Administrator Amit Kshatriya said the crew’s “expressions of love and devotion to family” have warmed hearts worldwide and served as “a great example of why we go and do these missions.”

“If you can’t take love to the stars, then what are we doing?” he said. “That’s why we send humans instead of robots sometimes, that’s why we have that firsthand witness.”

Friday’s reentry and Pacific splashdown off the coast of San Diego — as dynamic and dangerous as liftoff — now topped everyone’s minds. The recovery ship, USS John P. Murtha, was already at sea, with a squadron of military planes and helicopters poised to join the operation.

It’s the first time that NASA and the Defense Department have teamed up for a lunar crew’s reentry since Apollo 17 in 1972. Their Orion capsule will come screaming back, hitting the atmosphere at a predicted 34,965 feet (10,657 meters) per second — or 23,840 mph (38,367 kph) — not a record but still mind-bogglingly fast.

Flight director Jeff Radigan said the capsule must nail the reentry angle within a single degree.

“Let’s not beat around the bush. We have to hit that angle correctly — otherwise we’re not going to have a successful reentry,” he said.

Mission Control will be paying close attention to how the capsule’s heat shield holds up. During the only other Orion test flight to the moon — in 2022 without a crew — the heat shield suffered considerably more damage than expected from the 5,000 degrees Fahrenheit (2,760 degrees Celsius) of reentry.

Instead of replacing Artemis II’s heat shield, which would have forced another lengthy delay, NASA tweaked the capsule’s descent through the atmosphere to reduce the blisteringly hot exposure. Next year’s Artemis III and beyond will fly with redesigned heat shields.

Artemis III will see astronauts practice docking their capsule with a lunar lander or two in orbit around Earth. Artemis IV in 2028 will attempt to land two astronauts near the moon’s south pole, setting the stage for what NASA hopes will be a sustainable lunar base.

NASA officials have been loath to provide their risk assessment numbers for the nearly 10-day mission, acknowledging launch and entry as the biggest threats.

“We’re down to the wire now,” said NASA’s Lakiesha Hawkins. “We’re down to the end of the mission, and obviously getting the crew back home and getting them landed safely, is a significant part of the risk that’s still in front of us.”

Cadets recount how ROTC leader and members subdued gunman who targeted them at Old Dominion

By ALLEN G. BREED Associated Press

In a dramatic video shared online by the Army ROTC, cadets at Virginia's Old Dominion University are recounting how they stabbed and disarmed a gunman targeting their classroom, then frantically tried to save the life of the wounded instructor who grappled with the attacker.

In the 17-minute video posted Wednesday, the Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps cadets tell how Lt. Col. Brandon Shah lunged at the shooter during the March 12 incident at the Norfolk school, placing himself between the gunman and the class.

Cadet Jah-Ire Urtarte said Shah, who was shot and did not survive, saved lives that day.

"If he didn't lunge at him, you know, I wouldn't be here right now," he said. "There's a possibility he could've turned his gun and I could've been next."

The shooter, Army National Guard veteran Mohamed Bailor Jalloh, also died. He had pleaded guilty in 2016 to attempting to aid the Islamic State and was sentenced to 11 years in prison. He was on supervised release at the time of the attack.

The students say Jalloh walked into their classroom and nervously asked if it was an ROTC class. When someone confirmed that, they say he pulled a pistol from his waist, shouted 'Allahu akbar,' and fired toward Shah.

Students dived for cover. As Shah struggled with Jalloh, Cadet Louis Ancheta said he pulled out his pocket knife, moved toward them and was hit in the chest by a round.

"It really didn't feel like it hit me," he said, pointing toward his sternum. "It felt like a graze. After that, I'm like, 'I can keep on going.'"

When Shah got the man turned around, Ancheta said he took action with the folding tactical knife that most cadets carry with them.

"So, I just go in there, just start stabbing him," he said. "As I'm stabbing, other cadets jump in."

Cadet Jeremy Rawlinson said he took out his knife, too, to help stop the threat.

Despite having several people on top of him, Jalloh still had the gun. Cadet Wesley Myers said he made that his priority, squeezing his fingers between Jalloh's hand and the weapon to pry it away and clear the final round from the chamber.

