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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 a.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.

Monday, April 20

Senior Menu: BBQ chicken breast, au gratin potatoes, coleslaw, fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Egg bake.

School Lunch: Hot dogs, chips.

Senior Citizens meet at Groton Community Center, 1 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Christian Literature Circle, 7:30 p.m.

FFA Convention at Brookings

Grades 5 & 8 Science Testing

Girls Golf at Sisseton, 10 a.m.

Middle School Track at Ipswich, 2:30 p.m.

Girls Fast Pitch Softball at Arlington (Varsity at 4:30 p.m. followed by JV)

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

Groton Daily Independent
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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.

White House Eyes Mythos

Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei reportedly met yesterday with White House Chief of Staff Susie Wiles to discuss government access to Mythos, an AI model designed to detect cybersecurity vulnerabilities. The meeting comes amid a legal battle over the Pentagon labeling Anthropic a supply chain risk, an unprecedented move against a US company.

Earlier this month, Anthropic shared Mythos with over 40 technology companies—including Apple, Amazon, and Microsoft—to find and patch software bugs. The company says it will not release the model publicly, citing concerns Mythos could be used to exploit flaws in critical systems. The model has reportedly already uncovered thousands of bugs in popular software programs, such as a 27-year-old bug in an operating system widely incorporated into internet routers and firewalls.

The companies with access to Mythos call themselves Project Glasswing after the glasswing butterfly, which uses transparent wings to hide in plain sight (see here). The name is a nod to the bugs humans have never found within complex code.

Strait of Hormuz reopens, but US blockade continues.

President Donald Trump and Iran's foreign minister yesterday said the strait is fully open to commercial vessels and will remain open at least until the Israel-Lebanon ceasefire ends on April 26 at 5 pm ET. Brent crude oil prices dropped over 10% with this news. However, Trump said the US naval blockade on Iranian ships would remain until the US and Iran reach a deal to end the war.

Separately, thousands of displaced families tried to return to southern Lebanon yesterday. Roughly 1.2 million people, including over 390,000 children, have been displaced since fighting between Israel and Hezbollah intensified last month.

US House extends surveillance powers in postmidnight vote.

The controversial program permitting the CIA, the National Security Agency, the FBI, and other agencies to collect and analyze overseas communications without a warrant was due to lapse Monday. It is now extended until April 30 as lawmakers weigh civil liberty concerns against national security risks. The White House has lobbied for a full renewal of the program, while Democrats have been more skeptical.

Sex differences in brain cells may explain differing risks for brain diseases.

An analysis of over 1 million brain cells reveals widespread variation in gene activity between male and female brains. Researchers believe the differences, which were observed across several regions, could help explain why conditions like Alzheimer's and mood disorders are more common in women, while schizophrenia and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder are more common in men.

Acting ICE director to step down next month.

Todd Lyons, who has led Immigration and Customs Enforcement since March 2025, will leave on May 31 for a private-sector role. Newly appointed Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin will oversee the search for his replacement. The Senate has not confirmed an ICE director since 2017, leaving the agency under acting leadership for nearly a decade.

Meanwhile, the White House is expected to nominate former Navy SEAL Cameron Hamilton to lead the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Hamilton previously served as acting head before being ousted for publicly contradicting the Trump administration's plans to overhaul FEMA.

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Cave, hippo bones found under Welsh castle could give insights into ancient Britain.

A five-year archeological project will explore an enormous cave discovered beneath Pembroke Castle, which was built in the 11th century. Researchers had long assumed the cave—accessible via a spiral staircase—was cleared by the Victorians, but recent excavations have uncovered evidence of early humans and a roughly 120,000-year-old hippo.

Police identify remains of Oregon family that went missing in 1958.

An advanced DNA analysis identified remains found in Oregon's Columbia River as those of a family that went missing nearly 70 years ago while collecting Christmas greenery. The search for the family became national news, but parts of their car and the remains of most family members were only found in 2024 by a private diver. The sheriff's office said it found no signs of foul play despite crime theories.

Humankind(ness)

Dear readers—We're taking a brief intermission next month to feature stories about mothers and motherhood. Take a moment to share a memory, lesson, or note of gratitude [here](#) for a chance to be featured.

Today, we're sharing a story from reader Julia S. in Dallas, Texas.

"My dad and I have always shared the same Amazon account. After retirement, he got a part-time job working as a crossing guard. Soon after starting his new job, I noticed bright yellow purchases on the account. Hat, jacket, gloves, [and] a raincoat. I didn't think much of it, other than he was getting prepared for his new crossing guard role.

"After a few weeks went by, I noticed a second raincoat purchase—this one slightly different than the first. I just figured maybe he lost the original. Then another. Then several. Then over 10. I was getting concerned at this point. Why on earth would my dad buy so many different bright yellow raincoats? Had the account been hacked? I called him. I was prepared to cancel the latest order and update passwords.

"He laughed, and explained that he had been giving the raincoats away to coworkers and strangers who either couldn't afford them for work or got caught in the rain. Every time my dad picks me up from the airport now, his car is filled with yellow raincoats ready to be given to a stranger or a coworker in need."

Make Plans to Submit Your Tails

The 2026 Youth Trapping Recruitment Program has nearly reached the 20,000 maximum tail allocation.

Participants are encouraged to make plans to get their tails submitted to scheduled collection sites prior to the program meeting the maximum. Those sites can be found at the link below.

The Coyote Bounty Program is also currently open for participation. This program is open for all South Dakota residents until July 1, or until the maximum payout of \$300,000 is reached.



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Kurtz concludes 34-year teaching career, plans time with family and new hobbies

by Dorene Nelson

After thirty-four years in the classroom teaching junior high and high school English classes, Diane Kurtz has decided to resign. Now it's time to be more relaxed, have more free time, and have more hours to enjoy her grandson Jett Kolbeck.

Diane graduated from Groton High School in 1988, followed by getting her Bachelor's Degree from South Dakota State University and her Master's Degree from Northern State University. She has taught only in the Groton Public School District.

Diane's job required many hours and a lot of hard work. Her favorite aspect of teaching has been the meaningful relationships she has developed with students and watching them grow and mature. "Few things are more rewarding than seeing students develop confidence over time and know that I played a small part in their journey," Kurtz explained.

"The worst part of teaching English has been the significant amount of time required for grading students' papers and recording student performance data," she admitted.

"I decided to become a teacher because I've always enjoyed academic work and the various activities associated with school," Kurtz stated. "While I never truly regretted my decision to be a teacher, there have been moments of frustration when students haven't reached their full potential. It can be challenging to see capable students become apathetic or complacent when they have so much to offer and can do so much better!"

"My husband Ryan Kurtz is a Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist at Avera in Aberdeen," Diane explained, before going on to list their children and their individual jobs.

"Ryan and I have four children," she said. "Kasey Kurtz is a police officer in Aberdeen; Courtney Kurtz Kolbeck is a dental hygienist in Dell Rapids; Kaden Kurtz is a pilot with the Aberdeen Flying Service; and Camyrn Kurtz is a nursing student at the University of South Dakota."

"I haven't made any definite plans for my retirement," Diane smiled. "Maybe I will pursue another job, but I really look forward to having more time to spend with my family and friends, especially my grandson Jett!"

"Staying active and trying something new is on my retirement agenda," she admitted. "I do plan to learn how to play pickleball and golf. I'm also going to attend Zumba classes at the YMCA, do some traveling with Ryan, and really enjoy relaxing at our cabin on Pickerel Lake."



Diane Kurtz

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Local newspaper asking if annual fundraising drives could be industry's future

SDPB | By Jackson Dircks

Could annual fundraising drives keep local newspapers and media alive? That's the question one newspaper in northeastern South Dakota is posing after putting up a GoFundMe page.

The Groton Daily Independent is a local newspaper that's been running for 143 years. Despite being one of the longest-running newspapers in the state, it's not immune to the financial strain local papers are seeing right now. That's according to editor Paul Kosel, more commonly referred to as "Paper Paul."

"We're basically able to keep up with most of our expenses, but our copier expense has been just, basically our lease we have with that, has been getting behind," Paper Paul said. "Way behind actually."

South Dakota's seen local newspapers at risk of going out of business and struggle to find funds.

Paper Paul took what some may call an unconventional approach to solving the issue: He started a Go Fund Me to help the Groton Daily Independent. He drew inspiration from the Brandon Valley Journal, which started a Go Fund Me to help "keep the doors open" on the local publication. The Brandon effort has raised over \$15,000 of the \$18,000 goal.

"I thought, you know, I guess if they can do it, maybe I could do the same thing, type deal," Paper Paul said. "So, I decided, well, let's give it a shot. I'm not thinking, nothing lost, you know, so I put a Go Fund page out there and the response we've gotten so far has been really good."

Paper Paul said it's a model that's shown previous success for news media in South Dakota and is something the industry should consider.

"The more I think about it, it's like, you know, South Dakota Public Broadcasting does annual fundraisers like this, you know, on a different scale," Paper Paul said. "Maybe we have to do the same thing in the newspapers as well, have like an annual fundraiser to generate funds to keep the papers going."

The GoFundMe has received funds from people beyond just Groton, something Paper Paul said shows people care about local news. He added it's not about padding pockets.

"That's not our objective. Our objective is to make sure the bills are paid for," Paper Paul said. "I mean, I've got a full-time job and so, it's just a matter of I want to meet the expenses and not have to drain my savings account all the time."

The Groton Daily Independent's Go Fund Me is over 90% of the way there for its \$7,500 goal.

Jackson Dircks is a Freeburg, Illinois, native. He received a degree from Augustana University in English and Journalism. He started at SDPB as an intern before transitioning to a politics, business and everything in-between reporter based in Sioux Falls.

<https://gofund.me/a175241e3>

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ACE OF HEARTS JACKPOT OVER \$43K



6	12	15	18
26	27	29	31
32	36	39	41
43	48	49	51

The Ace of Hearts drawing was held Thursday at the Groton American Legion with the jackpot now growing to over \$43,000. Scott Hanlon was the winner of \$300 as ticket sales last week was just over \$3,000. Tickets can be purchased at the Groton American Legion or from Paper Paul (Sorry - No Venmo sales).



Softball Livestreamers Wanted

GDILIVE.COM is looking for someone to livestream the softball games at Arlington Monday and at Hanson on Tuesday as I will be unable to go. Text Paul at 605-397-7460 for details.

SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

Democrats fail to field candidates for a majority of South Dakota legislative seats

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER

Democrats are running for 46 of South Dakota's 105 legislative seats — leaving 56% of seats without a Democratic candidate.

That doesn't bode well for the party ahead of November, said Michael Card, professor emeritus of political science at the University of South Dakota.

"It doesn't put them in a position to actually put forward their ideological policy preferences and have much of a success at getting those enacted," Card said.

In the state Senate alone, Democrats have failed to field a candidate for 22 seats, which is nearly two-thirds of the chamber. In the House, Democrats have failed to field a candidate for 38 seats, which is 54% of the chamber.

There is only one Democratic legislative primary in the state: a state Senate race in District 26, which includes the Rosebud Reservation.

There are no statewide Democratic primaries, after announced candidates for governor and U.S. House dropped out or failed to gather enough petition signatures to make the ballot, leaving one Democrat in each of those races.

Statewide candidates will have less name recognition than Republican candidates ahead of the general election, since they didn't have primaries, Card said. In the Legislature, Card said Democrats "are guaranteeing they won't get a majority."

In contrast, Republicans have primary races for governor, U.S. House and U.S. Senate. Five legislative districts do not have Republican primaries, but do have Republican candidates. There is a Republican candidate running for every legislative seat, except for one House seat in District 27, which includes the Pine Ridge Reservation.

Card said there are several factors leading to poor candidate turnout among Democrats, including a self-fulfilling cycle of failure.

"A lack of winning makes fewer people willing to take a chance on running for office," Card said. "Why run if I think I'm going to lose?"

Democrats haven't held a statewide office since 2015, and they haven't held a majority of either legislative chamber since 1994.

Joe Zweifel, deputy executive director of the South Dakota Democratic Party, said the organization worked "really, really hard" to convince Democrats to run for office.

"But you can't force people to run for office," said Zweifel, of Sioux Falls, who's running for a legislative seat himself in District 12.

He's heard the open seats called a "failure." But he disagrees, choosing to focus on the Democrats who did step forward.

"We're running quality, good candidates in those races," Zweifel said.

The South Dakota Democratic Party hopes to build on legislative successes, such as a new law from Rep. Kadyn Wittman, D-Sioux Falls, that commits state funding to cover the family portion of reduced-price school meals.

"That specifically is a return on investment for our donors, and it shows that Democrats are doing good things for the people of South Dakota," Zweifel said.

Wittman's success helped inspire Democratic District 13 House of Representatives candidate Ali Rae Horsted, of Sioux Falls, to take a second run at the Legislature. Horsted ran unsuccessfully for the Senate

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against Sen. Sue Peterson in 2024, garnering 42% of the vote.

Horsted plans to build on that success and the name recognition she already has in the district. She hopes she'll have "better odds" in this election, since there are two House seats for every district.

Horsted said it would better serve South Dakota if the state had a more balanced Legislature. While the latest Legislature was 92% Republican, 52% of voters in South Dakota are Republican. South Dakota has the lowest percentage of Democrats, 7.6%, in the Legislature nationwide.

"I think it's important that people have options on the ballot," Horsted said, "and people are able to vote for candidates that represent their values and their vision for the future of South Dakota."

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

COMMENTARY

Growth is not a problem, but walking away from it is

by Michael Bockorny

A recent article from South Dakota Searchlight highlighted the clear divide among gubernatorial candidates over a state investment tied to a major business expansion in Brookings. The same kinds of debates are occurring at the legislative, city and county levels. At its core, this is a question about whether South Dakota intends to compete.

The narrative that economic development incentives are "corporate welfare" is false. Anti-growth candidates and officials argue that public dollars are being handed to large companies unfairly, picking winners and losers. While that sounds good in a headline, it falls apart under scrutiny. The surrounding states we regularly compete with — North Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska and Wyoming — all use structured incentives to attract and retain employers. This is not theory; rather, it is standard operating procedure. If South Dakota unilaterally disarms, we do not create fairness, we create a competitive disadvantage for all existing businesses.

Let us take this out of theory and into reality. According to CNBC's annual Top States for Business rankings, South Dakota slipped to 35th in the nation in 2025; a significant drop from where we stood at our high point of being number one in 2013. This did not happen by accident. Over the past several years, South Dakota has seen an increase in anti-growth rhetoric, questioning incentives, resisting development, and creating uncertainty around whether we want investment.

The market reacts to signals, and so do companies. When the message becomes inconsistent or, worse, hostile to growth, projects do not wait around. They go elsewhere. We can draw a straight line between attitude and outcome.

The Brookings project is exactly what economic development is supposed to look like: a large-scale private capital investment, expansion of an existing employer, immediate and long-term job creation and wage growth, and a significant increase in property tax base and secondary economic activity. The \$15 million state participation is not the story; rather, it is the lever that made the project competitive. Without an incentive, that project is just as likely to be in another state.

Let us take the most common anti-growth claims head-on. First, "this is corporate welfare." Wrong. It is a performance-based investment. Companies earn incentives by investing, building, hiring and operating. No performance equals no benefit.

This is not welfare, it is accountability.

Second, "it is unfair to small businesses." Wrong. Small businesses benefit directly from increased local spending, increased supply chain demand, workforce attraction and retention, and population stability. A stagnant economy hurts small business far more than a growing one.

Third, "government should not pick winners and losers." We are not; the market does that. Our job is to ensure South Dakota is in the game when decisions are made. Incentives are one of several tools used

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nationwide to compete. Opting out does not make us neutral. It makes us irrelevant.

