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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

Roncalli Geffdog Track Relays at Warner, 1:30 p.m.

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

JV Baseball hosting Brookings with a doubleheader starting at 5 p.m.

Pickleball, 6 p.m., Elementary Gym

JVT Practice, 7 p.m., Arena

Friday, April 17

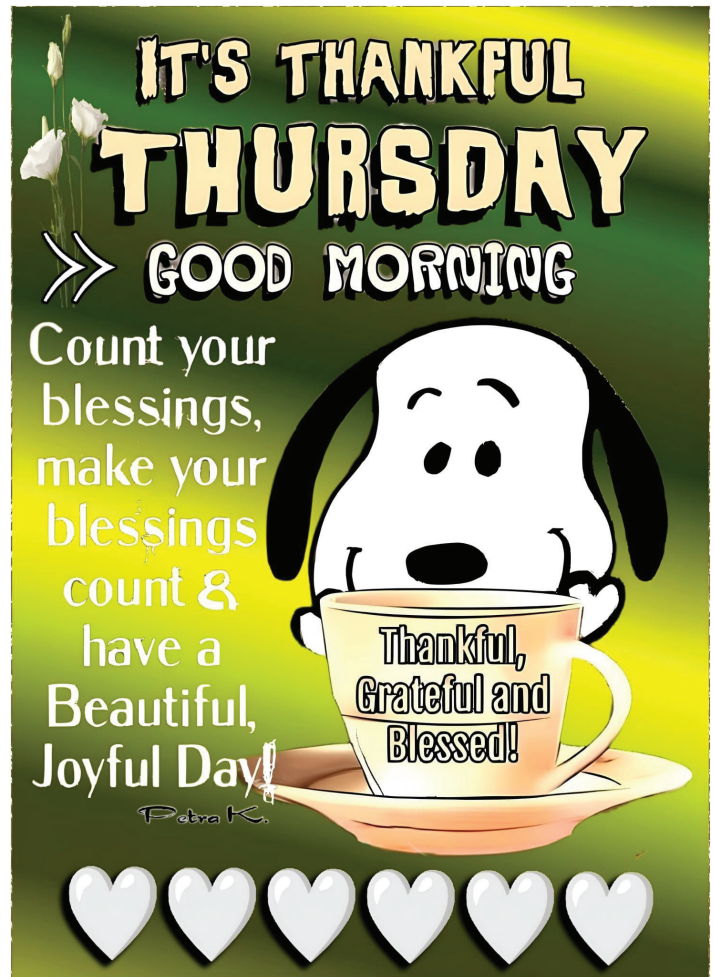
Senior Menu: Lemon baked fish, parsley buttered potatoes, California beld, fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Doughnuts

School Lunch: Cheese pizza, green beans

Grades 6-8 ELA & Math Testing

Moved to May 4th: Junior High Track Meet at Sis-ton, 3:30 p.m.



Saturday, April 18

Emmanuel Lutheran: WELCA Spring gathering at Emmanuel

St. John's Lutheran: Aberdeen LWML Zone spring meeting at St. Paul's Church, 10:30 a.m.

Prom, 7:30 p.m.

Firemen Spring Social, 7 p.m.

Groton Daily Independent
PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445
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.

Federal Reserve Future

President Donald Trump threatened to fire Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell yesterday if he does not resign from the Board of Governors when his term as chair ends next month.

Powell revealed this year that the DOJ launched a probe into a roughly \$2.5B renovation of the Fed's headquarters. Powell characterized the investigation as a pressure campaign by Trump to push the central bank to lower interest rates. Since then, the investigation appears to have continued; despite a judge's order last month blocking the subpoenas, three officials appeared at the construction site this week.

The probe has complicated Trump's efforts to see Kevin Warsh confirmed next week to replace Powell as chair, with Sen. Thom Tillis (R-NC) refusing to vote for any nominees while the investigation continues. While former chairs typically resign from the bank's seven-member Board of Governors after their leadership term ends, Powell has said he plans to stay on as governor until the probe ends.

Allbirds Flies to AI

Shoe company Allbirds announced yesterday that it will pivot from footwear to AI-related hardware, pending shareholder approval. The company, rebranding as NewBird AI, saw shares close up over 500% on the news.

Allbirds was cofounded by New Zealand soccer star Tim Brown. The company launched its first shoe in 2016, with an emphasis on simple design and natural materials (including merino wool, tree fiber, and sugarcane). At its height, Allbirds was valued at over \$4B. However, the company saw mounting losses after going public in 2021. Last month, Allbirds sold its footwear business to American Exchange Group for \$39M.

Now, the remnants of Allbirds—once considered part of the uniform of Silicon Valley—will turn to graphics processing units, the computer chips that power AI. The company announced a \$50M investment that it will use to purchase and sell GPUs.

Whale, You Don't Say

Sperm whale communication follows a strikingly similar pattern to human speech, according to a study published yesterday.

Previous research has shown how these massive mammals—some weighing more than 100,000 pounds—communicate using clicks known as codas, which resemble human vowels. Now, a new analysis of nearly 4,000 codas from 15 calves and females reveals that sperm whales shorten, elongate, and vary tone to produce thousands of possible combinations. Researchers likened the patterns to elements of Mandarin, Latin, and Slovenian. The analysis also suggests individual whales have distinct cadences.

The study is part of Project CETI, an international quest to translate—and eventually communicate with—sperm whales using robotics and artificial intelligence.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

A'ja Wilson, a four-time WNBA MVP, signs a three-year, \$5M deal to stay with the Las Vegas Aces—marking the largest contract in league history.

Katy Perry is under investigation by Australian police for alleged 2010 sexual assault of actress Ruby Rose. "Looksmaxxing" influencer Clavicular is hospitalized for a suspected overdose, says he's at home recovering.

Madonna announces new album "Confessions on a Dance Floor: Part II," a sequel to her 2005 Grammy Award-winning album, will be released July 3.

Kanye West postpones summer concert in France after officials threaten to ban him.

Science & Technology

Geological feature on Mars resembling a bathtub ring points to an ancient ocean that once covered roughly a third of the planet.

Earth-sized planets need 20%-50% of water in Earth's oceans to support life, more than previously thought.

Printed neurons generate brainlike signals capable of communicating with living cells, with potential applications in vision, hearing, and movement implants.

Maine lawmakers pass nation's first statewide ban on new data center projects; centers requiring over 20 megawatts of power are barred until October 2027 as a council analyzes their impact on local grid, electricity bills, air, and water.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 +0.8%, Dow -0.2%, Nasdaq +1.6%); S&P 500 rises to new high. Robinhood shares rise 10% after SEC removes limit on day trading activity.

Jury finds Live Nation and its subsidiary Ticketmaster illegally monopolized ticketing market and overcharged customers, with remedies pending; verdict was brought by 34 states and DC after Live Nation settled separately with the DOJ.

Snap to lay off roughly 1,000 employees, or about 16% of its global workforce, and will not fill another 300 open roles; marks fourth round of layoffs since 2022.

Politics & World Affairs

President Donald Trump signals peace talks with Iran could resume as US military enforces blockade on all commercial ships from Iran.

US Senate rejects resolution to block Trump from further military hostilities.

Migrant boat carrying Bangladeshi and Rohingya refugees capsizes in the Indian Ocean, with at least 250 people missing.

Oklahoma principal tackles gunman in high school lobby, protecting 6,200 students; see surveillance footage.



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Annual elections were held this past Monday at the Groton American Legion Post. Far left conducting the installation of Legion Post officers is Bob Thomason, District 4 Vice Commander. L-R Bruce Babcock, former Post Commander. Newly elected officers : Doug Hamilton, Post Commander; Scott Cooper, Vice Commander; Brent Wienk, Finance Officer; Ben Smith, Adjutant; and Steve Dresbach, Chaplain. Not pictured Todd McGannon, Sargeant of Arms. (Courtesy Photo Bruce Babcock)

April Groton Legion Auxiliary Meeting

At the Groton American Legion Auxiliary April meeting, members welcomed District President Deanne Hoyle from Ipswich as our guest. She reminded members of the need for help with District 4 hosting the Department Convention in Aberdeen June 19-21, and shared ideas for Purple Up Military Child Month, as well as project suggestions for the group.

The date for the Groton Salad luncheon has been changed to July 8 (a week earlier than previously planned, due to scheduling conflicts). The Americanism poem and essay local winners were announced and will be invited to the May meeting. Lori Giedt has picked up new flowers for the vases at the cemetery. Wendy Cooper reported \$4500 in grocery receipts have been submitted in March and reminded everyone that receipts must be dated before May 1st to be included for this school year. Please get your receipts to her as soon as possible after April 30.

Our next meeting will be May 4 at 6:30.

Absentee Ballots Will Not Be Available at Start of Voting Period for June 2 Primary

Brown County, SD — The Brown County Auditor's Office is notifying voters that absentee ballots for the upcoming June 2 Primary Election will not be available on the first day of the absentee voting period.

Under South Dakota law, absentee voting is scheduled to begin 46 days prior to an election pursuant to SDCL 12-19-1.2. However, the candidate petition filing deadline was March 31, as established in SDCL 12-6-4, which determines the final list of candidates to appear on the ballot.

Because ballots cannot be finalized until after the petition filing deadline has passed and candidate eligibility is confirmed, additional time is required for ballot preparation, including certification, layout, programming, proofing, and printing.

This statutory timing results in a brief delay between the start of the absentee voting period and the availability of ballots.

The Auditor's Office is working diligently to complete this process as quickly as possible. Once ballots are available:

- Absentee ballots will be mailed immediately to voters who have submitted applications
- In-person absentee voting will begin at the Auditor's Office
- Updates will be shared through the county website, local media, and official communication channels

"Our office is committed to ensuring ballots are accurate and available as soon as possible," said Lynn Heupel, Brown County Auditor. "This delay is a function of state law timelines that require final candidate filings before ballots can be prepared."

Voters are encouraged to:

- Submit absentee ballot applications early
- Verify voter registration information
- Monitor official county communications for updates

The deadline to request an absentee ballot remains 5:00 p.m. the day before the election, pursuant to SDCL 12-19-2.

Mount Rushmore Fireworks Celebration Draws Strong Public Interest for America's 250th

PIERRE, S.D. – Demand for the upcoming July 3 fireworks celebration at Mount Rushmore National Memorial soared with 102,991 tickets requested for the official Freedom 250 event.

Approximately 4,800 participants will be able to attend the event. The randomly selected ticket lottery was administered by Recreation.gov from April 8 through April 12. Lottery applicants were notified if they were successful on April 14.

"South Dakota is proud to welcome visitors from across the country to celebrate America's 250th anniversary at Mount Rushmore," said Governor Larry Rhoden. "We appreciate the partnership with the U.S. Department of the Interior and National Park Service. Their collaboration has been instrumental in planning an event that reflects the values of our nation and the significance of this iconic landmark as a symbol of freedom and unity."

Event organizers are finalizing an evening program designed to deliver a memorable and meaningful celebration at Mount Rushmore. The night will culminate in a fireworks and light show set to a patriotic soundtrack, honoring the legacy of the monument and the enduring spirit of the United States.

A crew of 30 pyrotechnicians and specially trained highline operators will install fireworks and lighting at designated locations at the Memorial. The State of South Dakota has contracted with Pyro Spectaculars, the same vendor that successfully produced the 2020 Mount Rushmore fireworks display. In addition to pyrotechnics, the 2026 contract includes lighting elements that can be utilized if environmental conditions require an alternative to fireworks.

To enhance the visitor experience and prioritize safety & security, total attendance has been reduced compared to the 2020 event, ensuring all ticketed guests remain within the main campus of Mount Rushmore.

The National Park Service has conducted an environmental assessment for the event, which is available on the NPS website. Protection of the Black Hills and Mount Rushmore National Memorial remains central to planning efforts for the July 3 celebration. Planning partners continue to coordinate closely to ensure a safe and responsible event.

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Groton Area Third Quarter Honor Roll

Seniors

4.0 GPA: Nathan Unzen, Natalia Warrington, Karsten Flihs, Carly Gilbert, Jerica Locke, Talli Wright, Jaedyn Penning, Mia Crank, Paisley Mitchell, Becker Bosma, Rylee Dunker, Raelle Lilly, Gage Sippel

3.99-3.50: Hannah Sandness, Cali Tollifson, Drake Peterson, Ryder Johnson, Keegen Tracy, Lincoln Krause, Lucas Carda, London Bahr, Logan Warrington, Nicholas Groeblichhoff, Jayden Schwan, Jarrett Erdmann, Garrett Schultz, Emma Davis, Gavin Englund, Breslyn Jeschke, Karter Moody

3.49-3.00: De Eh Tha Say, Oliva Stiegelmeier, Charlie Frost, Keegan Harry, Benjamin Hoeft, Gentry Pigors, Cambria Bonn

Juniors

4.0 GPA: Carlee Johnson, Liby Althoff, Teagan Hanten, Brody Lord, Kira Clocksene, Ashlynn Warrington, Emerlee Jones, Halee Harder, Colt Williamson

3.99-3.50: Claire Schuelke, Taryn Traphagen, Hailey Pauli, McKenna Tietz, Leah Jones, Addison Hoffman Wipf, Gavin Kroll, Kella Tracy, Blake Lord, Zander Harry, Walker Zoellner, Hayden Zoellner

3.49-3.00: Avery Crank, Aiden Strom, Logan Clocksene

Sophomores

4.0 GPA: Makenna Krause, Chesney Weber

3.99-3.50: Mya Feser, Sydney Locke, Thomas Schuster, Easton Weber, Rylen Ekern, Elizabeth Cole, Jace Johnson, Ethan Kroll, Ryder Schelle, Gracie Pearson, Kyleigh Kroll, Brysen Sandness,

3.49-3.00: Braeden Flihs, Addison Hoeft, Layne Johnson, Kinsley Rowen, Brayden Barrera, Rylie Rose, John Bisbee, Jeremiah Muller, Audrey Davis

Freshmen

4.0 GPA: Neely Althoff, Aspen Beto, Wesley Borg, Abby Fjeldheim, Zachary Flihs, Tevan Hanson, Madison Herrick, Asher Johnson, Brooklyn Spanier, Novalea Warrington

3.99-3.50: Jose Fernando Nava Remigio, Kolton Antonsen, Logan Olson, Jordan Schwan, Lincoln Shilhanek, Tenley Frost

3.49-3.00: Raquel Tracy, Wesley Morehouse, Arianna Dinger, Audrey Smalley, Sydney Holmes, Adeline Kotzer, Connor Kroll, Samuel Crank

Eighth Graders

4.0 GPA: Axel Abeln, Hudson Eichler, Amelia Ewalt, Sophia Flihs, Gavin Hanten, Liam Johnson, Jameson Penning

3.99-3.50: Andi Gauer, Ryder Schwan, Gavin Younger, Asher Zimmerman, Keegan Kucker, Liam Lord, Trey Tietz, Kyson Kucker, Haden Harder, Rowan Patterson, Trayce Schelle, Jace Hofer, Dawson Feist, Elias Heilman

3.49-3.00: Kamryn McKane, Major Dolan, Wyatt Morehouse, Nolan Bahr, Kinleigh Furman, Peyton Padfield, Chloe Witchey

Seventh Graders

4.0 GPA: Gracie Borg, Lillian Davis, Brynlee Dunker, Libby Johnson, Kendyll Kroll, Kinley Sandness, Victoria Schuster, Rylee Stoltenburg, Taylynn Traphagen, Ayce Warrington

3.99-3.50: Amara El Salahy, Brinley Guthmiller, Hadley Heilman, Easton Larson, Zoe Olson, Addison Steffes, Ambrielle Feist, Rylee Hofer, Andi Iverson, Maycee Moody, Mason Locke, Hank Hill, Charli Jacobsen, Drew Fjeldheim, Mya Moody, Bella Barrera, Parker Zoellner, Knox Mulder

3.49-3.00: Keith Furman, Emmett Zoellner, Grady Rowen, Grayden Zeck, Rylan Blackwood, Ivan Schwan, Quinton Flores

Sixth Graders

4.0 GPA: Arthur Eichler, Evan Locke, Brody Zimmerman

3.99-3.50: Taylor Flihs, Tigh Flihs, Ryan Hanson, Boston Kurth, Kacie McComsey, Jernie Weig, Willow Cowan, Hayden Hubbart, Lennox Locke, Blakely Stiegelmeier, Avery Huber, Titan Johnson, Taylor Thompson, Elise Pharis, Gideon Rix, Micah Krause, Shealee Gilchrist, Deylon Johnson, Rowan Hanson, Kayson Hofer

3.49-3.00: Hudson McGannon, Calvin Locken, Rosalyn Block, Harley Furman, Kaelee Morehouse, Jack Schuelke, Simon Simunek, Tanner Frost, Avery Roettele

SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

Early voting for the June 2 election will be delayed, election officials say

Quirk of calendar and lack of an immediate legislative fix leave county auditors scrambling

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER

Early and absentee voting for the June 2 primary election will be delayed, several election officials in South Dakota said Wednesday.

Early voting is supposed to begin on Friday, but some county auditors across the state alerted the public this week of the delay. No one knew how long the delay will be, but said they hope it will not last longer than April 24.

The delay is due to a shortened window this year between the deadline for candidates to file their nominating petitions and the beginning of early voting.

To earn a place on the ballot, prospective statewide candidates from political parties had to gather the required number of petition signatures from registered voters and file them by the last Tuesday in March. Through a quirk of the calendar, that fell on March 31 this year, leaving 17 days before the beginning of early voting for the review and certification of petitions and the printing of ballots.

Early and absentee voting is required by state law to begin no later than 46 days before the election, and ballots must be printed 48 days before.

Pennington County Auditor Sabrina Green, in Rapid City, said counties cannot print ballots until the state has certified all candidates for the ballot.

"We don't have a choice if we don't have ballots," Green said.

Green said the South Dakota Secretary of State's Office also has one outstanding nomination petition challenge holding up the process. Green did not know which race was affected or any other details. The Secretary of State's Office did not immediately respond to questions about the delay.

Green and other election officials are encouraging voters to call their local county auditor office before they travel to their early voting center. South Dakotans can also check their county website elections page and social media.

"It's a sticky situation, and we're sorry voters are put in this place, but we're working as diligently as we can to get everything here," Green said.

Green is "still working out" if she can make accommodations for voters impacted by the potential delay, such as extending weekday hours or opening voting on the weekend. In the meantime, she plans to offer absentee ballot request forms to people who try to vote early. The office will then "mail them a ballot as soon as we get it in."

In Brown County, which includes Aberdeen, Auditor Lynn Heupel said she plans to alert residents via an emergency management text notification when early voting is available. Douglas County Auditor Phyllis Barker, in Armour, said she plans to do the same, if approved by the Douglas County emergency manager.

Barker said her office has been accused of attempting election fraud because of the delay.

"This is really out of our hands," Barker said, adding that the Legislature sets the deadlines in law and the Secretary of State's Office handles petition verification, challenges and certification. "We all saw this coming, but now we're the ones who are trying to make this work."

Auditors have been warning lawmakers and county officials for years of the potential for delay, Barker said. "I think it was impossible to do this election cycle," Barker said.

Lawmakers reacted to those warnings earlier this year by changing the nominating petition deadline to the third Tuesday in March. But they were concerned about changing the deadline for a petition process

that was already underway, so they made the change effective for future elections, not the current one.

Every auditor that South Dakota Searchlight spoke with plans to pay for expedited and overnight shipping of ballots, which could cost counties thousands of dollars.

The American Civil Liberties Union of South Dakota criticized the early voting delay in a statement Wednesday, calling it a "barrier to democracy." The organization called on the Secretary of State's Office to extend the deadline to return absentee ballots, provide transparent and real-time tracking so voters know the status of their ballots, and launch an independent review of how changes to state elections laws over the past few years are impacting preparedness for early voting.

In the 2024 election, 211 South Dakotans voted on the first day of early and absentee voting. By the end of the first week, 1,857 people had cast their ballots.

This year's June 2 primary election includes Republican primaries for governor, U.S. Senate, U.S. House and legislative primaries. Voters may also have local races and issues on their ballots.