With the shooter disarmed, the cadets said they turned their attention to the wounded: Cadet Samuel Reineberg found a gunshot wound to Shah's upper right thigh. Rawlinson handed him his belt for a tourniquet.

"On an instant, we switched over to doing combat care," Rawlinson said.

Myers went to Ancheta.

"It's different when it's not a mannequin and it's your friend," Myers said. "So, myself and another cadet pull him to the side and lay him on his back and begin performing first aid."

Ancheta said he asked them to call his mother.

He received the Purple Heart — one of several cadets awarded medals for their response.

They praised Shah for taking action to protect them and for preparing them for the moment.

"So, he got to see all the training that he and the rest of Cadre had been giving us for the past years. He got to see us instantly do that in action," Rawlinson said. "He got see right then and there, like, hey, these guys didn't panic. They immediately switched over."

Shah attended Old Dominion University as an ROTC student, according to his biography on the university's website, and had returned in 2022 as a leader for the program. In the Army, Shah had flown helicopters over Iraq, Afghanistan and Eastern Europe as a pilot.

Two days before the shooting, Shah had told cadets not to wear their uniforms around campus as a precaution, another cadet previously told The Associated Press.

"Because of all the situation that's happening with Iran and all of that stuff in the Middle East," said Cadet Brandon Rebolledo, who was in the nearby ROTC building when the shooting occurred. "To make sure that we did not become a target and to make sure that we were keeping a low profile."

The students say Shah was the real hero that day.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 65 of 80

"So, he has a saying: 'Be bold, be quick, be gone,'" Rawlinson said.

Added Cadet Oshea Bego: "Col. Shah really set that example for what it means, not just as a warrior, leader and soldier, but also just as a human being."

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, including those who have been posting screenshots of their monthly charges. They are angry and perplexed over soaring utility costs that are sometimes surpassing rents and mortgages in one of the most energy-rich, yet poorest, corners of America, where 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.

Broton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 66 of 80

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 outsiders taking advantage of the state's resources. They have been loud over a lack of public input and

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 67 of 80

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?"

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.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 68 of 80

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 Crihfield Jones packed up his overstock retail shop, JCD Bargain and Trading, 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?"

Rutte the 'Trump whisperer' faces a fresh test as the US leader turns on NATO over Iran

By LORNE COOK Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte declined to say Thursday whether President Donald Trump had repeated his threat to quit the military organization, saying only that the U.S. leader was disappointed in some allies for being too slow to help with the Iran war.

Rutte's remarks came a day after he weathered a fresh ordeal with the U.S. leader, following months of tensions over Trump's threats to seize Greenland. The U.S.-Israel war on Iran does not involve the world's biggest military alliance and NATO allies were not consulted about it, but Trump has criticized fellow treaty members for their lack of support.

Since launching the war, Trump has derided U.S. allies as "cowards," slammed NATO as "a paper tiger" and compared U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer to Neville Chamberlain, who is probably best remembered for a policy of appeasement toward Nazi Germany.

In recent days, the man who is as good as chairman of the NATO board suggested that the U.S. might leave. Trump already threatened to walk out in 2018 during his first term. His complaint now is that some allies ignored his call to help as Iran effectively shut the Strait of Hormuz, a vital trade waterway.

After the talks with Rutte, the alliance's most powerful leader took to social media to show his annoyance. "NATO WASN'T THERE WHEN WE NEEDED THEM, AND THEY WON'T BE THERE IF WE NEED THEM AGAIN," Trump posted.

Asked repeatedly since then whether Trump intends to take America out of NATO, Rutte has said little, but he has not denied that such a threat was made. "I sensed his disappointment about the fact that he felt that too many allies were not with him," was all Rutte would say on Thursday.

Keeping America in

Rutte has earned a reputation as a "Trump whisperer," notably helping to draw up a plan that has seen European allies and Canada buy U.S. weapons for Ukraine, and keep the administration involved in Europe's biggest war in decades.

Indeed, one of his most demanding tasks since taking office in 2024 has been to keep the mercurial U.S. leader engaged in NATO, particularly as America has set its sights on security challenges elsewhere, in the Indo-Pacific, Venezuela, and most recently Iran.

Rutte has used flattery, praising Trump for forcing allies to spend more on defense. He has congratulated the U.S. leader over the war and refrained from criticizing Trump's warning that "a whole civilization will die" should Iran not reopen the strait.