Fourth, "let the free market handle it." This statement ignores reality. Every competing state is actively shaping outcomes. This is not a passive environment, it is competitive. Refusing to engage is not principled, it is credulous.

Our end goal is the same as it always has been, reasonable growth. The key word here is "reasonable." We do economic development by supporting performance-based incentives, projects aligned with workforce and infrastructure capacity, a focus on long-term return on investment, transparency and accountability. This approach is not reckless; rather, it yields reasonable growth.

We could look at falling rankings, missed opportunities, and growing skepticism toward development and complain about it. Or we can treat it for what it is: a wake-up call.

What we need now is a consistent message that South Dakota is open for business, serious about growth and willing to compete. If we continue down an anti-growth path, projects will go elsewhere, our population will stagnate or decline, workforce shortages will worsen, property tax pressure will increase, and young people will leave and not come back.

South Dakota did not become successful by accident. It was built through intentional, pro-growth policy and a willingness to compete. Earlier I shared that South Dakota has fallen from the top ranked state for business in 2013 to 35th in 2025. All the states I mentioned that we typically compete with (North Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska and Wyoming) were ranked above us in 2025.

For the benefit of all of us, we need to stop questioning growth and start executing it.

Michael Bockorny is the CEO of the Economic Development Professionals Association of South Dakota, headquartered in Aberdeen. He previously served as CEO of the Aberdeen Development Corporation for over 10 years, and prior to that worked in the private sector in senior living, the nonprofit sector in a university setting, and in retail development.

Scores of Forest Service plans could be upended after Boundary Waters mining vote

Lawmakers used the Congressional Review Act to allow mining in a national forest

BY: ALEX BROWN

Congress' move to allow mining in a national forest near a wilderness area may have broad ramifications across the country.

The U.S. Senate voted Thursday to overturn a mining ban in Minnesota's Superior National Forest, the headwaters of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.

By using an obscure tool known as the Congressional Review Act to open the national forest for mining, lawmakers have called into question the validity of every management plan issued by the U.S. Forest Service over the past several decades. That could result in legal chaos for thousands of permits covering logging, grazing, mining and outdoor recreation.

Over the past year, Congress for the first time has used the Congressional Review Act to revoke management plans for regions managed by the Bureau of Land Management, seeking to allow more mining and drilling. Such plans had not previously been considered "rules" subject to lawmakers' review.

Under the act, federal agencies must submit new regulations to Congress before they can take effect. Because management plans, which function as high-level guidance documents, were never considered rules, federal agencies did not submit them to Congress for review.

Using a new legal theory, Republicans in Congress have opened reviews and revoked several specific plans that limited resource extraction in Alaska, Montana, North Dakota and Wyoming. But those actions call into question whether more than 100 other such plans are legally in effect, since they are now considered rules that were not sent to Congress as the law requires.

Public lands experts say the new interpretation could create legal jeopardy across hundreds of millions of acres managed by the Bureau of Land Management, threatening any permit issued under a manage-

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ment plan drafted after the passage of the Congressional Review Act in 1996.

Now, for the first time, Congress has used the review tool to overturn a management decision on Forest Service land.

"There's a huge playing field of actions that would be forbidden if none of these management plans are lawfully in place," Robert Anderson, who served as solicitor for the Department of the Interior during the Biden administration, told Stateline earlier this year. "This could bring things to a screeching halt."

Longtime outdoors writer Wes Siler, who has written extensively about the Boundary Waters review battle, said in a post Thursday that the vote will "destroy the Forest Service's ability to conduct regular business for the foreseeable future." If the agency's management plans suddenly become invalid, he wrote, "not only could this grind industrial operations on (Forest Service) land to a halt as all of this winds its way through federal court, but it could also set (the Forest Service) the task of re-doing 30 years of work."

On Thursday, the Senate voted 50-49 to revoke a Biden-era plan that banned mining on land in the Superior National Forest. The resolution will now go to President Donald Trump for his signature.

A Chilean mining company has proposed to mine for copper, nickel and cobalt along Birch Lake in Minnesota. The planned mine would sit at the headwaters of the wilderness area's watershed. The Boundary Waters is the most popular wilderness in the country, and advocates say the water is so pristine that many visitors fill their bottles straight from the surface of its lakes.

Wilderness proponents say such mines have a long track record of pollution, and leaks from the proposed site would flow downstream and irreversibly contaminate the treasured Boundary Waters.

U.S. Rep. Pete Stauber, the Minnesota Republican who sponsored the review action, has said the mine would bring jobs to the region. Opponents have argued that the tourism economy centered on the Boundary Waters is a larger economic driver, and noted that the mine will be run by a foreign company that will likely export the copper to China.

U.S. Sen. Tina Smith, a Minnesota Democrat, led the effort to uphold the mining ban on the Senate floor. Following the vote, she said that supporters of the Boundary Waters would likely mount a legal challenge, questioning the use of the Congressional Review Act to revoke a public land order from the Forest Service.

"I question the legality of what Congress did," Smith said, according to the Minnesota Reformer.

Two Republican senators, Susan Collins of Maine and Thom Tillis of North Carolina, also voted against the measure. Tillis also questioned the use of the Congressional Review Act.

"It's a precedent that I think our Republican colleagues are going to regret," he told The Minnesota Star Tribune.

The Forest Service oversees nearly 200 million acres of land, managed for multiple uses, including timber harvests, grazing, outdoor recreation and wildlife habitat. Some legal experts fear the management plans governing those activities are now in legal jeopardy.

"That right there is chaos," Peter Van Tuyn, a longtime environmental lawyer and managing partner at Bessenyey & Van Tuyn LLC, told Stateline earlier this year.

"Those (plans) go across the full spectrum of what land managers do: conservation and preservation, mining approvals, oil and gas drilling, resource exploitation, public access and recreation," he added. "There's a very real chance that a court could say that a resource management plan was never in effect and all the implementation actions under the umbrella of that plan are invalid."

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

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

Pushback leads Homeland Security to compromise on some warehouse detention centers for immigrants

BY: TIM HENDERSON

Some of the Trump administration's controversial new warehouse immigration detention centers are getting scaled back and postponed as states and cities fight back and new Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin reviews actions taken by his ousted predecessor, Kristi Noem.

Some states and cities have seen more communication and compromise as Mullin takes over and the Department of Homeland Security faces a continued funding shutdown that has reached 60 days.

That includes discussions about a proposed Arizona detention center where DHS agreed to scale back the number of prisoners by two-thirds and pay a city for lost taxes, and a proposed center in Maryland with a similar offer from the department. A lawsuit also is holding up work on that detention center. And in Georgia, a small city cut off the water supply to a proposed immigrant holding site.

A plan to house up to 1,500 immigrants in Surprise, Arizona, starting as soon as May was scaled back to 542 detainees starting in October at the earliest, and DHS agreed to pay the city \$300,000 a year for lost property taxes. The department also may offer more to help with any police costs, after negotiations with DHS under Mullin.

"With the new leadership there's been a lot of communication," Surprise Mayor Kevin Sartor told a local radio show April 15, a contrast to the "very frustrating" experience of how the city learned from news reports in January that DHS had purchased a 418,000-square-foot distribution center for \$70 million.

"We do have a different leadership style," Mullin said in a CNBC interview April 16, comparing himself to Noem. "We want to make sure people understand that we're here working for the people, not against you."

In Maryland, the new DHS administration has also offered a scale-back from 1,500 detainees to 542, in a Williamsport warehouse bought for \$102 million in January. An April 15 court order keeps most work on the center paused as the state continues a lawsuit claiming "impacts on the environmental, economic, and public health and safety interests of the state."

In Arizona, dozens of Democratic state lawmakers sent a letter in April asking the city of Surprise to "stop the facility from opening at all costs," but Mayor Sartor has said he doesn't see a legal basis for a lawsuit. The mayor's office is nonpartisan, but Republicans predominate among registered voters in the city by almost 2-1 over Democrats.

Communities across the country are facing the results of a massive detention expansion fueled in large part by the record \$45 billion approved for increased immigration detention by Congress last summer.

Other state and local action on the plan to repurpose warehouses for detention centers include a Kansas City, Missouri, ban on nonmunicipal detention facilities passed in January. Developers halted the sale of a south Kansas City warehouse in February.

Owners of an Indiana warehouse sent a letter saying they weren't in active negotiations with for the site, which had been reported as a potential detention center and drew local opposition from the town of Merrillville. Democratic lawmakers in Florida opposed plans for a warehouse detention center near Orlando in February, while some Republican lawmakers supported it.

In Georgia, the city of Social Circle cut off water and sewer service for a \$128.6 million warehouse proposed to hold 10,000 detainees, saying the town of 5,000 people did not have the capacity to serve it.

"The city's infrastructure cannot accommodate this level of demand," according to a February statement from the city, despite a "certainly creative" solution suggested by DHS to fill a water-supply cistern at times of low demand.

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Tim Henderson covers demographics for Stateline. He has been a reporter at the Miami Herald, the Cincinnati Enquirer and the Journal News.

Limits on speech rights for military retirees at issue in Sen. Kelly case against DOD

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — Arizona Democratic Sen. Mark Kelly's legal team is urging a federal appeals court to uphold a ruling that allows the former Navy captain to keep his retirement rank and pay while his First Amendment case against the Pentagon moves forward.

Benjamin C. Mizer, partner at Arnold & Porter, wrote in a brief filed April 15 that the Defense Department violated Kelly's constitutional rights when it tried to punish him for appearing alongside other Democrats in the "Don't Give Up The Ship" video.

The Trump administration's appeal of the district court's ruling, he wrote, doesn't cite "a single case" that has expanded the limited speech rights of active-duty military members to "retirees like Senator Kelly."

The legal precedent the Trump administration did reference, *Parker v. Levy*, "involved an active-duty officer directly urging soldiers at his wartime military post to refuse specific orders to deploy and fight," Mizer wrote.

"Senator Kelly, by contrast, is a retired officer and legislator who publicly called, alongside other Members of Congress, for adherence to settled law, not defiance of it," Mizer wrote.

'Illegal orders' video posted in November

Kelly, Michigan Sen. Elissa Slotkin, Colorado Rep. Jason Crow, New Hampshire Rep. Maggie Goodlander, and Pennsylvania Reps. Chris Deluzio and Chrissy Houlahan, all Democrats with backgrounds in the military or national security, posted the video at the center of the case on Nov. 18.

They said that Americans in those institutions "can" and "must refuse illegal orders."

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

Mizer wrote in his legal brief that "Kelly never told members of the armed forces to refuse any particular military orders. The video did not even identify any specific military orders or operations."

Mizer added the obligation to refuse clearly illegal orders "is a bedrock of the law of armed conflict."

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth announced in January that he would attempt to downgrade Kelly's retirement rank and pay for his participation in the video, leading the senator to file a lawsuit.

Senior Judge Richard J. Leon of the District of Columbia District Court issued a preliminary injunction in February, blocking that from taking effect while the case progresses through the legal system.

The Trump administration appealed the preliminary injunction to the Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit, which has scheduled oral arguments for May 7.

Karen LeCraft Henderson, nominated by President George H.W. Bush in 1990; Cornelia T.L. Pillard, nominated by President Barack Obama in 2013; and Florence Y. Pan, nominated by President Joe Biden in 2022, make up the three-judge panel that will decide whether to uphold the district court's preliminary injunction or overturn it.

DOJ argues discipline at risk

Assistant Attorney General Brett A. Shumate wrote in a 71-page brief filed March 20 the district court judge's ruling "was gravely wrong and sweeps far beyond Kelly's suit, calling into question the military's ability to maintain discipline among servicemembers."

Shumate added later in the filing that "while retired officers may well have greater speech rights than active-duty servicemembers in some respects, the district court erred in holding that they are indistinguishable from civilians for purposes of First Amendment analysis."

"The court reasoned that retired officers cannot undermine discipline as significantly as active-duty servicemembers, but that conclusion is unsupportable."

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Shumate contended that the "district court also erred insofar as it suggested that Kelly is entitled to heightened First Amendment protection because he is a Member of Congress. Whatever enhanced speech rights Kelly has in that capacity, they come from other constitutional provisions, not the First Amendment."

"If anything, Kelly's role in Congress provides more, not less, reason to hold him as accountable as other servicemembers for counseling disobedience to lawful orders, given that his 'leadership position' as a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee gives him 'unique sway over the military,'" Shumate wrote.

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

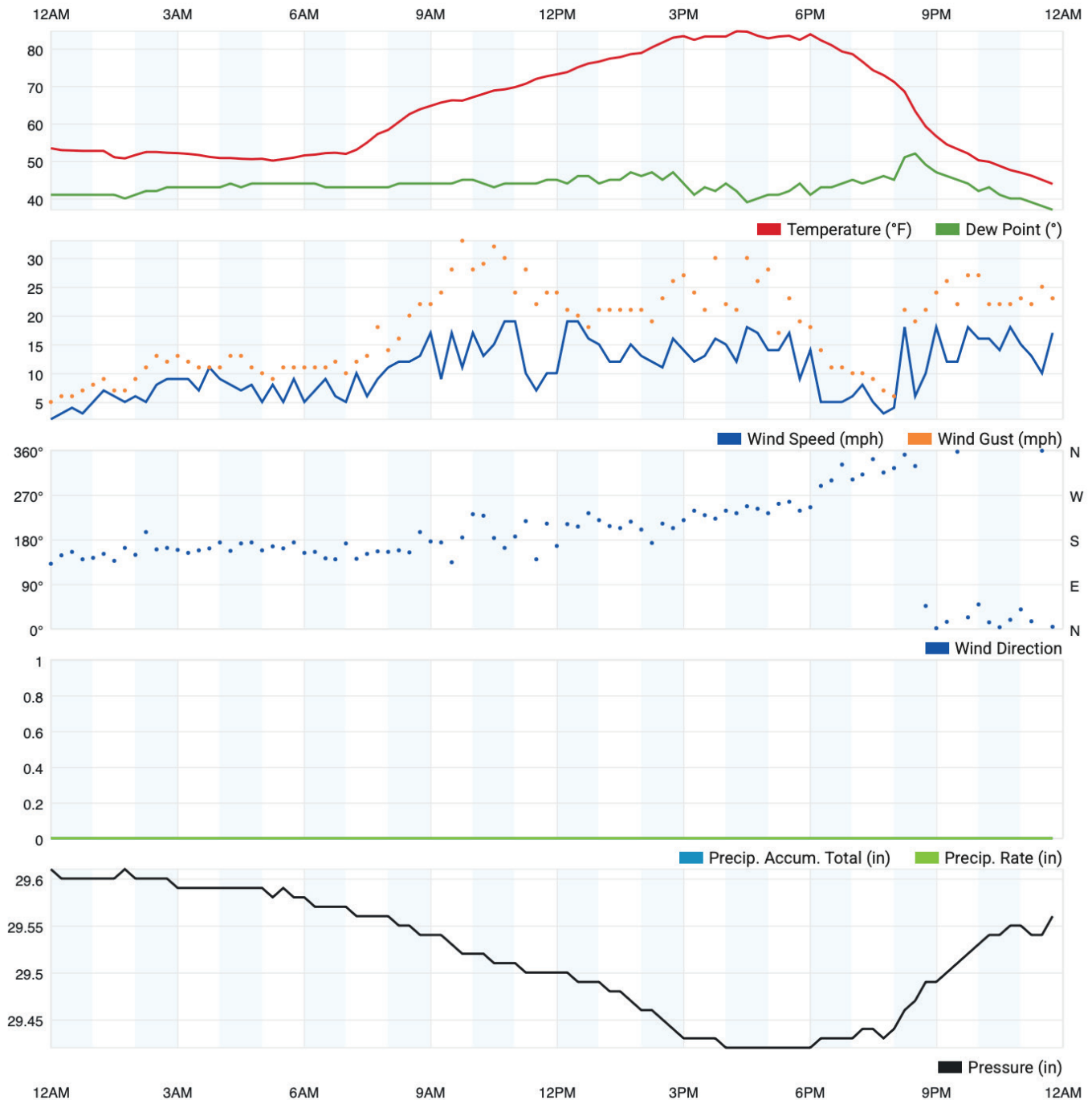
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