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

Forest Service shake-up that includes SD lab will boost states' role, but even supporters have concerns

Some fear the agency's reorganization will undermine federal land management

BY: ALEX BROWN

A sweeping reorganization of the U.S. Forest Service signals that the agency is planning to lean heavily on states to help manage millions of acres of federal land, foresters across the West say.

State officials and timber industry leaders say they've been given scant details about the plan, which will move the agency's headquarters from Washington, D.C., to Salt Lake City, restructure its regional management, and close scores of research stations in dozens of states.

While they wait for the dust to settle, they're preparing for the Forest Service — with its workforce slashed by the Trump administration — to ask more of its partners under the new model.

"The Forest Service itself is unable to uphold its mission and cannot alone manage the many challenges on these landscapes," said Nick Smith, public affairs director with the American Forest Resource Council, a timber industry group. "The transition from regional offices to more state-level offices is a recognition that partnerships are the future for the Forest Service."

But many forestry veterans fear the shake-up will cause more attrition in an agency that's already shrunk because of Trump's cuts to the federal workforce. Some see a clear sign that moving the headquarters to Utah — a state whose leaders are often hostile to federal land ownership — is designed to undermine the Forest Service's management of its lands.

The closure of 57 research stations, some agency partners fear, will threaten critical science that states and other forest managers rely on to learn about wildfire behavior, timber production and a host of other issues.

Some observers noted that the agency is required to seek congressional approval to relocate offices, which could trigger legal challenges to the plan if lawmakers do not weigh in.

Meanwhile, some foresters feel the uncertainty swirling over the agency will cause chaos as the West heads into a dangerous fire season amid record temperatures and drought.

The plan announced on March 31 will relocate Forest Service Chief Tom Schultz and his headquarters staff to Salt Lake City. The agency will close its nine regional offices, each of which oversee national forests across multiple states. Replacing those offices will be 15 state directors, mostly in Western states.

Many state leaders, from both conservative and liberal states, say they welcome the opportunity to deepen their partnerships with the Forest Service and play a greater role on federal lands. But they're

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still anxious to see more details about the agency's new structure and concerned that national forests remain deeply understaffed.

"There are definitely a lot of vacancies in key positions that need to be filled," said Jon Songster, federal lands bureau chief with the Idaho Department of Lands. "I hope that a lot of that remaining expertise is not lost, but shifted to the forest level where it's desperately needed. Hopefully with all these changes there will be opportunities to put more people in some of those key gaps."

Scarce details

The Forest Service manages nearly 200 million acres of land, mostly in Western states. With a mandate to manage the land for multiple uses, the agency oversees timber harvests, livestock grazing, outdoor recreation and wildlife habitat.

Under President Donald Trump, the Forest Service has lost about 16% of its workforce — nearly 5,900 employees — through buyouts, layoffs and early retirements. Trump's proposed budget for 2027 would cut billions of dollars from the agency's funding.

Many observers view the reorganization plan as an effort to force out more longtime agency leaders. The moves are expected to affect about 5,000 employees across the various offices that are relocating.

"If this were a stand-alone proposal where the American public and the public agency employees had trust in the administration, a lot of it makes sense," said Mike Dombeck, who served as chief of the Forest Service under President Bill Clinton and remains a vocal conservation advocate. "But the level of trust is at rock bottom."

In its announcement, the agency said that the new state-based model will bring decision-making closer to the forest level and reduce bureaucracy. The Forest Service did not grant a Stateline interview request.

State foresters, who are responsible for managing the forests in their states, say they've been given few details other than the new office maps released by the agency. They don't know when the transitions will happen, which officials will be staffing the new offices or what authority they will have.

"They've made the statement that they need to rely more on states," said Washington State Forester George Geissler. "If you're going to lean on us, it might help us to know what that means."

States' role

In recent years, the Forest Service has increasingly partnered with states, tribes, counties and nonprofits to carry out projects on federal lands. Foresters say agreements such as the Good Neighbor Authority have become a critical tool, allowing more work to happen in national forests even as the feds' own capacity shrinks.

"We've seen some of that institutional knowledge (at the Forest Service) dwindle a little bit," said Utah State Forester Jamie Barnes. "Building these partnerships, if you do see a decline on one side or the other, you can bridge that loss. We're working together, making joint decisions so we can get timber off the landscape here in Utah."

Some foresters said they welcome the chance to work more closely with the Forest Service, but they're concerned that the agency has not recovered from Trump's workforce cuts. Reassigning hundreds of employees to new locations could lead to more attrition.

In Wyoming, state officials are excited to have Forest Service leaders working in close proximity. But State Forester Kelly Norris acknowledged that the move could be "bumpy," given the lack of details and ongoing workforce shortages in the agency.

"The logistics of this may be a lot harder implemented than said," she said. "We see this as a positive for us, but I do think that this is going to be a real long transition."

Idaho, Utah and Wyoming are among the Western states that share the Trump administration's goal of increasing timber production on federal lands. Trump has moved to limit environmental reviews and protections for endangered species to speed up logging projects.

Some Forest Service veterans feel the move to increase states' role will prove destructive in some parts

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of the West.

"We're putting the governance of the forests more subject to states' interests," said Kevin Hood, executive director of Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics, a nonprofit that advocates for civil employees. "I would be concerned that the values that don't have strong lobbying groups, such as watershed integrity, may be subjugated to extractive values like timber, mining and grazing."

Several agency veterans stressed that the Forest Service's state directors should be career professionals, not political appointees.

HQ move

By relocating its headquarters to Salt Lake City, the Forest Service said in its announcement, the agency is moving leaders closer to the forests they manage.

But some are skeptical the move will bring stronger management to the West. During Trump's first term, he moved the Bureau of Land Management headquarters to Grand Junction, Colorado. Only 41 of the 328 employees subject to the transition actually relocated.

"Shaking things up is going to get people to abandon their positions, and that's the intent," said Chandra Rosenthal, Western lands and Rocky Mountain advocate with Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, a group that defends whistleblowers in the federal service. "It's a long-term dismantling of the scientific backbone and staff. The theory is that the federal government will abandon a lot of the public lands and then states will be forced to fill in those gaps."

Rosenthal and others noted that Utah's political leaders are hostile to federal land ownership. U.S. Sen. Mike Lee, a Republican, led an effort last year to sell off millions of acres of federal land, which drew widespread backlash before it was withdrawn. Utah's state government has also sued the federal government, seeking to claim control of 18.5 million acres of federal land managed by the Bureau of Land Management.

"Why would you move the headquarters of a public lands management agency to the state that is the most anti-public lands in the country?" said Dombeck, the former Forest Service chief.

Dombeck also noted that the Forest Service chief frequently reports to the White House, testifies in congressional hearings and coordinates national policy with other agency leaders. Moving the position out of D.C., he said, makes little sense.

In a webpage set up to respond to news coverage of the move, the Forest Service said it is a "myth" that the transition is designed to reduce its workforce or transfer federal lands to the states.

But some agency veterans are skeptical.

"It's hard not to reach the conclusion that this is an effort to weaken federal agencies and federal management of these lands," said Robert Bonnie, who served as undersecretary of agriculture for natural resources and environment during the Obama administration. "You're going to lose some good staff as part of the reorganization, as they move chairs across the deck of the Titanic."

Meanwhile, some state leaders are concerned that the uncertainty caused by the reorganization and Trump's staffing cuts could lead to chaos as wildfire season approaches. With record temperatures and drought drying out much of the West, foresters expect a challenging fire season this summer. The Forest Service remains the nation's largest wildland firefighting agency, even as the Trump administration seeks to consolidate wildland fire operations into a separate service under the U.S. Department of the Interior.

"I've got federal firefighters, fire managers, and all they're talking about is what's happening at (the Forest Service)," said Geissler, the Washington state forester. "I don't feel like having a bunch of distracted firefighters on my hands going into a summer fire season."

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

Rapid City lab is on closure list

FROM SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

A Forest and Grassland Research Laboratory in South Dakota's Black Hills will close and potentially relocate to another state as part of a national reorganization, according to the U.S. Forest Service.

The lab, housed in the Black Hills National Forest's Mystic Ranger District office at Rapid City, does re-

search for forest and grassland managers dealing with a changing climate, invasive species, fire, habitat fragmentation and threatened species. The lab houses scientists associated with the Maintaining Resilient Dryland Ecosystems Program, which investigates the biology, use, management and restoration of grasses and shrublands.

No information was immediately available about the number of employees affected by the closure of the Rapid City lab. South Dakota Searchlight contacted the Black Hills National Forest and the Rocky Mountain Research Station headquarters. Both told Searchlight to direct questions to the national press office via email, but the office has not responded.

The Forest Service's reorganization website is unclear about the ultimate fate of research labs on the closure list. "In many locations, 'closure' refers only to individual buildings currently housing small teams," the website says. "Staff and programs will continue their work, relocated into fewer facilities while maintaining research presence across the country." But the website does not specifically say if the Rapid City lab will move after its closure, or where it will go.

Dave Mertz, who retired from the Black Hills National Forest in 2017 as a natural resource officer, said he worries the change could negatively affect the Forest Service.

"What will happen is these people will get reassigned, but do not want to move. They will be gone," he said. "They haven't really explained why they're doing this."

Based in Seattle, Alex Brown covers environmental issues for Stateline. Prior to joining Stateline, Brown wrote for The Chronicle in Lewis County, Washington state.

Tax Day 2026: Democrats and Republicans battle over impact of new Trump tax cuts

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — The 2026 tax filing season closed Wednesday with the Trump administration and Republicans on Capitol Hill hailing success under last year's massive tax cuts law, while Democrats said any benefits have been wiped out by skyrocketing gas prices, inflation and more.

More than 53 million Americans claimed at least one new benefit, averaging a tax cut of \$800, under the tax cuts and spending package passed by congressional Republicans and enacted by President Donald Trump on July 4, according to the Department of the Treasury.

Originally titled the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, but rebranded by Republicans as the Working Families Tax Cuts law, the measure made permanent Trump's 2017 reduced tax brackets.

It also quadrupled the state and local tax deduction cap and increased the child tax credit by \$200.

Democrats marked Tax Day by criticizing the law and pointed to increasing inflation and tariff costs as wiping out the value of tax relief, as both sides try to gain the advantage in messaging ahead of crucial midterm elections that will determine control of Congress.

Tips, car loans, overtime

The new law cut taxes on tips until 2028 and on qualifying car loan interest until 2029.

As for Trump's campaign promise for no tax on overtime, the law applies the advantage on up to \$12,500 in overtime earnings for individuals, and \$25,000 for joint filers, through 2028.

Additionally, eligible senior citizens can now deduct up to \$6,000 for individuals, \$12,000 for couples, until 2029.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said in a Tax Day statement that Trump's leadership upholds "the foundational principle that hardworking Americans should be rewarded, not punished with tax hikes, and the results of this tax season prove it."

According to Internal Revenue Service statistics to date and made public Wednesday:

Six million filers claimed no tax on tips, with an average deduction of \$7,100.

Twenty-five million filers claimed no tax on overtime, averaging a \$3,100 deduction.

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Thirty million seniors claimed the enhanced senior deduction, receiving an average break of \$7,500. One million Americans deducted car loan interest, getting a \$1,800 break on average. Bessent, acting IRS commissioner after a turnover of six IRS commissioners in 2025, said the agency has "worked tirelessly to ensure our tax system works for the people it is meant to serve."

"From the shop floor to the kitchen table, taxpayers are feeling the difference of the largest tax cuts in our nation's history, and millions of Americans are keeping more of what they earn and seeing their paychecks go further than ever before," Bessent said.

The White House circulated a collection of statements from taxpayers Tuesday praising the new deductions.

Trump also held a photo opportunity Monday, when he received a McDonald's delivery from a self-proclaimed "DoorDash Grandma" who lauded tax relief on her tips in a planned event. Trump subsequently pulled cash from his pocket and handed it to the woman, Sharon Simmons of Arkansas, who represented the tech delivery service.

Simmons, no newcomer to such GOP appearances, also testified before the U.S. House Ways and Means Committee in late July 2025, following the passage of the tax law, to praise the no tax on tips policy.

134 million income tax returns

Frank Bisignano, IRS chief executive officer, told Senate tax writers on Capitol Hill Wednesday that the 2026 filing season was the "most successful tax filing season in IRS history."

Trump created the IRS CEO position last year. Bisignano also serves as the commissioner of the U.S. Social Security Administration.

"This landmark legislation forms the cornerstone of the administration's growth agenda. The latest numbers tell the story," Bisignano told the Senate Committee on Finance during the panel's annual oversight hearing examining tax collection.

The agency to date has seen over 134 million income tax returns filed for 2025 earnings, with 98% of them done electronically, according to IRS data. Bisignano hailed the issuance of 80 million refunds that on average totaled \$3,400, up by 11% compared to 2024.

Senate Democrats on the panel panned the cost of the new tax regime and questioned whether a shrinking IRS staff will contribute to less enforcement.

Sen. Michael Bennet, D-Colo., said "the lack of cops on the beat at the IRS is going to cost the Treasury in the United States \$646 billion in unpaid taxes by the wealthiest people in America."

According to reports, roughly 26,000 employees left the IRS last year as part of Trump's civil service reduction incentives and firings.

"I remember you saying when you and I met before your confirmation that you are deeply concerned about the level of national debt in this country," Bennet said to Bisignano. "It is \$38 trillion and a lot of that is because of the completely unpaid-for tax bill that is the Trump tax bill."

The cost of the tax bill will be realized in years to come, according to congressional scorekeepers.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office and Joint Committee on Taxation estimated the law will cost \$3.4 trillion over the next 10 years — more than \$4 trillion if accounting for interest that will accumulate on the nation's debt.

An analysis by the Tax Foundation, which generally advocates for lower taxes, found tax revenue coming into U.S. coffers will drop by nearly \$5.2 trillion over the next decade. Individual income taxes have been the government's largest single source of revenue since 1944, according to data compiled by the Tax Policy Center, a partnership between the Urban Institute and Brookings Foundation.

How the tax cuts were offset

Lawmakers who wrote the massive tax law accounted for some of the lost revenue by overhauling eligibility and work requirements for government health and food assistance for low-income Americans.

According to a recent report from the progressive Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, roughly 2.5

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million Americans have lost Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, benefits since the tax law came into effect.

The CBO estimated the law's changes to work requirements for Medicaid, the government's low-income health care program, will result in millions of Americans losing health insurance.

Senate Republicans defended the law, saying it helped Americans by avoiding "the largest tax increase in American history."

"Had the 2017 tax cuts expired, taxpayers earning less than \$400,000 would have faced a more than \$2.6 trillion tax hike over the next decade," said Senate Finance Committee Chair Mike Crapo, R-Idaho.

Pilot program canned

The panel's highest-ranking Democrat, Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., slammed the new law for terminating a free alternative for tax filing, IRS Direct File, enacted under former President Joe Biden's own budget reconciliation megabill.

The limited pilot program offered a free filing portal directly through the IRS and was available to 19 million taxpayers in 2024.

"Direct File in America died on Mr. Bisignano's watch," Wyden said, adding the program's termination again puts taxpayers at the mercy of "tax software giants who overcharge for a service that ought to be free."

Rather, the IRS offers Free File, an option available to taxpayers under a certain income level, now capped at \$89,000, via a handful of tax preparation software companies that contract with the federal government.

A 2019 Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration report described the program as "fraught with complexity and confusion." Estimates show roughly 14 million free-file-eligible taxpayers were led to pages where they were prompted to pay for add-ons and extra services.

Taxpayers at any income level have the option to file for free via fillable PDF forms, but that option requires manual entry without guided prompts.

Wyden said the arrangement is a "multi-billion dollar rip-off."

Bisignano called Direct File an "unnecessary and less popular duplicate of programs."

Dems continue 'affordability' argument

The Democratic National Committee pounced on Tax Day to highlight Trump's policies and use of taxpayer funds. Affordability is front and center in the upcoming midterm elections.

Though Trump campaigned on lowering prices and taxes, DNC Chair Ken Martin said in a statement the president has so far given Americans "a reckless trade war that has hiked prices, and a deadly and costly taxpayer-funded war with Iran."

"This Tax Day, Americans are seeing lower-than-promised refunds hit their bank accounts that won't even cover the higher costs Trump has forced them to shoulder. It couldn't be clearer: Trump and the Republican Party are on the side of billionaires, big corporations, and wealthy special interests," Martin said.

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

US Senate again rejects attempt to limit Trump action in Iran

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — An effort to force President Donald Trump to seek congressional approval for further war actions in Iran failed in the U.S. Senate for the fourth time Wednesday, with all but one Republican continuing to support the president's Middle East conflict.

Senators voted down the measure, 47-52, with a similar partisan breakdown as earlier votes that saw one Republican and one Democrat break with their parties.

Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., who previously sponsored one of the Iran War Powers Resolutions, again split with his party to oppose Trump's military actions in Iran, which the president launched without approval from Congress.

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As he has previously, Sen. John Fetterman, D-Pa., was the only Democrat to support Trump continuing the war in Iran.

Sen. Jim Justice, R-W.Va., did not vote.

Senate Democrats have vowed more votes ahead to rein in Trump's joint operations with Israel in Iran. Wednesday's War Powers Resolution was sponsored by Sens. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., Tim Kaine, D-Va., Chris Murphy, D-Conn., Adam Schiff, D-Calif., and Tammy Baldwin, D-Wis.

Fourth failed vote

Prior votes to cut off Trump's unchecked military operations in Iran were held March 18, March 4 and June 27, when the U.S. and Israel bombed Iran's nuclear facilities last year.

The U.S.-Israeli war in Iran has claimed the lives of 13 American troops, and as of Wednesday injured 395, according to the Pentagon. Thousands of civilians in Iran and across the Middle East have been killed and injured in the shelling on both sides.

Meanwhile, the war has set off an oil crisis across the globe as Iran and the U.S. vie for control of the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow passage connecting the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Sea that moves one-fifth of the world's oil and liquid natural gas.

A gallon of regular gas peaked at \$4.16 on average across the U.S. last week, while diesel reached nearly \$5.97, according to AAA. As of Wednesday, a gallon of regular gas sat at \$4.10 on average, and diesel at \$5.63.

A Quinnipiac University poll released Wednesday showed voters held Trump responsible for the spike in gas prices by a nearly 2-to-1 margin.

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

How Republicans in Congress could fully fund ICE for years to come — and maybe do more

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — Republicans in Congress are once again looking toward the complex budget reconciliation process as a way to achieve some of their policy goals without Democratic votes.

GOP leaders were able to use the special pathway last year to approve the "big, beautiful" law that extended tax cuts, overhauled and cut Medicaid, provided hundreds of billions in extra funding for the departments of Defense and Homeland Security, and raised the country's debt limit by \$5 trillion, among other provisions.

Now, Republicans will try to use the process at least one more time to provide years of funding to the Department of Homeland Security amid a two-month shutdown, with none of the constraints on immigration enforcement that Democrats have sought.

Democrats' push to rein in enforcement after federal immigration officers shot and killed two U.S. citizens in Minneapolis led to a record-breaking stalemate over the annual DHS appropriations bill.

The funding lapse hasn't yet affected Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Customs and Border Protection, DHS agencies which Republicans bolstered in the last reconciliation bill. But it has had an impact on the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Secret Service and Transportation Security Administration.

Reconciliation will require Republicans in the House and Senate to be almost completely unified on their goals, especially if the party tries to include elements of a hot-button voter identification bill called the SAVE America Act or other policies that don't have a significant impact on federal revenue, spending, or the debt limit.

What goes in and what is kept out of another reconciliation package will become increasingly important to GOP leaders' reelection message as the country moves closer to November's midterm elections.

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Why use budget reconciliation?

Regular bills need a simple majority vote to pass the House, but at least 60 senators need to vote to end debate in that chamber. This step, sometimes called the legislative filibuster, or cloture, forces bipartisanship on most legislation, unless it moves through the reconciliation process.

Budget reconciliation bills are exempt from that Senate rule.

So why haven't Republicans used reconciliation to enact all of their policy goals and campaign promises since taking over unified control last year?

