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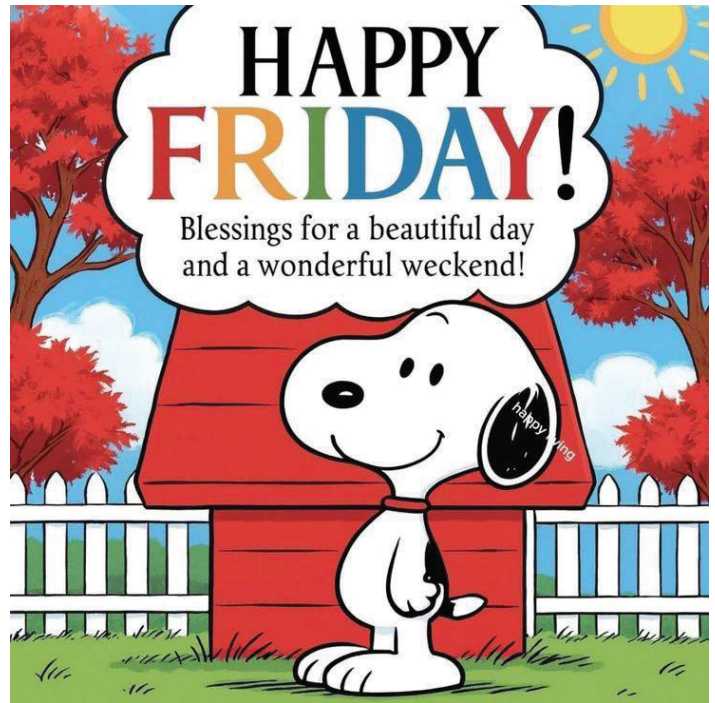
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Friday, April 17

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 Siseton, 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.



Sunday, April 19

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

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

United Methodist: Worship at Conde, 8:15 a.m.; at Groton, 9:30 a.m.; at Britton, 11:15 a.m.; Groton Sunday School, 9:30 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 10:30 a.m.

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

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

Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship (Jordan and Julia (Grenz) Kroll will be the guest speakers), 10:30 a.m.

JVT Practice, 3 p.m., Arena
Princesses Prom, 4:30 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.

Israel-Lebanon Ceasefire

Israel and Lebanon agreed to a 10-day ceasefire starting at 5 pm ET yesterday, which may aid efforts to extend the fragile US-Iran truce.

The Israel-Lebanon deal calls for US-mediated talks toward longer-term peace. The neighboring nations have technically been at war since Israel was established in 1948. Amid the Iran war, fighting has intensified between Israel and Hezbollah, an Iranian-backed Lebanese militant group widely seen as stronger than the national military. Hezbollah declined to engage in direct talks with Israel, so the Lebanese government negotiated the truce on its behalf, as in a 2024 ceasefire. Israel says it will not remove ground troops stationed in southern Lebanon, a move Hezbollah says could upend the ceasefire.

Meanwhile, Pakistan is seeking to host another round of US-Iran peace talks before that ceasefire expires April 22. The truce has held so far despite a US naval blockade of Iranian ports aimed at applying economic pressure to the regime.

Triumphal Arch, Triumphant

The US Commission of Fine Arts approved designs yesterday for President Donald Trump's proposed white-and-gold Triumphal Arch.

Conditional on the results of pending lawsuits, the arch will sit on Columbia Island, a human-made island in the Potomac River separating Washington, DC, from Arlington, Virginia. The monument stands at 250 feet (nearly 100 feet taller than Paris' Arc de Triomphe) and commemorates the US' 250th anniversary. At the arch's base are four gold lions. Capping the structure is a 60-foot-tall, Lady Liberty-like gold statue facing the Washington Monument, flanked by gold eagles. Visitors would be able to access the viewing deck via an internal staircase or elevator.

The Interior Department also got approval for two other proposed projects: an underground center to screen White House guests and painting for the exterior of the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, part of the White House complex.

All's Well That Maps Well

A newly uncovered map has pinpointed the exact site of William Shakespeare's only known London home, a Blackfriars property he bought in 1613, solving a centuries-old mystery over the playwright's city residence.

The 1668 precinct plan, discovered in the London Archives and drawn two years after the Great Fire of 1666, shows the property stood at what is now the eastern end of Ireland Yard, spanning 5 Burgon St. and 5 St. Andrew's Hill, directly under an existing plaque. The map depicts an L-shaped building, large enough to have been divided into two homes, carved from a 13th-century Dominican friary near the Blackfriars Theatre, which Shakespeare partly owned. Associated documents indicate the property later passed to his daughter and was sold by his granddaughter before being destroyed in the fire.

Over time, the site has housed a printing firm, carpet wholesaler, construction office, the National Book Association, and, most recently, modern offices and apartments.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Singer D4vd, real name David Anthony Burke, is arrested on murder charges and held without bail months after the body of 14-year-old Celeste Rivas Hernandez was found in his abandoned Tesla.

NHL regular season wraps with 16 teams heading to the Stanley Cup playoffs, which begin Saturday.

UEFA Champions League semifinals set after Bayern Munich beats Real Madrid; games resume April 28.

University of Southern California launches an AI institute for aspiring actors, focused on how the technology can be used to help their craft.

NPR receives two charitable gifts totaling \$113M after federal budget cuts.

Science & Technology

President Donald Trump nominates retired Coast Guard officer and former deputy surgeon general Erica Schwartz to serve as director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Paleontologists discover a new long-necked dinosaur dating back roughly 155 million years in Argentina; our understanding of long-necked dinosaurs to date has relied largely on finds in the Northern Hemisphere.

Neurobiologists manipulate brain circuits linked to placebo pain relief, pointing to new possibilities for opioid-free pain management strategies.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close up (S&P 500 +0.3%, Dow +0.2%, Nasdaq +0.4%) after Israel and Lebanon agree to temporary ceasefire.

Europe could run out of jet fuel in six weeks due to Middle East war, International Energy Agency warns.

Netflix shares drop 10.4% in after-hours trading after announcing its cofounder and chairman, Reed Hastings, who served as CEO for 25 years, will exit the streaming giant's board.

Brokerage Charles Schwab introduces cryptocurrency investing product, dubbed Schwab Crypto, which will make bitcoin and ether trading available to clients.

Politics & World Affairs

Former Virginia Lt. Gov. Justin Fairfax (D) kills his wife before dying by suicide amid divorce proceedings, police say.

Analilia Mejia (D) wins special election to fill House seat after Rep. Mikie Sherrill (D, NJ-11) won gubernatorial election in November.

Russia carries out deadliest drone and missile attack in Ukraine so far this year, with at least 18 people killed and more than 100 wounded.



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Groton Area distance runners shine at Roncalli Geffdog Relays

WARNER — Despite a limited roster due to the HOSA Conference in Sioux Falls, Groton Area still found success Thursday at the Roncalli Geffdog Relays, powered by a dominant showing from its distance runners.

The boys placed sixth in the team standings with 65 points in a competitive field won by Ipswich with 102.5. Aberdeen Roncalli (94) and host Warner (87) followed, with Frederick Area (79) and Mobridge-Pollock (70) rounding out the top five.

Groton Area's strength came in the distance events, where Jayden Schwan delivered a standout performance by sweeping three individual titles. Schwan won the 800 meters in 2:13.04, captured the 1600 meters in 4:53.59, and added another victory in the 3200 meters with a time of 11:11.31.

Teammate Riley Shellenberger also contributed key points in the distance races, placing third in the 800 meters (2:17.91) and fourth in the 1600 meters (5:07.46).

Groton Area's relay teams added to the scoring effort. The 4x800 relay team of Jayden Schwan, Jace Johnson, Riley Shellenberger and Ethan Kroll turned in a second-place finish in 8:56.81. The 4x200 relay squad of Lincoln Krause, Jordan Schwan, JJ Muller and Ryder Schwan placed third with a time of 1:35.38, while the sprint medley relay team of Ryder Schwan, Lincoln Krause, Jordan Schwan and Jace Johnson finished third in 4:00.12. The 4x100 relay team added a fifth-place finish in 46.65.

In the sprints, Tate Johnson led the way with a 37th-place finish in the 100 meters (13.79) and 34th in the 200 meters (28.22). Briggs Conn placed 21st in the 400 meters (1:09.20) and added an 11th-place finish in the 800 meters (2:44.16). David Jetto also competed in the sprints, placing 41st in the 100 meters and 37th in the 200 meters.

In the field events, Jordan Schwan took 22nd in the discus with a throw of 77 feet, 7 inches.

On the girls' side, Suri Jetto competed in three events, placing 29th in the 100 meters (16.50), 26th in the 200 meters (35.31), and 18th in the 400 meters (1:21.13).

Boy's Division

Team Scores: 1. Ipswich 102.5, 2. Aberdeen Roncalli 94, 3. Warner 87, 4. Frederick Area 79, 5. Mobridge-Pollock 70, 6. Groton Area 65, 7. Faulkton Area 60, 8. Leola 57, 9. Redfield 56.5, 10. Northwestern 46.5, 11. Gettysburg 35.5.

100 Meters: 37. Tate Johnson, 13.79; 39. Briggs Conn, 14.59; 41. David Jetto, 15.41.

200 Meters: 34. Tate Johnson, 28.22; 37. David Jetto, 31.94.

400 Meters: 21. Briggs Conn, 1:09.20.

800 Meters: 1. Jayden Schwan, 2:13.04; 3. Riley Shellenberger, 2:17.91; 11. Briggs Conn, 2:44.16.

1600 Meters: 1. Jayden Schwan, 4:53.59; 4. Riley Shellenberger, 5:07.46.

3200 Meters: 1. Jayden Schwan, 11:11.31.

4x100 Relay: 5. Groton: (Lincoln Krause, Jordan Schwan, JJ Muller, Ryder Schwan), 46.65.

4x200 Relay: 3. Groton: (Lincoln Krause, Jordan Schwan, JJ Muller, Ryder Schwan), 1:35.38.

4x800 Relay: 2. Groton: (Jayden Schwan, Jace Johnson, Riley Shellenberger, Ethan Kroll), 8:56.81.

SMR 1600m - [200-200-400-800]: 3. Groton: (Ryder Schwan, Lincoln Krause, Jordan Schwan, Jace Johnson), 4:00.12.

Discus - 1.6kg: 22. Jordan Schwan, 77' 7".

Girl's Division

100 Meters: 29. Suri Jetto, 16.50

200 Meters: 26. Suri Jetto, 35.31

400 Meters: 18. Suri Jetto, 1:21.13

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Teagan Hanten competes at the triple jump.

Track action pictures from Bob Billotto Invite in Eureka (Photos by Bruce Babcock)



Emerlee Jones on run up on high jump placing fourth.



Freshman Riley Schellenberger contributing in the second place 4x800m relay finish.



Multi event Junior Teagan Hanten leads and wins her heat in the 100m Hurdles.

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Groton Area Hurlers L-R Ella Kettner, Emerlee Jones, and Tevan Hanson.



Junior Hurdling Ace McKenna Tietz in far right finishes 3rd in overall 100m Hurdles. Setting a personal record from McKenna in the 100m H.



Riley Schellenberger (left) and Jace Johnson (right) battle for position in the 1600m (mile) run.



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Taryn Traphagen hands off to Ashlynn Warrington (above) while Rylee Dunker (below) anchors the winning leg of the 4x200m relay.



Jordan Schwan hands off to JJ Muller (above) while Keegen Tracy (below) anchors the winning leg of the 4x200m relay.



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Sprinting Ace McKenna Tietz hands off to Taryn Traphagen in the winning 4x100m relay.



Both long distance standouts Ryelle Gilbert (above) and Jayden Schwan (below) anchor their SMR 1600m relay teams to first place.



Multi event Junior Taegan Hanten hurdling in the 300m H.



Speedster senior Lincoln Krause hands off to freshman Jordan Schwan in the winning 4x100m relay.



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The winning girls 4x400 m relay team hand offs with McKenna Tietz, Taryn Traphagen, Ashlynn Warrington, and Ryelle Gilbert.



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Brookings JV sweeps Groton Area in Thursday doubleheader

GROTON — The Groton Area junior varsity squad ran into a tough Brookings team Thursday, dropping both ends of a home doubleheader by scores of 15-3 and 11-2.

In the opener, Groton Area struck first in the bottom of the first inning when Braden Fliehs singled to bring home a run for a 1-0 lead. Brookings responded in the second, taking advantage of a walk, a groundout and an error to push across three runs and take control.

The Bobcats added to their lead in the third on a two-run double by Mack Nelson, then broke the game open in the fifth inning, scoring five runs despite collecting just one hit. A mix of walks, an error and a three-run double from Wesden Van Ede helped extend the margin.

Ryder Schelle drove in two runs to lead Groton Area offensively, finishing 1-for-3, while Case Reints added a pair of hits, going 2-for-3. Reints also took the loss on the mound, working five innings while allowing 12 runs (five earned) on five hits, with two strikeouts and seven walks.

Brookings' Cooper Drawdy earned the win, pitching three innings and allowing three runs (two earned) on five hits while striking out six. Van Ede led the Bobcats with three RBIs, while Drawdy and Dario McSweeney each collected two hits. Brookings showed patience at the plate, drawing nine walks in the game.

In the second game, Brookings again jumped out early, scoring four runs in the first inning with help from a passed ball, an error and RBI singles from Mack Nelson and Jace Jaacks. The Bobcats continued to build their lead in the second inning behind a run-scoring single from Dixon Dauer and a sacrifice fly by McSweeney.

Groton Area struggled to generate offense against Brookings starter Mason Diers, who tossed three hitless innings while striking out five to earn the win. Isaiah Scepaniak took the loss for Groton Area, allowing seven runs (four earned) on six hits over three innings.

Case Reints once again led Groton Area at the plate, going 2-for-3, while John Bisbee drove in a run and finished 1-for-2.

Brookings pounded out nine hits in the nightcap, led by leadoff hitter Cooper Drawdy, who went a perfect 3-for-3. Dauer added two RBIs on a 2-for-3 effort.

Groton Area will look to bounce back in its next contest as the Tigers travel to face Watertown JV.



Is Mount Rushmore National Memorial currently in an extreme drought?

By Michael Klinski
South Dakota News Watch

Yes.

Three months before a planned fireworks celebration commemorating the nation's 250th anniversary, Mount Rushmore is under an extreme drought designation.

The national memorial is at a level 5 of 6 tiers ranging from a drought condition of "normal" to "exceptional," as of an April 7 report.

The Black Hills region has already had severe fires and is currently in a "high" fire danger risk (4 out of 6).

The state of South Dakota says 102,991 tickets were requested for the celebration on July 3. About 4,800 will be able to attend, and applicants were notified April 14 if they were successful.

After the event was discontinued during President Obama's administration in 2009 because of wildfire and other environmental concerns, President Trump's first administration brought it back in 2020.

The celebration will feature "lighting elements" if "environmental conditions require an alternative to fireworks," according to Travel South Dakota.

This fact brief responds to conversations such as this one.

South Dakota News Watch partners with Gigafact to publish fact briefs that refute or confirm a claim with supporting information and additional evidence and context. Send questions or feedback to news@sdnewswatch.org. Submit a question for us to answer on the tipline.

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SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

'Absolute chaos': State, local officials disagree on path forward amid delay in early voting

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER

County auditors and the state's lead election official disagree about how to handle a delay of early and absentee voting for the June 2 primary election in South Dakota.

Codington County Auditor Brenda Hanten told local media on Wednesday that the county would begin early and absentee voting on time by using sample ballots as the county waits for official ballots, under the guidance of South Dakota Secretary of State Monae Johnson.

Hanten walked back those plans on Thursday, telling South Dakota Searchlight she hadn't yet discussed the plan with her state's attorney when she made those comments. Codington County will not use sample ballots and will wait until official ballots are mailed.

Ballot printing has been delayed due in part to a quirk of the calendar that created an unusually short window between the filing deadline for candidate petitions and the start of early voting. Earlier this year, lawmakers declined to heed warnings from county auditors and apply a fix for this year's election, citing concerns about changing the laws governing a candidate petition process that was already underway.

A Thursday press release from the Secretary of State's Office cited two state laws, one of which doesn't mention sample ballots, that the office said support the option for county auditors to use sample ballots to accommodate absentee voting until they receive their official ballots.

Early voting is supposed to begin Friday, but county auditors alerted the public this week that it will be delayed. No one knows how long the delay will be, but they hope it will not last longer than April 24.

Split between county auditors and secretary of state

Hanten joined several other county auditors who told South Dakota Searchlight they are not following Johnson's guidance. Auditors discussed the potential use of sample ballots earlier in the year when they were warning lawmakers about the expected delay in early voting. Auditors ultimately rejected the sample ballot option, Lincoln County Auditor Sheri Lund said, because South Dakota state law says sample ballots can be used "if the supply of official ballots has been completely exhausted."

"We can't run out of ballots if we haven't even received them," Lund said. She brought the issue to the Lincoln County state's attorney, who agreed with her, she said.

Spokesman Tony Mangan with the state Attorney General's Office told South Dakota Searchlight the office was not consulted about the sample ballot law before the Secretary of State's Office issued its guidance on the matter.

Auditors wouldn't be able to track sample ballots the same way as official ballots, said Harding County Auditor Kathy Glines, and auditors would risk a judge ruling the practice illegal and throwing out sample ballots used for voting.

"We are absolutely not going to use sample ballots to vote. That's an integrity issue," Glines said.

"Which law do you want us to break?" Glines added. "The most important thing to us is to protect the ballot and protect the vote. If we start to use sample ballots, we lose that objective."

Glines has been an auditor since 1991. She and eight other auditors started to provide their own advice and guidance to auditors throughout the state in recent years.

"We work together so we're on the same page and not just hoping someone shows up on our behalf," Glines said.

The Secretary of State's Office did not issue a press release to the public about the delay in early voting until Thursday — one day before early and absentee voting were supposed to start — and did not respond

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to several calls or emails beginning earlier in the week from South Dakota Searchlight, or immediately update the office's website, leading to conflicting media reports about the status of early voting.

The Thursday press release from the Secretary of State's Office listed a number of factors leading to the delay in early voting, such as a tight schedule, pending challenges to candidates' nominating petitions, a more complicated process due to lawmakers' introduction of federal-only ballots in the state, and the newly required combination of school and city elections with the June primary and November general elections.

Criticism of secretary of state, legislators

Johnson, a Republican, is up for reelection this year.

Democratic challenger Terrence Davis said Johnson's lack of communication and planning undermine confidence in elections and create unnecessary barriers for voters. He added that South Dakotans should still trust the election process even if they "don't trust the administrator."

"This is a lack of good statesmanship and lack of a good leader," Davis said. "Uniformity and consistency breed trust."

State Rep. Heather Baxter, R-Rapid City, is challenging Johnson for the Republican nomination.

"These timing issues are critical and I look forward to working with all stakeholders as secretary of state to ensure seamless processes in the future," Baxter said.

Glines called the start to the election season "absolute chaos." She said state lawmakers deserve blame for not passing a legal fix to avoid the time crunch.

"We knew it was going to be a perfect storm. I'm putting 100% of the blame on the Legislature for not listening to us on that," Glines said, adding, "I hate to throw them under the bus, but you guys told us you didn't care. So here we are."

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, there were five Tuesdays in March this year, and the last one fell on March 31. That left 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.

Lawmaker responds

Earlier this year, state lawmakers changed the legal deadline for the filing of nominating petitions to the third Tuesday in March, but declined to include an emergency clause in the legislation that would have made it effective immediately. The law therefore won't take effect until July 1, after the June 2 primary.

Because petition circulation had begun in January and was still underway, some lawmakers were against changing the deadlines for prospective candidates who'd been operating under the assumption of a March 31 deadline.

House Majority Leader Scott Odenbach, R-Spearfish, said some lawmakers viewed the emergency clause as an "incumbent protection measure" that would have disadvantaged challengers who needed more time to gather petition signatures. Absentee voting "goes on way too long" in South Dakota, Odenbach added, which contributed to his rejection of the emergency clause.

"Auditors and the secretary of state will have to find their way through this year and then the deadline issue should be resolved in future years," Odenbach said. "I don't think anybody will be disenfranchised because they only have 40 days to vote early rather than 45."

Neither Glines nor other auditors could estimate when early voting would start. Pennington County Auditor Sabrina Green said the county's ballots are being printed, and she'll update her residents when voting can begin.

Glines' biggest concern is equal opportunity for voters. She is worried some counties will have more early voting time than others because of differences in when ballots arrive.

"We want every voter to get the same kind of access, and we want every voter across the state to be equal," Glines said. "The way this is panning out, one county might get 43 days of early voting while another gets 40 days. That hurts perception."

But Glines said voters should not be concerned about the election as a whole.

"The election is not in jeopardy. It's going to go on. We're going to pull it off," Glines said. "We just need to get past this hurdle."

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.

South Dakotan tells Congress of 'growing water security risk' if pipeline project is delayed

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

The leader of a proposed water pipeline project told a U.S. House panel Thursday that delaying the next federal step toward bringing Missouri River water to western South Dakota poses a "growing water security risk" for the region, and a drought is making things worse.

Kristin Conzet, executive director of the Western Dakota Regional Water System, said studies show the region's "aquifers are currently under stress and will not meet the current or the future population growth during an extended drought period."

Conzet's testimony came during a House Natural Resources subcommittee hearing on a bill introduced by U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota. It would provide \$10 million for a Bureau of Reclamation feasibility study.

Conzet said the project area, including Rapid City, is "one of the only major regions in the state without a reliable, long-term water supply to meet community, rural, agricultural, economical, tribal, and national defense needs."

The water system has received \$12 million from the state and has completed five years of foundational work, including demand projections, intake evaluations and regional system planning. The project is expected to cost billions of dollars.

Conzet also tied the proposal to Ellsworth Air Force Base and the impending arrival of B-21 bomber planes, which are under development. She told lawmakers that "reliable water is essential to mission readiness and sustained operations."

A similar bill is pending in the U.S. Senate, sponsored by Majority Leader John Thune and cosponsored by Sen. Mike Rounds, who are both Republicans from South Dakota.

Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.

Trump proposal to streamline jobs program funding would cut funding to states

BY: DAVID LIGHTMAN

WASHINGTON — Tucked into President Donald Trump's new budget request is a plan that could dramatically change — and, critics say, slash — how much money and help states provide to people needing jobs and training.

Trump's latest budget proposes a federal "Make America Skilled Again" grant that would combine a dozen current programs and provide \$3.4 billion in spending for certain employment and training programs, down from \$4.65 billion anticipated this fiscal year.

The president's plan would fund block, or general, grants to states, which could then tailor the spending to employment and training needs.

There's no formula in the budget proposal detailing how or where the money would be distributed, other than a requirement that at least 10% be spent on an apprenticeship program and 3% on innovations. The secretary of the Department of Labor could also reserve up to 0.75% on "program accountability" and technical support.

Congressional Republicans are moving ahead with other ways to fund, and in some cases revamp, federal job programs, though they showed little interest in Trump's MASA proposal that was also in his budget request last year.

The Trump plan

The MASA effort is another in a series of administration initiatives aimed at streamlining job training programs' administrative costs and making them more responsive to changes in the workplace.

The Labor Department referred questions about the plan to the Office of Management and Budget, which did not respond to questions.

At the National Skills Coalition, an advocacy organization for skills-based training, Megan Evans saw the MASA effort as a way of making deep cuts that ultimately hurt workers and employers, she said in an interview.

"The administration says it's trying to streamline," said Evans, the coalition's senior government affairs manager. "But in reality it's combining deep cuts with risky consolidations and rollbacks."

The White House last year issued a detailed report and a video on its strategy, outlining how "workforce programs are fragmented across agencies, stifled by red tape, and too often misaligned with the skills employers need."

These issues, it said, "pose particular risks as the United States advances toward a bold reindustrialization agenda and navigates the transformational impact of AI (artificial intelligence) on the workforce."

In the budget released this month, the administration called the program "a key part of the administration's strategy to fill the growing demand for skilled trades and other occupations," along with some other programs, including the tax cuts enacted last year.

Changes in getting money and help

While MASA aims to reduce administrative costs, a long-sought goal of administrators across the country, popular programs would be consolidated under the block grant, including several with strong constituencies.

Among them are programs for adult training and employment, youth training and employment, the Labor Department's Re-integration of Ex-Offenders program, Native American programs and others.

The National Skills Coalition saw trouble in folding these programs into a single grant.

"These programs weren't created in a vacuum," it said in a blog post last year. "They each serve distinct populations."

Merging them would be "making it harder for people to access training that fits their lives and needs," the group said.

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It also had doubts about whether block grants would in fact be more efficient.

"By combining multiple workforce programs into a single grant, it becomes significantly harder to track program outcomes, monitor equity and assess whether specific populations—such as veterans, youth, people with disabilities, or former incarcerated people—are being effectively served," the coalition said.

Some state and local officials share the concern.

"Washington state is already facing significant budget shortfalls, and this proposal would further widen that gap," said Marisol Tapia Hopper, director of strategic partnerships & funding at the Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County.

She said combining the programs into a block grant "functions as a reduction in workforce investment, applying a one-size-fits-all approach to a system that is already chronically underfunded."

The National Governors Association, a bipartisan group comprising all the nation's governors, has taken no position on the proposal.

"Workforce training is a huge bipartisan priority for governors," said Jack Porter, NGA program director for workforce development & economic policy.

"Federal support is critical to standing up effective workforce programs, but the federally funded workforce system as it stands now comes with a lot of red tape that shifts time and focus away from the goal, which is (to) provide workers with training," he said.

Congressional reluctance

Congress has shown little enthusiasm for the administration's consolidation.