In a speech Thursday on America's role in NATO, Rutte said "allow me here to applaud President Trump for his bold leadership and vision." Rutte chided some allies for being "a bit slow, to say the least," to help with Iran.

He declined to confirm reports that Trump is considering moving U.S. troops out of European countries that do not support the war, saying: "I totally understand that over time the U.S. wants more and more to pivot towards the Indo-Pacific."

War launched by a NATO member, not at one

The striking thing about the war on Iran is that NATO has no role to play there. As a defensive alliance it has protected ally Turkey when Iranian missiles were fired in retaliation at its territory, but the war was launched by a NATO member, not at one.

Rutte himself has said that NATO would not join the war, and there is no public confirmation that the U.S. had even raised the issue at the organization's Brussels headquarters, although it cannot be ruled out that the administration made a request on Wednesday for that to happen.

NATO declined to say whether security for the strait has been officially discussed and referred questions to the United Kingdom, which is leading an effort outside the alliance to make the trade route safe for shipping once the ceasefire is working.

Estonian Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna said Thursday that his country is always ready to consider providing support through NATO to partners who request it there.

"If the U.S. or any other NATO ally is asking (for) our support, we are always read to discuss it," he told

broadcaster CNBC. "But for that, we need of course the official ask to discuss then what is the mission, what is the goal."

If allies "need our support, then we need to plan together," he said.

NATO trying to stay out

Rutte himself insists that the alliance will only defend itself, and not become involved in another conflict outside of NATO territory, which is considered to be much of Europe and North America.

NATO has operated outside of the Euro-Atlantic area in the past, notably in Libya and Afghanistan. But there is no appetite to do so again given its chaotic U.S.-led exit from Afghanistan in 2021, which former NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg described as a "defeat."

Trump's ire seems most directed at Spain and France, rather than NATO itself. Spain has closed its airspace to U.S. planes involved in the Iran war and has refused U.S. forces the use of jointly operated military bases.

After the two-week ceasefire was announced, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez posted on X that his government "will not applaud those who set the world on fire just because they show up with a bucket."

France has been critical, insisting that the war was launched without respecting international law and that Paris was never consulted about it. No blanket restrictions were placed on the use of joint bases or its airspace, but French authorities have said they're making such decisions on a case by case basis.

Democrats grow bolder on talk about removing Trump from office after his Iran threats

By STEPHEN GROVES, LISA MASCARO and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's threats to wipe out Iran, "a whole civilization," ended the restraint that Democrats have mostly practiced when it comes to questions of removing him from office in his second term.

By the dozens, Democrats came out to say that Trump should no longer serve in the White House, either through the impeachment process or the 25th Amendment, which allows the vice president and the Cabinet to declare that a president is no longer able to perform the job.

While Trump eventually pulled back on his threat and agreed to a two-week ceasefire with Iran, the episode highlighted the growing demands for Democrats to oppose the Republican president in the strongest possible terms. Calls about Iran flooded into congressional offices, lawmakers said.

The breadth of the Democratic pushback underscored the gravity of Trump's apocalyptic threat to a country of more than 91 million people. It also served to raise the domestic political stakes for a conflict that is far from over. The Trump administration faces mounting calls to testify about the war and justify its demands for hundreds of billions of dollars in new military spending.

"We cannot excuse what the president said as a negotiating tactic," Rep. Sara Jacobs, a California Democrat told reporters at the Capitol Thursday.

"It is important that even though we were able to get this ceasefire, which I pray holds, that we hold this president accountable for what he threatened because threatening genocide is not just against international law, it's against our federal law, too," she added.

Still, Democratic leaders and many moderates in the party have steered clear of endorsing impeachment, and any attempt to remove Trump from office is doomed to fail so long as Republicans control Congress.

In the near term, Democratic leaders in the House and Senate are instead pushing Republicans to join them and pass legislation that would force Trump to get congressional approval before carrying out any more attacks on Iran.

A few Democrats attempted during a brief session of the House on Thursday to pass what's known as a war powers resolution on Iran, but Republicans, who control the chamber, did not acknowledge their request.

"We need Speaker Johnson to call us into session," said Democratic Rep Emily Randall of Washington. "The American people deserve that."

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 71 of 80

At the White House, press secretary Karoline Leavitt has defended Trump's rhetoric as effective.