April 16, 2026



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Today



High: 46 °F

Sunny then
Sunny and
Breezy

Tonight



Low: 25 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Sunday



High: 48 °F

Sunny

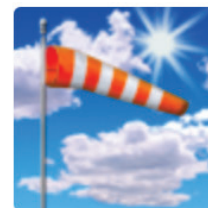
Sunday Night



Low: 29 °F

Mostly Clear

Monday



High: 71 °F

Mostly Sunny
and Breezy



Below Normal Temperatures Today

April 18, 2026
3:28 AM CDT

Highs roughly 10 degrees below normal

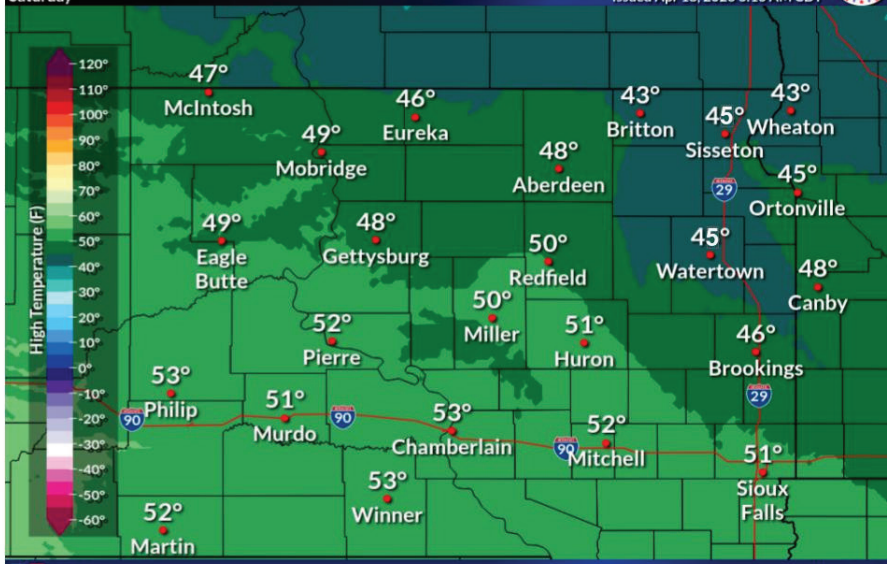
- Continued cool and windy today.
- Northwest winds gusting 25 to 35 mph.
- Warmer temperatures in the 70s and 80s Monday - Thursday next week!**

Site	Forecast	Normal
Aberdeen	48°	59°
Mobridge	49°	60°
Pierre	52°	60°
Sisseton	45°	56°
Watertown	45°	55°

High Temperature Forecast

Saturday

Weather Forecast Office
Aberdeen, SD
Issued Apr 18, 2026 3:10 AM CDT



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

A cool air mass will remain in place across the Northern Plains today, along with gusty northwest winds. Highs will be in the 40s to low 50s, which are roughly 10 degrees below normal for this time of year. Increasing clouds by late afternoon and evening may bring a few sprinkles or light snow showers.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 46 °F at 2:03 PM

Low Temp: 29 °F at 11:28 PM

Wind: 34 mph at 6:46 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 89 in 1985

Record Low: 13 in 1953

Average High: 59

Average Low: 32

Average Precip in April.: 0.91

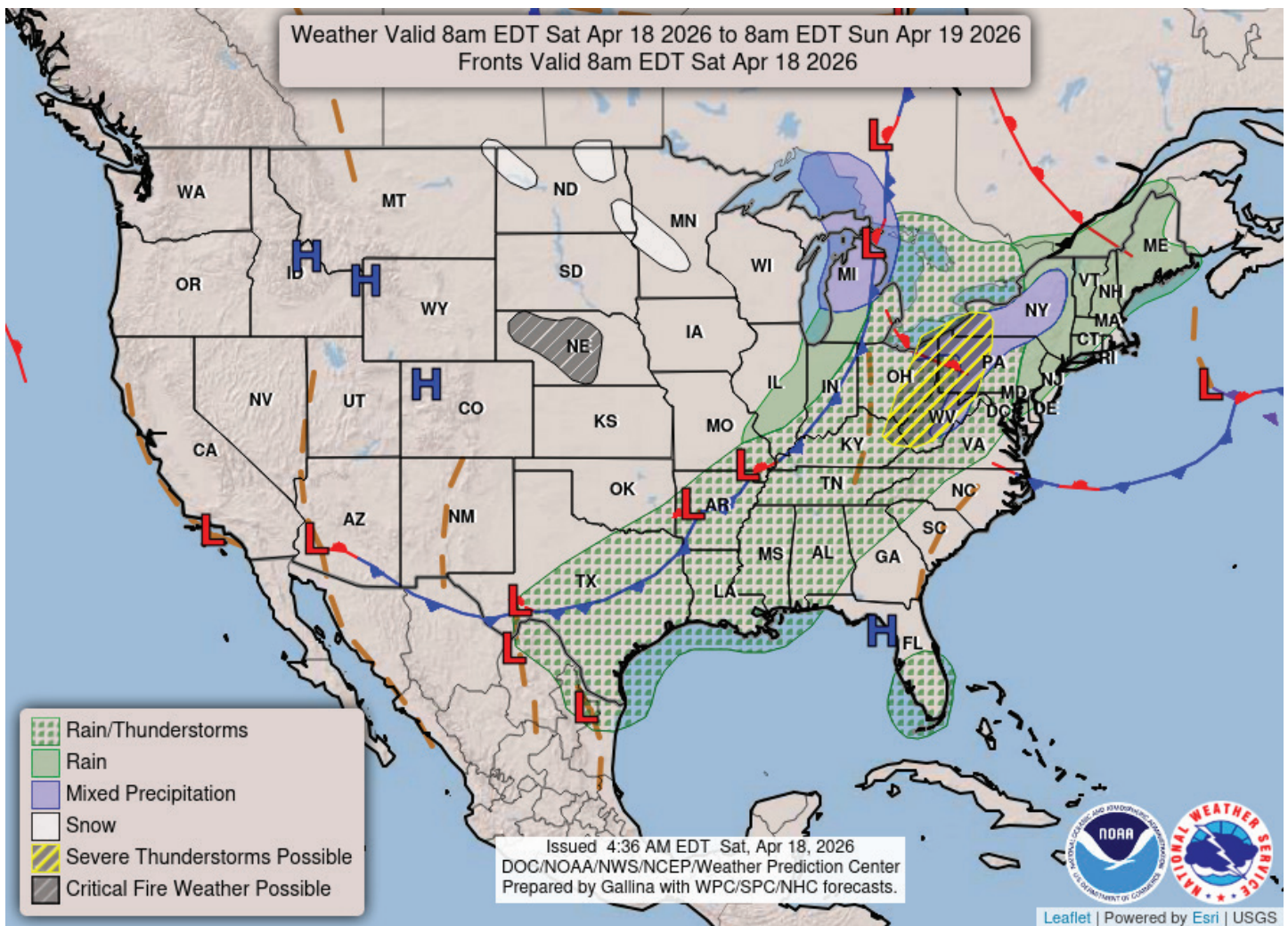
Precip to date in April.: 0.95

Average Precip to date: 2.97

Precip Year to Date: 2.57

Sunset Tonight: 8:21 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:39 am



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Today in Weather History

April 17-18th, 1995: Eight inches to two feet of snow fell in central South Dakota in two days from the 17th to the 18th. Many businesses, schools, and roads closed on the 18th. Hundreds of power poles were downed due to the heavy snow and high winds in Faulk, Hughes, Sully, Hyde, Hand, Lyman, and Buffalo Counties, leaving thousands of people without power. Some significant calf losses also occurred (around 10 to 20 percent in some areas), especially in Hand County. Snowfall amounts included 24.0 inches at Vivian, Ree Heights, and in the Murdo area; 23.0 inches at Kennebec, 18.0 inches at Highmore, 16.0 inches at Blunt, 15.0 inches at Miller and Faulkton, and 8.0 inches at Gettysburg.

1880 — More than two dozen tornadoes were reported from Kansas and Arkansas to Wisconsin and Michigan. More than 100 persons were killed, including 65 persons at Marshfield MO. (David Ludlum)

1906 — A severe earthquake shook San Francisco, and unusual easterly winds spread fires destroying the city. (David Ludlum)

1944 — California experienced its worst hailstorm of record. Damage mounted to two million dollars as two consecutive storms devastated the Sacramento Valley destroying the fruit crop. (The Weather Channel)

1957 — A dust devil near Dracut MA lifted a small child three feet into the air, and rolled two other children on the ground. Fortunately none of the three were hurt. The dust devil was accompanied by a loud whistling sound as it moved westward. (The Weather Channel)

1970 — Rapid City, SD, received a record 22 inches of snow in 24 hours. (17th-18th) (The Weather Channel)

1987 — Thirty-one cities in the central U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date, including International Falls MN with a reading of 88 degrees, and Bismarck ND with a high of 92 degrees. A sharp cold front produced high winds in the western U.S. Winds in Utah gusted to 99 mph at the Park City Angle Station, and capsized a boat on Utah Lake drowning four persons. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — Afternoon and evening thunderstorms produced large hail and damaging winds in the southeastern U.S. A strong (F-2) tornado severely damaged seventeen mobile homes near Bainbridge GA injuring three persons. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 — Thunderstorms produced large hail and damaging winds in Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas. A thunderstorm in Pecos County of southwest Texas produced wind gusts to 90 mph at Imperial. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1990 — Heavy snow blanketed the west central valleys and southwest mountains of Colorado with up to 18 inches of snow. Nine cities from the Mid Mississippi Valley to the Middle Atlantic Coast Region reported record low temperatures for the date, including Fort Wayne IND with a reading of 23 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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Daily Devotion

Sent to Serve

**Pause a moment and ask God to open your eyes
to the people around you who need encouragement and hope.**

John 17:18-21: 18 ``As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.
19 ``For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.
20 ``I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word;
21 that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us,
so that the world may believe that You sent Me.

Too often, people wrongly believe they have no real purpose in life. But that isn't what God has planned for His children. So let's look to Jesus as our example for how to think and live. Scripture clearly shows His coming was no accident and His time was not wasted—He came to accomplish a goal.

Many times in the Gospels, Jesus referred to having been sent by the Father. That word implies focus and intention. Jesus didn't just appear; He was sent into the world for a clear purpose.

And what was that purpose? Matthew 20:28 reveals Jesus came not to conquer but to serve. His life shows a clear mission, and everything He did in the Gospels—revealing the Father, dying for sin, saving the lost, and providing abundant life—was an integral part of His purpose.

No matter where He was, who He was with, or what He was doing, the Lord was always mindful of the reason for His coming. What's more, just as Jesus was sent by the Father, so we are sent by Christ—to carry His message of hope throughout the world. Is this purpose evident in your life? Pray for clarity and focus as you serve the Lord today.

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:

04.17.26

2 17 40 50 57 5

TOP PRIZE:

\$1,000,000/year

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 16 Mins 51 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

04.17.26

38 43 44 49 62 8

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$140,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[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: 16 Hrs 16 Mins 51 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

04.15.26

6 7 11 12 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$56,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 31 Mins 51 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

04.15.26

8 11 41 44 53 3

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 51 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: 17 Hrs 51 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Stuck in Neutral: Nebraska used to be a leader in creating jobs and spurring growth. Not anymore.

By HENRY J. CORDES/Flatwater Free Press Flatwater Free Press

Not long ago, Nebraska's growth was quite literally a national cover story.

Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts soared through the air wearing skis and goggles on the Olympic-themed March 2018 cover of Site Selection, an economic development industry magazine.

The cartoon image illustrated Nebraska's high-flying, three-year run as winner of the "Governor's Cup," awarded to the state landing the most economic development projects per capita in the nation.

But when Site Selection last month named the top development states for 2025, Nebraska was nowhere to be found. It didn't crack the magazine's top 10 at all, the second straight year it missed the list.

It's the latest indicator that formerly front-running Nebraska has lost its edge when it comes to competing for jobs and economic growth, creating what state business leaders see as an urgent challenge and cloud darkening the state's future.

A Flatwater Free Press analysis comparing Nebraska job growth to that of six neighboring states illustrates the state's diminished economic competitiveness — and suggests it has cost Nebraska 70,000 jobs in recent years.

Those vanishing jobs mean fewer families, less prosperity and lower tax collections to support education and other vital services, said Dana Bradford, an Omaha businessman who has worked on the state's employment challenges as past chairman of the Greater Omaha Chamber and Aksarben Foundation.

"It's a silent killer," Bradford told the Flatwater Free Press. "Somewhere along the line, companies just decided, 'We are going somewhere else.'"

Economists, business leaders, economic developers and others cite a variety of complex challenges behind Nebraska's slip in growing jobs, including the state's worker shortage, a lack of affordable housing and child care, a lack of growth in high-paying jobs and the longtime "brain drain" of young college graduates to other states.

But some also cite a far simpler reason: State leaders have not made growth a priority.

A statewide economic development strategy produced in 2019 by a blue-ribbon panel of Nebraskans was largely shelved. State policymakers did enact some of Blueprint Nebraska's tax recommendations — in a way that burdened state finances with a deepening structural deficit.

Tens of millions of dollars have been sliced from economic development programs as Gov. Jim Pillen and the Legislature work to balance the budget.

The Pillen administration, through cuts and attrition, has slashed staffing inside the Nebraska Department of Economic Development by 27% in the past nine months alone.

State lawmakers have capped tax incentive payments, creating uncertainty in the programs. Last year, they passed a Pillen-championed anti-China bill that made many of the nation's biggest corporations ineligible to receive tax incentives, a move they're now seeking to fix.

Nebraska has "stepped back" from its focus on economic development at the same time that competing states are stepping up efforts, the Greater Omaha Chamber said in a recent report.

"I just don't think we've really had a commitment to growth in the state," said Eric Thompson, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln economist. "I just think we've been focused on other priorities — and that's OK. But this is one of the things that happens."

There are recent signs the state has begun to turn new attention to growing jobs.

A Pillen-sponsored tax bill enhancing state tax incentives passed the Legislature this year, as did measures to expand child care support and spur housing construction.

The Nebraska Chamber of Commerce and Industry is preparing to dust off Blueprint Nebraska and give it new life. The chamber earlier this year quietly launched a growth-focused initiative it's now preparing

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to roll out statewide.

Matt Williams, the state chamber's interim president, is hopeful numbers like those in the Flatwater analysis spotlight the urgent need to respond now.

"We have to use new thoughts and new energies and new directions to step up and solve these problems," he said. "The trajectory we are on right now is not going to be healthy for us in the long term."

But it won't be easy. He and other business leaders say it will take a concerted statewide effort — over a number of years — to alter the state's current course.

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In 1987, the economic anxiety across Nebraska was palpable.

Omaha was reeling from the departure of an energy company — the not-yet-infamous Enron — to Houston. Food giant ConAgra was threatening to leave, too. The deepest agricultural depression in a half-century threatened the entire state. There was a sinking feeling Nebraska was being left behind.

"The sky could be falling," recalled John Cederberg, a business accountant long active in state policy. "I don't think it was psychological. It was real."