Earlier this month, the Republican-led U.S. House Education and Workforce Committee proposed a comprehensive job training blueprint.

Among its ideas: providing funding for on-the-job learning and strengthening the system that holds state and local workforce boards responsible "for delivering positive outcomes for workers and job seekers."

The bill would have adult education programs governed by the Labor Department. The aim would be to "connect adult education to apprenticeships, sector partnerships, and employer-led training especially as artificial intelligence reshapes skill demands."

Included in the legislation, which a committee spokeswoman says is clearly "in line with the broad goals proposed in the president's budget," is a Make America Skilled Again pilot program.

It would permit states to apply to combine different workforce funding streams and then spend them on programs that best suit their needs.

The bill, said committee Chairman Tim Walberg, R-Mich., in a statement, "modernizes a struggling and underutilized workforce development system, delivering reforms that strengthen participant outcomes and ensure greater accountability for taxpayer dollars."

In the U.S. Senate, Republicans began pushing changes that will help people get access to current programs.

The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee Republicans' aim is to "increase Americans' access to job opportunities by eliminating red tape, increasing flexibility, and modernizing the workforce system."

The goal is to create one-stop centers where people can get information about jobs and training. The measure would "help Nebraskans find great jobs more efficiently," said Sen. Pete Ricketts, a Nebraska Republican who co-sponsored the bill.

Spending bill season

At the moment, Democrats and Republicans appear deadlocked on how to proceed. The House Appropriations Committee plans to write labor spending legislation in June. The Senate has not announced a schedule.

The partisan lines are forming.

The Trump labor budget "attacks workers and small businesses by undermining workforce develop-

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ment programs at the Department of Labor," said Rep. Bobby Scott, D-Va., top Democrat on the House workforce panel, in a statement.

Without the specific programs, he said, "many workers will struggle to provide for their families."

Walberg sees a need for big change.

"The workforce is evolving rapidly, and legislation designed over a decade ago is no longer meeting today's demands," he said.

David Lightman has been a reporter or editor for more than 50 years. He's worked for the Hagerstown (Md.) Morning Herald, Riverside (Calif.) Press Enterprise, and then 10 years at the Baltimore Evening Sun, covering local news and, for six years, state government and the legislature. He spent 23 years as the Hartford Courant's Washington Bureau Chief, and 18 years at McClatchy's Washington bureau, where he covered the White House and Congress. He also served as regional editor, supervising the bureau's seven regional reporters. He was president of Washington's Gridiron Club in 2018 and won the David Lynch award for regional reporting in 2007.

US House Dems at ag hearing excoriate Trump cuts proposed for farm and food aid

BY: JACOB FISCHLER

Democrats on a U.S. House spending panel slammed President Donald Trump's proposed cuts to farm and nutrition programs Thursday, as Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins pledged to collaborate with members of both parties to address their concerns.

The president's budget request would make deep cuts to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, gutting programs to help feed hungry people and support farmers in need — even as the rising costs of groceries, gas and other necessities made those programs even more essential, Democrats on the House Appropriations Agriculture Subcommittee told Rollins.

"It'll be hard for our constituents to believe that USDA serves America's farmers and rural communities when USDA is taking away their services," the panel's ranking Democrat, Sanford Bishop of Georgia, said.

The proposed USDA budget for fiscal 2027 would cut \$4.9 billion, or nearly one-fifth of the department's budget. Already, due to the Republican spending and tax cuts law last year, 2.5 million people have lost access to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, the department's major food assistance initiative.

Trump overall in his budget request is seeking a huge boost in defense spending accompanied by cuts in domestic programs.

Accessibility, cooperation promised

Rollins defended the budget proposal, but projected a spirit of cooperation with the panel, which writes the annual spending bill for her department, telling Democrats and Republicans that she would be happy to address their priorities. She offered to field direct phone calls from several members.

Asked by Michigan Republican Rep. John Moolenaar about foreign growers undercutting U.S. sugar producers, she said she was ready to take on the issue in upcoming trade negotiations.

"We've got a lot going on around the world, but anything you hear, Congressman, that you think would be helpful for me, any way I can lean in... I would love to get more involved in that," she said. "We are making progress but it does need to remain a priority."

Rollins also touted some of her department's wins over the past year, noting that bird flu cases were down 61% and that egg prices had also dropped.

The administration has also increased exports of key crops and Republicans' massive spending and tax cuts bill raised the exemption to the federal estate tax that allows more family farms to be inherited with fewer taxes, she said.

She also called the Make America Healthy Again initiative that Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has spearheaded, with USDA also playing a major part, "one of our most important

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legacies.”

She agreed to Maine Democrat Chellie Pingree’s request to develop a “comprehensive overview” for the Make America Healthy Again philosophy.

Rollins vows no Farm Service Agency closures

Democrats on the panel, including leading members Bishop and full Appropriations Committee ranking member Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut, hammered the budget request’s many cuts.

The budget would eliminate more than 70 USDA programs and was particularly ill-timed as prices continue to climb, DeLauro said,

“The price of everyday goods continues to escalate: Grocery prices are up, gas prices are up, utility costs, housing costs, health care costs are through the roof,” she said. “And the administration’s only plan is to decimate the public programs that help alleviate the strain on working families and farmers across the country.”

Bishop complained that assistance from the Farm Service Agency, which provides credit, disaster relief and other financial programs, would be more difficult for farmers to access.

Rollins sought to justify the proposed decrease, noting that the cuts Bishop mentioned made up only about 4% of the total department budget.

But she also said she would never close a Farm Service Agency office and offered to work directly with the Democrat and others to address understaffed offices.

“But as we are looking to make sure we are honoring the taxpayer, making sure we’re doing the best we can with every tax dollar, while putting the farmers first, (we are) taking key advice from you,” she said.

She added that members should contact the department “if you hear of an FSA office that isn’t fully staffed, or that the farmers aren’t getting what they need — and I realize they’re out there, I’m not living in some Pollyanna world, these are very difficult times.”

She ended her dialogue with Bishop by telling him to “feel free to call me, sir, anytime.”

Power of the purse

DeLauro and Bishop led a push to assert Congress’ power to control spending, executed by Appropriations committees in both chambers.

Bishop said he expected USDA to “not circumvent this appropriations process by refusing to spend or obligate program funding once it is signed into law.”

DeLauro quizzed Rollins about a grant program that was created in a December 2024 law to assist farmers hit by extreme weather events over the prior two years. “Not a single dime” of the \$220 million appropriated in the law had been allocated to qualifying states, DeLauro said.

Again, Rollins was conciliatory, saying the issue was a priority for the department and that funding for DeLauro’s home state was “at the finish line.”

“Yes ma’am, we’re moving on that,” she said.

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

With GOP defections, US House passes bill extending legal status for 350,000 Haitians

Republican Dusty Johnson of South Dakota votes no

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA-

WASHINGTON — The U.S. House on Thursday passed a measure that would extend Temporary Protected Status for Haiti for three years, in a rare rebuke by the GOP-led Congress to President Donald Trump's mass deportation campaign.

Ten Republicans defected, including Reps. Maria Salazar, Mario Díaz-Balart and Carlos Giménez of Florida, Rich McCormick of Georgia, Don Bacon of Nebraska, Mike Lawler and Nicole Malliotakis of New York, Mike Turner and Mike Carey of Ohio and Brian Fitzpatrick of Pennsylvania.

Rep. Kevin Kiley, a California independent who caucuses with the GOP, also voted for the bill.

The bill, which succeeded 224-204, came as Trump's administration has sought to revoke legal protections for immigrants with Temporary Protected Status, or TPS, including Haitian nationals, amid his crackdown on immigrants without legal status.

The bill now heads to the GOP-led Senate, and should that chamber pass the measure, would almost certainly be vetoed by Trump.

Discharge petition

The Democratic-led effort came to the floor under a discharge petition, which allows a bill to skirt Republican leadership and be brought to the House floor once it gains the signatures of a majority of House members.

U.S. Rep. Ayanna Pressley — a Massachusetts Democrat and co-chair of the House Haiti Caucus — brought forth the petition in January and it reached the 218-signature threshold in late March.

Pressley's petition forced a floor vote on a bill from New York Democratic Rep. Laura Gillen. The version voted on by the House would require the secretary of Homeland Security to designate Haiti for TPS until April 2029.

Lawler, a New York Republican, was an original co-sponsor of Gillen's measure.

Lawler, Salazar, Fitzpatrick and Bacon had also signed on to Pressley's discharge petition.

The bill's passage in the House came just days before the U.S. Supreme Court is set to hear arguments over Trump's efforts to revoke TPS for 350,000 Haitians and 6,000 Syrians.

A federal judge in February blocked the termination of TPS for Haiti from going into effect — shortly before the designation was slated to end.

TPS is provided by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security secretary to nationals who cannot safely return home. The deportation protection lets individuals legally work in the United States, with renewal cycles that range from six to 18 months.

'A death sentence'

"Let us be clear about what deportation would mean — we would be sending parents back into danger, ripping our seniors away from their caregivers, faith leaders back into instability, and essential workers back into insecurity," Pressley said at a Wednesday press conference she and Gillen held with colleagues and advocates regarding the effort.

"To deport anyone to a country that is grappling with layered political, humanitarian and economic crises is unconscionable, it is dangerous and it is preventable," Pressley added.

"To deport anyone to Haiti right now is unlawful, and it would be a death sentence."

Shauneen Miranda is a reporter for States Newsroom's Washington bureau. An alumna of the University of Maryland, she previously covered breaking news for Axios.

'Shirtless in a hot tub with Kid Rock': Democrats in Congress question RFK Jr. priorities

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. testified before Congress on Thursday that he's not pleased with how spending cuts to programs that help lower-income Americans afford food will affect his efforts to bolster healthy eating habits.

"Am I happy about the cuts? No, I'm not happy about the cuts," Kennedy said during a lengthy hearing in front of the House Ways and Means Committee, one of several congressional panels he'll testify before in the days ahead.

Kennedy added that President Donald Trump and White House budget director Russ Vought also didn't truly want to propose funding cuts to the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, often called WIC, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP.

"Nobody wants to make the cuts. Russ Vought doesn't want to make the cuts. President Trump doesn't," he said. "But we got a \$39 trillion debt."

Wisconsin Democratic Rep. Gwen Moore, who asked the questions, then referenced comments Kennedy made earlier in the hearing about Froot Loops, when he said it "isn't even a food. It's just poison."

Moore noted the cereal is "a lot cheaper than good, healthy food."

Froot Loops includes a corn flour blend, sugar, wheat flour, whole grain oat flour, modified food starch and other ingredients.

Trump advocates reductions for HHS

The Trump administration's budget request for the fiscal year set to begin on Oct. 1 proposes Congress increase defense spending by more than half a trillion dollars, accounting for a 43% boost, and that lawmakers cut domestic spending by 10%.

It suggested Congress reduce spending at HHS by \$15.8 billion, or 12.5%, to \$111.1 billion, though lawmakers largely rejected proposed spending cuts to the department during last year's government funding process.

Vought testified earlier this week that the administration expects to ask Congress for additional defense spending for the war in Iran, though he said he couldn't give lawmakers a ballpark estimate for how much that will add to the current request for \$1.5 trillion in defense funding.

Lawmakers questioned Kennedy about dozens of other issues throughout the hearing, including how he's spoken about vaccines since being confirmed HHS secretary, the rise in measles cases throughout the country and comments Kennedy and Trump made about the possible causes of autism.

Utah Republican Rep. Blake Moore, after sharing that his 10-year-old is on the autism spectrum, said he was "underwhelmed" by what the administration has released so far about possible causes.

He also said that his wife was hurt by claims from Trump and Kennedy that women who take Tylenol when pregnant could increase the risk their children are later diagnosed with autism.

"We don't even know if she took Tylenol during her pregnancy, but that was a hurtful moment for her," Blake Moore said. "And I just want to encourage the administration and your team to keep at it. And I think there's more we can do here with low expectations."

Medical experts say that decades of research shows autism is the result of a combination of genetic and environmental factors.

Measles death

California Democratic Rep. Linda T. Sánchez questioned Kennedy about comments he made during his Senate confirmation hearing on vaccines, arguing that he hasn't stuck to the commitments he made during that process.

She then asked him if the measles vaccine could have prevented a boy from dying of the disease in Texas.

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"It's possible, certainly," Kennedy said.

But, he repeatedly declined to answer a question from Sánchez about whether Trump approved the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's decision to remove a messaging campaign to encourage vaccination, even as she asked it several times.

Sánchez then displayed a poster showing a photograph of Kennedy and Kid Rock to illustrate her discontent with his work so far as HHS Secretary.

"Now, one thing that I find incredible is that you suspended this pro-vaccine messaging campaign. But somehow you're spending taxpayer dollars to drink milk shirtless in a hot tub with Kid Rock," she said. "And somehow you think that's a better public health message than informing the public about the importance of vaccines."

Day care, Medicaid, Black maternal health

Illinois Democratic Rep. Danny K. Davis pressed Kennedy about whether he agrees with a statement Trump made earlier this month when the president said, "We can't take care of day care. It's not possible for us to take care of day care. Medicaid, Medicare, all of these individual things. They can do it on a state basis. You can't do it on a federal. We have to take care of one thing, military protection."

Kennedy responded that he was "told to make a 12% cut across our department" because the national debt, which has accumulated over decades, has reached \$39 trillion.

"We're now having to tighten our belt," Kennedy said.

Davis also questioned Kennedy on funding and initiatives to reduce Black maternal mortality, saying "the Trump administration is undermining Black maternal health from all sides."

"The GOP slashed over a trillion dollars from Medicaid, which pays for over 40% of births in the United States. President Trump just proposed cutting maternal and child health programs by over \$800 million," he said. "DOGE canceled funds for several research projects that could save countless Black mothers, like the Morehouse School of Medicine research on improving the health of Black pregnant and postpartum women."

Kennedy responded by arguing that he and others in the Trump administration are "doing more to advance maternal health than any other administration in history."

"There was tremendous duplication in the departments. We had 42 different maternal health services in our department," Kennedy said. "And we cut some of those and consolidated them. Right now, we are investing huge amounts of money in maternal health."

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

US House narrowly defeats resolution limiting Trump war powers

U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota, votes no

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — The approval gap on President Donald Trump's war in Iran narrowed slightly Thursday in the U.S. House, when a War Powers Resolution gained a handful of votes, though still falling just short of passage.

The effort to force Trump to seek congressional authorization before further action in Iran failed 213-214, with one Republican voting present — shrinking the daylight compared to a 212-219 result in early March.

Democrats Greg Landsman of Ohio, Juan Vargas of California and Henry Cuellar of Texas flipped to vote in favor of the resolution brought to the floor by Rep. Gregory Meeks, D-N.Y.

Rep. Jared Golden, D-Maine, remained the only Democrat in opposition.

Golden said in a statement following the vote that he opposed the War Powers Resolution because it "would weaken our hand."

"The purported aim of this and other war powers resolutions is to stop the hostilities. Thankfully, the

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United States and Iran are currently in a ceasefire, and we are negotiating over critical questions of national security and international order. I believe we must maintain a strong negotiation position over Iran's nuclear program, freedom of movement in the international waters at the Strait of Hormuz, and how to achieve a durable peace between our two nations," Golden said.

As he did in early March, Rep. Thomas Massie, R-Ky., supported curtailing Trump's military operations in the Middle East without further approval from Congress.

Rep. Warren Davidson, R-Ohio, switched his support from last month's "yes" vote to "present" Thursday. The vote occurred one day after the Senate rejected a similar proposal, for the fourth time. The Senate's vote margin has remained unchanged, with the exception of a couple absences.

Ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon

The vote also happened minutes after Trump announced on his social media platform Truth Social a 10-day ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon, a separate deadly war front that flared just days after the United States and Israel launched their Feb. 28 joint strikes on Iran.

The U.S. and Iran, meanwhile, are more than halfway through a two-week ceasefire that began on tenuous ground on April 7.

Talks with the Iranians, led by Vice President JD Vance, collapsed Saturday in Islamabad, Pakistan. Trump on Thursday repeated his earlier claims that the war is winding down.

"We're very close to making a deal with Iran. You'll be the first to know," Trump told reporters at the White House before departing for a planned event in Nevada to promote his no tax on tips policy.

"I think we have a chance. And if that happens, oil goes way down, prices go way down, inflation goes way down, and you're going to have much more importantly than even that, you won't have nuclear holocaust happening now," Trump said.

The war is "very close to being over," Trump told Fox Business host Maria Bartiromo Wednesday. Trump told the New York Post Tuesday that Iran-U.S. peace talks could pick up again "over the next two days."

Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth said Thursday the U.S. military remains "locked and loaded" on Iran's "critical dual use infrastructure," including power plants and energy infrastructure, if the regime does not meet U.S. demands.

Strait of Hormuz

The U.S. is three days into a blockade on vessels from any nation sailing in and out of Iranian ports and coastline.

Thirteen vessels turned around to comply with orders from the U.S. Navy in the waters just east of the narrowest point in the Strait of Hormuz, Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Dan Caine said during a joint press briefing Thursday morning from the Pentagon.

U.S. Central Command updated that figure to 14 in a Thursday morning X post.

Caine said more than 10,000 sailors, marines and airmen are executing the operation on more than a dozen ships and dozens of aircraft.

Caine said in addition to the blockade, U.S. forces in all international waters are ordered to "actively pursue any Iranian flagged vessel or any vessel attempting to provide material support to Iran."

The flashpoint in the Strait of Hormuz has rocked global energy markets, causing massive fuel shortages and soaring gas prices. Americans are paying on average \$4.09 for a gallon of regular gas, and \$5.61 for a gallon of diesel, according to AAA.

The war has claimed the lives of 13 American troops, and injured 398 as of Thursday, according to the Pentagon. Thousands of civilians have been killed and injured across the Middle East since the start of the conflict.

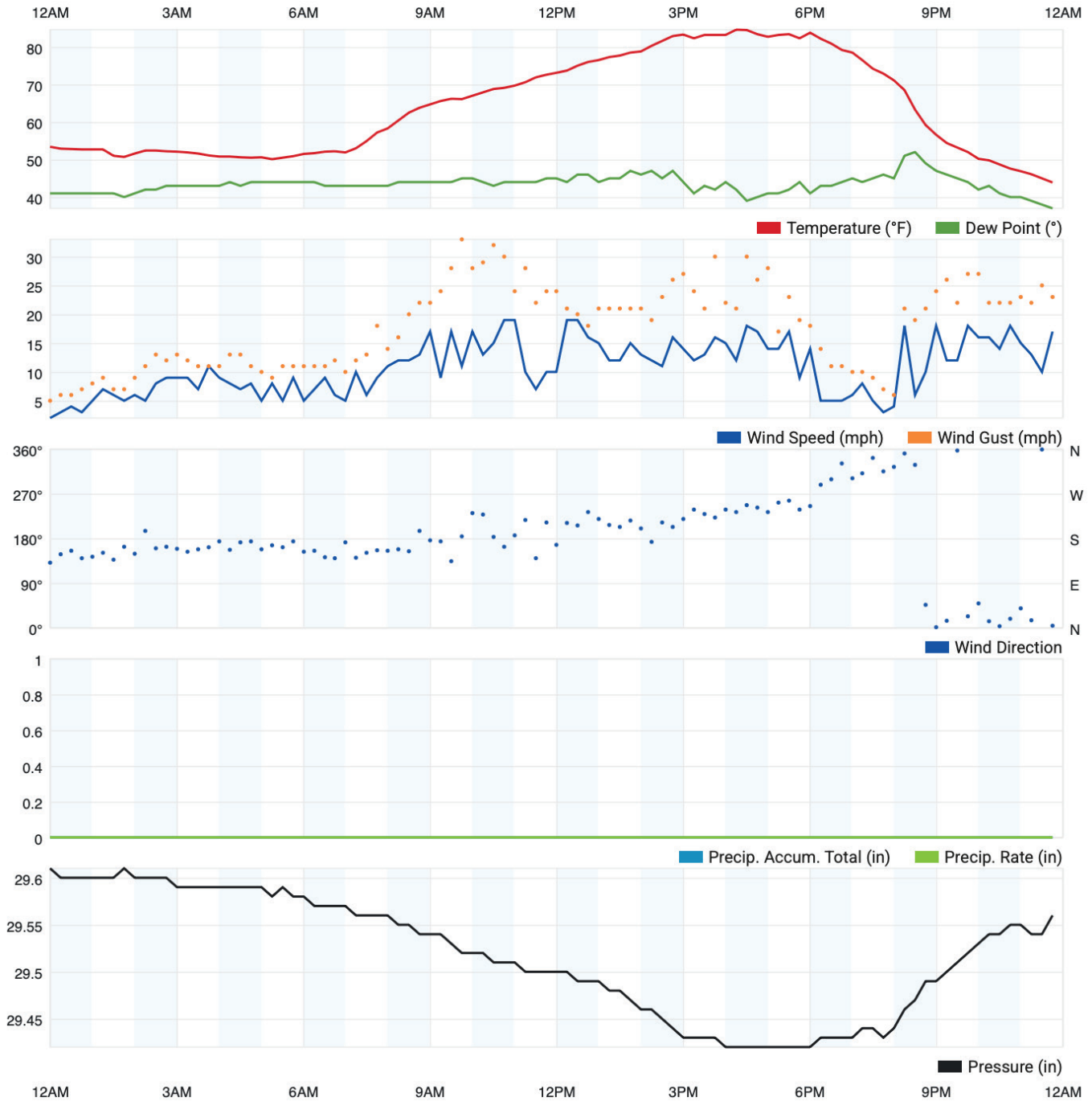
Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

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Today

Tonight

Saturday

Saturday Night

Sunday



High: 45 °F

Breezy.
Chance Snow
Showers then
Partly Sunny



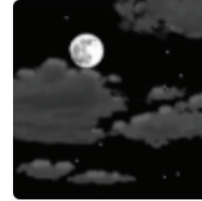
Low: 23 °F

Mostly Cloudy
and Blustery
then Partly
Cloudy



High: 46 °F

Mostly Sunny
then Sunny
and Breezy



Low: 26 °F

Partly Cloudy



High: 52 °F


Sunny



Gusty Winds Through Friday

April 16, 2026
2:37 PM CDT

- Wind will continue to gust between **25 to 35 mph through this evening**, and **30 to 40 mph tonight through Friday**.
- **Shifting winds** becoming out of the north/northwest this evening.

 **Shifting wind directions and changing speeds will be a concern for any ongoing fires this afternoon and evening! (highlighted times in the red box)**

Maximum Wind Gust (mph) Forecast

	4/16 Thu			4/17 Fri						4/18 Sat					
	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am
McIntosh	31	33	39	39	37	35	39	40	43	41	33	26	23	24	29
Eagle Butte	31	31	38	43	41	38	39	40	40	39	35	28	24	25	30
Murdo	33	23	31	40	41	40	39	40	40	39	33	25	22	23	30
Mobridge	26	23	31	36	36	33	33	36	35	35	31	25	23	22	25
Pierre	29	20	26	36	37	36	36	36	37	36	30	22	18	18	25
Gettysburg	31	22	29	38	39	38	39	40	40	37	32	29	25	25	30
Eureka	29	22	30	36	36	36	39	39	40	39	33	29	26	28	30
Chamberlain	29	23	22	26	32	35	36	36	36	33	29	23	21	22	29
Miller	31	21	23	30	36	38	39	39	39	37	32	26	24	25	31
Redfield	31	21	23	33	38	39	39	39	39	38	32	26	26	26	32
Aberdeen	30	21	26	35	36	35	35	35	36	37	31	25	24	24	29
Britton	31	22	24	30	31	32	33	35	36	37	33	29	28	28	30
Clark	31	23	23	28	32	37	37	37	38	38	35	30	29	29	31
Webster	31	24	22	26	30	33	35	35	37	37	35	30	29	29	31
Watertown	31	24	23	26	25	30	33	36	36	37	33	29	28	28	30
Sisseton	32	22	21	26	30	33	35	36	38	37	33	29	30	30	31
Milbank	30	22	22	24	26	30	32	33	36	36	32	26	28	26	29
Wheaton	31	22	21	24	29	30	32	33	35	33	32	28	29	28	30

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD



Winds will continue to be breezy out of the south/southwest before a strong cold front pushes through, shifting winds along and behind it out of the north and northwest this evening. Behind the front winds will increase, with gusts of 30 to 40 mph tonight through Friday.

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Light Rain/Snow Tonight Through Friday

April 16, 2026
2:42 PM CDT

Cooldown with temps below average

- **Rain** this evening will transition to **rain/snow** mix or **snow** tonight and continue through Friday morning
 - ◆ Precipitation type will remain rain for south central SD due to warmer lows.
- Dusting to a couple tenths of an inch possible over portions of north central SD. Any accumulation will be confined to grass/cars during the nighttime hours.
 - No accumulations expected on roads as they will remain warm.
- Highs for Friday will be much cooler with highs ranging only in the **upper 30s to the mid 40s**.
 - 10 to 20 degrees below average!

Weather Forecast

	4/16 Thu		4/17 Fri				
	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm
McIntosh	65%	90%	90%	60%	20%		
Eagle Butte	35%	40%	85%	75%	20%	20%	
Murdo	45%	30%	20%	45%	30%	20%	30%
Mobridge		45%	80%	75%	30%		
Pierre	35%	15%	20%	40%	30%		
Gettysburg	45%	35%	30%	55%	35%		
Eureka		55%	55%	65%	40%		
Chamberlain				20%	15%	15%	15%
Miller	20%	25%		20%	30%	40%	
Redfield	20%	25%			25%	40%	
Aberdeen		20%		15%	40%	45%	
Britton		15%			35%	50%	20%
Clark	20%	20%			15%	40%	35%
Webster	15%	15%			20%	40%	45%
Watertown	15%	15%			30%	30%	40%
Sisseton	15%				15%	40%	50%
Milbank					30%	35%	40%
Wheaton	15%				20%	30%	45%



Rain this evening will transition to rain/snow mix or snow tonight and continue through Friday morning. Dusting to a couple tenths of an inch possible over portions of north central SD. Any accumulation will be confined to grass/cars during the nighttime hours. Highs for Friday will be much cooler with highs ranging only in the upper 30s to the mid 40s.