"I think it was a very, very strong threat from the president of the United States that led the Iranian regime to cave to their knees and ask for a ceasefire and agree to reopening the Strait of Hormuz," she said at a Wednesday White House press briefing.

Callers jam congressional phone lines

As they press their case against Trump, Democrats are responding to the worries of their own base and constituents. Congressional offices were bombarded with phone calls and emails this week, largely from people alarmed by the president's rhetoric.

In the House, the office of Rep. Suzan DelBene, D-Wash., received a "ton" of calls and emails Monday and Tuesday, mostly about Iran but also about impeaching Trump or removing him by deploying the 25th Amendment, said one aide who was not authorized to discuss the internal office situation and insisted on anonymity.

When her district staffers in the state office took a break Tuesday, they returned to 75 voicemails on Iran an hour later, the aide said.

"My office phones have not stopped ringing," said Rep. Maxine Dexter, D-Ore., at a press conference in Portland, urging House colleagues to immediately return to Washington.

Dexter's office received more calls on Tuesday, 257, than it has ever received in a 24-hour period since the first-term lawmaker's team began keeping track.

The groundswell appeared to be organic, rather than an orchestrated campaign to pressure lawmakers to act.

While outside groups have been circulating some discussion points, including the legal details around invoking the 25th Amendment, there has not been an organized effort to flood the congressional offices with a strategic message, said one Democratic strategist familiar with the situation who insisted on anonymity to discuss the private conversations.

It was simply the "horror" of what Trump was saying, the strategist said, and the scale of the president's threats, that appeared to have sparked the mobilization.

On the political right, several prominent figures including former Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia, also suggested Trump should be removed from office through the 25th Amendment.

Will Democrats make an impeachment push?

Democrats twice impeached Trump for actions taken during his first term, but he was acquitted each time. They have tried to avoid such debates for the last 16 months as they tried to center their midterm message on kitchen table issues rather than opposing a president who narrowly won the popular vote.

Republicans also have the majority in the House and have easily fended off two previous efforts to impeach Trump in his second term. A significant number of Democrats have either joined with Republicans or voted "present" as the House blocked impeachment resolutions sponsored by Rep. Al Green, D-Texas.

Then came Trump's threat on Tuesday morning to wipe out "an entire civilization."

"Temporary ceasefire or not, Trump already committed an impeachable offense. Congress needs to get back to work and remove him from office before he does more damage to our country and the world," said Rep. Seth Moulton of Massachusetts, a veteran of the war in Iraq.

It's unclear how House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries will handle the demands for another impeachment push. But Democratic leaders are holding a call on Friday with members of the House Judiciary Committee that is focused on "Trump administration accountability and the 25th Amendment."

Standing on the Capitol steps Thursday, Rep. Madeleine Dean, D-Pa., said she supports impeachment, but nevertheless hit the brakes on it for now, as the Democrats are in the minority. Instead, she called on Republicans to stand up to Trump's threats, including by invoking the 25th Amendment.

She predicted the imperative to remove Trump from office could only grow as negotiators navigate a fragile framework for a peace deal. Dean and other Democrats criticized the plan as "chaotic" and unworkable.

Yet Dean said Trump's threat to destroy Iranian civilization should have already been enough. "The president brought the entire globe to watch his madness," she said.

UK and Norway led a military operation to deter Russian submarines in the North Atlantic

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain and Norway conducted a weekslong military operation to deter Russian spy submarines near undersea cables in the North Atlantic, the U.K. defense chief said Thursday, accusing Moscow of using the distraction of the Iran war to ramp up malign activity against Europe.

Defense Secretary John Healey said a Royal Navy frigate, aircraft and hundreds of personnel were involved in tracking a Russian attack sub and two spy submarines operating north of the U.K., and prevented the spy vessels from carrying out “nefarious” activities against underwater infrastructure.

He said the Russian vessels eventually left after the operation that lasted more than a month. There is no evidence of damage to any cables or pipes, he said.

The U.K. said other allies were also involved in the operation, but didn’t name them.

NATO countries have repeatedly expressed concern that Russia could use its fleet of spy ships to sabotage underwater cables on which global communications depend. Russia has dismissed those claims.

