

Groton Daily Independent

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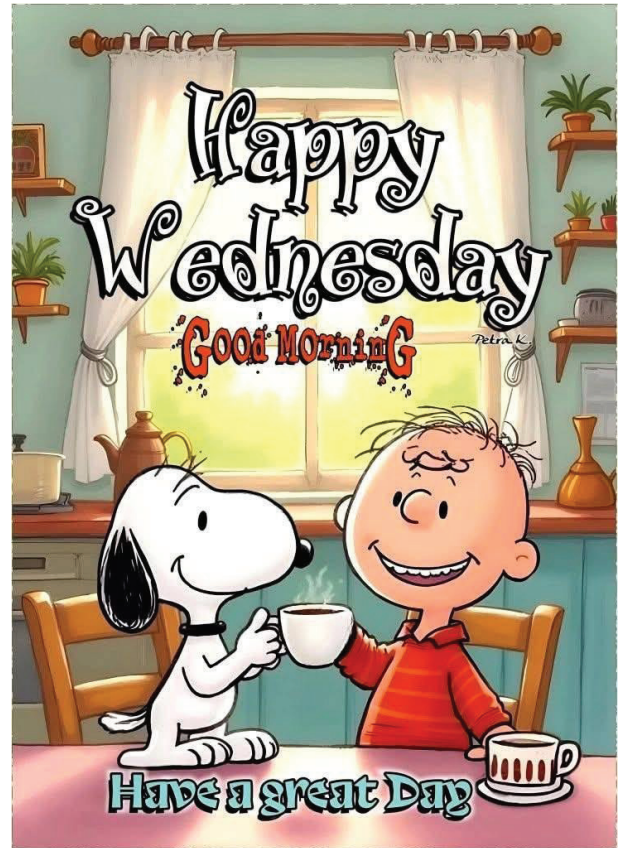
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Wednesday, April 15

Senior Menu: Teriyaki chicken, wild rice, oriental blend, fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Omelets

School Lunch: Mac and cheese, peas

Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.; Leauge, 6:30 p.m.

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton Ad council, 7 p.m.

Groton C&MA: Kid's Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study, 7 p.m.

Grades 6-8 ELA & Math Testing

Pickleball, 5:30 p.m., Elementary Gym

JVT Practice, 7:30 p.m., Arena

Thursday, April 16

Senior Menu: Swedish meatballs, mashed potatoes and gravy, carrots, fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Biscuits.

School Lunch: Burrito bowl, chili lime corn

Grades 6-8 ELA & Math Testing

National Guard Track and Field at Milbank, 3:30 p.m.

5th Grade Girls Basketball, 4 p.m., elementary gym

Pickleball, 6 p.m., Elementary Gym
HS Track @ Roncalli Invite @ Warner (1:30pm field events, 3:30pm track events)

JV Baseball will host Brookings JV for a double header starting at 5pm.

JVT Practice, 7 p.m., Arena

Friday, April 17

Senior Menu: Lemon baked fish, parsley buttered potatoes, California beld, fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Doughnuts

School Lunch: Cheese pizza, green beans

Grades 6-8 ELA & Math Testing

Junior High Track Meet at Sisseton, 3:30 p.m.

High School Baseball at Northville. Varsity at 6 p.m., JV to follow.

Groton Daily Independent
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Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460

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1440

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

Maradona Death Trial

Argentina has resumed a trial over soccer star Diego Maradona's death, with seven healthcare workers accused of negligence, almost a year after the first case collapsed when a judge withdrew following a documentary appearance.

Prosecutors say the defendants failed to provide adequate care in the weeks before Maradona died in November 2020 at age 60 of cardiac arrest while recovering from brain surgery. Defense attorneys say Maradona had multiple serious medical conditions and argue that no crime was committed. Defendants—a neurosurgeon, psychiatrist, psychologist, doctors, and nurses—face culpable homicide charges, similar to involuntary manslaughter in the US, and could receive eight to 25 years in prison if convicted. A verdict is expected in early June.

Maradona, who led Argentina to the 1986 World Cup title and shared the FIFA Player of the 20th Century award with Pelé, is famous for the controversial "Hand of God" goal against England, an illegal handball that was not called in real time.

Earbuds That See

Researchers yesterday presented a novel wireless earbud-camera system that lets users talk with an artificial intelligence model about what they're seeing.

Each earbud has a rice-grain-sized camera that captures low-resolution images and sends them to a phone or other nearby device. There, an AI model verbally answers questions about the scene in about one second. The prototype—called VueBuds—achieved over 80% accuracy in identifying objects and 93% accuracy in identifying book titles and authors. Due to camera size constraints, the images are in grayscale, so the system cannot yet answer color-related questions. Future studies will explore how VueBuds could help people with low vision read books and assist travelers with translations.

The project team hopes VueBuds will be adopted more widely than smart glasses and VR headsets, since people already wear earbuds. Users can also delete images instantly, addressing privacy concerns tied to Meta's AI glasses, which have reportedly sent sensitive footage to subcontractors in Kenya.

Can You Afford a Picasso?

France sold a \$1M Picasso painting to a Parisian sales engineer for 100 euros (\$117) yesterday. The sale was part of a charity raffle that collectively raised 12 million euros (\$14M) for Alzheimer's research.

The portrait was Pablo Picasso's 1941 "Tête de Femme" ("Head of a Woman"), a cubist gouache-on-paper in shades of gray donated by Paris' Opera Gallery. The piece measures 15.3 inches by 10 inches. It was painted under Nazi occupation, in the same Paris studio where Picasso painted his sweeping canvas "Guernica" four years earlier.

The sale marks the third-ever "1 Picasso for €100" raffle. In 2013, organizers sold "Man in the Opera Hat" to a fire-sprinkler worker in Pennsylvania. In 2020, "Nature Morte" was sold to an Italian accountant who got the ticket as a Christmas present.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Ex-Michigan football coach Sherrone Moore gets 18 months of probation on charges stemming from a confrontation with a now former female staffer.

NFL reporter Dianna Russini resigns after vacation photos of her with New England Patriots coach Mike Vrabel surface.

Broadcaster Dick Vitale, 86, is diagnosed with cancer for the fifth time after completing his 46th year covering college basketball.

US Soccer's sporting director departs for a job in Saudi Arabia two months before the World Cup.

Taylor Swift leads 2026 American Music Awards nominations with eight nods.

Rock & Roll Hall of Fame reveals 2026 inductees, including Billy Idol, Phil Collins, and Wu-Tang Clan.

Science & Technology

Fusion power startup Inertia strikes a deal with Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory to commercialize fusion energy, marking one of the largest public-private partnerships in lab history.

Scientists identify nine genes linked to hyperemesis gravidarum—a severe pregnancy sickness that affects about 2% of women and can lead to severe malnourishment; the condition was long dismissed as psychological.

Ultraprocessed foods may hurt muscle health by creating more fat between people's muscles, increasing the risk of knee osteoarthritis.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +1.2%, Dow +0.7%, Nasdaq +2.0%).

Iran war to hit UK economic growth the hardest of any G7 nation, IMF says.

Amazon to buy Globalstar to boost its low Earth orbit satellite network in \$11.57B deal; Globalstar is the biggest rival to SpaceX's Starlink satellite program.

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette sold to nonprofit publishing group, will no longer shut down following the 240-year-old company's January announcement.

Walt Disney Co. begins laying off 1,000 employees, including within Marvel unit.

Politics & World Affairs

President Donald Trump says second round of negotiations with Iran could restart this week; the US turns away six ships as it continues blockade of Strait of Hormuz.

New accuser says outgoing Rep. Eric Swalwell (D, CA-14) drugged and sexually assaulted her in 2018.

Lebanon and Israel hold direct negotiations for the first time since 1993 amid ongoing Israeli strikes in southern Lebanon.



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BROWN COUNTY COMMISSION AGENDA
SPECIAL MEETING
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15, 2026, 4:45 P.M.
COMMISSIONER'S CHAMBERS
COURTHOUSE ANNEX - 25 MARKET STREET, ABERDEEN SD

1. Call To Order - Pledge of Allegiance
2. Approval of the Agenda
3. Opportunity for Public Comment
 - ❖ *Public comment will be limited to 10 minutes or at Boards Discretion. Presentations will be limited to 3 minutes.*
4. Approve & Authorize Chairman to sign the Building Purchase Agreement
5. Executive Session (if requested per SDCL 1-25-2)
6. Adjourn

You can join the Brown County Commission Meeting via **your computer, tablet, or smartphone** at <https://meet.goto.com/BrCoCommission>
You can also dial in using your phone. United States: +1 (872) 240-3311 - Access Code: 601-168-909 #
Get the app now and be ready when your first meeting starts: <https://meet.goto.com/install>

Official Recordings of Commission Meetings along with the Minutes can be found at [Commission Meetings | Brown County](#)

Groton Area Track & Field Day

Mark your calendars! Our Track & Field Day will take place on Friday, May 15, starting at 12:30 PM. We're excited to invite families to join us earlier in the day for a picnic lunch with students. Please follow the schedule below:

Picnic Lunch Schedule

- Kindergarten & 1st Grade: 11:00 – 11:25
- 2nd & 3rd Grade: 11:25 – 11:50
- 4th & 5th Grade: 11:50 – 12:15

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Fifth grade Elementary Picture: back row left to right: Wendy Cooper, Janel Lone, Hailey Erickson (1st place Columbia and region), Aschar Warrington (2nd place Groton essay), Mehetsi Renata Garcia (1st place Groton and region essay), Cora Kotzer (1st place Groton and region poem), Jerrie Vedei, and Carrie Cole. In front left to right is Jozie Lord (2nd place Columbia), Anna Oswald (2nd place Columbia essay), Bless Moo (1st place Columbia essay), and Aryanna Cutler (2nd place Groton poem). (Photo by Tina Kosel)

Groton, Columbia Auxiliary Units Announce 2026 Essay, Poetry Winners

The 2026 American Legion Auxiliary essay and poetry contest winners have been announced by the Groton and Columbia Auxiliary units, recognizing the work of local students across multiple grade levels.

This year's contests centered on patriotic themes tied to the nation's upcoming milestone anniversary. The Americanism Essay Contest carried the theme "Celebrate America's 250th Birthday and Veterans Who Fought for Our Freedom," while the Americanism Poetry Contest invited entries under the theme "Happy 250th Birthday, America."

Students from the Groton area took part in both competitions, with participation spanning elementary through high school levels. Fourth- and fifth-grade students from Groton Area Elementary submitted entries, along with students from Groton Area High School, showcasing their reflections on American history, freedom, and the sacrifices made by veterans. The first and second place winners locally advanced to the regional competition.

Through essays and poetry, students explored the meaning of patriotism and honored those who have served the country. The contests, sponsored annually by the American Legion Auxiliary, are designed to promote Americanism and encourage young people to develop a deeper appreciation for the nation's heritage.

Local Auxiliary representatives noted that the contests continue to provide an opportunity for students to express their thoughts creatively while learning about the importance of service, freedom, and national pride.

First-place winners from the region will advance to the state competition, where their work will be judged against top entries from across South Dakota.

Winners from both communities were recognized for their efforts, continuing a long-standing tradition of celebrating student achievement through writing and poetry.

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High School Picture back row: Left to right Scott Thorson, Jerrie Vedvei, Ivan Schwan (seventh grade second place Groton essay), Asher Zimmerman (eighth grade 2nd place Columbia essay), Kamryn McKane (eighth grade first place Groton essay), Ryder Schwan (seventh grade second place Groton essay), Illyanna Dallaire (eighth grade 1st place Columbia essay), Wendy Cooper and Mary Johnson, in front left to right is Hayden Hubbart (sixth grade 2nd place Groton and 1st place region essay), Amara El Salany (7th grade 1st Groton essay), Ryan Hanson (sixth grade 1st Place Groton essay) and Brooke Torrence; not pictured is Amara Freeland (seventh grade first place region essay); and Emily Sueltz (9th-10th grade 1st place region essay). (Photo by Tina Kosel)



Fourth Grade Winner: In back, left to right, are Wendy Cooper, Nolan Rose (2nd place Groton essay), Freddy Cole (1st place Groton and region essay), Lincoln Heilman (1st place Columbia essay), Baylin Taylor (2nd place Columbia poem), Laken Kurth (1st place Groton and region essay); Jerrie Vedvei and Susan Fjeldheim; in front, left to right, are Samuel Flihs (2nd place Columbia essay), Piper Heilman (1st place Columbia and region poem), Katerina Simunek (2nd place Groton essay). (Photo by Tina Kosel)

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Groton Area relay dominance highlights Bob Billotto Invite in Eureka

EUREKA — The Groton Area Tigers turned in a strong showing Tuesday at the Bob Billotto Invitational, using standout relay performances and key individual efforts to finish sixth in the boys division and fourth in the girls division.

In the boys standings, Groton Area totaled 61 points in a tightly contested meet, finishing just behind North Central (62) and ahead of Linton/HMB (60.5). Ellendale claimed the team title with 86 points, followed closely by LaMoure/Litchfield-Marion (82) and Aberdeen Christian (78).

Groton's biggest impact came in the relays, where the Tigers captured three first-place finishes. The 4x100 relay team of Lincoln Krause, Jordan Schwan, JJ Muller and Keegen Tracy raced to gold in 45.33 seconds. The 4x200 relay squad of Krause, Muller, Schwan and Ethan Kroll followed with another win in 1:34.13, while the sprint medley relay team of Krause, Schwan, Tracy and Jayden Schwan added a third victory in 3:45.79.

The Tigers also picked up a runner-up finish in the 4x800 relay, as Jayden Schwan, Jace Johnson, Riley Shellenberger and Kroll combined for a time of 8:45.71.

Individually, Keegen Tracy led the way with a first-place finish in the 200 meters in 23.40 seconds. Groton also found strength in the distance events, with Riley Shellenberger placing fourth in the 800 meters (2:15.36) and fifth in the 1600 meters (5:02.97), while Jace Johnson was close behind in both races, taking fifth in the 800 (2:15.42) and 11th in the 1600 (5:22.52).

On the girls side, Groton Area piled up 72 points to finish fourth behind North Central (105), Benson County (82) and Herreid/Selby Area (76).

The Tigers dominated the relays, sweeping all four events. The 4x100 relay team of McKenna Tietz, Taryn Traphagen, Kella Tracy and Makenna Krause claimed first in 52.67. The 4x200 team of Rylee Dunker, Traphagen, Krause and Tracy followed with a win in 1:51.78.

Groton's 4x400 relay squad of Tietz, Traphagen, Tracy and Ashlynn Warrington added another victory in 4:21.56, while the sprint medley relay team of Tietz, Traphagen, Tracy and Rylee Gilbert completed the sweep with a time of 4:29.89.

Individually, Makenna Krause led the sprinters with a third-place finish in the 100 meters (13.43), while Rylee Dunker (13.92) and Raquel Tracy (13.94) also placed in the top 15. Raquel Tracy added a seventh-place finish in the 200 meters (29.04), with Dunker ninth (29.43).

In the hurdles, McKenna Tietz turned in a strong performance with a third-place finish in the 100-meter hurdles (16.85). Emerlee Jones added a fifth-place finish in the 300-meter hurdles (55.48) and cleared 4-foot-6 to place fourth in the high jump.

Ashlynn Warrington contributed in the 400 meters with a fourth-place finish in 1:06.80.

Boy's Division:

100 Meters: 10. Lincoln Krause, 12.09; 44. Tate Johnson, 13.91; 45. Briggs Conn, 14.30; 47. Sam Crank, 14.37.

200 Meters: 1. Keegen Tracy, 23.40; 12. Jordan Schwan, 25.14; 13. JJ Muller, 25.31; 42. Tate Johnson, 28.83; 45. Sam Crank, 29.88.

400 Meters: 18. Briggs Conn, 1:08.71.

800 Meters: 4. Riley Shellenberger, 2:15.36; 5. Jace Johnson, 2:15.42; 15. Briggs Conn, 2:45.30.

1600 Meters: 5. Riley Shellenberger, 5:02.97; 11. Jace Johnson, 5:22.52.

4x100 Relay: 1. Groton: (Lincoln Krause, Jordan Schwan, JJ Muller, Keegen Tracy), 45.33.

4x200 Relay: 1. Groton: (Lincoln Krause, JJ Muller, Jordan Schwan, Ethan Kroll), 1:34.13.

4x800 Relay: 2. Groton: (Jayden Schwan, Jace Johnson, Riley Shellenberger, Ethan Kroll), 8:45.71.

SMR 1600m - [200-200-400-800]: 1. Groton: (Lincoln Krause, Jordan Schwan, Keegen Tracy, Jayden Schwan), 3:45.79.

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Girl's Division:

100 Meters: 3. Makenna Krause, 13.43; 14. Rylee Dunker, 13.92; 15. Raquel Tracy, 13.94; 45. Suri Jetto, 16.72.

200 Meters: 7. Raquel Tracy, 29.04; 9. Rylee Dunker, 29.43; 44. Suri Jetto, 35.59.

10 Makenna Krause, DNS

400 Meters: 4. Ashlynn Warrington, 1:06.80; 19. Suri Jetto, 1:20.60.

100m Hurdles - 33" / 0.838m: 3. McKenna Tietz, 16.85; 9. Ella Kettner, 19.44; 10. Emerlee Jones, 19.93; 12. Tevan Hanson, 20.02; 13. Teagan Hanten, 20.22.

300m Hurdles - 30" / 0.762m: 5. Emerlee Jones, 55.48; 6. Ella Kettner, 56.58; 8. Teagan Hanten, 59.01.

4x100 Relay: 1. Groton: (McKenna Tietz, Taryn Traphagen, Kella Tracy, Makenna Krause), 52.67.

4x200 Relay:

1. Groton: (Rylee Dunker, Taryn Traphagen, Makenna Krause, Kella Tracy), 1:51.78.

4x400 Relay:

1. Groton: (McKenna Tietz, Taryn Traphagen, Kella Tracy, Ashlynn Warrington), 4:21.56.

SMR 1600m - [200-200-400-800]:

1. Groton: (McKenna Tietz, Taryn Traphagen, Kella Tracy, Ryelle Gilbert), 4:29.89.

Shot Put - 4kg: 26. Avery Crank, 25' 4.5"

Discus - 1kg: 21. Avery Crank, 72' 9"

Javelin - 600g: 20. Avery Crank, 74' 6"

High Jump: 4. Emerlee Jones, J 4' 6"

Triple Jump: 12. Teagan Hanten, 26' 8"

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Groton Area Middle School Athletes Shine at Milbank Meet

MILBANK — The Groton Area middle school track teams turned in a strong overall performance Tuesday at the Milbank Middle School Track Meet, highlighted by a runner-up finish from the seventh-grade girls and a second-place showing by the eighth-grade boys.

Milbank swept both eighth-grade team titles, winning the boys division with 177 points and the girls with 221. Groton Area's eighth-grade boys finished second with 78 points, while Sisseton followed closely with 75. In the girls standings, Groton Area placed 10th.

In the seventh-grade divisions, Sisseton claimed the boys title with 124 points, while Groton Area finished fifth with 39. The Groton Area seventh-grade girls delivered one of the top team performances of the day, placing second with 120 points, trailing only Milbank's 147.5.

Groton Area's boys were led by standout sprint performances from Ryder Schwan, who swept the eighth-grade 100-meter dash (11.43) and 200-meter dash (24.39).

In the seventh-grade division, Ivan Schwan mirrored that effort with victories in both the 100 meters (12.92) and 200 meters (26.31). Quinton Flores added a runner-up finish in the 800 meters (2:38.78) to pace the distance events.

The 400 meters was another strong event for Groton Area's eighth-grade boys, as Kyson Kucker won the race in 58.16, followed by a second-place finish from Trey Tietz (1:02.42). Keegan Kucker added a fourth-place finish.

Trayce Schelle also turned in a strong meet, placing third in the 200 meters and fifth in the 100, while contributing to the Tigers' sprint depth.

In the field events, Liam Johnson led the eighth-grade throwers with a fourth-place finish in the shot put (28-5) and sixth in the discus (71-8). Hank Flihs and Grayson Warrington added seventh- and ninth-place finishes, respectively, in the seventh-grade shot put.

On the girls side, Groton Area's seventh-grade squad showcased impressive depth and balance in earning the team runner-up trophy.

Kinley Sandness led the way with victories in both the 100-meter dash (14.35) and 200-meter dash (30.57), while Libby Johnson finished second in both events to give Groton a dominant one-two finish.

In the middle-distance races, Avery Huber captured the 400 meters (1:12.76), with Taylor Flihs placing second in both the 400 and 800 meters. Andi Iverson added a fourth-place finish in the 400.

The hurdles were another highlight, as Charli Jacobsen swept both the 100-meter and 200-meter hurdles. Addison Steffes followed with a second-place finish in the 200 hurdles and fourth in the 100 hurdles.

Additional contributors to the team effort included Mya Moody, Zoe Olson, Shealee Gilchrist, and Brynlee Dunker, all of whom placed in the top 15 in sprint events, helping pile up valuable team points.

In the eighth-grade girls division, Rowan Patterson led the Tigers with an eighth-place finish in both the 100 and 200 meters, while Andi Gauer contributed in both the shot put and discus.