- Rain + - Wintry Mix + - Snow +

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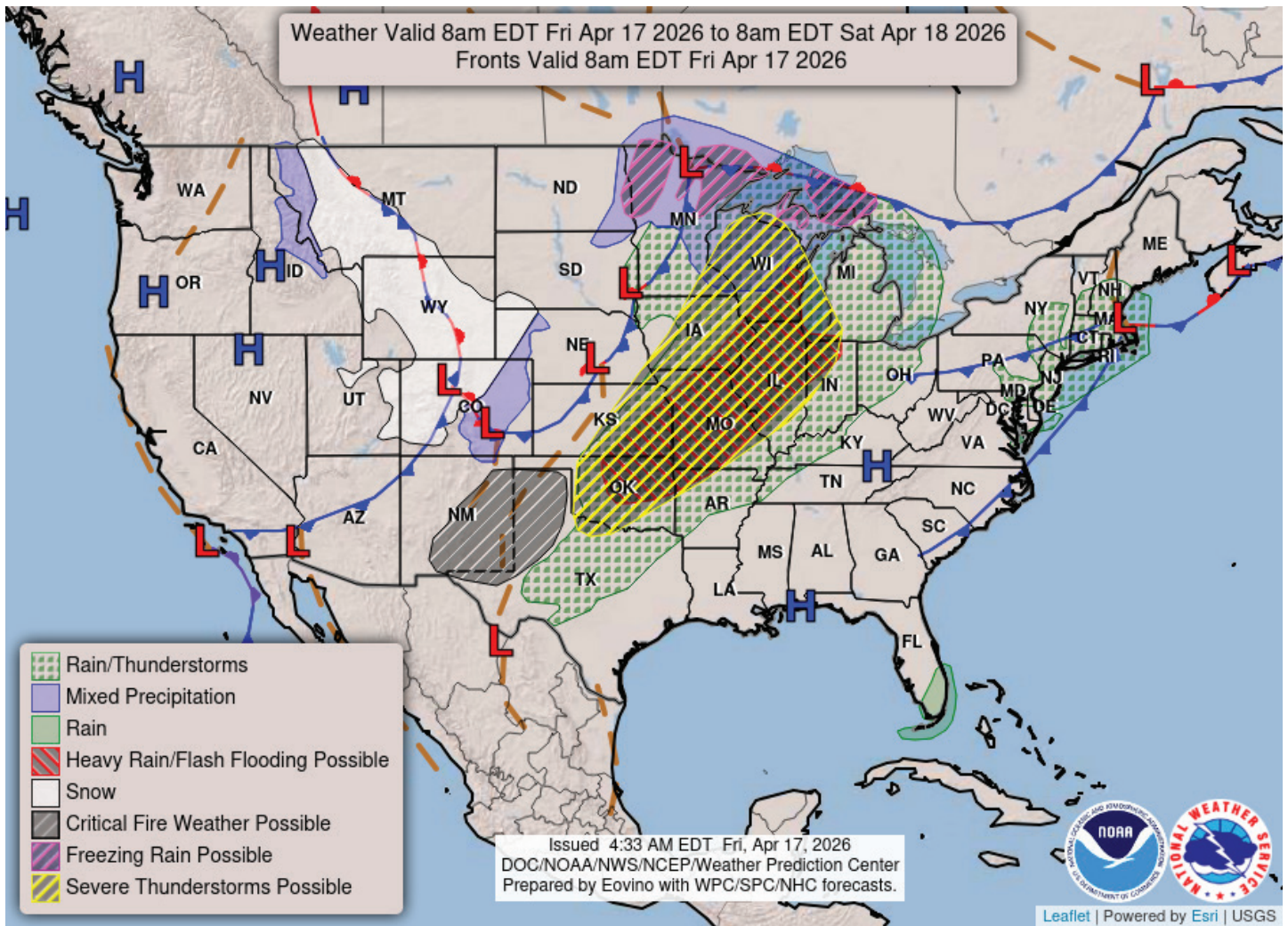
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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 85 °F at 4:40 PM
Low Temp: 45 °F at 11:29 PM
Wind: 33 mph at 9:42 AM
Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 92 in 1913
Record Low: 10 in 1953
Average High: 59
Average Low: 32
Average Precip in April.: 0.85
Precip to date in April.: 0.95
Average Precip to date: 2.91
Precip Year to Date: 2.57
Sunset Tonight: 8:20 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:41 am



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Today in Weather History

April 17th, 2006: A strong spring storm moved across the northern and central plains, bringing precipitation and stiff northwest winds. Sustained winds of 30 to 50 mph, with gusts around 70 mph, were felt across a good portion of western South Dakota for more than 24 hours as the storm slowly crossed the region.

1922 — A family of at least six tornadoes caused death and destruction along parts of a 210 mile path from north of Ogden IL to Allen County OH, killing sixteen persons. A post card, picked up in Madison County IN, was found 124 miles away near Mount Cory OH. (The Weather Channel)

1953 — One of the few severe hailstorms accompanied by snow, sleet, glaze, and rain, pelted parts of Kay, Osage, Creek, Tulsa, Washington, and Rogers Counties in northeastern Oklahoma late in the day. Nearly 10,000 insurance claims were filed. (The Weather Channel)

1965 — The Mississippi River reached a flood crest at Saint Paul MN four feet higher than any previous mark. During the next two weeks record levels were reached along the Mississippi between Saint Paul and Hannibal MO. Flooding caused more than 100 million dollars damage, but timely warnings kept the death toll down to just twelve persons. (David Ludlum)

1987 — Twenty-two cities in the central U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date. Temperatures warmed into the 70s and 80s from the High Plains Region to the Mississippi Valley, with readings in the low 90s reported in the Southern Plains Region. Tulsa OK hit 92 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 — Heavy snow blanketed northern Arizona. Snowfall totals ranged up to 16 inches at Pinetop, with 10 inches reported at Flagstaff. Afternoon thunderstorms spawned a couple of tornadoes in Idaho. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 — Arctic cold invaded the north central U.S. Missoula MT was blanketed with four inches of snow, and Glasgow MT reported a record cold morning low of 14 degrees above zero. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1990 — High winds in northern Utah, gusting to 90 mph in Weber County, blew a trampoline through a living room window, and strong winds associated with a cold front crossing the Middle Atlantic Coast Region gusted to 75 mph in the Chesapeake Bay area of Virginia. Unseasonably cold weather prevailed in the north central U.S. Valentine NE was the cold spot in the nation with a record low of 10 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



Daily Devotion

What It Means to Be Victorious

To thrive in life, we must seek God's perspective, surrender to His will, and trust Him to provide what we truly need.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10: 9 And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

10 Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

Paul learned the secret of how to be triumphant: Maintain God's perspective on the ups and downs of life, and depend on His power. The apostle was firmly convinced that having the person of the Holy Spirit living in him meant that God's power was available to him. And it's available for us too.

The first step is to believe God's power is within us through the presence of His Spirit. We must accept that God's priority is to transform us into His image, and not necessarily to provide comfortable circumstances. Diligently seeking to maintain Jesus' perspective on hardships (John 16:33) is also important.

Having embraced these truths, we can learn to depend on divine power. The key lies in submitting our will to the Lord's. Then, instead of reacting to life, we'll switch to responding on the basis of His will. Yielding control to the Holy Spirit will help us accept the Father's pattern for how His children are to live. When we can say, "Lord, whatever You choose to send will be all right with me," then we will experience the inner peace Christ promised us (John 14:27).

Divine perspective, surrender, and firm faith—these are the ingredients for the victorious life.

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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

04.16.26

1 2 31 47 57 4

TOP PRIZE:

\$1,000,000/year

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 22 Mins 48 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

04.14.26

17 21 24 57 69 12

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$130,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 7 Mins 49 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: 1 Days 16 Hrs 22 Mins 49 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

04.15.26

6 7 11 12 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$56,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 37 Mins 49 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

04.15.26

8 11 41 44 53 3

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 6 Mins 49 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: 1 Days 17 Hrs 6 Mins 48 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Suspect enters new guilty plea in the case of missing Navajo grandmother Ella Mae Begay

By SAVANNAH PETERS and JACQUES BILLEAUD Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — A man charged in the disappearance of a Navajo grandmother whose case has highlighted the crisis of violence against Native Americans pleaded guilty Thursday to robbery as part of a second agreement reached with prosecutors.

Preston Henry Tolth, 26, could be sentenced to a maximum of five years in federal prison, with credit for three years already served, under the conditions of the proposed agreement.

U.S. District Judge Douglas Rayes asked Tolth during a hearing in Phoenix if he was entering the plea because he was, in fact, guilty.

"Yes, your honor," Tolth said.

Ella Mae Begay was 62 when she vanished in 2021 from Sweetwater, Arizona, a community in the northern part of the Navajo Nation where she spent her days visiting with relatives and weaving rugs that she sold to nearby trading posts.

In 2022, Begay's niece Seraphine Warren walked from the Navajo Nation to Washington, D.C., to raise awareness about her aunt's disappearance and the high rate of homicides and missing persons cases in Indian Country. Begay's case has drawn national media attention and provided fuel for tribal leaders and victim advocates as they push for more law enforcement resources and cooperation between tribal and federal investigators.

Navajo Nation police identified Tolth, whose father was dating Begay's sister, as a suspect within days of her disappearance.

Under the conditions of the agreement, Tolth acknowledged using force to take Ella Mae Begay's pickup truck, striking her in the face several times and leaving her on the side of the road before driving away and eventually selling the truck for money and methamphetamine.

Rayes is scheduled in May to review the latest plea agreement, which also protects Tolth from future murder or manslaughter charges in relation to Begay's case.

Members of Begay's family say prosecutors negotiated the agreement against their wishes and without their input.

Begay's son, Gerald Begay, took a break from his construction job in Denver to listen to Thursday's hearing by phone. He told The Associated Press that he plans to attend the next court hearing and ask the judge to reject the plea agreement in hopes that Tolth can be put on trial.

"The prosecutors aren't thinking about our rights or what we need as a family," he said.

In an emailed statement, Lennea Montandon, a spokesperson with the U.S. Attorney's Office for the district of Arizona, said the office has complied with federal victims' rights law while prosecuting Tolth and will continue to do so. Tolth's public defender declined to comment on the new agreement.

In a 2021 FBI interrogation, Tolth confessed to attacking Begay in a fit of anger and leaving her for dead. But Rayes dealt prosecutors a major blow by ruling that confession inadmissible in court, saying the FBI agent had unlawfully coerced Tolth into waiving his right to remain silent. In court filings, prosecutors acknowledged that weakened the government's case significantly.

At a hearing earlier this month, Rayes rejected an earlier agreement that would have released Tolth from federal custody on a sentence of three years of time served in exchange for a guilty plea. The judge's rare move came after Begay's grieving family members testified that Tolth should not walk free without leading investigators to her remains.

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

More than half a million people expected at Pope Leo XIV's Mass in Cameroon

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

DOUALA, Cameroon (AP) — Thousands of people turned out Friday to see Pope Leo XIV, who was celebrating a big Mass in Cameroon's port city and then was to visit the country's Catholic university on a day focused on encouraging young people.

Leo travelled to Douala, the commercial and economic capital of Cameroon, to celebrate Mass. The Vatican predicted some 600,000 people would turn out for the liturgy, the biggest crowd Leo is expected to draw on his 11-day, four-nation trip, the first to Africa by history's first American pope.

With an hour to go before the liturgy got underway, the big field in front of the Japoma sports stadium was bursting with people singing and dancing as an announcer shouted "Habemus Papam!" (We have a pope!). The Latin phrase is used to announce the election of a new pope but in this case joyfully announced Leo's arrival.

The crowd cheered when Leo emerged in his open-sided popemobile, with waves of young people running alongside him trying to keep up, as he looped through the crowd. Some had spent the night on the ground, battling mosquitos, to be in place for the late morning Mass, but said they were willing to make the sacrifice for the pope.

"I wanted to offer this effort to the pope, to show him that what he is doing and what he wants to accomplish should truly come to life," said Alex Nzumo.

Later Friday, Leo has an appointment back in the capital, Yaounde, with students, professors and administrators at the Catholic University of Central Africa. Popes have often used such encounters, especially in the developing world, to rally young people to persevere in the face of poverty, corruption and other challenges.

With a population of 29 million, Cameroon is an overwhelmingly young country, where the median age is 18. Catholics represent about 29% of the population, and the country is a major source of growth and priestly vocations for the church.

Attention to young people

Leo has already offered words of encouragement to Cameroon's youth, including in his opening speech to President Paul Biya — at 93 the world's oldest leader. In the speech, Leo demanded the "chains of corruption" in Cameroon be broken and said Cameroon's youth represent the future and hope of the country.

But with Biya in power since 1982, Cameroon perhaps represents the most dramatic example of the tension between Africa's youth and the continent's many aging leaders.

Despite being an oil-producing country experiencing modest economic growth, young people say the benefits have not trickled down beyond the elites.

"Of course, when unemployment and social exclusion persist, frustration can lead to violence," Leo warned in his opening address to Biya and government authorities earlier this week. "Investing in the education, training, and entrepreneurship of young people is, therefore, a strategic choice for peace. It is the only way to curb the outflow of wonderful talent to other parts of the world."

According to World Bank data, the unemployment rate in Cameroon stands at 3.5%, but 57% of the labor force aged 18 to 35 works in informal employment.

The dire economic outlook in Cameroon has led to significant brain drain and has strained an already understaffed health sector, as many doctors and nurses are leaving the country for more lucrative jobs in Europe and North America.

In 2023, about a third of doctors who graduated from medical school in Cameroon left the country, according to the Ministry of Higher Education.

Growing frustration over Biya's record and long-term rule intensified during last October's tense presidential election, in which Biya secured an eighth consecutive term.

When Cameroon's main opposition candidate, Issa Tchiroma Bakary, contested the result of the poll, deadly protests erupted throughout the country.

House extends surveillance powers until April 30 after late-night revolt sinks GOP plan

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House early Friday approved a short-term renewal until April 30 of a controversial surveillance program used by U.S. spy agencies in a post-midnight vote after Republicans revolted and refused President Donald Trump's push for a longer extension.

GOP leaders rushed lawmakers back into session to late Thursday with a series of back-to-back votes that collapsed in dramatic failure, before they quickly pushed ahead the stopgap measure as they race to keep the surveillance program running past Monday's expiration date.

First they unveiled a new plan that would have extended the program for five years, with revisions. Then they tried to salvage a shorter 18-month renewal that Trump had demanded and Speaker Mike Johnson had previously backed. Some 20 Republicans joined most Democrats in blocking its advance.

Shortly after 2 a.m. they quickly agreed to the 10-day extension, which was agreed to on a voice vote without a formal roll call. It next goes to the Senate, which is gaveling for a rare Friday session, as Congress races to keep the surveillance program running.

"We were very close tonight," said Johnson after the late-night action.

But Democrats blasted the middle-of-the-night voting as amateur hour. "Are you kidding me? Who the hell is running this place?" said Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass., during a fiery floor debate.

At the center of the standoff that has stretched throughout the week is Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, which permits the CIA, National Security Agency, FBI and other agencies to collect and analyze vast amounts of overseas communications without a warrant. In doing so, they can incidentally sweep up communications involving Americans who interact with foreign targets.

U.S. officials say the authority is critical to disrupting terrorist plots, cyber intrusions and foreign espionage.

Surveillance program fight is a debate over privacy and security

Its path to passage has teetered all week in a familiar fight, as lawmakers weigh civil liberties concerns against intelligence officials' warnings about national security risks.

Opponents of the surveillance tool point to past misuses. FBI officials repeatedly violated their own standards when searching intelligence related to the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol and racial justice protests in 2020, according to a 2024 court order.

Trump and his allies had lobbied aggressively all week for a clean renewal of the program, without changes.

A group of Republicans traveled to the White House on Tuesday, and on Wednesday CIA Director John Ratcliffe spoke directly with GOP lawmakers. House Majority Leader Steve Scalise said Thursday there had "been negotiations late into the night with the White House and some of our members."

"I am asking Republicans to UNIFY, and vote together on the test vote to bring a clean Bill to the floor," Trump wrote on Truth Social this week. "We need to stick together."

The result of days of negotiations

Thursday's proceedings came to a standstill as lawmakers retreated behind closed doors and Johnson reached for an agreement to resolve the standoff.

Shortly before midnight GOP leaders announced a new proposal, a five-year extension, with revisions. The changes were designed to win over skeptics of the surveillance program who have demanded greater oversight to protect Americans' privacy.

Among the changes are new provisions to ensure that only FBI attorneys can authorize queries on U.S. persons, and to require the Office of the Director of National Intelligence to review such cases, said Rep. Austin Scott, R-Ga., during the debate.

But the final product, a 14-page amendment, did not go far enough for some holdouts in either party.

With Johnson controlling a slim majority, he has little room for dissent. As the Republicans fell short on both efforts before the short extension, a handful of Democrats stepped in to try to help them advance the longer extensions, but most Democrats were opposed.

"We just defeated Johnson's efforts to sneak through a 5-year FISA authorization tonight," said Democratic Rep. Ro Khanna of California. "Now, they will have to fight in daylight."

Asian stocks lower and oil falls after Wall Street sets another record on ceasefire hopes

By CHAN HO-HIM AP Business Writer

HONG KONG (AP) — Asian stocks were mostly lower Friday even after Wall Street set another record, as investors watched for signs of more U.S.-Iran talks and an extension of the ceasefire of the Iran war that is expiring next week.

Oil prices fell Friday, while U.S. futures edged up.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 fell 1.8% to 58,475.90 after reaching an all-time high on Thursday. South Korea's Kospi was 0.6% lower at 6,191.92.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng dropped 1% to 26,143.60. Shares of Chinese spatial design software firm Manycore Tech, one of the so-called leading "six little dragons" technology companies of Hangzhou, was up more than 140% on its first day of trading in Hong Kong, fueled by the artificial intelligence boom. The Shanghai Composite index edged down 0.1% to 4,051.43.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 lost 0.1%. Taiwan's Taiex traded 0.9% lower, while India's Sensex gained 0.4%.

U.S. President Donald Trump suggested Thursday that he's open to extending the two-week ceasefire in the Iran war, and Iran's U.N. envoy said Tehran remained "cautiously optimistic" over negotiations with the U.S.

As optimism over an extended ceasefire grew, oil prices fell early Friday after climbing a day earlier. Brent crude, the international standard, was 1.1% lower at \$98.26 per barrel. It had surged roughly 40% since the beginning of the Iran war in late February. Benchmark U.S. crude was down 1.6% to \$89.70 a barrel.

Global energy shocks are growing over impacts of the Iran war, with the Strait of Hormuz remaining largely closed while the U.S. imposed a sea blockade on Iranian ports. The head of the International Energy Agency told The Associated Press on Thursday that Europe has "maybe six weeks or so" of jet fuel supplies remaining and warned of flight cancellations "soon."

On Thursday, Wall Street set another record with the benchmark S&P 500 closing 0.3% higher at 7,041.28, just a day after it eclipsed its previous all-time high in January. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 0.2% to 48,578.72, and the tech-focused Nasdaq composite added 0.4% to 24,102.70.

Shares of PepsiCo gained 2.3% following its announcement of better-than-expected quarterly results. U.S. logistics company J.B. Hunt Transport Services was 6.3% higher also on stronger-than-expected results.

In other dealings, gold was 0.1% lower at \$4,806.10 an ounce, while silver prices gained 0.3% to \$78.94 per ounce.

The U.S. dollar rose to 159.25 Japanese yen from 159.17 yen. The euro was trading at \$1.1782, up from \$1.1781.

Australia's most decorated veteran walks free on bail on war crimes charges related to Afghan deaths

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Australia's most decorated living veteran, Ben Roberts-Smith, walked free on bail from a Sydney prison on Friday, 10 days after he was charged with war crimes in the killings of five people while serving in Afghanistan.

Judge Greg Grogin granted Roberts-Smith bail in a Sydney court around five hours earlier, ruling the former Special Air Service Regiment corporal had established exceptional circumstances to justify his release from custody. Prosecutors had opposed bail and argued there was a risk that Roberts-Smith would flee Australia or interfere with witnesses and evidence.

Roberts-Smith, 47, was arrested on April 7 and charged with five counts of war crime murder involving the deaths of five Afghans in Uruzgan province in 2009 and 2012.

Australian law defines war crime murder as the intentional killing in a context of armed conflict of a person who is not taking an active part in the hostilities, such as a civilian, prisoner of war or a wounded soldier.

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Roberts-Smith was driven away from Sydney's Silverwater Correctional Complex late Friday apparently wearing the same clothes he wore when police escorted him from a commercial airliner at Sydney Airport last week, news media images showed.

Roberts-Smith was awarded both the Victoria Cross and Medal of Gallantry for his service in Afghanistan and is only the second Australian veteran of the Afghanistan campaign to be charged with a war crime.

The charges follow a military report released in 2020 that found evidence elite SAS and commando regiment troops unlawfully killed 39 Afghan prisoners, farmers and other noncombatants. Around 40,000 Australian military personnel served in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2021, of whom 41 were killed.

Similar allegations against Roberts-Smith were found credible in a civil court case in 2023 when a judge rejected his claims that newspaper articles defamed him.

At that trial, Roberts-Smith testified he had never killed an unarmed Afghan and denied ever committing a war crime. He claimed he was the victim of spiteful fellow soldiers' lies and of others' envy of his medals.

But while the civil court found the war crimes allegations were mostly proven on a balance of probabilities, the war crime murder charges would have to be proved in a criminal court to a higher standard of beyond reasonable doubt.

Roberts-Smith is accused of personally shooting dead two victims. He allegedly ordered subordinates to shoot the other three victims.

In opposing bail, prosecutor Simon Buchen described the charges against Roberts-Smith as "among the most serious known to the criminal law."

Buchen said Roberts-Smith had been "on the cusp of relocating overseas" without telling authorities when he became aware that prosecutors were considering charges.

Roberts-Smith had made "advanced plans to relocate overseas. Consideration was being given to moving to various destinations overseas," Buchen told the court.

Roberts-Smith faces a potential maximum sentence of life in prison on each conviction. He has yet to enter pleas.

Defense lawyer Slade Howell told the bail hearing Roberts-Smith's case "may properly be described as exceptional in the sense that it is out of the ordinary."

"The use of domestic courts to prosecute alleged war crimes committed by a highly decorated Australian soldier deployed overseas repeatedly by the Australian government to fight a war on its behalf is unprecedented and is uncharted legal territory of the common law of this country," Howell said.

Howell also said Roberts-Smith's "proceedings will be beset by a multitude of delays, many of which are peculiar to these proceedings."

Potential delays could arise if prosecutors decide to charge one or more of Roberts-Smith's fellow veterans, some of whom now live overseas, Howell said.

Roberts-Smith took part in the bail hearing by video link from prison and spoke only when asked by the judge to confirm that he could see and hear proceedings.

ICE went on a hiring spree. Sterling credentials were not required, AP investigation finds

By RYAN J. FOLEY Associated Press

Their backgrounds stand out. And not in a good way.

Two bankruptcies and six law enforcement jobs in three years. An allegation of lying in a police report to justify a felony charge against an innocent woman — an incident that led to a \$75,000 settlement and criticism of his integrity. A third job candidate once failed to graduate from a police academy, then lasted only three weeks in his only job as a police officer.

Their common bond: All were hired recently by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement during an unprecedented hiring spree — 12,000 new officers and special agents to double its force — after the agency received a \$75 billion windfall from Congress to enact President Donald Trump's mass deportation

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campaign.

The president put a premium on swift action, and for ICE that meant rapid-fire recruitment and hiring, which in turn led to new employees with questionable qualifications. Their backgrounds and training have come under scrutiny after numerous high-profile incidents in which ICE agents used excessive force.

"If vetting is not done well and it's done too quickly, you have higher risk of increased liability to the agency because of bad actions, abuse of power and the lack of ability to properly carry out the mission because people don't know what they are doing," said Claire Trickler-McNulty, who served as an ICE official during the Obama, first Trump and Biden administrations.

The agency has said the majority of new hires are police and military veterans. But evidence is mounting that applicants with questionable histories were either not fully vetted before they were brought on or were hired in spite of their past, an investigation by The Associated Press found.

ICE's acting director, Todd Lyons, said during a congressional hearing in February that he was proud of the hiring campaign, which drew more than 220,000 applications. "This expansion of a well-trained and well-vetted workforce will help further ICE's ability to execute the president's and secretary's bold agenda," he said.

AP finds legal issues in new ICE hires' backgrounds

Unlike many local law enforcement agencies, ICE said it shields the identity of employees to protect them from harassment, making a full accounting of the new hires impossible.

The AP focused on more than 40 officers who recently made public their new jobs as ICE officers on LinkedIn pages, using public records to check their backgrounds. All but one were male.

While most of them had conventional qualifications as former correctional officers, security guards, military veterans and police officers, it's unclear how many should have potentially been disqualified because AP did not have access to their full personnel files. But several had histories of unpaid debts that resulted in legal action, two had filed for bankruptcy and three others had faced lawsuits that alleged misconduct in prior law enforcement jobs, the AP found.