Budget reconciliation bills must follow a specific process and meet strict requirements in the Senate, known as the Byrd rule, named for former West Virginia Democratic Sen. Robert Byrd.

Very simply, this requires reconciliation bills to address federal spending, revenue, or debt in a way that is not deemed "merely incidental" by the Senate parliamentarian.

How complicated could reconciliation really be?

Very.

First, the House and Senate must adopt a budget resolution with identical sets of reconciliation instructions for committees. Those guidelines will give committee leaders either a minimum amount to spend during the next decade or a maximum amount they can add to the deficit during that window.

The Senate cannot approve the budget resolution without going through a marathon amendment voting session referred to as a vote-a-rama, which typically lasts well into the night.

A budget resolution is a tax and spending blueprint, sort of like a blueprint for building a house before you've actually gotten a mortgage or purchased any land. It's a proposal, but it doesn't actually change tax law or spend any money.

Once the budget is adopted, the House committees that receive reconciliation instructions must draft, debate and vote to send their bill to the Budget Committee.

Then, the Budget Committee bundles all of the reconciliation bills together in one package and sends it to the House floor, where lawmakers must vote to send it to the Senate, where things get even more complex.

What happens next?

Before a reconciliation bill goes to the Senate floor, it moves through something referred to as the "Byrd bath," where the Senate parliamentarian determines if each provision fits the strict rules.

Senate leaders can take up the House-passed version of the bill or work through the committee process on their side of the Capitol. Typically, the upper chamber goes directly to the floor and amends the House-passed bill.

The Senate then goes through another vote-a-rama session, giving the minority party, currently Democrats, the chance to put all 100 lawmakers in that chamber on the record about various proposals in the bill.

That process will be especially challenging this year, with Democrats looking to institute guardrails on immigration enforcement activities and get Republicans up for reelection on the record over some of the most pressing issues facing the country.

If the Senate makes any changes to the House-passed bill, it must go back to that chamber for final approval before it can go to President Donald Trump for his signature.

If the Senate approves a bill identical to the one passed by the House, it would go to Trump without needing another House vote.

What exactly is the Byrd rule?

Elements in the bill would violate that rule if they:

Didn't change revenue, spending, or the debt limit.

Change revenue or spending in a way deemed "merely incidental."

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Change policy outside the jurisdiction of the authorizing committee.
Didn't comply with the committee's reconciliation instructions in the budget resolution.
Increases the deficit past the budget window (usually 10 years).
Change Social Security in any way, shape, or form.
How many times can Republicans use reconciliation? Is it unlimited?
They have two more chances during this Congress but are limited by how many budget resolutions they can adopt.

GOP leaders used the fiscal 2025 budget resolution to set up passage of the "big, beautiful" law. They can write a fiscal 2026 budget resolution for one more round and then use the fiscal 2027 budget resolution to run through a third reconciliation process, if they want to.

Fiscal years for the federal government begin on Oct. 1.

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.

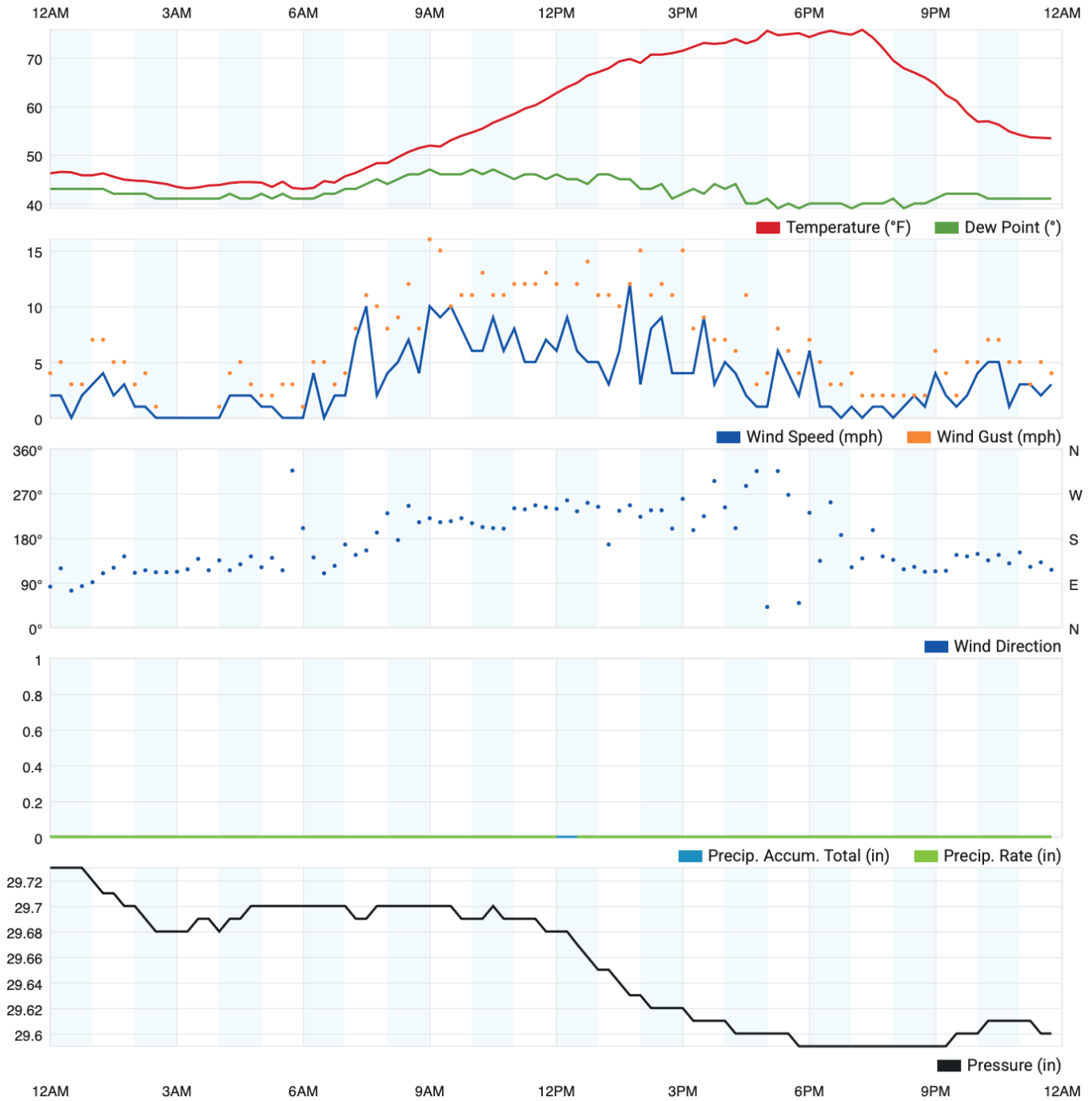
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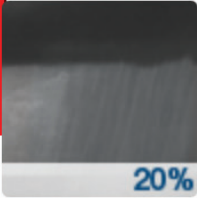

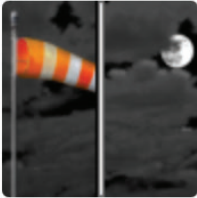

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

April 15, 2026



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Red Flag Warning					
Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday	
					
High: 83 °F	Low: 32 °F	High: 42 °F	Low: 24 °F	High: 45 °F	
Sunny and Breezy	Slight Chance Showers and Breezy	Breezy. Chance Rain/Snow then Chance Snow Showers	Mostly Cloudy and Blustery then Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny and Breezy	



Red Flag Warning Today

April 16, 2026
3:27 AM CDT

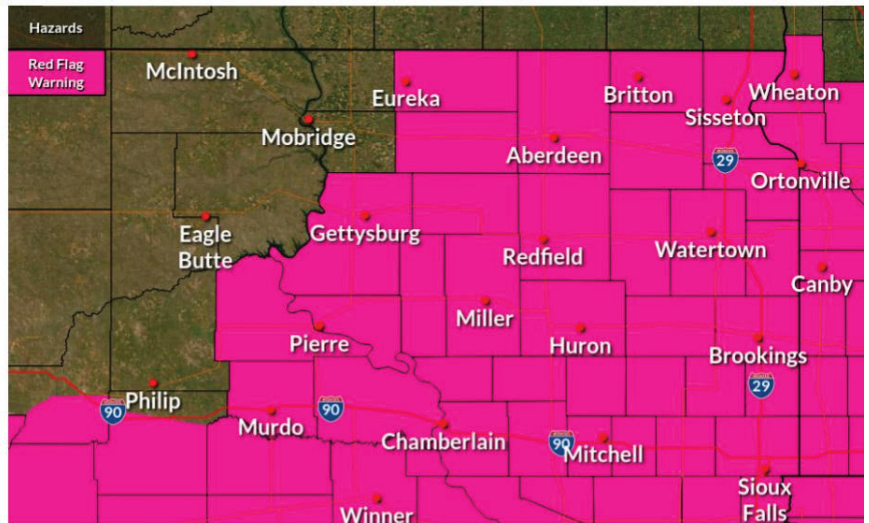
For much of central to northeastern South Dakota and west central Minnesota

Key Messages

- Red Flag Warning from 11 AM to 8 PM CDT
- Hot, dry, and windy, with continued dry grasses and shrubs
- **Winds gusting 25 to 35 mph** today and **30 to 40 mph tonight through Friday.** Shifting winds this afternoon and evening
- Afternoon relative humidity **15 to 25%**

Any fires that ignite may spread rapidly and become difficult to control!

Red Flag Warning Today



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

There is a Red Flag Warning from 11 AM to 8 PM CT today due to the combination of hot, dry, and windy conditions on continued dry grasses and shrubs. Winds will gust 25 to 35 mph today, and 30 to 40 mph tonight through Friday. Expect shifting winds this afternoon and evening. Any fires that ignite may spread rapidly and become difficult to control.

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Peak Wind Gusts Today

April 16, 2026
3:42 AM CDT

Winds gusting 25 to 35 mph today, and 30 to 40 mph tonight through Friday

Shifting winds becoming out of the north tonight

	Thu											Fri					
	11am	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm	9pm	10pm	11pm	12am	1am	2am	3am
McIntosh	33	35	33	32	29	30	31	31	32	33	36	39	38	37	36	35	33
Eagle Butte	28	29	30	30	28	28	28	26	25	30	33	36	38	39	39	39	39
Murdo	29	31	32	32	31	30	29	23	22	21	28	29	31	33	37	39	38
Mobridge	23	24	28	26	26	25	23	24	22	29	30	32	32	36	35	36	33
Pierre	26	26	26	30	30	30	29	22	20	16	32	31	31	36	33	37	37
Gettysburg	28	28	30	30	31	31	29	25	18	18	28	29	30	33	38	37	37
Eureka	24	28	28	30	31	29	28	24	22	21	31	29	29	32	35	33	31
Chamberlain	24	26	29	29	29	29	26	23	21	21	21	20	22	24	25	26	29
Miller	30	30	30	31	31	30	28	24	20	17	20	20	23	28	30	30	32
Redfield	26	28	30	31	32	31	29	24	17	15	14	22	28	31	35	35	33
Aberdeen	26	26	28	31	30	31	31	25	15	16	22	29	30	32	36	35	32
Britton	32	32	29	31	32	31	28	25	18	16	26	24	24	28	29	30	31
Clark	33	29	29	31	32	32	29	26	23	16	17	18	22	25	26	30	30
Webster	35	32	29	31	32	32	30	26	22	16	20	15	20	28	29	29	30
Watertown	31	31	31	30	31	30	28	25	22	18	16	15	16	17	21	23	25
Sisseton	31	31	32	31	31	31	29	25	17	15	14	23	25	25	26	28	30
Milbank	26	29	31	30	30	29	26	24	21	18	18	16	18	22	23	26	25
Wheaton	26	30	31	31	29	30	26	24	22	21	14	24	25	24	23	25	26

Shifting wind directions and changing speeds will be a concern for any ongoing fires! (highlighted times in the red boxes)



Cloudy & Much Cooler Friday

Highs in the 40s

Breezy. Winds out of the northwest gusting 35 to 40 mph



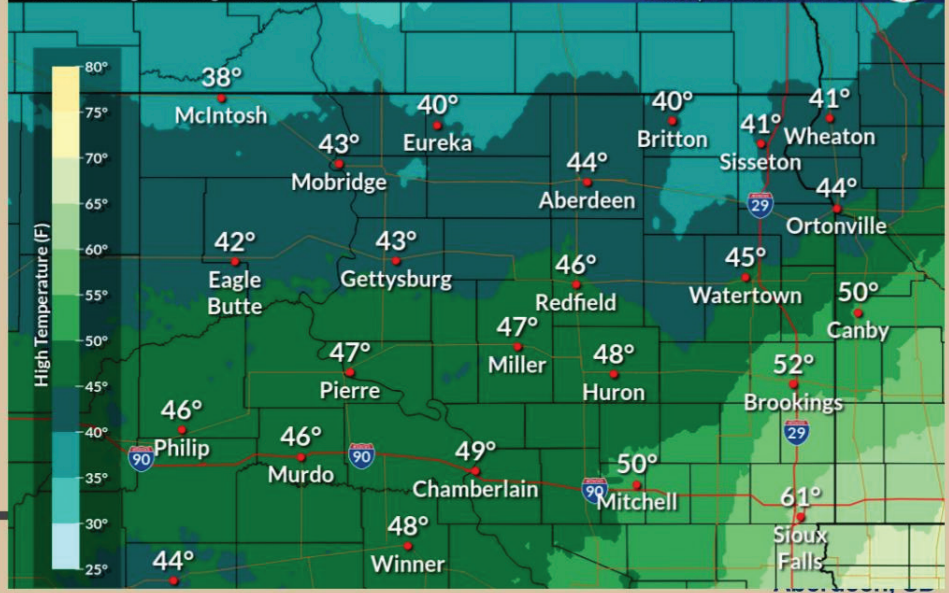
30% chance of light Rain or Snow Showers in the morning. Total precipitation of 0.05 to 0.20" of liquid over north central SD tonight through Friday morning.



High Temperatures Friday

30% chance of light morning rain or snow showers

Weather Forecast Office
Aberdeen, SD
Issued Apr 16, 2026 1:34 AM CDT



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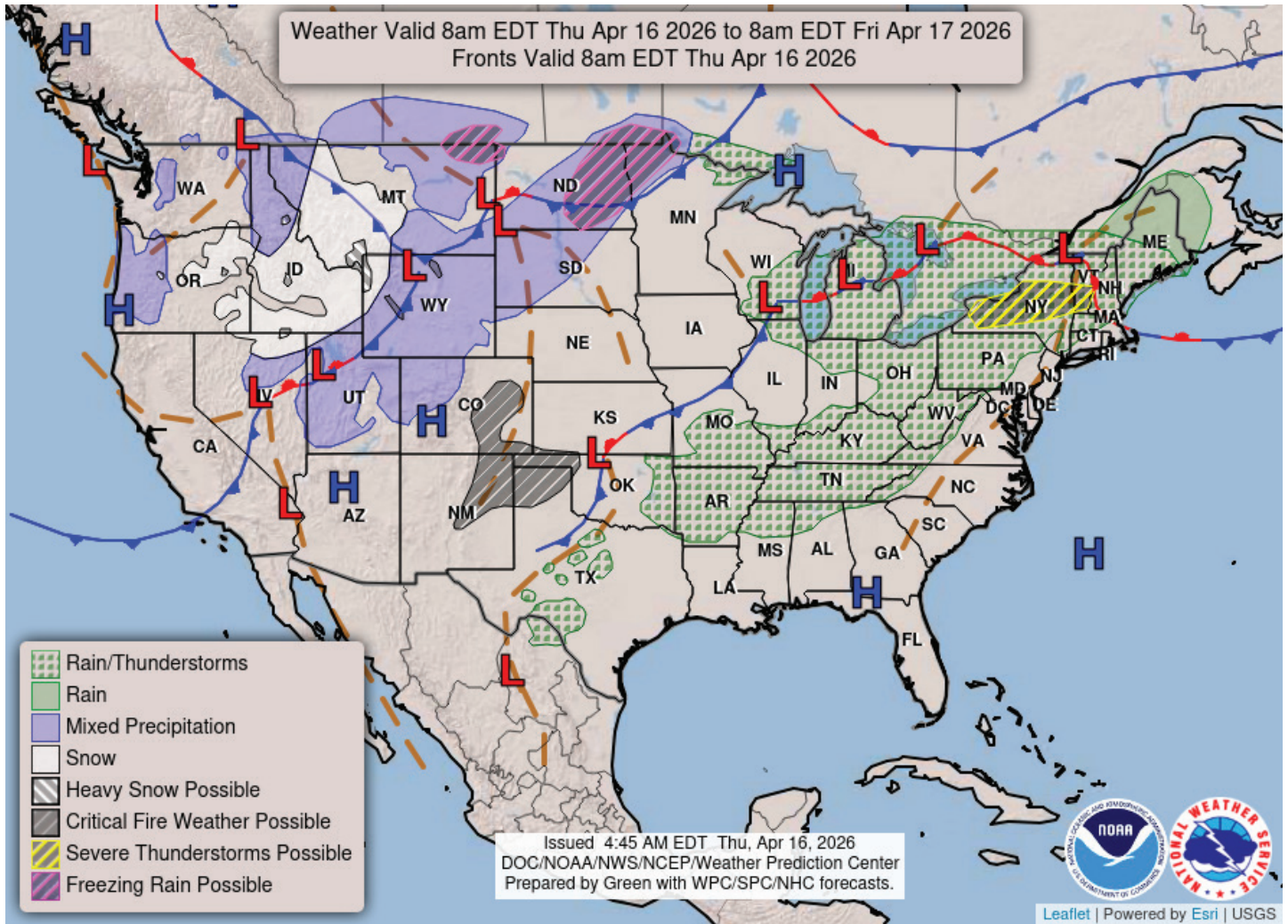
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 76 °F at 6:53 PM
Low Temp: 42 °F at 6:05 AM
Wind: 16 mph at 8:55 AM
Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 91 in 1913
Record Low: 14 in 1953
Average High: 58
Average Low: 32
Average Precip in April.: 0.79
Precip to date in April.: 0.95
Average Precip to date: 2.85
Precip Year to Date: 2.57
Sunset Tonight: 8:18 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:43 am



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Today in Weather History

April 16th, 1967: Severe thunderstorms moved through central and eastern South Dakota areas, producing large hail, damaging winds, and even a few tornadoes. The event began in the mid-afternoon hours and lasted into the evening. One of the tornadoes, an F1, formed over Lake Poinsette in Hamlin County. From there, it moved from southwest to northeast, toward the northern shore, then made a loop and traveled toward the southeast. Two trailer houses and a few small buildings were damaged. Eleven people were injured when a trailer house was turned over to one side and then turned over on the other side. In Brown County, the storms produced hail 1.75 inches in diameter and 61mph winds.

April 16th, 1976: A deepening low-pressure system moved northward out of Nebraska and across western South Dakota. Winds of 60 to 80 mph were reported across the area, with gusts of over 90 mph in southwest Minnesota. Some recorded wind speeds included 62 mph at Sioux Falls, 70 mph at Brookings, and 82 mph at Watertown. Many buildings were damaged, roofs were blown off, and planes were overturned at Sioux Falls and Huron airports. Across southwest Minnesota, many trees were uprooted, and several trucks were blown off of the highway. Across the area, many barns, outbuildings, sheds, and older structures were demolished.

April 16th, 2000: Heavy snow of 6 to 9 inches fell across parts of central and northeast South Dakota during the morning hours. The snow made many roads slushy and difficult to travel, and some tree branches were downed. Some snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Ferney, Miller, and Webster, 7 inches at Agar, Mellette, and Twin Brooks, 8 inches at Gettysburg, and 9 inches at Faulkton.