In response, the Legislature for the first time enacted major business incentives, providing tax cuts for businesses that invest and create jobs in the state.

The program known by its LB 775 bill number was blasted as costly "corporate welfare." But the results were hard to argue.

In the decade prior to LB 775, Nebraska's private sector job growth trailed the average for the other states in the north-central Great Plains — Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, South Dakota, North Dakota and Minnesota.

After, it began easily topping the region average, typically leading all the states but the Dakotas in average annual growth. A Flatwater analysis shows that by 2000, Nebraska had 90,000 more jobs than it would have had it continued to trail the region's growth as before.

Nebraska remained a regional job growth leader into this century. But sometime around 2010, the narrative flipped.

Nebraska's job growth had exceeded the regional average in 14 of 19 years prior to 2010. It has trailed the region in 11 of the 16 years since.

Nebraska's annual average growth rate was 42% higher than the region's in the two decades before 2010. If it had kept that pace from 2010 on, the state would boast 70,000 more jobs than it currently does.

Instead, it has trailed the region's growth by 6% in that time frame.

Nebraska has lost ground to every regional competitor except Iowa, which has recently posted even more dismal job growth.

While Nebraska's private sector employment was flat over the past two years, Iowa lost 28,000 such jobs. The other five states in the region added a combined 50,000 jobs in that time.

The new analysis follows studies released last fall by the Omaha chamber and Aksarben Foundation that found job growth in Omaha and Lincoln is trailing regional peer cities.

But the Flatwater analysis offers a longer view and reveals the starkly different fortunes before and after 2010. That appears to suggest something fundamental has changed.

Josie Schafer, director of the University of Nebraska at Omaha's Center for Public Affairs Research, said 2010 is meaningful to her, because that's right around the time Nebraska and the nation hit a "demographic cliff."

The oldest Baby Boomers were beginning to enter their retirement years, while the smaller millennial generation was moving into the workforce.

"The Baby Boom generation retiring is such a big deal because ... we don't have a replacement for it," she said.

The resulting worker shortage changed the game, as states' attention turned from chasing companies to chasing people. Nebraska, it appears, has not fared well in that competition.

That notion is also supported by data on the "brain drain" — the loss through migration of college-educated people — that Schafer tracks.

In 2010, Nebraska was annually losing a net of about 1,000 people with bachelor's degrees or higher.

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By 2020: 4,000 per year. The figure is still over 3,000 annually.

Bryan Slone, former CEO of the state chamber, said 2010 also signaled the dawn of a technology boom marked by the explosion of smartphones and apps.

In 2010, Apple sold fewer than 40 million iPhones. In 2015, it sold 230 million.

Nebraska has a growing tech sector, Slone said, but it's not growing like other states and has not been viewed as a technology state. That's making it harder to attract tech jobs and young tech workers.

"It's very easy in this era to go in a downward spiral ... because there's a chicken and egg," he said. "You can't grow your economy without young people, but you can't attract young people without having a growing economy."

In 2010, Nebraska and the nation were also emerging from the Great Recession brought on by a housing market collapse. Housing construction in Nebraska dipped sharply amid the recession. It has never recovered.

That has led to a shortage of affordable housing and caused housing prices to spike, putting a single-family home out of the reach of many families. That, too, makes it harder to attract workers and families.

Nebraska could long boast cheap housing as a big selling point, and compared to the coasts, that's still true. But in the seven-state region, a Flatwater analysis of federal cost-of-living data suggests Nebraska's housing costs since 2008 have risen from fourth highest to the second highest.

"I do believe housing is a big part of this," Slone said.

The need to build more housing. Attract young workers. Grow tech. All of those have a familiar ring. In fact, the state nearly seven years ago came out with a "blueprint" for tackling such issues.

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During nearly a decade as CEO of Omaha-based Union Pacific railroad, Lance Fritz saw firsthand how ferociously Nebraska's neighbors fight for jobs.

He remembers Arkansas' then-governor had a war room next to his office, where maps on the wall with pins and markers denoted new business targets. Iowa, Kansas and Utah aggressively pursued UP jobs — some even making bids to wrest the entire headquarters out of the city it's been based in since 1862.

"I would get calls all the time with different packages, seeing if they could make it attractive enough to locate there or relocate there — exit Nebraska entirely," he said.

Some of the offers were tempting, he said, though never quite enough to justify the pain the company and its employees would endure by picking up and leaving.

Nebraska, Fritz said, needs to worry about that equation all the time.

"Whether we recognize it or not, Nebraska is in a fight for its economic survival, and the fact that we are not growing is very troublesome," he said. "In my personal opinion, we're not doing enough to make us look attractive to the vast population that could potentially be here."

Around 2017, Fritz and other Omaha business leaders expressed concerns to then-Gov. Ricketts about the state's economic trajectory and their difficulty finding workers.

That helped prompt Ricketts, then-University of Nebraska President Hank Bounds and others to launch Blueprint Nebraska, a statewide effort to produce an economic development strategy.

Fritz co-chaired the effort with Owen Palm, a major implement dealer in Nebraska's Panhandle. Its steering committee featured business and community leaders from across the state, and it received input from thousands of Nebraskans.

In 2019, the panel's report offered myriad ways to grow. They included tax reform, aligning the state education system from pre-K to career, stepped up housing construction and growing key industries, including tech.

But full-scale efforts to make this plan a reality never got off the ground, Slone and others said.

COVID-19 hit, making it harder to move forward and posing its own economic challenges. Slone and Fritz noted progress was made in some areas, including taxes.

A Blueprint follow-up tax study called for cutting income taxes and unpopular property taxes to make the state more competitive while also broadening the state sales tax to assure stable state finances.

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The Legislature under governors Ricketts and Pillen moved to significantly cut both income and property taxes, but hasn't broadened the sales tax.

And after federal COVID relief money vanished, the pain of simply cutting taxes, but not replacing the lost revenue, has become obvious.

The income tax cuts are estimated by the Legislature to have reduced state revenues by more than \$800 million in the current fiscal year. And dollars devoted to reducing property taxes have become an ever-growing share of the budget, now amounting to one-sixth of all state spending.

Those are big reasons the state over the last two years has been making hundreds of millions of dollars in cuts to state spending — among them tens of millions in cuts to economic development programs intended to help grow the state.

Such cuts have fallen on an internship program aimed at addressing the worker shortage, a national marketing campaign to attract workers, new housing support, business site development funds and a tax credit helping businesses pay for the cost of hiring and relocating out-of-state workers.

"If you look at the facts, you can easily see (economic development) is not a priority," said Bradford, the former Omaha chamber chair. "Some people are OK with just focusing on property taxes."

Without a focus on growing the state, he said, Nebraskans' tax burdens are only going to increase.

An Omaha chamber report in December likewise raised questions about the state's "posture toward economic development."

"Economic development efforts statewide have difficulty succeeding," it read, "when the state is not an integral partner."

In addition to the tax changes, Blueprint may have contributed to original decisions by the Legislature to boost funding for affordable housing construction.

Fritz also noted that to attract workers, the Blueprint report had recommended Nebraska focus on becoming a more welcoming state. He said that has been undercut by controversial social issues lawmakers have prioritized in recent years.

While the Legislature's default position for decades was to support tax incentives, Cederberg and others said, in the past decade such programs have faced more pushback. The Legislature at one point struggled to get the votes to reauthorize the state's main incentive program, now called ImagiNE Nebraska.

Pillen has also been seen by some within the business community as not friendly to incentives. Last year, Pillen said all of Nebraska's tax credit and relief programs "should be focused on working-class Nebraskans, not Fortune 500 companies." And the Department of Revenue under his anti-China bill sent letters seeking to retroactively deny businesses incentives they had earned for growing in the state.

But Pillen also introduced and pushed an incentives bill passed by lawmakers in April, one whose main purpose is to lure high-paying jobs in Union Pacific's proposed merger with Norfolk Southern. It includes other enhancements to the state's incentives programs and received praise from the Omaha chamber.

The Pillen administration in a statement defended the governor's record on economic development, saying he has made it a "central priority."

The statement mentioned numerous Pillen initiatives, including tax cuts, scholarships for high ACT scorers and a new regional economic development strategy launched with the state chamber in 2024.

The administration has acknowledged recent reductions in the Department of Economic Development, defending it as right-sizing the agency after it swelled due to pandemic-era programs.

"Nebraskans are amazing innovators who can outcompete anyone, anywhere," Pillen said in the statement. "We're creating a culture that's primed for long-term economic prosperity by investing in our kids, cutting taxes, boosting value-added agriculture, and giving businesses the freedom to grow."

Business leaders, though, say there remains much more to be done.

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During a future-focused meeting in La Vista in late February, the Nebraska chamber brought Blueprint leaders Fritz and Palm back to the stage. Fritz's message to the hundreds gathered was simple.

"Pick up the ball," he said.

The gathering kicked off what the Nebraska chamber is calling "Go Big Future," a plan meant to refocus the state on the growth-centered goals and competitive strategies spinning out of the Blueprint report.

"Some of those things, honestly, if they had been done, we would not see the change we're seeing in the (job growth) data," said the chamber's Williams.

Go Big Future, like Blueprint, will focus on workforce and technology. A third prong: Making sure Nebraska has enough energy to grow — an issue that has risen to prominence since Blueprint.

One of the themes at the Go Big Future kickoff was the need to recognize the challenges the state faces and the effort required to address them.

Nebraska starts with a higher quality of life than most states, Slone said, making him optimistic it can reverse recent job growth trends. But it will take a sustained and broad-based effort.

"This has to be tackled by government, business, philanthropy and community leaders," Slone said. "Everybody."

Eyewitnesses recount three deadly Israeli strikes on medics in southern Lebanon

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

NABATIYEH, Lebanon (AP) — It was late morning when two ambulances slowed to a stop outside of the village of Mayfadoun in southern Lebanon.

Having heard minutes earlier on Wednesday that Israel had attacked two other ambulances, hitting one and then the other after it showed up to help the first, they didn't hesitate before rushing to the scene. They knew the danger, and they found a hellscape.

The first two ambulances were destroyed, their tires blown and windows shattered. Six of their eight crew members were covered in blood and lying in the road or the back of one vehicle. A paramedic in one of the driver's seats, blood pulsing from his abdomen, was cradling a colleague in his lap, pleading with him to stay conscious.

"I felt sick. I couldn't believe my eyes," Mohammed Jaber, 43, told The Associated Press on Friday from his emergency team's headquarters in Nabatiyeh, where team members dozed on foam mattresses. A 10-day truce in the Israel-Hezbollah war delivered the exhausted team a rare respite from the drum line of explosions.

Jaber said he and the others hurried to load the most critically injured into their working ambulances. As team leader Mahdi Abu Zaid ran to close the doors, they, too, were attacked.

The three strikes, which killed four paramedics and wounded six others, is the latest example of Israel's willingness to target Lebanon's health sector.

Such attacks became a contentious issue during the 2024 Israel-Hezbollah war, as Israel accused Hezbollah, as it did Hamas in Gaza, of using Lebanese hospitals as cover for militant activities — a claim denied by Hezbollah and the Lebanese Health Ministry.

The attacks haven't slowed, as humanitarian agencies report that an average of two health workers have been killed every day in this war before a truce took hold Friday.

Back-to-back-to-back strikes

In response to questions about the Mayfadoun strikes, the Israeli army did not repeat its previous accusations about Hezbollah's use of health facilities. Instead, it said it was aware of reports about the ambulance attacks and "the incident is under review."

The attack on the third team of ambulances to make a rescue attempt Wednesday happened as they were still assessing the first two crews' injuries, less than six minutes after their arrival.

An Israeli drone smashed the vehicles' windows and struck 30-year-old Abu Zaid, throwing him to the ground, his colleagues told the AP. Abu Zaid, who had a 4-year-old son and sold spices and nuts when he wasn't volunteering as a paramedic, was later proclaimed dead on arrival at al-Najda Hospital.

Their accounts of what happened match footage captured by a GoPro camera that was strapped on one

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of the paramedics. The video shows a barrage of fire hitting the ambulance as medical workers administered first aid to two colleagues in blood-soaked clothes, one taking shallow breaths through an oxygen mask.

After the third attack, a fourth team of rescuers finally managed to reach the stranded medics and evacuate the wounded without being targeted.

Risking their lives to save lives

The attacks on the ambulances have drawn condemnation, including from the United Nations' human rights office, which said it was "shocked" and warned that intentionally targeting medics constituted a war crime.

For the emergency workers involved, it was the latest example of Israel's efforts to wreck southern Lebanon's health system as its army extends security control to the Litani River, some 20 miles (30 kilometers) into Lebanese territory, in a bid to protect its northern towns from Iran-backed Hezbollah.

"They should be targeting fighters, where the fighting is happening, at the border," said Jaber. "Why target medics and civilians? So that life becomes unbearable and people tell Hezbollah to give up?"

The Lebanese Health Ministry has recorded at least 100 medical workers killed since Israel launched its bombing campaign and ground invasion in Lebanon in retaliation for Hezbollah firing missiles across the border on March 2, after Israel and the United States began strikes against Iran.

"This war is different than all the other wars," said Mohammed Suleiman, the chief paramedic for Nabatiyeh Emergency Services.

His own son, 16-year-old Joud — who had been tagging along and helping on missions since he was a young child — was killed with a fellow paramedic in an Israeli strike on their motorcycle on March 24 — the unit's first casualties since its founding in 2002.

"I always had my fears, but I believed that as a neutral organization with no connection to politics, we would be safe, off-limits," he said.

Israel pursues Hezbollah-linked civilian targets

Apart from its armed wing, Hezbollah is one of Lebanon's most powerful political parties and runs a sprawling network of civilian institutions including hospitals and schools.

The first two teams of paramedics attacked on Wednesday were dispatched by the Islamic Health Committee, a major health care provider affiliated with Hezbollah, and the Risala Scout Association, a paramedic group affiliated with Hezbollah's ally, the Amal movement.

Dozens of paramedics from both groups have been killed in these six weeks of war. The main Islamic Health Committee clinic in the village of Jibsheit, near Nabatiyeh, was destroyed by an Israeli airstrike last month, one of 59 primary health care centers shuttered due to Israeli attacks, according to the World Health Organization.

The U.N. health agency also denounced Israeli strikes that twice in a matter of three days this week hit Lebanon's Tebnine Government Hospital, one of the region's busiest trauma centers, wounding 11 medical workers, damaging the emergency department and pharmacy and ruining critical equipment like ventilators and monitors.

An ambulance 'to bear witness'

With the ceasefire in effect on Friday, the Nabatiyeh medics rented a tow truck and ventured back to the roadside in Mayfadoun where they had been attacked. The three ambulances sat there, peppered with shrapnel, and the asphalt was stained with blood.

They hauled Abu Zeid's mangled ambulance to a public square in Nabatiyeh, where they said they hoped it would serve as a reminder.

"We want this vehicle to bear witness," said Mahdi Sadeq, a coordinator for the service. "To bear witness to what happened, to what this war has done to our profession."

Iran reimposes restrictions on Strait of Hormuz, accusing US of violating deal to reopen it

By SAMY MAGDY and SAM METZ Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Iran swiftly reversed course on reopening the Strait of Hormuz, reimposing restrictions on the critical waterway on Saturday after the U.S. said it would not end its blockade of Iran-linked shipping.

Iran's joint military command said on Saturday that "control of the Strait of Hormuz has returned to its previous state ... under strict management and control of the armed forces." It warned that it would continue to block transit through the strait as long as the U.S. blockade of Iranian ports remained in effect.

The announcement came the morning after U.S. President Donald Trump said that even after Iran announced the strait's reopening on Friday, the American blockade "will remain in full force" until Tehran reaches a deal with the U.S., including on its nuclear program.