Healey said his message to Russian President Vladimir Putin was “we see your activity over our cables and our pipelines and you should know that any attempt to damage them will not be tolerated and will have serious consequences.”

Norwegian Defense Minister Tore Sandvik said in a statement that Russia’s operation occurred in and near Norwegian and British maritime areas in recent weeks.

Norway and the U.K. said the activity was coordinated by Russia’s Main Directorate of Deep Sea Research, known as GUGI, which is part of Russian armed forces. The activity is a reminder that Russia is further developing its abilities to map and sabotage critical Western infrastructure at ocean depths, Norway’s Defense Ministry said.

Healey said the subs are “designed to survey underwater infrastructure during peacetime and sabotage it in conflict.”

In November, Britain told Russia it was ready to deal with any incursion into its territory after the spy ship Yantar was detected on the edge of U.K. waters north of Scotland.

Healey said the submarine activity occurred in the U.K.’s exclusive economic zone, which extends for 200 nautical miles (230 miles, 370 kilometers) from shore, but not its narrower territorial waters.

British officials have tried to keep Russia in the international spotlight even as the world’s attention is focused on conflict in the Middle East. They have also stressed the overlap between conflicts there and in Ukraine, saying Russia has supplied Iran with drone parts and other support.

The U.S.-Israeli war on Iran has shed light on the reduced state of Britain’s military, which has been shrinking for decades. U.S. President Donald Trump has derided the Royal Navy, which has sent one destroyer to the eastern Mediterranean to help defend Cyprus.

Healey told a news conference that “Putin would want us to be distracted by the Middle East,” but Russia is the main threat to the U.K. and its allies.

“We will not take our eyes off Putin,” he said.

In late March, the U.K. said its military was ready to seize ships suspected to be part of Russia’s “shadow fleet” of vessels shipping oil in violation of international sanctions over Moscow’s war on Ukraine. Previously, Britain had only helped France and the U.S. monitor ships before they were boarded.

Katja Bego, a senior research fellow at international affairs think tank Chatham House, said “calling out” Russian operations as Healey had done could be an effective deterrent.

“But there are urgent conversations to be had as well about what European countries can do to inflict a far higher cost on Russia in response to these increasingly brazen incursions,” 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.

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 itself as an independent group of Iranians with no connection to the government. "We don't even receive any funding. We're just a group of friends working voluntarily — paying for our own internet, using our own laptops and computers, and doing all of this ourselves," the group told The Associated Press on the messaging app Telegram.

The group said it is producing and upload from within Iran to try 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," Akhbar Enfejarsaid. "But this time, something feels different. This time, we've disrupted the game. This time, we're doing it better."

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

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 74 of 80

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.

Key inflation gauge remains elevated in February before Iran war

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — A key measure of inflation stayed high in February, before the war in Iran spiked gas prices, a sign that everyday costs were elevated even before the conflict began.

An inflation gauge monitored by the Federal Reserve rose 0.4% in February from January, up slightly from the previous month. Compared with a year ago, prices rose 2.8%, the same as January. Thursday's data was delayed by a backlog of economic reports created by the six-week government shutdown last fall.

Excluding the volatile food and energy categories, core inflation also rose 0.4% in February from January, and it was 3% higher than a year earlier. The annual figure is slightly below January's reading of 3.1%.

Still, the monthly increases are at a pace that if continued for a whole year, would easily top the Fed's 2% inflation target.

"Consumer inflation was firming even prior to the outbreak of war in the Middle East, and it is primed to jump sharply higher in March," Kathy Bostjancic, chief economist at Nationwide, wrote in a client note. "Even if a long-lasting deal to end the war is reached and the Strait of Hormuz is fully reopened, it would take months for oil, gasoline, diesel and other commodity supplies to snap back to prewar levels and thus for prices to settle back to preconflict levels."

Thursday's report is largely a warm-up for the more important inflation data to be released Friday, when the government will publish the higher-profile consumer price index for March. The Friday report will be the first to reflect the impact of the gas price spike from the Iran war. Economists forecast it will show a big increase of 0.9% just in March from February, and a 3.4% gain from a year earlier. The annual figure would be a big increase from 2.4% in February.

The large jump in inflation in March will heighten concerns at the Fed that prices are moving further away from their inflation target and make it much less likely the central bank will cut rates anytime soon. At their most recent meeting last month, some Fed officials supported opening the door to the potential for rate hikes if inflation didn't show signs of improving.