Marshall Jones, an expert on police recruiting at the Florida Institute of Technology, said it's hard to get a full picture of ICE's new employee pool without more data. But he said ICE has likely hired some "less than ideal candidates" who meet minimum requirements but would be passed over in a normal hiring cycle.

"If you're hiring hundreds or thousands of people, even with the best of background processes, there are going to be outliers," he said. "The question is, are these normal outliers from human beings doing things, or is there a systemic challenge in properly vetting folks if there are issues?"

DHS says 'vetting is an ongoing process'

The Department of Homeland Security, ICE's parent agency, did not answer questions about specific hiring decisions. But it acknowledged some applicants received "tentative selection letters" and offers to begin working on a temporary status before they had been subjected to full background checks.

"ICE is committed to ensuring its law enforcement personnel are held to the highest standards and rigorously vets them throughout the hiring process," the department said. "Vetting is an ongoing process, not a one-time occurrence."

The process includes reviewing their criminal histories and credit scores and conducting background investigations that include interviewing prior employers and other associates, which can take weeks. But the deluge of hires has strained the agency, which promised signing bonuses of up to \$50,000 and advertised that college degrees were not required.

An internal memo, first reported by Reuters in February, told ICE supervisors that if they receive "deleterious information about a newly hired employee's conduct" they should refer the allegations to an internal affairs unit for investigation. Such information could include the employees' termination or forced resignations, the memo said.

Two bankruptcies, six jobs before ICE hired him

Among the new hires is Carmine Gurliacci, 46, who resigned as a police officer in Richmond Hill, Georgia, to join ICE in Atlanta in December, according to a resignation letter obtained by AP.

He filed for bankruptcy in 2022, saying he had no income and had been unemployed for two years after

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moving from New York to Georgia, court filings show. He said he was living with a friend and doing chores in exchange for housing, listing tens of thousands of dollars of unpaid loans, bills, child support and other debts. He also had filed for bankruptcy in 2013 in New York, when he listed \$95,000 in liabilities, records show.

Serious financial problems are "a pretty big red flag" because they might make employees susceptible to bribes or extortion, which have been problems at ICE, Trickler-McNulty said.

After his 2022 bankruptcy petition was approved, Gurliacci rejoined the work force, hopping to six Georgia law enforcement agencies within three years, each time resigning before moving on, records obtained by AP show.

He left one campus security job in 2023, citing "unforeseen personal issues that render me unable to fulfill my duties," a resignation letter shows. But he then began working for the Butts County Sheriff's Office soon after.

He lasted months there before moving to the Chatham County Sheriff's Office, where he quit after two months on the job, records show. The federal government recently obtained his Chatham County personnel file as part of a background check, two months after he started at ICE.

Reached by phone, Gurliacci told a reporter he would call back. He never did and did not respond to follow-up messages.

Critic says new ICE hire 'abuses his power'

Another new hire is Andrew Penland, 29, who joined ICE after resigning in December as a sheriff's deputy in Greenwood County, Kansas.

Penland had spent most of his career as a deputy in Bourbon County, Kansas, but left last year after facing a lawsuit alleging he arrested a woman on false allegations in 2022. The county's insurer paid \$75,000 to settle the case, the agreement shows.

The woman, June Bench, recounted in an interview what happened. One of her neighbors, a county official, claimed Bench had purposely made a wide turn and nearly hit him with her car.

Penland responded to the property. Body camera video shows he urged the neighbor to press charges and told the man Bench would go to jail but he would not have to testify in court because it would get resolved through a plea.

Bench denied the allegation and said it was part of a personal dispute. But Penland arrested her on a felony assault charge, took her to jail and seized her car. Penland wrote in a report that he watched surveillance video showing her neighbor jumping out of the way of her speeding car.

It took a week for Bench to get out of jail and more than a year to defeat the charge, which was dismissed for lack of evidence. When she obtained the video Penland cited as proof, it showed her car appearing to make a routine turn and no near-collision with the neighbor.

Bench said she was outraged to learn Penland had been hired by ICE.

"That's scary to me. He abuses his power," she said.

After being reached for comment, Penland deactivated his LinkedIn account and alerted ICE to the inquiry but did not respond to AP.

New hire struggled at police academy

A third new ICE hire, Antonio Barrett, initially failed to graduate from a Colorado law enforcement academy in 2020, one of two students who did not "complete portions of the academy" and received "an incomplete grade," an email obtained by AP shows.

He finished the program after a community college arranged a special one-day training and test for him, and landed a job at the police department in La Junta, Colorado, in July 2020. But he only worked three weeks before resigning and never worked in local policing again.

Previously, Barrett worked as a corrections officer at a Colorado prison.

He was accused in a lawsuit of excessive force for inflicting pain on a handcuffed inmate when he and another colleague forcibly removed the man from a wheelchair in 2017. But state officials argued their actions were not excessive and a court agreed, dismissing the case.

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Barrett didn't respond to a message seeking comment.

Ex-ICE instructor says training is inadequate

ICE has denied removing any training requirements, saying new recruits receive 56 days of training and 28 days of on-the-job training. The agency said that most of the new officers have already completed law enforcement academies.

But former ICE academy instructor Ryan Schwank testified in February that agency leaders cut training on the use of force, firearms safety and the rights of protesters. He said the new recruits include some as young as 18 who lack college degrees and whose primary language is not English.

"We're not giving them the training to know when they're being asked to do something that they're not supposed to do, something illegal or wrong," he said.

Iran war energy shock drives nuclear power plans in hard-hit Asia and Africa

By ALLAN OLINGO and ANTON L. DELGADO Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — The Iran war's global energy shock is causing some nations in Asia and Africa to boost nuclear power generation and spurring atomic energy plans in non-nuclear countries on both continents.

Asia, where most of the Middle Eastern oil and natural gas was headed, was hit first and hardest by disruptions to shipping routes carrying those fuels — swiftly followed by Africa. The U.S. and Europe are also feeling the pinch as the conflict drives up energy costs.

African and Asian nations with nuclear plants are increasing their output as they scramble for short-term energy supplies, while non-nuclear countries are accelerating long-term nuclear plans to safeguard against future fossil fuel shocks.

Nuclear power isn't a quick fix for the current energy crisis. Developing atomic energy can take decades, especially for nuclear newcomers. But long-term commitments to nuclear power made now will likely lock it in to countries' future energy mixes, said Joshua Kurlantzick of the Council on Foreign Relations.

In Asia, the Iran war is pushing South Korea to increase nuclear power generation, while Taiwan is debating restarting mothballed reactors. In Africa, future plans to build reactors have taken on urgency, with Kenya, Rwanda and South Africa affirming their support.

Nuclear power takes advantage of the energy released when the nucleus of an atom, such as uranium, splits in a process called fission. Unlike fossil fuels, this doesn't release climate change-causing carbon dioxide. But it creates potentially dangerous radioactive waste, one reason many countries are cautious about nuclear power.

The war has accelerated a global "nuclear renaissance," said Rachel Bronson of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, as countries seek an out from the risks of fossil fuel markets.

There are 31 countries that use nuclear power, which provides about 10% of global electricity, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency, which says another 40 nations are either considering the technology or preparing to build a plant.

Hard-hit Asia advances on nuclear

In Asia, where energy triage efforts range from increased coal use to purchases of Russian crude oil, countries with nuclear plants are seeking to get more out of their existing reactors.

South Korea is increasing generation at its nuclear plants and speeding up maintenance at five offline reactors, with restarts planned in May.

Taiwan and Japan are reversing policies that shuttered nuclear sites following the 2011 Fukushima nuclear meltdown, triggered when an earthquake and tsunami disabled the power supply that cooled the reactors.

Taiwan is considering the years-long process of restarting two reactors because of the current crisis, which will require meticulous inspections, safety checks and control system verifications.

In Japan, since the start of the war, Prime Minister Takaichi Sanae has signed a \$40 billion reactor deal with the U.S., a nuclear fuel recycling agreement with France and promised Indonesia nuclear cooperation.

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Japan restarted the world's largest nuclear plant, the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa site, in January.

Renewables, like solar and wind, make more sense than nuclear for energy affordability and security, according to Michiyo Miyamoto of the U.S.-based Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis.

While the Iran war is also driving consumer and government interest in renewable energy globally and in Japan, historically high electricity costs combined with the current crisis is swinging Japanese public opinion toward acceptance of nuclear power, she said.

In South Asia, Bangladesh is racing to turn on new reactors built by Russia's state-owned nuclear corporation Rosatom. Dhaka hopes they will supply the national grid with 300 megawatts by this summer, relieving some pressure from current gas shortfalls.

Meanwhile, Vietnam signed a deal with Moscow in March for two Russian-designed reactors.

The Philippines, which recently declared a national energy emergency, is also considering reviving a nuclear plant built in the aftermath of the 1973 oil crisis but was never turned on.

"I hope we learned our lesson," said Alvie Asuncion-Astronomo of the Philippine Nuclear Research Institute. The Iran war is "providing a needed push for nuclear."

Africa voices atomic aims

Soaring energy prices and power shortages in Africa, triggered by the Iran war, is leading to public calls for nuclear cooperation and re-invigorated interest in long-term nuclear energy plans, which are underway in more than 20 of the 54 African countries.

With Africa seen as an atomic energy growth market, nuclear nations — including the U.S., Russia, China, France and South Korea — are pitching advanced technology such as small modular reactors, or SMRs, as a solution to energy shortages.

These modular reactors are a cheaper, more compact alternative to large-scale plants.

Proponents tout them as a faster option, but projects can still take years. Kenya, for instance, plans to bring a small modular reactor online in 2034 after starting the first phase in 2009.

Last month, Justus Wabuyabo of Kenya's Nuclear Power and Energy Agency, said "nuclear energy is no longer a distant aspiration for African countries; it is a strategic necessity."

During a March summit convened by the U.N.'s nuclear watchdog agency, Rwandan President Paul Kagame said Africa will be "one of the most important global markets" for the smaller reactors in the years ahead.

Smaller reactors, which can offer scalable, low-emitting base load power, are considered a solution to Africa's rising electricity demand, weak grids and over reliance on imported diesel.

Similarly, Loyiso Tyabashe of the South African Nuclear Energy Corporation, said SMRs could "fulfill our strategic objective of positioning South Africa at the forefront of advanced nuclear technologies."

South Africa, which has the continent's only existing nuclear plants, wants nuclear to go from making around 5% of its energy mix now to 16% by 2040.

US and Russia vie for role as a nuclear provider

The energy disruptions come as competition for influence in Africa intensifies between Washington and Moscow.

Russia's Rosatom is building Egypt's first reactor and has cooperation agreements with Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Tanzania and Niger, spanning major projects, research centers, uranium processing facilities and training programs.

While only Kenya and Ghana have joined an American-led modular reactor initiative, Washington is trying to catch up.

The U.S. and South Korea sponsored a nuclear conference in Nairobi last month. Ryan Taugher of the U.S. State Department said Washington is working with African nations to rapidly develop secure and safe civil nuclear reactors.

Ghana, which aims to begin building a nuclear plant in 2027, is in the market for foreign suppliers.

Considering the risks of nuclear energy

Risks like meltdowns and mismanaged waste remain, even as interest builds. Nuclear energy could also be a step toward building nuclear bombs.

Ayumi Fukakusa, of the advocacy group Friends of the Earth Japan, said "nuclear is very risky" and will keep countries reliant on imported fuels such as enriched uranium.

Given that nuclear sectors take years to develop, governments should stay focused on building out renewables for long-term energy security, said Rex Amancio of the Global Renewables Alliance.

Bronson, with the atomic scientists group, also said nuclear plants are vulnerable during conflicts, citing recent instances where reactors were specifically targeted during the Iran war and the Russia-Ukraine War.

"All of this comes into the mix of how we think about energy security," she said. "Countries are now weighing those kinds of risks against the other risks, which Asia and Africa are seeing first and foremost, about what happens when gas and oil stops."

A 10-day ceasefire in Lebanon goes into effect

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB, ABBY SEWELL and MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — A 10-day truce appeared to be holding in Lebanon early Friday, promising a pause in fighting between Israel and the Hezbollah militant group and possibly clearing one major obstacle to a deal between Iran and the United States and Israel to end weeks of devastating war.

But it remained unclear whether Israel would completely stop strikes on Hezbollah, and whether the militant group would recognize a deal it did not play a role in negotiating and which will leave Israeli troops occupying a stretch of southern Lebanon.

Barrages of gunshots rang out across Beirut as residents fired into the air just after midnight to celebrate the beginning of the truce, and displaced families began moving toward southern Lebanon and Beirut's southern suburbs despite warnings by officials not to attempt to return to their homes until it became clear whether the ceasefire would hold.

U.S. President Donald Trump heralded the deal a "historic day for Lebanon," even as he expressed confidence that the war with Iran would soon end in a Las Vegas speech.

"I will say the war in Iran is going along swimmingly," Trump said. "It should be ending pretty soon."

An end to Israel's war with Hezbollah was a key demand of Iranian negotiators, who previously accused Israel of breaking the current ceasefire deal with strikes on Lebanon. Israel said that deal did not cover Lebanon.

Pakistan's army chief met Thursday with Iran's parliament speaker as part of international efforts to press for an extension of the ceasefire.

While oil prices fell on hopes of a deal, the head of the International Energy Agency warned that energy shocks could get worse if the Strait of Hormuz doesn't reopen soon. Iran closed the crucial waterway, through which a fifth of the world's oil normally passes, shortly after the war began. Europe has "maybe six weeks or so" of jet fuel left and broader economic consequences will grow the longer the strait is closed, IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol told The Associated Press on Thursday.

The leaders of France and the U.K. will gather dozens of countries — but not the United States — on Friday to push forward plans to reopen the strait.

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.

Israel says it will keep troops in Lebanon

Earlier, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he agreed to the ceasefire "to advance" peace efforts with Lebanon, but he said Israeli troops would not withdraw.

Israeli forces have engaged in fierce battles with Hezbollah in the border area as they pushed into southern Lebanon to create what officials have called a "security zone." Netanyahu, in his video address, said it will extend 10 kilometers (6 miles) into Lebanon.

"That is where we are, and we are not leaving," he said.

Hezbollah has said that Lebanese people have "the right to resist" Israeli occupation of their land and that their actions "will be determined based on how developments unfold."

The U.S. State Department said that according to the agreement, Israel reserves the right to defend itself

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“at any time, against planned, imminent or ongoing attacks.” But otherwise, Israel “will not carry out any offensive military operations against Lebanese targets, including civilian, military, and other state targets.”

Trump announced the agreement as a ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon, but a Hezbollah official said the ceasefire was a result of negotiations between the U.S. and Iran. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak publicly.

Israel and Hezbollah have fought several wars and have been fighting on and off since the day after the start of the Gaza war. Israel and Lebanon reached a deal to end that war in November 2024, but Israel has kept up near-daily strikes in what it says is an effort to prevent the Iran-backed militant group from regrouping. That escalated into another invasion after Hezbollah again began firing missiles at Israel in response to its war on Iran.

Flurry of diplomacy led up to Lebanon ceasefire

The agreement came after a meeting between Israel’s and Lebanon’s ambassadors in Washington and a flurry of subsequent phone calls from Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio, according to a White House official.

They were the first direct diplomatic talks between the two countries in decades. Hezbollah had opposed direct talks between Lebanon and Israel.

Trump spoke Wednesday evening with Netanyahu, who agreed to a ceasefire with certain terms, according to the official, who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Rubio then called Lebanon’s president, Joseph Aoun, who got on board. Trump then spoke with Aoun, and again with Netanyahu.

The State Department worked with both governments to formulate a memorandum of understanding for the truce.

Pakistan army chief meets with Iranian parliament speaker

Pakistan’s army chief met Thursday with Iran’s parliament speaker as part of efforts to press for an extension to a ceasefire that has paused almost seven weeks of war between Israel, the U.S. and Iran.

Even as the U.S. blockade on Iranian ports and renewed Iranian threats strained the ceasefire, regional officials reported progress, telling AP 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.

Mediators are pushing for a compromise on three main sticking points: Iran’s nuclear program, the Strait of Hormuz and compensation for wartime damages, according to a regional official involved in the mediation efforts.

Trump suggested the ceasefire could be extended.

“If we’re close to a deal, would I extend?” Trump said in an exchange with reporters. “Yeah, I would do that.”

Macron and Starmer hold international summit on reopening the Strait of Hormuz

By SYLVIE CORBET and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — The leaders of France and the U.K. will gather dozens of countries — but not the United States — on Friday to push forward plans to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, a key oil route choked off by the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran.

The Paris meeting is part of attempts by sidelined nations to ease the impact of a conflict they didn’t start and haven’t joined, but that has sent the global economy reeling. After the war started on Feb. 28, Iran effectively shut the narrow strait through which a fifth of the world’s oil usually passes.

The U.S. is not part of the planning for what has been branded the Strait of Hormuz Maritime Freedom of Navigation Initiative. In a post on X ahead of Friday’s conference, French President Emmanuel Macron said the mission to provide security for shipping through the strait would be “strictly defensive,” limited to non-belligerent countries and deployed “when security conditions allow.”

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Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer have spearheaded international efforts to increase diplomatic and economic pressure on Iran, which Starmer has accused of "holding the world's economy to ransom." U.S. President Donald Trump's announcement of a retaliatory American blockade of Iranian ports has raised the economic jeopardy even higher.

"The unconditional and immediate reopening of the Strait is a global responsibility, and we need to act to get global energy and trade flowing freely again," Starmer said before the meeting.

Military planning underway

France and Britain also have led military planning meetings, in an echo of the "coalition of the willing" assembled to provide security for Ukraine in the event of a ceasefire in that war.

French military spokesman Col. Guillaume Vernet said Thursday that the mission is still "in construction."

Macron's office said participants will contribute "each according to its capabilities," stressing options to ensure safe passage through the strait will depend on the security situation after a lasting ceasefire.

"What matters is that ship operators have all the means at their disposal to be sure their vessels will not be hit if they pass through the strait. That may require intelligence, mine-clearing capabilities, military escorts, communication procedures with coastal states, etc.," an official said, speaking on condition of anonymity in line with the French presidency's customary practices.

Sidharth Kaushal, a research fellow in sea power at the Royal United Services Institute think tank, said mine-clearing and creating a warning system for maritime threats were more likely roles for the coalition than warships escorting commercial tankers through the strait.

"You need huge numbers of vessels for that sort of thing, which nobody has," he said.

Iran expert Ellie Geranmayeh, deputy head of the Middle East and North Africa program at the European Council on Foreign Relations think tank, said mine-clearing is an area where European countries and their partners could play a role.

"They would be a better party to do this than the United States, because once you have U.S. military doing this and lingering on Iranian shores, it creates a potential arena for Iran and the U.S. to have miscalculations and get back into a sort of military tension," she said.

Dozens of countries involved in talks

Britain has discussed using mine-hunting drones, deployed from the ship RFA Lyme Bay, for a Hormuz mission.

The war has highlighted the shrunken state of the Royal Navy, which has deployed just one major warship, destroyer HMS Dragon, to the eastern Mediterranean. France, which has the European Union's most powerful military, has sent its nuclear-powered aircraft carrier to the region, alongside a helicopter carrier and several frigates.

More than 40 nations have taken part in diplomatic or military meetings led by France and the U.K. in recent weeks, though fewer are likely to commit military resources.

Macron's office said about 30 countries are to attend Friday's talks, including some from the Middle East and Asia. The list has not been disclosed. German Chancellor Friedrich Merz and Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni are expected to attend in person, with others joining by video.

The operation is partly a response to Trump, who has berated allies for failing to join the war and said reopening the strait is not America's job. The president has called allies "cowards," said NATO "wasn't there when we needed them" and telling Britain: "You don't even have a navy."

"I imagine there'll be some desire on the part of many European states, and potentially Canada, to demonstrate the ability to provide security in a way that's distinct from if not completely separate from the U.S. and which also demonstrates a capacity for independent action," Kaushal said.

"How many states actually have spare capacity to offer to this is a pretty open question."

Trump draws Marie Antoinette comparisons as he leans into the gilded trappings of the presidency

By MICHELLE L. PRICE and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump had something urgent to address while flying back to Washington from his luxury Mar-a-Lago estate on a recent Sunday.

It wasn't the Iran war, nor the still-going partial government shutdown over Department of Homeland Security funding. He wanted to talk about a monumental issue of a different kind, hoisting up large artist renderings of the \$400 million White House ballroom he's building, complete with hand-carved "top-of-the-line" Corinthian columns.

"I'm so busy that I don't have time to do this. I'm fighting wars and other things," Trump said before extensively detailing plans for "the greatest ballroom anywhere in the world."

His divided attention has become a Democratic point of attack and a concern for some Republicans who worry he's not spending enough time on issues that voters care most about ahead of November's midterm races.

The contrast was on full display Thursday, when, as Trump flew to Las Vegas to discuss tax cuts for Americans earning tips, his administration was pushing ahead with plans to build a 250-foot Triumphal Arch near the Lincoln Memorial replete with a Lady Liberty-like statue and a pair of golden eagles.

The president's ability to speak to the concerns of working people has always seemed incongruous with his biography as a billionaire real estate developer. Yet his populist policies and emphasis on the economy during his 2024 campaign helped catapult him back to the White House.

Republican strategist Rick Tyler noted that, when Trump first ran for president in 2016, his wealth was a selling point.

"While other people, like Mitt Romney, played down how rich he was, Trump was giving free helicopter rides at the Iowa State Fair," Tyler said. "People loved it."

Still, Trump's preoccupation with some of the gilded trappings of the presidency, as more Americans worry about bills, has drawn accusations that he's a modern-day Marie Antoinette.

"Fighting wars' and surging gas prices, yet Trump has time to brag about his billionaire backed ballroom," Sen. Andy Kim, a New Jersey Democrat, responded on X to Trump's Air Force One presentation.

Democratic California Gov. Gavin Newsom, a potential 2028 presidential hopeful, has been more direct in comparing Trump to the last queen before the French Revolution, who has come to embody extravagant opulence — even posting an AI-generated image of Trump's face on her body on social media.

"TRUMP 'MARIE ANTOINETTE' SAYS, 'NO HEALTH CARE FOR YOU PEASANTS, BUT A BALLROOM FOR THE QUEEN!' Newsom wrote in October 2025, at the start of a 43-day government shutdown.

White House says Trump's success benefits all Americans

Asked about opponents invoking Marie Antoinette, White House spokesman Davis Ingle said Trump "is going to go down in history as the most successful and consequential president in our lifetime."

"His successes on behalf of the American people will be imprinted upon the fabric of America and will be felt by every other White House that comes after him," Ingle said in a statement.

The president faced similar critiques during his first term. But lately he's been unabashed about accusations he's disconnected from Americans' worries about high costs, which could leave Republicans with an uphill battle to retain control of Congress.

About two-thirds of Americans said Trump is "out of touch" with the concerns of most people in the United States today, according to an ABC News/Washington Post/Ipsos poll from February, though the same percentage said the same about the Democratic Party.

Presidents are usually removed from voters, separated by layers of security and surrounded by adoring subordinates. In her book "Why Presidents Fail And How They Can Succeed Again," Elaine Kamarck argues that presidents get too focused on their own political narratives rather than the public's concerns. Yet, when it comes to Trump, "All of this stuff is frankly unique to him."

She pointed to the ballroom as well as Trump's other White House renovations, soon adding his signature

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to paper currency, and renaming the Kennedy Center after himself.

"It's a reflection, I think, of his own background as a businessman and somebody who made his fortune selling his name," said Kamarck, who worked in Bill Clinton's White House.

While Trump focuses on the ballroom and other Washington projects, some public work projects in other parts of the country have languished.

Joe Meyer, the former mayor of Covington, Kentucky, spent years pushing for critical improvements to the Brent Spence Bridge connecting his town with Cincinnati, a project listed as a top federal priority dating back to Trump's first administration.

Federal funds for improvements were approved under President Joe Biden but held up by a Trump-ordered review. Work is now finally set to begin later this year, though delays will likely limit design options and slow the project, Meyer said.

"The ballroom is Washington inside-baseball," Meyer said. "The bridge is just a wreck. It's frustration that we've been dealing with forever."

A \$100 tip and a golden tractor

Trumpeting new tax deductions for tips, Trump staged ordering McDonald's to the Oval Office — which he has crammed with gold flourishes — and tipped the grandmother making the delivery \$100. When she described large medical bills from her husband's cancer treatments, Trump said she should bring him to an upcoming UFC fight on the White House lawn.

When hundreds of farmers were invited to the White House for an agricultural policy speech, they stood on the South Lawn beside a tractor that had been painted gold. It drizzled, but Trump stayed dry, addressing them from a covered second-floor balcony.

"You don't mind rain," the president told the farmers below.

He then flew to Miami for a conference of Saudi investors who, the president noted, were too rich to be impressed by U.S. families scrounging to save up \$5,000.

"I know they're looking like, 'What the hell is \$5,000?'" Trump joked. "Their shoes cost them more than \$5,000."

When asked in February, meanwhile, for his message to young people wanting to buy a home, Trump replied: "Save a little longer. Wait a little longer."

Members of the Cabinet have also fed the perception that Trump's promised "Golden Age" may not be arriving for everyone. Health Secretary Robert Kennedy Jr. advised Americans to buy liver instead of beef.

"If you go and buy a steak, it's still pretty expensive. But if you buy the cheaper cuts, it's great meat. And it is very, very affordable. Or liver, or, you know, all these alternatives," he told podcast host Joe Rogan.

Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins said people could still afford meals consisting of "a piece of chicken, a piece of broccoli, corn tortilla and one other thing."

The White House has sought to show that Trump is attuned to voter concerns by sending the president to politically competitive parts of the country to trumpet his efforts to lower costs. But Trump has stepped on the message by insisting that affordability concerns are a Democratic "hoax."