The conflict over the chokepoint threatened to deepen the energy crisis roiling the global economy after oil prices began to fall again on Friday on hopes the U.S. and Iran were drawing closer to an agreement. Roughly one-fifth of the world's oil passes through the strait and further limits would squeeze already constrained supply, driving prices higher once again.

Control over the strait has proven to be one Iran's main points of leverage and prompted the United States to deploy forces and initiate a blockade on Iranian ports as part of an effort to force Iran to accept a Pakistan-brokered ceasefire to end almost seven weeks of war that has raged between Israel, the U.S. and Iran.

Iran said it fully reopened the Strait of Hormuz to commercial vessels after a 10-day truce was announced between Israel and the Iranian-backed Hezbollah militant group in Lebanon. An end to Israel's war with Hezbollah was a key demand of Iranian negotiators, who previously accused Israel of breaking last week's ceasefire with strikes on Lebanon. Israel had said that deal did not cover Lebanon.

But after Trump said the blockade would continue, top Iranian officials said his announcement violated last week's ceasefire agreement between Iran and the U.S. and warned the strait would not stay open if the U.S. blockade remained in effect.

A data firm, Kpler, said movement through the strait remained confined to corridors requiring Iran's approval.

U.S. forces have sent 21 ships back to Iran since the blockade began on Monday, U.S. Central Command said on X.

Pakistan announces progress toward new deal

Despite the escalation in the Strait of Hormuz, Pakistani officials say the United States and Iran are still moving closer to a deal ahead of the April 22 ceasefire deadline.

The ceasefire in Lebanon could clear one major obstacle to an agreement. Speaking at a diplomatic forum in Antalya, Turkey, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar said the ceasefire in Lebanon was a positive sign, noting that fighting between Israel and Hezbollah had been a key sticking point before talks in Islamabad ended "very close" to an agreement last weekend.

Pakistan's army chief Field Marshal Asim Munir visited Tehran, while Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif met with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Qatar's Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani in Antalya, the military and Sharif's office said. Pakistan is expected to host a second round of talks between Iran and the U.S. early next week.

Questions linger about Lebanon truce

Even though mediators were optimistic, it was unclear to what extent Hezbollah would abide by a truce it did not play a role in negotiating and which will leave Israeli troops occupying a stretch of southern Lebanon.

Trump said in another post that Israel is "prohibited" by the U.S. from further strikes on Lebanon and that "enough is enough" in the Israel-Hezbollah war.

The State Department said the prohibition applies only to offensive attacks and not to actions taken in self-defense.

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Shortly before Trump's post, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel agreed to the ceasefire in Lebanon "at the request of my friend President Trump," but that the campaign against Hezbollah is not complete.

He claimed Israel had destroyed about 90% of Hezbollah's missile and rocket stockpiles and added that Israeli forces "have not finished yet" with the dismantling of the group.

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

The Lebanese army and U.N. peacekeepers in southern Lebanon reported sporadic artillery shelling in some parts of southern Lebanon in the hours after the ceasefire took effect.

The war, which began with U.S. and Israeli strikes on Feb. 28, has killed at least 3,000 people in Iran, more than 2,290 in Lebanon, 23 in Israel and more than a dozen in Gulf Arab states. Thirteen U.S. service members have also been killed.

Starmer's Mandelson nightmare never ends. This time, it may cost him his job as UK leader

By PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British Prime Minister Keir Starmer probably wishes he had never heard the name Peter Mandelson.

Starmer is again facing questions over his future. And again, it's do with his misguided decision to appoint a self-professed "best pal" of convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein to the plummiest of plum jobs in U.K. diplomacy — ambassador to the United States.

Two months ago when he was last imperiled over the appointment in late 2024, it was his judgment that was in question. Enough for some in his Labour Party, including its leader in Scotland, to urge him to stand down.

Now, he's facing accusations that he misled Parliament over how Mandelson cleared the official hurdles to get the job in the first place.

If he's found to have done so, he will be on very thin ice, not least because Starmer put integrity at the heart of his pitch to the British electorate at the July 2024 election to replace the scandal-plagued Conservatives.

"Starmer set himself up as the guy who always followed the rules, in stark contrast to, say, Boris Johnson, and he came to power effectively promising to 'drain the swamp,'" said Tim Bale, politics professor at Queen Mary University of London.

"Because of that, the latest revelations in the unholy mess created by his ill-judged appointment of Peter Mandelson mean that many voters now see him not only as a liar but as a hypocrite — and hypocrisy is one of the worst sins that any British politician can possibly commit," he added.

The vetting bombshell

On Thursday, The Guardian newspaper revealed that Mandelson, 72, failed security vetting before he took up the ambassadorial post in early 2025. That's a problem for Starmer, who has told Parliament that "full due process" was observed.

The government stressed that Starmer and other ministers only found out earlier this week that the Foreign Office had cleared Mandelson for the job despite the assessment. The fallout quickly led to the resignation of the Foreign Office's top civil servant, Olly Robbins.

Starmer is trying to fend off questions about what he did or didn't know about the vetting process, which would have involved an assessment of Mandelson's suitability for the role in light of questions over his finances, his relationships, including that with Epstein, and his personality.

People familiar with the vetting process said that is standard practice for ministers not to be told, because of the sensitive personal information involved. They said the checks don't produce a binary pass or fail, but a risk-based assessment that leaves a final decision to senior officials like Robbins.

Starmer is also facing questions over whether he had effectively given direction to officials to sidestep

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concerns over Mandelson.

Starmer said he is "absolutely furious" that he was kept in the dark, calling it "staggering" and "unforgivable." He will make a statement to Parliament on Monday. Robbins, who was effectively fired by Starmer, is due to address lawmakers on Tuesday and may give a very different version of events.

Not Mandelson again

Mandelson was a high-risk appointment, given he had twice resigned from Labour governments for financial or ethical missteps around the turn of the century, and his acquaintance with Epstein, who died in prison in 2019.

The calculation seemingly made by Starmer was clear: the risk was worth it as Mandelson's lobbying skills and previous trade expertise would help persuade the Trump administration to spare the U.K. from some of the most onerous tariffs.

That appeared to work but by September 2025, the narrative changed after the release of emails that showed that Mandelson had supported Epstein even when he was facing jail for sex offenses. Though uncomfortable, Starmer hoped his decision to fire Mandelson would settle the matter.

However, the release of millions of pages of Epstein-related documents by the U.S. Justice Department in January put an end to that. Starmer's political judgment was questioned after emails in the Epstein files suggested that when Mandelson was a member of the Labour government, in 2009-2010, he had passed on sensitive — and potentially market-moving — government information to the disgraced financier.

British police launched a criminal probe, searched Mandelson's two houses in London and western England. Mandelson was arrested on Feb. 23 on suspicion of misconduct in public office. He was released the following morning after more than nine hours of questioning. He has not been charged, has denied any wrongdoing and does not face allegations of sexual misconduct.

Starmer has repeatedly apologized to the British public and to the victims of Epstein's sex trafficking for believing what he has termed "Mandelson's lies."

Mandelson nightmare will go on

Despite Starmer's dire personal ratings and the anticipated heavy electoral defeats for Labour in a raft of local and regional elections in May, the frenzy around his leadership had died down. His decision to not get the U.K. directly involved in the war in Iran chimed with the public mood.

Now his job is in danger again.

"This scandal is not ending," said Kemi Badenoch, leader of the main opposition Conservative Party. "He has run out of people to sack, he has run out of places to hide, he has run out of authority. The buck stops with him. His position is untenable and he must go."

Starmer's party commands a large majority in Parliament, so the prime minister's fate depends on what Labour lawmakers think.

On Monday, Starmer will gauge the mood, when he makes his statement. So far, few in his party have said he should go. If more Labour lawmakers put their heads above the parapet following a weekend of campaigning in their local electoral patches, he may be in real trouble.

Confidence in a leader can be a fragile thing, no matter how big their majority. Just ask Boris Johnson, who was elected with a thumping majority in 2019 and resigned both as prime minister and as a lawmaker three years later, after a string of scandals.

Russia has looted thousands of Ukrainian cultural objects in the war. Finding them is a challenge

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — When Alina Dotsenko returned to her museum after Ukrainian forces retook the southern city of Kherson from Russian forces in late 2022, she found thousands of artworks had vanished.

"I walked in and saw empty storage rooms, empty shelves. My legs gave way, and I just sat down by the wall, like a child," the Kherson Art Museum director said.

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Before Russia's full-scale invasion in early 2022, the museum held more than 14,000 works in a collection "ranging from America to Japan." As the Russians retreated, they loaded much of it onto trucks and took it to Russian-annexed Crimea, according to Dotsenko and video filmed by residents.

The fate of nearly 10,000 pieces remains unknown.

Ukraine is again raising its voice over the looting as Russia seeks to return to the world's cultural stage. Next month's Venice Biennale plans to allow Russian representatives to take part for the first time since 2022. Ukraine has said the event "must not become a stage for whitewashing the war crimes that Russia commits daily against the Ukrainian people and our cultural heritage."

A rare documented case of looting

The Kherson case stands out because Ukraine knows exactly what was lost.

Years before the war, Dotsenko began photographing every item in the museum's holdings, creating a digital archive. When Russian forces occupied Kherson, she hid the hard drives containing it. After Ukrainian troops returned, she retrieved them.

Today, that archive forms the most detailed record of looted cultural property during the war, allowing prosecutors to work with Interpol to trace missing works and pursue those responsible.

Across much of Ukraine, however, such documentation does not exist. And cultural losses can only be pursued in court if they can be proved, item by item.

The Russian Culture Ministry did not respond to an Associated Press request for comment on the alleged removal of items from Ukrainian museums. In the past, Russian-appointed officials in occupied territories described the removal as protective measures.

Kirill Stremousov, the former Russia-installed deputy administrator in Kherson who died shortly before Ukrainian forces liberated the city, said removed statues would "definitely return" once fighting stopped.

Carrying catalogs through checkpoints

Halyna Chumak, former director of the Donetsk Regional Art Museum, fled Russian-controlled Donetsk in 2014, carrying what she could: catalogs documenting a fraction of the museum's roughly 15,000 artworks.

She spent a year transporting the catalogs through checkpoints into Ukrainian-controlled territory, leaving most behind as she tried not to draw attention from pro-Russian forces who searched her at each crossing.

Those catalogs covering just over 1,000 items are the only surviving evidence. More than a decade later, Ukrainian entrepreneur Oleksandr Velychko is digitizing them.

It took his team over three painstaking months to process about 400 works. Once completed, the database will be given to Ukrainian authorities, providing a partial legal basis to claim ownership of missing items.

Prosecutors turn to open-source intelligence

Officials say many cases across Ukraine resemble Donetsk more than Kherson.

Anna Sosonska, deputy head of a war crimes unit at Ukraine's Prosecutor General's Office, said her department is handling 23 criminal proceedings involving cultural crimes, covering 174 episodes of looting, damage and destruction.

The Kherson museum case is among the priorities, she said, largely because of Dotsenko's digital archive.

Sosonska said Russian forces often remove inventory books and other documentation from museums, making it harder to establish what was taken.

Prosecutors sometimes rely on open-source intelligence, tracking artworks through photos, auction records and other online traces — a labor-intensive process that cannot reconstruct entire collections.

It takes time, but Sosonska noted that cultural crimes fall under international law and have no statute of limitations.

The scale of looting remains unknown

Ukrainian officials say the scale of looting far exceeds what can be documented.

According to Ukraine's Culture Ministry, Russia as of March had destroyed or damaged 1,707 cultural heritage sites and 2,503 cultural infrastructure facilities including events spaces and galleries, notably the Mariupol Drama Theatre.

The ministry said over 2.1 million museum objects remain in Russian-occupied territories. Of the territories Ukraine has retaken since 2022, over 35,000 museum items are confirmed to have been looted.

Large parts of Ukraine have been under Russian occupation since 2014, and much original documentation has been lost, destroyed or removed.

Russia has moved to formalize control over seized collections. In 2023, it amended legislation to incorporate 77 Ukrainian museums in the occupied Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions into its national catalog, a step critics say effectively prohibits the return of looted works.

Appointed as Ukraine's culture minister in October 2025, Tetiana Berezhna said digitalization will be a key priority for her office to preserve collections.

"If we had digitalized them beforehand, then we would know how many objects were stolen and what they look like," she said.

One case of accountability

A recent case in Europe has drawn attention to the possibility of accountability.

In March, a Polish court ruled that Oleksandr Butiahin, a Russian national, can be extradited to Ukraine over allegations he conducted illegal excavations in Crimea, removing artifacts from a site Ukraine considers its cultural heritage.

Butiahin was detained in Poland last year at Ukraine's request. The court's decision remains subject to appeal.

Sosonska described the case as the first time a Russian national could face prosecution for crimes against Ukraine's cultural heritage linked to occupied territory.

For museum workers like Dotsenko, the issue remains deeply personal.

She spoke with The Associated Press at an exhibition in Kyiv featuring reproductions of the paintings taken from the Kherson museum.

"While these works are still in captivity, we all hope the situation will be resolved in favor of the Kherson Art Museum. I didn't dedicate 50 years of my life to this museum for nothing," she said.

Families in Iran struggle with school closures even as the airstrikes have stopped

By AMIR VAHDAT Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Mahnaz Ataei, a finance manager in Tehran, brings her 7-year-old to the office and oversees his online classes while trying to do her job.

Schools have been closed across Iran since the United States and Israel launched the war on Feb. 28, with no word on when in-person instruction will resume. The fear of airstrikes has lifted since a fragile ceasefire went into effect, but life has not returned to normal.

As with the COVID closures six years ago, it's especially difficult for working parents with small children.

"My productivity drops when I have to pay attention to both my child and my work at the same time," Ataei said. "The hardest part is trying to create balance between work and online classes, and always stressing over whether he is really learning his lessons properly."

The war killed at last 3,000 people in Iran, including more than 165 people killed in a strike on an elementary school. The ceasefire is set to expire early next week, with the U.S. and Iran still divided on key issues like Iran's enriched uranium. A U.S. naval blockade could further damage Iran's already cratered economy.

Safer but not easier

Many parents fled Tehran with their children after the airstrikes began. But the relative safety came at the cost of disrupted routines, crowded living arrangements and financial stress. Now they are struggling to resume normal life with no idea what comes next.

"I feel like I'm suspended — neither in the air nor on the ground," said Roya Amiri, a housewife who recently returned to Tehran after fleeing with her two sons, ages 10 and 18, days after the start of the war.

The family joined hundreds of thousands of Iranians who fled the capital and other cities for safety in rural areas or the relatively unscathed north. They stayed with relatives, with 15 people living under one roof.

Tensions flared among the children as they packed into close quarters and their routines — and sleep

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— were disrupted. Her 10-year-old son has a respiratory illness, and they struggled to find his medication. Schools shut down after the initial strikes, briefly resuming with online classes for a week in March before the Nowruz holiday. Online classes resumed April 4.

Even with the risk of renewed conflict hanging over the capital, Amiri said she felt returning to Tehran was the right decision. If war breaks out again, she plans to stay in her own home.

"I was tired of living collectively. I wanted to return to my own home and routine," Amiri said. "I missed Tehran."

Reza Jafari and his wife took their children to stay with her family — in another home that soon filled with more than a dozen relatives and in-laws.

"Because the sound of explosions was distressing and my children were terrified, I left Tehran for their peace of mind," he said. "I was happy to be with relatives. It felt like a forced but valuable opportunity to reconnect."