Thursday's report from the Commerce Department also showed that Americans' incomes slipped 0.1% in February, the first decline since October, while spending after adjusting for inflation barely increased.

Higher inflation is sapping Americans' purchasing power. Spending rose a solid 0.5% in February from the previous month before adjusting for higher prices. Bostjancic expects consumer spending, adjusted

for inflation, will rise a modest 1.2% at an annual rate in the first three months of this year, below the 1.9% reached in last year's fourth quarter.

The economy may still grow a decent 2% in the first quarter, Bostjancic said, driven by investments in artificial intelligence and a bounceback in government spending after last year's shutdown. The government said Thursday growth was just 0.5% at the end of last year.

Russian court criminalizes the activities of the Nobel Prize-winning rights group Memorial

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

Russia's Supreme Court on Thursday effectively criminalized the activities of the Nobel Peace Prize-winning rights group Memorial, the latest step in an unrelenting crackdown on dissent and civil society organizations in the country amid its war in Ukraine.

Separately, police in Moscow raided the offices of the prominent independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta, whose chief editor Dmitry Muratov was a Nobel Peace Prize laureate in 2021. The newspaper said its lawyers were not allowed inside the office.

The ruling against the human rights group followed a closed hearing on a petition from the Justice Ministry to designate what it called "the Memorial international civic movement" as extremist and ban its activities in Russia.

Memorial said in a statement issued earlier in the day that there is no such entity but that the ruling still "would allow the authorities to crack down on any Memorial projects, their participants and supporters."

A long history of human rights activism

Memorial is one of the oldest and the most renowned Russian human rights organizations. It was awarded the 2022 Nobel Peace Prize, less than a year after President Vladimir Putin launched his full-scale invasion of Ukraine, alongside Belarusian activist Ales Bialiatski, who was imprisoned at the time, and the Ukrainian organization Center for Civil Liberties.

In a statement on Wednesday, the Norwegian Nobel Committee condemned the actions against the group, calling them "an affront to the fundamental values of human dignity and freedom of expression" and urged Russia to "cease all harassment of Memorial and its members."

Amnesty International's Eastern Europe and Central Asia deputy regional director Denis Krivosheev said in a statement that the court ruling was targeting not just Memorial but "criminalizing human rights work itself."

Memorial was founded in the late 1980s to ensure that the victims of the Soviet Union's political repression would be remembered, and grew to a network of smaller organizations both in Russia and abroad.

The group had been declared a "foreign agent," a designation that brought additional government scrutiny and carried strong pejorative connotations, and over the years was ordered to pay massive fines for alleged violations of the "foreign agent" law. Russian courts ordered its two main entities — the human rights center and the International Memorial — to shut down in December 2021.

Undeterred, the group continued to operate. In 2023, its members founded an international Memorial association in Geneva. Earlier this year, that association was banned in Russia as "undesirable," a label that exposes anyone involved with it to prosecution.

In February 2024, Memorial's co-chair Oleg Orlov was sentenced to 2 1/2 years in prison for speaking out against the war in Ukraine. He was released in a massive East-West prisoner exchange in August 2024 along with other imprisoned dissidents.

Increasing pressure on Memorial

An extremist designation puts even more pressure on the group, as involvement with extremist activities is a criminal offense in Russia punishable by prison terms.

Jan Raczynski, chair of the International Memorial that was forced to shut down in 2021, told The Associated Press that he was surprised and bewildered to learn from the news about the Justice Ministry's

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 76 of 80

petition.

He said Memorial has been well-known for many years on par with "perestroika" and "glasnost" — Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of political reform and openness. Raczynski noted that Soviet physicist and human rights advocate Andrei Sakharov, a 1975 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, was its first chairman.

Raczynski likened the Supreme Court's closed hearing to the repressions studied by the group.

"This is very similar to what we've been doing for almost 40 years now, these closed trials of people, in absentia, usually without a defense," he said, adding that it was difficult to predict what would happen next.

"I just know that for many hundreds of thousands of people in Russia, this is a very anxious time, because Memorial has helped a lot of people, and now they don't understand what is happening," Raczynski said.

He denounced allegations that Memorial was extremist, saying the group has always stood against violence, and vowed that its work will continue "one way or another."