1851 — The famous "Lighthouse Storm" raged near Boston Harbor. Whole gales and gigantic waves destroyed Minot Light with its two keepers still inside. The storm resulted in great shipping losses and coastal erosion. (David Ludlum)

1880 — A tornado near Marshall, MO, carried the heavy timbers of an entire home a distance of twelve miles. (The Weather Channel)

1933 — Franklin Lake, NH, was buried under 35 inches of snow. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1960 — A wind gust of 70 mph was measured at the Stapleton International Airport in Denver CO, their highest wind gust of record. (The Weather Channel)

1987 — A slow moving storm system produced heavy rain over North Carolina and the Middle Atlantic Coast States. More than six inches of rain drenched parts of Virginia, and flooding in Virginia claimed three lives. Floodwaters along the James River inundated parts of Richmond VA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — A storm in the northeastern U.S. produced a foot of snow at Pittsburg VT. Severe thunderstorms produced baseball size hail and spawned five tornadoes in the Southern High Plains Region. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 — A cold front, ushering sharply colder air into the north central U.S., brought snow to parts of Montana and North Dakota. At midday the temperature at Cutbank MT was just 22 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 — Thunderstorms developing along a stationary front produced large hail and damaging winds across Oklahoma, with 99 reports of large hail and damaging winds during the evening and early nighttime hours. Thunderstorms produced baseball size hail south of Carney, and wind gusts to 100 mph in the Oklahoma City area which swept away many Federal tax returns being transported from a mail cart to a waiting truck about the time of the midnight deadline. Will Rogers Airport in Oklahoma City reported a record wind gust of 92 mph. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

The Spiritual Fruit of Patience

**As our confidence in God grows, so does
our capacity to wait for His answers and accept His will.**

Colossians 3:12-13: 12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;

13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

The “fruit of the Spirit” includes patience (Galatians 5:22-23), but that doesn’t mean the Holy Spirit will force it into the believer’s life. Instead, He acts as our ever-dependable teacher and the one who enables our growth. Spiritual fruit matures over time as we obey the Lord and surrender to His will.

Patience involves waiting for God’s timing, whether in regard to things we desire or challenges caused by other people. Either way, it’s an outgrowth of deepening faith. The Holy Spirit urges believers to take note of the Lord’s handiwork on the journey through life. Our confidence in Him is nurtured by answered prayer, the rich blessings that arise unexpectedly from difficult circumstances, and every trace of good that God brings from a bad situation. As our trust in His goodness and sovereignty grows, we are willing to wait for God’s solutions and outcomes.

In fact, recognizing God’s sovereignty is key to developing patience. A significant part of surrendering to His control is waiting upon Him to do what He will.

Patience doesn’t come naturally. The Holy Spirit strengthens our resolve to endure without complaint. After all, God is slow only from a human standpoint. From a divine, eternal perspective, He’s always working at the perfect speed.

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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Password _____

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paypal.me/paperpaul

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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.15.26

32 36 41 54 58 3

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

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 27 Mins 38 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.14.26

17 21 24 57 69 12

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$130,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 12 Mins 38 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.15.26

17 18 31 46 51 2

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$22,280,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 27 Mins 38 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.15.26

6 7 11 12 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$56,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 42 Mins 38 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.15.26

8 11 41 44 53 3

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 11 Mins 38 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.15.26

13 21 27 43 45 26

Power Play: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$75,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 11 Mins 38 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

The data center boom meets resistance in Maine as lawmakers pass a yearlong freeze

By PATRICK WHITTLE and MARC LEVY Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — Maine could impose the nation's first statewide moratorium on energy-hungry data centers in a sign of growing political opposition to tech giants' massive structures that have stoked fears about blackouts, rising electricity bills and voracious water needs.

The legislation arose in a state that isn't necessarily a destination for the computer-stocked warehouses that power artificial intelligence, but a couple of proposals there generated intense community backlash and helped propel a measure quickly through the state's Democratic-controlled Legislature. Lawmakers on Tuesday approved sending the bill to Gov. Janet Mills, a Democrat who is running for U.S. Senate.

It's the latest sign that increasingly stiff opposition at the local level is gaining a foothold higher up the political ladder. Tech giants and the data centers they are building have high-level support from President Donald Trump's administration and many governors, who see them as economic engines and essential for winning the artificial intelligence race with China, even as voters raise concerns about the enormous amount of power data centers use. Analysts also warn of the possibility of blackouts in the mid-Atlantic grid in the coming years.

Proposals to slap a moratorium on data centers have been introduced in at least a dozen states, but other than Maine's, none have even passed a legislative chamber. That's as some states struggle to meet clean energy goals and the centers emerge as a barrier.

Maine's legislation would institute a moratorium for more than a year on data centers above a certain size, and create a special council to help towns vet potential projects. Mills' office did not respond to a request for comment Wednesday on whether she plans to sign the bill.

"It's not that there's no place for data centers in Maine," said Democratic Rep. Melanie Sachs, who sponsored the measure. "Frankly, the tradeoffs have not been shown to be of benefit to our ratepayers, water usage or community benefit in terms of economic activity."

Why Maine?

Despite Maine's relatively low profile among developers of massive data centers, called hyperscalers, supporters of the projects said the moratorium will still matter long into the future to all sorts of industries.

"It says that the state is willing to essentially put a blanket ban on you if it decides that you may be politically unfavorable," said Dan Diorio of the Data Center Coalition, a trade association that includes tech companies and developers.

They said it could deter data center developers from going to Maine and deprive the state of a long-term economic development anchor that attracts other industries. It also means local builders and labor unions won't develop the skills necessary to build the facilities and might leave them lagging behind other states, they said.

"We think that these data centers could bring good jobs, good opportunities to these regions," said Montana Towers, a policy analyst with the free market Maine Policy Institute. "And a lot of these concerns about them are luddite in nature."

Nonetheless, several communities in Maine have raised concerns about a lack of transparency in potential data center projects. The Maine moratorium is largely about getting those communities to have input in the development process, said Joe Oliva, a spokesperson for the Maine Broadband Coalition and GrowSmart Maine, which both supported the moratorium.

"If this is going to come, we want to be in early and often on the conversation," Oliva said.

Growing opposition

Since last summer, community opposition has become a serious concern for data center developers, with numerous municipalities defeating their proposals in planning and zoning board votes before packed

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rooms of angry residents.

A handful of counties and municipalities in the U.S. have imposed a moratorium, and some bills emerged in states where development is brisk such as Virginia, Michigan and Wisconsin. Voters in Festus, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis, replaced half of their city's eight-member city council this month amid a backlash over a data center project.

Some bills died without action, like one in Georgia, a data center hotspot. Other states have explored other ways to rein in data centers, such as by imposing tougher standards around water and energy use, transparency and protection of ratepayers and communities.

In Ohio, residents are trying to bypass the Legislature and get a measure on the ballot in November that is designed to permanently ban hyperscale data centers. They'll need to gather more than 400,000 voter signatures by July 1 in what is perhaps the strictest measure of any under consideration.

Public officials, developers and other interests could otherwise "make this state a virtually unbroken field of data centers," said Austin Baurichter, a Cincinnati-area lawyer who is helping organize the effort.

In South Dakota, a one-year moratorium bill failed in a state Senate committee amid opposition from power plant owners and data center developers. The governor also opposed it, telling senators that such planning is best done at the local level and that a statewide moratorium holds back municipalities that want a data center.

The sponsor, Republican Sen. Taffy Howard, told senators that "citizens are asking for this" and that the opponents are all lobbyists, "billion-dollar corporations" and government officials.

"Are you going to listen to the people or the paid lobbyists?" she asked.

Pope heads to epicenter of Cameroon's separatist conflict to preach message of peace

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

YAOUNDE, Cameroon (AP) — Pope Leo XIV is travelling to the western Cameroon city of Bamenda to preach a message of peace in the epicenter of a separatist conflict that humanitarian groups have called one of the world's most neglected crises.

Leo is to preside Thursday over a peace meeting involving a Mankon traditional chief, a Presbyterian moderator, an imam and a Catholic nun. The aim is to highlight the interfaith movement that has been seeking to end the conflict and care for its many traumatized victims.

The pope is also set to celebrate a Mass for the people of Bamenda, located near Cameroon's western border with Nigeria.

Leo arrived in Cameroon on Wednesday on the second leg of his four-nation African trip, the first by the first American pope. In his arrival speech, he demanded the "chains of corruption" in the mineral-rich country be broken and lectured President Paul Biya on the legitimate exercise of authority.

The 93-year-old Biya, the world's oldest leader, has been in power since 1982 and claims to have won a disputed election last year that gave him an eighth term in office.

A conflict rooted in colonial history

The conflict in Cameroon's two Anglophone regions is rooted in Cameroon's colonial history, when the country was divided between France and Britain after World War I. English-speaking regions later joined French Cameroon in a 1961 U.N.-backed vote, but separatists say they have since been politically and economically marginalized.

In 2017, English-speaking separatists launched a rebellion with the stated goal of breaking away from the French-speaking majority and establishing an independent state. The conflict has killed more than 6,000 people and displaced over 600,000 others, according to the International Crisis Group.

On the eve of Leo's arrival, separatist fighters announced a three-day pause in fighting. A spokesperson for the Unity Alliance, Lucas Asu, said the pause "reflects a deliberate commitment to responsibility, restraint and respect for human dignity, even in the context of ongoing conflict."

He said the pope's visit should remain "spiritual" and not be seen as endorsing any political authority.

Though the number of deadly attacks by separatists has decreased in recent years, the conflict shows no sign of resolution. Peace talks with international mediators have stalled, with both sides accusing each other of acting in bad faith.

China's economy grows at 5% in first quarter, shrugging off initial impact of Iran war

By CHAN HO-HIM AP Business Writer

HONG KONG (AP) — China's economy accelerated in the first quarter of this year, expanding 5% from a year earlier as it largely shrugged off impacts from the Iran war so far, according to data released Thursday.

The January-March data released by the government, covering a period during which the Iran war began, was better than what economists expected and was up from the 4.5% growth seen in the October-December quarter.

On a quarter-on-quarter basis, China's economy grew 1.3% in the first three months from the final quarter of last year, the fastest pace in a year.

Economists expect China, the world's second largest economy, to be able to weather short-term impacts from the Iran war, now in its seventh week. The war is pushing energy prices higher, worsening inflation and impacting global economic growth. But longer term, areas including global demand for Chinese exports could take a hit.

The International Monetary Fund this week trimmed its economic growth estimates for China to a 4.4% expansion for 2026 as it lowered its global growth forecasts over Iran war shocks. Chinese leaders last month set an economic growth target of 4.5% to 5% for this year, the slowest since 1991.

"China can likely weather short term disruptions, but a protracted war and higher for longer energy prices would likely start to bite into growth by the second half of the year," said Lynn Song, chief economist for Greater China at Dutch bank ING.

Also on Thursday, government data showed industrial output in China rose 5.7% in March year-on-year, better than market expectations, as global demand for Chinese exports of electronic equipments, autos, semiconductors and robotics remained strong.

Retail sales were up 1.7% from a year earlier, worse-than-estimates and slower than the 2.8% growth in January and February, reflecting sluggish domestic demand for consumer goods.

A years-long real estate sector slump in China has dragged consumer and investor confidence, but the country managed to achieve its targeted "around 5%" growth last year, powered by robust exports that drove its trade surplus to a record nearly \$1.2 trillion despite U.S. President Donald Trump's higher tariffs.

China's exports will continue to be key in propelling its economy this year, economists believe, but reliance on export growth could now increasingly become a problem.

"The lack of a speedy resolution to the Iran war is likely to dent global growth, which will negatively impact other economies' ability to absorb Chinese exports," said Eswar Prasad, a professor of economics and trade policy at Cornell University.

"At a time when all countries are trying to protect their firms, households and economies from the fallout of the Iran war, the appetite for Chinese imports is clearly shrinking," he explained.

On Tuesday, China reported its exports grew 2.5% in March from a year ago, significantly slowing from the previous two months although some analysts partly attributed that to seasonal distortions.

China could likely still attain its full year economic growth target of 4.5% to 5% for 2026 through policy stimulus measures, economists say, but there are other concerns.

A boost in public sector investment, Prasad said, would stabilize headline growth but, unless household demand strengthens significantly, could intensify underlying deflationary pressures and increase the economy's reliance on exports down the line.

Ukraine's army evolves under fire, with new units challenging Soviet legacy

By HANNA ARHIROVA, VASILISA STEPANENKO and SAMYA KULLAB By Associated Press
KHARKIV, Ukraine (AP) — When a Ukrainian agricultural tycoon founded a volunteer unit of 30 people in the early days of Russia's invasion, he had no certainty he would live to see what came next — but he did, and so did the force he created.

The group is now a 40,000-strong corps widely seen as one of Ukraine's most effective fighting formations within official defense forces.

"Ukraine needs to have an effective modern army. And this is our number one guarantee of the country's security," said Vsevolod Kozhemyako, owner of a large agricultural conglomerate and now an adviser to the Commander of the Khartia Corps.

Its rapid expansion reflects a broader transformation of Ukraine's military, part of a new wave of formations, alongside the Third Army and Azov Corps, breaking with Soviet-era practices long criticized by soldiers.

As talks on a potential peace settlement stall and global attention shifts to the Middle East, Ukraine continues to seek firm security guarantees from its allies, particularly the United States.

But for many in Ukraine, the war has reinforced a different conclusion: the country's strongest guarantee may ultimately be its own army.

"We have kids, we have grandkids, and we will stay on this territory," Kozhemyako said. "The future of this country depends on us."

Soviet legacy vs. new model

After the Soviet Union collapsed, Ukraine inherited a large military and arsenal. But by 2014, Russia's annexation of Crimea and armed conflict in eastern Ukraine exposed weaknesses from underinvestment, corruption and a lack of clear strategy, prompting an influx of volunteers and long-overdue military reforms.

Those changes helped Ukraine withstand the 2022 invasion, but as the war dragged on, some of its deepest problems — rigid top-down leadership, excessive bureaucracy and a culture where bad news is often hidden out of fear of punishment — began to reassert themselves, with consequences on the battlefield.

From the outset, Kozhemyako said his unit would have to take a different path. He said he understood the shortcomings of the regular army as an active military member since 2014 who was surrounded by veterans.

"They didn't want to join the post-Soviet army, but they wanted to fight," Kozhemyako recalled.

Many of them were civilians with a background in business, he said. They brought their own leadership mindset and sought to build a structure that valued initiative.

It began with studying and applying U.S. Army planning methods, combining them with battlefield experience and adapting as the war evolved. The unit introduced Western protocols such as Troop Leading Procedures (TLP) and After Action Reviews (AAR), relying on in-house experts to refine them.

TLP allow lower-level units to plan operations faster, which is critical for exploiting narrow windows of opportunity on the battlefield. AAR push soldiers to identify what happened, why and how to improve, a process the corps has applied with particular rigor to its fast-evolving use of technology.

Trust and technology are the new tactics

The Khartia's focus on rapidly evolving technologies has drawn attention beyond Ukraine's borders. In an article published in *Military Review*, the U.S. Army's professional journal, Maj. Gen. Curtis Taylor pointed to Khartia's December 2024 drone assault near Kharkiv as a landmark moment — the first all-robot attack on Russian positions. For the U.S. Army, he argued, it was a call to rethink how its own armored formations must adapt to survive on the modern battlefield.

That technology is now part of daily operations. When a 23-year-old platoon commander was transferred to Khartia from a regular unit, he was put in charge of ground robotic systems used routinely for supply delivery and evacuation.

He and other soldiers quoted in this story spoke on condition of anonymity, in keeping with Ukrainian military protocol, although higher ranking officials can speak on the record.

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The soldier said he was struck by how little emphasis was placed on rigid formalities that had defined his previous unit — from strict dress codes to repetitive routines unrelated to combat.

“People understand why we are here, and they don’t overload us with unnecessary tasks,” he said, having paced the military position just moments earlier in a pair of blue plush house slippers.

He also pointed to a different relationship with commanders, contrasting it with a rigid hierarchy he had experienced before, where fear of punishment often discouraged honest communication.

“When officers look at you from above, like in rear units, they become almost like enemies to you,” he said. “In Khartiia, relationships are different. When you go on a mission, you trust the people giving you orders.”

Business tools for battlefield results

The results have been tangible on the battlefield. In December 2025, the Khartiia Corps led a counterattack in the Kupiansk direction, liberating several villages north of the city and pushing to the Oskil River. The Institute for the Study of War said that seizing Kupiansk had been a Russian priority since mid-2025, but despite months of effort, Russian forces were unable to make significant gains in that area.

The Khartiia Corps has had no major setbacks, and did not share the number of troops wounded or killed, as is customary for both sides of the war.

The Washington-based think tank assessed in December that the operation demonstrated Ukrainian forces remain capable of “conducting successful counterattacks and making tactically significant gains, particularly when Russian forces are overstretched.”

Relying largely on its own recruitment and fundraising, the corps has built a professional HR system and a strong brand, actively using YouTube and social media, partnering with public figures and making it easy to donate online.

A Ukrainian military officer involved in the public outreach for one of the Ground Forces’ units said the Third Army Corps, and then Khartiia, became trendsetters in this space whose campaigns others actively study when building their own. The two corps were among the first to build their own brands, something that now plays a critical role for the army as it faces a constant need to recruit.

“The approaches that work in the commercial sphere translate perfectly here — only you are competing not for profit, but for people, equipment and attention of the volunteers,” he said.

Spreading the model

Stepping into one of Khartiia’s underground command posts, it feels more like a gaming room than a military hub. But instead of video games, large screens stacked wall-to-wall glow with real-time reconnaissance footage from the front line in Ukraine’s Kharkiv region. Overseeing it all is a former bodybuilding coach who rose through the ranks from soldier to senior officer, dressed in a Khartiia hoodie with an energy drink by his keyboard.

“One of our secrets is that we don’t spare people during training — we train them constantly,” he said. “But during combat, it’s the opposite. People come first. We don’t save drones or equipment at the expense of our people.”

It is a philosophy that Khartiia is now trying to spread by forging direct alliances with formations that share the same approach.

The Khartiia and the 3rd Army Corps recently launched a joint training initiative, sharing resources and expertise to build a common way of fighting.

For the commanders, who are also neighbors on the front lines, the motivation is practical: after months of exchanging tactics, both units identified the same critical vulnerability in the broader army — a desperate need to overhaul basic combat training for soldiers, sergeants and junior officers.

Ihor Obolienskyi, commander of the Khartiia Corps, estimated that about 300,000 troops are currently deployed along the front line, with the two corps accounting for roughly 80,000 — enough, he said, to drive meaningful change within the military, even as reform remains difficult in what he described as an inherently inert system.

Commanders from other units have already approached the corps to learn from their model, suggesting

a growing demand within the army for change.

Yet it is unclear if senior command is ready to abandon its Soviet legacy.

"We want to give a tool to the General Staff," said Andrii Biletskyi, the commander of 3rd Army Corps, during a joint briefing. "Whether they accept it or not — that is their decision."

A dispatch from inside the Vatican bubble during a remarkable exchange between pope and president

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ABOARD THE PAPAL PLANE (AP) — There is an odd sense of isolation when you are covering Pope Leo XIV from inside the Vatican's traveling press pool: Escorted from venue to venue with police motorcades that clear even the most congested of traffic jams, it's a membership that has many privileges.

But during Leo's epic four-nation trip to Africa, being inside the Vatican "bubble" has been an almost surreal experience, as an unprecedented back-and-forth plays out between U.S. President Donald Trump and history's first American pope.

Every morning this week, waking up to developments in Washington from the evening before, the questions have abounded: Will Leo bite? How will he address the latest criticism, if at all, while focusing on the Africa program he has planned?

That was certainly the case on Wednesday, as Leo, the Vatican delegation and a pool of around 70 accredited reporters boarded the ITA Airways charter for the second leg of Leo's 11-day odyssey — the flight from Algiers, Algeria to Yaounde, Cameroon.

Much to the reporters' delight, Leo had responded head-on to Trump at the start of the trip when he gamely greeted reporters traveling April 13 from Rome to Algiers. He responded to those who asked him about Trump's Truth Social post a day earlier, in which the U.S. president had accused him of being soft on crime, cozy with the left and owed his papacy to Trump.

Trump was responding to Leo's calls for peace, in reference to the Iran war, and comments that Trump's threat to annihilate Iranian civilization were "truly unacceptable."