Boy's Eighth Grade Team Points: 1. Milbank 177, 2. Groton Area 78, 3. Sisseton 75, 4. St Martin's Lutheran 45, 5. Tri-State 40, 6. Tiospa Zina 36, 7. Britton-Hecla 29, 8. Waubay-Summit 24, 9. Hamlin 5

Girl's Eighth Grade Team Points: 1. Milbank 221, 2. Sisseton 117, 3. St Martin's Lutheran 68, 4. Wilmot 46, 5. Langford Area 40, 6. Hamlin 29, 7. Tiospa Zina 13, 8. Waubay-Summit 5, 8. Tri-State 5, 10. Britton-Hecla 3, 10. Groton Area 3

Boy's Seventh Grade Team Points: 1. Sisseton 124, 2. Milbank 109, 3. Hamlin 87, 4. Wilmot 70, 5. Groton Area ms 39, 6. Waubay-Summit 25, 7. Browns Valley 20, 8. Tri-State 6, 9. St Martin's Lutheran 5, 10. Langford Area 2

Girl's Seventh Grade Team Points: 1. Milbank 147.5, 2. Groton Area ms 120, 3. Hamlin 71, 4. Tri-State 54, 5. Sisseton MS 40, 6. Langford Area 38.5, 7. St Martin's Lutheran 33, 8. Browns Valley 23, 9. Wilmot 19, 10. Britton-Hecla 13; 11. Waubay-Summit 9

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Boy's Division

100 Meters 8th Grade: 1. Ryder Schwan, 11.43; 4. Trey Tietz, 12.51; 5. Trayce Schelle, 12.83; 10. Liam Lord, 13.45; 20. Bentley Harms, 15.51; 26. Wyatt Morehouse, 17.35

100 Meters 7th Grade: 1. Ivan Schwan, 12.92; 4. Quinton Flores, 13.73; 22. Jack Schuelke, 15.82; 23. Micah Krause, 15.87; 32. Titan Johnson, 18.39

200 Meters 8th Grade: 1. Ryder Schwan, 24.39; 3. Trayce Schelle, 26.58; 16. Wyatt Morehouse, 32.93

200 Meters 7th Grade: 1. Ivan Schwan, 26.31; 21. Micah Krause, 35.03; 25. Hayden Hubbard, 38.85; 26. Titan Johnson, 43.66

400 Meters 8th Grade: 1. Kyson Kucker, 58.16; 2. Trey Tietz, 1:02.42; 4. Keegan Kucker, 1:04.45.; 8. Liam Lord, 1:08.56

800 Meters 7th Grade: 2. Quinton Flores, 2:38.78; 11. Hayden Hubbard, 3:14.16

4x100 Relay 8th Grade: 1. 50.29

4x100 Relay 7th Grade: 5. 1:00.56

Shot Put - 4kg 8th Grade: 4. Liam Johnson, 28-05.00; 17. Bentley Harms, 21-05.00; 18. Gavin Hanten, 21-03.00

Shot Put - 4kg 7th Grade: 7. Hank Fliehs, 22-03.00; 9. Grayson Warrington, 20-07.00

Discus - 1kg 8th Grade: 6. Liam Johnson, 71-08; 8. Gavin Hanten, 71-01; 16. Bentley Harms, 54-11

Discus - 1kg 7th Grade: 11. Grayson Warrington, 46-00; 15. Hank Fliehs, 42-05

Girl's Division

100 Meters 8th Grade: 8. Rowan Patterson, 14.92; 21. Andi Gauer, 17.40

100 Meters 7th Grade: 1. Kinley Sandness, 14.35; 2. Libby Johnson, 14.56; 6. Mya Moody, 14.84; 8. Zoe Olson, 15.01; 10. Addison Steffes, 15.26; 15. Brynlee Dunker, 15.46; 19. Rowan Hanson, 15.77; 20. Shealee Gilchrist, 15.92; 24. Harley Furman, 16.03; 29. Lillian Davis, 16.37; 37. Hadley Heilman, 16.98; 37. Lennox Locke, 16.98; 45. Gracie Borg, 17.68; 47. Hallie Perkins, 18.19

200 Meters 8th Grade: 8. Rowan Patterson, 30.85SB

200 Meters 7th Grade: 1. Kinley Sandness, 30.57; 2. Libby Johnson, 31.03; 6. Mya Moody, 31.96; 7. Zoe Olson, 32.46; 8. Avery Huber, 33.05; 10. Shealee Gilchrist, 33.50; 15. Harley Furman, 34.13; 22. Rowan Hanson, 35.03; 24. Lennox Locke, 36.21; 28. Gracie Borg, 37.87

400 Meters 7th Grade: 1. Avery Huber, 1:12.76; 2. Taylor Fliehs, 1:13.70; 4. Andi Iverson, 1:16.01SB

800 Meters 7th Grade: 2. Taylor Fliehs, 3:09.07

100m Hurdles - 30" / 0.762m 7th Grade: 1. Charli Jacobsen, 19.13; 4. Addison Steffes, 22.12; 13. Hallie Perkins, 26.40

200m Hurdles - 30" / 0.762m 7th Grade: 1. Charli Jacobsen, 34.85; 2. Addison Steffes, 37.53

4x100 Relay 7th Grade: 1. 58.20

Shot Put - 6lb 8th Grade: 13. Andi Gauer, 18-00.00SB

Shot Put - 6lb 7th Grade: 17. Lillian Davis, 21-00.00, 22. Hadley Heilman, 17-09.00

Discus - 1kg 8th Grade: 8. Andi Gauer, 40-09SB

Discus - 1kg 7th Grade: 9. Lillian Davis, 45-00

SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

\$4 million for gunsmithing program is latest economic development grant from governor amid campaign

BY: SETH TUPPER

RAPID CITY — South Dakota's governor, who's in the midst of an election campaign, awarded another grant Tuesday from an economic development fund he controls.

Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden announced a \$4 million Future Fund award for Western Dakota Technical College in Rapid City. The college will use the money to move a gunsmithing school from Colorado and incorporate it into Western Dakota's offerings for students.

Rhoden, who attended Western Dakota decades ago but didn't graduate, made the announcement at the college.

"It's fitting to me that South Dakota would be home for a school like this," Rhoden said. "South Dakota is the most Second Amendment-friendly state in the nation."

Last week, Rhoden granted \$6 million from the Future Fund to establish a South Dakota Defense Institute in Rapid City that will help companies in the state earn federal military contracts. That grant brought the unobligated balance of the Future Fund down to \$13 million, a spokesperson for the Governor's Office of Economic Development said at the time.

A similar spurt of Future Fund grants from Rhoden last year sparked criticism from the three Republicans who are running for his job. Aberdeen businessman Toby Doeden called the grants an "attempt to buy votes," state House Speaker Jon Hansen said the Future Fund was "funding the governor's political future," and U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson said although Future Fund grants are an important economic development tool, "they aren't meant to help someone's campaign." Meanwhile, Johnson has pledged that if he's elected, he'll use \$2 million from the Future Fund to create a new local business startup initiative.

Upon being reminded of that criticism Tuesday by South Dakota Searchlight, Rhoden called it "ridiculous" and said he's awarding Future Fund grants to projects and ideas that will improve the state's economy and workforce.

"I am doing my job," Rhoden said. "If you look at the opportunities that I have as a governor, as far as an appropriate use for Future Funds, this is picture perfect."

The state gets money for the Future Fund by charging a fee to employers. They pay the fee when they submit payroll taxes that support unemployment benefits.

The late Republican Gov. George Mickelson convinced lawmakers to create the fund in 1987. They placed it under the governor's exclusive control to enable quick responses to economic opportunities.

State law says only that the fund "must be used for purposes related to research and economic development for the state," but that's about to change. Lawmakers approved new restrictions earlier this year, in response to past uses of the fund by Rhoden's predecessor, former Gov. Kristi Noem. Rhoden was elevated from lieutenant governor after Noem resigned in January 2025 to become secretary of the federal Department of Homeland Security.

Noem's controversial uses of the Future Fund included a fireworks show at Mount Rushmore, the construction of a state-owned shooting range near Rapid City that legislators refused to fund, a rodeo in Sioux Falls where Noem carried the American flag into the arena on horseback, and a workforce recruitment advertising campaign that featured Noem as the star.

Rhoden signed the legislative Future Fund reforms into law last month, but they won't take effect until July 1 — after the June 2 primary election pitting Rhoden against three opponents for the Republican nomination.

The reforms add legal definitions for acceptable uses of the fund, mandate more reporting to legislators

about awards, specify the information required of applicants, direct the Governor's Office of Economic Development to formulate rules for the fund's use, and require the office to make recommendations to the governor about potential awards.

The latest grant from Rhoden will help move the equipment, faculty and curriculum of the Colorado School of Trades, which operates solely as a gunsmithing school, to Western Dakota Tech.

The president of the Colorado school, Ryan Lishner, said Tuesday that gun policies in Colorado "are starting to impede what firearms dealers and firearms manufacturers can do, and that's getting to where it's impacting our educational process." He views South Dakota as willing to support the gunsmithing program "at a much higher level than Colorado was going to do."

The Colorado school can accommodate up to 20 faculty members and 140 students. After completing the 14-month program, students go on to professions ranging from self-employed gunsmiths to employees of major firearms manufacturers.

"Western Dakota Tech is going to have the ability to grow that program to a much higher level," Lishner said.

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

Lawmakers approve pay and bonus package for investment manager, despite concerns about returns

BY: MEGHAN O'BRIEN

PIERRE — South Dakota's state investment officer will receive a salary raise and an opportunity for an incentive bonus that could push his total pay beyond \$1 million for the next fiscal year, despite concerns from some lawmakers about underperformance.

Members of the legislative Executive Board voted 12-3 on Tuesday to approve the pay and bonus package, after the state's Investment Council previously recommended it.

The Investment Council manages nearly \$21 billion worth of total assets that fund the retirement system for public employees and also support the state budget, including health care and education trust funds. Clark told lawmakers he believes in a conservative approach to investing.

"We're only going to be conservative, versus others, when the markets are above our estimates of fair value," he said.

Clark compared his investment strategy to famed investor Warren Buffet: "buy low, sell high."

Investment returns for the State Retirement System have been below its benchmark each of the last three years, and the cumulative returns over the past 10 years have also underperformed the benchmark. That's been a factor in the system's retirees receiving cost-of-living benefit adjustments less than inflation for five straight years. The system is still beating its benchmark returns over the longer term of 20 years and beyond.

Clark said the council has been avoiding investments in major tech companies and artificial intelligence, which have become "expensive and overvalued," he said.

The council acted similarly in the late 1990s to avoid the worst effects of the "dot-com" bubble, Clark told lawmakers.

House Majority Leader Scott Odenbach, R-Spearfish, cast a "no" vote Tuesday on Clark's compensation package.

"At some point we are going to get questions from state employees, and from people who have a significant amount of their retirement invested in this," Odenbach said. "Is that the wisest way forward? Can we as the policymakers answer to those who are looking to us and say, 'Are you doing your job to make sure we're getting the returns?'"

Clark currently makes a salary of \$647,723. His new salary will begin July 1, the start of the 2027 fiscal

year. He will receive an increase of 1.4% with all other state employees as budgeted by the Legislature, which will bring his salary to \$656,791.

The investment performance incentive plan approved by the Executive Board could provide Clark up to 200% of his salary as a bonus, after the performance of the State Retirement System fund is audited and other performance indicators are taken into account. The council weighs its performance against a Capital Markets Benchmark, which is an index that can be used as a comparison to measure an investment portfolio's results.

The average bonus for Clark is about 80%, he said. That would be a little more than \$525,000 on top of his new salary. At 200%, the maximum allowed bonus, Clark could see an additional \$1.3 million, "which is almost impossible to achieve," he said.

Last fall, Clark received a little more than \$125,000 as a bonus for performance during the 2025 fiscal year, on top of a salary from the same fiscal year of about \$640,000, resulting in total compensation of more than \$765,000.

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

Immigration enforcement to be funded for 3 years under US Senate GOP plan

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — U.S. Senate Majority Leader John Thune said Tuesday he plans to use the complex reconciliation process to fund immigration enforcement for the next three years, though it wasn't immediately clear if House Republicans were on the exact same page.

The plan to fund Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Border Patrol with only Republican votes could end the two-month shutdown at the Department of Homeland Security when combined with the regular funding bill for that department, which the Senate already approved but is stalled in the House.

Thune, R-S.D., said during an afternoon press conference that House GOP leaders "could" add additional provisions to the reconciliation bill, but said he would like it to remain narrow.

"My hope would be that if we can execute on getting that done here in the Senate, the House would be able to follow through," he said.

Thune said the Senate could vote as soon as next week on a budget resolution with reconciliation instructions. That is the first step of the complicated process. But the House must vote to adopt that budget resolution before Republicans can pass the funding bill for ICE and the Border Patrol.

Speaker Mike Johnson's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Homeland Security shuttered

The Department of Homeland Security has been shut down since Feb. 14, after Democrats insisted on new guardrails for immigration enforcement following the fatal shootings of two U.S. citizens in Minneapolis by federal immigration officers.

Without any bipartisan consensus on how to do that, Republicans have instead decided to use the same reconciliation process they used last year to enact their "big, beautiful" law to approve funding for Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Border Patrol.

The House would then likely pass DHS' spending bill without those two line items, which the Senate has already approved. That would provide funding for the other agencies within the department, including the Coast Guard, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Secret Service and Transportation Security Administration.

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Safeguards demanded

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said during a separate press conference that Democrats have repeatedly asked for "common sense" safeguards that would require immigration agents to show identification, prevent them from wearing masks and require judicial warrants to enter someone's home.

"The bottom line is these are simple. These are common sense," he said. "They're what every police department uses and when you ask the American people, they're on our side. It's the intransigence, particularly of the hard right, who seem to like what ICE is doing."

Schumer said Democrats would use the marathon amendment voting session on both the budget resolution and the later reconciliation bill to hold Republicans' "feet to the fire on DHS, on the war, on so many other issues."

Thune said he has been "trying to figure out exactly" what Democrats have gotten out of the DHS shut-down, especially considering that immigration enforcement operations haven't been affected since there was funding for that in last year's reconciliation bill, exempting those programs from the funding lapse.

"All of the things that the Democrats made this about, which was supposed to be reforms to the way that ICE and CBP operate. They got none of that. Zero," he said, referring to Customs and Border Protection, the larger agency that includes the Border Patrol. "And now we're going to fund those agencies for three years into the future."

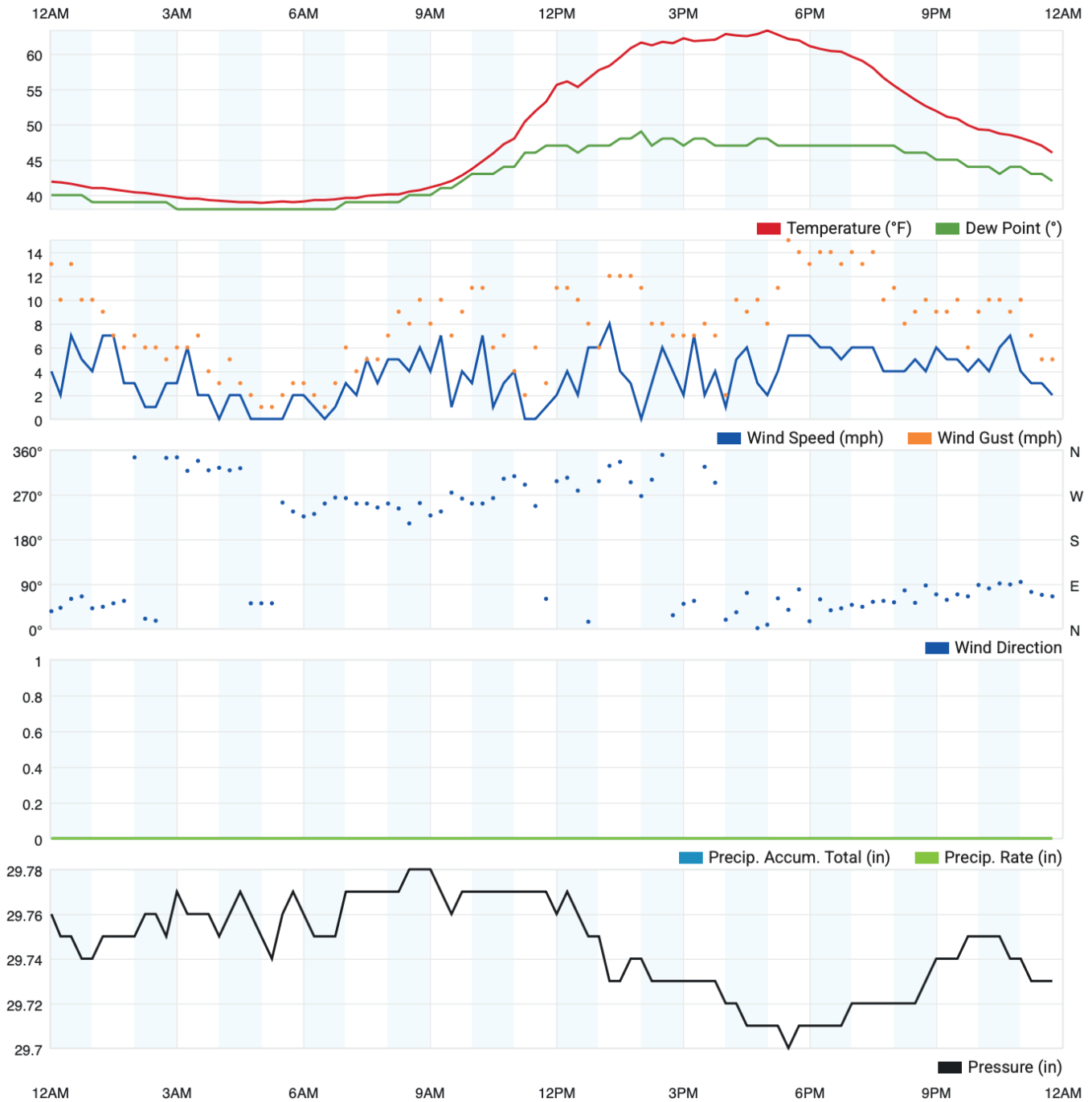
Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

April 14, 2026



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Fire Weather Watch

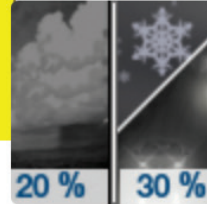
Wednesday

Wednesday
Night

Thursday

Thursday
Night

Friday



High: 76 °F

Low: 47 °F

High: 81 °F

Low: 33 °F

High: 42 °F

Chance
Sprinkles

Mostly Clear

Sunny

Slight Chance
Showers then
Chance
Rain/Snow and
Drizzle

Chance Snow
Showers and
Breezy



Fire Weather Watch Thursday

April 15, 2026
2:53 AM CDT

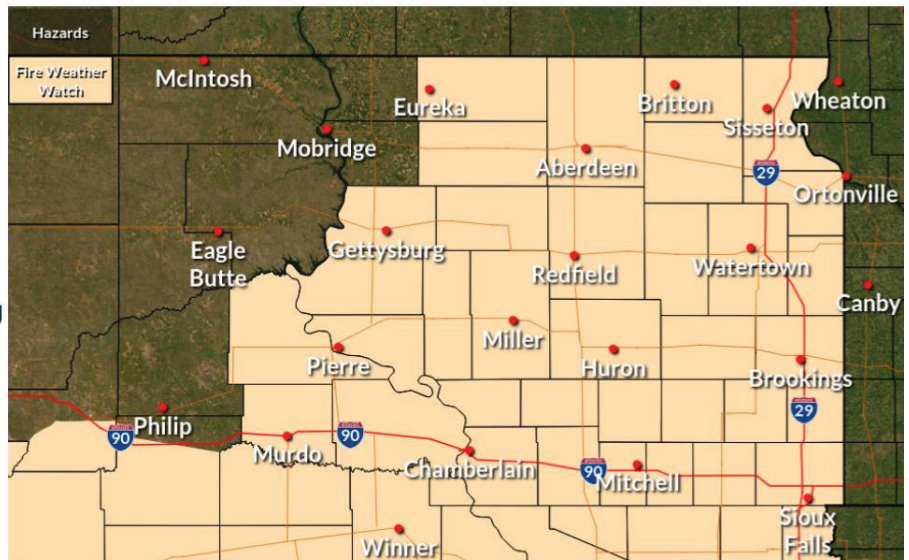
For portions of central to northeastern South Dakota

Key Messages

- Winds gusting 25 to 30 mph out of the south, before increasing while shifting out of the northwest and north late afternoon and evening
- Afternoon relative humidity 20 to 30%
- Temperatures 15 to 30° above normal, continued dry weather, and dry grasses/shrubs

Fire Weather Watch late Thursday morning through Thursday evening

Fire Weather Watch Thursday



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Elevated fire weather conditions are forecast Thursday late morning through Thursday evening. Continued dry weather prior to green-up will combine with well above normal temperatures in the 70s and 80s, afternoon relative humidity of around 20 to 30% and winds gusting 25 to 30 mph. Winds will shift mainly out of the northwest and north Thursday afternoon and evening, while increasing with gusts of 30 to 40 mph behind a cold front.

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Peak Wind Gusts

April 15, 2026
2:53 AM CDT

Winds gusting 25 to 30 during the day Thursday

Winds shift mainly out of the northwest and north Thursday afternoon and evening, increasing with gusts 30 to 40 mph



Winds will be changing directions a concern for any ongoing fires

Wind Gust (mph) Forecast

	4/16 Thu											4/17 Fri					
	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm	9pm	10pm	11pm	12am	1am	2am	3am	4am
McIntosh	28	28	29	29	30	30	30	31	32	35	36	36	36	36	36	36	36
Eagle Butte	28	29	29	28	28	28	26	28	30	32	35	37	38	39	39	39	38
Murdo	31	31	31	31	30	28	25	24	25	28	30	32	35	37	38	38	38
Mobridge	23	24	24	24	24	23	22	22	23	25	28	30	31	32	32	32	32
Pierre	24	25	25	25	24	22	21	20	21	23	25	28	30	31	32	33	33
Gettysburg	28	29	29	29	28	25	22	21	22	24	28	30	32	35	36	36	36
Eureka	25	26	28	28	28	26	24	23	24	25	28	29	30	31	31	32	32
Chamberlain	24	25	26	25	24	22	18	17	18	20	22	23	25	26	28	29	30
Miller	28	29	30	30	29	25	22	20	20	21	23	25	28	30	31	32	33
Redfield	29	29	29	30	29	26	23	21	21	22	24	26	28	30	31	32	33
Aberdeen	28	29	29	29	28	25	23	22	22	23	24	26	28	30	31	31	31
Britton	30	30	30	29	28	25	23	22	22	22	23	24	26	28	29	29	29
Clark	30	30	30	30	29	26	23	21	20	21	22	24	26	29	30	30	30
Webster	29	29	29	29	28	25	23	21	21	21	22	23	25	26	28	28	28
Watertown	29	29	29	29	28	25	22	20	18	17	18	21	23	25	26	26	26
Sisseton	29	29	29	29	28	25	23	21	21	21	22	23	24	25	26	26	28
Milbank	24	25	26	26	26	24	22	20	18	18	18	20	22	23	24	25	25
Wheaton	26	28	28	28	26	24	22	21	21	21	22	23	23	24	25	25	26



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

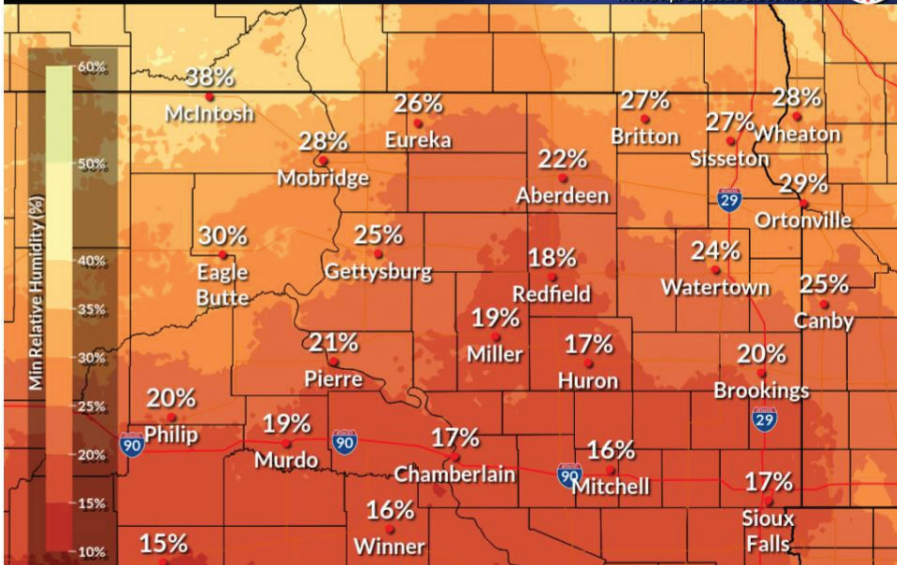


Minimum Relative Humidity

April 15, 2026
2:53 AM CDT

Minimum Relative Humidity Thursday

Weather Forecast Office
Aberdeen, SD
Issued Apr 15, 2026 1:53 AM CDT



Lowest Relative Humidity around 20 to 30% Thursday afternoon

	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm	9pm
Aberdeen	31	27	25	22	22	22	22	25	33	40
Miller	25	22	21	19	19	19	20	22	28	33
Mobridge	36	31	29	28	28	29	31	36	44	52
Murdo	26	22	21	20	19	20	21	23	28	31
Ortonville	37	32	30	29	29	29	29	29	34	40
Pierre	27	25	23	22	20	22	23	28	34	40
Sisseton	35	32	30	27	27	27	30	33	37	43
Watertown	36	31	28	26	25	25	27	29	34	38