The Russian state news agency Tass cited the Supreme Court's press service as saying Memorial's activities "are clearly anti-Russian in nature, aimed at destroying the fundamental foundations of Russian statehood, violating territorial integrity, and eroding historical, cultural, spiritual, and moral values."

Memorial said the case against the group "is yet another attempt to intimidate all dissent in the country and silence civil society" that will not succeed.

"Memorial and other civil society organizations, which are being destroyed in Russia, will continue their work abroad," it said. "Memorial will outlive the Putin regime and will be able to openly return to Russia."

A criminal case reported against Novaya Gazeta

After news emerged about the police raid against Novaya Gazeta, the Russian news agency Interfax, citing law enforcement officials, reported that a criminal case has been launched against the renowned newspaper on charges of illegal collection and use of personal data.

Tass cited law enforcement as saying the raid was connected to a case against Novaya Gazeta journalist Oleg Roldugin, who also co-founded another independent Russian newspaper, Sobesednik. Novaya Gazeta on social media said it couldn't confirm or deny whether this is the case, but noted that Roldugin's home also was raided, he has been taken in for questioning, and a lawyer was later allowed to see him.

The newspaper has faced growing pressure since Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Its website has been blocked in Russia, its media license was revoked in 2022, and many of its journalists fled abroad and regrouped in a separate publication called Novaya Gazeta Europe. That publication has been banned in Russia as "undesirable."

Muratov, Novaya Gazeta's longtime editor who still lives in Russia, shared the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize with Maria Ressa, a journalist from the Philippines. He was declared a "foreign agent" by Russian authorities.

The newspaper was itself born from the legacy of Gorbachev's Nobel Peace Prize in 1990. He used part of his prize money to fund what later became Novaya Gazeta, which launched in 1993.

AP study: MLB average salary hits a record \$5.34M as the Mets lead spending again

By RONALD BLUM AP Baseball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Major League Baseball's average salary rose 3.4% on opening day to a record \$5.34 million, according to a study by The Associated Press, and the New York Mets topped spending at the season's start for the fourth straight year.

Mets outfielder Juan Soto is the highest-paid player for the second consecutive season at \$61.9 million and was followed by New York Yankees outfielder Cody Bellinger at \$42.5 million.

Philadelphia pitcher Zack Wheeler and Mets third baseman Bo Bichette tied for third at \$42 million. Toronto first baseman Vladimir Guerrero Jr. was fifth at \$40.2 million, just ahead of Yankees outfielder Aaron Judge at \$40 million.

The Mets' payroll of \$352.2 million was just below the record \$355.4 million they set in 2023 and up from \$322.6 million last year. The Mets' total is more than five times that of Cleveland, the lowest-spending

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 77 of 80

team at \$62.3 million.

The two-time defending World Series champion Los Angeles Dodgers were second at \$316.6 million, down from \$319.5 million last year. The Dodgers' total would be \$395.2 million if deals for nine players with deferred money had not been discounted to present-day value. The Mets have deals with deferred money with just three players and their total would be \$360 million without discounting.

MLB's average of \$5,335,966 increased from \$5,160,245 at the start of last season and has risen 28% under the five-year collective bargaining agreement that expires in December, an average of 5.6% annually.

The top five spenders were unchanged from last year, with the Yankees third (\$297.2 million), followed by Philadelphia (\$282 million) and Toronto (\$269 million).

Six clubs had \$250 million payrolls, up from four; and 10 teams had \$200 million payrolls, an increase from nine.

Eight teams were under \$100 million, up from five.

Detroit had the biggest increase, up \$64.2 million to \$206.7 million after signing pitcher Framber Valdez, re-signing Gleyber Torres with a qualifying offer and giving a big raise to ace Tarik Skubal via arbitration. Atlanta increased by \$44.1 million, and the Chicago Cubs, Toronto and the Mets by just under \$30 million.

Minnesota slashed payroll by \$46.3 million from opening day last year to \$96.5 million.

St. Louis cut its opening day payroll from \$141.5 million to \$100.4 million. The Cardinals' spending includes \$44 million it is paying Arizona and Boston as part of trades to get rid of Nolan Arenado, Sonny Gray and Willson Contreras, plus just under \$3.4 million to Arenado as the present-day value of a \$6 million assignment bonus that originally had been deferred money owed in his contract and remains payable by the Cardinals in 2040 and '41.