Leo had told journalists aboard the papal plane that he was merely preaching the Gospel when he called for peace and criticized war, and that he didn't fear the Trump administration.

A comment about peace

On Wednesday, Leo didn't take questions from reporters and kept his remarks focused on his just-concluded visit to Algeria, where he honored the legacy of his spiritual inspiration, St. Augustine of Hippo.

In brief remarks to reporters standing at the front of economy class, Leo didn't refer to war or Trump. But he spoke in terms that could suggest the latest overnight lobs from Washington certainly hadn't gone unnoticed. Perhaps tellingly, he spoke exclusively in English.

Trump had kept up the criticism on Truth Social, while U.S. Vice President JD Vance, a Catholic convert, said that Leo should "be careful" when speaking about theology.

For starters, Leo noted the sign of "goodness," "generosity," and "respect" that the Algerian government showed him in welcoming him on the first-ever papal visit. He said that the Algerian honors had included a full military aerial escort of the papal plane through Algerian airspace.

He also recalled his visit to the Great Mosque in Algiers, which he said was a significant way to show that "although we have different beliefs, we have different ways of worshipping, we have different ways of living, we can live together in peace."

He said that St. Augustine's message of searching for God, searching for truth, building bridges and seeking unity and community "is something which the world needs to hear today and that together we can continue to offer in our witness as we continue on this apostolic voyage."

A papal press pool

Like other heads of state, the pope travels internationally with both the Vatican's own media team as well as a group of external news organizations that pay, oftentimes handsomely, to have their reporters travel aboard the papal plane and have special access to cover his events.

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Being inside the Vatican bubble has journalistic advantages and disadvantages. You get the best access and are traveling under the Vatican's security umbrella, meaning there's little or no hassle from local security organizers. The Vatican facilitates visas and local SIM cards in advance, and arranges hotels and local transportation, allowing reporters to focus on the news rather than logistics.

Journalists in the bubble get the pope's speeches ahead of time and have occasional access to delegation members, as well as other information in real time from the Vatican spokesman.

But the real reason news organizations choose to spend thousands of dollars per journalist, per trip, to be on the papal plane is to be on hand for the pope's news conferences. The only time a pope holds such briefings with journalists is at an altitude of 35,000 feet (around 10,000 meters)

Who could forget Pope Francis' famous line on his maiden trip as pope, in 2013 to Rio de Janeiro, when he uttered the line "Who am I to judge," when he was asked about a purportedly gay priest.

The downside of being in the Vatican bubble is obvious for many of the same reasons it's helpful: You are removed from local reality, whether in Algeria or Alaska, and rarely have time to do the type of on-the-ground reporting that makes a news report balanced.

Those news organizations that have the resources have teams on the ground producing such content, or journalists within the bubble break away to do their own reporting, so that the end result is a healthy combination of official Vatican information and local input.

But when the real drama involving the pope is occurring thousands of miles and time zones away, being in the Vatican bubble is a somewhat jarring experience. The news everyone wants to know isn't necessarily what the pope has on his agenda.

But on this trip, the first by an American pope to Africa, being in the Vatican bubble certainly had its advantages.

Pakistani army chief visits Tehran in hopes for renewed talks between US and Iran

By SAMY MAGDY, MELANIE LIDMAN, and KAREEM CHEYAHEB Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Pakistan's army chief is set to meet with Iranian officials in Tehran on Thursday in a bid to extend the ceasefire which paused almost seven weeks of war between Israel, the U.S. and Iran that have killed thousands of people and upended global markets by disrupting the flow of oil. Uncertainty remains whether the frantic diplomacy can lead to a deal as the ceasefire passes the half-way mark in the original two-week agreement.

The meeting comes as President Donald Trump announced the leaders of Israel and Lebanon will speak later on Thursday about halting the fighting between them. If it takes place, the conversation would be the first time the leaders of the two countries have spoken directly in more than 30 years. Both Israeli and Lebanese governments refused to confirm a conversation. Meanwhile, the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah and Israel's military continued cross-border attacks on Thursday.

The White House said any further talks would likely take place in the Pakistani capital of Islamabad, though no decision had been made on whether to resume negotiations. The fragile ceasefire, which halted the fighting in the Middle East a week ago, is holding despite a U.S. naval blockade of Iranian ports and Iranian counter-threats to target regional ports across the Red Sea.

Pakistan has emerged as a key mediator after it hosted direct talks between the U.S. and Iran in Islamabad that authorities said helped narrow differences between the two sides. Mediators are seeking a new round before the ceasefire expires next week.

The war 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. Oil prices have fallen amid hopes for an end to fighting, and U.S. stocks on Wednesday surpassed records set in January.

Uncertainty over Israel, Lebanon talks as strikes continue

Trump said that Israel and Lebanon are expected to speak later on Thursday about a possible ceasefire, but did not elaborate which leaders would speak.

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Officials from Netanyahu's office and the Lebanese government refused to confirm the possible conversation.

An Israeli minister said Netanyahu will speak with Lebanese President Joseph Aoun on Thursday. "Today the prime minister will speak for the first time with the president of Lebanon, after so many years of a complete disconnection in the dialogue between the two countries," Gila Gamliel, Israel's Minister of Science and Technology, told Army Radio Thursday morning.

Gamliel, who was at a cabinet meeting late Wednesday night about negotiations with Lebanon, is part of Israel's security cabinet. She said the talks "will hopefully ultimately lead to prosperity and flourishing" between the two countries. 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 Iran-backed Hezbollah.

But the two countries continued exchanging fire across the border on Thursday, with Hezbollah targeting towns in northern Israel with rockets and drones. Israeli fire against southern Lebanon intensified, especially around the cities of Tyre, Nabatieh, and the strategic town of Bint Jbeil near the border with Israel.

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

Officials say US and Iran are making progress

Even as the U.S. blockade on Iranian ports and renewed Iranian threats strained the ceasefire agreement, regional officials reported progress, telling The Associated Press the United States and Iran had an "in-principle agreement" to extend it to allow for more diplomacy. They spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive negotiations.

But while mediators worked for peace, tensions simmered.

The commander of Iran's joint military command, Ali Abdollahi, threatened to halt trade in the region if the U.S. does not lift its naval blockade, and a newly appointed military adviser to Iranian Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei said he doesn't support extending the ceasefire.

Mediators seek compromise on sticking points

Mediators are pushing for a compromise on three main sticking points that derailed direct talks last weekend — Iran's nuclear program, the Strait of Hormuz and compensation for wartime damages, according to a regional official involved in the mediation efforts.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei said Iran is open to discussing the type and level of its uranium enrichment, but his country "based on its needs, must be able to continue enrichment," Iranian state media reported.

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.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said the Trump administration would ramp up economic pain on Iran with new economic sanctions on countries doing business with it, calling the move the "financial equivalent" of a bombing campaign.

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif arrived in Qatar on Thursday as part of a regional visit aimed at discussions on the ongoing U.S.-Iran peace process and efforts to promote stability in the Middle East amid continuing tensions, his office said.

China calls for Strait of Hormuz to reopen

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said the window of peace was opening during a phone call with his Iranian counterpart, who briefed him on the latest developments in Iran-U.S. negotiations and Tehran's considerations on the next step, according to a statement from China's foreign ministry late Wednesday.

Wang told Araghchi that the situation has reached a critical juncture between war and peace, and said Iran's sovereignty, security, and legitimate rights should be respected as a littoral state of the Strait of Hormuz, while freedom of navigation and safety through the strait should be ensured.

Since the war began, Iran has curtailed maritime traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, which a fifth of global oil transited through in peacetime. Tehran's effective closure of the strait sent oil prices skyrocketing, raising the cost of fuel, food and other basic goods far beyond the Middle East, and the U.S. has responded with a blockade on Iranian shipping.

U.S. Central Command said Wednesday that no ships had made it past the blockade since it was imposed two days earlier, while 10 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.

Democrats crow about fundraising in competitive Senate races

By MIKE CATALINI and JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

Democrats are boasting of eye-popping fundraising hauls in some of this year's top Senate contests, a potential sign of voter enthusiasm in what remains an uphill quest to win the Senate majority.

In the first three months of the year, Texas Democratic Senate candidate James Talarico's campaign said he brought in \$27 million, while vulnerable incumbent Sen. Jon Ossoff of Georgia said he raised \$14 million. Former North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper's campaign said he'll report \$13.8 million and former Sen. Sherrod Brown will report \$12.5 million in his comeback bid in Ohio.

The money will help Democrats make their case to voters and counter Republican attacks, but it doesn't change the fundamental fact that control of the Senate will be decided in territory that favors Republicans. Except for Maine, where Democrats Graham Platner and Janet Mills are still battling for the party's nomination to challenge Republican Sen. Susan Collins, all of the top battleground races are in states President Donald Trump won in 2024.

While Democrats touted their totals, they offer only a snapshot of overall fundraising, as campaigns had until the end of the day Wednesday to file with the Federal Election Commission.

Republicans lagged

In races where Republicans had reported their fundraising by Tuesday evening, Democrats were far outpacing them.

In Texas, incumbent Sen. Jon Cornyn and state Attorney General Ken Paxton — who are locked in a bitter runoff for the GOP nomination — raised \$2.5 million combined, less than 10% of Talarico's revenue for the quarter. Two of the three main Republicans in Georgia — Derek Dooley and Buddy Carter — combined for about \$1.1 million. The third, Mike Collins, had not yet reported his fundraising as of Wednesday evening.

Former Republican National Committee Chair Michael Whatley raised \$2.1 million in North Carolina and Sen. Jon Husted raised \$2.9 million in Ohio.

Collins, a top target for Democrats, raised \$3.1 million in Maine. Mills, the governor who is preferred by much of the Democratic establishment, said she'll report raising \$2.6 million, while Platner, an oyster farmer backed by progressive leaders including Sen. Bernie Sanders, said he raised \$4 million.

In Alaska, Democratic former Rep. Mary Peltola said she'll report raising \$8.9 million, compared with \$1.7 million for Republican Sen. Dan Sullivan.

Money isn't everything

Republicans said flush coffers don't guarantee victory.

Retiring Republican Sen. Thom Tillis of North Carolina pointed out that his opponent in 2020 also celebrated successful fundraising quarters but didn't win.

Democrats Beto O'Rourke in 2018 in Texas and Jaime Harrison in 2020 in South Carolina shattered fundraising records and still lost to their Republican rivals.

"We don't have to outraise them," Tillis said. "We just got to out run them."

There's an imbalance in Republicans' favor at the national committee level. The Republican National Committee reported roughly \$109 million cash on hand in its most recent FEC filing, compared with roughly \$16 million for their Democratic counterpart, plus Democrats are carrying about \$17 million in debt.

Waiting in the wings for Republicans is a super political action committee tied to Trump — MAGA Inc. — which has more than \$300 million cash on hand, according to the FEC.

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The rosy first-quarter contributions carry some advantages for Democrats, namely the ability to buy limited advertising slots ahead of the election to get on the air early and make an impression with voters. Candidates also get favorable rates for television ads so their money goes further than independent expenditures by outside groups, though that advantage is eroding as ad spending increasingly shifts toward digital streaming.

"Winning in Texas will require unprecedented resources," Talarico campaign manager Seth Krasne said in a statement. "This grassroots fundraising haul puts our movement in a strong position to spread our message in some of the most expensive media markets in the country."

Talarico will face the winner of the GOP runoff on May 26 between Cornyn and Paxton.

Trump to promote tax breaks in Las Vegas, where residents feel the pinch of high gas prices

By MICHELLE L. PRICE and JESSICA HILL Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — President Donald Trump heads to Las Vegas on Thursday to promote the tax cuts he signed into law last year to try to highlight what Republicans see as an economic strength ahead of this year's elections.

Workers who earn tips and overtime are seeing bigger returns this tax season, but those savings and others resulting from the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act" that Trump signed last year have been eaten away by higher gas prices driven by the Iran war.

The president's rare trip out West comes as Trump faces growing political pressure to wrap up the war and focus on a message that helps his party as they try to defend their congressional majorities in November's midterm elections.

On Friday, Trump will hold an event in Phoenix with conservative political group Turning Point USA. But his first stop is in Las Vegas where he will hold a roundtable with several police officers who have benefited from new tax breaks on overtime, along with a barber and a casino pit supervisor, who got to claim the new tax breaks on tips.

The Treasury Department said Wednesday that the average tax refund this year has been over \$3,400, up about \$340 from a year ago.

Vegas, once known for affordable living, feels economic pain

Trump has said he first conceived of his "no tax on tips" in Las Vegas, a city where entertainment is the financial lifeblood and many workers depend on gratuities from visitors.

But it's also a city of commuters, including the tipped workers who drive to their jobs at glitzy casinos. Gasoline is averaging \$5 a gallon in Las Vegas, up 28% from a year ago, according to AAA.

Nicholas Delaney, an airline attendant who lives in the Las Vegas suburb of Henderson and said he did not vote for the president in 2024, said he thinks Trump is doing a "terrible" job when it comes to the cost of living. He thought the tax break for tips was a good policy, but is concerned about the cost of groceries and gas.

"I gotta spend over \$100 for a full tank of gas, 13 gallons? Crazy," Delaney said.

Paula Goodman, a bartender in a Henderson casino, said the cost of living is her biggest concern right now, adding that she spends more than \$400 a week on groceries for her family.

But Goodman, who voted for the president, said she thought he is "doing a pretty good damn job," and doesn't blame him for high gas prices, which she portrayed as just a fluctuation. As a bartender, she said she personally appreciated the tax savings on tips she brings home.

"Every little penny nowadays is, like, huge," she said. "You've seen diesel, right? \$6.11."

Tax refunds are offset by gas prices

The White House said Trump is focused on tax cuts, deregulation and boosting U.S. energy production to drive down prices, and describes high gas prices as a temporary disruption from the war in Iran.

"Tens of millions of Americans are benefiting this tax season from the president's signature provisions" in the tax law, said White House spokesman Kush Desai, saying that shows "how the administration hasn't

lost focus on delivering on our affordability agenda at home.”

Even so, the conflict has made things less affordable. The Bank of America Institute looked at its deposit and spending data and in a Tuesday analysis concluded that “the average increase in tax refunds could cover the average increase in gasoline spending for at least five months.”

Kathy Bostjancic, chief economist at Nationwide, the insurance and financial services company, said last week in an analysis that “the steep rise in gasoline prices looks likely to completely offset the increased tax funds windfall with households,” stressing that the money back would likely prevent a sharper drop in consumer spending.

Trump’s economic message focusing on the tax breaks has also been drowned out this week by distractions from the president himself, who angered even some of his own supporters when he got into a public fight with the pope and posted a now-deleted image on social media depicting himself as Jesus.

GOP strategist Ron Bonjean said among Republicans, “the frustration and concern is growing every week about whether or not we will be able to hold onto the House this November.”

It takes a lot of repetition for a message like promoting the tax bill to break through to voters, but Trump’s tendency to drift into other subjects can dilute that, Bonjean said. Trump, who has at times dismissed affordability concerns as “a hoax,” and “con job” from Democrats, has to acknowledge the economic realities people are facing now if he wants to help his party this November, Bonjean said.

“He absolutely has to talk about his plan to bring down high gasoline costs, or else he’s lost his own message. It won’t be credible just to talk about no taxes on tips,” Bonjean said.

When will gas prices come down?

While the president has said he thinks the war with Iran will end soon, a deal to resolve it has not yet emerged, with the U.S. and Iran still proffering stances that are far apart.

Trump on Sunday said in a Fox News Channel interview that gas prices “could be the same or maybe a little bit higher” by the November midterms.

By Wednesday, in another Fox News interview, Trump walked back that comment. “I think they’ll be much lower” before the election, on the assumption the war will be long over.

“When that’s settled, gas prices are going to go down tremendously,” Trump said.

Hours later at the White House, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent was less rosy, predicting that gas prices will fall sometime this summer, depending on how the negotiations with Iran go.

“I’m optimistic that sometime between June 20th and September 20th, that we can have \$3 gas again,” Bessent told reporters.

Homeland Security worker and another woman are killed in a series of Atlanta-area attacks

By SARAH BRUMFIELD, R.J. RICO and JULIE WATSON Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — A man has been charged in a string of attacks near Atlanta that left two women dead and a man in critical condition, drawing the Trump administration’s attention after one victim was identified as a Department of Homeland Security employee who was walking her dog.

The killing of the DHS worker, Lauren Bullis, and shootings of the two other victims on Monday led Homeland Secretary Markwayne Mullin to issue a statement raising concerns that the 26-year-old defendant, U.K.-native Olaolukitan Adon Abel, was granted U.S. citizenship in 2022, when Democrat Joe Biden was president.

“These acts of pure evil have devastated our Department and my prayers are with the families of the victims,” Mullin wrote in a statement posted on social media, cataloging a litany of the defendant’s previous alleged crimes but not specifying whether they happened before he was granted citizenship.

Court records show that Olaolukitan Adon Abel, whose name appears in different variations in court and government records, pleaded guilty in California in October 2024 to assaulting two police officers with a deadly weapon and attacking another person when he was stationed at Naval Base Coronado.

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Authorities have said they believe at least one victim in this week's shootings was targeted at random, and possibly more.

A morning of violence

The first victim was found with multiple gunshot wounds near a restaurant in the Decatur area at around 1 a.m. Monday. She was taken to a hospital but died, DeKalb County Police Chief Gregory Padrick said at a news conference. Police have not publicly identified her.

About an hour later in Brookhaven, an Atlanta suburb about 12 miles (19 kilometers) northwest of the first attack, a 49-year-old homeless man sleeping outside of a grocery store was shot multiple times, Brookhaven Police Chief Brandon Gurley said. The man, whose name hasn't been released, remains hospitalized in critical condition.

"It is apparent to us that it was a completely random attack on a member of our unhoused community," Gurley said.

Just before 7 a.m. and more than 10 miles (16 kilometers) away in the suburb of Panthersville, officers responding to a call found Bullis with gunshot and stab wounds, Padrick said. She died at the scene.

Investigators in Brookhaven determined that the three attacks were connected, Gurley said.

Adon Abel was taken into custody later Monday during a traffic stop in Troup County, which borders Alabama. He is charged with two counts of malice murder, aggravated assault and firearms counts, court records show. He waived an initial court appearance Tuesday, and a public defender listed as his attorney did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment.

Toyin Adon Abel Jr., the defendant's brother, said he did not want to talk about his brother when reached by phone but expressed sympathy for the victims. "I feel terrible for the victims, their families and their connections," he said. "It's a horrible thing."

Remembered for her warmth and compassion

Bullis served in multiple roles at DHS Office of Inspector General, including as an auditor in the Office of Audits and as a Team Leader in the Office of Innovation, DHS posted on social media, saying she brought "warmth, kindness, and a genuine sense of care to her colleagues each day."

Relatives said in a statement, that she loved her family, running, reading and traveling, and "her warmth and generosity touched everyone surrounding her."

Fellow DHS auditor Ashley Toillion of Denver said she met Bullis at a work conference last year. The two became fast friends as they bonded over running and quickly made plans to do a race at Walt Disney World.

"You couldn't meet her and not be her friend," Toillion said, choking back tears. "She was just the nicest, sweetest, most encouraging person I've ever met."

Naval service and criminal case in California

Military records show the defendant enlisted in the Navy in 2020, last serving in the Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron in Coronado, California, and as a petty officer received a Navy "E" Ribbon for superior performance for battle readiness.

But in 2024 he was arrested and charged with assaulting two Coronado police officers and attacking another person. He pleaded guilty, court records show, and he was kicked out of the Navy in September of that year.

Mullin says suspect had criminal record

Mullin said Adon Abel has a criminal record that includes a sexual battery conviction.

Online court records show that someone listed with a similar name and the same birth date pleaded guilty last June in Chatham County, Georgia, to four misdemeanor counts of sexual battery.

Mullin also noted that since President Donald Trump took office, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, which DHS oversees, has worked to ensure that people with criminal histories don't attain citizenship. But the U.S. has long barred people convicted of most violent felonies from becoming citizens, and it wasn't immediately clear if Adon Abel had a criminal record that predated him becoming a citizen in 2022.