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 63 °F at 4:56 PM

Low Temp: 39 °F at 4:25 AM

Wind: 16 mph at 5:26 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 91 in 1926

Record Low: 8 in 2014

Average High: 58

Average Low: 31

Average Precip in April.: 0.73

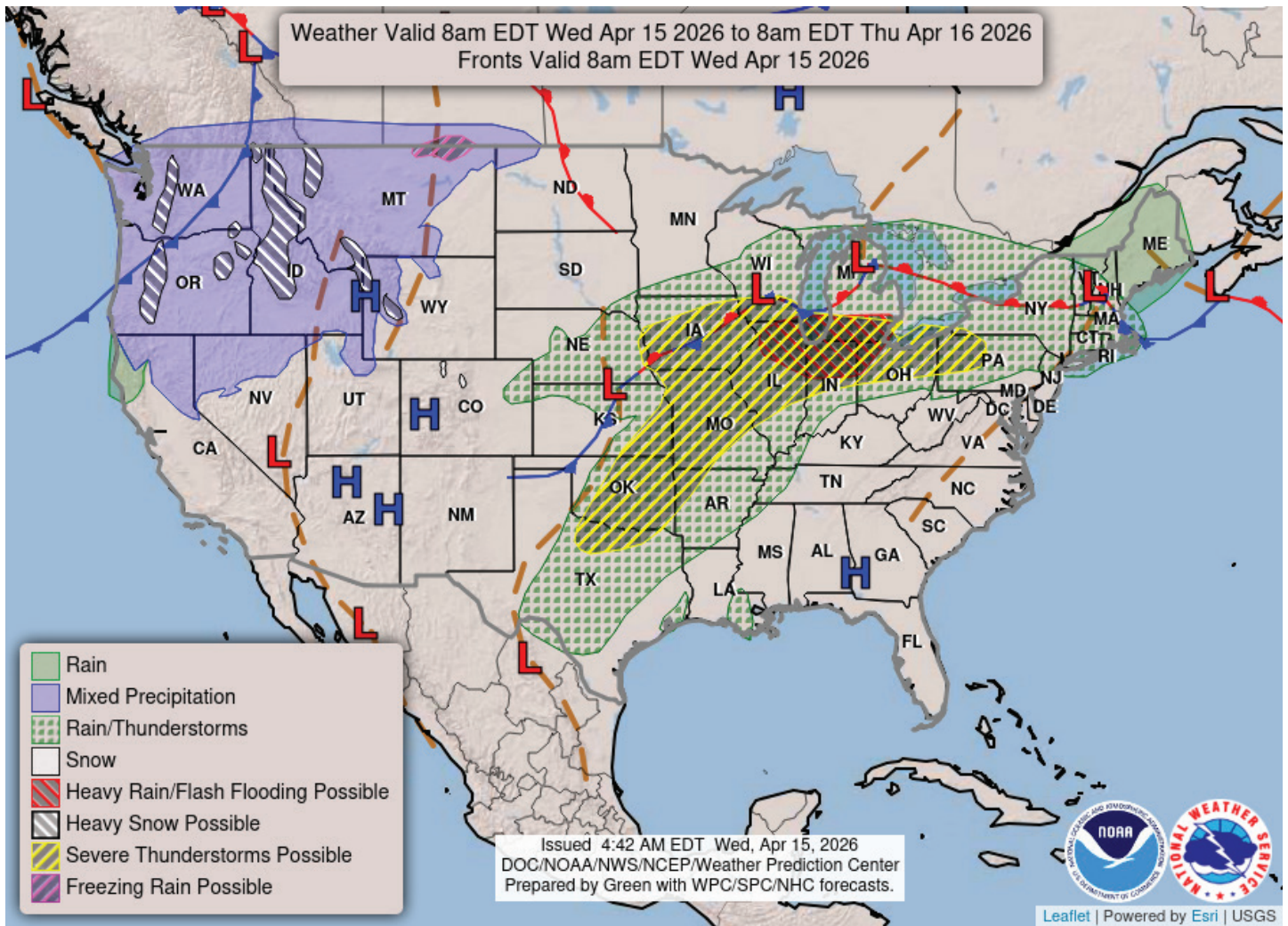
Precip to date in April.: 0.95

Average Precip to date: 2.79

Precip Year to Date: 2.57

Sunset Tonight: 8:17 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:44 am



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Today in Weather History

April 15th, 1896: A tornado, possibly an F3, moved northeast from Burkmere, 10 miles west of Faulkton. About half a dozen farms were torn apart. Two children were killed, and the rest of the family was critically injured as a home was leveled. 6 miles northwest of Faulkton, near Millard.

April 15th, 2011: A strong upper-level low-pressure area brought widespread heavy snowfall to central and parts of northeast South Dakota. This early spring storm brought 6 to 14 inches of heavy snow to the area. The heavy wet snow caused many travel problems and a few accidents. Locations with a foot or more of snowfall included 12 inches 12 SSW Harrold, 23 N Highmore, and Orient; 13 inches 14 NNE Isabel and Eureka, with 14 inches at Eagle Butte.

1921 — Two mile high Silver Lake, CO, received 76 inches of snow in 24 hours, the heaviest 24 hour total of record for North America. The storm left a total of 87 inches in twenty-seven and a half hours. (David Ludlum)

1927 — New Orleans LA was drenched with 14.01 inches of rain, which established a 24 hour rainfall record for the state. (The Weather Channel)

1949 — A hailstone five inches by five and a half inches in size, and weighing four pounds, was measured at Troy NY. (The Weather Channel)

1958 — A tornado 300 yards in width skipped along a five mile path near Frostproof FL. A 2500 gallon water tank was found one mile from its original position (it is not known how much water was in the tank at the time). (The Weather Channel)

1987 — Thunderstorms developing along a cold front produced severe weather in the Southern Atlantic Coast Region. A tornado killed one person and injured seven others near Mount Dora FL. Drifts of hail up to two feet deep were reported in Davidson and Rowan counties in North Carolina. Myrtle Beach SC was deluged with seven inches of rain in three hours. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — Death Valley, CA, was soaked with 1.53 inches of rain in 24 hours. Snow fell in the mountains of southern California. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 — Showers and thunderstorms soaked the eastern U.S. with heavy rain, pushing the rainfall total for the month at Cape Hatteras NC past their previous April record of 7.10 inches. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1990 — Thunderstorms developing along a stationary front produced severe weather from west central Texas to west central Arkansas during the late afternoon and evening. Thunderstorms spawned a tornado which caused more than half a million dollars damage at Fort Stockton TX, produced wind gusts to 65 mph at Dennison TX, produced baseball size hail at Silo OK and near Capps Corner TX, and drenched southeastern Oklahoma with up to 4 inches of rain in two hours. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

Developing Patience

Growth rarely comes easily, yet we can celebrate the good that God will bring from our struggles.

James 1:1-4: 1 James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.

2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,

3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Do you ever wish you were more patient? Most of us would say yes! But how do we acquire a calm, gentle heart? And what can we do to help strengthen this attribute over time?

Let's start by thinking of patience as a muscle that has to be used in order to become stronger. Toward that end, believers should recognize difficulty as an opportunity to develop their patience. The human instinct is to cry out to God in bewilderment when tribulation comes. We blame. We resist. We complain. But what we should do instead is say, "Thank You, Father—it's time to grow in patience!"

James tells us to consider trials a joy (1:2). But we often fail at this, don't we? Humanly speaking, praising the Lord for tribulation feels unnatural. However, doing so begins to make sense to believers when they cling to God's promise that good comes from hardship (Romans 8:28). We are not waiting on the Lord in vain. We can praise Him for the solution He will bring, the lives He will change, or the spiritual fruit He will develop in us.

Accepting hardship as a means of growth is a radical concept. But God's followers have cause to rejoice. Tribulation increases our patience so that we can stand firm on His promises and await His good timing.

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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.14.26

10 19 31 42 53 4

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

NEXT DRAW: 18 Hrs 16 Mins 29 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.14.26

17 21 24 57 69 12

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$130,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 18 Hrs 1 Mins 29 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.13.26

1 18 19 35 50 9

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$21,960,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 16 Mins 29 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.11.26

4 11 13 19 20

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$52,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 31 Mins 29 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.13.26

25 30 39 47 56 16

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 18 Hrs 30 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.13.26

38 43 59 63 64 15

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$58,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 18 Hrs 30 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Children killed in Lebanon as Israeli strikes hit homes far from front lines of war with Hezbollah

By ABBY SEWELL Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Jawad Younes, 11, and his cousins were playing soccer in the lot between their houses, as they often did. His little brother, 4-year-old Mehdi, had joined them but grew tired, so Jawad took him home and handed him off to their mother before returning to the game. Minutes later, an Israeli strike came.

The target was Jawad's uncle's home. The blast shook neighboring buildings and threw Jawad's siblings at home to the ground. As their mother, Malak Mesmani, scrambled to help them up, she could think only of Jawad.

"I was pulling my children off the floor in the house, but as I was running to pick them up, I screamed, 'Jawad,'" she said. "My heart told me."

Her son was instantly killed in the March 27 Israeli strike in Saksakieh. So was one of his cousins — so close they were more like brothers. Several other children were wounded.

Jawad's uncle also was killed. He was an interior design engineer; Jawad wanted to be an engineer like him. Mesmani called him a civilian. But like many Shiite families in southern Lebanon, the family were loyal supporters of the militant group and political party Hezbollah, which formed in the 1980s to fight Israel's occupation of the area.

Jawad and his cousin are among 168 children killed — of more than 2,100 people in all — by Israel's strikes in the six weeks of renewed war between the country and Iran-backed Hezbollah.

Israel has often struck alleged Hezbollah militants or officials in their homes without warning, frequently in areas far from the front line when they are with their families, in apartment buildings surrounded by uninvolved neighbors. The Israeli military rarely names the targets of its strikes but says it takes measures to minimize civilian casualties — including children — and blames Hezbollah members for mixing with the general population. The families of children killed accuse Israel of committing war crimes because of the large number of civilian casualties.

At least two Israeli civilians — both adults — and 13 soldiers have been killed in the current war with Hezbollah, according to figures from Israel. One of the civilians was killed by mistaken Israeli fire.

In response to Associated Press questions, the Israeli military didn't deny that children have been killed in its Lebanon strikes but said it has targeted Hezbollah facilities and militants. The army says it's killed hundreds of Hezbollah operatives but has provided little evidence to support the claim.

Under international law governing armed conflict, it's never legal to directly target civilians, but collateral damage — harm to civilians when striking a military target — is allowed if it is proportional to the anticipated military gains of any given strike.

The Israeli military told AP in a statement that its strikes follow the law, including "the principles of distinction, proportionality, and the taking of precautions."

Charles Trumbull, an assistant University of South Carolina law professor who studies the law and ethics of armed conflict, said it's difficult to assess whether the proportionality threshold was met without knowing the strike targets and whether the military knew children were present.

"To the extent that they knew that children were likely to be harmed or killed in these strikes, and as an ethical matter, absolutely I think that should affect the calculus," he said. "Just because certain strikes might not violate the law on conflict doesn't mean that they're not concerning or problematic or that they are morally justified."

Children crushed under their own homes

At 2 a.m. March 12, Taline Shehab — who would have turned 4 last month — was sleeping when missiles tore into an apartment above hers in the family's building in Aramoun, about 20 km (12 miles) south of Beirut, causing it to collapse. Taline and her father died; her mother was critically wounded.

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Aramoun is a religiously mixed area that was generally considered safe, though it had been targeted by airstrikes in the previous Israel-Hezbollah war, in 2024.

Taline's father, Mohamad, was a drone operator and video producer who often worked with the Lebanese army and on high-profile television productions. He and his wife, Nathalie, ran a fashion company; Taline appeared regularly on its social media.

"They were a very close family. Their daily life revolved around their daughter," said Ali Shehab, Mohamad's brother.

Taline "was full of personality," he said. "She was very attached to her father. She loved being around him and didn't like to share him with anyone."

He comforts himself with the thought that "maybe Mohammed and Taline, because they are so attached to each other, God chose them both."

Dr. Ghassan Abu Sitta, who's worked extensively in Gaza and Lebanon and runs an initiative treating some of the most seriously war-wounded children at the American University of Beirut Medical Center, said that, like Taline, most of the cases he has seen are "children being crushed underneath the rubble of their own homes."

A lifetime shadowed by war and loss

Ten-year-old Zeinab al-Jabali used to tag along wherever her father went: the corner store, the mountains around their village in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley.

Now, he sleeps in the Beirut hospital where doctors are treating his wife and three older daughters, all wounded in the strike that killed Zeinab.

War has shadowed most of Hassan al-Jabali's life. In 1982, his brother — then 10, like Zeinab — was killed by an Israeli missile.

Al-Jabali made a living selling mouneh, or preserved foods such as raisins and dried herbs, and worked for his cousin's factory producing laban, or yogurt.

On March 5, al-Jabali's wife and daughters were preparing for iftar, the meal ending the daily fast during the holy month of Ramadan, at his wife's sister's house when the airstrike hit it.

Al-Jabali acknowledged his brother-in-law — who was killed — "in the past was with the resistance," referring to Hezbollah.

"But they struck him at home, in a house full of children, full of girls," said al-Jabali, who heard the blast from elsewhere in the village and found a scene of carnage when he rushed to check on his family.

He said his wife still doesn't know Zeinab is dead; he's afraid the grief would endanger her recovery.

Families grieve: "I remember everything"

In response to questions about the strikes that killed Jawad, Taline, and Zeinab, the Israeli military didn't give details about the intended targets beyond that they were related to Hezbollah.

The military's statement said Israel regrets any civilian harm but that it's operating against Hezbollah, "which attacked the State of Israel under Iranian backing."

Many Lebanese have blamed Hezbollah for pulling their country into the war when it fired missiles across the border March 2, two days after the U.S. and Israel attacked Iran. But for others, the devastation from Israeli strikes has strengthened their support.

"We are now holding onto the resistance more than any time before," said Meslmani, Jawad's mother.

Despite Israeli army notices for residents in large swathes of southern Lebanon to flee, many in their town of Saksakieh stayed. Displaced people from farther south took refuge there. Life felt almost normal before the strike that killed Jawad.

Now, Meslmani visits his grave in a small cemetery overlooking a mountain vista, where she can hear warplanes roar overhead.

"I remember everything," she said. "How he used to eat and drink, how he used to play, how he would get dressed and fix his beautiful hair."

Since he was killed, the planes no longer bother her.

"The most precious thing, my heart, is gone," she said. "What more can they do?"

Sudan enters a fourth year of war as officials lament an 'abandoned crisis'

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Famine. Massacres. And now badly needed food and other supplies are under strain. Sudan on Wednesday enters a fourth year of war that's being called an "abandoned crisis," as a new conflict in the Middle East throws into shadow the fighting that has forced 13 million people to flee their homes.

Sudan has been described as the world's largest humanitarian challenge, notably in terms of displacement and hunger. There is no end in sight to the fighting between the military and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces that witnesses and aid groups say has laid waste to parts of the vast Darfur region.

Growing evidence shows regional powers like the United Arab Emirates backing combatants behind the scenes. Attempts by the United States and regional powers, now distracted by the Iran war, have failed to establish a ceasefire.

"This grim and chastening anniversary marks another year when the world has failed to meet the test of Sudan," United Nations humanitarian chief Tom Fletcher said.

Numbers tell a tale of pain

At least 59,000 people have been killed. At least 6,000 died over three days as the RSF rampaged through the Darfur outpost of el-Fasher in October, according to the U.N., with U.N.-backed experts concluding the offensive bore "the defining characteristics of genocide." More than 11,000 people were missing over the course of the war, the Red Cross says.

The war has pushed parts of Sudan into famine. The number of people with severe acute malnutrition, the most dangerous and deadly kind, is expected to increase to 800,000, the world's foremost experts on food security, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, said in February.

About 34 million people, or almost two of every three Sudanese, need assistance, the U.N. says. Only 63% of health facilities remain fully or partially functional amid disease outbreaks including cholera, according to the World Health Organization.

And now fuel prices in Sudan have increased by over 24% because of the Iran war and its effects on shipping, driving up food prices.

"A plea from me: Please don't call this the forgotten crisis. I'm referring to this as an abandoned crisis," the top U.N. official in Sudan, Denise Brown, said Monday, criticizing the international community for failing to focus on ending the fighting.

The war could spill over Sudan's borders

The war exploded from a power struggle that emerged following Sudan's transition to democracy after an uprising forced the military ouster of longtime dictator Omar al-Bashir in April 2019.

The tensions sparked between military chief Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, who chairs the ruling sovereign council, and RSF commander Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, who was Burhan's deputy there.

Neither side can achieve a decisive victory, said Shamel Elnoor, a Sudanese journalist and researcher, adding that Sudanese "have become powerless and are subjected to foreign dictates."

Germany, meanwhile, is hosting a conference in Berlin Wednesday for governments, U.N. agencies and aid groups. The aim is to rally donors to help fund the strained humanitarian response and to "promote an immediate ceasefire" in Sudan, the German Development Ministry said in a statement.

The Sudanese government in Khartoum, however, slammed the Berlin conference as an "unacceptable" interference in its internal affairs. It said Germany, as the host country, didn't consult with Sudan before convening the gathering.

Sudan is now essentially divided between a military-backed, internationally recognized government in the capital, Khartoum, and a rival RSF-controlled administration in Darfur.

The military has established control over the north, east and central regions, including Sudan's Red Sea ports and its oil refineries and pipelines. The RSF and allies control Darfur and areas in the Kordofan region along the border with South Sudan. Both regions include many of Sudan's oil fields and gold mines.

While Egypt supports Sudan's military, the UAE is accused by U.N. experts and rights groups of providing

arms to the RSF. The UAE has rejected the accusation.

The Yale School of Public Health's Humanitarian Research Lab, which tracks the war through satellite imagery, said this month that the RSF had received military support from a base in Ethiopia. The RSF didn't comment on the allegation.

Josef Tucker, senior analyst for the Horn of Africa at the International Crisis Group, told The Associated Press that the war could spill over Sudan's borders, making the conflict "even more intractable."

Experts look at possible war crimes

Three years of fighting have seen widespread atrocities including mass killings and rampant sexual violence including gang rapes.

Hospitals, ambulances and medical workers in Sudan have been attacked, with over 2,000 people killed, the WHO has said.

The International Criminal Court has said it was investigating potential war crimes and crimes against humanity, particularly in Darfur, a region that two decades ago became synonymous with genocide and war crimes.

Most of the latest atrocities have been blamed on the RSF and their Janjaweed allies, Arab militias that were notorious for atrocities in the early 2000s against people identifying as East or Central African in Darfur. The RSF grew out of the Janjaweed.

"We have ... no reason at all to believe it will stop the mass atrocities that we saw in el-Fasher," Brown, the U.N. official, said.

The military's seizure of Khartoum and other urban areas in central Sudan in early 2025 did allow the return of about 4 million people to their homes, the U.N. migration agency said in March. But they struggle with damaged infrastructure and other challenges.

"It's not really a return to normal. It is trying to survive amid a new normal," said Tjada D'Oyen McKenna, CEO of aid group Mercy Corps.

At least 250 people missing, including Rohingya and Bangladeshis, after boat sinks in Andaman Sea

By JULHAS ALAM Associated Press

DHAKA, Bangladesh (AP) — At least 250 people, including Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi nationals, were missing after a boat capsized in the Andaman Sea recently on the way to Malaysia, according to the United Nations' refugee and migration agencies.

While details remained sketchy, Bangladesh Coast Guard spokesperson Lt. Com. Sabbir Alam Suzan told The Associated Press on Wednesday that nine people, including three Rohingya and six Bangladeshis, were rescued on April 9. Suzan said the Bangladesh flag carrier M.T. Meghna Pride rescued the nine people when the crew found them floating at sea after the capsizing.

When the boat sank and the status of any search Wednesday were unclear.

The U.N. high commissioner for refugees and the International Organization for Migration in a joint statement said Tuesday that the trawler departed from Teknaf in the southern Bangladeshi district of Cox's Bazar carrying a large number of passengers to Malaysia.

Overcrowding, strong winds and rough seas caused the vessel to lose control and sink, the agencies said.

Shari Nijman, a UNCHR communication officer in Cox's Bazar, said Wednesday that the agency had no other updates.

Another coast guard media official told the AP by phone Wednesday that the rescued people, eight men and one woman, were all safe after being handed over to the coast guard, who brought them to the police in Teknaf.

The official said the rescue was not part of any official search operation as it is outside Bangladesh territory, and that the crew of the M.T. Meghna Pride saved the people while it was on its way to Indonesia from Bangladesh's Chittagong.

The official spoke by phone on condition of anonymity in line with official policy.

UNHCR and IOM said the disappearance reflected the protracted displacement of Rohingya people and the absence of durable solutions.

They said ongoing violence in Myanmar's Rakhine state has made the Rohingya's safe return to Myanmar uncertain, while limited humanitarian assistance, as well as restricted access to education and employment in refugee camps, continue to push vulnerable Rohingya refugees to choose risky sea journeys, often based on false promises of higher wages and better opportunities abroad.

UNHCR and IOM urged the international community to strengthen funding and solidarity to ensure life-saving assistance for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, which has sheltered more than 1 million Rohingya from Myanmar.

Pope heads to Cameroon as separatists announce 3-day pause in fighting

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ALGIERS, Algeria (AP) — Pope Leo XIV is heading to the central African nation of Cameroon with a message of peace for its separatist region and for talks with President Paul Biya, the 93-year-old leader whose grip on power was extended for an eighth term in a widely disputed election last year.

The Vatican says fighting corruption in the mineral-rich country and insisting on the correct uses of political authority are expected to be themes of Leo's visit, which starts Wednesday with his arrival in Yaounde, the capital. Leo was traveling to Cameroon from Algeria, the first stop on his four-nation Africa tour.

The Vatican has made clear that Catholic social teaching disapproves of the types of authoritarian leaders that Leo is encountering on his visit, the first to the continent by history's first American pope.

Biya is the world's oldest leader and has led the central African nation since 1982.

Leo will meet with Biya upon arrival at the presidential palace in the capital Yaounde. He'll then address Cameroon government authorities, civil service representatives and diplomats before visiting an orphanage run by a Catholic religious order of nuns.

Cameroon authorities made a last-minute change to the program, the Vatican said Wednesday. Biya, and not the prime minister, will now deliver a speech before Leo addresses government authorities and the encounter will occur in the presidential palace, not a conference center.

Cameroon's opposition has contested the result of the Oct. 12 election that secured the victory for Biya. His election rival, Issa Tchiroma Bakary, claims to have won and has called on Cameroonians to reject the official result.

Just this week, Leo issued an unrelated message on the correct role of political leaders and the need for "authentic democracy" to legitimize their authority and act as a "guardrail against the abuse of power."

In a message to a Vatican academy for social science, Leo wrote that democracy remains healthy only when it is driven by morality and a vision of humanity that respects the dignity of everyone.

"Lacking this foundation, it risks becoming either a majoritarian tyranny or a mask for the dominance of economic and technological elites," he warned in a message that wasn't directed at any particular nation or leader and was dated April 1.

A peace meeting and a pause in fighting

Leo has two major events in Cameroon, with the highlight a "peace meeting" on Thursday in Cameroon's northwest city of Bamenda, which has been plagued by separatist violence.

English-speaking separatists launched a rebellion in 2017 with the stated goal of breaking away from the French-speaking majority of Cameroon 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.