Other teams with big cuts included the Guardians (\$40.2 million), Texas (\$37.3 million) and Washington (\$23.3 million).

Payrolls include the 942 players on opening day rosters and injured lists. They do not include players on the restricted list such as Cleveland pitchers Emmanuel Clase and Luis Ortiz, Atlanta outfielder Jurickson Profar and Philadelphia outfielder Johan Rojas.

They also don't reflect players who started the season assigned to minor league teams such as Dodgers second baseman Hyeeseong Kim and Toronto pitcher Yariel Rodríguez.

Baseball's median salary, the point at which an equal number of players are above and below, rose to \$1.4 million from \$1.35 million and remained below the record high of \$1.65 million at the start of 2015. Active rosters expanded to 26 players in 2021.

Average and median salaries decline over the course of the season as veterans are released and replaced by younger players making closer to the minimum. MLB calculated the 2025 final average at \$4.61 million and the players' association at \$4.72 million.

There were 519 players earning \$1 million or more, at 55% the same as last year.

Nineteen players earned \$30 million or more, an increase of four; 74 were at \$20 million, up from 66; and 168 at \$10 million, down from 177.

Thirty-one players made the \$780,000 minimum.

The top 50 players make 30% of the salaries, up from 29% in the prior two years, and the top 100 earn 49%, up from 48% last year.

The AP's figures include salaries and prorated shares of signing bonuses and other guaranteed income. Payroll figures factor in adjustments for cash transactions in trades, signing bonuses that are the responsibility of the club agreeing to the contract, option buyouts and termination pay for released players.

MLB's payrolls are based on 40-man rosters and fluctuate each day depending on roster moves.

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 Premier 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

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.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 79 of 80

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."

Today in History: April 10

Northern Ireland's Good Friday Agreement

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, April 10, the 100th day of 2026. There are 265 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On April 10, 1998, the Northern Ireland peace talks concluded as negotiators signed the Good Friday Agreement, a landmark settlement to end 30 years of bitter rivalries and bloody attacks.

Also on this date:

In 1815, Indonesia's Mount Tambora exploded in the biggest known volcanic eruption in 1,000 years, one that altered global weather. About 92,000 people are thought to have died, including 82,000 who perished of starvation and disease and 10,000 killed by its direct impact.

In 1866, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was founded in New York by Henry Bergh.

In 1912, the British liner RMS Titanic set sail from Southampton, England, bound for New York on its ill-fated maiden voyage.

In 1919, Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata was assassinated by forces loyal to President Venustiano Carranza.

In 1963, the nuclear submarine USS Thresher (SSN-593) sank during deep-diving tests east of Cape Cod, Massachusetts, killing all 129 aboard.

In 1971, the U.S. table tennis team arrived in China at the invitation of the communist government for a goodwill visit that came to be known as "ping-pong diplomacy."

In 2010, a plane crashed on approach in dense fog to the Smolensk airport in Russia, killing Polish President Lech Kaczynski, the first lady and 94 other government and armed forces figures as well as many prominent Poles.

In 2019, scientists released the first image ever made of a black hole, revealing a fiery, doughnut-shape object in a galaxy 55 million light-years from earth.

In 2023, a Louisville bank employee armed with a rifle opened fire at his workplace, killing five people while livestreaming the attack on Instagram. Police arrived as shots were still being fired inside Old National Bank and killed the shooter in an exchange of gunfire.

Today's Birthdays: Labor leader-activist Dolores Huerta is 96. Football Hall of Famer Mel Blount is 78. Author Anne Lamott is 72. Singer-producer Kenneth "Babyface" Edmonds is 67. Musician Brian Setzer is

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, April 10, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 309 ~ 80 of 80

67. Singer Kenny Lattimore is 56. Rapper-producer Q-Tip (A Tribe Called Quest) is 56. Singer Shemekia Copeland is 47. Actor Charlie Hunnam is 46. Actor-singer Mandy Moore is 42. Actor Haley Joel Osment is 38. Country singer Maren Morris is 36. Actor-singer AJ Michalka (mish-AL'-kah) is 35. Actor Daisy Ridley is 34. Singer-actor Sofia Carson is 33.