Texas-based Republican consultant Brendan Steinhauser said he thinks that Trump "can kind of get away with" building a ballroom because voters have come to expect that from him as a brash dealmaker and businessman.

But Steinhauser said he worries that dramatic increases in gas prices and a potentially weakening economy could resonate with voters. Ahead of the midterms, Steinhauser said, Democrats could score points "trying to make it more about Trump and his oligarch friends."

ICE acting director Todd Lyons will resign at end of May, DHS says

By TIA GOLDENBERG and HALLIE GOLDEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement acting director Todd Lyons, a key executor of President Donald Trump's mass deportations agenda, will resign at the end of May, federal officials announced Thursday.

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Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin announced Lyons' departure, calling him a great leader of ICE who helped to make American communities safer. Mullin said Lyons' last day will be May 31.

"We wish him luck on his next opportunity in the private sector," Mullin said in a statement. The Department of Homeland Security did not immediately respond to an email from The Associated Press asking why he is resigning.

Lyons, who was named acting director in March 2025, led the agency at the center of President Donald Trump's plans to reshape immigration to the U.S.

Under his leadership, the agency was granted a massive infusion of cash through Congress, which it used to expand hiring and detention capabilities, and it ramped up arrests to meet demand from the administration.

ICE was also central to a series of high-profile immigration enforcement operations in American cities, including Chicago and Minneapolis, a deployment that ended after backlash erupted over the deaths of two American protesters at the hands of federal immigration officers.

Stephen Miller, the president's deputy chief of staff and the main architect of his immigration policy, called Lyons a "dedicated leader."

"His courageous work at ICE has saved countless thousands of American lives and helped deliver safety and tranquility to millions of Americans," Miller said in a statement.

White House spokesperson Abigail Jackson described Lyons in a post on X as "an American patriot who made our country safer."

It's not clear who might replace Lyons. But whoever does will take over an agency flush with cash while still a flashpoint for controversy. ICE is at the center of a battle in Congress, with Democratic lawmakers demanding restraints on immigration officers before agreeing to restore routine funding for DHS.

On Thursday, Lyons, along with two other top immigration officials, appeared before a House subcommittee to argue for his agency's budget and faced continued scrutiny from lawmakers of ICE's actions.

Lyons' departure also comes as DHS is under new leadership after Trump fired former Secretary Kristi Noem, who led the department through the administration's major immigration policy changes.

Mullin, who took over as secretary last month, is likely to continue to advance the president's agenda but has struck a softer tone on some of the administration's most contentious policies.

Public perceptions of ICE during Lyons' tenure were low. In a February AP-NORC poll, most U.S. adults, including independents, said they have an unfavorable view of the agency.

Lyons faced questions in Congress over the shooting deaths of Renee Good and Alex Pretti and was asked if he would apologize for the way some Trump administration officials characterized Good as an agitator. He declined to do so.

"I welcome the opportunity to speak to the family in private. But I'm not going to comment on any active investigation," Lyons said.

Lyons said he had seen video that captured Pretti's shooting but said he could not comment, citing an active investigation.

Lyons, who joined ICE in 2007 as an immigration enforcement agent in Texas, signed off on a memo, first obtained by The Associated Press, that granted federal immigration officers sweeping powers to forcibly enter homes and make arrests without a judge's warrant.

Trump's border czar Tom Homan described Lyons as serving selflessly and "a highly respected and effective acting Director of ICE."

A 10-day ceasefire agreed on by Israel and Lebanon goes into effect

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB, ABBY SEWELL and ELENA BECATOROS Associated Press
BEIRUT, Lebanon (AP) — A 10-day truce began in Lebanon on Friday that could pause fighting between Israel and the Hezbollah militant group and boost attempts to extend the ceasefire between Iran, the United States and Israel after weeks of devastating war.

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U.S. President Donald Trump announced the agreement as a ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon. However, Israel has not been fighting with Lebanon itself, but rather with the Iranian-backed Hezbollah militants inside the country, who were not formally part of the agreement.

Barrages of gunshots rang out across Beirut as residents fired into the air just after midnight to celebrate the beginning of the truce.

Displaced families began moving toward southern Lebanon and Beirut's southern suburbs, despite warnings by officials not to attempt to return to their homes until it became clear whether the ceasefire would hold.

Earlier, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he agreed to the ceasefire "to advance" peace efforts with Lebanon, but said Israeli troops would not withdraw.

Israeli forces have engaged in fierce battles with Hezbollah in the border area as they pushed into southern Lebanon to create what officials have called a "security zone." Netanyahu, in his video address, said it will extend 10 kilometers (6 miles) into Lebanon.

"That is where we are, and we are not leaving," he said.

Hezbollah said that "Israeli occupation on our land grants Lebanon and its people the right to resist it, and this matter will be determined based on how developments unfold" — a stance that could complicate the ceasefire.

Israel reserves right to defend itself

The U.S. State Department said that according to the agreement, Israel reserves the right to defend itself "at any time, against planned, imminent, or ongoing attacks." But otherwise, Israel "will not carry out any offensive military operations against Lebanese targets, including civilian, military, and other state targets."

The wording suggested Israel would maintain the freedom to strike at will, as it did in the months following the ceasefire that ended the previous war. This time, Hezbollah said it would respond to any strikes by Israel.

It's unclear when the 1 million people displaced by the war will be able to safely return.

Lebanon's state-run National News agency reported that Israeli shelling continued in the villages of Khiam and Dibbine about a half hour after the truce went into effect. Israel's military said it was looking into reports of shelling and artillery fire in southern Lebanon.

Hezbollah kept firing rockets at northern Israeli towns and communities right up to the start of the ceasefire. Air raid sirens went off in some often-targeted border towns less than 10 minutes before midnight.

Flurry of diplomacy

The agreement came after a meeting between Israel's and Lebanon's ambassadors in Washington and a flurry of subsequent phone calls from Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio, according to a White House official.

They were the first direct diplomatic talks between the two countries in decades. Hezbollah had opposed direct talks between Lebanon and Israel.

Trump spoke Wednesday evening with Netanyahu, who agreed to a ceasefire with certain terms, according to the official, who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Rubio then called Lebanon's president, Joseph Aoun, who got on board. Trump then spoke with Aoun, and again with Netanyahu.

The State Department worked with both governments to formulate a memorandum of understanding for the truce.

"May have been a historic day for Lebanon. Good things are happening!!!" Trump said in a social media post.

Trump extends White House invitation

Lebanon has insisted on a ceasefire to stop the fighting between Israel and Hezbollah before engaging in more talks, while vowing to commit to disarming the group.

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

Trump also invited the leaders of Israel and Lebanon to the White House for what he said would be "the

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first meaningful talks" between the countries since 1983.

"Both sides want to see PEACE, and I believe that will happen, quickly," Trump wrote on social media.

Lebanon and Israel signed an agreement in 1983 saying Lebanon would formally recognize Israel, and Israel would withdraw from Lebanon. The deal fell apart during Lebanon's civil war and was formally rescinded a year later.

A Hezbollah official said the ceasefire was a result of Iran's negotiations with the U.S., in which Iran had insisted Lebanon be included in its own ceasefire, and came about through efforts by mediator Pakistan. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak publicly.

Pakistan army chief meets with Iranian parliament speaker

Meanwhile, Pakistan's army chief met Thursday with Iran's parliament speaker as part of international efforts to press for an extension to a ceasefire that has paused almost seven weeks of war between Israel, the U.S. and Iran.

It was unclear whether the frantic diplomacy could lead to a lasting deal before the ceasefire ends next week. The Iran war has killed thousands of people and upended global markets by disrupting the flow of oil.

Iranian state television did not provide details on the meeting between Pakistani Army Gen. Asim Munir and Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, his country's chief negotiator.

There was no immediate comment from Pakistan, a key mediator after hosting the talks between the U.S. and Iran that authorities said helped narrow differences between the sides.

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

Trump suggested the ceasefire could be extended.

"If we're close to a deal, would I extend?" Trump said in an exchange with reporters. "Yeah, I would do that."

The war has jolted markets and rattled the global economy as shipping has been cut off and airstrikes have pounded military and civilian infrastructure. Oil prices have fallen amid hopes for an end to fighting, and U.S. stocks on Wednesday surpassed records set in January.

Officials say US and Iran are making progress

Even as the U.S. blockade on Iranian ports and renewed Iranian threats strained the ceasefire, regional officials reported progress, telling AP 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 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 does not support extending the ceasefire.

Mediators seek compromise on sticking points

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.

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

Since the war began, Iran has curtailed maritime traffic through the strait, 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.

Lawyers for singer D4vd say he didn't kill 14-year-old girl after his arrest

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Singer D4vd has been arrested on suspicion of killing a 14-year-old girl whose decomposed body was found seven months ago in his apparently abandoned Tesla, authorities said Thursday, while his lawyers declared his innocence.

Los Angeles police said in a brief statement that homicide detectives arrested the 21-year-old Houston-born alt-pop singer, whose legal name is David Burke, on suspicion of murder in the investigation of the killing of Celeste Rivas Hernandez.

Defense attorneys Blair Berk, Marilyn Bednarski and Regina Peter responded in an email: "Let us be clear — the actual evidence in this case will show that David Burke did not murder Celeste Rivas Hernandez and he was not the cause of her death."

Police said investigators would present a case to prosecutors at the Los Angeles County District Attorneys Office on Monday. The office said in its own statement that it is aware of the arrest and its Major Crimes Division will review the case to determine whether there is enough evidence to file charges.

The defense lawyers added, "There has been no indictment returned by any grand jury in this case and no criminal complaint filed. David has only been detained under suspicion. We will vigorously defend David's innocence."

It was their first public statement on the case. Authorities did not publicly name Burke as a suspect until his arrest. He was being held in jail without bail.

The singer had been under investigation by an LA County grand jury looking into the death of Rivas Hernandez. The probe was officially secret, but its existence — and the designation of D4vd as its target — was revealed on Feb. 25 when his mother, father and brother filed an objection in a Texas court to subpoenas demanding they testify.

The long-dead body of Rivas Hernandez was found in a Tesla towed from the Hollywood Hills on Sept. 8, a day after she would have turned 15. She was a 13-year-old seventh grader when her family reported her missing in 2024 from her hometown of Lake Elsinore, about 70 miles (112 kilometers) southeast of Los Angeles. Authorities give her age as 14 when she was killed in court documents.

The 2023 Tesla Model Y was registered in the singer's name at the Texas address of his subpoenaed family members, according to court filings from prosecutors. It had been towed from an upscale neighborhood in the Hollywood Hills where it had been sitting, seemingly abandoned.

Police investigators searching the Tesla in a tow yard found a cadaver bag "covered with insects and a strong odor of decay," court documents said, and "detectives partially unzipped the bag and observed a decomposed head and torso."

Investigators from the Los Angeles County Medical Examiner's Office removed the bag and "discovered the arms and legs had been severed from the body," according to court documents. A second black bag was found under the first, and dismembered body parts were inside it. No cause of death has been publicly revealed.

D4vd, pronounced "David," gained popularity among Generation Z fans for his blend of indie rock, R&B and lo-fi pop. He went viral on TikTok in 2022 with the hit "Romantic Homicide," which peaked at No. 4 on Billboard's Hot Rock & Alternative Songs chart. He then signed with Darkroom and Interscope Records and released his debut EP "Petals to Thorns" and a follow-up, "The Lost Petals," in 2023.

When the body was discovered, D4vd had been on tour in support of his first full-length album, "Withered." Later, the last two North American shows, in San Francisco and Los Angeles, along with a scheduled performance at LA's Grammy Museum, were canceled, as was the European tour that was to have begun in Norway.

Progressive Analilia Mejía takes New Jersey US House special election, giving Democrats another win

By MIKE CATALINI Associated Press

DENVILLE, N.J. (AP) — Democrat Analilia Mejía won a New Jersey special election for the U.S. House on Thursday, defeating Republican Joe Hathaway on a message of standing up to President Donald Trump and defending progressive policies.

Mejía, 48, a former head of the Working Families Alliance who had support from Vermont U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders, will fill the seat previously held by Democratic Gov. Mikie Sherrill and serve until January.

Her victory is a win for progressives and means Democrats hold on to the 11th District seat in the House, where Republicans hold a thin majority. It also adds to a string of victories for Democrats heading into this year's midterm elections.

The Associated Press called the race for Mejía minutes after the polls closed.

Mejía later spoke in Montclair to an enthusiastic crowd of supporters who called out in unison with her that she was an "unbought, unbossed, sassy new member of Congress."

Republicans criticized her throughout the campaign as too far to the left. She pushed back against those arguments, calling for better health care and education and attacking billionaires for having a "stranglehold" on the economy.

"It is not radical to say that a worker who toils every day cannot make ends meet, that they deserve justice, that they deserve higher wages," Mejía said Thursday night. "That is not radical, that is good conscience. That is a good economy."

Her speech echoed Sanders, who congratulated her in a social media post and said she would be a "great progressive addition" to Congress.

Mejía emerged from a crowded primary in February and cast the race as a test of Trump's leadership. She criticized his pardons of people convicted of Jan. 6-related crimes and faulted him for freezing funds authorized by Congress.

She campaigned on populist economic policies and pushing to abolish U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. She has criticized the Israeli government and said she stands with Palestinian communities in their "pursuit of peace and dignity."

Hathaway, 38, tried to use Mejía's progressive credentials to his advantage, as national Republicans cast her as a socialist. After her victory he congratulated Mejía and wished her well. He added that he still believes the district is looking for "balanced, pragmatic" leadership, not "far-left policies."

The two could go head to head again in November's election for a full two-year term.

The 11th District, which covers parts of Essex, Morris and Passaic counties in northern New Jersey's wealthy suburbs, was long a Republican stronghold but has become increasingly Democratic since Trump's first term.

Sherrill first won the seat in 2018's midterm elections, when Democrats flipped dozens of seats to take control of Congress. In 2024 she won reelection by about 15 points, while Vice President Kamala Harris, the Democratic presidential nominee, carried the district by nearly 9 points.

Mejía's margin of victory was greater. With more than 90% of votes counted late Thursday, she led Hathaway by about 20 percentage points. Additional mail-in ballots — which have favored Mejía by an even larger margin — will be counted in the coming days as they can arrive as late as Wednesday.

Saran Cunningham, an 86-year-old retired special educator, said she was initially reluctant to support Mejía, worried that her views were too far to the left. She backed another candidate in the primary. But recently, outside the Morristown early polling location, she said she would now vote for Mejía.

"I think we've been tilting a little bit more to the right lately, which worries me," Cunningham said. "I think that we need people in Congress who will fight for things that will help people as opposed to hurting them."

Rob Berkowitz, 62, cast his early vote for Hathaway at the Denville polling station. Describing himself as a conservative, Berkowitz gave Trump high marks on immigration, the economy and the war in Iran, comparing him to Winston Churchill. He criticized the Democratic Party for moving away from leaders in

the style of Harry Truman, whom he praised.

"They want borders wide open. They don't want to enforce existing immigration laws," Berkowitz said.

The February Democratic primary pitted Mejía against former Rep. Tom Malinowski and others in a race where the American Israel Public Affairs Committee was a key player. The group's affiliated super PAC tried to thwart Malinowski after he questioned unconditional aid to the Israeli government. That effort appeared to backfire as Mejía, who said she agreed that Israel has committed genocide in Gaza, came out on top.

Over the years she has been a regular presence in the state Capitol, advocating for progressive causes, and was Sanders' political director during his 2020 presidential run. During the Biden administration, she was deputy director of the Labor Department's Women's Bureau.

In addition to winning Sanders' endorsement, she was backed by U.S. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York and Sen. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts.

Hathaway, a former Yale University football player, has worked in health care and finance as well as in politics as an aide for former GOP Gov. Chris Christie.

Trump rails against court decision that once again stalls his White House ballroom project

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump railed against a federal judge's decision on Thursday that continues to block above-ground construction of a \$400 million White House ballroom, allowing only below-ground work on a bunker and other "national security facilities" at the site.

U.S. District Judge Richard Leon's latest ruling comes in response to an appeals court's instruction to clarify an earlier decision on the 90,000-square-foot (8,400-square-meter) ballroom planned for the site where it demolished the East Wing of the White House.

Trump on social media called Leon, who was nominated to the bench by Republican President George W. Bush, a "Trump Hating" judge who "has gone out of his way to undermine National Security, and to make sure that this Great Gift to America gets delayed, or doesn't get built."

The administration filed a notice that it will ask the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit to review Leon's latest decision, too.

National Trust for Historic Preservation president and CEO Carol Quillen, whose group sued to challenge the project, said in a statement that the group is pleased with the court's ruling.

Leon said that below-ground work on security measures is exempt from his order suspending above-ground construction. Government lawyers have argued that the project includes critical security features to guard against a range of possible threats, such as drones, ballistic missiles and biohazards.

Leon's latest ruling comes several days after a three-judge panel from the D.C. appeals court instructed him to reconsider the possible national security implications of stopping construction.

In his previous order, Leon barred above-ground work on the ballroom from proceeding without congressional approval. The judge also ruled on March 31 that any construction work that's necessary to ensure the safety and security of the White House is exempt from the scope of the injunction. Leon said he reviewed material that the government privately submitted to him before concluding that halting construction wouldn't jeopardize national security.

Leon had suspended his March 31 order for two weeks. He stayed his latest decision for another week, which gives the administration more time to seek Supreme Court review.

Leon said he is ordering a stop only to the above-ground construction of the planned ballroom, apart from any work needed to cover or secure that part of the project. Otherwise, the Trump administration is free to proceed with the construction of any excavations, bunkers, military installations, and medical facilities below the ballroom.

"Defendants argue that the entire ballroom construction project, from tip to tail, falls within the safety-and-security exception and therefore may proceed unabated," the judge wrote. "That is neither a reason-

able nor a correct reading of my Order!"

On Saturday, the appeals court panel said it didn't have enough information to decide how much of the project can be suspended without jeopardizing the safety of the president, his family or the White House staff.

Leon said he recognizes the safety implications of the case, but stressed that "national security is not a blank check to proceed with otherwise unlawful activity." He also said he has "no desire or intention to be dragooned into the role of construction manager."

On April 2, two days after Leon's previous ruling, Trump's ballroom won final approval from the 12-member National Capital Planning Commission, which is charged with approving construction on federal property in the Washington region.

The preservation group sued in December, a week after the White House finished demolishing the East Wing to make way for a ballroom that Trump said would fit 999 people. Trump says the project is funded by private donations, although public money is paying for the bunker construction and security upgrades.

Tijuana River sewage is making the air toxic and sickening thousands in California

By JULIE WATSON and DORANY PINEDA Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — The smell of rotten eggs permeates Steve Egger's Southern California home, especially at night as the nearby Tijuana River foams up with sewage from Mexico before emptying into the Pacific Ocean.

Egger, 72, says he and his wife have frequent headaches and wake up congested and coughing up phlegm. Their home is outfitted with a hospital-grade filtration system that cycles the air every 15 minutes.

Despite those measures, "most nights we breathe in a horrible stench," he said. "It's awful."

Since 2018, more than 100 billion gallons (378 billion liters) of raw sewage laden with industrial chemicals and trash have poured into the Tijuana River, according to the International Boundary and Water Commission. The river traverses land where three generations of the Egger family once raised dairy cows. The United States and Mexico signed an agreement last year to clean up the longstanding problem by upgrading wastewater plants to keep up with Tijuana's population growth and industrial waste from factories, many owned by U.S. companies.

In the meantime, tens of thousands of people are being exposed to the sewage. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lee Zeldin said during a February visit to San Diego that it will take about two years to resolve one of the nation's worst and longest-running environmental crises, which affects a largely poor, Latino population.

Raw sewage doesn't just smell bad. It emits hydrogen sulfide, a toxic gas that can erode neurons in the nose and trigger asthma attacks. It can cause headaches, nausea, delirium, tremors, cough, shortness of breath, skin and eye irritation and even death, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Its long-term health problems are only starting to be understood.

There is no federal safety standard for hydrogen sulfide except for workers at sites where the risk is extreme, such as wastewater treatment plants or manure pits. A few states set standards decades ago, but those are outdated. A California proposal would require the state's 56-year-old standard reflect the health risks of the gas. In Texas, lawmakers are also considering updating its law.

"I think when you look back when the standard was first established and then it was reviewed, it was all about nuisance — basically it was all about odor," said the California bill's author, Democratic Sen. Steve Padilla, who represents the Tijuana River Valley. "I don't think we had the understanding scientifically of what the health impacts were here, and now we do."

Even if the bill passes, the new standard would likely not be developed until 2030.

Toxic gas from the river's sewage infuses the air

A "Stop the Stink" sign is on Egger's fence, part of a campaign that Citizens for Coastal Conservancy launched to demand officials clean up the cross-border sewage.

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The 120-mile (195 kilometer)-long river flows through the Mexican city of Tijuana, crosses into California and empties into the ocean. San Diego County beaches nearby have closed for years, and Navy SEALs who train in the water have fallen ill.

Just since January, the Tijuana River has carried 10 billion gallons (38 billion liters) of mostly raw sewage and industrial waste across the U.S. border, according to International Water and Boundary Commission data. By comparison, a massive pipe that ruptured in January sent 244 million gallons (924 million liters) of untreated sewage into the Potomac River, affecting affluent, largely white communities. That spill prompted federal intervention within weeks.

In 2024, a sampling by San Diego County and the CDC representing the roughly 40,000 households close to the Tijuana River found 71% could smell sewage inside their homes and 69% had a member get sick from being exposed.

Even at low levels, "you're going to feel like it's in your sinuses. You can't get rid of the smell. It's going to be a constant irritation," said Ryan Sinclair, an associate professor of environmental microbiology at Loma Linda University School of Public Health.

The EPA said it is working with local and state officials to find ways to mitigate the smell.

San Diego County this year distributed over 10,000 air filters to homes. But the air remains a threat. The river's foam can now be seen from space.

Hydrogen sulfide levels stun researchers

In September 2024, Kimberly Prather, a chemistry professor at the University of California, San Diego, and a team of researchers installed air monitors in the neighborhood where Egger lives.

What they found stunned them: The hydrogen sulfide concentrations were 4,500 times higher than typical urban levels and 150 times higher than California's air standards when river flows peaked at night.

Many residents, like Egger, felt vindicated.

"They'd been being more or less gaslit and told, 'There's gas. It's a nuisance. It smells, but it's not bad,'" Prather said.

She said her researchers have since detected thousands of other gases coming from the river that don't smell, "and many of them are more toxic."

Doctors recommend people move

Egger said doctors have told him to move, though they have not given him a written diagnosis as suffering from hydrogen sulfide exposure.

But his family's roots run deep. His wife grew up in Tijuana. His brother and his late brother's family live in the neighboring houses on what was Egger Dairy. Nearby are the dilapidated milk barn and rusting farm equipment.

"This is where I've lived all my life, with my family, my parents, my grandparents," he said. "This is home."

When Egger was a boy, he swam in the river that ran only during the rainy season. Now mostly filled with sewage and industrial waste, it goes year-round. He says the river should be restored to its historical route, which is closer to the border and farther from most residences and schools. He believes then it would not pond, creating hot spots of hydrogen sulfide gas.

Less than half a mile from Egger's home, the smell is overwhelming where the river shoots out of pipes after being forced briefly underground near Saturn Boulevard.

Scientists call it "the Saturn hot spot." The stench permeates passing cars with the windows up, lingering inside for days.

When river flows go up, so do the number of patients

Dr. Matthew Dickson and his wife, Dr. Kimberly Dickson, run a clinic about a mile from the hot spot. Many of their patients suffer from migraines, nausea, wheezing, eye infections and brain fog. Those with asthma say they use their inhalers more when the air reeks.

"They'd say, 'You know, I feel better when it doesn't smell outside,'" Dr. Kimberly Dickson said.

In August 2023, a tropical storm caused the river to overflow onto the streets. Within days, the doctors' caseloads tripled.

Electronic health records confirmed what the doctors suspected. When the river flows have jumped, the number of patients they have treated for respiratory problems has increased by 130%, they said. "Every day that this isn't fixed," Dr. Matthew Dickson said, "more people are getting sick."

A vaccine standoff and other key moments from RFK Jr.'s first congressional hearing in months

By ALI SWENSON Associated Press

Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. on Thursday faced federal lawmakers for the first time since September as he sought to defend a more than 12% proposed cut to his department's budget and dodge arrows from angry Democrats along the way.

In his testimony before the House Ways and Means Committee, kicking off an expected sprint of seven budget hearings he'll attend across congressional committees and subcommittees over the next week, Kennedy emphasized the administration's work to reform dietary guidelines and crack down on waste, fraud and abuse.

Republicans on the committee praised Kennedy as a "breath of fresh air" and asked him to promote his department's recent actions. Democrats, who have been furious over Kennedy's sweeping overhaul of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, largely had a different agenda.

They needled Kennedy on what they viewed as the Trump administration's hypocrisy on fraud, demanded to know why he was cutting budgets for various programs and slammed his efforts to pull back vaccine recommendations and messaging, which they said have caused unnecessary deaths.

Kennedy fired back, often raising his voice as he accused the Democrats of misrepresenting his work and past statements.

Here are three standout moments from Thursday's hearing:

A standoff over measles

One heated exchange early in the hearing came between Kennedy and Rep. Linda Sanchez. The California Democrat decried recent measles outbreaks across the U.S. and asked Kennedy to answer for the fact that under his leadership, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention pulled back public health messaging supporting vaccination.

"As a mother, this horrifies me," Sanchez said. "Did President Trump approve your decision to end CDC's pro-vaccine public messaging campaign?"