He said the children seemed to adapt faster, surrounded by grandparents, cousins and constant activity. It was the adults who grappled with interrupted sleep, a loss of privacy, financial pressure and the exhaustion that comes from being a houseguest for weeks on end, no matter how warm the reception.

Life on fast-forward

Padideh Teymourian, an architect, and her husband, Amir Ramezani, who owns a jewelry shop, have had to reorganize their lives around their 6-year-old daughter's online preschool.

Teymourian's office resumed work after the holidays and did not allow remote work, she said. Employees who failed to show up were told to apply for unpaid leave.

Their mornings begin with a rush to prepare a makeshift classroom at home. One of them has to sit beside their daughter throughout her classes, ensuring she has the right book open and is following along.

Ramezani shifted his schedule so he could remain at home during the day. Teymourian takes over in the afternoon, using hourly leave to cover the gap. "My husband's work schedule has been completely disrupted, and I also take about an hour and a half of hourly leave every day," she said.

Ramezani often returns late at night, after their daughter has gone to bed. Family dinners are rare.

"It has put economic and emotional pressure on both of us," he said. "Life is moving on fast forward ... You don't even notice how the day becomes night. We're just getting through time until things go back to the way they were."

Stories of Black and Indigenous patriots come into focus as US remembers the American Revolution

By MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

LEXINGTON, Mass. (AP) — Charlie Price says he didn't learn much about the American Revolution in school. He knew about George Washington, the Battle of Bunker Hill and that the patriots won. It wasn't until he joined the Lexington Minutemen — a group of Revolutionary War reenactors — that he realized there's so much more to the story.

The Lexington Minutemen are marking the anniversary of the Battle of Lexington in Massachusetts on Saturday, as they do every year, and among the soldiers represented will be Prince Estabrook, an enslaved man who joined his white neighbors on Lexington Green in April 19, 1775, as British troops approached. He was wounded that day but went on to serve in multiple deployments throughout the war.

"I wasn't surprised that we didn't know about it," said Price, a 95-year-old Black Korean War veteran who played the role of Estabrook for 50 years. "I was surprised that there was one Black soldier out here."

As America prepares to celebrate its 250th anniversary, Estabrook and other patriots of color are being celebrated through programs nationwide that aim to tell a more complete story of the birth of the nation.

Telling the whole story

Museum exhibits, documentary films and lectures have traditionally focused on the white leaders of the American Revolution, such as Washington, Benjamin Franklin and Paul Revere.

Christopher Brown, a British Empire historian at Columbia University, said the Revolution has long been

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portrayed as a “simple story and a moral story that celebrates American origins and that looks to the American past in a kind of idealized version of what the present is.”

But in recent decades, “a more accurate view of the past” has emerged that showcases the diverse collection of men and women who played critical roles in the fight for freedom.

“There were Black men in the ranks who were fighting in Concord and Lexington and fought on Bunker Hill,” he said. “They knew all of the work that women were doing to support the revolutionary effort. The fact that we didn’t know that is more of a sign of our lack of curiosity and the need for greater research.”

The National Park Service estimates that by the end of the Revolution more than 5,500 patriots of color — including Black and Indigenous people — served on the colonial side, while many runaway slaves fought for the British.

The stories of Black patriots cannot be told without mentioning slavery, which was legal at the time in all 13 Colonies. Some Blacks who fought were enslaved and others fought in the hopes of gaining freedom. Indigenous soldiers made similar calculations, even as tribes fought for their very survival.

But despite the documented military diversity of that time, efforts to promote such stories are under pressure. The Trump administration has ordered the removal or censorship of some exhibits highlighting the history of slavery and enslaved people, the Civil Rights Movement and the mistreatment of Indigenous people.

Roger Davidson, Jr. an associate professor of history at Bowie State University, said failure to recognize that important part of history can impact communities of color today.

“If you’re not seen as having contributed to society, to the military, to any of it, then people can sort of overlook you,” Davidson said. “It plays into, and I hate to put it this way, but it plays into some people’s biases. Why should we pay any attention to you in the present day, politically, socially, economically, if you have not contributed?”

Remembering patriots of color

MA250 has handed out millions of dollars in grants to commemorate the battles across Massachusetts that helped lead to America’s independence. Among the beneficiaries is the Black Heritage Trail in Concord that highlights the lives of Black residents in the town during the Revolution.

Museum exhibitions celebrating Black patriots have also received grants. Among those highlighted is Crispus Attucks, a sailor of African and Indigenous ancestry who died on March 5, 1770, when British troops fired on a crowd in what is known as the Boston Massacre. Another, Salem Poor, was born enslaved but purchased his freedom before fighting at Bunker Hill.

American Ancestors, a nonprofit history and heritage center in Boston that also received MA250 funding, opens its “Patriots of Color” exhibit next week, throwing a spotlight on the lives of 26 Black and Indigenous men and women who played a role in the American Revolution. They include: Prince Ames, a Black and Narragansett man from Andover, who was forced to join the Continental Army in place of his enslaver; and Paul Cuffe, a Black and Wampanoag businessman, who petitioned the Massachusetts government to reject taxation without representation.

Some of their descendants will attend the opening of the exhibition.

“By telling these lesser known stories, we want to highlight that ordinary people made a tremendous difference in the arc of the country’s history,” Ryan Woods, president and CEO of American Ancestors, said.

The details of Estabrook’s life

Records about Prince Estabrook’s life are scant, but according to the National Park Service, he was likely born in the Lexington area around 1740. His father was enslaved by landowner Benjamin Estabrook, so Prince was born into slavery.

It is unclear what his life was like before he trained as a soldier in the Lexington militia. The Park Service says he was serving under the command of Colonel John Parker on April 19, 1775, when his left shoulder was struck by a musket ball. He recovered from that injury and went on to serve eight years with the militia and the Continental Army.

After the Revolution, he was granted freedom and returned to Lexington, where tax records from 1790

indicate he joined Benjamin Estabrook's payroll as 'a non-white freeman.' It is unclear if he ever married, had children or owned property.

According to family records, he died in 1830, around the age of 90, and was buried in the same cemetery as Benjamin's son, Nathan, in Ashby, Massachusetts.

Price, who has handed reenactment duties to a younger colleague but still attends the early morning reenactment every year, says it is important to know about the soldier's life.

"Keep the story alive to make sure that everybody knows, everybody that we can get in touch with, everybody knows that Prince Estabrook was here," Price said. "He was a viable person. He did his role, he did his part in fighting for the country."

Weapons-grade chemical carfentanil surges as dangerous substitute for fentanyl

By HALLIE GOLDEN and JIM MUSTIAN Associated Press

Nearly two decades after drug addiction sent him to rehab as a teenager, 36-year-old Michael Nalewaja had settled into a quiet life in Alaska where he worked as an electrician.

That all came crashing down days before Thanksgiving 2025, when he and a mutual friend unknowingly took a lethal cocktail of fentanyl and carfentanil they may have mistaken for cocaine.

"I heard the word 'autopsy' and I literally just collapsed to the floor," his mother, Kelley Nalewaja said, recalling the call she received from his wife. "Even if somebody had been there prepared with Narcan — even if somebody had called 911 in time — he was not going to survive."

Carfentanil, a weapons-grade chemical that authorities say is 10,000 times more potent than morphine and 100 times stronger than fentanyl, has seen a drastic resurgence across the U.S., killing hundreds of unsuspecting drug users.

The rise coincides with a recent crackdown by the Chinese government on the sale of precursors used to make fentanyl. Those regulations are likely prompting traffickers in Mexico to use carfentanil to boost the potency of a weakened version of fentanyl, according to U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration intelligence bulletins reviewed by The Associated Press.

The surge of a drug so deadly that less than a poppy seed-sized amount can kill a person comes as fentanyl seizures and overall drug overdose deaths continue a multiyear decline.

"You're talking about not even a grain of salt that could be potentially lethal," said Frank Tarentino, the DEA's chief of operations for its northeast region, which stretches from Maine to Virginia. "This presents an extremely frightening proposition for substance abuse dependent people who seek opioids on the street today."

Carfentanil surge

A decade ago, carfentanil exploded into the North American drug supply, causing hundreds of unsuspecting drug users to overdose, only to see a major dip after China banned it, closing a key regulatory loophole in the U.S.

But the situation has shifted dramatically in recent years.

In 2025, DEA labs identified carfentanil 1,400 times in U.S. drug seizures, compared with 145 in 2023 and only 54 in 2022, according to DEA records viewed by AP.

Traffickers in Mexico may be experimenting with producing carfentanil themselves, authorities say, while others could be procuring it from China-based vendors skirting the country's regulations by spamming online forums in other countries with ads for the drug.

Complicating matters for the cartels are the extreme dangers associated with manufacturing carfentanil, Tarentino said.

"You can't just dabble in this," he said. "This is not some mad scientist on Reddit you're going to get to go out to a rudimentary laboratory in Mexico to make carfentanil."

Dip in overdose deaths and fentanyl seizures

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U.S. overdose deaths have fallen for more than two years — the longest drop in decades. Experts point to several possible explanations, including the overdose-reversing drug naloxone being more widely available and the expansion of addiction treatment. Some have also tied it to the regulatory changes the U.S. has pressed for in China.

Experts say that even multiple high doses of naloxone might not be enough to reverse an overdose when carfentanil is involved.

Fentanyl seizures, along with several other illicit drugs, have also dipped. U.S. Customs and Border Protection reported that fentanyl seizures plunged to about 12,000 pounds (5,443 kilograms) in 2025 — less than half the amount seized in 2023.

But even as fentanyl numbers fall, it remains a major focus of the DEA. Just recently, the agency's proposed budget included a \$362 million increase centered on cartel-driven fentanyl trafficking.

"Anyone who takes a pill that is not prescribed to them by their doctor is playing a game of Russian roulette with their life," said Sara Carter, President Donald Trump's drug czar. "But if those terrorists think they can continue this chemical warfare without consequences, they are wrong."

Researched as a chemical weapon

While the prevalence of carfentanil still pales in comparison to fentanyl, experts are nevertheless alarmed by the increase of a substance researched for years as a chemical weapon and deployed by Russian forces on Chechen separatists in 2002.

The DEA's annual quota for lawfully manufactured carfentanil — veterinarians use it to tranquilize elephants and other large animals — is just 20 grams, an amount that can fit in the palm of your hand.

"It's like a biological weapon," said Michael King Jr., founder of the Opioid Awareness Foundation. "If the world thinks we had a problem with fentanyl, that's minute compared to what we're going to be dealing with with carfentanil."

In 2024, overdose deaths involving carfentanil nearly tripled compared to the previous year, with 413 deaths across 42 states and Washington, D.C., according to the most recent data available by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"Carfentanil definitely has that potential of spreading throughout the United States unless law enforcement really focuses in on carfentanil and they develop intelligence as to how these drug addicts are getting it," said Mike Vigil, a former chief of international operations at the DEA.

In recent months, the DEA has documented several large seizures of carfentanil. In October, the DEA Los Angeles Field Division found 628,000 pills containing carfentanil, while in September, officials seized more than 50,000 counterfeit M30 pills from a person at a gas station in Washington state that turned out to be a mixture of carfentanil and acetaminophen.

'All about money'

In some cases, frequent drug users have become tolerant to fentanyl and are seeking out carfentanil, despite the danger, because of the sudden euphoria it promises, explained Rob Tanguay, senior medical lead for addiction services with Recovery Alberta, a health agency in Canada. It appeals to the drug market, he said, because so little of it goes such a long way toward supply.

"The toughest part about all of this," he said, "is that this is all about money."

After Michael Nalewaja's death, his mother decided against a large funeral.

Instead, she organized a town hall in her hometown of El Dorado Hills, California, bringing together local officials along with mothers who had gone through something similar.

As she grieves her son, an adept salesman full of charisma who had recently gotten a national award by the electrical union, she's pushing for major legislative and judicial changes so others don't go through what she did because of a drug she said was never meant for humans.

"It's not an OD; it's not an overdose," she said. "It's a murder weapon."

Iran reopens Strait of Hormuz, but threatens to close it again as the US maintains its blockade

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB, AAMER MADHANI and ELENA BECATOROS Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Iran said it fully reopened the Strait of Hormuz to commercial vessels, but questions lingered Saturday about how much freedom ships actually had to transit the waterway as Tehran maintained its grip on the who got through and threatened to close it again if the U.S. kept in place its blockade of Iranian ships and ports.

Iran's Friday announcement about the opening of the crucial body of water, through which 20% of the world's oil is shipped, came as a 10-day truce between Israel and the Iranian-backed Hezbollah militant group in Lebanon appeared to hold.

U.S. President Donald Trump, meanwhile, said the American blockade "will remain in full force" until Tehran reaches a deal with the U.S., including on its nuclear program.

Asked by a reporter Friday night what he will do if there's no deal when the ceasefire expires next week, Trump said, "I don't know. ... But maybe I won't extend it, so you'll have a blockade and unfortunately we'll have to start dropping bombs again." But he also told reporters accompanying him aboard Air Force One to Washington that a deal is "going to happen," and flatly rejected the idea of restrictions or tolls by Iran on the Strait of Hormuz.

Trump had earlier celebrated the Iranian announcement, posting on social media that the strait was "fully open and ready for full passage." But minutes later, he issued another post saying the U.S. Navy's blockade would continue "UNTIL SUCH TIME AS OUR TRANSACTION WITH IRAN IS 100% COMPLETE."

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi posted on X that ships would use routes designated by the Islamic Republic in coordination with Iranian authorities, suggesting Iran planned to retain some level of control over the channel. It was not clear if vessels would have to pay tolls.

Iranian officials said the blockade was a violation of last week's ceasefire agreement between Iran and the U.S. The strait "will not remain open" if the blockade continues, Iran's parliamentary speaker, Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, posted on X early Saturday.

A data firm, Kpler, said movement through the strait remained confined to corridors requiring Iran's approval.

U.S. forces have sent 21 ships back to Iran since the blockade began on Monday, U.S. Central Command said on X.

Trump says new talks could happen soon

Trump imposed the blockade as part of his effort to force Iran to open the strait and accept a Pakistan-brokered ceasefire to end almost seven weeks of war that has raged between Israel, the U.S. and Iran.

The president's decision to continue the blockade despite Iran's announcement appeared aimed at sustaining pressure on Tehran as the fate of the two-week ceasefire reached last week remained uncertain.

Direct talks between the U.S. and Iran last weekend were inconclusive, as the two nations could not agree about Iran's nuclear program and other points.

Trump suggested a second round of talks could happen this weekend.

"The Iranians want to meet," he said in a brief telephone interview with the news outlet Axios. "They want to make a deal. I think a meeting will probably take place over the weekend."

Oil prices fell Friday on hopes the U.S. and Iran were drawing closer to an agreement. The head of the International Energy Agency had warned that the energy crisis could get worse if the strait did not reopen.

Two Iranian semiofficial news agencies seemed to challenge Araghchi's announcement about the strait.

Considered close with Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guard, the Fars news agency issued a series of posts on X criticizing what it said was a lack of clarity over the decision to reopen the waterway and a "strange silence from the Supreme National Security Council and the negotiating team."

Iran's Supreme National Security Council has recently acted as the country's de facto top decision-making body, amid doubts over the status of the new supreme leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, who was reportedly wounded early in the war.

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The Mehr news agency also said the decision to reopen the strait needed "clarification" and required the supreme leader's approval.

Truce in Lebanon could help US-Iran peace efforts

The ceasefire in Lebanon could clear one major obstacle to an agreement between Iran, the United States and Israel to end the war. But it was unclear to what extent Hezbollah would abide by a deal it did not play a role in negotiating and which will leave Israeli troops occupying a stretch of southern Lebanon.