On the eve of Leo's arrival, the English-speaking separatists announced a three-day pause in fighting to allow "safe travel" for Leo's visit.

The Unity Alliance, which includes several separatist groups, said in a statement late Monday the pause

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reflects the "profound spiritual importance" of the visit and is intended to allow civilians, pilgrims and dignitaries to travel safely.

Leo's other big event in Cameroon, where about 29% of the population is Catholic, is a Mass on Friday in the city of Douala, where some 600,000 people are expected to turn out.

On Saturday, Leo heads to Angola for the third leg of his trip, which ends next week in Equatorial Guinea.

Asian shares mostly rise after Wall Street rallies on lower oil prices

By YURI KAGEYAMA AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Asian shares mostly rose in Wednesday trading, echoing the rally on Wall Street that came as oil prices eased on hopes the United States and Iran may try again on talks to end their war.

Japan's Nikkei 225 gained 0.4% in afternoon trading to 58,122.52. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 was little changed, inching up less than 0.1% to 8,978.70. South Korea's Kospi jumped 2.1% to 6,092.77. Hong Kong's Hang Seng edged up 0.4% to 25,980.69, while the Shanghai Composite declined less than 0.1% to 4,023.40.

On Wall Street, the S&P 500 added 1.2% to its leap from the day before, and the index at the heart of many 401(k) accounts is just 0.2% below its record set in January.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 317 points, or 0.7%, and the Nasdaq composite climbed 2%.

On Wednesday, benchmark U.S. crude fell 58 cents to \$90.70 a barrel. Brent crude added 7 cents to \$94.86, or less than 1% after falling 4.6% the day before. While that's still above its roughly \$70 price from before the war began in late February, it's well below the peak level of \$119.

Lower oil prices help bring down costs for all kinds of businesses. But some analysts noted the war was still ongoing, warning that the optimism may be unfortunately unfounded.

"The counterintuitive decline in crude appears driven by growing hopes that a second round of peace talks between Washington and Tehran could soon materialize, after the first attempt fizzled out. Traders are clearly choosing to price in the possibility of de-escalation rather than the immediate reality of restricted flows," said Tim Waterer, chief market analyst at KCM Trade.

Asian nations depends on access to the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow waterway that's the main avenue for crude oil produced in the Persian Gulf area to reach customers worldwide. Blockages there have kept oil off the global market, which has in turn driven up its price.

Global inflation this year looks set to accelerate to 4.4% from 4.1% in 2025, according to the International Monetary Fund, which had earlier thought inflation would slow to 3.8%. The IMF on Tuesday also downgraded its forecast for global economic growth to 3.1% this year from the 3.3% it had forecast in January.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 81.14 points to 6,967.38. The Dow Jones Industrial Average gained 317.74 to 48,535.99, and the Nasdaq composite climbed 455.35 to 23,639.08.

In the bond market, Treasury yields eased as the fall for oil prices took some of the pressure off inflation. The yield on the 10-year Treasury fell to 4.25% from 4.30% late Monday.

In currency trading, the U.S. dollar edged up to 158.95 Japanese yen from 158.79 yen. The euro cost \$1.1790, down from \$1.1797.

Xi calls China-Russia ties 'precious' in current international context

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese President Xi Jinping said Wednesday that the stability and certainty of China-Russia relations are particularly "precious" in the face of an international landscape intertwined with change and chaos.

During a meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Beijing, Xi said the strong vitality and exemplary significance of the friendship treaty between the two countries stand out even more under such a backdrop.

Xi said China and Russia need to use closer and stronger strategic collaboration to defend the legitimate interests of both nations and safeguard the unity of Global South countries, the state broadcaster CCTV reported. He also called for two countries to showcase the responsibility and commitment of major powers and permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, the report said.

"Firmly uphold and practice multilateralism, work together to revitalize the authority and vitality of the United Nations," he was quoted as saying. "Promote the development of the international order in a more just and reasonable direction."

Xi touted the value of the two nations' ties, but he did not specify what he referred to as chaos and changes in the international context. His remarks came as uncertainty still lingers about how long the Iran war would last.

In clips from an interview with the Fox Business Network, U.S. President Donald Trump said Tuesday the war was "close to over." Trump has repeatedly declared a U.S. victory in Iran after the war started — even as the reality on the ground has been far more complicated.

Relations between China and Russia have deepened in recent years, particularly following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in early 2022. Trump's unorthodox approach to the war in Ukraine has added a twist to the relationship but doesn't appear to have fundamentally changed it.

When Putin visited China in September, Xi welcomed his counterpart as an "old friend." Putin also addressed Xi as "dear friend."

Xi on Wednesday said foreign ministries from both countries would need to fully implement the consensus reached between him and Russian President Vladimir Putin, calling for strengthening strategic communication and close diplomatic coordination. He also urged them to promote the comprehensive strategic partnership between Beijing and Moscow to "stand higher, walk more steadily and go further."

CCTV reported that Lavrov said Russian-Chinese relations demonstrated high resilience in a complex external environment, pointing to good momentum in trade and investment cooperation and close coordination in the U.N and other multilateral platforms.

He said Russia is willing to work with China to uphold international fairness and justice, push their ties to achieve greater development and make greater contributions to world peace, among other goals, CCTV said.

Lavrov arrived in China on Tuesday for a two-day trip at the invitation of his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi.

Hopes rise for renewed talks as US military says Iran blockade is in force

By MUNIR AHMED and SAM METZ Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Hopes rose for renewed talks between the United States and Iran on Wednesday, as the U.S. military said its blockade of Iranian ports was in full effect and Tehran threatened to retaliate by strike targets across the war-weary region.

U.S. President Donald Trump said Tuesday that a second round of talks could happen "over the next two days," telling the New York Post the negotiations could be held again in Islamabad as diplomats worked through back channels to arrange them.

U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres said it's "highly probable" that talks will restart, citing a meeting he had with Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar. The office of Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said he would travel to Saudi Arabia Wednesday as his country pushes to mediate new talks and to Turkey for the Anatolia Peace Forum, which starts Friday.

Oil prices fell on hopes for an end to fighting, and in the U.S. stocks surged close to records set in January. The war, now in its seventh week, has jolted markets and rattled the global economy as shipping has been cut off and airstrikes have torn through military and civilian infrastructure across the region.

Meanwhile in Washington, the first direct talks in decades between the Israeli and Lebanese ambassadors to the U.S. concluded on a productive note Tuesday, according to the U.S. State Department.

Israeli Ambassador Yechiel Leiter said the two countries are "on the same side of the equation" in "liberating Lebanon" from the militant Hezbollah group. Lebanese Ambassador Nada Hamadeh Moawad called the meeting "constructive" but urged an end to the ongoing conflict between Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah militants. Since March, that war has displaced more than 1 million people in Lebanon.

Israel and Lebanon have technically been at war since Israel was established in 1948, and Lebanon remains deeply divided over diplomatic engagement with Israel.

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First round of talks with Iran failed to end conflict

Last weekend in Pakistan, an initial round of talks aimed at permanently ending the U.S.-Iran conflict failed to produce an agreement. The White House said Iran's nuclear ambitions were a central sticking point.

"I think they want to make a deal very badly," Trump said in an excerpt from an interview with Fox Business Network's "Mornings with Maria" scheduled to air Wednesday morning. He added: "I view it as very close to over."

A U.S. official said Tuesday that fresh talks with Iran were still under discussion and that nothing has been scheduled. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss sensitive negotiations.

Muhammad Aurangzeb, Pakistan's finance minister, told The Associated Press that "our leadership is not giving up" on efforts to help the U.S. and Iran end the conflict.

Though the ceasefire appeared to hold, the showdown over the strategic Strait of Hormuz risked reigniting hostilities and deepening the regional war's economic fallout.

The fighting has killed at least 3,000 people in Iran, more than 2,100 in Lebanon, 23 in Israel and more than a dozen in Gulf Arab states. Thirteen U.S. service members have also been killed.

Tankers turned around after blockade took effect

U.S. Central Command said Tuesday no ships made it past the blockade in the first 24 hours, while six merchant vessels complied with direction from U.S. forces to turn around and reenter Iranian waters.

The blockade is intended to pressure Iran, which has exported millions of barrels of oil, mostly to Asia, since the war began Feb. 28. Much of it has likely been carried by so-called dark transits that evade sanctions and oversight, providing cash that's been vital to keeping Iran running.

Tankers approaching the strait Monday turned around shortly after the blockade took effect, though one reversed course again and transited the waterway.

Since the war began, Iran has curtailed maritime traffic, with most commercial vessels avoiding the waterway. Tehran's effective closure of the strait, through which a fifth of global oil transits in peacetime, has sent oil prices skyrocketing, pushing up the cost of gasoline, food and other basic goods far beyond the Middle East.

They scour the Mexican cartel lands for the missing — and for closure

By EDUARDO VERDUGO and MARÍA VERZA Associated Press

GUADALAJARA, México (AP) — For hours under the blistering sun, Raúl Servín shovels and digs his way through days filled with pain, hope and usually frustration. He is looking for his son, gone eight years now — and for "all the other missing people" in Mexico as well.

Every Tuesday, Servín loads a van with picks, shovels, water and lunches. He commends himself to God. He picks up his three teammates for the day. Then they venture forth into areas where the ground beneath their feet may sometimes hide the bodies of the missing — the victims of foul play in a Mexican state rife with drug cartel violence.

They call themselves the Guerreros Buscadores — the "Searching Warriors." There is much to search for, and dozens of groups like theirs do: More than 130,000 people have been reported missing since 2006, according to official records.

Balancing the search efforts with daily obligations is not easy. Servín lost his job when he started looking for his missing son. Now he works as a waiter on weekends.

But the most difficult parts also offer ways forward — news that arrives via a skull, a mutilated body, evidence of closure in many respects of the word. There is even joy now and then — even if it comes from a pit.

On those difficult days, Servín, 54, comes to grips with a jarring fact: Sometimes, in the end, the worst-case scenario can become the best possible outcome.

Searching, waiting, hoping

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Servín's life is filled with mixed-feeling moments not easy to witness. On a recent day, these Guerreros agreed to be shadowed by an Associated Press photojournalist to see what they do — and why it matters. They set out to cover several locations on the outskirts of Guadalajara, the capital of the Mexican state of Jalisco and a World Cup host city.

Servín and the women go alone, unaccompanied by any protection. The only semblance of an authority is a "panic button" held by Servín that connects to a federal network to protect rights activists.

It is perilous work in a perilous environment. Mexico is neither at war nor under a military dictatorship, yet thousands of people disappear every year amid cartel violence. Clandestine graves are discovered on a semiregular basis; more than 70,000 unidentified remains have piled up in morgues and cemeteries.

The previous administration recognized the magnitude of the problem and launched official search commissions, but high levels of impunity and inaction persist. The current government has said missing information for one-third of those disappeared makes it impossible to search for them at all. Families remain the main driving force behind the searches and the findings.

The group heads to several locations based on anonymous tips received on the Guerreros Buscadores website. These often come from people who heard screams or gunshots or who saw something but fear going to the authorities.

On their previous outing, they dug down more than a yard (meter) at four locations. Nothing. Sometimes they find bloodstains or shell casings. They check every tip anyway. Says Servín: "There cannot be room for doubt."

He receives a call. An informant says there is a body buried in a residential area. The information seems reliable, so they change their plans. This time they won't be able to check the area in advance, a security measure to avoid encountering drug cartel lookouts or gunmen who could drive them off with shots into the sky. That has happened before.

Arches mark the entrance to the residential complex identified by the informant. It sits next to a commuter train line on the outskirts of Guadalajara, a city plastered with fliers of missing people. Jalisco state, a stronghold of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, is an epicenter of disappearances.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum visited the area following the violence that erupted in February over the killing of the cartel's leader. She insisted that security for the World Cup would be guaranteed.

The search collectives want to take advantage of the world's focus on Mexico to draw attention to their reality. "I love soccer," Servín says, "but that's not going to stop me from going out to search."

A lullaby for the dead

Caps and scarves shield the searchers from the sun. Each wears a personalized T-shirt with a photo of their loved one. Servín's reads "Searcher Dad."

The group prepares their equipment. A metal rod they call "the seer" is a must-have: For over a decade, it has been the searchers' rudimentary yet indispensable tool. They stick it into the ground and then sniff. If there's an organic smell, there's a clue.

They begin digging in a small dirt area at one residential corner. They dig and dig some more. Nothing.

Then, after hours of no progress, Servín steps outside the apartment complex and walks between the wall and the tracks. The ground is soft. "I saw a hole with small rocks; it was strange."

Years ago, his heart would have raced. Now he says, "I don't get nervous anymore."

He kneels and grips his shovel. A train passes. First he sees part of a skull. He begins to dig out the soil with his shovel and hands.

"We've got a positive!" he shouts.

The four don masks and gloves. A jawbone appears. There is no doubt: It is a human being.

Servín shows his colleagues the head, holding it with the utmost delicacy. They decide to keep digging to look for the full body. A bag of bones appears. Then a shoe. Then a pelvis. They carefully place each outside the pit. If any bone looks the same, it would be placed elsewhere because it could belong to a second person.

The women's voices mingle like lullabies. "Hi baby, you're going home soon." "Your family is waiting for

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you." One lights a candle at the edge of the pit.

To someone unfamiliar with violent environments, the scene might seem macabre. To those who witness it, it's an act of tremendous tenderness and solidarity carried out by people who were re-victimized by the authorities for years. In 2021, a prosecutor handed a woman the remains of her relative in a trash bag. A photo of her with a vacant stare over the huge black bag at her feet went viral.

Criminals hide their victims because if there's no body, there's no crime. Nearly 20,000 missing people have been found dead since 2010. So finding a body can be dangerous.

Servín activates his panic button that many searchers carry. Since 2010, at least 36 searchers have been killed, according to civil society organizations. The latest was in mid-March.

Servín talks to the federal officials on the line, confirms his identity with a password, explains what he found and notes the location. He requests hourly monitoring, which means a call to confirm everything is all right.

Then he phones the police.

Navigating the aftermath — logistically and emotionally

One of the women prepares to go live on Facebook. It's a way to leave a record. If they hadn't gone live when they found a ranch used by the Jalisco Cartel, it would have been difficult to get people to believe what they discovered. It also helps people recognize things.

"There's a pair of gray underwear that says 'Sport' in orange letters, some size 5 brown boots," one of the searchers explains. "There's the skull, it still has some hair. ... There's the pelvis."

The phone zooms in to show the details of the shoe, of the jawbone missing a tooth. Any detail might help. One woman hopes that the "little person" will soon be with loved ones. They pray.

Servín begins answering questions online. He's no expert, but his experience tells him the body might have been buried about 18 months ago. It cannot be his son, but hope is never entirely lost; two weeks ago, a mother found her son after seven years of searching. He thanks God that there are remains for DNA testing.

When the Guerreros find bodies "in pieces," Servín feels like crying. "What hits us hardest is to think that our children might be in those conditions."

But he also feels good. Because he knows there are answers there.

While waiting for the authorities, the searchers sit down to rest. It is a moment of intimate conversation among people united by grief and their mission.

A woman from the neighborhood arrives with her son. She has a missing child and wants to see if he recognizes anything. An hour later, another mother arrives. The searchers embrace her and advise to go to the attorney's office for a DNA test. Emotion overflows.

When the police arrive, Servín answers their questions. Mistrust, though, persists because he knows some officers work for the cartel. He says that "some time ago" the authorities accused them of contaminating crime scenes, but the collectives have gradually earned respect.

As evening falls, the forensic team begins its job. In Mexico, the results of a genetic test can take days or years. The remains of one searcher's brother — a searcher who is also Servín's partner — have been at the forensic institute for six years. There has been a match, but the experts haven't finished processing the remains from all the bags found back then. "It's illogical," he says. His anguish is evident.

At 9 p.m., Servín presses the panic button one more time to check in that he is home. "I arrive feeling at peace," he says, "knowing the day was fruitful."

Trump urges extending foreign surveillance program as some lawmakers push for US privacy protections

By DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congress is set to take up the reauthorization of a divisive program that lets U.S. spy agencies pore over foreigners' calls, texts and emails, with supporters like President Donald Trump saying it has saved lives while critics point to longstanding concerns about warrantless surveillance of

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Americans.

A key provision of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act permits the CIA, National Security Agency, FBI and other agencies to collect and analyze vast amounts of overseas communications without a warrant. It incidentally sweeps up the conversations of any Americans who interact with those foreigners targeted for surveillance.

The program expires Monday, and critics want changes, including a requirement for warrants before authorities can access the emails, phone calls or text messages of Americans. They also want limits on the government's use of internet data brokers, who sell large volumes of personal information gleaned online, offering the government what critics say amounts to an end-run around the Constitution.

Despite bipartisan criticism, the chances of significant reforms dropped when Trump announced his support for the program's renewal, saying it had proven its worth in supplying information vital to recent U.S. actions in Venezuela and Iran.

"The fact is, whether you like FISA or not, it is extremely important to our military," Trump said on social media Tuesday.

Trump calls for another extension of the program

U.S. authorities say the program, known as Section 702 of the law, is vital to national security and has saved lives by uncovering terror plots. Critics question what they call a dangerous infringement on civil liberties and privacy.

In a Truth Social post, Trump said a different FISA provision was used to spy on his 2016 campaign but that he supported Section 702's renewal despite misgivings that political adversaries could use parts of the law against him in the future. He called on lawmakers to extend the foreign surveillance program for another 18 months.

"My administration has worked tirelessly to ensure these FISA reforms are being aggressively executed at every level of the Executive Branch to keep Americans safe, while protecting our sacred Civil Liberties guaranteed by our Great Constitution," Trump wrote.

Trump is a longtime critic of the nation's intelligence services and was once opposed to Section 702 before he reversed himself. "KILL FISA" Trump posted on social media in 2024, when the provision was last reauthorized.

Trump isn't the only one-time critic to change their mind: Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard sponsored legislation to repeal Section 702 as a Hawaii congresswoman but now supports it after being tapped to coordinate the nation's 18 intelligence agencies.

Gabbard says new protections added since her time in Congress helped change her mind.

Greater protections are sought for Americans' communications

In addition to a requirement for a warrant to access Americans' data, critics also want greater protections on how the FBI or other agencies can search communications and how that is reported to the public.

"Journalists, foreign aid workers, people with family overseas, all could have their communications swept up in this surveillance merely because they talked to someone outside of this country," said Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore. The longtime critic of the law is pushing for changes that he said will ensure the government isn't violating civil rights in secret.

Several Republicans also have suggested changes, such as the warrant requirement.

"National security and civil liberties are not mutually exclusive," said Rep. Andy Biggs, R-Ariz. "We can give our intelligence professionals the tools they need to target foreign threats while ensuring that Americans are not subjected to unconstitutional surveillance."

Gabbard's office releases an annual report showing the number of foreign surveillance targets and number of searches likely to identify an American.

For 2025, the number of foreign surveillance targets increased to nearly 350,000 from almost 292,000 in 2024. Searches using terms likely to identify an American decreased slightly to 7,724 from 7,845 in 2024.

The totals are incomplete because agencies like the FBI have found ways to access the data without reporting the searches publicly, said Elizabeth Goitein, senior director of the Liberty and National Security

Program at the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University.

FBI officials repeatedly violated their own standards when searching for intelligence related to the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol and racial justice protests in 2020, according to a 2024 court order.

"It's reminiscent of J. Edgar Hoover's tenure at the FBI," Goitein said, referring to the FBI's founding director who used illegal surveillance to harass and spy on Americans. "They can pretty much target anyone."

There's little time to make changes to the law

Despite bipartisan concerns about the law and its implications for civil liberties, time is running out for Congress to make any changes before Monday's expiration.

Trump's support also reduces the odds that enough Republicans will break ranks and join Democrats to push for reforms.

Wyden said Section 702 votes are routinely delayed until the last minute, then lawmakers are told that national security demands they vote yes. Lawmakers are told, he said, that "if they vote for any amendments, the program will die and terrible things will happen and it will be all their fault."

The best chance for inserting changes likely is the House, where a large number of lawmakers from both parties have expressed concerns.

But Rep. Rick Crawford, an Arkansas Republican who chairs the House Intelligence Committee, is backing Trump's call for an 18-month renewal.

Crawford has taken aim in the past at what he calls the weaponization of intelligence but said last month that he believes the government can empower spy agencies while also holding them accountable.

"We can walk and chew gum at the same time," Crawford said.

Sexual abuse allegations are spurring calls for a broader reckoning in Congress

By STEPHEN GROVES and JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Resignations came quickly this week from two congressmen accused of sexual misconduct toward staff members. Yet for many of the women of Capitol Hill, the moment of accountability was years in the making — and far from enough.

Reps. Eric Swalwell, a California Democrat, and Tony Gonzales, a Texas Republican, both announced within hours of each other Monday that they were leaving Congress. Their decisions came the day before the House returned to Washington and as both faced the prospect of being expelled from the chamber by their colleagues.

It was a reckoning of sorts for Capitol Hill, the most striking since the careers of roughly a dozen male politicians were toppled during the heights of the #MeToo movement. Yet some congresswomen said that the pair of resignations took too long and proved what they've long been saying: that more must be done to rid Capitol Hill of sexual predation.

"Today was an important turning point," said Democratic Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York. "That it should — that abuse of power — should never be accepted, and above all, in public office. And so, I think this is an important resetting point for the institution."

A bipartisan group of congresswomen had threatened on Tuesday to file resolutions that could have forced votes on expelling Swalwell and Gonzales. Their moves forced the two men to act and came swiftly after the San Francisco Chronicle and CNN had reported Friday that a woman said Swalwell sexually assaulted her.

The initial allegations against Swalwell date back to 2019 and 2024; they were followed with other allegations of inappropriate behavior made by other women. Swalwell has denied engaging in any sexual misconduct but acknowledged mistakes in judgment. Gonzales for months had resisted calls for his resignation after he admitted to a 2024 affair with a staff member who later committed suicide.

"Accountability can happen. We can hold men accountable when they abuse women, and we're going to do more of it," said Rep. Teresa Leger Fernández, who chairs the Democratic Women's Caucus.

House rules forbid relationships with staff

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It is against the House Code of Conduct for any member to have a sexual relationship with their staff members.

Following the #MeToo movement, the House changed its rules to require annual trainings on sexual harassment and discrimination for members. The House also approved legislation to speed the slow-moving process for harassment complaints, require more disclosure of settlements and force lawmakers to personally pay any penalties they're required to make.

Former Rep. Jackie Speier, a California Democrat who led the movement for reforms around sexual assault, told The Associated Press that problems still persist after those reforms.

"What we do in Congress is basically look the other way," she said, adding that she was calling on House Speaker Mike Johnson and House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries to "really tighten the rules and create a safe environment for these women to report."

While Johnson said he did not talk with the lawmakers before they announced their resignations, he told reporters that the episode had played out "appropriately."

"This is the right thing for the institution," he said.

How the push for accountability has grown

Sexual abuse has been top of mind for lawmakers as they investigate the actions of the late financier Jeffrey Epstein. A handful of Republican women, mostly hailing from the right wing of their party, played crucial roles in forcing Congress to take up the issue.

Republican Rep. Nancy Mace, alongside Rep. Lauren Boebert and then-Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, rebuffed pressure from President Donald Trump and Johnson last year as they joined with Democrats and forced a vote on a bill mandating the release of many of the case files on Epstein.