Kennedy repeatedly refused to answer, saying first he wanted to respond to the "misstatements that you've made" and later praising the Trump administration's record on preventing measles, although protections against the disease have eroded in some parts of the country as vaccination rates have dropped.

"That's not answering my question," Sanchez said as the two talked over each other.

But Sanchez also got Kennedy, a longtime anti-vaccine activist before he entered politics, to acknowledge that a 6-year-old who died of measles last year in West Texas could have potentially been saved with vaccination.

"Do you agree with the majority of doctors that the measles vaccine could have saved that child's life in Texas?" she asked.

"It's possible, certainly," Kennedy said.

RFK Jr. denies talking about Black children being 're-parented'

A fight erupted between Kennedy and Rep. Terri Sewell, a Democrat from Alabama, when Kennedy vehemently denied making remarks he'd said in 2024.

The comments dated back to when Kennedy was a presidential candidate. On the "High Level Conversations" podcast in 2024, he said, "Psychiatric drugs — which every Black kid is now just standard put on Adderall, SSRIs, benzos, which are known to induce violence, and those kids are going to have a chance to go somewhere and get re-parented to live in a community where there'll be no cellphones, no screens, you'll actually have to talk to people."

"Have you ever re-parented, or parented, I should say, a Black child?" Sewell asked, as her staff held

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up a poster featuring an abbreviated version of the quote.

"I don't even know what that phrase means," Kennedy said. "I'm not going to answer something I didn't say."

"You're making stuff up," he later claimed.

A recording of the podcast shows he made the comments during a conversation about free rehabilitation facilities he was proposing opening at the time in rural areas around the country.

HHS spokesperson Emily Hilliard said Kennedy before joining the administration was referring to spaces where young people facing alienation, mental health challenges and despair could get re-parented, which she said was a psychotherapy term for "developing the emotional regulation, discipline, boundaries, and self-worth that may not have been established in childhood."

For Kennedy and his former party, civility is the exception

Kennedy spent most of his life as a Democrat, the scion of one of the nation's most famous political families. Both Republicans and Democrats during the hearing began their remarks by expressing their admiration of Kennedy's relatives, among them former President John F. Kennedy.

But again and again throughout Thursday's hearing, the fraying of bonds between Kennedy and his former party was on full display as spiteful comments were passed back and forth.

The health secretary grew defensive and visibly agitated. He repeatedly criticized Democratic lawmakers for not giving him a word in edgewise.

"They've all shut me up," Kennedy said at one point. "They give a little speech that they can go and market, you know, for fundraising, and they don't allow me to answer the question."

On a few rare occasions, the exchanges were civil. One representative, Gwen Moore of Wisconsin, used humor to make that happen.

"I promise to give you easy, comfortable questions if you don't yell at me and hurt my feelings," she told Kennedy. He promised he wouldn't.

Trump bets his tax cuts will please Las Vegas voters on his swing West

By MICHELLE L. PRICE and JESSICA HILL Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — President Donald Trump is betting that the tax cuts he signed into law last year will resonate with voters in Las Vegas, where he highlighted his tax breaks for tipped workers in an appeal targeted at this year's midterm 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 recalled in his remarks how a woman in Las Vegas gave him the idea to make tips tax-free, a move that he said is now helping "thousands of Nevada waiters and waitresses, casino dealers, bartenders, bellmen, barbers, caddies."

"Every single American at every income level has more money in their pockets this week because of the Republican tax policies," Trump said. "And we got to win the midterms. If we don't, these policies are going to be taken away from you."

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 elections. Trump insisted before departing from the White House for Las Vegas that gas prices were "not very high" compared with what he thought they would be because of the Iran war.

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,

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up about \$340 from a year ago.

Vegas, once known for affordable living, feels economic pain

In Las Vegas, the entertainment industry has been the city's 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.

Joe Spica, a Democratic candidate for the state legislature and a steward of The Culinary Workers Union, which represents about 60,000 hospitality workers in Las Vegas and Reno, said Las Vegas workers are feeling belt-tightening that is happening all over, because that means fewer visitors to Las Vegas, and fewer tips for workers.

"Something has to change, and it has to change fast," Spica, a bellman at the Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas, said at a news conference Thursday organized by the union and the Nevada Democratic Party.

"The policies of this administration are hurting Las Vegas," he said.

Artemis II astronauts praise their moonship's performance, especially the heat shield

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — The Artemis II astronauts who ignited a lunar renaissance gave high marks Thursday to their moonship, especially the heat shield, for its performance during reentry.

In their first news conference since returning to Earth, the three Americans and one Canadian said their lunar flyby puts NASA in a much better position for a moon landing by a crew in two years and an eventual moon base. They spoke from NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston, their home base.

Commander Reid Wiseman later told The Associated Press that he's been so busy since getting back that he hasn't had time to gaze up at the moon, let alone Carroll Crater, the name suggested by the crew for a bright lunar crater in honor of his late wife. They shared two daughters whose anxieties and fears over their father's journey ended with his safe splashdown late last week.

"Being 252,000 miles away from home was the most majestic, gorgeous thing that human eyes will ever witness," he said in an interview with the AP. But hurtling back through the atmosphere at 39 times the speed of sound, "that is scary and that is risky." That's why he yearned for home midway through his flight. "You just want to hold your kids and you just want them to know that you're safe."

Wiseman, pilot Victor Glover, Christina Koch and Canada's Jeremy Hansen launched to the moon from Florida on April 1, NASA's first lunar crew in more than a half-century and by far the most diverse.

They became the most distant travelers ever — breaking Apollo 13's record — as they whipped around the lunar far side, illuminated enough to reveal features never viewed before by the human eye. The sight of a total lunar eclipse added to the wonderment.

Their Orion capsule, which they named Integrity, parachuted into the Pacific last Friday to close out the nearly 10-day voyage. Artemis II's Houston homecoming the next day coincided with the 56th anniversary of the launch of Apollo 13.

Wiseman said he and Glover "maybe saw two moments of a touch of char loss" to the heat shield as Integrity plunged through the fastest, hottest part of reentry. Once aboard the recovery ship, they peered at the bottom of the capsule as best they could, leaning over to view any signs of damage. They spotted a little loss of charred material on the shoulder, where the heat shield meets the capsule.

"For four humans just looking at the heat shield, it looked wonderful to us. It looked great, and that ride in was really amazing," Wiseman said.

He cautioned that detailed analyses still need to be conducted. "We are going to fine-tooth comb every single, not even every molecule, probably every atom on this heat shield," he said.

The heat shield on the first Artemis test flight in 2022 — with no one aboard — came back so pockmarked and gouged that it pushed Artemis II back by months if not years. Instead of redoing it, NASA opted to change the capsule's entry path to minimize heating. Future capsules will sport a new design.

As the parachutes released right before splashdown, Glover said he felt like he was in freefall — like diving backward off a skyscraper. "That's what it felt like for five seconds," he said, adding when the ride

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smoothed out: "It was glorious."

Since their return, the four astronauts have endured round after round of medical testing to check their balance, vision, muscle strength and coordination, and overall health. They even put on spacewalking suits for exercises under conditions simulating the moon's one-sixth gravity of Earth to see how much endurance and dexterity future moonwalkers might have upon lunar touchdown.

NASA already is working on Artemis III, the next step in its grand moon base-building plans. The platform from which the rocket launches headed back Thursday to Kennedy Space Center's Vehicle Assembly Building, where it will be prepped for next year's Artemis launch.

Still awaiting an assigned crew, Artemis III will remain in orbit around Earth as astronauts practice docking their Orion capsule with one or two lunar landers in development by Elon Musk's SpaceX and Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin.

Artemis IV will follow in 2028 under NASA's latest schedule, with two astronauts landing near the moon's south pole.

NASA is aiming for a sustainable moon presence this time around. During the Apollo moonshots, astronauts kept their visits short. Twelve astronauts explored the lunar surface, beginning with Apollo 11's Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin in 1969 and ending with Apollo 17's Gene Cernan and Harrison Schmitt in 1972.

Koch said that since returning, she and her crewmates are "feeling even more excited and just ready to take that on as an agency."

"We made it happen," she added.

Everyone will need to accept extra risk to achieve all this and trust that any future problems can be figured out in real time, Hansen noted. "We're not going to be able to pound everything flat before we go. We're going to have to trust each other," he said.

While everything went smoothly for them, "it was also very clear to us that it can get pretty bumpy," he said. Future crews will have to "understand it can get real bumpy real fast."

Justin Fairfax killed his estranged wife and himself 2 weeks before a court deadline to move out

By MICHAEL BIESECKER and NATHAN ELLGREN Associated Press

ANNANDALE, Va. (AP) — Former Virginia Lt. Gov. Justin Fairfax, a rising star in the Democratic Party until sexual assault allegations ruined his political fortunes, killed his estranged wife and then himself weeks before a judge's deadline to move out of their family home, according to police and court records.

Officers called to the home in the Washington, D.C., suburb of Annandale early Thursday found the bodies of Fairfax, 47, and his wife, Dr. Cerina Fairfax, 49, Fairfax County Police Chief Kevin Davis said.

Justin Fairfax fatally shot his wife, a successful dentist, in the basement before going to an upstairs bedroom and killing himself, Davis said. Their son called 911.

One of Justin Fairfax's longtime friends told The Associated Press that he became increasingly despondent after his wife filed for divorce last year. The judge overseeing the divorce recently wrote that his "isolation, drinking, and a lack of participation in family life are manifestations of what seems to be a sense of fatalism and hopelessness."

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story includes discussion of suicide. If you or someone you know needs help, the national suicide and crisis lifeline in the U.S. is available by calling or texting 988. There is also an online chat at [988lifeline.org](https://www.988lifeline.org)

A turn in fortunes

Less than a decade ago, Justin Fairfax's political career was taking off. He won the race for lieutenant governor in 2017 and seemed poised to become Virginia's second Black governor two years later when Democratic Gov. Ralph Northam faced widespread calls to resign over a racist photo in his medical school yearbook. Fairfax would have become governor if Northam had stepped down.

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But two women came forward accusing Fairfax of sexually assaulting them years earlier.

Fairfax said the encounters, which occurred before he was married, were consensual and refused calls to resign. He tried to run for governor in 2021, but was largely shunned by Virginia Democrats and defeated in the Democratic primary.

A career and marriage fall apart

Cerina Fairfax said in court filings that she and her husband separated nearly two years ago. But they were still living in the same house with their two teenage children, who were both home when the deaths occurred, Davis said.

In a March 30 order, the judge told Justin Fairfax to move out by the end of April, writing "it is clear tensions in the Fairfax home have been extremely high for an extended period of time."

The judge said in court documents that Justin Fairfax's "mental and emotional health" suffered after two setbacks: his unsuccessful 2013 campaign for the Democratic nomination for attorney general and the 2019 sexual assault scandal. After both, he drank heavily and withdrew from his family, but while it took about a month to recover from the first setback, he never bounced back from the second.

Cerina Fairfax testified during the divorce proceedings that her husband drank daily, and that his living space was littered with empty wine bottles and piles of dirty laundry. He bought a handgun in 2022 with money intended for horseback riding lessons for their children, court records showed.

Sophia A. Nelson, a Virginia author and journalist who described Justin Fairfax as a close friend, said Thursday that he never moved past the 2019 scandal.

She told the AP that during a group text with her and another friend Tuesday night, he expressed how the recent sexual assault allegations against Democratic Rep. Eric Swalwell of California had brought back for him what he continued to insist was an unfair rush to judgment.

Nelson said she and other friends repeatedly asked Fairfax to seek help. She urged him to move out but believes he wasn't able to do so financially.

"I was concerned, as were other close friends, fraternity brothers, family members," Nelson said. "There were talks of suicidal thoughts."

Filings show that Justin Fairfax had financial challenges following the sexual assault allegations, which prompted his resignation as a partner at a prestigious law firm. The IRS filed a lien against the couple for more than \$91,000 in unpaid taxes that was resolved in 2021.

Nelson said Fairfax was "unemployable" after the scandal and tried to rebuild his legal career, but with a few successes.

Davis, the police chief, said Justin Fairfax was recently served with paperwork telling him when next to appear in court. He said officers went to the family's home in January after Justin Fairfax alleged that his wife had assaulted him -- but cameras she had set up around the home showed "the alleged assault never occurred."

Cerina Fairfax had a thriving dental practice

The couple met as undergraduates at Duke University and married in 2006. Cerina Fairfax also attended the Virginia Commonwealth University School of Dentistry, which honored her in 2015 as an outstanding alumna.

A profile page on the website of her family dentistry practice described her as an avid reader who liked to travel, practice yoga, go on trail runs with her Vizsla-breed dogs, and "spend time with her wonderful family."

"It's very sad for this community," Davis said. "A lot of people who know the Fairfax family, everybody's shocked. We're shocked."

An outpouring of grief

The deaths stunned political leaders throughout the state.

"We are keeping Cerina and Justin Fairfax's family — especially their two children — in our prayers as we all process this shocking and horrifying news," Virginia's Democratic U.S. senators, Mark Warner and Tim Kaine, said in a joint statement.

Fairfax had served as co-chair for Warner's 2014 reelection campaign.

Virginia's Democratic governor, Abigail Spanberger, posted on X that she was deeply saddened and praying for the families.

"This tragedy reminds us that domestic violence can occur in any family and in any place," she wrote.

Nelson said that as much as she and Justin Fairfax's other friends wanted to believe he would never abuse women, killing his wife would be his epitaph and undercut the good and honorable things he had done in public life.

"You now fit what many, many men have done in domestic violence incidences like this," Nelson said while fighting back tears. "And that's how you're remembered."

Trump nominates Erica Schwartz, former deputy surgeon general, to serve as CDC director

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

President Donald Trump on Thursday nominated Erica Schwartz, a former deputy surgeon general, to be the next director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In a social media post, Trump described Schwartz as "incredibly talented" and said, "She is a STAR!"

The Atlanta-based CDC, which is charged with protecting Americans from preventable health threats, has been in turmoil since Trump returned to office more than a year ago, with a succession of mostly temporary leaders.

The agency is overseen by Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who had promised not to change the nation's vaccination schedule. But shortly after taking office, Kennedy said he was going to investigate the childhood vaccine schedule and went on to attempt a substantial rewrite of vaccine recommendations for kids. Some of those efforts were put on hold recently by a federal judge.

The administration's first pick to run the CDC was former Florida congressman Dr. David Weldon, but his March 2025 Senate confirmation hearing was canceled an hour before it was to begin. Weldon said at the time that he'd been told not enough senators were willing to vote for him.

The White House then moved on to Susan Monarez, who had been serving as the CDC's acting director. Monarez was confirmed by the Senate, but she was ousted in less than a month. Trump administration officials said she wasn't aligned with their agenda so they terminated her.

Several key CDC scientific leaders resigned in protest, saying Monarez's dismissal dashed their hopes that a CDC director would be able to guard against political meddling in the agency's scientific research and health recommendations.

Since then, there's been a revolving door in agency leadership, with the short-term role of acting director being passed from one Washington-based HHS official to another. National Institutes of Health Director Jay Bhattacharya has been overseeing the CDC the past several weeks.

During a House Appropriations Committee hearing Thursday, Kennedy said the new CDC team was "extraordinary."

"I think this new team is really going to be able to revolutionize CDC and get it back on track," he said.

Schwartz holds multiple academic credentials, including both medical and law degrees. Her career has largely been spent in military uniform, including in a leadership position at the U.S. Coast Guard where she oversaw the organization's system of 41 clinics and 150 sick bays.

She later served as deputy surgeon general, where she helped lead uniformed medical and health professionals posted at the CDC and government health agencies that serve the general public.

Schwartz could not be reached for comment.

Trump also announced the appointment of Sean Slovenski, a former Walmart executive, as CDC deputy director and chief operating officer. Dr. Jennifer Shuford, Texas health commissioner, was named the CDC's deputy director and chief medical officer. And Dr. Sara Brenner, a former Food and Drug Administration administrator, was designated as a senior counselor for public health to Kennedy.

In a social media post Thursday, Kennedy congratulated Schwartz and the other appointees and said he looks "forward to working together to restore trust, accountability, and scientific integrity" at the CDC.

But Aaron Siri, a lawyer and ally of Kennedy in attacking vaccines and pharmaceutical companies, criticized Schwartz's selection. In a social media post, Siri lambasted Schwartz's past promotion of vaccinations and said "she lacks the basic ethics and morals to lead the CDC."

Schwartz's nomination comes as Dr. Casey Means, Trump's pick for another key health-related role, U.S. surgeon general, has had difficulty getting confirmed.

Means' languishing nomination after appearing for a confirmation hearing in February reflects the skepticism that lawmakers of both parties have expressed toward the direction Kennedy has taken his department.

A look at investigations into federal officers months after immigration crackdown in Minnesota

By The Associated Press undefined

Minnesota has launched investigations into the actions of several federal law enforcement officers during the Trump administration's immigration crackdown in the Twin Cities.

On Thursday, Hennepin County announced charges against an Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent Gregory Donnell Morgan Jr., accusing him of pointing his gun at a motorist and passenger on a Minneapolis highway. A local prosecutor said she believes it is the first criminal case against a federal officer involved in the Minnesota immigration crackdown.

The federal government has suggested Minnesota prosecutors don't have jurisdiction to investigate federal officers. Nevertheless, Minnesota officials last month sued the administration for access to evidence for investigations into three shootings during the crackdown, including two that resulted in deaths.

Here's where some of the more high-profile cases stand:

Alex Pretti

Pretti, a 37-year-old intensive care nurse, was one of many protesters on a commercial street on Jan. 24 when he was shot and killed by federal officers.

The Trump administration said shots were fired "defensively" against Pretti, who federal authorities said had a semiautomatic handgun and was "violently" resisting officers. Multiple videos of the shooting contradict those claims, showing Pretti had only his mobile phone in his hand as officers tackled him to the ground. One of the officers removed a handgun from the back of Pretti's pants moments before another officer shot him in the back.

The Justice Department said the FBI was conducting a civil rights investigation into Pretti's killing, and Customs and Border Patrol is conducting its own internal investigation.

Renee Good

Good, a 37-year-old mother, was blocking a residential street with her SUV and honking her horn on Jan. 7 when immigration officers approached the vehicle. She began to pull forward and an ICE officer standing in front of the vehicle fired at least two shots into the car, killing Good.

The Department of Homeland Security has said the matter remains under investigation but that footage shows Good impeded law enforcement operations and weaponized her vehicle, leading the officer to act in self-defense.

Acting U.S. Attorney General Todd Blanche has said the department's Civil Rights Division does not investigate every law enforcement shooting and that there have to be circumstances and facts that "warrant an investigation."

Julio Cesar Sosa-Celis

Sosa-Celis was wounded Jan. 14 when a federal officer shot his right thigh. Federal officials initially accused Sosa-Celis and another man of beating an ICE officer with a broom handle and a snow shovel. But federal prosecutors later dropped all charges against the men, and authorities opened a criminal investigation into whether two immigration officers lied under oath about the shooting.

DHS has said both officers are on administrative leave as ICE and DOJ conduct a joint review.

ChongLy "Scott" Thao

Ramsey County, which includes St. Paul, is investigating federal officers' Jan. 18 arrest of ChongLy "Scott"

Thao, a Hmong American man, as a potential case of kidnapping, burglary and false imprisonment.

ICE officers bashed open the front door of Thao's St. Paul home with guns drawn, then led him outside in just his underwear and a blanket in freezing conditions. The arrest was captured on widely shared video.

Ramsey County Attorney John Choi and Sheriff Bob Fletcher said Monday that they are pursuing information from DHS but have not been able to determine whether ICE officers had a warrant for Thao's arrest.

DHS said in a statement that ICE does not kidnap people and called the county's investigation a political stunt.

Other incidents

In early March, Hennepin County Attorney Mary Moriarty said her office was investigating at least 17 cases and considering whether to bring misconduct charges against federal officers, including Border Patrol official Greg Bovino.

Included in the investigation was an incident in which Bovino threw a smoke canister at protesters on Jan. 21. Another on Jan. 7 involved federal officers making an arrest outside a high school and deploying chemical irritants with students and staff nearby.

US military will target Iran-linked ships worldwide, broadening scope beyond blockade

By KONSTANTIN TOROPIN, BEN FINLEY and DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. military has widened its efforts beyond the blockade of Iran's ports to allow its forces around the world to stop any ship tied to Tehran or those suspected of carrying supplies that could help its government, from weapons to oil, metals and electronics.

Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, specifically pointed to operations in the Pacific, saying the U.S. would be targeting vessels that left before the blockade began earlier this week outside the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial waterway for energy and other shipments.

U.S. forces in other areas of responsibility "will actively pursue any Iranian-flagged vessel or any vessel attempting to provide material support to Iran," he told reporters at the Pentagon.

The military also detailed an expansive lists of goods that it considers contraband, declaring that it will board, search and seize them from merchant vessels "regardless of location." A notice published Thursday says any "goods that are destined for an enemy and that may be susceptible to use in armed conflict" are "subject to capture at any place beyond neutral territory."

The expansion of U.S. military efforts to target Iranian shipping is another pressure point for Tehran and comes as a ceasefire is set to expire in mere days. Mediators are pressing for an extension to a truce that has paused almost seven weeks of war between Israel, the U.S. and Iran.

US military details items that could be seized from Iran-linked ships

The military's new list of banned materials includes products such as weapons, ammunition and military equipment that are classified as "absolute contraband." However, it also lists items such as oil, iron, steel, aluminum and other goods as "conditional contraband" that it argues can be used both for civilian and military purposes.

Otherwise innocuous items like electronics, power generation equipment or heavy machinery can be seized if "circumstances indicate intended military end-use," the notice says.

More than 10,000 American troops are helping enforce the blockade on Iranian ports. While no ships have yet been boarded, defense leaders say the military is warning Iran-linked ships that it could fire warning shots or escalate to other force if they try to outrun the Navy.

In the first three days of the military action, 14 ships have turned around rather than confront the naval blockade, according to U.S. Central Command, which oversees the Iran war.

Some Iran-linked or sanctioned vessels that left through the strait have appeared to halt their movements, turn off their radio transponders or head back toward Iran's coast, shipping data firms say.

Ships near the blockade face US warnings

Vessels that approach the blockade, which is being enforced in Iran's territorial seas and international

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waters and not in the Strait of Hormuz, get a warning, Caine said.

"Any ship that would cross the blockade would result in our sailors executing pre-planned tactics designed to bring the force to that ship — if need be, board the ship and take her over," he said.

U.S. Central Command has released a recording of a radio broadcast sent to vessels in the region that said the military was ready to use force if needed to compel compliance.

"Vessels will be boarded for interdiction and seizure transiting to or from Iranian port," the message said.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth told reporters that "less than 10% of America's naval power" is being used to enforce the blockade. The Navy has 16 warships — 11 destroyers, three amphibious assault ships, an aircraft carrier and a littoral combat ship — in the Middle East out of a battle force of roughly 300 total warships.

Also supporting the blockade are a series of aircraft as well as surveillance, reconnaissance and intelligence operations designed to give the Navy the latest information on the vessels it is encountering.

The Navy is likely tracking ships linked to Iran through satellites, drones and other forms of surveillance as well as each commercial vessel's past history, said Kevin Donegan, a retired vice admiral and former commander of the Navy's Fifth Fleet, which is based in Bahrain.

"It's a pretty complex operation to make work," said Donegan, who spoke Thursday during a webinar hosted by the Middle East Institute. "Not just from the intelligence standpoint, but positioning all the ships in the right way to make the intercepts if you have to."

Donegan stressed that the blockade is only one pressure point on Iran and that it won't end the conflict on its own.

"For it to be most effective, this military tool is added to the other operational tasks that were being done and paired with — hopefully, diplomacy," Donegan said. "And if those two are scripted together in the right way, we can potentially get the outcomes we want."

US Central Command chief appears at the Pentagon

As Hegseth and Caine discussed the blockade, Adm. Brad Cooper, the head of U.S. Central Command, made a rare appearance in the Pentagon briefing room.

He said that before the ceasefire took hold, American service members and troops from allied countries in the Persian Gulf had "fought together side by side."

"In creating the largest air defense umbrella in the world across the Middle East, we embedded specially trained U.S. military air defenders alongside our partner nation soldiers," Cooper said, adding that Bahrain's king and crown prince knew American soldiers by name.

County prosecutor charges ICE agent with assault for pointing gun at people on Minneapolis highway

By TIM SULLIVAN, CLAUDIA LAUER and RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A federal immigration agent accused of pointing his gun at occupants of a car after pulling alongside them on a Minneapolis-area highway is wanted on felony assault charges, Minnesota prosecutors said Thursday.

Hennepin County Attorney Mary Moriarty said it is the first criminal case against a federal officer involved in the Minnesota immigration crackdown, which was part of a surge of forces into cities including Los Angeles, Chicago and New Orleans.

"There is no such thing as absolute immunity for federal agents who violate the law in the state of Minnesota," Moriarty told a news conference, saying the agent acted outside the scope of a federal officers' authority.

An arrest warrant filed in Hennepin County, which includes Minneapolis, says Immigration and Customs Enforcement officer Gregory Donnell Morgan Jr. is charged with two counts of second-degree assault. Minnesota authorities say Morgan, 35, was driving back to immigration offices at the end of his shift when the incident occurred Feb. 5.

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The driver and front-seat passenger of a car called 911 saying the driver of an unmarked SUV pulled alongside them, rolled down his window and pointed a handgun at them both. The car's driver told investigators they feared it was a "crazy person driving down the road aiming guns at people," according to the warrant.

A spokesman for Moriarty's office said no arrangements have been made for Morgan to surrender and that there is an active nationwide warrant for his arrest. If convicted, Morgan faces up to seven years in prison for each assault charge.