In response to a request for further details about the case and the defendant's criminal history, DHS referred The Associated Press to its post about Bullis and her death.

Jury finds that Ticketmaster and Live Nation had an anticompetitive monopoly over big concert venues

By LARRY NEUMEISTER and JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A jury found Wednesday that entertainment giant Live Nation, which hosts tens of thousands of concerts a year, and its Ticketmaster subsidiary had a harmful monopoly over big venues.

The ruling, in a lawsuit brought by dozens of states, won't immediately bring relief for concertgoers who have long complained about high ticket prices. But it could cost Live Nation hundreds of millions of dollars and perhaps force the company to sell some of its concert venues when the judge hands out penalties later.

Among other things, the jury found Ticketmaster's anticompetitive practices led to people in 22 states paying an extra \$1.72 per ticket, which the judge could order the companies to pay back.

A jury in New York deliberated for four days before reaching its decision. State attorneys general who sued Live Nation said the verdict could potentially lead to lower ticket prices for music fans.

Live Nation said in a statement that the verdict "is not the last word on this matter."

The company predicted that once a remedy phase of the litigation is completed before the judge and all appeals are resolved, the outcome likely won't be much different from what the federal government achieved with a settlement it reached with the company just after the trial began.

That deal included a cap on service fees at some amphitheaters, plus some new ticket-selling options for promoters and venues — potentially allowing, but not requiring, them to open doors to Ticketmaster competitors such as SeatGeek or AXS.

The trial was a backstage pass

The trial gave fans the equivalent of a backstage pass to a business that dominates live entertainment in the U.S. and beyond.

Live Nation CEO Michael Rapino testified, answering questions about matters including the company's Taylor Swift ticket debacle in 2022. Rapino blamed a cyberattack.

Jurors also got to see a Live Nation employee's internal messages to another employee declaring some prices "outrageous," calling customers "so stupid" and boasting that the company was "robbing them blind, baby." The employee, Benjamin Baker, who has since been promoted to a position as a ticketing executive, apologetically testified that the messages were "very immature and unacceptable."

Live Nation Entertainment owns, operates, controls booking for or has an equity interest in hundreds of venues. Its subsidiary Ticketmaster is widely considered to be the world's largest ticket-seller for live events.

The verdict could cost Live Nation and Ticketmaster hundreds of millions of dollars, based on the jury's estimate that customers paid an extra \$1.72 per ticket. The companies could also be assessed penalties. In addition, sanctions could result in court orders that they divest themselves of some entities, including venues such as amphitheaters that they own.

In its statement, Live Nation said the jury's award of \$1.72 per ticket applied to "a limited number of tickets" sold at 257 venues and representing about 20% of total tickets sold. The company estimated the aggregate single damages figure would be below \$150 million, though it would be trebled.

The civil case, initially led by the U.S. government, accused Live Nation of using its reach to smother competition — by blocking venues from using multiple ticket sellers, for example.

Live Nation denies it is a monopoly

Live Nation insisted it is not a monopoly, saying that artists, sports teams and venues decide prices and ticketing practices. A company lawyer said its size was simply a function of excellence and effort.

"Success is not against the antitrust laws in the United States," attorney David Marriott said in his summation.

Ticketmaster was established in 1976 and merged with Live Nation in 2010. The company now controls of 86% of the market for concerts and 73% of the overall market when sports events are included, according to an attorney for the states, Jeffrey Kessler.

Ticketmaster has long drawn ire from fans and some artists. Grunge rock titans Pearl Jam battled the business in the 1990s, even filing an anti-monopoly complaint with the U.S. Department of Justice, which

declined to bring a case then.

Decades later, the Justice Department, joined by dozens of states, brought the current lawsuit during Democratic former President Joe Biden's administration.

Days into the trial, Republican President Donald Trump's administration announced it was settling its claims against Live Nation.

A handful of the states joined the settlement. But more than 30 pressed ahead with the trial, saying the federal government hadn't gotten enough concessions.

Attorneys hail verdict

New Jersey Attorney General Jennifer Davenport said in a release after the verdict that Live Nation's "illegal, anti-competitive practices" had driven up ticket prices and made it harder for fans to see their favorite acts.

New York Attorney General Letitia James called the verdict "a landmark victory."

After the victory, Kessler would not say specifically what the states will seek in the next phase of the litigation, which was expected to involve another lengthy legal proceeding before penalties are decided.

But he celebrated the moment.

"It's a great day for consumers," he said.

MLB celebrates Jackie Robinson Day as every player wears No. 42 on anniversary of his historic debut

By BETH HARRIS AP Sports Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Major League Baseball honored Jackie Robinson on Wednesday with every player, coach and umpire wearing his No. 42 to mark the 79th anniversary of the infielder breaking the sport's color barrier.

Robinson debuted for the Brooklyn Dodgers on April 15, 1947. He went on to win Rookie of the Year honors, become a six-time All-Star and the 1949 National League MVP. He played in six World Series, and won his only championship in 1955 with the Dodgers.

"Every player of color who now enjoys our great sport, they owe it to this man," said Bob Kendrick, president of the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum in Kansas City, Missouri.

Robinson made his pro debut with the Kansas City Monarchs of the Negro Leagues in 1945. He was there five months before Dodgers general manager Branch Rickey interviewed him for possible selection to Brooklyn's International League farm club. Rickey wanted to make sure Robinson could withstand the racial antagonism without reacting angrily.

"What he did was incredibly difficult under some of the most harsh circumstances you could ever imagine," Kendrick said. "He had to go out there and deal not only with the racial hatred but he was carrying 21 million Black folks on his back when he walked across those lines. Had he failed, an entire race of people would have failed. That's an enormous amount of pressure. How he did it with such grace, class and dignity is absolutely incredible. And no, we should never forget Jackie Robinson."

The Los Angeles Dodgers and New York Mets gathered around the centerfield statue of Robinson stealing home at Dodger Stadium. Among the Dodgers were Tyler Glasnow, Teoscar Hernández, Will Smith, Roki Sasaki, Alex Vesia and Will Klein. Shohei Ohtani, who has attended previously, was not there ahead of pitching against the Mets later.

"A special day, especially for me as a Latino. I wouldn't be here if it wasn't because of him," Mets manager Carlos Mendoza said. "Talk about dealing with pressure at this level, imagine what he dealt with back in the day."

Dave Roberts, one of just two Black managers currently in the majors, told the teams Robinson would be proud that they reflect his dream and vision of what equality and unity would look like.

"My ask is that we remember how we got here," Roberts said.

In New York, Yankees second baseman Jazz Chisholm Jr. wore his pinstriped pants loose and blousy

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and rolled at the knees the way many players did in the 1940s, including Robinson.

A video commemorating Robinson and narrated by former Yankees pitcher CC Sabathia was played on the stadium scoreboard before the team's game against the Los Angeles Angels.

"You look at the diversity in our game as far as now, worldwide, and Jackie was the start of opening those doors to not just Black players being able to play but Latin America," Yankees manager Aaron Boone said, "and now we have people from all over the globe playing this, and Jackie was the start of all that."

In Pittsburgh, Pirates manager Don Kelly said, "It doesn't seem like one day is enough to really give back to Jackie and what he meant to baseball and to people."

Two of Robinson's granddaughters joined the teams at Dodger Stadium, not far from Robinson's adopted hometown of Pasadena. He was a four-sport star at Pasadena Junior College before going on to UCLA, where the Georgia native was better known for football than baseball.

Last year, a historical marker honoring the Robinson family was unveiled by the city of Pasadena at their former home.

"We're really carrying the legacy now and it's an incredible honor," said granddaughter Ayo Robinson, whose father David is Robinson's youngest son. "It's a weight that feels good because it keeps you grounded in what is so important. I feel like the legacy is just as important today as it has ever been."

Robinson's widow, Rachel, turns 104 in July. She lives in New York and still visits the Jackie Robinson Museum.

"She's the strong matriarch of our family, surrounded by love and intention to continue to allow her to live a life that she wanted," said granddaughter Sonya Pankey Robinson, whose father was Jackie Robinson Jr.

Also on hand in Los Angeles were recipients of scholarships from the Jackie Robinson Foundation.

For the first time in at least two decades, the percentage of Black players on opening day rosters increased this season. Major League Baseball says 6.8% of players on opening day rosters, injured lists and the restricted list were Black, up from 6.2% at the start of the 2025 season and 6.0% at the start of 2024.

"He's an icon," Milwaukee Brewers manager Pat Murphy said. "To take this day and make it something special says a lot about the character of the game."

Pakistani delegation meets in Tehran hoping for more US-Iran talks before ceasefire ends

By SAMY MAGDY, SAM METZ, MUNIR AHMED and MIKE CORDER Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Pakistan's army chief met Wednesday in Tehran with Iran's foreign minister in the latest diplomatic move to ease tensions in the Middle East and arrange a second round of negotiations between the United States and Iran after almost seven weeks of war.

The White House said any further talks would likely take place in the Pakistani capital of Islamabad, though no decision had been made on whether to resume negotiations.

The U.S. naval blockade of Iranian ports continued as the Trump administration warned it would ramp up economic pain on Iran with new economic sanctions on countries doing business with it, calling the move the "financial equivalent" of a bombing campaign.

Pakistan has emerged as a key mediator after it hosted direct talks between the U.S. and Iran in Islamabad that authorities said helped narrow differences between the two sides. Mediators are seeking a new round before the ceasefire expires next week.

Officials say US and Iran are making progress

Even as the U.S. blockade on Iranian ports and renewed Iranian threats strained the ceasefire agreement, regional officials reported progress, telling The Associated Press the United States and Iran had an "in principle agreement" to extend it to allow for more diplomacy. They spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the matter.

Iran's foreign minister, Abbas Araghchi, took part in a preliminary meeting with Asim Munir, Pakistan's army chief of staff, Iranian state media reported. It said talks would continue Thursday.

But even as mediators worked for peace, tensions simmered.

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The commander of Iran's joint military command, Ali Abdollahi, threatened to halt trade in the region if the U.S. does not lift its naval blockade.

And a newly-appointed military adviser to Iranian Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei said he doesn't support extending the ceasefire.

Iranian state media quoted Mohsen Rezaei, a former commander in the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, as saying: "Unlike the Americans who are afraid of continuous war, we are fully prepared and familiar with a long war."

U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said the White House has warned countries and private companies they could face sanctions for doing business with Tehran.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said the U.S. had not "formally requested an extension of the ceasefire" with Iran, which is set to expire Tuesday.

"At this moment, we remain very much engaged in these negotiations, in these talks," Leavitt said, adding that any further in-person talks "would very likely" return to Islamabad.

Mediators seek compromise on sticking points

Mediators are pushing for a compromise on three main sticking points that derailed direct talks last weekend — Iran's nuclear program, the Strait of Hormuz and compensation for wartime damages, according to a regional official involved in the mediation efforts.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei said Iran is open to discussing the type and level of its uranium enrichment, but his country "based on its needs, must be able to continue enrichment," Iranian state media reported.

The negotiating team led by Vice President JD Vance urged Iran to agree to a 20-year moratorium on uranium enrichment as part of a potential deal to end the war, according to the regional official and a person briefed on the matter.

The Iranians countered with an offer to suspend enrichment for five years, said the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to comment publicly on the negotiations.

The White House rejected that. The dueling proposals were first reported by The New York Times.

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.

Trump says Iran wants a deal

The war 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. Oil prices have fallen amid hopes for an end to fighting, and U.S. stocks on Wednesday surpassed records set in January.

Yet the future of the fragile ceasefire still hung in the balance as the U.S. pressed ahead with its blockade, which threatens to sever Iran from economic lifelines.

"I think they want to make a deal very badly," U.S. President Donald Trump said in an interview Wednesday on Fox Business Network's "Mornings with Maria."

In a social media post, Trump said China has agreed not to provide weapons to Iran as reports circulated that Beijing has considered transferring arms.

China has long supported Iran's ballistic missile program and backed it with dual-use industrial components that can be used for missile production, according to the U.S. government.

US military says no ships got past blockade

U.S. Central Command said Wednesday that no ships had made it past the blockade since it was imposed two days earlier, while 10 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.

Since the war began, Iran has curtailed maritime traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, which a fifth of global oil transited through in peacetime. Tehran's effective closure of the strait sent oil prices skyrocketing, raising the cost of fuel, food and other basic goods far beyond the Middle East.

Strikes continue in Lebanon after Washington talks

Meanwhile, Israel pressed ahead with its aerial and ground war in Lebanon. The country's National News Agency reported airstrikes and artillery shelling throughout southern Lebanon on Wednesday, including near Bint Jbeil, where Israeli forces have encircled Hezbollah fighters.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israeli troops were about to "eliminate this great stronghold of Hezbollah" and would continue expanding control of areas in southern Lebanon.

The fighting continued after Israeli and Lebanese officials concluded their first direct talks in decades. Netanyahu said negotiations are continuing, with disarming Hezbollah a key goal.

The Lebanese Health Ministry said Israel struck three teams of paramedics Wednesday in southern Lebanon, first hitting one team and then two more that rushed to help. The attacks killed three paramedics and wounded six others, the ministry said.

The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

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

Camp Mystic security guard says an early evacuation order could have saved lives

By JIM VERTUNO Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — The security guard at Camp Mystic the night of last year's deadly flood acknowledged Wednesday that if a general evacuation order came early in the storm, lives could've been saved.

Glenn Juenke, who helped move some girls to a two-story building before getting trapped inside a cabin himself, also saved a group of campers when he told them to run to higher ground as flood waters rose.

He testified at the end of a three-day hearing in a legal fight between the camp operators, who want to reopen the all-girls Christian Camp this summer, and families of some of the victims who died in the July 4th flood that swept through the Guadalupe River in the predawn hours.

Juenke, called as a witness for the camp operators, said it was his decision to tell a group of campers to scramble on foot up a hillside as floodwaters rose, and was not an order from camp directors or authorities.

He did not recall camp operators ever training the campers, counselors and staff where to go in case an emergency evacuation was needed.

The camp's plan to reopen has angered families of the girls who were killed, and the camp license is still under review by state health regulators. A judge last month ordered the camp to preserve damaged areas as evidence for pending lawsuits. That ruling is under appeal.

The hearing has produced the most extensive details from camp operators of what happened in the flood, including missed chances to prepare for the storm, and the delayed decisions to evacuate.

Describing the storm that came roaring through camp, Juenke said he first joined camp directors Dick and Edward Eastland in driving some of the girls away from their cabins. But Juenke later abandoned his truck when the water got too high to drive.

Now on foot, Juenke ordered a group of young girls to run to higher ground. He returned to another cabin where he was soon trapped in waist-deep water. Storage trunks were tossed around the current before they were sucked out and away.

Juenke ordered the girls in the cabin to get on air mattresses, and they stayed floating there for several hours.

"It was a long night. We were getting bitten by fire ants. There were spiders ... The girls did everything I told them to do," Juenke said. None of the girls in that cabin died.

Juenke said they emerged around dawn. He then met up with Catie Eastland, one of the camp directors, near the two-story recreation building where about a hundred girls had escaped the flood.

"I said y'all could have had a million different evacuation plans, nothing would have worked," Juenke testified.

Lawyers for the families have zeroed in on the lack of a detailed evacuation plan and the failure to send

orders to get out of the cabins. A short emergency notice posted in cabins, one that had passed state inspection just two days earlier, had told campers to stay in their cabins until given instructions by staff.

In all, 25 campers and two teenage counselors were killed. Camp co-owner Dick Eastland also died.

"You can blame it on Mother Nature or God Almighty, but if anyone had used the speakers or walkie talkie and told them to leave before 3 (am), they would've survived," said Brad Beckworth, an attorney for the family of Cile Steward, 8, the only camper whose body still has not been recovered.

Juenke defended his actions and those of the staff that night.

"We did everything we could do in the time that we had," Juenke said.

Justice Jackson chides Supreme Court conservatives over 'oblivious' pro-Trump emergency orders

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson has delivered a sustained attack on her conservative colleagues' use of emergency orders to benefit the Trump administration, calling the orders "scratch-paper musings" that can "seem oblivious and thus ring hollow."

The court's newest justice, Jackson delivered a lengthy assessment of roughly two dozen court orders issued last year that allowed President Donald Trump to put in place controversial policies on immigration, steep federal funding cuts and other topics, after lower courts found they were likely illegal.

While designed to be short-term, those orders have largely allowed Trump to move ahead — for now — with key parts of his sweeping agenda.

Jackson spoke for nearly an hour on Monday at Yale Law School, which posted a video of the event on Wednesday.

Last week, Justice Sonia Sotomayor similarly talked about emergency orders in an event Tuesday at the University of Alabama that also took issue with the conservatives' approach.

Jackson has previously criticized the emergency orders both in dissenting opinions and in an unusual appearance with Justice Brett Kavanaugh last month. But her talk at Yale, addressing the public rather than the other eight justices, was notable.

She referred to orders, which often are issued with little or no explanation as "back-of-the-envelope, first-blush impressions of the merits of the legal issue."

Worse still, she said, was that the court then insists that "those scratch-paper musings" be applied by lower courts in other cases.

The orders suffer from an additional problem, she said, a failure to acknowledge that real people are involved, making them "seem oblivious and thus ring hollow."

She also pushed back on the court's assessment that preventing the president from putting his policy in place also is a harm that often outweighs what the challengers to a policy might face.

"The president of the United States, though he may be harmed in an abstract way, he certainly isn't harmed if what he wants to do is illegal," Jackson said during a question-and-answer session with law school dean Cristina Rodriguez.

The court used to be reluctant to step into cases early in the legal process, she said. "There is value in avoiding having the court continually touching the third rail of every divisive policy issue in American life," Jackson said.

While she said she couldn't explain the change, "in recent years, the Supreme Court has taken a decidedly different approach to addressing emergency stay applications. It has been noticeably less restrained, especially with respect to pending cases that involve controversial matters."

Jackson, often joined by Sotomayor and Justice Elena Kagan, has frequently dissented.

There have been conversations about emergency orders among the justices, Jackson said, but she decided to speak publicly with the goal of being "a catalyst for change."

Also on Wednesday, Sotomayor issued a rare public apology to another justice, Kavanaugh, for what she termed "hurtful comments" she made last week during an appearance at the University of Kansas

law school.

Referencing an opinion Kavanaugh wrote in an immigration case where the court granted an emergency order sought by the administration, Sotomayor said her colleague "probably doesn't really know any person who works by the hour." Her remarks were reported by Bloomberg Law.

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

By DAVID KLEPPER and JOEY CAPPELLETTI 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 long-standing concerns about warrantless surveillance of 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.

Planned votes on the legislation were canceled Wednesday as an agreement between House Republican leaders and some rank-and-file members remained elusive. Members have pushed back despite a pressure campaign that included a trip to the White House and direct involvement from CIA Director John Ratcliffe.

The chances of significant changes, however, seem to have dropped since Trump announced his support for the program's renewal, saying it had proved 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 essential to national security and has saved lives by uncovering terrorist plots. Critics question what they say is 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 urged lawmakers to extend the foreign surveillance program for 18 more 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.

The Republican president is a longtime critic of the nation's intelligence services and was once opposed to Section 702 before he reversed himself. His director of national intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard, sponsored legislation to repeal Section 702 as a Hawaii congresswoman but now supports it. She says new protections added since her time in Congress helped change her mind.

Some Republican House members who have opposed the extension without changes went to the White House late Tuesday to discuss the matter. Ratcliffe also met with lawmakers early Wednesday.

"I am asking Republicans to UNIFY, and vote together on the test vote to bring a clean Bill to the floor," Trump said Wednesday. "We need to stick together."

Greater protections are sought for Americans' communications

In addition to a requirement for a warrant to access Americans' data, critics also want greater protec-

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tions 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. He is pushing for changes that he said will ensure the government is not 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 such as 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, riot at the 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 an overhaul.

Rep. Jim Himes of Connecticut, the top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, announced a proposal Tuesday that would require the Justice Department to seek a court order before the FBI could access search results involving Americans. Himes said in a statement that he wants to see Section 702 renewed with new protections.