Mace, who in 2019 shared her own account of surviving rape, has continued an outspoken campaign advocating for victims of sexual assault. She and Republican Rep. Anna Paulina Luna had repeatedly called for Swalwell and Gonzales to resign.

Mace has also extended that demand to Republican Rep. Cory Mills, who is facing an ethics investigation on allegations of sexual misconduct and violence against an ex-girlfriend. Mills has said he will disprove the allegations.

Meanwhile, Mace and Luna are also calling for the resignation of Rep. Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick, a Florida Democrat. The House Ethics Committee found evidence that she broke campaign finance law related to a mistaken overpayment of \$5 million from the state of Florida to her family's health care business. She has said she did nothing wrong.

"Clean house. Expel them. Hold every last one accountable," Mace said on social media. "The American people are watching."

At the same time, Mace herself is under investigation by the ethics panel for allegations she improperly claimed housing reimbursements. She has denied wrongdoing.

Swalwell allies are facing close scrutiny

As accusations of sexual abuse continued to land against Swalwell, some Democrats found themselves in a moment of reflection and contrition, especially those who kept close company with him.

Arizona Sen. Ruben Gallego, a close friend of Swalwell's who chaired his presidential campaign, called reporters to his office on Tuesday for an emotional press conference.

"I messed up. I'm human. I trusted this man," a teary-eyed Gallego said.

Under intense questioning from reporters, Gallego acknowledged that he had heard rumors about Swalwell being "flirty," but contended that he trusted him as a close family friend.

"I definitely look at the world in a different way now," Gallego said. "I personally am going to make sure that I'm going to take personal steps and office steps to make sure that we don't even get close to a gray line."

Policing behavior in Congress presents challenges

Speier, who entered politics by first working as a congressional aide and experienced harassment from a supervisor, said that part of the problem in Congress is that members are given wide latitude to run their

offices. All 535 lawmakers are bosses of their own hand-selected staff.

"There's really no one overseeing you," Speier said. "There's a sense of entitlement that kind of overtakes many of these members."

Speier, alongside then-Rep. Bradley Byrne, led the effort to pass legislation to make it easier to report sexual harassment and discrimination, including banning nondisclosure agreements to protect members of Congress.

Since the 2018 reforms began requiring the Office of Congressional Workplace Rights to report awards and settlements related to formal complaints, there have been eight payments made by House members' offices, totaling just over \$400,000. Those payments cover all types of violations of workplace rights, not just sexual harassment, and the violations could have been committed by other congressional staff in the office.

Speier said that it was crucial to keep making it easier for survivors to report sexual abuse.

"Unless someone comes forward, you know the conduct continues," she said.

Why many Americans are turning to AI for health advice, according to recent polls

By ALI SWENSON and LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — When Tiffany Davis has a question about a symptom from the weight-loss injections she's taking, she doesn't call her doctor. She pulls out her phone and consults ChatGPT.

"I'll just basically let ChatGPT know my status, how I'm feeling," said the 42-year-old in Mesquite, Texas. "I use it for anything that I'm experiencing."

Turning to artificial intelligence tools for health advice has become a habit for Davis and many other Americans, according to a Gallup poll published Wednesday. The poll, conducted in late 2025 and backed up by at least three other recent surveys with similar findings, found that roughly one-quarter of U.S. adults had used an AI tool for health information or advice in the past 30 days.

Dr. Karandeep Singh, chief health AI officer at the University of California San Diego Health, said AI tools, many of which now incorporate web search, are an upgraded version of Google health searches that Americans have been doing for decades.

"I almost view it like a better entry portal into web search," he said. "Instead of someone having to comb through the top, you know, 10, 20, 30 links in a web search, they can now have an executive summary."

Most recent AI health users are looking for quick answers

Most Americans using AI tools for health purposes say they want immediate answers. In some cases, it helps them evaluate what kind of medical attention they need.

"It'll let me know if something's serious or not," Davis said of ChatGPT, which she typically consults before scheduling medical appointments.

The Gallup survey found about 7 in 10 U.S. adults who have used AI for health research in the past 30 days say they wanted quick answers, additional information or were simply curious. Majorities used it for research before seeing a doctor or after an appointment.

Rakesia Wilson, 39, in Theodore, Alabama, said she recently used AI to better understand her lab results after an endocrinologist visit. She also regularly uses ChatGPT and Microsoft Copilot to decide whether she needs to take time off for a doctor's appointment or can simply monitor an ailment.

"I just don't necessarily have the time if it's something that I feel is minor," said Wilson, who said she sometimes works up to 70-hour weeks as an assistant principal.

Younger adults and lower-income users have used AI to bridge care gaps

On the whole, the findings suggest that the rise of AI tools hasn't stopped people from seeking professional medical care. About 8 in 10 U.S. adults say they have sought out a doctor or other health care professional for health information in the past year, while about 3 in 10 say that about AI tools and chatbots, according to a KFF poll conducted in late February.

Similarly, a Pew Research Center survey conducted in October found that about 2 in 10 U.S. adults say they get health information at least sometimes from AI chatbots, while about 85% said the same about health care providers.

But there are indications that some Americans are using AI for health advice because they are struggling to obtain professional medical care, at a time when federal policy and market factors are worsening health costs and creating obstacles to access around the country.

A small but significant share of respondents in the Gallup study say they used AI because accessing health care was too expensive or inconvenient. About 4 in 10 wanted help outside of normal business hours, while about 3 in 10 did not want to pay for a doctor's visit. Roughly 2 in 10 did not have time to make an appointment, had felt ignored or dismissed by a provider in the past or were too embarrassed to talk to a person.

The KFF survey found that younger adults and lower-income people were more likely to say they used an AI tool or chatbot for health information because they could not afford the cost of seeing a provider or were having trouble accessing health care.

Americans are divided on whether AI medical advice can be trusted

Tech experts often warn that AI chatbots don't think for themselves — and therefore can sometimes spout false information. Those concerns have trickled down even to frequent AI users.

About one-third of adults who had recently used AI for health information said they "strongly" or "somewhat" trust the accuracy of health information and advice generated by AI tools, according to the Gallup poll. About the same share, 34%, distrusted it, and another 33% neither trusted it nor distrusted it.

Dr. Bobby Mukkamala, an ear, nose and throat doctor and the president of the American Medical Association, said he loves when patients come in and have "more evolved questions than they used to have" because they used AI for research. But he said AI should be considered a tool and not a stand-in for medical care.

"It is an assistant but not an expert, and that's why physicians need to be involved in that care," he said.

There are also concerns about privacy, according to KFF. About three-quarters of U.S. adults said they are "very concerned" or "somewhat concerned" about the privacy of personal medical or health information that people provide to AI tools or chatbots.

Singh, of UC San Diego Health, said most AI tools have settings users can toggle to prevent their data from being used to train future models. But that requires user vigilance — and not being careful can have consequences.

Last summer, for example, internet sleuths on Google discovered private ChatGPT conversations that had been indexed on a public website without the users realizing it.

Tamara Ruppert, a 47-year-old director in Los Angeles, said she is lucky enough to have doctors in her husband's family that she contacts instead of turning to AI. With her family history of breast cancer, using a chatbot for health advice feels too risky.

"Health care is something that's pretty serious," she said. "And if it's wrong, you could really hurt yourself."

Nature puts heat on blast as scorching temperatures in eastern US could smash records

By JEFF MARTIN Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — A long-lasting weather pattern is poised to blast hot air like a furnace across the eastern United States, with the unusual heat wave threatening to shatter record high temperatures on Wednesday in big cities including New York, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C.

The heat is unusual for April, not only because it's scorching much of the nation so early in the year but also for its duration. The near-record temperatures are expected to last into this weekend, forecasters say.

The potentially dangerous heat comes after severe storms tore through Kansas, Minnesota and Wisconsin on Monday, and more storms threaten Tuesday in the nation's midsection.

While it's not unprecedented to see high temperatures climb toward 90 degrees (32 Celsius) on an April

day, the length of such an April heat wave is rarely seen, experts say.

"That's borderline unprecedented as far as the duration of it this time of year," said John Feerick, senior meteorologist at the forecasting firm AccuWeather.com.

Feerick said that starting Wednesday "we're going to have records challenged from basically Georgia all the way up through the New York City area and back towards the Ohio Valley."

The National Weather Service is projecting a high temperature around 86 degrees (30 Celsius) for Central Park in New York City on Wednesday. The record high for the date is 87, which has stood since 1941.

Even hotter weather is expected in Philadelphia, where Wednesday's high is expected to be 92 degrees (33.3 C). Other likely hot spots include Washington, D.C., which could see a high of 94 (34.4 C); and Atlanta, where the high is projected to be 88 (31.1 C).

"It's really some very impressive heat for the middle of April, for sure," Feerick said.

"The good thing about this is that the humidity is not summer-time levels," he added. That means it won't feel as hot as a sizzling July day.

However, the early-season heat can be more stressful on people's bodies since they haven't had a chance to acclimate.

"It's kind of one of those things where it's a little more stressful to the body because you're not used to it the first time around," Feerick said.

Heat is the No. 1 weather-related killer in the U.S., the weather service warns. Infants and young children; older adults, people with chronic medical conditions and pregnant women are especially vulnerable to heat-related injuries and death.

A strong ridge of high pressure fueling moisture into the southern plains was responsible for bringing the unusual heat to the eastern U.S., the weather service said.

Though Wednesday is a day when many records could fall, the heat wave will continue through Friday in many areas, forecasters said.

"Widespread lower to even middle 90s are expected Friday across the lower elevations of the Carolinas, which could set additional daily records and perhaps come close to some monthly records," the agency's Weather Prediction Center wrote in a memo.

The heat wave should finally be breaking down by Sunday as a strong cold front moves toward the eastern seaboard, and then it should be "pleasantly cooler" by Monday with the front heading out to sea, the weather service said.

As Vance rallies with Turning Point, some supporters bristle at Trump's war, memes and feuds

By BILL BARROW and EMILIE MEGNIEN Associated Press

ATHENS, Georgia (AP) — Fresh from a marathon trip to Pakistan that failed to reach a deal for ending the war with Iran, Vice President JD Vance jetted to this Georgia college town for a campus tour organized by the conservative powerhouse Turning Point USA.

But instead of showcasing the youthful energy that the organization harnessed to return President Donald Trump to the White House less than two years ago, there was a mostly empty arena, awkward questions and unusually sharp criticism.

The event affirmed Trump's difficulty selling the war and how much he's complicated his own political fortunes by assailing Pope Leo XIV and posting a social media meme that depicted himself as Jesus.

"I did vote for Trump. I am not a Trump supporter anymore," said Joseph Bercher, a Catholic who said he was glad that Leo has expressed opposition to the war with Iran.

Bercher said the Jesus meme, which the president took down Monday after a rare conservative backlash, was a "red flag" indicating Trump's true character.

"He sees himself as like a demagogue or someone to be worshipped," Bercher said.

C.J. Santini, a recent graduate of Liberty University, an evangelical school in Virginia, said he didn't have an opinion on whether Iran was truly close to manufacturing a nuclear weapon and thus needed to be

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attacked. But he laughed and shook his head when asked about Trump attacking Leo.

"It's just stupid. Stupid," he said, calling it a "distraction" from Trump's agenda in Iran and at home.

Mostly empty arena contrasts with 2024 rallies

Many of the college-age attendees donned Turning Point attire, Trump hats and red-white-and-blue paraphernalia for the event. Yet they were outnumbered more than 2-to-1 by empty seats in what is not even the largest arena on this sprawling campus that sits about a 90-minute drive from downtown Atlanta.

A Marine veteran who served in Iraq, Vance acknowledged that not all young conservatives are enamored with another U.S. war in the Middle East.

"I'm not saying you have to agree with me on every issue," Vance told the young crowd. "What I'm saying," he added, "is don't get disengaged."

The vice president took questions from Turning Point executive Andrew Kolvet instead of Erika Kirk, who began leading the organization after the assassination of her husband Charlie Kirk. Kolvet said Erika Kirk canceled her plans to be on stage because of unspecified threats she had received.

Vance, whose presence ensured significant Secret Service and other law enforcement protection around the venue, said he'd been worried that the event would be canceled altogether.

Kolvet asked Vance directly about the war and Trump's back-and-forth with Leo. Audience questions were more aggressive. Vance jostled with at least one heckler over the war in Gaza, and he was pressed by another person over the administration's handling of the Jeffrey Epstein case files.

In the audience, even some of Vance's sympathetic listeners offered caveats and critiques.

"The pope needs to stay out of politics," said Jessie Williams, a Methodist. But he noted his mother is Catholic, and he said he understands why Catholics recoil at Trump calling the pope "weak" and suggesting that the first U.S.-born pontiff was chosen only as a counter to Trump.

Williams called Trump's meme distasteful.

"I don't like it, but it's — what can we do?" Williams said. "He's a grown man, he's gonna do what he wants."

Blake McCluggage, a Baptist, said he did not approve of the meme or Trump's profane Easter Sunday message that threatened widespread destruction of Iran's civilian infrastructure.

The threat, plus Trump's follow up message that a "whole civilization" would die, prompted escalating criticism from Leo, with the pope calling the president's comments "truly unacceptable."

However, McCluggage said, "you can still be a Republican" despite disagreeing with Trump.

Vance adjusts his comments about the pope

A day before coming to Georgia, Vance tried to laugh off the meme as a joke that "a lot of people weren't understanding." The vice president also seemed to echo Trump's assertion that Leo should concentrate less on global affairs.

"It would be best for the Vatican to stick to matters of morality, to stick to matters of what's going on in the Catholic church and let the president of the United States stick to dictating American public policy," Vance said in a Fox News interview.

On stage in Athens, he shifted his arguments, saying he welcomes Leo's comments even if he disagrees with them.

"At the very least, it invites conversation," said Vance, who converted to Catholicism as an adult.

Still, Vance questioned Leo anew, pushing back specifically at the pope's Palm Sunday assertion that God does not hear the prayers of those who make war. Leo was quoting scripture from the Old Testament book of Isaiah. Vance asked whether God was on the side of Allied forces in World War II as they liberated Jewish survivors of Nazi's extermination camps.

"I certainly think the answer is yes," Vance said. When Leo mixes global affairs and complex theology, Vance said, "it's very important for the pope to be careful."

Diplomats try to arrange more US-Iran talks during first full day of American blockade

By MUNIR AHMED and SAM METZ Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Diplomats worked through back channels Tuesday to arrange a new round of talks between the United States and Iran after Washington enacted its blockade of Iranian ports, while Tehran threatened to retaliate by striking targets across the war-weary region.

U.S. President Donald Trump said a second round of talks could happen “over the next two days,” telling the New York Post the negotiations could be held again in Islamabad.

U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres concurred, saying it’s “highly probable” that talks will restart. He cited a meeting he had with Pakistan’s deputy prime minister, Ishaq Dar.

Meanwhile in Washington, the first direct talks in decades between the Israeli and Lebanese ambassadors to the U.S. concluded on a productive note, according to the U.S. State Department.

Israeli Ambassador Yechiel Leiter said the two countries are “on the same side of the equation” in “liberating Lebanon” from the militant Hezbollah group. Lebanese Ambassador Nada Hamadeh Moawad called the meeting “constructive” but urged an end to the ongoing conflict between Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah militants. Since March, that war has displaced more than 1 million people in Lebanon.

Israel and Lebanon have technically been at war since Israel was established in 1948, and Lebanon remains deeply divided over diplomatic engagement with Israel.

First round of talks failed to end conflict

Last weekend in Pakistan, an initial round of talks aimed at permanently ending the U.S.-Iran conflict failed to produce an agreement. The White House said Iran’s nuclear ambitions were a central sticking point.

“I think they want to make a deal very badly,” Trump said in an excerpt from an interview with Fox Business Network’s “Mornings with Maria” scheduled to air Wednesday morning. He added: “I view it as very close to over.”

A U.S. official said Tuesday that fresh talks with Iran were still under discussion and that nothing has been scheduled. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss sensitive negotiations.

Muhammad Aurangzeb, Pakistan’s finance minister, told The Associated Press that “our leadership is not giving up” on efforts to help the U.S. and Iran end the conflict.

Though the ceasefire appeared to hold, the showdown over the strategic Strait of Hormuz risked reigniting hostilities and deepening the regional war’s economic fallout.

The war, now in its seventh week, has jolted markets and rattled the global economy as shipping has been cut off and airstrikes have torn through military and civilian infrastructure across the region.

The fighting has killed at least 3,000 people in Iran, more than 2,100 in Lebanon, 23 in Israel and more than a dozen in Gulf Arab states. Thirteen U.S. service members have also been killed.

Tankers turned around after blockade took effect

The blockade is intended to pressure Iran, which has exported millions of barrels of oil, mostly to Asia, since the war began Feb. 28. Much of it has likely been carried by so-called dark transits that evade sanctions and oversight, providing cash that’s been vital to keeping Iran running.

U.S. forces enforcing the blockade will operate in the Gulf of Oman, a U.S. official told The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive military operations. Ships transiting the Strait of Hormuz must cross the Gulf of Oman to reach the open sea.

The official said the move will allow the U.S. military to observe vessels subject to the blockade leaving Iranian facilities and clearing the strait before they are intercepted and forced to turn around.

U.S. Central Command said Tuesday no ships made it past the blockade in the first 24 hours, while six merchant vessels complied with direction from U.S. forces to turn around and reenter Iranian waters.

Tankers approaching the strait Monday turned around shortly after the blockade took effect, though one reversed course again and transited the waterway.

The tanker Rich Starry had been waiting off the coast of the United Arab Emirates, according to shipping

data firm Lloyd's List, which cited data from the energy cargo-tracking firm Vortexa. It was not immediately clear whether the tanker had earlier docked in Iran. Yet it was listed by the U.S. Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control as linked to Iranian shipping.

Lloyd's List, citing ship registry and tracking data, reported that the vessel is owned by a Chinese shipping company and was ultimately bound for China with a stopover in an Omani port, south of the strait. The vessel updated its broadcast signal on Tuesday evening to no longer show it was headed for Sohar, Oman, according to tracking data reported by maritime analytics firm MarineTraffic.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said Chinese tankers will not be allowed passage through the strait. "So they're not going to be able to get their oil," he told reporters Tuesday.

In a comment seemingly directed at Trump without naming him, Chinese President Xi Jinping said nations should "oppose the world's retrogression to the law of the jungle."

Since the war began, Iran has curtailed maritime traffic, with most commercial vessels avoiding the waterway. Tehran's effective closure of the strait, through which a fifth of global oil transits in peacetime, has sent oil prices skyrocketing, pushing up the cost of gasoline, food and other basic goods far beyond the Middle East.

Israel and Lebanon conclude talks

The Israel-Lebanon talks in Washington were "productive," the U.S. State Department said in a statement, adding that "all sides agreed to launch direct negotiations at a mutually agreed time and venue."

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who facilitated the talks, had downplayed expectations for any immediate agreement.

Leiter, the Israeli ambassador to the U.S., said after the talks that both countries saw eye-to-eye in several areas.

"The Lebanese government made it very clear that they will no longer be occupied by Hezbollah," he said.

Moawad, Lebanon's top U.S. envoy, said in a brief statement that she had called for a ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah and the return home of Lebanese displaced by the fighting.

After the ceasefire in Iran, Israel pressed ahead with its air and ground campaign in Lebanon. It has, however, halted strikes in Beirut, the country's capital since April 8, after a deadly bombardment that hit several crowded commercial and residential areas in central Beirut and killed more than 350 people in one day.

The deaths sparked an international outcry and threats by Iran that it would end the ceasefire.

Lebanese officials have pushed for a ceasefire. Israel has framed the negotiations around Hezbollah's disarmament and a potential peace deal, without publicly committing to halting hostilities or withdrawing its forces.

Israel wants Lebanon's government to assume responsibility for disarming Hezbollah, much as was envisaged in a November 2024 ceasefire. But the militant group has survived efforts to curb its strength for decades and said on Monday that it will not abide by any agreements that may result from the talks.

Teenage gunman opens fire at a school in Turkey, wounding 16 before killing himself

By SUZAN FRASER Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — A former student opened fire at a high school in southeastern Turkey on Tuesday, wounding at least 16 people, before killing himself, an official said.

The 18-year-old attacker fired randomly inside a vocational high school in Siverek, Sanliurfa province. He later killed himself with the same shotgun after being "cornered by police," Gov. Hasan Sildak said.

The attack wounded 10 students, four teachers, a canteen employee and a police officer, Sildak said. While most of them were being treated in Siverek, five of the teachers and students were transferred to a hospital in the provincial capital because their conditions were more serious, the governor said.

The motive for the attack was unclear. School shootings are rare in Turkey.

The attacker did not have a criminal record, Sildak said. The school had been declared safe and no

permanent police officer was assigned to protect it, he added, calling the shooting an "isolated incident." NTV television and other media reports said the assailant had threatened an attack on the school on social media prior to the shooting.

One student told the state-run Anadolu Agency that he and a friend jumped out of their classroom window to flee the attacker.

"He suddenly entered the classroom and fired. He fired four or five times. Two people were hit. He then went into the next classroom," Anadolu quoted Omer Furkan Sayar as saying. "We first threw ourselves to the ground and then two of us jumped out of the window."

Sayar continued: "He didn't say anything, he entered and started to shoot directly."

Earlier, media reports said all students were evacuated and police special operations units were deployed after the assailant refused to surrender.

"The individual was cornered inside the building through police intervention and died after shooting himself," Sildak told reporters, adding that a "comprehensive" investigation into the shooting would be carried out.

Video footage showed dozens of students running out of the school toward the gate and onto the street.

Lebanon and Israel hold first direct diplomatic talks in decades in Washington

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Lebanon and Israel held their first direct diplomatic talks in decades on Tuesday in Washington following more than a month of war between Israel and the Iran-backed Hezbollah militant group, with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio calling it a "historic opportunity" but making clear that no breakthrough agreement would happen right away.

In a statement after the two-hour session ended, the State Department praised the two sides for what it called "productive discussions on steps toward launching direct negotiations between Israel and Lebanon." Hezbollah opposed the direct talks and was not represented, appearing to step up its fire on northern Israel as the discussions began.

"The United States affirmed that any agreement to cease hostilities must be reached between the two governments, brokered by the United States, and not through any separate track," the State Department said.

Israeli Ambassador to the U.S. Yechiel Leiter hailed what he called a convergence of opinion about removing Hezbollah's influence from Lebanon, saying he was encouraged by a "wonderful exchange."

"The Lebanese government made it very clear that they will no longer be occupied by Hezbollah," he said. "Iran has been weakened. Hezbollah is dramatically weakened. This is an opportunity."

Lebanese Ambassador to the U.S. Nada Hamadeh Moawad "reaffirmed the urgent need" for an end to the Israel-Hezbollah conflict, "underscoring the principles of territorial integrity and full state sovereignty." She also called for a ceasefire, the return of displaced people to their homes, and "concrete measures to address and alleviate the severe humanitarian crisis" resulting from the conflict.

Despite Hezbollah's outright rejection, the talks are a major step for two countries with no diplomatic relations that have been officially at war since Israel's inception in 1948. The latest round of fighting was sparked by Hezbollah firing rockets into northern Israel on March 2, days after the United States and Israel attacked Iran, Hezbollah's key ally and patron.

Hezbollah pushes back as Lebanese government hopes for end to war

As the talks began, Rubio said the Trump administration was "very happy" to facilitate but noted that "we understand we're working against decades of history and complexities" that will not be quickly resolved.

"But we can begin to move forward with a framework where something can happen — something very positive, something very permanent — so that the people of Lebanon can have the kind of future they deserve, and so that the people of Israel can live without fear," Rubio said.