Department of Homeland Security and Justice Department officials didn't immediately respond to emails seeking comment.

A person returning a call to a possible phone listing for Morgan said it was a wrong number for him. A message sent to a possible email address for Morgan bounced back as undeliverable. No one immediately returned a phone message left at a number for a person listed as sharing an address with Morgan. It was not immediately known if he had an attorney who could speak for him.

Accused agent told state investigators he 'feared for his safety'

Moriarty said during a news conference that Morgan was driving a rented, unmarked SUV on the shoulder of the highway when a car also moved into the shoulder to try to slow Morgan down, its driver not knowing he was an officer. After the car returned to the legal lane, she said, Morgan pulled up alongside and pointed his service weapon at the two people in the car.

According to the warrant, Morgan then merged his SUV back into traffic ahead of the victims, who took cellphone photos of the SUV's license plate.

The warrant does not identify the victims.

Morgan and his partner, who was not charged, told investigators they were returning at the end of their shift to the federal building being used to stage officers. The arrest warrant says Morgan "made no claim that he was conducting any law-enforcement operation or activity or responding to any emergency situation."

Morgan told investigators with the Minnesota State Patrol that the other vehicle "swerved over in front of him and cut him off," the warrant said. Investigators wrote that Morgan said "he feared for his safety and the safety of others" when he drew his gun and yelled: "Police! Stop!"

The warrant says the victims couldn't tell Morgan was a law enforcement officer and couldn't hear him because their windows were up.

Trump administration has warned against arresting federal agents

The charges could intensify a clash between the Trump administration and Minnesota officials over the crackdown. Todd Blanche, the acting attorney general, has warned that the Justice Department could investigate and prosecute state or local officials who arrest federal agents for performing their official duties.

Moriarty said she is not concerned about blowback from federal authorities and that her office will "hold people accountable if they violate the laws of the state."

Michael Gerhardt, a constitutional law professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, said federal officers are granted immunity for actions within the scope of their official responsibilities.

He said the actions described in the arrest warrant don't seem relevant to the officer's duties. But because he apparently was on-duty at the time, the officer could petition to move the charges to federal court and make a claim for immunity.

"When you look at it more closely, flashing a gun is a serious threat," Gerhardt said. "And there's a good argument that isn't part of his official duties ... it's abusing his powers."

Minnesota still investigating killings of 2 US citizens by federal officers

DHS deployed about 3,000 federal officers to the Minneapolis-St. Paul area from December through February in what the department called its "largest immigration enforcement operation ever." The Minnesota operation led to thousands of arrests, angry mass protests and the fatal shootings of two U.S. citizens.

Backlash over the officers' aggressive tactics mounted, and two of the crackdown's most high profile leaders were soon gone. Trump fired Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem in March shortly after the

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Minnesota surge ended. That same month, Gregory Bovino, the Border Patrol sector chief who led immigration operations in several large cities, announced his retirement.

Minnesota authorities continue to investigate the conduct of federal officers during the immigration crackdown, insisting they can't trust the federal government to investigate itself. Minnesota sued the Trump administration last month for access to evidence in three cases involving shootings by federal officers, including the killings of Renee Good and Alex Pretti.

Wall Street sets another record after US stocks tick higher

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The U.S. stock market ticked to another record high Thursday as Wall Street waits for more clues about what will happen in the Iran war before making its next big move.

The S&P 500 rose 0.3%, a day after topping its prior all-time high set in January, for its 11th gain in 12 days. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 115 points, or 0.2%, and the Nasdaq composite rose 0.4%.

U.S. stocks have leaped more than 10% since hitting a low in late March, driven by hopes for an end to the war or something that could avert a worst-case scenario for the global economy. Now, the wait is on to see if such hopes were prescient or just wishful thinking.

Pakistan's powerful army chief met Thursday with Iran's parliament speaker as part of efforts to press for an extension to a ceasefire that has paused almost seven weeks of war between Israel, the U.S. and the Islamic Republic.

Oil prices climbed, showing that caution still remains in financial markets. The price for a barrel of Brent crude oil, the international standard, rose 4.7% to settle at \$99.39. It's gone from roughly \$70 before the war to as high as \$119 at times on uncertainty about how long the war will keep oil stuck in the Persian Gulf area and away from customers.

"The key upside risk for the market is that peace talks between the US and Iran break down," ING Bank strategists Warren Patterson and Ewa Manthey wrote Thursday. "This isn't an unrealistic scenario, given that US and Iranian demands remain fairly wide apart."

In the meantime, big U.S. companies are continuing to deliver growth in profits for the start of 2026 that's even better than analysts expected. Such growth is the lifeblood of the stock market, whose level tends to follow the track of corporate profits over the long term.

PepsiCo rose 2.3% after reporting better results for the latest quarter than analysts expected. Customers bought more snacks during the quarter, after the company said in February it would cut prices on Lay's, Doritos, Cheetos and Tostitos chips to win back people frustrated by high prices.

J.B. Hunt Transport Services vroomed 6.3% higher, and Marsh & McLennan climbed 4.4% after both likewise delivered stronger results than expected.

Technology stocks also broadly got some support after Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co., an industry heavyweight, reported stronger revenue and profit for the start of 2026 than analysts expected. TSMC's Chief Financial Officer Wendell Huang said the company expects strong demand to continue into the spring.

On the losing end of Wall Street was Abbott, which fell 6% even though it reported slightly better results than analysts expected. The health care company cut its forecast for profit over the full year, mostly because of its purchase of cancer-screening company Exact Sciences.

Allbirds slumped 35.8%, but that gave back only a portion of its 582% surge from the day before. The company formerly known for sneakers is pivoting to the artificial-intelligence industry and hopes to rent out the use of high-powered AI chips as a service.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 18.33 points to 7,041.28. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 115.00 to 48,578.72, and the Nasdaq composite gained 86.69 to 24,102.70.

In stock markets abroad, indexes climbed across much of Europe and Asia. Japan's Nikkei 225 jumped 2.4%, South Korea's Kospi rallied 2.2% and Hong Kong's Hang Seng rose 1.7% for some of the world's larger moves.

China on Thursday reported 5% economic growth for the January-March quarter, an acceleration from the previous quarter. While economists say China has largely shrugged off the initial impacts of the Iran war, some are warning its massive export engine could be hit more significantly in the coming months on slower global economic growth.

In the bond market Treasury yields rose a bit after a report showed fewer U.S. workers applied for unemployment benefits last week.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury rose to 4.31% from 4.29% late Wednesday.

Jet fuel supplies are lagging. What does that mean for airlines and travelers?

By MAE ANDERSON, CATHY BUSSEWITZ and WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILLIPS AP Business Writers
NEW YORK (AP) — A looming jet fuel shortage in Europe and Asia sparked by the Iran war and the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz could further upend world travel within weeks if oil doesn't start flowing again soon — meaning higher fares and flight cancellations as the summer travel season approaches.

In an exclusive Associated Press interview Thursday, International Energy Agency Director Fatih Birol said Europe has "maybe six weeks" of remaining jet fuel supplies and said the global economy faces its "largest energy crisis."

In general, some European countries hold several months' worth of jet fuel inventory at a time, according to an IEA report released this week.

Jet fuel — a refined kerosene-based oil product — is airlines' biggest cost, making up about 30% of overall expenses, according to the International Air Transport Association. And jet fuel prices have roughly doubled since the war began. Shortages could start next.

"Every passing day that the Strait of Hormuz remains shut, Europe is edging closer to supply shortages," said Amaar Khan, head of European jet fuel pricing at Argus Media. "The strait accounts for around 40% of Europe's jet fuel imports, but no jet fuel has passed the strait since the war broke out."

Airline officials have largely reacted with caution, acknowledging potential fuel issues but working to reassure customers. Still, some carriers have already passed costs on to consumers by increasing fees for baggage and other add-ons, embedding costs into ticket prices, or raising fuel surcharges.

A handful of airlines already are cutting flights. Experts say other parts of air travel — such as scheduling flexibility and routes — would likely be impacted.

Here's a look at how jet fuel supplies work and how consumers might see effects.

How does jet fuel get to the plane?

Jet fuel is made from crude oil at refineries, which also create gasoline and diesel.

Airlines generally buy jet fuel from refineries or fuel companies, similar to drivers buying gasoline from stations, but on a much larger scale. Jet fuel travels on ships and through pipelines and is stored by airlines at airports.

Purchasing is handled by airlines. If fuel supplies are running out in a region, that doesn't necessarily mean there will be no flights. Some airlines might have more stored than others.

But remaining flights are likely to be expensive, reflecting fuel costs.

Larger airlines have advantages in regions with shortages. They have the financial means to deal with high prices, said Jacques Rousseau, managing director at financial firm Clearview Energy Partners.

In Europe, a number of countries are now relying on less than 20 days of coverage in their fuel supplies, according to this week's IEA report. Supplies haven't dropped below 29 days since 2020, the report said.

If that falls under 23 days, physical shortages may emerge at some airports, resulting in flight cancellations and lower demand, the report warned.

Which regions could feel pain?

Asia-Pacific countries are the most reliant on oil and jet fuel from the Middle East, followed by Europe, Rousseau said.

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Most of Europe's jet fuel is produced by European refiners, but about 20-25% of its supply is missing because of the war, Rousseau said.

To fill some gaps, the U.S. has increased its exports of jet fuel to Europe considerably, sending about 150,000 barrels per day in April, or about six times the normal level, Rousseau said.

Availability of jet fuel is less of an issue in the U.S., a major oil producer, he added.

"I tell my kids ... we're not so much going to run out of supply," Rousseau said. "It's just going to cost more here, whereas in different parts of the world you could actually get to a point where there's just no fuel."

How much is the world supply of jet fuel lagging?

The world is losing 10 million to 15 million barrels of oil a day due to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, said Pavel Molchanov, senior investment strategist at investment firm Raymond James & Associates.

"There are exactly the same refineries in exactly the same places in Asia and Europe, but if there is not enough oil for those refineries to operate, it's going to lead to physical supply disruption," he said.

Even though the IEA has released 400 million barrels of oil from members' emergency reserves, that won't help in the short term, he added.

"It could take until the end of the year to get all of those barrels onto the market," he said.

How will my travel be affected?

Christopher Anderson, a professor of operations, technology and information management at Cornell University, said travelers should prepare for more than just higher airfares.

"This is no longer just a fuel-price story. For airlines, it is now a network-planning story," he said. "Higher fuel costs matter, but so do longer routings, reduced scheduling flexibility and greater uncertainty about what demand will look like even a few weeks out."

Travelers might see "a market with later booking patterns, more schedule volatility and fewer low-fare options if this disruption lasts into the core summer season," he said.

What are airlines doing?

Dutch airline KLM and U.K. budget carrier easyJet told AP they weren't experiencing current fuel shortages, without commenting further on the IEA's warning.

Still, both airlines are among those that have seen higher costs eat into their budgets.

On Thursday, KLM said it would cut 160 flights next month — about 1% of its total European routes. The airline cited "rising kerosene costs" and said a limited number of flights are "no longer financially viable to operate."

In a Thursday update, EasyJet said it expects to see a pretax loss of 540 million to 560 million pounds (about \$731 million to \$758 million) for the first half of the 2026 fiscal year. Still, CEO Kenton Jarvis said demand remains strong overall — noting that Easter travel was easyJet's busiest ever for that holiday period.

Lufthansa said Thursday that labor disputes and high fuel prices are forcing it to immediately shut down feeder airline CityLine, earlier than planned, and take its 27 older, less fuel-efficient planes out of service. The decision accelerates a shutdown that had been expected for next year.

U.S. carrier Delta Air Lines — which frequently flies to European destinations — said on Thursday that it was "aware of the potential jet fuel supply issue" on the continent and monitoring the situation. Delta, which bought a refinery in Philadelphia in 2012 to manage its largest expense, said it doesn't expect any "near-term impact to our operations."

How are prices affected?

Other airlines have sounded the alarm about rising fuel prices, with some already passing along new costs to travelers, often embedded into ticket prices and add-on fees.

U.S. carriers Delta, United, American Airlines, Southwest Airlines and JetBlue have all increased checked baggage fees, for example, in recent weeks.

United CEO Scott Kirby said in a recent memo to staff that if fuel prices stay elevated, it could add \$11 billion in annual costs. "For perspective," Kirby wrote, "in United's best year ever, we made less than \$5B."

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

Ex-NBA player Damon Jones is expected to become first person to plead guilty in gambling sweep

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Former NBA player and assistant coach Damon Jones is expected to become the first person to plead guilty in a gambling sweep that led to the arrests of more than 30 people, including reputed mobsters and other basketball figures.

A change-of-plea hearing for Jones is scheduled for April 28 in Brooklyn federal court, according to a court filing Thursday. It was originally set for May 6, but was moved at the request of the parties.

Jones, 49, had previously pleaded not guilty to separate indictments charging him with profiting from rigged poker games and providing sports bettors with non-public information about injuries to stars LeBron James and Anthony Davis.

Jones is charged in both cases with wire fraud conspiracy and money laundering conspiracy.

A message seeking comment was left for his lawyer, Kenneth Montgomery. He told a judge at Jones' arraignments in November that they "may be engaging in plea negotiations."

Jones, a onetime teammate of James, was arrested last October along with Portland Trail Blazers head coach and Basketball Hall of Famer Chauncey Billups and Miami Heat guard Terry Rozier, and others, including a sports bettor accused of cashing in on injury information.

Jones was one of three people charged in both the poker and sports betting schemes. He remains free on bail.

A native of Galveston, Texas, Jones earned more than \$20 million playing for 10 teams in 11 seasons from 1999 to 2009. He and James played together in Cleveland from 2005 to 2008 and Jones served as an unofficial assistant coach for James' Los Angeles Lakers during the 2022-2023 season.

According to prosecutors, Jones sold or attempted to sell non-public information to bettors that James was injured and wouldn't be playing in a Feb. 9, 2023, game against the Milwaukee Bucks, texting an unnamed co-conspirator: "Get a big bet on Milwaukee tonight before the information is out."

James wasn't listed on the Lakers' injury report at the time of the text message, but the NBA's all-time scoring leader was later ruled out of the game because of a lower body injury, according to prosecutors, and the Lakers lost the game 115-106.

On Jan. 15, 2024, prosecutors said, sports bettor Marves Fairley paid Jones approximately \$2,500 for a tip that Davis, the Lakers' forward and center at the time, would see limited playing time against the Oklahoma City Thunder because of an injury.

Fairley then placed a \$100,000 bet on the Thunder to win, prosecutors said, but the tip was wrong. Davis played his usual minutes, scored 27 points and collected 15 rebounds in a 112-105 Lakers win, prompting Fairley to demand a refund of his \$2,500 fee, prosecutors said.

In the poker scheme, according to prosecutors, Jones was among former NBA players used to lure unwitting players into poker games that were rigged using altered shuffling machines, hidden cameras, special sunglasses and even X-ray equipment built into the table.

According to the indictment, Jones was paid \$2,500 for a game in the Hamptons where he was instructed to cheat by paying close attention to others involved in the scheme. His instructor likened those people to James and NBA All-Star Steph Curry, prosecutors said. When in doubt, Jones was told to fold his hand, prosecutors said.

In response, according to prosecutors, Jones texted: "y'all know I know what I'm doing!!"

The poker scheme often made use of illegal poker games run by New York crime families that required them to share a portion of their proceeds with the Gambino, Genovese and Bonnano crime families, according to prosecutors.

Members of those families, in turn, also helped commit violent acts, including assault, extortion and robbery, to ensure repayment of debts and the continued success of the operation, officials said in court documents.

A hot hand from outside the three-point arc, Jones once proclaimed himself in an interview with inside-

hoops.com as "the best shooter in the world." He played in every regular season game for three consecutive seasons from 2003 to 2006.

After his playing days, he worked as a "shooting consultant" for the Cavaliers and was an assistant coach when the team, led by James, won the NBA championship in 2016.

AP Exclusive: Europe has 'maybe 6 weeks of jet fuel left,' energy agency head warns

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Europe has "maybe six weeks or so" of remaining jet fuel supplies, the head of the International Energy Agency said Thursday in a wide-ranging interview, warning of possible flight cancellations "soon" if oil supplies remain blocked by the Iran war.

IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol painted a sobering picture of the global repercussions of what he called "the largest energy crisis we have ever faced," stemming from the pinch-off of oil, gas and other vital supplies through the Strait of Hormuz.

"In the past there was a group called 'Dire Straits.' It's a dire strait now, and it is going to have major implications for the global economy. And the longer it goes, the worse it will be for the economic growth and inflation around the world," he told The Associated Press.

The impact will be "higher petrol (gasoline) prices, higher gas prices, high electricity prices," said Birol, speaking in his Paris office looking out over the Eiffel Tower.

Economic pain will be felt unevenly and "the countries who will suffer the most will not be those whose voice are heard a lot. It will be mainly the developing countries. Poorer countries in Asia, in Africa and in Latin America," said the Turkish economist and energy expert who has led the IEA since 2015.

But without a settlement of the Iran war that permanently reopens the Strait of Hormuz, "Everybody is going to suffer," he added.

"Some countries may be richer than the others. Some countries may have more energy than the others, but no country, no country is immune to this crisis," he said.

'Slow growth or even recession'

Nearly 20% of the world's traded oil passes through the Strait of Hormuz in peacetime. Birol warned that not reopening the waterway within weeks could compound the repercussions for global energy supplies.

"In Europe, we have maybe six weeks or so (of) jet fuel left," he said. "If we are not able to open the Strait of Hormuz ... I can tell you soon we will hear the news that some of the flights from city A to city B might be canceled as a result of lack of jet fuel."

Dutch airline KLM and U.K.-based budget carrier easyJet said Thursday that they were not experiencing current fuel shortages, without commenting further on the IEA's warning. Meanwhile, U.S. carrier Delta Air Lines — which frequently flies to destinations across Europe — said it was aware of the continent's "potential jet fuel supply issue" and monitoring the situation, although it didn't expect immediate impacts. Still, all three airlines are among those that have already seen higher costs eat into their budgets.

KLM is cutting 160 flights to and from Amsterdam's Schiphol airport next month, accounting for about 1% of its total European routes. The airline cited "rising kerosene costs," and said a limited number of flights are "no longer financially viable to operate."

Travelers are already paying the consequences. Beyond flight cancellations, some carriers are increasing ticket fares and add-on fees.

Birol added: "Many government leaders tell me that if Hormuz is not open until (the) end of May, many countries — starting from the weaker economies — are going to face huge challenges, and this will go from the high inflation numbers to coming close to slow growth or even to recession in some cases."

Birol spoke out against the so-called "toll booth" system that Iran has applied to some ships, letting them travel through the strait for a fee. He said allowing that to become more permanent would run the risk of setting a precedent that could then be applied to other waterways, including the vital Malacca Strait in Asia.

"If we change it once, it may be difficult to get it back," he said. "It will be difficult to have a toll system

here, applied here, but not there.”

“I would like to see that the oil flows unconditionally from the point A to point B,” he said.

Damage for Persian Gulf energy facilities

More than 110 oil-laden tankers and over 15 carriers loaded with liquefied natural gas are waiting in the Persian Gulf and could help ease the energy crisis if they could escape through the Strait of Hormuz to world markets, Birol said, adding: “But it is not enough.”

Even with a peace deal, war-damage to energy facilities means it could be many months before pre-conflict levels of production are restored, he said.

“Over 80 key assets in the region have been damaged. And out of these 80, more than one-third are severely or very severely damaged,” he said.

“It will be extremely optimistic to believe that it will very quick,” Birol said. “It will take gradually, gradually, up to two years to come back where we were before the war.”

‘Dark shadow’ of geopolitics

Birol said it is incomprehensible that “a couple of hundred men with guns” — apparently referring to Iranian forces — are able to hold hostage the global economy. He said his Paris-based agency, which advises governments on energy policy and helped coordinate a record release of emergency oil reserves earlier in the crisis, has warned for years about the critical importance of the Strait of Hormuz.

The global shock could spur the embrace of other energy technologies, including nuclear power, and “will reshape the global energy map for the next years to come,” he said.

On his office shelves, Birol has a couple of soccer balls — he’s a devoted supporter of the Turkish club Galatasaray — and other memorabilia, including a photo of his late father playing soccer, and reams of books. One in particular stood out for its timely title: “Oil, Power and War.”

“Energy and geopolitics have been always interwoven,” Birol said. “But I have never, ever seen ... such a dark and long shadow of geopolitics.”

He added: “Unfortunately, energy is at the heart of many conflicts which, again, makes me, as an energy person, rather sad, to be honest.”

Ukraine scrambles to supply air defenses as large-scale Russia attacks kill 16

By VASILISA STEPANENKO and DAN BASHAKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia hammered civilian areas across Ukraine with drones and missiles Thursday, killing at least 16 people and wounding more than 100 others in the worst aerial attack in weeks, Ukrainian authorities said.

Nearly 700 drones and dozens of ballistic and cruise missiles were used, as Ukrainian officials acknowledged that vital stocks of advanced interceptors are running low.

Tetiana Sokol, a 54-year-old Kyiv resident, said two missiles hit near her home and she took cover with her dog in the hallway as flashes lit up the night and windows shattered from the blast wave.

“On the third attack everything broke, everything flew, we were shocked, we didn’t know where to run. I grabbed whatever came to hand and ran away with the dog,” she told The Associated Press.

Moscow’s forces have hit civilian areas almost daily since its all-out invasion of its neighbor more than four years ago, with the regular assaults occasionally punctuated by massive attacks. More than 15,000 Ukrainian civilians have died in the strikes, the United Nations says.

Russia’s Defense Ministry maintained the operation was launched against military-related targets “in retaliation” for Ukrainian strikes deep inside Russia against oil refineries and weapons plants.

European Council President António Costa described Thursday’s strikes in Ukraine as “yet another horrendous attack” while people slept in their homes.

Zelenskyy on a mission to improve air defenses

The attacks came in the wake of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s 48-hour trip this week to Germany, Norway and Italy in an urgent search for more air defense systems that can stop Russian missiles.

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Ukraine has developed a significant domestic arms industry, especially in the production of drones and missiles, but cannot yet match the sophistication of U.S. Patriot air defense systems.

Yuriy Ihnat, head of communications for the Ukrainian air force, said the Russian attack made extensive use of ballistic missiles, which only Patriot systems can reliably shoot down.

"We desperately need more missiles for the Patriot systems," Ihnat told Ukraine's private TV channel 1+1.

Ukraine fears the Iran war is depleting stockpiles of the advanced American-made air defense systems it needs, and strongly opposes a U.S. pause on Russian oil sanctions.

"Another night has proven that Russia does not deserve any easing of global policy or lifting of sanctions," Zelenskyy said on X.

Ukrainian city grieves over death of young boy

Thursday's strikes killed four people in Kyiv, including a 12-year-old, with more than 50 others injured, authorities said. Attacks killed nine people in the southern port city of Odesa and four in the central Dni-pro region.

The central city of Cherkasy declared a day of mourning Thursday for the funeral of eight-year-old Bohdan Serhiiev, killed in a Russian drone strike earlier this week.

Mourners left flowers and stuffed toys next to the open casket before the burial, while friends and classmates held white balloons and a sign reading "Eternal Memory."

"He was such a happy kid. He was always running around and he loved me so much," Bohdan's 15-year-old brother Denys Zhuk, told the AP. "We played together, went to soccer together. I love my younger brother so much. I just wish he was here with me."

Man plans to plead guilty in killing of Run-DMC's Jam Master Jay. 2 other men went to trial

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

One of the three men charged in the killing of Jam Master Jay plans to plead guilty, court records show, in what would be the first admission anyone has made in court to any role in the Run-DMC star's 2002 death.

Jay Bryant pleaded not guilty to murder after his 2023 indictment, but his lawyer and federal prosecutors told the court in recent letters that they were negotiating a plea agreement.

A court docket entry Thursday indicated that Bryant intends to change his plea, without saying anything about the charge or conduct to which he might admit or the punishment he might expect. No date was set for a change of plea, and prosecutors declined to comment; a message was sent to Bryant's attorney.

The notice isn't an irreversible commitment, and defendants can change their minds about pleading guilty even as they're sitting in court.

If Bryant goes through with the plea, it could bring a measure of both closure and complexity to the already convoluted case. Co-defendants Karl Jordan Jr. and Ronald Washington were convicted by a jury, but Jordan was later cleared by a judge — and Bryant has been something of an outlier.

He was indicted nearly three years after the others, when authorities said Bryant's DNA was found on a hat in the music studio where Jam Master Jay was gunned down. Born Jason Mizell, he was the DJ in Run-DMC, crafting beats and scratches that helped propel rap into music's mainstream in the 1980s. The trio's hits included "It's Tricky" and a take on Aerosmith's "Walk This Way."

By the time the DNA was allegedly matched to Bryant, prosecutors had long since articulated a theory that Jordan and Washington — both of whom were close to Mizell — went after him out of anger over a failed drug deal. According to prosecutors and trial witnesses, Jordan shot the DJ while Washington blocked the door during the shooting and ordered one of Mizell's to get on the ground. Both men denied the allegations.

Jordan was Mizell's grandson, and Washington was one of the DJ's childhood friends. Bryant, by contrast, had little if any connection to the rap star. He knew someone in common with Jordan and Washington, according to testimony at their trial, but it was unclear whether Bryant had ever met Mizell.

After the alleged DNA match, prosecutors contended that Bryant had slipped into the studio building and

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opened a back fire door so that Washington and Jordan could avoid buzzing up and could ambush the DJ. Meanwhile, Bryant's uncle claimed that his nephew told him he shot Mizell after the artist reached for a gun. No other witnesses even placed Bryant in the studio, however, and prosecutors differed with the uncle's account, even though he was their witness. Instead, they suggested that Bryant touched the hat and then Jordan or Washington carried it into the studio and dropped it.