Trump said in another post that Israel is "prohibited" by the U.S. from further strikes on Lebanon and that "enough is enough" in the Israel-Hezbollah war.

The State Department said the prohibition applies only to offensive attacks and not to actions taken in self-defense.

Shortly before Trump's post, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel agreed to the ceasefire in Lebanon "at the request of my friend President Trump," but that the campaign against Hezbollah is not complete.

He claimed Israel had destroyed about 90% of Hezbollah's missile and rocket stockpiles and added that Israeli forces "have not finished yet" with the dismantling of the group.

Celebrations in Beirut

In Beirut, celebratory gunshots rang out at the start of the truce. Displaced families began moving toward southern Lebanon and Beirut's southern suburbs despite warnings by officials not to return to their homes until it became clear whether the ceasefire would hold.

The Lebanese army and U.N. peacekeepers in southern Lebanon had reported sporadic artillery shelling in some parts of southern Lebanon in the hours after the ceasefire took effect.

An Israeli strike in the area of Kounine hit a car and a motorcycle, killing one person and wounding three, including a Syrian citizen, the Lebanese Health Ministry said Friday. It was the first airstrike and first fatality reported since the truce took effect.

There was no immediate response from the Israeli army or Hezbollah.

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

The fighting has killed at least 3,000 people in Iran, more than 2,290 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

Israel's hard-line Defense Minister Israel Katz said Israel would continue to hold all the places where it is currently stationed, including a buffer zone extending 10 kilometers (6 miles) into southern Lebanon. He said many homes in the area would be destroyed and Lebanese residents will not return.

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

Israel and Hezbollah have fought several wars and have been fighting on and off since the day after the start of the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza. Israel and Lebanon reached a deal to end the earlier fighting 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.

Mediators seek compromise on three points

In the Iran war, mediators are pushing for compromise on three main 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 on Friday suggested Iran has agreed to hand over its enriched uranium.

"The USA will get all the nuclear dust," Trump said in a speech in Arizona. "We're going to get it by going in with Iran with lots of excavators."

Nuclear dust is the shorthand Trump frequently uses to refer to the highly enriched uranium that is be-

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lieved buried under nuclear sites the U.S. bombed during last year's 12-day war between Israel and Iran.

If true, it would be a major concession from Iran and would lock in a key demand of the U.S. to end the conflict. Neither Iran nor countries acting as intermediaries in the conflict have said Tehran has made such an agreement.

Trump said no money would exchange hands to end the war.

US extends waiver on Russian oil sanctions to ease Iran war shortages despite Bessent denial

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. Treasury Department on Friday extended its pause on sanctions on Russian oil shipments to ease shortages from the Iran war, days after Secretary Scott Bessent ruled out such a move.

The so-called general license means U.S. sanctions will not apply for 30 days on deliveries of Russian oil that has been loaded on tankers as of Friday. It extended a similar 30-day license issued in March for Russian oil that had been loaded by March 11. The extension underscores how the fallout from the Iran war has boosted Moscow's ability to profit from its energy exports, which had been restrained since the invasion of Ukraine.

Speaking at the White House on Wednesday, Bessent ruled out extending the license. "We will not be renewing the general license on Russian oil, and we will not be renewing the general license on Iranian oil," he said. The administration did not immediately explain the reversal.

San Diego Padres are nearing a whopping sale, AP source says

By GREG BEACHAM AP Sports Writer

ANAHEIM, Calif. (AP) — The family of late San Diego Padres owner Peter Seidler is nearing a sale of the team, a person with knowledge of the negotiations told The Associated Press on Friday.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the Padres aren't commenting publicly on the process.

The Wall Street Journal first reported the imminent deal with private equity billionaire Jose E. Feliciano and his wife, Kwanza Jones. The team is expected to be sold at a valuation of \$3.9 billion in a record deal for a Major League Baseball team, easily topping the approximately \$2.4 billion paid by Steven Cohen for the New York Mets in 2020.

The 53-year-old Feliciano is the co-founder and managing partner of Clearlake Capital, a private equity firm based in Santa Monica, California. The firm was part of an investment group that purchased Premier League club Chelsea in 2022, with Los Angeles Dodgers minority owner Todd Boehly becoming the Blues' chairman.

Seidler's family began to explore a sale of the Padres last November, two years after the death of the popular Peter Seidler. His brother, John Seidler, has served as the Padres' chairman since then.

Peter Seidler was part of a group that bought the Padres in 2012 for \$800 million, and he became the team's primary owner in 2020. He enthralled San Diego's baseball fans with his free-spending eagerness to win the Padres' first World Series, and general manager A.J. Preller built a series of exciting teams that have reached the MLB playoffs in four of the last six seasons — a first in team history — despite playing in the same division as the dominant Dodgers.

The Padres' current players reacted with excitement about the news of the potential sale to Feliciano — and the reported size of the billionaire's deal particularly caught these millionaires' attention.

"I think it's special that they went out there and put that number out there for us," slugger Manny Machado said in Anaheim before the Padres opened a series with the Los Angeles Angels. "Tells you everything they want for the organization. Looking forward to some conversations with them, and what they see for the future of San Diego. ... That's a big stepping stone, \$3.9 billion."

The Padres' potential sale price reflects their value as San Diego's only franchise in North America's four traditional major sports leagues, leading to a passionate fan base in their attractive home at downtown

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Petco Park. The Padres have set attendance records in each of the past three seasons, capped last season by drawing a whopping 3,437,201 fans — the second-most in the majors to the Dodgers, who play in their much larger stadium in Chavez Ravine.

"You look at what's going on in our city and just the state of baseball in general, and this game is in an amazing place," said infielder Jake Cronenworth, who has been with the Padres since 2020. "For the market that we're in, and what the team just sold for, I think it shows where the game is. Not only is it close to \$4 billion, but for it to break the record is very, very impressive."

The Padres finished last season with the majors' ninth-highest payroll at around \$217 million, still down significantly from its peak under Seidler.

The current team, which arrived at Angel Stadium on an eight-game winning streak, boasts a lineup anchored by Fernando Tatis Jr., Machado and Jackson Merrill — who are all signed through at least 2033 — along with closer Mason Miller, who has become the most dominant reliever in baseball.

Potential buyers also were clearly not frightened off by the Padres' relative lack of media revenue. The team is expected to benefit immensely from any new media deal that would accompany baseball's next collective bargaining agreement.

Feliciano was born and raised in Puerto Rico before attending Princeton and Stanford. He co-founded Clearlake Capital two decades ago.

Machado, a Miami native with Dominican ancestry, was excited by the prospect of a second Latino owner in baseball alongside the Angels' Arte Moreno. Machado holds a minority ownership stake in Major League Soccer's San Diego FC.

"That is unbelievable, having another Latin come and be an owner," Machado said. "I think that tells you a lot about where baseball is heading. Blessed to have another Latin owner that can bring that Latin culture to San Diego, which is already a big part of the Latin community. I know he's going to bring a lot of great things to the organization, to the city itself."

The BlueCo consortium formed to buy Chelsea also owns Strasbourg in France's Ligue 1. Chelsea has been among the Premier League's biggest spenders since Boehly and his partners took over the club, although it has yet to produce significant success.

Any sale of the Padres must be approved by 75% of MLB owners.

Federal judge blocks Nexstar-Tegna TV station merger until antitrust lawsuit is settled

By REBECCA BOONE Associated Press

A federal judge has blocked a \$6.2 billion merger of local television giants Nexstar Media Group and rival Tegna until an antitrust lawsuit is resolved.

U.S. District Court Chief Judge Troy L. Nunley in Sacramento, California, made the ruling late Friday afternoon, finding that eight attorneys general and DirecTV were likely to prevail in their legal bid to stop the merger. The attorneys general, all Democrats, and DirecTV contend the merger will lead to higher prices for consumers, stifle local journalism and that the deal runs afoul of federal laws designed to protect against monopolies.

The deal, announced last year and approved by the Federal Communications Commission, would create a company that owns 265 television stations in 44 states and the District of Columbia, most of them local affiliates of one of the "Big Four" national networks: ABC, CBS, Fox and NBC.

That would likely give Nexstar the power to raise the retransmission fees it charges to video programming distributors like DirecTV, which means higher bills for consumers, Nunley wrote. The company also has a track record of consolidating local television news stations when it owns more than one station in a market, the judge said, meaning viewers "will lose options for where to get their local news."

The deal could also force distributors like DirecTV to comply with Nexstar's demands for higher broadcast fees or risk leaving subscribers potentially unable to watch things like Sunday NFL football games, the judge said.

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Stopping the merger for now is "in the public interest," Nunley wrote.

Attorneys representing Nexstar and Tegna did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Nexstar's attorneys told the court the deal has already been reviewed and cleared by the FCC and the Department of Justice. They said the FCC order commits the company to expand local journalism and programming, not shrink it.

The merger needed the approval of the Republican Trump administration's FCC because the government had to waive rules that limit how many local stations one company can own. FCC Chairman Brendan Carr said in March that the company had agreed to divest itself of six stations.

The judge said the FCC clearance process for the deal was "unusual," and that the regulatory oversight "did not curb the manifest anticompetitive effects of this acquisition."

The Department of Justice, which is tasked with conducting antitrust reviews of these types of mergers, announced it was closing its investigation of the deal in March through "early termination," the judge noted, ending the review process sooner than is normally required by statute.

"In unusual circumstances — with the FCC's quasi-adjudicatory licensing proceeding still pending — the President himself weighed in publicly in February and urged federal regulators to approve the deal to 'knock out the Fake News,'" Nunley wrote.

The preliminary injunction is designed to keep things as they are until the lawsuit is fully decided, Nunley said.

New York Attorney General Letitia James called the ruling a "critical victory" in a statement released Friday evening.

"Consolidating hundreds of local TV stations under one corporate owner would mean higher prices and lower quality programming for consumers," she wrote. She later continued, "We will keep fighting our case to ensure fair competition among local TV stations that serve communities across the country."

Key prosecutor in John Brennan investigation has been removed from case, AP source says

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A lead prosecutor in the John Brennan investigation has been removed from the case after expressing concerns to Justice Department officials about the legal strength of a potential criminal prosecution of the former CIA director, a person familiar with the matter said Friday.

Maria Medetis Long told defense lawyers involved in the investigation that she was no longer participating in the Brennan investigation. Her departure from the investigation came after she conveyed doubt that there was sufficient evidence for a criminal case against Brennan, said the person, who spoke on condition of anonymity to The Associated Press to discuss internal Justice Department conversations.

The Justice Department did not dispute that Medetis Long was no longer part of the investigation but also did not elaborate on the circumstances of her departure. The department said in a statement that "as a matter of routine practice, attorneys are moved around on cases so offices can most effectively allocate resources. It is completely healthy and normal to change members of legal teams."

CNN first reported Medetis Long's departure from the investigation. She referred a request for comment to a spokesperson for her office, who did not immediately provide a statement.

Medetis Long heads the national security section at the U.S. Attorney's office for the Southern District of Florida, which for months has been scrutinizing Brennan in connection with one of President Donald Trump's chief grievances — the U.S. government's years-old investigation into potential ties between Russia and Trump's 2016 campaign for the White House.

Brennan served as CIA director under President Barack Obama and was in the position when the intelligence community published a detailed assessment of Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election. The Justice Department last year received a referral from Rep. Jim Jordan, the Republican chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, asserting that Brennan had given false testimony about the preparation

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of that assessment — a claim Brennan and his lawyers have vigorously denied.

Investigators who in recent months have issued a flurry of subpoenas have been preparing for additional interviews in the probe, though it remains unclear whether any charges will be brought or what impact Medetis Long's departure will have on the case or on witnesses' willingness to cooperate.

Trump this month replaced Pam Bondi as his attorney general, frustrated by the lack of progress in criminal investigations against political opponents like Brennan.

Her deputy, Todd Blanche, is now acting attorney general and has said that Trump has the right and duty to be involved in seeking investigations against people he has had "issues with."

Last year, Trump effectively forced out the acting U.S. attorney in the Eastern District of Virginia, Erik Siebert, after Siebert did not push forward with criminal charges against two other Trump foes, former FBI Director James Comey and New York Attorney General Letitia James. A hastily installed loyalist prosecutor, Lindsey Halligan, subsequently secured indictments against Comey and James but the cases were thrown out after a judge concluded that Halligan was unlawfully appointed.

US and Cuban officials met recently in Havana amid new diplomatic push

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — An American delegation recently met with Cuban government officials in the island nation, marking a renewed diplomatic push even as U.S. President Donald Trump has threatened to intervene and Cuba's leader said this week that his country is prepared to fight if that should happen.

A senior State Department official met with the grandson of retired Cuban leader Raúl Castro last week during the trip, according to a department official, who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke Friday on condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive matter.

The official did not say who from the U.S. met with Raúl Guillermo Rodríguez Castro, whose grandfather is believed to play an influential role in the Cuban government despite not holding an official post. A second U.S. official said Secretary of State Marco Rubio was not part of the delegation that visited Havana.

U.S. officials have previously said Rubio, the son of Cuban immigrants and a longtime Cuba hawk, met the younger Castro in the Caribbean island nation of St. Kitts and Nevis in February.

During last week's extraordinary diplomatic push, which was reported earlier by Axios, the U.S. delegation urged Cuba to make major changes to its economy and way of governing because it would not let the island nation become a national security threat in the region, the State Department official said.

It marked the first U.S. government flight to land in Cuba other than at the U.S. Naval Base at Guantánamo Bay since 2016.

Cuba's crises have deepened following a U.S. energy blockade, coming as the Trump administration has described its government as ineffective and abusive. In return for easing sanctions, U.S. demands have included an end to political repression, a release of political prisoners and a liberalization of the island's ailing economy.

Along with those similar topics, the sides last week also discussed a U.S. proposal to provide free and reliable internet to the island through a Starlink satellite connection, the State Department official said.

The talks were revealed after Trump said earlier this week that his administration could focus on Cuba after the war in Iran ends.

"We may stop by Cuba after we finish with this," he said. He described it as a "failing nation" and asserted that it has "been a terribly run country for a long time."

In response, Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel said the U.S. has no valid reason to carry out a military attack against the island or attempt to depose him but that the country was ready to fight back if needed.

"The moment is extremely challenging and calls upon us once again, as on April 16, 1961, to be ready to confront serious threats, including military aggression. We do not want it, but it is our duty to prepare to avoid it and, if it becomes inevitable, to defeat it," Díaz-Canel said.

He was speaking during a rally that drew hundreds of people to commemorate the 65th anniversary of

the declaration of the Cuban Revolution's socialist essence.

The Cuban Foreign Ministry didn't immediately respond to messages seeking comment about the talks last week.

Pope Leo XIV's visit to an African church linked to slavery reflects on his own complex heritage

By GERALD IMRAY Associated Press

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP) — The Church of Our Lady of Muxima was built by Portuguese colonizers in Angola at the end of the 16th century as part of a fortress complex and became a hub in the slave trade. It remains a reminder of the inextricable link hundreds of years ago between Catholicism and the exploitation of the African continent.

Pope Leo XIV's planned visit to the church in the town of Muxima on Sunday as part of his Africa tour is in recognition of it becoming a popular Catholic shrine after believers reported an appearance by the Virgin Mary around 1833.

But before that, the white-walled church on the edge of the Kwanza River was a point where enslaved Africans were gathered to be baptized by Portuguese priests before being forced to walk the last 145 kilometers (90 miles) to Angola's main port of Luanda to be put on ships to the Americas.

The Portuguese colonizers were emboldened by 15th-century directives from the Vatican that authorized them to enslave non-Christians.

Angola was at the center of the slave trade

Ultimately, more than 5 million people left from Angola on the trans-Atlantic slave route, more than any other country and nearly half of the roughly 12.5 million African slaves sent across the ocean.