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The Lebanese government hopes the talks will help pave the way to an end to the war. While Iran has set ending the wars in Lebanon and the region as a condition for talks with the U.S., Lebanon insists on representing itself.

Hezbollah and other critics say Lebanon's government lacks leverage and that it should back Iran's position. Wafiq Safa, a high-ranking member of the militant group's political council, told The Associated Press that the group will not abide by any agreements made during the talks.

On the day of the discussions, incoming fire triggered nonstop drone and rocket alert sirens in Israeli communities near the Lebanese border. Hezbollah, so far on Tuesday, has claimed 24 attacks on northern Israel and on Israeli troops in southern Lebanon.

At least 2,124 people have been killed in Israeli strikes in Lebanon, the Health Ministry said, including hundreds of women and children. More than 1 million people are displaced. The deadliest day of the war took place last week, when Israel launched 100 airstrikes across Lebanon in 10 minutes, including in the heart of the capital, killing over 350 people.

The Israeli military has invaded southern Lebanon, a move some Israeli officials have said aims to create a "security zone" from the border to the Litani River, some 30 kilometers (20 miles) to the north.

Israel's defense minister says hundreds of thousands of people uprooted from southern Lebanon will not be allowed to return home until the area is demilitarized and Israel believes its northern communities are safe. Hezbollah, though weakened in its last war with Israel that ended in November 2024, still fires drones, rockets and artillery daily into northern Israel and on ground troops inside Lebanon.

Hezbollah enjoys wide influence in Beirut's southern suburbs, as well as large swaths of the country's southern and eastern provinces. Hezbollah-allied politicians hold two Cabinet minister positions, though the group's ties have soured with Lebanon's top political authorities, who have been critical of Hezbollah's decision to enter the war last month and who have since criminalized the group's military activities in the country.

First Israel-Lebanon talks in more than 30 years

The talks are the first between Israel and Lebanon since 1993. Both countries have relied on indirect communication, often brokered by the United States or UNIFIL, the United Nations peacekeeping mission in southern Lebanon.

Lebanon's top political authorities, critical of Hezbollah's decision to fire rockets toward Israel on March 2 in solidarity with Iran, quickly proposed direct talks in a bid to stop the escalation, hoping that Israel would not launch its ground invasion.

Israel did not respond positively until last week, after its deadly bombardment hit several crowded commercial and residential areas in Beirut, sparking an international outcry and triggering threats by Iran that it would end the ceasefire with the United States and Israel.

Lebanese officials have pushed for a truce, which Israel has ruled out. Israel has, however, halted strikes on Lebanon's capital following the bombardment.

"Israel's destruction of Lebanese territories is not the solution, nor will it yield any results," Lebanese President Joseph Aoun said Monday. He came to power vowing to disarm non-state groups, including Hezbollah. "Diplomatic solutions have consistently proven to be the most effective means of resolving armed conflicts globally."

Foreign Minister Gideon Saar on Tuesday denied having disputes with Lebanon and said, "The problem is Hezbollah."

Hezbollah wants a return to the 2024 agreement under which talks were conducted indirectly with the U.S., France and UNIFIL as mediators.

Carney suspends Canada's fuel tax in first act after securing a majority government

By ROB GILLIES Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney on Tuesday suspended the fuel tax in response to the Iran war in his first act after securing a majority government.

Carney said that with fuel prices increasing sharply, he is suspending the federal fuel excise tax from next Monday until Labor Day, Sept. 7. He called it a "responsible, temporary measure" that also will reduce costs for truckers and businesses.

Carney's Liberals now have 174 of the 343 seats in the House of Commons and won't need support from opposition parties to pass legislation after winning three districts that became vacant after last year's election.

Carney's government is the first in Canada's history to switch from a minority to a majority between national elections.

The Liberal Party could stay in power until 2029 after Monday's results.

Carney said he wants to focus on affordability, housing and accelerating major economic projects.

"Voters have placed their trust in our new government's plan," he said.

Carney won Canada's election last year, fueled by public anger over U.S. President Donald Trump's annexation threats. He has vowed to reduce Canada's reliance on the U.S.

Five defections from opposition parties, including four from the main opposition Conservative party, later put Carney's Liberals on the cusp of the majority.

One of those defectors referenced Carney's speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in his decision. In that speech, Carney condemned economic coercion by great powers against smaller countries, and received widespread praise.

Carney, the former head of the Bank of England as well as Canada's central bank, has moved the Liberals to the center-right since replacing Justin Trudeau as prime minister.

Nelson Wiseman, professor emeritus at the University of Toronto, said Trump has been a major factor in Carney's rise to prime minister, but his performance on the world stage has added to his popularity.

"Canadians liked seeing how well he was received at Davos and have been impressed by his travels abroad — he visited 13 countries by last September — in search of new alliances, investments and trade pacts. World leaders want to do business with him," Wiseman said.

Raffle winner thrilled to claim a \$1 million Picasso with a \$117 ticket

By SAMUEL PETREQUIN Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — A Parisian art enthusiast could not believe his luck when he found out Tuesday he'd won a Pablo Picasso painting worth \$1 million with a \$117 raffle ticket.

"How do I check that it's not a hoax?" said Ari Hodara, 58, after organizers called him following the draw at Christie's auction house in the French capital.

Hodara described himself as an art amateur fond of Picasso and said he bought his ticket over the weekend after finding out about the charity raffle by chance during a meal in a restaurant.

"First, I will tell the news to my wife, who has yet to return from work," said Hodara, a sales engineer. "And at first, I think I'll take advantage of it and keep it."

The third iteration of the "1 Picasso for 100 euros" lottery was for Picasso's "Head of a Woman," a portrait of Picasso's longtime muse and partner Dora Maar. The gouache-on-paper was painted by the artist in 1941.

The online draw offered the chance to win a \$1 million portrait by the Spanish artist in aid of Alzheimer's research.

Organizers said all 120,000 tickets were sold worldwide, netting 12 million euros (\$14 million). Of that, 1 million euros will be paid to the Opera Gallery, an international art dealership that owned the painting.

Gilles Dyan, the gallery founder, said he offered a preferential price for the painting, with the public price at 1.45 million euros.

The first raffle in 2013 saw a Pennsylvania man who worked at a fire-sprinkler business win "Man in the Opera Hat," which the Spanish master painted in 1914 during his Cubist period.

The oil-on-canvas "Still Life" was raffled off in 2020 and won by Claudia Borgogno, an accountant in Italy whose son bought her the ticket as a Christmas present.

Painted in 1921, that painting was purchased for the raffle from billionaire art collector David Nahmad, who argued in an interview with The Associated Press that Picasso would have approved of his work being raffled. Picasso died in 1973.

The Alzheimer Research Foundation, the charity raffle's organizer, is based in one of Paris' leading public hospitals and says it has become France's leading private financier of Alzheimer-related medical research since its founding in 2004.

Organizers said the two previous Picasso raffles raised a total of more than 10 million euros for cultural work in Lebanon and water and hygiene programs in Africa.

Attorney for suspect in attack at Sam Altman's home says he was in midst of 'mental health crisis'

By OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — The man accused of trying to kill OpenAI CEO Sam Altman by throwing a Molotov cocktail at his San Francisco home was experiencing a mental health crisis and has been overcharged by prosecutors, his public defender said Tuesday.

Daniel Moreno-Gama made his first court appearance on state charges with disheveled hair and wearing an orange jail uniform. The 20-year-old, whose attorney said is autistic, kept his gaze down during the brief hearing and softly answered "yes" when asked by a judge whether he agreed to continue his arraignment. San Francisco Judge Kenneth Wine ordered him held without bail and set his arraignment for May 5.

Authorities say Moreno-Gama, of Spring, Texas, hurled the incendiary device at Altman's home Friday, setting an exterior gate on fire before fleeing on foot. Less than an hour later, Moreno-Gama went to OpenAI's headquarters about 3 miles (5 kilometers) away and threatened to burn down the building, they said. They said he traveled to the city from Texas.

No one was injured at Altman's home or the company's offices. San Francisco Deputy Public Defender Diamond Ward called the case a "property crime, at best," and said that prosecutors are pursuing higher charges to curry favor for Altman. Moreno-Gama also faces federal charges.

"It is unfair and is unjust for the San Francisco district attorney and the federal government to fear-monger and to exploit the mental illness of a vulnerable, young man by turning a vandalism case into an attempted murder, life exposure case to gain support of a billionaire, and to get political points at the expense of true justice for everyone involved," Ward said.

San Francisco District Attorney Brooke Jenkins disputed that he was overcharged, saying Moreno-Gama carried out a "targeted attack on Mr. Altman" and that prosecutors had evidence to back up the charges. She said prosecutors would act the same whether the victim was a "billionaire or a CEO or any average San Franciscan."

"Regardless of a victim's status, they all deserve justice and they all deserve safety," she said.

Moreno-Gama's parents said in a statement he has never harmed anyone and recently began having mental health issues.

"We have been trying our best to address these issues and get him effective treatment, and we are very concerned for his well-being," they said.

Authorities said Moreno-Gama, who works part-time at a pizzeria and is attending community college, expressed hatred of artificial intelligence in his writings, describing it as a danger to humanity and warning of "impending extinction," according to court filings.

"This was not spontaneous. This was planned, targeted and extremely serious," FBI San Francisco Act-

ing Special Agent in Charge Matt Cobo said during a news conference Monday.

Moreno-Gama is charged in California state court with two counts of attempted murder and attempted arson. He tried to kill both Altman and a security guard at Altman's residence, Jenkins alleged. Officials have not said whether Altman was home at the time, prosecutors said.

Jenkins said the state charges carry penalties ranging from 19 years to life in prison.

On Monday morning, FBI agents went to Moreno-Gama's home in a Houston suburb where they spent several hours before leaving. He has also been charged by federal prosecutors with possession of an unregistered firearm and damage and destruction of property by means of explosives. Those charges carry respective penalties of up to 10 years and 20 years in prison.

"We will treat this as an act of domestic terrorism, and together with our partners, prosecute him to the fullest extent of the law," U.S. Attorney Craig Missakian said.

The document in which Moreno-Gama discussed his opposition to AI also made threats against Altman and executives at other AI companies, officials said.

"If I am going to advocate for others to kill and commit crimes, then I must lead by example and show that I am fully sincere in my message," Moreno-Gama wrote, according to authorities.

Advocacy groups that have issued grave warnings about AI's risks to society condemned the violence.

Anthony Aguirre, president and CEO of the Future of Life Institute, said in a written statement Friday that "violence and intimidation of any kind have no place in the conversation about the future of AI."

Another group, PauseAI, said in a statement that the suspect had no role in the group but joined its forum on the social media platform Discord about two years ago and posted about 34 messages there, none containing explicit calls to violence but one that was flagged as "ambiguous."

Discord said Monday that it has banned Moreno-Gama for "off-platform behavior."

Jury selection starts for Harvey Weinstein's latest retrial in a New York rape case

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — After years of #MeToo infamy, legal peril and prison, Harvey Weinstein is again going on trial on a rape charge in New York City.

Jury selection started Tuesday in the onetime movie mogul's latest retrial, where jurors will weigh — for the third time — whether he raped hairstylist and Jessica Mann in a Manhattan hotel in 2013.

It's a more streamlined proceeding than the array of allegations that were aired at Weinstein's previous trials in New York and Los Angeles. The Oscar-winning producer denies all the accusations and declared in court this winter that he had "acted wrongly, but I never assaulted anyone."

Still, the retrial is expected to last up to six weeks. Questioned about the length of the proceeding and whether they could be fair and impartial about the much-publicized case, more than 80 people asked to be excused during initial screening Tuesday morning. The day ended with no jurors chosen.

The process is scheduled to resume Wednesday with prospective jurors being questioned individually in private about their knowledge of the case and Weinstein. Wider-ranging questioning in court should follow eventually.

A surprise move from prosecutors

In a surprise move before jury selection began, prosecutors said they had a new piece of evidence — a remark that Weinstein allegedly made to a court officer six years ago.

According to Manhattan Assistant District Attorney Candace White, the officer told prosecutors last week that he was present during Weinstein's February 2020 sexual assault conviction — which was later overturned — and heard Weinstein say: "If you had seen these girls, you would have done the exact same thing."

Weinstein's lawyers urged Judge Curtis Farber to keep any mention of the supposed remark out of the upcoming retrial.

"This sounds far-fetched," defense attorney Marc Agnifilo said, also arguing that it emerged too late.

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A subject that was explored in prior trials — a claims fund for women who said Weinstein sexually mistreated them — likely won't come up again. The defense team doesn't intend to raise the subject, Farber said.

A new defense team

Agnifilo and his partners took on the case in February, when longtime Weinstein lawyer Arthur Aidala stepped aside from the retrial to focus on the former studio boss' appeals and civil matters. Both Aidala and Agnifilo are well-known New York defense attorneys, but their litigation styles differ. Aidala is folksy, while Agnifilo is more buttoned-up.

Weinstein wielded significant clout in the entertainment industry, having built his reputation on such critical and popular hits as "Shakespeare in Love," "Pulp Fiction" and "Chocolat." He also became a prominent Democratic donor.

Then a series of sexual harassment and sex assault allegations against Weinstein began to emerge in news media in 2017, propelling the #MeToo movement.

He was criminally charged in New York in 2018 and in Los Angeles two years later.

A tangled series of trials

Weinstein went to trial and was convicted of some — but not all — counts in both cases. His initial New York convictions were overturned, spurring a retrial last year.

The retrial verdict was mixed: Weinstein was convicted of forcing oral sex on production assistant and producer Miriam Haley in 2006, but he was acquitted of forcibly performing oral sex on model-turned-psychotherapist Kaja Sokola. The jury didn't decide on the rape charge involving Mann because the foreperson refused to keep deliberating.

Mann has testified that she had a consensual, on-and-off relationship with the then-married Weinstein. But when he cornered her in a Manhattan hotel room where she was staying on a weekend getaway, she protested, "I don't want to do this," she told jurors. She said he kept making advances and demands until she "just gave up."

Weinstein hasn't testified at any of his trials. His lawyers have contended that he never had non-consensual sex.

At his trials to date, the defense claimed that his accusers accepted his sexual overtures because they wanted his help in show business. The women said Weinstein dangled his Hollywood influence to attract and victimize them.

He's appealing the Los Angeles verdict and is expected to appeal the New York conviction involving Haley. It carries the potential for up to 25 years in prison; no sentencing date has been set.

In this case, the rape charge is a lower-level felony punishable by up to four years behind bars. Weinstein, 73, already has served longer than that.

Weinstein has various health problems and uses a wheelchair. He told the judge in January that his "mental state is collapsing" in New York's notorious Rikers Island jail.

The Associated Press generally does not identify people without their permission if they say they have been sexually assaulted. Haley, Mann and Sokola agreed to be named.

Super Typhoon Sinlaku pounds remote US islands in the Pacific Ocean with ferocious winds

By JOHN SEEWER, KATHY McCORMACK and JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER Associated Press

A super typhoon steadily battered a pair of remote U.S. islands in the Pacific Ocean with ferocious winds and relentless rains, shredding tin roofs and forcing residents to take cover from flying tree limbs.

Super Typhoon Sinlaku pounded the Northern Mariana Islands for hours before daybreak Wednesday, slowing just to inflict more damage across the islands of Tinian and Saipan, home to nearly 50,000 people.

In the village Susupe on Saipan, the wind tore the roof off a commercial building and broke tree branches. A blue sedan lay on its side.

Resident Dong Min Lee shot some video of a car sitting on top of two others in his apartment building's

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parking lot below. The winds also tore off part of his balcony railing.

"I hope people will take an interest and help. The damage is really huge here," Lee said in a Facebook message.

Preliminary reports include a lot of flooding, uprooted trees and downed power lines, said Jaden Sanchez, spokesperson for the Saipan mayor's office. There were no reports of deaths, he said.

Authorities were advising residents to remain indoors and away from strong winds, but Mayor Ramon "RB" Jose Blas Camacho was out in the community assessing the damage, Sanchez said.

The typhoon — the strongest tropical cyclone on Earth this year — was packing sustained winds of up to 150 mph (240 kph) when it made landfall on the islands, the National Weather Service said.

Tropical force winds and torrential rainfall also led to flash flooding on Guam, a U.S. territory to the south with several U.S. military installations and about 170,000 residents, the weather service said. Earlier, it hit the outer islands and atolls of Chuuk in the Federated States of Micronesia.

The American Red Cross and its partners were sheltering more than 1,000 residents across Guam and the Northern Marianas, agency spokesperson Stephanie Fox said.

'Rain was coming through everywhere'

"I'm guessing anything that was made of wood and tin did not survive this," said Glen Hunter, who grew up on Saipan, the largest of the Northern Mariana Islands as well as its capital, known for its resorts, snorkeling and golf.

Hunter, who has weathered numerous typhoons, told The Associated Press this felt like the strongest yet. Rain was seeping into every crevice of his concrete home, and he watched at least three tin roofs fly past his yard, he said.

"It was a losing battle because the rain was coming through everywhere," he said. "Every house is just flooded with water, no matter what type of structure you're in."

Ed Propst, a former lawmaker in Saipan who works in the governor's office, said he heard "banging and clanging through the night."

"We haven't heard of any — knock on wood — deaths so far," he said, attributing that to residents heeding warnings to take shelter if they weren't in a concrete home.

Winds at 75 mph (121 kph) or greater were expected to continue through Wednesday afternoon as the eye of the storm was moving northwest of Saipan and Tinian, said Ken Kleeschulte, acting science and operations officer for the National Weather Service on Guam. Even as winds slowly subside to about 50 mph (80 kph), they will remain too strong for people to safely go outside for at least a day and a half, he said.

Sinlaku will start to curve toward sparsely populated volcanic islands in the far northern Marianas, he said.

Still recovering from a 2018 typhoon

In Guam, where Typhoon Mawar knocked out power for days in 2023, U.S. military officials warned personnel to shelter in place. The military controls about one-third of the land on Guam, a critical hub for U.S. forces in the Pacific.

Tourism-dependent Saipan — the site of one of World War II's bloodiest battles in the Pacific — was still recovering from 2018's Super Typhoon Yutu when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Hunter said. The economy has yet to rebound, he said.

Yutu destroyed 85% of the Saipan campus of Northern Marianas College, said the school's president, Galvin Deleon Guerrero. The institution secured \$100 million in grant funding to rebuild.

"Just as we were finally beginning to recover and rebuild, we get hit with this," he said. "Climate change is real."

He said he worries about people still suffering from the post-traumatic stress of Yutu.

"We are an incredibly resilient people," he said, noting that he's Chamorro, the Indigenous people of the Mariana Islands. "But just because we're resilient doesn't mean that we should be subjected to this on this frequent basis."

Disaster declaration

President Donald Trump approved emergency disaster declarations ahead of the latest storm for Guam and the Mariana Islands. The Federal Emergency Management Agency said it was coordinating support

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across multiple agencies, dispatching nearly 100 FEMA staff as well as other personnel.

Super typhoons are the equivalent of Category 4 or 5 hurricanes in the Atlantic, with winds of at least 150 mph (240 kph). There have been more than 300 super typhoons identified over the past 80 years by the Joint Typhoon Warning Center in Guam.

Typhoons are "very common" in the Pacific, but the peak season is similar to the Atlantic hurricane season, which runs from summer to fall, said Jason Nicholls, AccuWeather's lead international forecaster. "As we've seen this year, you can get tropical systems in the West Pacific any time of year," Nicholls said. "But getting them in April is a little unusual."

Justice Department moves to toss seditious conspiracy convictions of Oath Keepers and Proud Boys

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department on Tuesday asked a federal appeals court to throw out the seditious conspiracy convictions of Proud Boys and Oath Keepers leaders who were sentenced to prison terms for leading members of the far-right extremist groups in attacking the U.S. Capitol to keep President Donald Trump in office over five years ago.

Trump commuted the prison sentences of several Proud Boys and Oath Keepers leaders last January in a sweeping act of clemency for all 1,500-plus defendants charged in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack.

The request by the Justice Department would go a step further and erase all the convictions for extremist group leaders, including Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes, who didn't receive pardons last January.

The move to abandon the convictions represented a stunning reversal from the Biden administration, which hailed the guilty verdicts as a crucial victory in its bid to hold accountable those responsible for what prosecutors described as an attack on the heart of American democracy. It's part of the Trump administration's continued efforts to rewrite the history of the Jan. 6 attack and downplay the violence carried out by the mob of Trump supporters that left more than 100 police officers injured.

In court filings, prosecutors asked the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit to vacate the convictions so that the government can permanently dismiss the indictments.

"The government's motion to vacate in this case is consistent with its practice of moving the Supreme Court to vacate convictions in cases where the government has decided in its prosecutorial discretion that dismissal of a criminal case is in the interests of justice — motions that the Supreme Court routinely grants," prosecutors wrote in a court filing signed by U.S. Attorney Jeanine Pirro.

Juries in Washington, D.C., convicted the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers leaders of orchestrating violent plots to stop the peaceful transfer of power after Trump's 2020 election loss to Democratic President Joe Biden.

The department's dismissal request also includes the convictions of Oath Keepers members Kelly Meggs, Kenneth Harrelson and Jessica Watkins and Proud Boys members Ethan Nordean, Joseph Biggs, Zachary Rehl and Dominic Pezzola.

Other extremist group members, including former Proud Boys national chairman Enrique Tarrío, received pardons from Trump on the first day of his second term in the White House.

Rhodes was sentenced to 18 years in prison after he and several lieutenants were convicted in one of the most consequential cases arising from the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol by a mob of Trump supporters.

Prosecutors said Rhodes and his followers stockpiled guns for possible use by "quick reaction force" teams at a Virginia hotel, but they never deployed the weapons.

Nordean's attorney, Nicholas Smith, said they are grateful to the Justice Department for its "wise decision" in seeking dismissal of the convictions.

"We don't want a precedent that says that any physical confrontation between protesters and law enforcement means a crime akin to treason, such as seditious conspiracy," Smith said.

Former Metropolitan Police Officer Michael Fanone, who was dragged into the mob and suffered a heart attack after a rioter shocked him with a stun gun, was disappointed but not surprised by the latest mile-

stone in the dismantling of Capitol riot prosecutions.

"I would remind Americans that these were traitors to this country," Fanone said. "They planned, incited and carried out an insurrection."

California woman says she was raped by Rep. Eric Swalwell in 2018

By CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A California woman on Tuesday said she was raped by Rep. Eric Swalwell in 2018 and now plans to make a report to law enforcement.

Lonna Drewes said during a news conference that the assault occurred at a hotel in Southern California. She said she had one glass of wine that evening and believes Swalwell drugged her before raping her. Swalwell dropped out of the California governor's race on Sunday and said he would resign from Congress this week following earlier allegations of sexual assault from a different woman.

"I did not consent to any sexual activity," Drewes said.

Attorney Sara Azari released a statement Tuesday on Swalwell's behalf saying he "categorically and unequivocally denies each and every allegation of sexual misconduct and assault that has been leveled against him." She pledged to "pursue every available legal remedy against those responsible for orchestrating this reprehensible campaign of lies."

EDITOR'S NOTE: This story includes discussion of sexual assault. If you or someone you know needs help, please call 1-800-656-4673 for the national sexual assault hotline in the U.S.

Drewes' allegation comes a day after Swalwell said he would resign from Congress following other allegations of sexual misconduct, including at least two other alleged incidents of nonconsensual sex. Other women have accused him of sending them inappropriate messages and nude photos. Swalwell denied the prior accusations of sexual assault but said he had made unspecified errors in judgment.