It "is too critical to allow it to expire, but the legitimate concerns about the possibility of abuse also demand that we consider additional reforms," he said.

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 leads the House Intelligence Committee, is backing Trump's call for an 18-month renewal.

Crawford has said he believes the government can empower spy agencies while also holding them accountable.

Wall Street hits a record as S&P 500 continues its 2-week rally on hopes for an end to the Iran war

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The U.S. stock market hit a record Wednesday after adding to its two-week rally built on hopes the war with Iran won't create a worst-case scenario for the global economy. Whether Wall Street is correct to have so much hope for peace and whether stocks should be the highest they've ever been remains to be seen.

The S&P 500 rose 0.8% and eclipsed its prior all-time high set in January. After falling nearly 10% below its record in late March, a drop steep enough that Wall Street calls it a "correction," the index at the heart of many 401(k) accounts has since roared more than 10% higher.

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Much of the rally has been due to expectations for calming tensions in the war and a resumption of the full flow of oil from the Persian Gulf to customers worldwide. Hopes remained high Wednesday as regional officials told The Associated Press that the United States and Iran had an "in principle agreement" to extend a ceasefire to allow for more diplomacy.

To be sure, stocks could easily get back to falling if those expectations get undercut, which has happened before in the war. Oil prices drifted up and down Wednesday and showed that caution remains in financial markets. Stock indexes around the world also made only modest movements following their big gains in recent weeks.

The price for a barrel of Brent crude, the international standard, added 0.1% to settle at \$94.93. That's still well above its roughly \$70 price from before the war, though it's down from its \$119 peak when worries about the fighting have been at their heights.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average dipped 72 points, or 0.1%, while the Nasdaq composite gained 1.6%.

But if U.S.-Iran talks do happen and if they are successful, the war could end up being just a temporary setback for the global economy instead of a new normal of very high oil prices and inflation. And that in turn could allow investors to return their attention to what matters most for stock prices: money.

Through all the day-to-day noise that can affect investors' opinions, stock prices tend to move with the direction of corporate profits over the long term. And positive trends there had stock markets doing well before the war began. Analysts also see continued growth ahead, for now at least.

Bank of America rose 1.8% after saying it made \$8.6 billion in profit during the first three months of the year, more than analysts expected. CEO Brian Moynihan also said the bank saw signs of a "resilient American economy," including solid spending by U.S. consumers.

Morgan Stanley jumped 4.5% after the investment bank likewise delivered a better-than-expected quarter of results.

Companies hurt earlier in the year by worries about artificial-intelligence technology also rose to recover more of their losses for 2026. Some of the concerns were about companies potentially spending too much to build out AI capabilities, while others focused on businesses that may go obsolete because of AI-powered competition.

The worries got so deep that they shook private-credit companies that have lent money to software businesses and others potentially under threat because of AI.

ServiceNow climbed 7.3%, Oracle rose 4.2% and Ares Management gained 5.9% for some of Wednesday's bigger gains in the S&P 500. All are still down between 12% and 39% for the year so far.

With stock prices overall back to where they were in January, and with analysts' expectations for upcoming profits from big U.S. companies only rising since then, optimists say many stocks look less expensive than they did a few months ago.

"Today, we see compelling opportunity potential" to shift into areas of the market that look like better buys than earlier this year, such as technology stocks, said Mason Mendez, investment strategy analyst at Wells Fargo Investment Institute.

The stock price of Allbirds surged 582% to nearly \$17 after the company said it's shifting gears and moving into the AI compute infrastructure industry, while changing its name to NewBird AI. The Allbirds name will stay with the shoe brand that the company has already agreed to sell to American Exchange Group.

Nike rose 2.8% after CEO Elliott Hill and Tim Cook — a Nike director and the CEO of Apple — disclosed that they purchased a combined 48,000 shares of the athletic shoe maker at a cost of about \$1 million each. Nike shares are still down nearly 29% this year.

On the losing end of Wall Street was Live Nation Entertainment. It fell 6.3% after a jury found the concert giant and its Ticketmaster subsidiary had a harmful monopoly over big concert venues.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 55.57 points to 7,022.95. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dipped 72.27 to 48,463.72, and the Nasdaq composite rose 376.93 to 24,016.02.

In stock markets abroad, indexes were mixed in Europe following modest gains in Asia. South Korea's Kospi was an outlier and jumped 2.1%.

In the bond market, the yield on the 10-year Treasury rose to 4.28% from 4.26% late Tuesday.

How a US blockade on Iran has sanctioned ships turning around

By DAVID McHUGH, KONSTANTIN TOROPIN and MICHAEL BIESECKER Associated Press

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP) — The U.S. Navy's sea blockade against Iran appears to be working.

Iran-linked or sanctioned vessels that have left the Persian Gulf through the Strait of Hormuz have stopped or turned around, shipping data firms say. They appear to have jammed or faked their locations in some instances, complicating an uncertain and risky shipping situation.

The blockade that started Monday "has been fully implemented," said Adm. Brad Cooper, head of U.S. Central Command. "U.S. forces have completely halted economic trade going in and out of Iran by sea."

The action could put serious pressure on the Iranian economy, while Tehran's earlier cutoff of the waterway crucial to oil and gas supplies has sent energy prices higher during the war with the U.S. and Israel.

Here are key things to know about the blockade and the situation at the Strait of Hormuz:

How the US Navy is enforcing the blockade

The blockade is being enforced "impartially against all vessels of all nations entering or leaving coastal areas or ports in Iran," U.S. Central Command said. Vessels avoiding Iranian ports are not affected.

The military set up the blockade in the Gulf of Oman beyond the Strait of Hormuz, a U.S. official said. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive military operations, said the strategy is to observe vessels subject to the blockade leave Iranian facilities and clear the strait before intercepting them and forcing them to turn around.

The official said that the military relies on more than just automated tracking beacons that all merchant ships are required to carry, called AIS, to determine merchant ships were coming from a port in Iran but wouldn't go into more detail citing the need for operational security.

Ships are turning around as traffic adjusts

U.S. Central Command said Wednesday that no vessels have made it past its forces during the first 48 hours of the blockade.

It noted that 10 vessels have complied with directions to turn around and return toward an Iranian port or Iran's coastal area. Navy warships are telling merchant ships that they are ready to board them and use force to compel compliance.

On Tuesday, the first full day of the blockade, only eight vessels, most of them linked to Iran or sanctioned, transited the strait, said Ana Subasic, trade risk analyst at data and analytical firm Kpler. The environment is still considered "extremely high risk" despite the ceasefire, she said.

"Most of the vessels have appeared to halt or have reduced movement after clearing the strait," she said, "which tells us that the effect of the blockade is starting to show up because most of these vessels that have crossed have some kind of history with carrying Iranian-origin sanctioned cargo."

The Rich Starry, a Chinese-owned tanker previously sanctioned by the U.S. for smuggling Iranian petroleum products, left the strait and then turned back this week, according to publicly available ship tracking data.

Radio transponder data for the vessel, which is sailing under the flag of the landlocked East African nation of Malawi, shows it entered the Persian Gulf on April 4 empty of cargo. It turned off its transponder for more than a week, a tactic smugglers often use called "running dark" to avoid showing its location.

The Rich Starry's signal popped back up off the United Arab Emirates on Monday laden with oil, though it is possible the ship wasn't transmitting its accurate location. Smugglers sometimes "spoof" their locations by transmitting inaccurate coordinates.

The ship went through the Strait of Hormuz on Monday night before abruptly reversing course in the Gulf of Oman on Tuesday, heading back through the strait and toward Iran's coast Wednesday.

Other Iran-linked tankers transited the strait this week only to stop. For example, the oil-products tanker Elpis left Iranian waters Monday, passed through the strait before cutting its engines in the Gulf of Oman, tracking data shows. The ship turned off its radio transponder Tuesday and its current location couldn't

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be independently verified.

Maritime intelligence firm Windward said that vessel behavior was "indicating a fragmented and uneven response to the blockade" as sanctioned and false-flagged vessels continued to be active, some transiting the strait, others delaying or reversing course.

Trying to break Iran's chokehold

Iran has blocked the strait by threatening to attack shipping, cutting off 20% of the world's typically daily oil consumption, sending oil prices sharply higher and leading to warnings about higher inflation and recessions in leading economies.

Vessels were hit with aerial and undersea drones as well as unknown projectiles, killing 11 crew members. While those attacks have dwindled, the risk of navigating the area means that ship traffic has dropped by more than 90%.

Some of that blocked oil is making it out from Gulf producing nations through pipelines to the Red Sea and the Gulf of Oman. But those pipelines can't make up for the effective closure of the strait.

Iran has started vetting and collecting money from the few vessels daring to pass. Vessels must submit detailed information on cargo and crew to the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard and pay a \$1 fee per barrel of oil or fuel products before being allowed to pass, according to Kpler.

The US blockade has a rule book

The terms of the U.S. blockade have contributed to some uncertainty. According to a notice to mariners, the blockade is being enforced in the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea, not at the Strait of Hormuz. So simply passing the strait doesn't mean a vessel beat the blockade.

"Humanitarian shipments including food and medical supplies essential for the survival of the civilian populations" can pass with inspections.

That last provision aligns with international law on naval warfare, which bars blockades solely intended to starve civilians, according to a legal guide from the U.S. Naval War College cited by maritime historian Sal Mercogliano, who runs a YouTube channel on shipping.

"Neutral" ships can pass — though they may be inspected — but it's not clear what "neutral" means. The Lloyd's List Intelligence maritime data firm said the U.S. action "has plunged shipowners into fresh uncertainty around enforcement."

So ships from Iranian ports can be detected passing the strait — and still face the risk of being stopped farther out. Container ships heading for Iranian ports could be allowed in or out if they're carrying food — or not, if they're carrying other goods.

Iran says it would halt Gulf trade if blockade doesn't end

Unless Iran can export oil, available storage will fill up and it will have to shut down wells that are difficult to restart. Additionally, Iran imports gasoline since it lacks the refinery capacity to turn its own oil into fuel.

The commander of Iran's joint military command warned Wednesday that Iran would completely block exports and imports across the Persian Gulf region, the Sea of Oman and the Red Sea if the U.S. does not lift its blockade on Iranian ports.

"Iran will act with strength to defend its national sovereignty and its interests," Ali Abdollahi said. He added that the U.S. blockade is "a prelude to violating the ceasefire."

Senate Republicans reject effort to halt Iran war, but some eye future war powers votes

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Republican-led Senate on Wednesday rejected the latest Democratic attempt to halt President Donald Trump's war in Iran, turning aside a resolution that would require the U.S. to withdraw forces from the conflict until Congress authorizes further action.

The 47-52 vote was the fourth time this year that the Senate has voted to cede its war powers to the president in a conflict that Democrats say is illegal and unjustified. Republicans say they will keep faith in Trump's wartime leadership, for now, citing Iran's nuclear capabilities, the potential for ongoing talks and

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the high stakes of withdrawal.

Still, GOP lawmakers are anxious for the conflict to end, and some are eyeing future votes that could become an important test for the president if the war drags on. And the outcome of a war powers vote in the House, expected this week, is uncertain.

Under the War Powers Act of 1973, Congress must declare war or authorize use of force within 60 days of its start — a deadline that will arrive at the end of this month. The law provides for a potential 30-day extension of that deadline, but lawmakers have made clear that they want the administration to soon lay out a plan for the end of the conflict.

After the 60-day or 90-day deadline, "it's time to fish or cut bait," said Republican Sen. Thom Tillis of North Carolina. "I think that the administration would be wise to put together what would look like a well-founded authorization of military force and a funding strategy."

Republican senators mull a war powers resolution

While voting against the Democratic efforts to stop the war, Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, has been talking to her GOP colleagues about a resolution that would authorize the conflict beyond the 60-day deadline.

She said last month that the Democratic measures would hurt the troops by prompting an abrupt withdrawal. But she said that Congress should eventually draft an authorization of force and vote on it "so the American people know the limits and objectives of this military operation."

"There is no question that the president should have sought authorization from Congress before striking Iran on this scale, likewise bringing in our allies ahead of time as they now are equally in danger," she said at the beginning of March.

Utah Sen. John Curtis said Wednesday that he had looked at Murkowski's draft and provided feedback, but would not share details. "I think we are all watching" the war and its timeline, Curtis said, adding that he hopes it ends before the deadline.

Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., also said he would like to see the war end in the coming weeks. If not, he said, "at the end of 60 days, I think we need to vote on a military authorization."

Republican Sen. Susan Collins of Maine said that the president's power "is not unlimited as commander in chief."

"If this conflict exceeds the 60 days specified in the War Powers Act, or if the President deploys troops on the ground, I believe that Congress should have to authorize those actions," Collins said in a statement.

Republican leaders are noncommittal

It remains unclear if Republican leaders would go along with a vote to authorize the war. Senate Majority Leader John Thune said this week that "at this point most of us I think feel pretty good about what the military has achieved" in Iran.

But Thune did say that "they do need a plan for how to wind this down, how to get an outcome that actually leads to a safer, more secure Middle East and, by extension, a stronger national security position for the United States."

Thune said another "inflection point" will be an eventual White House request for war funding. Congress is still waiting for the request, which could total hundreds of billions of dollars.

That is a "power that Congress has to influence what happens there," Thune said.

Republican Sen. Jim Lankford of Oklahoma said that war funding will "be the big vote." He added that the question, then, will be: "Is it going to happen or is it not going to happen?" Lankford said.

Sen. John Kennedy, R-La., said that at the 60-day deadline, Congress isn't going to "jump up and say that's it, it's one second past 60 days, everybody come home."

Some of the people who want a vote just want to embarrass Trump, Kennedy said.

"I want to see us achieve our objective in Iran," Kennedy said. "And then I want to see us get out."

Democrats say war is illegal, unnecessary

Democrats have vowed to force votes on the Senate floor as long as the war continues.

"As our troops continue to sacrifice whatever is asked of them, we senators need to do the absolute minimum required of us," said Democratic Sen. Tammy Duckworth of Illinois, an Iraq war veteran who

lost both legs in combat, before Wednesday's vote.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said that with gas prices climbing, "the American people literally cannot afford for Republicans to forgo another opportunity to work with Democrats to end Trump's disastrous war."

Trump's budget director defends White House plan for massive boost in military spending

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — An effort to ramp up U.S. weapons production and build more ships, planes and drones will require a massive upfront investment, President Donald Trump's budget director told a House committee Wednesday.

The testimony from Russell Vought jump-starts the White House's push to increase defense spending to nearly \$1.5 trillion in the next budget year, up from nearly \$1 trillion this year, while cutting health research, heating assistance and scores of other domestic programs by about 10% overall. Such cuts do not cover mandatory spending, which includes such programs as Social Security and Medicare.

The debate over Trump's proposal underscored the sharp divide that will shape some of the most significant policy debates going into a midterm election that will give voters the ultimate say on the direction of the country.

"For the industrial base to double or triple and build more facilities, not just add shifts, it requires multi-year agreements to purchase into the future," Vought told lawmakers. "That cost has to be booked in this first year."

The White House is calling for about \$1.1 trillion for defense through the regular appropriations process, which typically requires support from both parties for approval. An additional \$350 billion would come through a separate bill that Republicans can accomplish on their own, through party-line majority votes.

Rep. Brendan Boyle of Pennsylvania, the ranking Democratic member of the committee, said he believes in a strong national defense. But he said the idea of increasing defense by more than 40% while cutting programs that people need shows that the Republican administration's priorities are "out of whack."

The committee chairman, Rep. Jodey Arrington predicted the hearing would be more "amped up" than usual, and that proved to be true, beginning with his opening statement focused on criticizing Democrat Joe Biden's presidency. Arrington, R-Texas, said he did not know of any president in his lifetime who "inherited such a complete and utter mess as President Trump did in January of last year."

Since then, Arrington said, Trump has secured the border, cut taxes and constrained nondefense spending. It was the beginning of several back-and-forths at the hearing.

"You know how bad this economy is when we hear Joe Biden being invoked, we hear trans people being invoked. I was waiting for Jimmy Carter to be blamed next," Boyle said in response to Arrington's opening remarks.

Boyle said consumer confidence is plummeting under Trump and noted a gas station he passed in Philadelphia recently was selling gas at \$4.11 a gallon versus less than \$3 a gallon some six weeks ago because of Trump's "war of choice in Iran."

Rep. Becca Balint, D-Vt., called the proposed defense spending increase shocking.

"We've never in the history of this country seen spending like this, paid for by slashing health care, education and housing," Balint said. "Mr. Vought, yes or no, is \$350 billion for the war in Iran lowering costs for Americans?"

"It is certainly not defunding child care. We fully fund child care in this budget," Vought said, not directly answering the question.

Balint went on to incorporate Trump's "America First" mantra in her questioning.

She said \$350 billion could pay for an enhanced health insurance tax credit for 10 years and that her constituents are asking how the country can continue to spend money on wars and not find a solution to helping people afford health care.

Vought said the president has made clear he was not going to let Iran have a nuclear weapons, missiles and a navy that affect U.S. national security.

"He is doing what is necessary to keep us safe, while at the same time trying to pursue diplomacy so that we can get out of wars and lower those costs over time," Vought said.

Vought said it was unclear how much the administration would seek to fund the war during the current budget year, which ends Sept. 30. That money would be part of an emergency supplemental spending bill and would be on top of the funds the White House is seeking to boost defense spending next year.

"Would it be more than \$50 billion?" asked Rep. Veronica Escobar, D-Texas.

"We're still working on it," Vought said. "I don't have a ballpark for you."

Prosecutors sought access to Federal Reserve building as Trump threatens to fire Powell

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN and CHRISTOPHER RUGABER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal prosecutors made an unannounced visit this week to a construction site at Federal Reserve headquarters that is the focus of an investigation into a \$2.5 billion renovation project, according to two people familiar with the visit.

Two prosecutors and an investigator from U.S. Attorney Jeanine Pirro's office were turned away on Tuesday by a building contractor and referred to Fed attorneys, one of the people said. The two people familiar with the visit spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to publicly discuss an ongoing investigation.

The visit underscores that the Trump administration is not backing down from its investigation of the Fed and its chair, Jerome Powell, even though the probe has delayed the confirmation of a new chair nominated by President Donald Trump. The investigation is focused on cost overruns and brief testimony about the project last summer by Powell. Trump confirmed in an interview that aired Wednesday on Fox Business that he wants to continue the probe.

Last month, during a closed-door hearing before a federal judge, a top deputy from Pirro's office conceded that they hadn't found any evidence of a crime in their investigation of the headquarters project.

Robert Hur, an attorney for the Federal Reserve board of governors, sent an email to Pirro's prosecutors about their visit and their request for a "tour" to "check on progress" at the construction site. Hur's email, which The Associated Press has viewed, noted that U.S. District Judge James Boasberg concluded that their interest in the Federal Reserve's renovation project was "pretextual."

"Should you wish to challenge that finding, the courts provide an avenue for you; it is not appropriate for you to try to circumvent it," Hur wrote.

Republican Tillis is key vote

Sen. Thom Tillis, a North Carolina Republican who is a key member of the Senate Banking Committee, has vowed to vote against Kevin Warsh, Trump's nominee to replace Powell as Fed chair, until the investigation is dropped. With the committee closely divided on partisan lines, Tillis' opposition is enough to block Warsh from receiving the committee's approval.

Tillis on Wednesday criticized the investigation as "bogus, ill-timed, ill-informed" and repeated that seven Republican members of the banking panel have said they do not believe Powell committed a crime when he testified last June.

Tillis also said there aren't enough votes on the committee or in the broader Senate to do an end-run around the committee and get Warsh confirmed some other way.

"There really is no path," he told reporters, adding that Pirro and her aides were "asleep at the switch" because the investigation has essentially delayed Powell's departure from the Fed, despite Trump's obsessive criticism of the Fed chair. Powell has now said he won't leave until the investigation is resolved.

Tillis suggested Pirro blindsided the White House with her investigation. "They should have consulted with the White House, because I'm sure if they would have, (the White House) would have said, 'no, we can wait,'" until Powell steps down.