Neither Washington's nor Jordan's DNA was found on the hat, according to court papers.

One of Jordan's lawyers, Michael Hueston, argued that the charges against Bryant raised reasonable doubt about the case against Jordan. Jordan's conviction ultimately was overturned for unrelated reasons.

Bryant, now 52, was jailed on federal drug and gun charges when he was indicted in Mizell's death. He has since pleaded guilty in the drug and firearm case and is awaiting sentencing.

House rejects effort to withdraw US forces from the Iran war as Republicans stick with Trump

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House rejected a resolution Thursday requiring President Donald Trump to withdraw U.S. forces from the war with Iran unless Congress authorizes military action. It was the latest such vote that fell short of passage as Republicans largely continue to support Trump's operation.

Democrats voiced concern that the United States is becoming further entrenched in another lengthy conflict in the Middle East. They promised to keep raising the issue through more war powers votes in the coming weeks.

The 213-214 vote came one day after a similar effort failed in the Senate. The U.S. and Israel struck Iran on Feb. 28, and a fragile ceasefire is now in its second week.

Democrats overwhelmingly supported the attempt to rein in Trump's use of military force.

"We're standing at the edge of a cliff and Congress must act before the president pushes off," said New York Rep. Gregory Meeks, the ranking Democrat on the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. "Every day we delay, we inch closer to a conflict with no exit ramp."

Republicans tried to cast the effort as hypocritical.

Florida Rep. Brian Mast, the committee chairman, said Congress never voted on a war powers resolution when the U.S. attacked Iranian-backed Houthis in Yemen in 2024 while Democrat Joe Biden was president.

"When Joe Biden was responding to merchant marine vessels being attacked, it was OK. No war power needed. It went on for about a year," Mast said. "President Trump responds — war power, war power, war power. ... That's the hypocrisy."

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

While the House vote failed, it gave Democrats an opportunity to highlight some of the most negative effects of the war: the billions of dollars spent, the death of at least 13 service members, the soaring gas prices and fissures with long-standing allies who do not support Trump's actions.

"Gas prices at home are up to \$7 in my home state, and families are hurting," said Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash. "Another 10,000 U.S. troops are being sent in to join 50,000 already stationed in the Middle East with absolutely no strategy, no plan and no exit."

Republicans defended Trump as taking decisive action against an Iranian government that has long terrorized the Middle East and its own people.

"President Donald Trump has sent a message that those who threaten the United States and our partners will be ultimately held accountable," said Rep. Joe Wilson, R-S.C.

In Thursday's vote, Rep. Thomas Massie of Kentucky was the only Republican to cross party lines and vote for removing U.S. forces from the war. Rep. Jared Golden of Maine was the only Democrat to vote against the measure.

The first House vote to curb Trump's military action with Iran failed in early March, 212-219.

Meet Yuji, the Mexican baby monkey finding comfort in a plush companion

By REFUGIO RUÍZ and FABIOLA SÁNCHEZ Associated Press

GUADALAJARA, Mexico (AP) — Yuji, a 6-week-old patas monkey in Mexico, wakes up every day clinging to a stuffed dog. More than a toy, this plush companion acts as a surrogate mom after the tiny primate was rejected by his own mother, Kamaria, a first-time parent unable to form a maternal bond.

Weighing a mere 673 grams (1.4 pounds), Yuji represents the most recent case of assisted rearing at the Guadalajara Zoo in western Mexico.

The story of Yuji has captured the attention of the Mexican public, drawing parallels to Punch, the Japanese macaque that went viral on social media after growing up clinging to a stuffed orangutan following his mother's rejection.

Unlike Punch, Yuji has not yet had physical contact with other members of his species; he spends most of his time inside a monkey crate at the Guadalajara Zoo's Comprehensive Center for Animal Medicine and Welfare, CIMBA, where he is under the care of 12 veterinarians and biologists.

No date has been set for Yuji's transfer to a habitat shared by 12 other adult patas monkeys and three other infants. That will depend on when he is weaned from a milk-only diet and starts an adult diet complete with fruits and vegetables, said veterinarian Iván Reynoso Ruiz, head of the primate section at the Guadalajara Zoo. That could happen when Yuji is around 6 months old, he said.

Just hours after giving birth on March 3, Kamaria began exhibiting irregular behavior. She struggled to hold her firstborn correctly, leaving the infant unable to secure a grip on its mother.

After noticing a problem, keepers separated the mother from her newborn, who weighed just 443 grams (less than a pound) and required immediate placement in an incubator at CIMBA to stabilize his temperature and safeguard his health, Reynoso Ruiz said.

This was the start of the infant's assisted rearing, a process often used by zoos to protect the health and development of at-risk offspring. A caregiver named him Yuji after a popular Japanese manga character.

During his first few weeks, Yuji was under round-the-clock supervision and was bottle-fed fortified milk.

From the start, Yuji was given a stuffed animal for comfort. Reynoso Ruiz explained that the toy fulfills the role of a mother by serving as his primary source of security. To maintain hygiene, staff rotate the original stuffed dog with two other toys — a bear and a monkey — to ensure he always has a clean companion.

To stimulate his development, caregivers outfitted Yuji's crate with a small hammock and ropes. As he began gaining weight and sleeping for longer intervals, his team adjusted his feeding schedule. Yuji now receives the first of his four daily bottles at 7:00 a.m.

While the stories of Punch and Yuji have been popular on social media, some animal rights advocates oppose the practice of assisted rearing.

Diana Valencia, an animal rights activist, argues that there is no substitute for a natural habitat, and that animals "have the right to be born, grow, develop, and die where they belong."

Responding to these criticisms, the Guadalajara Zoo's primate expert emphasized that modern zoos provide a unique opportunity to protect species from global threats. He said the intervention was a matter of life or death, and that Yuji likely would have perished in the wild without a "second chance" at survival.

Tiger Woods' lawyer vows to fight subpoena for prescription records in DUI case

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — Tiger Woods' attorney intends to fight an attempt by prosecutors to subpoena the golfer's prescription drug records following his arrest last month in Florida on suspicion of driving under the influence.

Attorney Doug Duncan said this week in a court filing that Woods has a constitutional right to privacy when it comes to his prescription medications. The attorney asked a judge overseeing the case in Martin

County, Florida to hold a hearing to determine if the drug records are necessary for the criminal investigation.

If the judge determines the drug records are necessary, Duncan asked for a protective order limiting their release only to prosecutors, law enforcement officers, state experts and Woods' defense team.

Woods has pleaded not guilty to driving under the influence. A sheriff's office report said deputies found two pain pills in his pocket and he showed signs of impairment after his SUV clipped a truck's trailer and rolled over on its side.

Woods was traveling at high speeds on a beachside, residential road on Jupiter Island with a 30 mph (nearly 50 kph) speed limit when his Land Rover caused \$5,000 in damage to the truck, according to an incident report. Woods agreed to a Breathalyzer test that showed no signs of alcohol, but refused a urine test, authorities said.

Prosecutors told the court they would issue a subpoena seeking copies of all prescription medication records for the legendary golfer on file at Lewis Pharmacy in Palm Beach, Florida from the start of the year through the end of last month.

Prosecutors also demanded in court papers on Wednesday that Woods reveal the names and locations of any witnesses he plans to present in his defense.

Younger adult colon cancer deaths are concentrated in people with less education, study says

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The worrisome rise in colorectal cancer deaths in younger adults is concentrated in people with less education, suggesting socioeconomic factors could be driving the escalation, according to a new study.

Celebrity deaths — including Chadwick Boseman in 2020 and James Van Der Beek earlier this year — have highlighted the increase in colorectal cancer deaths among younger adults, but the new paper was called the first to parse which people are most affected by the alarming rise.

The researchers found that over the last 30 years, the rise in colorectal cancer deaths in young adults occurred almost entirely among people without a four-year college degree.

Of course, getting a college degree doesn't protect you from getting colon cancer. Rather, experts say it's a marker for other issues: People without degrees tend to earn less money, have poorer diets, exercise less and get less medical care.

It's not totally unexpected that the death risk is concentrated in the less advantaged, but the paper published Thursday in JAMA Oncology is the first national study to actually show the connection, said Dr. Paolo Boffetta, a researcher at Stony Brook Cancer Center in New York who wasn't involved in the work.

American Cancer Society researchers used government data on more than 101,000 younger adults, ages 25 to 49, who died of colorectal cancer from 1994 through 2023.

Overall, the colorectal cancer death rate rose from about 3 per 100,000 in that age group to about 4 per 100,000. But for people who only made it through high school, the rate rose from 4 to 5.2 per 100,000, while the rate for people with at least a bachelor's degrees did not change from 2.7 per 100,000.

Ahmedin Jemal, the study's first author, said the findings underscore the need for public awareness about colorectal cancer and for younger adults to heed screening recommendations. Symptoms can include blood in stool or rectal bleeding; changes in bowel habits, such as diarrhea, constipation or narrowing of stool that lasts more than a few days; unintended weight loss; and cramps or abdominal pain.

The American Cancer Society estimates that more than 158,000 cases of colorectal cancer will be diagnosed in the U.S. this year. Overall, it's the nation's second leading cancer killer, behind lung cancer, and is expected to claim more than 55,000 in 2026.

The number of deaths for adults younger than 50 is around 7% of the total — about 3,900. Earlier this year, cancer society researchers reported that colorectal cancer mortality in Americans under 50 had increased by 1.1% a year since 2005, making it now the deadliest cancer in that age group.

Scientists don't know what's behind that increase. But they note risk factors include obesity, lack of

physical activity, a diet high in red or processed meat and low in fruits and vegetables, and a family history of colorectal cancer. The American Cancer Society changed its screening guidelines in 2021, lowering the age U.S. adults should start getting screened from 50 to 45.

Why did the researchers behind Thursday's study look at education level and not other factors?

Death certificates don't detail how much money a person had, or most other aspects of their life. But they do note how much schooling someone completed. And other research has found that data often aligns with statistics about income, health insurance, physical activity and chronic disease. So education serves as a proxy, but can't speak to other factors, like whether the person had health insurance.

"The focus on education is really (due to) something which was available in the data," Boffetta observed.

A look at the South African politician sentenced to jail on gun charge who described Trump as Hitler

By GERALD IMRAY Associated Press

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP) — A leftist South African politician who described U.S. President Donald Trump as a modern-day dictator was sentenced to five years in prison on Thursday for firing a rifle at a political rally in 2018.

Julius Malema, who leads a populist opposition party, has been a divisive figure in South Africa for years and accused of stoking racial tensions with anti-white rhetoric. Supporters praise him as a man of the people who stands up for the country's poor Black majority.

He has been a focus of U.S. government criticism and featured on a video played in a tense White House meeting last year between Trump and the South African president.

Malema recently referred to Trump as an "Adolf Hitler of (the) modern day."

Here's a look at Malema's controversial track record:

Expelled from the ruling party

Malema emerged as the outspoken president of the ruling African National Congress party's youth league from 2008-2012. His conduct regularly tested the patience of senior members of the party, including when he began publicly criticizing then-South African President Jacob Zuma, the leader of the ANC.

He had previously been a staunch supporter of Zuma, once saying "we are prepared to take up arms and kill for Zuma."

In 2010, Malema swore at a BBC journalist, accused him of being a British "agent" and threw him out of a press conference in a move that was condemned by the ANC. A central part of Malema's politics has been to accuse the United States and the U.K. of an "imperialist" and racist attitude toward South Africa.

Following a series of controversial comments, his public criticism of neighboring Botswana's government as a puppet regime ultimately led to him being expelled from the ANC in 2012.

Stirring racial tensions

Malema formed a new party, the Economic Freedom Fighters, in 2013 as a far-left, anti-capitalist movement.

The EFF has called for radical changes in South Africa, including the expropriation of land belonging to white people to be redistributed to Blacks who were oppressed under the former apartheid system of racial segregation.

Some of Malema's comments as the "Commander in Chief" of the EFF have been criticized as stoking racial tensions in a multiracial country that managed to embrace reconciliation in the years after apartheid.

"We are not calling for the slaughter of white people — at least for now," Malema said in one of many speeches to supporters criticizing South Africa's white minority.

He has also made disparaging remarks about South Africans who have Indian heritage.

Controversial chant and accused of hate speech

Malema gained some international notoriety by reviving the apartheid-era chant "Kill the Boer," which he chanted at rallies while he was the ANC youth leader and has also done with the EFF. Boer refers to a white farmer and the chant has been fiercely opposed by groups representing parts of South Africa's

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white minority as amounting to hate speech.

Malema's party — and the chant — have also been cited by Trump and his supporters, like South African-born Elon Musk, to make their baseless claim that there is a widespread campaign of violence against South Africa's white farmers.

Malema and the EFF were featured on a video reel that was played in the Oval Office during Trump's dramatic meeting with South African President Cyril Ramaphosa last year, when Trump confronted Ramaphosa over the issue.

The Trump administration's accusations that South Africa's Black-led government is pursuing an anti-white agenda has been central to a major diplomatic fallout between the countries.

While Malema and other EFF members serve as lawmakers in Parliament, their party has never held political power on a national level and received 10% of the vote in the last national election in 2024. The EFF is not part of the coalition government.

Causing chaos in Parliament

Malema and his EFF have also directed their disapproval at Ramaphosa and the ANC and have been thrown out of Parliament several times for interrupting proceedings.

In 2023, Malema and other EFF members wearing the party's uniform of red worker overalls stormed the stage during a speech by the South African president, leading to tussles with security officials.

Gun conviction

Malema was convicted of firearm offenses in October, seven years after he fired a rifle in the air at a political rally.

A group representing South Africa's Afrikaner white minority brought an application pushing prosecutors to eventually take Malema to court.

He was sentenced Thursday to five years in prison but launched an appeal and was freed on bail pending the appeal. If the sentence is upheld, he would be disqualified from serving as a lawmaker for five years after completing his sentence.

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 came to the back of the plane and greeted journalists 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."

Stopping to chat as he made his way from row to row that first day, Leo had told journalists that he

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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 Tuesday, on the short flight from Algiers to Annaba, the ancient city of Hippo, Leo stayed in the front of the plane where the Vatican delegation sits, dashing the Vatican pool's hopes for another Trump vs. Leo news cycle.

On Wednesday, with a five-hour flight ahead of us to Cameroon, excitement grew in economy class when Vatican personnel came to the back of the plane, readied the microphone and did sound checks to make sure the whole cabin could hear.

Emerging from behind the curtain, 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 standing at the front of the cabin, 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 his 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. The Associated Press is always on the plane, paying for as many as four journalists per trip.

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. The next stop is Angola. Who knows what Leo will have to say.

Pope blasts 'tyrants' ravaging the planet during his visit to Cameroon

By NICOLE WINFIELD and NALOVA AKUA Associated Press

BAMENDA, Cameroon (AP) — Pope Leo XIV blasted the "handful of tyrants" who are ravaging Earth with war and exploitation, as he preached a message of peace Thursday in the epicenter of a separatist conflict in central Africa considered one of the world's most neglected crises.

Leo traveled to the western Cameroon city of Bamenda, where jubilant crowds clogged the roads, blowing horns and dancing. They were overjoyed that a pope had come so far to see them and put a global spotlight on the violence that has traumatized this region for nearly a decade.

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

In his remarks in the St. Joseph Cathedral, on land donated by the Mankon, Leo praised the peace movement and warned against allowing religion to enter conflicts. It's a theme he has been echoing amid the U.S.-Israeli war in Iran and the religious justifications for it by U.S. officials.

"Blessed are the peacemakers!" he said. "But woe to those who manipulate religion and the very name of God for their own military, economic and political gain, dragging that which is sacred into darkness and filth."

He called for a "decisive change of course" that leads away from conflict and the exploitation of the land for military or economic gain.

"The world is being ravaged by a handful of tyrants, yet it is held together by a multitude of supportive brothers and sisters!" he said.

Leo's comments were directed at Cameroon's separatist conflict. But Vatican officials have made clear that on this trip, he is preaching the Gospel message of peace that surpasses borders and continents, and is meant for all those responsible for the wars and exploitation ravaging Earth.

Leo said Bamenda was a model for the rest of the world. "Bamenda, today you are the city on the hill, resplendent in the eyes of all!" Leo said in English, using a phrase often understood as referring to American exceptionalism.

It wasn't immediately clear if any of Cameroon's separatist fighters, who announced a three-day pause in fighting to allow the pope safe passage to Bamenda, attended.

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.

Leo arrived to a raucous welcome in Bamenda, where blasting music from loudspeakers gave the event a concert-like vibe.

"We are so overjoyed, so overwhelmed," said Felicity Cali, a Catholic student. "Say thank you, God, for this extraordinary day and for making us be alive to see this day."

Leo kept up the theme in his homily before an estimated 20,000 people who gathered for his after-

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noon Mass at Bamenda's airfield, where they went wild when he looped around the crowd in his covered popemobile. Leo pointed to the "moral, social and political corruption," that afflicts Cameroon, stifling its development.

Added to these internal problems of conflict and corruption "is the damage caused from outside, by those who, in the name of profit, continue to lay their hands on the African continent to exploit and plunder it," he said.

It was a cry that echoed the words of Pope Francis when he traveled to Congo in 2023. "Hands off Africa!" he exhorted the foreign interests plundering the continent.

Cameroon's separatist movement is believed to be backed by several actors abroad. In December, a federal jury in U.S. convicted two individuals for conspiracy to provide funds and equipment to the separatist fighters. Belgian authorities in March also announced they had arrested four people as part of investigations into Belgian residents suspected of being among the separatist leaders and raising money for them there.

"Those who rob your land of its resources generally invest much of the profit in weapons, thus perpetuating an endless cycle of destabilization and death," Leo said. "It is a world turned upside down, an exploitation of God's creation that must be denounced and rejected by every honest conscience."

Cameroon sits atop significant reserves of oil, natural gas, cobalt, bauxite, iron ore, gold and diamonds, making resource extraction one of the pillars of its economy.

While French and English companies have long dominated the extraction industry in Cameroon, Chinese companies have established a significant presence in recent years, particularly in the gold mining regions of the east.

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.

Morine Ngum, a mother of three whose husband was shot dead in 2022 by Cameroonian soldiers while fighting as a separatist, expressed doubt that the pope's visit and peace meeting would lead to meaningful change. She said any real progress must begin with those in power.

"Nothing is going to change," said Ngum, 30. "This conflict has turned my children into orphans and me into a widow. Many families have been rendered homeless."

Testimony to pope about the toll of the conflict

The archbishop of Bamenda, Andrew Nkea Fuanya, told Leo that the people there had suffered from "a situation they did not create," losing their livelihoods, homes and education: Children were not allowed to go to school for years.

"Most Holy Father, today that your feet are standing on the soil of Bamenda that has drunk the blood of many of our children," he said.

The Right Rev. Fonki Samuel Forba, emeritus moderator of the Presbyterian church in Cameroon, said the Vatican had joined other faith groups in trying to bring the separatists to the negotiating table with the government, and meeting with their supporters abroad.

Biya's government has been accused of shunning dialogue with the separatists.

"There is a proverb in Africa that 'When two elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers,'" Forba said.

Astronomers measure the mind-blowing power and speed of black hole jets for the first time

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — For the first time, scientists have measured the instantaneous mind-blowing power of jets blasting from a black hole.

The jet power from this relatively close black hole-star system is equivalent to 10,000 suns, an international research team reported Thursday. They also tracked the jet speed: roughly 355 million mph (540 million kph) — half the speed of light.

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Located 7,200 light-years away, Cygnus X-1 features not only a black hole — the first one ever identified more than a half-century ago — but a blue supergiant star, its constant companion. A light-year is nearly 6 trillion miles (9.7 trillion kilometers).

The University of Oxford's Steve Prabu and his team based their findings on 18 years of high-resolution radio imaging obtained by a global telescope network. He conducted the research while still at Australia's Curtin University, which led the study published in *Nature Astronomy*.

Prabu and his colleagues were able to measure the swift power of these "dancing jets" as he calls them, as they were pushed in opposite directions by the star's wind. The group based its calculations on how much the jets were bent by the stellar wind as well as computer modeling.

Until now, a black hole's jet power had to be averaged over tens of thousands of years, the researchers said.

Prabu said a key finding is that 10% of all the energy released as matter falls toward the black hole is carried away by the jets.

On the skimpy side as black holes go, the one in Cygnus X-1 is continually pulling gases from its stellar playmate as they orbit one another. Discovered in the 1960s, the binary system is located in our Milky Way's Cygnus, or swan, constellation.

The supergiant star feeds material to the black hole, giving it "something to 'eat' and launch as jets," Prabu said in an email.

These jets can help scientists better understand how black holes help shape galaxies and other cosmic structures through large-scale shocks and turbulence.

Prabu plans to apply similar techniques to other black holes. "It would be exciting to measure jet power in many more systems," he said.

Taiwan's chipmaker TSMC reports 58% jump in profit, warns about Iran war impacts

By CHAN HO-HIM AP Business Writer

HONG KONG (AP) — Taiwan's chipmaker TSMC, one of the world's largest companies, reported a 58% jump in profit on Thursday for the January-March quarter, thanks to strong demand driven by the artificial intelligence boom even as the Iran war was driving up costs.

Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Corp., a key supplier for Apple and Nvidia and the largest contract chipmaker in the world, reported a record net quarterly profit of 572.5 billion new Taiwan dollars (\$18.1 billion) for the first three months of the year, better than analysts had expected.

Profit for the quarter was 58.3% higher compared to the 361.6 billion new Taiwan dollars (\$11.5 billion) booked the same period a year earlier. It was also 13.2% higher compared with the previous quarter in October-December.

Revenue increased 8.4% in the January-March period from the previous three months to \$35.9 billion, the company said. For the current April-June quarter, TSMC expected revenue to further grow to between \$39 billion and \$40.2 billion.

As AI-related demand continues to surge, TSMC has been expanding chip fabrication plants in the U.S., Japan and Taiwan, with a focus on making more advanced 3-nanometer semiconductors that are used in smartphones and AI products.

"AI-related demand continues to be extremely robust," C.C. Wei, TSMC's CEO and chairman, told an earnings conference on Thursday. "Our conviction in the multi-year AI megatrend remains high, and we believe the demand for semiconductors will continue to be very fundamental."

TSMC also warned of potential impacts from the Iran war, which has not only pushed up global supply chain costs but is also disrupting the world's supply of chemicals and gas such as helium essential for chipmaking.

Wendell Huang, TSMC's chief financial officer, said while rising costs stemming from the Iran war could

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weigh on profitability, the company has "prepared safety stock inventory on hand" including for helium and is not expecting "any near-term impact" on operations.

TSMC has pledged huge investments in expanding its manufacturing capacity in Taiwan and abroad, including \$165 billion of commitments in building plants in Arizona. The company said Thursday its capital spending for the next three years will be "significantly higher" than the past three years as it ramps up capacity to meet customers' growing demand.

The chipmaker had earlier announced plans to raise its capital expenditure budget to \$52 billion-\$56 billion for this year from about \$40 billion in 2025. It said Thursday it now expects capital spending in 2026 to be toward the higher end of that.

Today in History: April 17, the Bay of Pigs Invasion

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, April 17, the 107th day of 2026. There are 258 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On April 17, 1961, some 1,400 CIA-trained Cuban exiles launched the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in a failed bid to topple Fidel Castro. Cuban forces crushed the incursion within three days.

Also on this date:

In 1964, Geraldine "Jerrie" Mock completed the first solo around-the-world flight by a woman, landing her single-engine Cessna plane in Columbus, Ohio, after a 29-day journey.

In 1969, a jury in Los Angeles convicted Sirhan Sirhan of assassinating Sen. Robert F. Kennedy. (Sirhan's death sentence would be commuted to life in prison with the possibility of parole. He remains in prison today.)

In 1970, Apollo 13 astronauts James A. Lovell, Fred W. Haise and Jack Swigert splashed down safely in the Pacific, four days after a ruptured oxygen tank crippled their spacecraft and forced the crew to abort plans for a third moon landing.

In 1975, Cambodia's five-year civil war ended as the capital Phnom Penh fell to the Khmer Rouge, which instituted brutal, radical policies that claimed an estimated 1.7 million lives (nearly one in four Cambodians) until the regime was overthrown in 1979.

In 1991, the Dow Jones Industrial Average closed above 3,000 for the first time, ending the day at 3,004.46, up 17.58.

In 1993, a federal jury in Los Angeles convicted two former police officers of violating the civil rights of motorist Rodney King in a 1991 beating. Two other officers were acquitted.

In 2013, a massive explosion of ammonium nitrate at a Texas fertilizer plant killed 15 people and injured hundreds of others. The blast and fire at the West Fertilizer Co. plant left part of the small town of West in ruins.

In 2014, astronomers announced NASA's orbiting Kepler telescope had discovered the most Earth-like planet yet detected — a distant, rocky world similar in size to our own orbiting a red dwarf star in the "Goldilocks" zone where it's not too hot and not too cold for life.

Today's Birthdays: Actor David Bradley is 84. Actor Clarke Peters is 74. Author Nick Hornby is 69. Actor Sean Bean is 67. Rock singer Maynard James Keenan (Tool) is 62. Actor Lela Rochon is 62. Actor Kimberly Elise is 59. Singer-songwriter Liz Phair is 59. Director-producer Adam McKay is 58. Rapper-actor Redman is 56. Football Hall of Famer Tony Boselli is 54. Actor Jennifer Garner is 54. Singer Victoria Beckham is 52. Actor Rooney Mara is 41. Rapper Ryujin is 25. Actor Kyla-Drew Simmons is 22. Singer Asa Enami is 20.