Drewes said she did not undergo a rape kit but disclosed the alleged assault to people close to her and documented it in her journal. She said she discussed the alleged rape during therapy sessions at a sexual assault center in Connecticut.

Attorney Lisa Bloom said those journal entries, along with text messages and photographs, will be included in the forthcoming report to the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

Drewes said she was working as a model and owned a fashion software company based in Beverly Hills when she met Swalwell. He offered to help her with connections to further her company and knew she had an interest in local politics.

She had met him twice before the night when she says he raped her. That night, the two met at a restaurant opening and were set to attend a political event, she said. On their way to the event, Drewes said Swalwell wanted to stop back at his hotel room to get some paperwork. By the time they reached the room, she said her limbs felt heavy and she felt like she had been drugged.

Swalwell raped her and later choked her, causing her to lose consciousness, she said.

In a letter read on the House floor, Swalwell said his resignation is effective as of 2 p.m. Tuesday.

"I am deeply sorry to my family, staff and constituents for mistakes in judgment I have made in my past. I will fight the serious, false allegations made against me," a clerk said in reading the letter. "However I must take responsibility and ownership for the mistakes I did make."

California Gov. Gavin Newsom has called a June special election to fill his seat.

Swalwell's abrupt downfall followed allegations published in the San Francisco Chronicle and later by CNN.

Ex-Michigan coach Sherrone Moore gets probation for confrontation with woman who disclosed affair

By LARRY LAGE and ED WHITE Associated Press

ANN ARBOR, Mich. (AP) — Former Michigan football coach Sherrone Moore was placed on probation Tuesday for 18 months for a confrontation with his executive assistant soon after he was fired for having an inappropriate relationship with her.

Moore was facing a possible sentence of up to six months in jail after pleading no contest to trespassing and malicious use of a telecom device. But Judge J. Cedric Simpson ordered no time in custody.

He said jail wasn't warranted, though he warned Moore that "all bets are off" if he violates probation. Simpson, too, said his decision was greatly influenced by the ex-coach's wife, Kelli.

Moore, 40, was fired on Dec. 10 after leading the Wolverines for two seasons, following Jim Harbaugh's move to the NFL's Los Angeles Chargers. It was a stunning dismissal at one of college football's most prestigious programs.

Moore was accused that same day of confronting Paige Shiver, with whom he had been having an affair, and blaming her for his firing, even threatening to kill himself with butter knives and kitchen scissors in her apartment. Authorities said she had ended the affair and spoken to school officials about it.

By ordering probation, "I would let Ms. Shiver know that this court is not by any means lessening the impact of those events," the judge said.

"Frankly, Mr. Moore, you had no right to do what you did," he added. "I know that she was placed in fear. It was a traumatic experience that day for you. It was certainly a traumatic experience for her. But you had no right to spread your pain to her."

Shiver did not attend the hearing but released a statement, saying the sentence "does not reflect the harm done to me."

"He broke into my apartment, crying, yelling, enraged, and came at me with knives. I was threatened, and I feared for my life," she said.

Moore was initially charged with felony home invasion, stalking and illegal entry. But Washtenaw County prosecutors agreed to a deal in which he pleaded no contest to two other misdemeanors.

Moore spoke briefly in court, thanking his wife for standing by him but not saying anything about Shiver. Defense lawyer Ellen Michaels told the judge that Moore had received counseling and was focused on his family.

The judge repeatedly praised Kelli Moore. Simpson said he was especially moved by a letter she wrote in support of her husband. He also noted that she was concerned about Moore's mental health when she calmly called police on the day of his firing in search of him.

"The person, quite frankly Mr. Moore, that is saving you from the full wrath of this court is the one you betrayed," Simpson said. "I don't know where your wife Kelli finds her strength."

Moore responded to the judge by nodding, while his wife's eyes welled with tears in the courtroom's front row.

The judge also cited the "courage" of prosecutors by backing off from the initial charges.

"When the charges were filed they were appropriate," Simpson said. "But as with any case, as more facts become known and as more things happen, the facts and the analysis change."

The plea deal came after Michaels planned to aggressively challenge how police gathered and shared information to get an arrest warrant. She argued that police didn't disclose that Moore and Shiver had a working relationship that involved calls and text messages.

Moore did not harm himself on Dec. 10 and was peacefully arrested in a parking lot away from Shiver's apartment.

When the hearing ended, Moore leaned over a courtroom barrier and hugged his wife. Outside the courthouse, he held a Bible in one hand and her hand with the other.

"Sherrone is grateful for this matter to be resolved and he and his wife, Kelli, are ready to move forward with their family and focus on the next chapter," Michaels said.

NFL reporter Dianna Russini resigns from The Athletic after photos published of her with Mike Vrabel

By ROB MAADDI AP Pro Football Writer

NFL reporter Dianna Russini has resigned from The Athletic less than a week after published photos of her and New England Patriots coach Mike Vrabel at an Arizona resort prompted an internal investigation at The New York Times-owned sports outlet.

The New York Post last week published the photos of Vrabel and Russini at the Sedona hotel and said they were taken before the NFL owners meetings that began in Phoenix on March 29.

"I have covered the NFL with professionalism and dedication throughout my career, and I stand behind every story I have ever published. When the Page Six item first appeared, The Athletic supported me unequivocally, expressed confidence in my work and pride in my journalism. For that I am grateful. In the days that followed, unfortunately, commentators in various media have engaged in self-feeding speculation that is simply unmoored from the facts," Russini said in a letter sent Tuesday to Athletic Executive Editor Steven Ginsberg and obtained by The Associated Press.

"Moreover, this media frenzy is hurtling forward without regard for the review process The Athletic is trying to complete. It continues to escalate, fueled by repeated leaks, and I have no interest in submitting to a public inquiry that has already caused far more damage than I am willing to accept. Rather than allowing this to continue, I have decided to step aside now — before my current contract expires on June 30. I do so not because I accept the narrative that has been constructed around this episode, but because I refuse to lend it further oxygen or to let it define me or my career."

Russini joined The Athletic in 2023 after nearly a decade at ESPN, where she held various roles, including "SportsCenter" anchor, NFL analyst and insider. She hosted a podcast for The Athletic and made appearances on their video platform.

Vrabel and Russini, who are both married, released statements to the Post after publication of the photos downplaying what the photos depict.

Russini said they "don't represent the group of six people who were hanging out during the day."

Vrabel told the newspaper: "Those photos show a completely innocent interaction and any suggestion otherwise is laughable."

Vrabel didn't attend New England's pre-draft news conference on Monday.

The New York Times reported Saturday that the digital outlet was investigating Russini's conduct.

That decision came after Ginsberg previously told the Post that the photos "lacked essential context" and lauded her work with The Athletic.

"When this situation was brought to our attention last week, there were clear concerns, but we received a detailed explanation and it was our instinct to support and defend a colleague while we continued to review the matter," Ginsberg said in a note to staff on Tuesday announcing Russini's resignation. "As additional information emerged, new questions were raised that became part of our investigation. While our investigation into Dianna's conduct was ongoing, she chose to resign."

Ginsberg said the review of Russini's work will continue.

Vrabel, who won three Super Bowls as a player with New England, is preparing for his second season as coach of the Patriots. He was the AP NFL Coach of the Year after leading the team to a 14-3 finish last season, which ended with a Super Bowl loss to Seattle. Vrabel previously won the AP NFL Coach of the Year award with Tennessee in 2021.

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Wall Street rallies to the edge of its all-time high as oil prices ease

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. stocks rallied to the edge of an all-time high Tuesday, and oil prices eased as hopes climbed that the United States and Iran may try again on talks to end their war and avoid a worst-case scenario for the global economy.

The S&P 500 added 1.2% to its leap from the day before, and the index at the heart of many 401(k) accounts is just 0.2% below its record set in January.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 317 points, or 0.7%, and the Nasdaq composite climbed 2%. They followed gains for stock markets worldwide as diplomats worked through back channels to arrange a new round of talks between the United States and Iran.

If talks succeed and the war ends up being only a temporary setback for the global economy, rather than a new normal of very high oil prices and inflation, investors can turn their attention back to what matters most for stock prices: How much money are companies making?

Positive trends there had stock markets worldwide doing well before the war began, and analysts see continued growth ahead, for now at least.

Lower oil prices help bring down costs for all kinds of businesses, and the price for a barrel of Brent crude to be delivered in June fell 4.6% to settle at \$94.79 Tuesday.

While that's still above its roughly \$70 price from before the war began in late February, it's well below the \$119 peak it has hit when worries about the war have been at their heights.

To be sure, hope has often swung quickly into doubt since the war began, which has caused extreme and sudden reversals in financial markets. Much of the stress has been due to the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow waterway that's the main avenue for crude oil produced in the Persian Gulf area to reach customers worldwide. Blockages there have kept oil off the global market, which has in turn driven up its price.

And that has meant a blast of higher inflation. In the United States, inflation at the wholesale level accelerated to 4% in March from 3.4% the month before, according to the latest data released Tuesday. That was actually better than the 4.6% rate economists expected.

The effect is worldwide. Global inflation this year looks set to accelerate to 4.4% from 4.1% in 2025, according to the International Monetary Fund, which had earlier thought inflation would slow to 3.8%.

The IMF on Tuesday also downgraded its forecast for global economic growth to 3.1% this year from the 3.3% it had forecast in January.

On Wall Street, strong profit reports from companies are helping to make up for such worries. Over the long term, stock prices tend to follow the path of corporate profits, and analysts are forecasting S&P 500 companies will report solid growth of more than 12% for the most recent quarter, according to FactSet.

Optimism remains high enough that analysts have raised their estimates since the war began for S&P 500 profits over the first six months of the year, according to strategists at Morgan Stanley.

BlackRock gained 3%, and Citigroup rose 2.6% Tuesday after the financial companies reported stronger profit and revenue for the latest quarter than analysts expected.

JPMorgan Chase likewise delivered a better-than-expected quarter, but its stock dipped 0.8% as CEO Jamie Dimon said bank officials cannot predict how the "increasingly complex set of risks" will play out given so much uncertainty.

Amazon climbed 3.8% after saying it would buy Globalstar, a mobile satellite services company, for \$90 per share in either cash or Amazon stock. Globalstar jumped 9.6%.

Software companies also rallied for a second day, recovering more of their sharp losses from earlier in the year on worries they could be made obsolete by artificial-intelligence technology. AppLovin rose 3.9%, and an ETF from iShares tracking the software industry added 1%.

That in turn helped private-credit companies recover. These companies have lent money to software businesses and others that may be under threat from AI, and some have seen a rush of investors trying to pull out their money.

Blue Owl Capital rose 8.5% to trim its loss for the year so far below 39%. Ares Management climbed 5.6%, and Apollo Global Management rose 4.4%.

They helped offset a 5.7% drop for Wells Fargo, which reported weaker revenue for the latest quarter than analysts expected.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 81.14 points to 6,967.38. The Dow Jones Industrial Average gained 317.74 to 48,535.99, and the Nasdaq composite climbed 455.35 to 23,639.08.

In stock markets abroad, indexes rose across much of Europe and Asia. South Korea's Kospi jumped 2.7%, and Japan's Nikkei 225 rose 2.4% for two of the bigger gains.

In the bond market, Treasury yields eased as the fall for oil prices took some of the pressure off inflation. The yield on the 10-year Treasury fell to 4.25% from 4.30% late Monday.

The Kennedy Center wants to show that the building really needs a renovation

By STEVEN SLOAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Kennedy Center's new leadership wants to prove to critics that the building is damaged beyond simple repair. It's starting with Congress.

Matt Flocia, the performing arts institution's new executive director and chief operating officer, is leading a series of tours this month that show water damage and intrusion to expansion joints, marble slabs and exterior pavers. Participants are guided through the building's water and HVAC systems, as well as the parking garages and loading docks that are said to need repairs.

The sessions began earlier this month while Congress was in recess and included staff for a bipartisan group of lawmakers, including Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries, the top Democrats on Capitol Hill. A representative for Washington Mayor Muriel Bowser was also included on the tour.

Similar access has been provided for several corporate and individual donors and in the coming weeks, Flocia is expected to provide tours for the lawmakers themselves and members of the media.

Assessing a suddenly controversial operation

Once one of Washington's relatively few apolitical spaces, the Kennedy Center has become a source of controversy during President Donald Trump's second term. Shortly after returning to office, Trump ousted the institution's previous leadership and replaced it with a handpicked board of directors.

The president's name was added to the building's facade and its programming took a Trump-friendly turn, serving as a venue for events such as the premiere of first lady Melania Trump's documentary, "Melania."

Trump's move to shutter the building for two years starting in July, which was approved by the board last month, has spurred lawsuits and an outcry that the closure is merely a response to plunging sales as artists canceled Kennedy Center performances in droves.

The tours are intended to cut through that and show that the Kennedy Center, which began construction in 1965, is in genuine need of a fundamental update.

"As the July closure approaches, the Trump Kennedy Center is leading with transparency and making sure Congress and the public understand what's at stake and why the work can't wait," Flocia said in a statement.

In addition to staff for Schumer, Jeffries, and Bowser, the recent tour included representatives for Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., Sens. Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va., Mark Warner, D-Va., Susan Collins, R-Maine, and Sheldon Whitehouse, D-R.I., along with Reps. Sam Graves, R-Mo., and Rick Larsen, D-Wash.

By virtue of their positions, these lawmakers are ex officio members of the Kennedy Center's board. Kennedy Center spokesperson Roma Daravi said working with both parties was a "top priority" as the institution implements Trump's vision for the renovation.

None of the participants discussed the tour on the record.

Need for repairs is not disputed

Trump secured nearly \$257 million from Congress to repair the Kennedy Center. Those who are arguing

against its closure haven't disputed the need for routine maintenance and repairs. They say the more substantial changes Trump has hinted at are in the works and should go through the typical review process that governs many major projects in the nation's capital.

Trump has suggested changes at the Kennedy Center could be so dramatic that the steel supporting the structure could be "fully exposed."

According to a lawsuit filed last month against Trump, the Kennedy Center and others in the administration, "Demolition, new construction, major reconstruction, major renovation, or major aesthetic transformation of the Kennedy Center would permanently destroy historic fabric, degrade the monumental core's vistas and public grounds, and compromise the Kennedy Center's memorial purpose and architectural integrity, causing permanent, irreversible harm that no subsequent remedy can fully undo."

The Kennedy Center is entering a critical period before its anticipated July closure, which will produce staff reductions.

In the meantime, the Kennedy Center is still hosting shows, including the musical "Chicago," which Trump attended this month. Performances of "Moulin Rouge! The Musical" are on the calendar from June 18 through July 5. Comedian Bill Maher will be presented the prestigious Mark Twain Prize for American Humor on June 28, just before the closure begins.

The Kennedy Center is part of Trump's broader effort to leave a lasting imprint on the Washington cityscape. He demolished the East Wing of the White House last year and wants to replace it with a ballroom, an effort that is also tangled in litigation.

The president also unveiled plans on Friday for an arch that would stand between the Lincoln Memorial in the east and Arlington National Cemetery toward the west and within a traffic circle connecting Washington with northern Virginia.

Postal Service union launches ad campaign promoting mail voting as Trump assails the method

By SUSAN HAIGH Associated Press

A major U.S. Postal Service union is launching a national TV ad campaign promoting voting by mail, stepping into a politically charged debate as skepticism about mail-in ballots has been raised by President Donald Trump and others.

The 30-second message features a variety of voters, among them a busy farmer and a flight attendant, explaining why they cast their ballots by mail. Sponsored by the 200,000-member American Postal Workers Union, the advertising campaign announced Tuesday will begin airing this week in Ohio, where Union Army soldiers during the Civil War cast the first mail ballots in 1864. It will then move to other states.

The ad ends with the message: "Vote by mail — keep it, protect it, expand it." It comes two weeks after Trump signed an executive order that seeks to create a nationwide list of verified eligible voters and subsequently bar postal workers from sending absentee ballots to those who are not on each state's approved list.

The order was met swiftly with lawsuits and opposition from postal workers. The National Rural Letter Carriers' Association said USPS is "not equipped or authorized to decide who is or is not entitled to vote" and pushing it into such a role "risks politicizing one of the nation's most trusted public institutions." The union also said it threatens confidence in the mail and in elections.

Jonathan Smith, president of American Postal Workers, said his union's TV ad was produced before Trump's executive order was issued, not in response to it. An executive order on elections that Trump signed last year also targeted mail ballots by seeking to require they be returned by Election Day, even though more than a dozen states allow a grace period.

Smith said the union wants to encourage people to continue voting by mail. But he expressed concern about the potential ramifications of requiring postal workers to determine who should receive an absentee ballot and who should not.

"It is our position that it is not the job of the postal workers to verify voter eligibility," he said. "It is our job to move mail from one destination to the next. He added: "We do not want to be politicized."

Trump's latest election executive order is already facing lawsuits by various groups, including Democrats in Washington who argue that the Constitution empowers states and Congress, not the president, to set election rules.

Trump, who as recently as last month voted by mail, has publicly bashed mail voting. Mail voting has existed for more than a century and had steadily been increasing in popularity in both Democratic- and Republican-led states until 2020, when Trump started to target the method, levying baseless claims of mass fraud. It has now become less popular among Republicans.

A report by the Brookings Institution published in 2025 found that cases of mail voting fraud occurred in only a tiny fraction of total mail ballots cast — about four cases out of every 10 million mail ballots.

A White House spokeswoman, Abigail Jackson, responded to the ad campaign by saying Trump "will do everything in his power to defend the safety and security of American elections and to ensure that only American citizens are voting in them."

Voting by noncitizens also is rare and, when caught, is punishable as a potential felony and with the possibility of deportation.

The Postal Service did not return a request for comment.

The union's TV ad campaign is intended to be a direct message to voters, not the president, Smith said.

"Our message is to America: Vote by mail is efficient, it's safe, and it's successful. Period," he said. "This is educating the American people that you can use vote by mail and you can be guaranteed that your voice will be heard and your vote will be counted."

Appeals court orders judge to end contempt investigation of Trump administration deportation flights

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal judge must end his "intrusive" contempt investigation of the Trump administration for failing to comply with an order over flights carrying Venezuelan migrants to El Salvador last year, a divided appeals court panel ruled Tuesday.

Chief Judge James Boasberg abused his discretion in forging ahead with criminal contempt proceedings stemming from the March 2025 deportation flights, according to the majority opinion by a three-judge panel from U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit.

The ruling is the latest twist in a yearlong legal saga that has become a flashpoint in President Donald Trump's mass deportation campaign. The White House has portrayed Boasberg as a biased judge who overstepped his authority.

Trump's administration has a "clear and indisputable" right to the termination of the contempt proceedings, Circuit Judge Neomi Rao wrote in the court's majority opinion.

"The legal error at the heart of these criminal contempt proceedings demonstrates why further investigation by the district court is an abuse of discretion," Rao wrote. "Criminal contempt is available only for the violation of an order that is clear and specific. (Boasberg's March 2025 order) did not clearly and specifically bar the government from transferring plaintiffs into Salvadoran custody."

Lawyers for the deported migrants will ask the full circuit court to review the panel's decision, according to plaintiffs' attorney Lee Gelernt of the American Civil Liberties Union. Gelernt said the majority opinion is "a blow to the rule of law."

"Our system is built on the executive branch, including the president, respecting court orders. In this case there is no longer any question that the Trump administration willfully violated the court's order," Gelernt said in a statement.

Rao was nominated by Trump, a Republican. Boasberg, chief judge of the district court in Washington, D.C., was nominated by Democratic President Barack Obama.

On March 15, 2025, Boasberg issued a temporary restraining order barring the administration from

transferring a group of Venezuelan migrants to El Salvador under an 18th century law. After the order was entered, two planeloads of migrants protected by the order departed from the U.S. on their way to El Salvador, where they were locked up in one of the world's most violent prisons. The administration said then- Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem was responsible for the transfer decision.

Boasberg has said the Trump administration may have acted in bad faith by trying to rush Venezuelan migrants out of the country in defiance of his order. He said he gave the administration "ample opportunity to rectify or explain their actions" but concluded that "none of their responses has been satisfactory."

Last year, the Justice Department filed a misconduct complaint accusing Boasberg of making improper public comments about Trump and his administration. Trump has called for impeaching Boasberg. In a rare rebuke, Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts publicly rejected calls for Boasberg's impeachment.

The case is assigned to Rao and Circuit Judges Justin Walker and J. Michelle Childs. Walker, also a Trump nominee, wrote a separate opinion concurring with Rao's. Childs, who was nominated by Democratic President Joe Biden, dissented from the majority.

Childs said the court's majority has trampled on Boasberg's authority "in a way that will affect not only these contempt proceedings but will also echo in future proceedings against all litigants."

"Now, any litigant can argue, based on their preferred interpretation of a court's order, that they did not commit contempt before contempt findings are even made," Childs wrote in her 80-page dissent.

WNBA Commissioner Cathy Engelbert says league is looking to play overseas in 2027

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — As the WNBA is racing through free agency, Commissioner Cathy Engelbert is already looking overseas.

Engelbert said before the draft Monday night that the league is looking to play a game outside North America for the first time in 2027. The WNBA expanded to Toronto this season, its first franchise outside the United States.

"We're heavily looking at that," Engelbert said of playing either an exhibition or regular-season game overseas. "Obviously this year we have the FIBA World Cup. Next year we expect that we'll do something outside of North America as a true global game."

The league welcomed its 2026 draft class days after a historic free agency period opened that included its first million-dollar contracts.

"I'm pretty emotional seeing 23 million-dollar contracts signed only two days into free agency," Engelbert said. "Now these players can build real generational wealth."

Commissioner declines to discuss her future

Engelbert deflected a question about her future as commissioner.

"I do crack up, everyone's focused on me and you should be focused on the hundreds and thousands of women who run this league outside of myself," she said.

Engelbert went back at the reporter, asking, "I wonder if you would ask that of a man?"

The commissioner went on to say she was "thrilled with the trajectory, growth and was really looking forward to the next few years."

Connecticut Sun sale

Engelbert said the Board of Governors still needs to approve the sale of the Connecticut Sun to Tilman Fertitta, owner of the NBA's Houston Rockets.

She said specifics of the move from Connecticut to Houston might be better discussed by the Rockets group and the franchise in the future.

Engelbert said she hoped Connecticut fans would still support the team this season.

"Great basketball state for women's basketball, some would call it the center of women's basketball," she said.

CBA close to finalized

The league's new collective bargaining agreement still needs to get finished with the long form sheet. Engelbert estimated its length at 400 to 500 pages and said it will be finished soon. The deal was transformational with record salary increases, housing adjustments for players, 401k contributions and money given to former players.

Officiating task force

The WNBA started a state-of-the-game task force that included a subgroup on officiating to help improve the quality of play on the court. Engelbert said the group received input from players, the union executive committee, college coaches, general managers and head coaches.

"You'll see some changes around physicality this year," she said. "All sides will get used to it and that will play out over the year. It's going to be a physical game, we got to draw lines around physicality."

Condensed schedule

It's been a busy two weeks for the WNBA with the labor deal completed so late. Free agency opened up a week ago and a flurry of players have signed over the last few days. Still, 80% of players were free agents this offseason and there are still many that need to sign. Training camps open on Sunday with the regular season tipping off May 8.

7-Eleven expects to close hundreds of its stores in North America this year

NEW YORK (AP) — Convenience chain 7-Eleven expects to close hundreds of its locations this year.