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But Kevin Hassett, the Trump administration's top economist, said Wednesday that the Justice Department got involved because "the president wanted to investigate the cost overrun," Axios reported.

The Banking panel said Tuesday that it will hold a hearing on Warsh's nomination April 21. Powell's term as Fed chair ends May 15, but Powell said last month he would remain as chair until a replacement is named.

Powell is serving a separate term as a member of the Fed's governing board that lasts until January 2028. Chairs typically leave the board when their terms as chair end, but they can remain on the board if they choose. Powell has said he won't leave until the investigation is resolved. If he remains it would deny Trump the opportunity to appoint someone else to the seven-member board.

Late Tuesday Tillis posted a link on social media to The Wall Street Journal's article on the visit below an image of the Three Stooges and wrote, "The U.S. Attorney's Office for D.C. at the crime scene."

Investigation centers on building renovations

The investigation centers on an appearance by Powell before the Banking Committee last June, when he was asked about cost overruns on the renovations. The most recent estimates from the Fed suggest the current estimated cost of \$2.5 billion is about \$600 million higher than a 2022 estimate of \$1.9 billion.

"It is probably corrupt, but what it really is, is incompetent," Trump said. "Don't you think we have to find out what happened there?"

The president's support for the investigation threatens a timeframe set out by Sen. Tim Scott, a South Carolina Republican who chairs the Banking Committee. Scott said Tuesday on Fox Business that he believed the investigation would be "wrapped up in the next few weeks," allowing Warsh to be confirmed soon after.

Threat to fire Powell

News of the unannounced visit by prosecutors comes as Trump has again threatened to fire Powell, if the Federal Reserve Chair decides to stay on the central bank's governing board after his term as chair expires next month.

"Well then I'll have to fire him, OK?" Trump said.

Trump has for months wanted to remove Powell, saying he has been too slow in orchestrating interest rate cuts that would give the U.S. economy a quick boost. Powell has said the investigation is a pretext to undermine the Fed's independence to set rates.

Sen. Josh Hawley, a Missouri Republican, said Trump can only fire Powell "for cause," meaning some kind of misconduct, "so that's a pretty tall order."

Supreme Court weighing another Trump removal

Trump's threat to fire Powell comes as the Supreme Court is weighing the president's effort to remove another central bank governor, Lisa Cook. Lower courts have so far allowed Cook to remain in her job while her legal challenge to the firing continues. The Supreme Court also seemed likely to keep her on the Fed when the court heard arguments in January. A decision could come any time.

The issue in Cook's case is whether allegations of mortgage fraud, which she has denied, is a sufficient reason to fire her or a mere pretext masking Trump's desire to exert more control over U.S. interest rate policy.

The Supreme Court has allowed the firings of the heads of other governmental agencies at the president's discretion, with no claim that they did anything wrong, while also signaling that it is approaching the independence of the nation's central bank more cautiously, calling the Fed "a uniquely structured, quasi-private entity."

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

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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 died by 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

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.

It's Tax Day. Treasury says 53 million filers used new Trump tax breaks before the deadline

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) —

It's Tax Day on Wednesday, the deadline for most Americans to file taxes, and the Trump administration says millions of people have already used new breaks such as no tax on tips and overtime, exemptions for interest on certain car loans, deductions for some seniors, and Trump Accounts for children's savings.

More than 53 million filers claimed a deduction under one of those provisions from Republicans' massive tax and spending law, a Treasury official told reporters Tuesday before the deadline, with 6 million people claiming no tax on tips, 21 million claiming the overtime deduction and 30 million older Americans claiming the enhanced deduction.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to preview the numbers, said the 2026 filing season was a success from the administration's perspective.

Still, the latest data comes as most Americans, or 7 in 10, still think their taxes are too high, according to recent polling, despite the passage of the Republican tax law which promised big savings for taxpayers.

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As the tax season kicked off in January, the White House boasted that average refunds were projected to rise by at least \$1,000. But currently, the average refund amount is \$3,462, according to the latest IRS data, which is up 11% or about \$350 from last tax year's \$3,116 average refund payment.

In an interview that aired on Wednesday, President Donald Trump claimed much bigger results. "People are getting refunds of \$5,000, \$8,000, \$11,000 that they had no idea they were getting," he told Fox Business News. "It's turned out to be better -- as good or better than I said it would be."

Treasury says tax refunds this season are up 24% compared with the four-year average of refunds before Trump took office.

The White House has been trying to promote Trump's tax cuts as a way to get voters more enthusiastic about the way he's handling the economy before November's midterm elections, but the message has been overshadowed for weeks by higher gas prices caused by the war in Iran.

Republicans on Capitol Hill took advantage of Tax Day to focus on the tax breaks.

"Lower taxes, bigger refunds and more money in the pockets of hardworking Americans," House Speaker Mike Johnson said on the Capitol steps, flanked by Republican lawmakers and Americans he said are benefiting, including a restaurant server, a farmer, and small business owners.

"We don't believe you should send it all here to Uncle Sam," Johnson said. "We want you to keep it."

But Democrats said Americans are reeling from inflation and the high cost of living as Trump focuses his attention on the Iran war. "Hardworking families are watching as the Trump administration spends billions to bomb Iran, yet they can't seem to find any funding for health care, housing or food for hungry children," said Rep. Pete Aguilar of California, the Democratic caucus chairman.

The 2026 season comes as the IRS has gone through a leadership turnover and reduced its workforce by 27% over the past year through cuts brought on by the Department of Government Efficiency.

IRS CEO Frank Bisignano testified to the Senate Finance Committee on Wednesday, extolling the IRS' implementation of the Republican tax law.

However, Democratic lawmakers have been zeroing in on IRS disclosures of confidential taxpayer information to Immigration and Customs Enforcement as part of an agreement between ICE and the Department of Homeland Security to share information for the purpose of identifying and deporting people illegally in the U.S.

Pope doubles down on peace and unity message as Trump's criticism continues

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ABOARD THE PAPAL PLANE (AP) — Pope Leo XIV on Wednesday doubled down as U.S. President Donald Trump's criticism showed no sign of letting up, insisting that the message "the world needs to hear today" is one of peace and dialogue.

Leo spoke to journalists en route to Cameroon as he continued his Africa visit.

He made no mention of Trump's latest social media post or the suggestion by U.S. Vice President JD Vance, a Catholic convert, that he should "be careful" when speaking about theology.

Leo took no questions. Rather, he focused on his first stop in Algeria and the teachings of St. Augustine of Hippo, the inspiration of his religious order and his own spirituality.

But Leo spoke in terms that suggested the Trump administration's criticism of the pope's calls for peace in the Iran war hadn't gone unnoticed. He spoke exclusively in English.

Trump has issued repeated broadsides this week against history's first U.S.-born pope, accusing him of being weak on crime and a captive to the left, and asserting that Leo owed his papacy to Trump. Trump also posted, then took down, an artificial intelligence-generated, Christ-like image of himself that drew widespread condemnation, even from many supporters.

Trump's attacks on Leo began after the pope amplified criticism of war and asserted that God doesn't bless those who drop bombs. Leo also called Trump's threat to annihilate Iranian civilization "truly unacceptable."

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Overnight, Trump posted "Not good!!!" in response to a post citing social media posts by Leo before he was pope that were critical of Trump. And he wrote: "Will someone please tell Pope Leo that Iran has killed at least 42,000 innocent, completely unarmed, protesters in the last two months, and that for Iran to have a Nuclear Bomb is absolutely unacceptable."

Leo points to St. Augustine and 'search for truth'

Leo drew attention to his visit Tuesday to Annaba, the ancient city of Hippo where St. Augustine, the theological and philosophical giant of the early church, lived as a bishop for more than 30 years.

"His writings, his teaching, his spirituality, his invitation to search for God and to search for truth is something that is very much needed today, a message that is very real for all of us today as believers in Jesus Christ, but for all people," Leo said.

By going to Hippo, Leo said that he wanted to offer the church and the world a vision that St. Augustine offers in terms of seeking "unity among all peoples and respect for all people in spite of the differences."

He recalled that the vast majority of Algerians are Muslim, but that they respect and honor St. Augustine as "one of the great sons of their land." Such an attitude, he said, helps to build bridges between Christians and Muslims and promote dialogue.

And he recalled his visit to the Great Mosque of Algiers, where he stood in silent prayer.

"I think the visit to the mosque was significant to say that although we have different beliefs, we have different ways of worshiping, we have different ways of living, we can live together in peace," he said.

"And so I think that to promote that kind of image is something which the world needs to hear today."

While being on the receiving end of Trump's criticisms online, Leo pointed to the respectful way that the Algerian government had received him on the first-ever papal visit — with a full military airborne escort through Algeria's airspace.

"It's a sign of the goodness, of the generosity, of the respect that the Algerian people and the Algerian government have wished to show to the Holy See and to myself," Leo said.

A debate about 'just war'

The Vatican's editorial director, Andrea Tornielli, was more pointed than Leo in his rebuttal of Vance, who had argued that the Catholic Church had a long tradition of endorsing so-called "just wars," when war can be morally justified.

Tornielli noted that the "just war" theory was developed centuries ago, when wars were fought with swords, not machine-guided drones.

"This teaching has gradually been enriched and deepened, to the point of recognizing how increasingly difficult it is to claim that a 'just war' exists," Tornielli wrote on Vatican Media. Modern warfare poses a "reality that raises moral questions of dramatic intensity."

"There has been a growing awareness that war is not a path to be followed," he wrote.

U.S. Cardinal Robert McElroy, the archbishop of Washington, has said the U.S.-Israeli war in Iran failed to meet the minimum criteria for the war to be considered morally just. Such criteria would have included that it was a response to an imminent threat, that the U.S. and Israel had clearly articulated their intentions or that the benefits would outweigh the harm.

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 before returning to the game. Minutes later, an Israeli strike came.

The target was Jawad's uncle's home. The blast shook buildings and threw Jawad's siblings at home to the ground. Their mother scrambled to help them but already had a feeling of dread.

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

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Her son was killed in the March 27 strike in Saksakieh. So was a cousin — 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. Meslmani 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 172 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 questions from The Associated Press, 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.

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

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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.

On March 5, she was helping to prepare for iftar, the meal ending the daily fast during the holy month of Ramadan, when an airstrike hit her aunt’s house.

Now, Hassan al-Jabali sleeps in the Beirut hospital where doctors are treating his wife and three remaining daughters, all wounded in the strike that killed Zeinab.

War has shadowed most of his life. In 1982, his brother — then 10, like Zeinab — was killed by an Israeli missile.

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

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.

‘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?”

Student kills 9 in Turkey’s second school shooting in 2 days

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — A student opened fire on two classrooms at a middle school in Turkey on Wednesday, killing nine people and wounding 13 others, the interior minister said, in the country’s second such shooting in two days.

The 14-year-old gunman was killed. He arrived at the school armed with guns believed to belong to his father, a retired police officer, Kahramanmaraş provincial Gov. Mukerrem Unluer said. He was carrying five firearms and seven magazines.

The motive of the attack wasn’t immediately known. It was not clear whether the gunman was killed by police or killed himself.

Six of the 13 people wounded were in serious condition, Interior Minister Mustafa Ciftci said.

The attack came a day after 16 people, mostly students, were wounded when a former student opened fire at a high school in nearby Sanliurfa province. The assailant later killed himself.

Until this week, school shootings were rare in Turkey.

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State-run broadcaster, TRT, identified the latest shooter as Isa Aras Mersinli and said his father was detained for questioning.

Turkish authorities imposed a ban on the broadcast of "traumatic" images from the shooting, warning media organizations to limit coverage to statements from officials.

Parents rushed to the school in Kahramanmaraş' Onikisubat district after hearing reports of an armed attack, NTV television reported.

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.

What to know about the new direct talks between Lebanon and Israel

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB and ABBY SEWELL Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Lebanon and Israel's first direct talks in decades this week, spurred by the latest war between Israel and the Iran-backed Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, have been met by both high

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hopes and condemnation.

Officials have sought to temper expectations of what might come out of the negotiations, but the fact that they are happening at all represents a significant step.

The two countries have had a rocky and often hostile relationship since Israel's inception in 1948. Like the majority of Arab countries, Lebanon has no formal diplomatic relations with Israel, and a 1955 law in Lebanon forbids Lebanese citizens from having any contact with Israelis - although the law is selectively enforced.

Here's why they are talking now, what has come out of previous diplomatic efforts, and what might come out of this one.

What led to the current talks

On March 2, two days after the U.S. and Israel launched their war on Iran, Hezbollah entered the fray by firing missiles across the border. Israel responded with an intense bombing campaign and ground invasion.

Lebanon's current government came to power in early 2025 on a reformist platform that included disarming non-state actors. Officials were angered by Hezbollah's decision to enter a new war. The government moved to criminalize the group's military activities, declared Iran's ambassador persona non grata, and banned the Iranian Revolutionary Guard.

President Joseph Aoun offered direct negotiations with Israel - the first in decades - in exchange for a cessation of hostilities. Neither Israel nor the Americans responded. French President Emmanuel Macron backed Aoun, but even then, the calls fell on deaf ears.

That changed after the announcement of a truce between Iran and the United States and talks between the two brokered by Pakistan.

Tehran included as a condition for permanent ceasefire that the cessation of hostilities should include Lebanon. Though Pakistan said it was part of the agreement, Israel dismissed Lebanon's inclusion in the ceasefire, and Washington later followed suit.

The Lebanese state, meanwhile, had reservations about Lebanon being a card in the Iranian negotiations and wanted to separate the war in Lebanon into its own diplomatic track.

Hezbollah and its supporters said that, given Lebanon's weak position, Beirut should rely on Tehran's leverage and not directly negotiate with Israel while under fire. The group accused the government of offering "free concessions" to an enemy state.

After Israel launched over 100 airstrikes in Lebanon, including in some of the busiest areas in the heart of Beirut killing over 350 people, on April 8 Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that he had agreed to direct talks with Lebanon.

What is expected to come out of the talks

The direct negotiations kicked off Tuesday, when Lebanon and Israel's ambassadors to the United States met in Washington in-person preparatory meeting.

The two countries are framing these talks very differently, and many in Lebanon fear that Beirut has little leverage.

Lebanon wants to follow the model of the talks in Pakistan, with a truce in place before beginning talks for a permanent ceasefire. Israel has said there will be no ceasefire, though it has halted its attacks in Beirut since last Wednesday, as per Washington's request.

Apart from calling for a ceasefire, Lebanon wants the withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon, the release of Lebanese prisoners held in Israel, the return of the displaced, and reconstruction. Lebanon has also pushed for boosting international funding for the military so it can deploy across the country and assume full-sovereignty over the country's geography.

Israel has framed these talks as peace talks largely focusing on disarming Hezbollah. 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."

Meanwhile, Lebanon Ambassador Nada Hamadeh Mouawad in a written statement to the press described the meeting as "constructive."

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At Tuesday's meeting in Washington - a preliminary session focused on logistics rather than substance - Lebanon and Israel's ambassadors sat quietly face-to-face while Secretary of State Marco Rubio and other U.S. officials sat in between. The meeting ended with no ceasefire. The two sides said formal negotiations will proceed, without giving a date.

"This is a process, not an event," Rubio said. "This is more than just one day. This will take time."

History of past Lebanon-Israel talks

Previous rounds of peace negotiations between the two countries have often gone nowhere or resulted in agreements that were never fully implemented or later revoked.

In 1949, indirect negotiations led to a non-aggression pact that remained in place until 1967, when Israel withdrew from all previously signed armistice agreements after the six-day war between it and several Arab countries.

In 1982, during Lebanon's civil war and after Israel invaded Lebanon in an offensive against the Palestinian Liberation Organization, Lebanon's government entered into direct negotiations with Israel. In May 1983, the countries signed an agreement under which Lebanon would formally recognize Israel, Israel would withdraw from Lebanon, and a security zone would be set up in southern Lebanon.

The deal fell apart under internal divisions and escalation in Lebanon's civil war. It was formally rescinded by the Lebanese government a year later.

In 1993, along with a number of other Arab countries, Lebanon took part in direct peace negotiations with Israel in the leadup to the Oslo peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. The Lebanese track did not continue after that.

In 2022, following indirect negotiations mediated by the U.S., Israel and Lebanon agreed on delineation of their long-disputed maritime border as a precursor to moving toward a land border agreement. The agreement was touted at the time as decreasing the risk of armed conflict.

But after the Oct. 7, 2023 Hamas-led attack in southern Israel sparked the war in Gaza, Hezbollah began firing missiles across the border in a "support front" for the Palestinians. The ensuing low-level conflict between Israel and the Lebanese militant group escalated into full-blown war in September 2024.

Lebanon entered into indirect negotiations with Israel to reach a ceasefire in that conflict, again mediated by Washington. The resulting agreement, which included moves to disarm Hezbollah and Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon, was never fully enforced. Lebanon is now calling for a return to that agreement.

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

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"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 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."

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 West Health–Gallup Center on Healthcare in America 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.

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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."

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.

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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 Tarrio, 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 milestone 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."

Today in History: April 16, the Virginia Tech shooting

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, April 16, the 106th day of 2026. There are 259 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On April 16, 2007, Seung-hui Cho, a 23-year-old Virginia Tech student, killed 32 people on the Virginia Tech campus before taking his own life. It remains the deadliest school shooting in US history.

Also on this date:

In 1866, a crate of nitroglycerine that had been shipped from New York to California by way of Panama exploded in the Wells Fargo building in San Francisco, killing 14 people and shattering windows up to a half mile away. (The blast prompted passage of a federal law banning shipments of explosives on passenger vessels.)

In 1917, Vladimir Lenin, after being exiled to Europe, returned to Russia by train to take command of the Russian Revolution that would overthrow a provisional government, install communism and bring about the rise of the Soviet Union.

In 1945, a Soviet submarine in the Baltic Sea torpedoed the ship MV Goya, which Germany was using to transport civilian refugees and wounded soldiers. As many as 7,000 people died as the ship broke apart and sank minutes after being struck.

In 1947, the French cargo ship Grandcamp, carrying over 2,000 tons of ammonium nitrate, blew up in the harbor of Texas City, Texas. A nearby ship, the High Flyer, which was carrying ammonium nitrate and sulfur, caught fire and exploded the following day. The combined blasts and fires killed nearly 600 people and injured 5,000 in the worst industrial accident in U.S. history.

In 1963, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote his "Letter from Birmingham Jail" in which the civil rights activist responded to a group of local clergymen who had criticized him for leading street protests. King defended his tactics, writing, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

In 1972, Apollo 16 blasted off for the moon with astronauts John Young, Charles Duke and Ken Mattingly aboard.

In 2010, the U.S. government accused Wall Street's most powerful firm of fraud, saying Goldman Sachs & Co. had sold mortgage investments without telling buyers the securities were crafted with input from a client who was betting on them to fail. (In July 2010, Goldman agreed to pay \$550 million in a settlement with the Securities and Exchange Commission but did not admit wrongdoing.)

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In 2012, trial began in Oslo, Norway, for Anders Breivik, charged with killing 77 people in a bomb and gun rampage in July 2011. (Breivik was found guilty of terrorism and premeditated murder and sentenced to 21 years in prison.)

In 2016, a magnitude 7.8 earthquake struck Ecuador's coastal provinces, killing hundreds of people and displacing thousands.

In 2023, the New York production of "The Phantom of the Opera" ended its 35-year Broadway run with standing ovations and champagne toasts. The final curtain came down on performance No. 13,981 at the Majestic Theatre, ending the longest-running show on "The Great White Way."

Today's Birthdays: Singer Bobby Vinton is 91. Basketball Hall of Famer Kareem Abdul-Jabbar is 79. Football coach Bill Belichick is 74. Actor Ellen Barkin is 72. Singer Jimmy Osmond is 63. Actor Jon Cryer is 61. Actor-comedian Martin Lawrence is 61. Actor Peter Billingsley is 55. Actor Lukas Haas is 50. Actor-singer Kelli O'Hara is 50. Actor Claire Foy (TV: "The Crown") is 42. Rapper Chance the Rapper is 33. Actor Anya Taylor-Joy is 30. Actor Sadie Sink is 24. Boxer Emiliano Vargas is 22.