According to earnings filings published last week, 7-Eleven's North American operator plans to close 645 stores in the 2026 fiscal year — outpacing the 205 locations it forecasts it will open during that same time.

Seven & i Holdings Co., the Japan-based parent of the convenience chain, noted that these closures "include the conversion to wholesale fuel stores." Financial documents show that 7-Eleven Inc. has steadily opened new wholesale fuel stores in North America over recent years, which accounted for more than 900 locations as of December 2025.

The company did not immediately explain the closures or specify which locations could be impacted. The Associated Press reached out for further information.

According to the company's website, there are over 86,000 7-Eleven stores across 19 countries today. 7-Eleven Inc., the brand's North American operator based in Texas, oversees more than 13,000 locations in the U.S. and Canada.

The convenience giant has closed hundreds of underperforming locations over the years, and the latest cuts arrive as higher prices strain consumers worldwide. The U.S. and Israel's war against Iran has especially rattled energy markets, with drivers now facing soaring gas prices.

Consumers were facing stubborn inflation even before the war. In North America specifically, Seven & i noted in its April 9 report, "although the economy remained robust, personal consumption also began to soften" for the 2025 fiscal year — "particularly among low-income households, as inflation continued to weigh on spending."

Openings for Seven & i subsidiaries outside of North America are set to outpace the stores they're closing — including Seven-Eleven Japan, which expects to close 350 stores and open 550 locations, per financial filings.

Seven & i expects its revenue to fall 9.4% for the current fiscal year, totaling a projected nearly 9.45 trillion yen (about \$59.5 billion).

The company has been looking for new opportunities for growth, and last year outlined a wider transformation plan aimed at boosting its convenience store offerings. Among goals, Seven & i has said it would invest in more fresh food offerings and expand its "7NOW" delivery service.

The changes also arrive under new leadership. Stephen Hayes Dacus became Seven & i's CEO last spring.

The Trump and Leo chronicles: A president and a pope square off over Iran and its aftermath

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

Pope Leo XIV, a studious and soft-spoken cleric, and Donald Trump, an unapologetically bellicose and pugilistic politician, have long been on a rhetorical collision course. Now their disagreement over the war in Iran has escalated in spectacular fashion, and their comments show how differently each see the conflict and its impact.

On social media, Trump said Leo was “Weak” and captive to the “Radical Left,” even suggesting that Leo somehow owed his position to Trump. The pope has declared Trump’s threats toward Iran “truly unacceptable” and pointed his flock to biblical text and church doctrine on war and peace, explaining that his purpose is not about Trump at all.

“I’m not afraid of the Trump administration,” Leo said Monday on the way to Africa, “or of speaking out loudly about the message of the Gospel, which is what the Church works for.”

It’s a spectacle involving the world’s two biggest megaphones, both held by Americans for the first time. Here is how they got to this point.

Before the papacy, Robert Prevost did not mince words

WHAT HE SAID: When Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, the future pope was a bishop in Peru. He did not shy away from assigning clear blame to Moscow. On a Peruvian show “Weekly Expression,” Prevost described an “imperialist invasion in which Russia wants to conquer territory for reasons of power given Ukraine’s strategic location.”

The clip resurfaced in Italian media soon after he was elected pope on May 8, 2025.

In early 2025, then-Cardinal Prevost used social media to share a news analyses that criticized U.S. Vice President JD Vance, a converted Catholic, for justifying harsh immigration policy by arguing that Christianity sets a pecking order of caring for others, putting one’s family, immediate community and fellow citizens above foreigners.

“JD Vance is wrong: Jesus doesn’t ask us to rank our love for others,” read the headline that the future pope shared.

CONTEXT AND WHY IT MATTERS: Catholic bishops comment often in their local media, and some achieve considerable influence. But they vary widely in how detailed they are about public policy and politics. Many stick to broad statements about church doctrine and values and avoid taking stands at odds with individual politicians. With his comments in Peru and then his rare retweet as a cardinal in Rome, Prevost showed he kept abreast of world affairs and was willing to be quite direct in his critiques.

Trump celebrated the ‘Great Honor’ of Pope Leo’s election

WHAT HE SAID: “Congratulations to Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost, who was just named Pope,” Trump posted on Truth Social on May 8, 2025. “It is such an honor to realize that he is the first American Pope. What excitement, and what a Great Honor for our Country. I look forward to meeting Pope Leo XIV. It will be a very meaningful moment!”

Trump later said at the White House that “we were a little bit surprised and very happy” with Leo’s election.

By Monday, he was using Truth Social to take credit for Leo’s election: “He wasn’t on any list to be Pope, and was only put there by the Church because he was an American, and they thought that would be the best way to deal with President Donald J. Trump.”

WHY IT MATTERS: Trump sees Leo in terms of nationalistic pride and loyalty. The immediate look toward meeting Leo (something that still hasn’t happened) reflected his typical embrace of power and celebrity, even when it isn’t a natural political fit. Further, Trump’s takes do not reflect any nuance about Leo’s origins or the Vatican’s relationship with the U.S.

The College of Cardinals historically has viewed the U.S. with some skepticism — specifically because of how Washington’s military and economic policies have affected the world, especially poor nations, and with a general reluctance to grant the papacy to someone from the world’s preeminent superpower.

Leo grew up, was educated and then ordained in the U.S. but spent decades as a church leader elsewhere,

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including in poor areas of South America. "He was the least American of the Americans," said Steven Millies, a professor at Chicago's Catholic Theological Union, where a young Leo earned his master of divinity.

From the start, Pope Leo reflected church teachings on war and peace

WHAT HE SAID: "Peace be with you all ... the first greeting of the risen Christ, the Good Shepherd who gave his life for the flock of God."

Those were Leo's first words from the balcony of St. Peter's. When he returned to the loggia for his first Sunday blessing, he addressed the Russian war on Ukraine and violence between Israel and Gaza, decrying a "third world war in pieces." The following Monday, Leo opened an audience with journalists by quoting Jesus. "In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus proclaimed: 'Blessed are the peacemakers,'" the pontiff said.

WHY IT MATTERS: Leo's earliest statements all emphasized "peace" as a central message of Jesus — and previewed a likely theme of his papacy. Adding mentions of Ukraine, Russia, Israel and Palestine affirmed his willingness to go beyond theory and apply doctrine to what's happening to people around the world.

The pope was careful about any US branding

WHAT HE SAID: Just as important as the words of his opening papal statements on peace were the languages the polyglot Leo used: none English.

At his introduction to the world from St. Peter's Square, Leo opened in Italian and then used Spanish to address Peruvian Catholics and citizens where he'd served. Leo's Sunday blessing was in Italian. He briefly greeted the journalist assembly in English, with the obvious inflection of a Chicago native, but then quickly transitioned to Italian for his remarks. Even in recent encounters with reporters, Leo has opened in Italian before then answering in English.

WHY IT MATTERS: Latin and Italian are the official languages of the Vatican so it's no surprise that Leo speaks the local vernacular. But it's a conscious choice for him to use his fluent Italian and Spanish. It underscores that he's the leader of a global institution with 1.4 billion followers.

"He doesn't want to be perceived, I think, as coming from the American side or as relying on his authority as American," said Catholic University professor William Barbieri. "He wants to speak in the name of the church."

Holy Week and Easter revealed a chasm

WHAT THEY SAID: Trump escalated threats to Iran around Easter, when Christians celebrate the story of Jesus' resurrection. Leo used his Palm Sunday message to call Jesus the "King of Peace" and say God "does not listen to the prayers of those who wage war, but rejects them, saying: 'Even though you make many prayers, I will not listen: your hands are full of blood.'"

Trump welcomed conservative religious leaders to the White House for a Holy Week observance. His spiritual adviser Paula White compared the president to Jesus, saying they're both persecuted figures who endured.

In Rome, Leo washed the feet of others, as the story of the Last Supper records Jesus doing for his disciples. Speaking to reporters, Leo named Trump directly for the first time and said he hoped the president would seek an "off-ramp" in Iran. On Easter, Trump threatened widespread bombing of Iran's civilian infrastructure and eradication of a "whole civilization." Leo called that threat "truly unacceptable."

WHY IT MATTERS: Their starkly different viewpoints and personalities, combined with the gravity of the Iran war, finally stripped away any pretense or possibility that Trump and Leo could avoid engaging directly.

Trump is still treating Pope Leo as a domestic political rival

WHAT THEY SAID: In Trump's post Sunday blasting Leo as "weak," among other things, the president said, "I don't want a Pope who criticizes the President of the United States because I'm doing exactly what I was elected, IN A LANDSLIDE, to do." (Trump's 2024 victory was by no means a landslide.) He added that Leo should "focus on being a Great Pope, not a Politician."

Leo, meanwhile, said again that he's not speaking as a politician.

"To put my message on the same plane as what the president has attempted to do here, I think is not understanding what the message of the Gospel is," Leo told The Associated Press aboard the papal flight to Algeria. "And I'm sorry to hear that but I will continue on what I believe is the mission of the church in the world today."

WHY IT MATTERS: It's all a rare exercise for the papacy, whose occupants often comment on global affairs without specifically naming secular politicians. And while Trump routinely lashes out at anyone he perceives as an enemy, these dynamics are uncommon for the president, too: This time, Trump is picking a fight with someone who does not accept the president's terms and faces no measurable political pressure to do so.

Trump promised tax relief, but polling shows most Americans still think they're overpaying

By LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Most Americans still think their taxes are too high, according to recent polls, even after last year's tax law fulfilled several of President Donald Trump's tax-related campaign promises.

In fact, a new Fox News poll indicates people are more upset about taxes than they were last year. The findings from the survey, which was conducted in late March, are another sign that Americans are on edge about their personal finances as the U.S. experiences a spike in inflation and sluggish economic growth. Other polling finds that frustration goes beyond personal tax obligations, with many believing that wealthy people and corporations are not paying their fair share, while others worry about government waste.

The surveys come after Trump and Republicans passed a massive tax and spending cut bill last year. The legislation enacted a range of tax breaks, including a boosted child tax credit and new tax deductions for tips and overtime. Tax refunds are up this season, and many households are expected to see more income from the Republicans' tax legislation, but the Congressional Budget Office estimated it will ultimately give the largest benefits to the richest Americans.

Republicans have touted the law as evidence that they are making life more affordable for working families. But polling shows that many Americans may not be feeling the benefits, especially as their tax refunds get eaten up by higher prices.

Most say taxes are too high

About 7 in 10 registered voters say the taxes they pay are "too high," according to the Fox News poll. That's up from about 6 in 10 last year. The poll shows heightened concern among very liberal voters and Democratic men, but there has also been a sizable increase among groups that Republicans want to court ahead of the midterm elections, such as moderates, rural voters and white voters without a college degree.

Discontent about taxes has been rising for the past few years. Recent polling from Gallup, conducted in March, found about 6 in 10 U.S. adults say the amount of federal income tax they have to pay is "too high," a finding that's been largely consistent in the annual poll since 2023. That's approaching the level of unhappiness found in Gallup's polling from the 1980s through the 1990s, before President George W. Bush's 2001 and 2003 tax cuts.

Now, about half of Democrats and about 6 in 10 Republicans say their federal income taxes are too high. Republicans tend to view their tax bill more negatively than Democrats, but Gallup's polling shows that this gap often shrinks when a Republican is president.

Many believe the rich aren't paying enough in taxes

Most Americans are troubled by the belief that some wealthy people and corporations don't pay their fair share of taxes, according to a Pew Research Center poll conducted in January. About 6 in 10 Americans said each of those notions bothers them "a lot," a measure that is largely unchanged in recent years.

By contrast, only about 4 in 10 U.S. adults in that poll said the amount they personally pay in taxes bothers them a lot.

About 8 in 10 Democrats are bothered "a lot" by the feeling that some corporations and rich people aren't paying their fair share, the Pew survey found, compared to about 4 in 10 Republicans. Government spending is a bigger issue for Republicans, according to the Fox News poll, which found that 75% of registered voters — and a similar share of Republican voters — say "almost all" or "a great deal" of government funding is wasteful and inefficient.

That points to a perception problem for many Americans. Even if their own tax bill is manageable, the

idea that the wealthy are underpaying — or that the government is wasting their dollars — bothers many. About half of Americans, 49%, in the Gallup poll say the income tax they will pay this year is “not fair,” which is in line with the record high from 2023.

Broad unhappiness with Trump’s tax approach

Americans’ tax frustration was rising before Trump re-entered the White House, but it’s still a problem for the president’s party — especially if Americans are not feeling the relief that he promised.

The Fox News poll found that about 6 in 10 registered voters, 64%, say they disapprove of how Trump is handling taxes, up from 53% last April. Disapproval has risen most sharply among independents, but also among Democrats and Republicans.

This aligns with a broader feeling that Trump isn’t doing enough to address inflation. Most Americans said Trump had hurt the cost of living “a lot” or “a little” in his second term, according to an AP-NORC poll conducted in January. Roughly 9 in 10 Democrats and about 6 in 10 independents said Trump has had a negative impact on the cost of living.

Pope Leo XIV in Algeria walks in footsteps of his spiritual father, St. Augustine

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ANNABA, Algeria (AP) — Pope Leo XIV walked Tuesday in the footsteps of his spiritual father, St. Augustine, making a pilgrimage to the archaeological ruins in Algeria where the fifth-century titan of early Christianity lived, died and wrote some of the most important works in Western thought.

Leo’s visit to Annaba, the modern-day Hippo, was a spiritual homecoming for the American pope on his second full day in Algeria. He arrived Monday on a first-ever papal visit, against the backdrop of his calls for peace that have sparked a feud with U.S. President Donald Trump over the war in Iran. It’s the first stop on Leo’s four-country Africa tour.

The pope arrived at the ruins in a rainstorm and with tight security, with sharpshooters positioned around the site and policemen stationed every few yards (meters) along roads leading to it.

Leo prayed under a tent looking out over the ruins of the ancient Roman city, including its theater, market and basilica where Augustine preached and the adjoining baptistry. In a sign of peace, he planted an olive tree and watched as white doves were set free.

Accompanied by the current head of his Augustinian religious order, the Rev. Joseph Farrell, Leo then walked amid the muddy ruins for a few minutes, pausing to listen to an Algerian choir.

Leo proclaimed himself a “son of St. Augustine” on the night of his election and has cited Augustine prolifically in his first year, making clear that he’s the guiding inspiration of Leo’s pontificate. For this trip, Leo is focusing on Augustine as a bridge-builder as he aims to press a message of peace and Christian-Muslim coexistence.

“God’s heart is torn apart by wars, violence, injustice and lies,” Leo later told a small gathering of nuns and elderly people in Annaba.

The visit also draws attention to the North African origins of Augustine, who spent only five years in Italy but is often seen through a Eurocentric lens as one of the greatest Western thinkers of Christianity for his writings on truth, evil, creation and grace.

Leo’s Augustinian religious order was founded in Italy in the 13th century, inspired by the saint.

A life in North Africa, looking to Rome

St. Augustine was born in 354 to a Berber mother and Roman father in Thagaste, today the Algerian city of Souk Ahras near the border with Tunisia. At the time, the swath of North Africa was part of the Roman Empire, including Carthage in today’s Tunisia, where Augustine was educated and taught rhetoric.

He left North Africa for Rome in 383 and then Milan, where he converted to Christianity. He returned to his homeland soon thereafter, founded a monastery at Hippo where he developed the rule of his order in use today, emphasizing community life. He became a bishop and in Hippo wrote some of the most important works in the Western canon, including “Confessions” and “The City of God.”

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A new book, "Augustine the African," by Catherine Conybeare, an Augustine scholar at Bryn Mawr college in Pennsylvania, explores Augustine from his perspective: As a North African, looking to Rome as the center of his universe but feeling insecure there about his Punic-accented Latin.

"One of the most important thinkers in the Western intellectual tradition actually came from Africa, spent almost his whole life in Africa," Conybeare told The Associated Press. "How does that change things?"

"Of course, because his successors — the people who carried on his heritage — were in Europe, they got to tell the story," she said. And Europe got his body: After Augustine died in Hippo in 430, his body was taken eventually to Pavia, Italy, though a forearm remains in the basilica dedicated to him in Annaba.

In welcoming Leo, President Abdelmadjid Tebboune expressed the "immense pride" Algerians feel over St. Augustine. He called him "a cherished son of this land, which having been his first cradle, proudly became his initial resting place."

A personal visit for Leo

Leo made clear en route to Algeria and in remarks to Algerian authorities how deeply personal and important this visit is to him, because of his spiritual connection to St. Augustine. He had visited twice before, while he was superior of the Augustinian order.

"This journey, which is very special for several reasons, was supposed to be the first of my pontificate," Leo told reporters on the papal plane. "As early as last May, I had said that on my first journey, I would like to visit Africa. Several people immediately suggested Algeria because of St. Augustine."

In the end, other trips intervened, but he kept the appointment.

The saint, he said, represents "a very important bridge in interreligious dialogue" that the world could use today.

"We must always seek bridges to build peace and reconciliation," he said. "This journey, then, truly represents a valuable opportunity to continue with the same voice, with the same message, that we wish to convey: to promote peace, reconciliation, respect and consideration for all peoples."

Also Tuesday, Leo was visiting a small community of Augustinians in Annaba. He was finishing the day by celebrating Mass at the Basilica of St. Augustine, the 19th century basilica overlooking the ruins of Hippo which contains the relic of the saint. Thousands of pilgrims visit the basilica each year, including Muslims.

Citing fallout from the Iran war, IMF cuts the outlook for global growth, expects higher inflation

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Iran war has stalled the world's economic momentum this year, likely pushing growth lower compared to 2025, the International Monetary Fund warned Tuesday.

The IMF downgraded its forecast for global growth to 3.1% in 2026 from the 3.3% it had forecast back in January. The expected growth would mark a deceleration from a 3.4% expansion in 2025.

U.S. and Israeli strikes on Iran — and Tehran's closing of the Strait of Hormuz and retaliatory strikes on oil refineries and other energy infrastructure in neighboring countries — have driven oil and gas prices sharply higher around the world.

As a result, the IMF marked up its expectation for global inflation this year to 4.4% from 4.1% in 2025 and from the 3.8% it had forecast for this year in January.

Until the war, the world economy had shown surprising resilience in the face of President Donald Trump's protectionist policies, which built a wall of import taxes around the United States, the world's biggest economy and once a market practically wide open to imports. The damage was less than feared partly because Trump's tariffs last year ended up being lower than what he'd originally announced.

A tech boom, marked by massive investment in data centers and artificial intelligence, and rising productivity also combined to strengthen the world economy.

"War in the Middle East has halted this momentum," IMF chief economist Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas wrote in a blog post accompanying the fund's latest World Economic Outlook.

The IMF's forecast assumes that conflict in the Persian Gulf is short-lived and that energy prices rise "a

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moderate 19%" this year. Things could be much worse. In a "severe scenario" in which the energy shocks spill into next year and central banks are forced to raise interest rates to combat inflation, global growth could drop to 2% in 2026 and 2027. "Despite the recent news of a temporary ceasefire, some damage is already done, and the downside risks remain elevated," Gourinchas wrote.

The fund slightly downgraded its forecast for U.S. growth this year to 2.3%. The 21 European countries that share the euro currency, hard hit by soaring natural gas prices, will collectively grow 1.1% this year, down from 1.4% in 2025, the IMF forecast.

Hardest hit are likely to be deeply indebted poorer countries that import energy and can't afford to buffer their economies with stepped-up government spending and tax relief. The IMF sharply lowered the outlook for Sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, to 4.3% this year from the 4.6% it had expected in January.

One winner that's emerging from the conflict is Russia, an energy exporter that stands to benefit from higher prices. The IMF upgraded its forecast for the Russian economy, hard hit by sanctions following the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, to a still-modest 1.1%.

Meanwhile, the governor of the National Bank of Ukraine has tried to keep Russia's war in his country at the center of talks among global economic leaders. But in a Monday interview with reporters, Andriy Pyschnyy noted how higher oil prices due the war in Iran are hurting his country.

He said through a translator that annual inflation in March hit 7.9% in Ukraine, well above the forecast of 7% in large part because of higher fuel costs. He estimated that fuel prices could push up annual inflation by 1.5 percentage points to 2.8 percentage points.

Pyschnyy noted that there could also be higher fertilizer and production costs in an economy that is seeking stable prices as part of the ongoing war with Russia, which attacks Ukraine by air on average every 3 to 4 minutes.

"We are trying to walk on a razor blade," he said of a mission complicated by external factors.

The IMF is a 191-nation lending organization that works to promote economic growth and financial stability and to reduce global poverty.

Today in History: April 15, the Titanic sinks in the North Atlantic

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Wednesday, April 15, the 105th day of 2026. There are 260 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On April 15, 1912, the British luxury liner RMS Titanic sank in the North Atlantic off Newfoundland just over two and a half hours after hitting an iceberg on its maiden voyage. More than 1,500 people died while 710 survived.

Also on this date:

In 1865, Abraham Lincoln died after being shot by John Wilkes Booth at Ford's Theater the previous evening; Andrew Johnson was sworn in as the 17th president hours later.

In 1947, Jackie Robinson, baseball's first Black major league player of the modern era, made his official debut with the Brooklyn Dodgers on opening day at Ebbets Field. (The Dodgers defeated the Boston Braves, 5-3.)

In 1955, Ray Kroc opened the first franchised McDonald's restaurant in Des Plaines, Illinois.

In 1974, members of the Symbionese Liberation Army robbed a branch of the Hibernia Bank in San Francisco; a member of the group was SLA kidnap victim Patricia Hearst, seen wielding a rifle. (Hearst later said she had been forced to participate in the robbery.)

In 1989, a crush of soccer fans at Hillsborough Stadium in Sheffield, England, caused 97 deaths and over 760 injuries.

In 1997, a raging fire stoked by high winds swept through a sprawling pilgrims' encampment near Mecca in Saudi Arabia, killing more than 300 people and injuring about 1,500 others during the annual Hajj pilgrimage to the Muslim religion's birthplace.

In 2013, two bombs made from pressure cookers exploded at the Boston Marathon finish line, killing

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two women and an 8-year-old boy and injuring more than 260. (Dzhokhar Tsarnaev was convicted and sentenced to death for his role in the bombing; his older brother, Tamerlan Tsarnaev, was killed in a gun battle gunbattlee days after the bombing).

In 2019, fire swept across the top of the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris during renovation work on the landmark structure; the blaze collapsed the cathedral's spire and spread to one of its iconic rectangular towers. (The cathedral was restored and reopened to the public in December 2024.)

In 2025, the federal government announced it was freezing more than \$2.2 billion in grants and \$60 million in contracts to Harvard University over Trump administration demands that the Ivy League school limit activism on campus. (A federal judge would rule for Harvard the following September, ordering the cuts reversed.)

Today's Birthdays: Basketball Hall of Famer Michael Cooper is 70. Olympic track & field gold medalist Evelyn Ashford is 69. Actor-screenwriter Emma Thompson is 67. Singer Samantha Fox is 60. Olympic swimming gold medalist Dara Torres is 59. Singer Luis Fonsi is 48. Country singer-songwriter Chris Stapleton is 48. Actor Luke Evans is 47. Actor-writer Seth Rogen is 44. Actor Alice Braga is 43. Singer-songwriter Margo Price is 43. Actor Samira Wiley is 39. Actor Emma Watson is 36. Actor Maisie Williams is 29. Gymnast Jordan Chiles is 25. Country singer Sam Barber is 23. Actor Julia Butters is 17.