It's unclear if Leo will address slavery on his Africa trip, as St. John Paul II did on papal visits to Cameroon in 1985 and Senegal in 1992. Joe Biden visited Angola in the last months of his presidency in 2024 and spoke about slavery as America's "original sin."

But some African Catholics see a highly symbolic moment when the head of the Catholic Church — who is himself an American — recites the Rosary on the riverside esplanade next to the fortress and the centuries-old chapel in Muxima, as Leo plans to do.

"For me, the pope going there to pray the Rosary ... he will give that place a new significance," said Rev. Celestino Epalanga, a priest with the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Angola. "We have to give it a new sense. To make this place sacred instead of being a place of evil."

The pope's complex heritage

The moment might resonate even more after revelations around Leo's own heritage.

Last year, a genealogist in the U.S. discovered that the first American pope — whose name is Robert Prevost — has Creole heritage and his maternal great-grandparents were described as people of color in Louisiana census records. The research uncovered that Leo had Black and white ancestors who included both enslaved people and slave owners.

Some of the first slaves to arrive in Louisiana were sent from Angola, according to historians.

Leo has not spoken publicly about his heritage. But Mariana Candido, a professor of history at Emory University in Atlanta, said she sees a fascinating complexity in how a place linked to such an immoral act like Muxima became a pilgrimage site for Angolans and how Leo might be cognizant of that when he goes there to reach out to a new generation of African Catholics.

"I can see how this is a way of connecting to Catholics in Angola, and making the Church more in sync with how people are practicing Catholicism in Angola and in African countries," she said.

Candido said Leo is well-placed to do that, given his history serving people in his hometown of Chicago, with its large African American population.

Rev. Stan Chu Ilo, a Nigerian priest and professor at DePaul University in Chicago, said he has seen evidence that the pontiff is developing connections to Africa by elevating African figures in the church, including with the recent promotion of Monsignor Anthony Ekpo of Nigeria to a high-ranking position at

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the Vatican.

"This pope is actively cultivating African presence within the church and trying to, I think, heal this policy or program of seeing Africa as just making up the numbers," said Chu Ilo.

Leo said at the start of his trip that he had decided in May of last year, soon after his election, that Africa would be his first trip as pope. Other trips intervened in the meantime, but he said this particular visit to Africa was "very special for several reasons."

A church that confronts modern-day problems

Angola bears especially deep scars from slavery and colonialism. It was a Portuguese colony until 1975. Immediately after independence, it slipped into a bloody civil war that pitted Angolans newly freed from colonialism against each other. The conflict lasted on and off for 27 years and killed more than half a million people.

African priests Epalanga and Chu Ilo both recognize colonialism's impact but said it's also important that Leo invigorates a Catholic Church in Angola — originally brought by colonial oppressors — to be an agent for good confronting modern-day problems.

The Vatican has said that some of the themes Leo will raise in Africa are the exploitation of natural and human resources, corruption and authoritarian regimes.

That resonates with Olivio Nkilumbo, an opposition lawmaker in Angola's Parliament who said the country is still not a democracy that delivers for its 37 million people more than a half-century after independence. Nkilumbo cited decades of authoritarian governments and an economic inequality that has left millions in poverty despite Angola's oil, diamonds and other resources.

"We still don't have democracy, don't have freedom," said Nkilumbo, who added he wanted the pope to be a pilgrim for peace and reconciliation but to also bring a forceful message calling for social justice. "In my view, the pope knows the real situation of Angola."

Nkilumbo said he was not a Catholic but praised the Catholic Church in Angola, the country's dominant religious denomination, for being at the forefront of that fight for equality.

Epalanga plays that role. Alongside his work as a priest, he is executive secretary of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Angola, which actively works to promote democracy and ease poverty and inequality, often challenging authorities.

Epalanga said he was one of many members of the church invited to an audience with Pope Leo in Angola. If he has the chance to speak to the pope, Epalanga said he would "thank him for coming and ask him to tell the bishops they should be more committed to the poor and to social justice."

Defense team in Charlie Kirk murder case says courtroom cameras are unfairly tilting case

By MATTHEW BROWN and HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

PROVO, Utah (AP) — Defense witnesses in the prosecution of the man accused of killing Charlie Kirk said Friday that conjecture in the media over his guilt and depictions of him as a "monster" are making it impossible for Tyler Robinson to get a fair trial.

The pretrial testimony came as Robinson's attorneys pressed a Utah judge to ban cameras from his case. They said live broadcasts of the proceedings are tainting potential jurors, by feeding into speculative stories based on Robinson's courtroom demeanor and alleged confessions.

Media organizations, prosecutors and Kirk's widow, Erika Kirk, want the court to allow cameras. They argue transparency is the best way to guard against the misinformation and conspiracy theories that concern Robinson's defense team.

Robinson's parents sat behind him for Friday's hearing in a half-full courtroom. His father lowered his head and stared down at his hands while the defense played a Fox News clip in which a commentator identified as a former FBI agent opined that Robinson was a sociopath.

"It's turning outside the courtroom into like a reality TV show," said defense witness Bryan Edelman, a social psychologist with a California-based trial consulting business. "I think it creates pressure on every-

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body to have cameras in here, from the jury to everyone involved.”

Prosecutors intend to seek the death penalty for Robinson if he is convicted of aggravated murder in the Sept. 10 shooting of Kirk. The conservative activist was addressing a crowd of thousands on the Utah Valley University campus in Orem when he was shot in the neck.

Robinson, 23, turned himself in a day after the shooting and has not yet entered a plea. A trial date has not been set. Judge Tony Graf said he would rule May 8 on whether cameras will continue to be allowed.

Cameras moved to the back of the room

Utah County prosecutor Chad Grunander noted that nearly all of the clips shown by the defense as examples of media sensationalism did not include material from the courtroom livestream.

“Mischievous lurks in the dark or in secret,” Grunander said. “Let’s shine a light on these proceedings, a bright light, so the public can have confidence in what happens in this courtroom.”

The sensationalism around the case has cut both ways. In a March 30 headline, the U.K.-based Daily Mail reported the bullet that killed Kirk “did NOT match” a rifle allegedly used by Robinson. The story was based on an inconclusive, preliminary finding by ballistics experts and led to speculation about Robinson’s possible exoneration. The FBI is running additional tests, according to court documents.

Livestreaming by media outlets tested Judge Graf’s patience during earlier hearings when pool camera operators inside the court broke his rules.

During a December hearing, Graf temporarily stopped the livestream after it showed the defendant’s shackles in violation of a decorum order.

A January hearing was interrupted when Robinson’s attorneys said close-up shots of Robinson being livestreamed by a local television station could again lead to claims based on lip reading. That, too, was a violation of Graf’s order. The judge ordered the camera operator not to film Robinson for the remainder of the hearing.

In recent hearings and again Friday, pool cameras for the media were stationed at the rear of the courtroom, behind Robinson. That sharply limited opportunities to capture video or photos of him in court. Graf also made camera operators come before him to acknowledge they understood the rules.

Mike Judd, a lawyer for a coalition of media organizations including The Associated Press that are fighting to preserve access, said Graf so far has focused on whether his rules inside the courtroom are being followed, not what the media is saying outside of court.

“The court can do all of that in order to try to control what gets fed into that media ecosystem,” Judd said. “You reduce the likelihood of somebody publishing things that you think may be of potentially biasing concern later on.”

Policies on cameras and livestreaming vary among states. Cameras are generally prohibited in federal courts.

“There’s Supreme Court precedent that says courts generally need to be open to the public, but that’s not an absolute right,” University of Utah law professor Teneille Brown said. “Even if they allow public access, that does not equal a right to broadcast or record.”

Surveillance video and a handwritten confession

A preliminary hearing scheduled for May will allow prosecutors to show they have enough evidence to proceed to trial. Authorities have said DNA consistent with Robinson’s was found on the trigger of the rifle, the fired cartridge casing, two unfired cartridges and a towel used to wrap the rifle.

But the defense argued Friday it cannot proceed with the hearing until federal law enforcement agencies turn over more details about their DNA analysis of evidence.

Prosecutors responded that they have sufficient proof beyond DNA to tie Robinson to Kirk’s killing. That includes surveillance video of Robinson near the university from the morning of the shooting wearing the same clothes as when he turned himself in. Robinson left a handwritten note for his romantic partner confessing to the crime, and also confessed to friends on the chat room platform Discord, prosecutors said.

“Justice delayed is justice denied,” Deputy Utah County Attorney Ryan McBride said.

What to know about singer D4vd's arrest in 14-year-old Celeste Rivas Hernandez's killing

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Seven months after a 14-year-old girl's body was found in D4vd's towed SUV, the alt-pop singer has been arrested on suspicion of killing her, authorities said.

Detectives arrested the 21-year-old, whose legal name is David Burke, on Thursday on suspicion of murder in the investigation of the killing of Celeste Rivas Hernandez, Los Angeles police said. Authorities had not publicly named Burke as a suspect previously. Investigators are expected to present a case to prosecutors on Monday, police said. Burke's lawyers have declared his innocence.

Here are a few things to know about the case:

Singer was arrested, but is not currently charged

Burke was arrested at about 4:30 p.m. Thursday, police said, at a home near the Chateau Marmont, the legendary Hollywood hotel that has been home to decades of industry scandal and lore. It is about two miles from the upscale Hollywood Hills street where Burke's Tesla and Rivas Hernandez's body were found.

He was booked into a jail in South Los Angeles with no bail several hours later.

Prosecutors say on Monday when they receive the case they will review it to decide whether there is enough evidence for charges.

Burke's defense attorneys stressed that Burke has only been detained under suspicion, no indictment had been returned and no criminal complaint has been filed.

"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," the lawyers said.

Celeste Rivas Hernandez was reported missing at age 13

The seventh grader's family reported her missing in 2024 from her hometown of Lake Elsinore, about 70 miles (112 kilometers) southeast of Los Angeles. Her long-dead body was found in an apparently abandoned Tesla Model Y impounded on Sept. 8, a day after she would have turned 15. Authorities in court documents list her age at death as 14.

In a tow yard, a bag covered with insects and a strong smell was discovered, and police found a decomposed head and torso when they opened it. Los Angeles County Medical Examiner's Office investigators discovered the limbs had been severed, and in a second bag found dismembered body parts.

No cause or time of death has been publicly revealed, and it is not clear whether they have been determined with any specificity, a potential hurdle to prosecution.

After the medical examiner revealed its initial findings, police in November got a judge to block the agency from releasing any more information. That court order remained in place Friday.

Singer popular with Gen Z for indie rock, R&B and lo-fi pop blend

D4vd, pronounced "David," went viral on TikTok in 2022 with the hit "Romantic Homicide," which peaked at No. 4 on Billboard's Hot Rock & Alternative Songs chart. After signing with Darkroom and Interscope Records, D4vd released his debut EP "Petals to Thorns" and a follow-up, "The Lost Petals," in 2023.

D4vd said in an interview last year that he was homeschooled after moving from New York to Texas at age 8 and while he appreciates art from Houston and New York, his artistry was shaped more by the internet.

"I was such an internet kid. The internet is really what I claim as my home," he said, explaining that he was online every day, doing schoolwork, making songs and videos and posting on social media. "My neighborhood was Instagram and the society was the internet."

When Rivas Hernandez's body was found, D4vd was on tour supporting his first full-length album, "Withered," and "Locked & Loaded," Fortnite's first official anthem, which he partnered with Epic Games on, had just been released. An email seeking comment Friday from Epic Games was not immediately answered. The last two North American shows of the tour, 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.

Secret grand jury investigation revealed after singer's family objects to testifying

The singer had been under a secret grand jury investigation looking into the death of Rivas Hernandez. The status of that part of the case isn't clear.

Often when a grand jury is convened, an indictment with charges comes before an arrest. But, as Burke's lawyers noted, none has been issued.

In Los Angeles County, prosecutors can charge a defendant then take their evidence before a judge in a public preliminary hearing to decide whether a trial is warranted. Or they can go to a grand jury, which circumvents the process, keeps it secret, and puts the case on a direct path to trial.

A grand jury may be used because its subpoena power can compel witnesses to talk in ways that police can't. There were several unwilling witnesses in this case.

The grand jury's existence — and the designation of D4vd as its target — was revealed when his mother, father and brother filed an objection in a Texas court to subpoenas demanding they come to Los Angeles to testify. The Associated Press obtained documents in the case in February that had been sealed in California. The filing said the Tesla was registered in the singer's name at the Texas address of his subpoenaed family members.

White House chief of staff meets with Anthropic CEO over its new AI technology

By JOSH BOAK and MATT O'BRIEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — White House chief of staff Susie Wiles on Friday sounded out Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei about the artificial intelligence company's new Mythos model, which has attracted attention from the federal government for how it could transform national security and the economy.

A White House official, who requested anonymity to discuss the meeting ahead of time, said the administration is engaging with advanced AI labs about their models and the security of software. The official stressed that any new technology that might be used by the federal government would require a technical period for evaluation.

The White House said afterward that the meeting was productive and constructive, as opportunities for collaboration were discussed as well as the goal of balancing innovation and safety.

Anthropic said in a statement that Amodei's meeting included senior administration officials and explored how the San Francisco-based company and the "U.S. government can work together on key shared priorities such as cybersecurity, America's lead in the AI race, and AI safety." The company said it was "looking forward to continuing these discussions."

The meeting came after tensions had run hot between the Trump administration and the safety-conscious Anthropic, which has sought to put guardrails on the development of AI to minimize any potential risks and maximize its economic and national security benefits for the U.S.

President Donald Trump tried to stop all federal agencies from using Anthropic's chatbot Claude over the company's contract dispute with the Pentagon, with Trump saying in a February social media post that the administration "will not do business with them again!" When Trump was asked Friday while in Arizona if Anthropic had a meeting at the White House, the president said he had "no idea."

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth also sought to declare Anthropic a supply chain risk, an unprecedented move against a U.S. company that Anthropic has challenged in two federal courts. The company said it wanted assurance the Pentagon would not use its technology in fully autonomous weapons and the surveillance of Americans. Hegseth said the company must allow for any uses the Pentagon deemed lawful.

U.S. District Judge Rita Lin issued a ruling in March that blocked the enforcement of Trump's social media directive ordering all federal agencies to stop using Anthropic products.

Anthropic has said the new Mythos model it announced on April 7 is so "strikingly capable" that it is limiting its use to select customers because of its ability to surpass human cybersecurity experts in finding and exploiting computer vulnerabilities.

And while some industry experts have questioned whether Anthropic's claims of too-powerful AI tech-

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nology were a marketing ploy, even some of the company's sharpest critics have suggested that Mythos might represent a further advancement in AI.

One influential Anthropic critic, David Sacks, who was the White House's AI and crypto czar, said people should "take this seriously."

"Anytime Anthropic is scaring people, you have to ask, 'Is this a tactic? Is this part of their Chicken Little routine? Or is it real?'" Sacks said on the "All-In" podcast he co-hosts with other tech investors. "With cyber, I actually would give them credit in this case and say this is more on the real side."

Sacks said: "It just makes sense that as the coding models become more and more capable, they are more capable at finding bugs. That means they're more capable at finding vulnerabilities. That means they're more capable at stringing together multiple vulnerabilities and creating an exploit."

The model's potential benefits, as well as its risks, have also attracted attention outside the U.S.

The United Kingdom's AI Security Institute said it evaluated the new model and found it a "step up" over previous models, which were already rapidly improving.

"Mythos Preview can exploit systems with weak security posture, and it is likely that more models with these capabilities will be developed," the institute said in a report.

Anthropic has also been in talks with the European Union about its AI models, including advanced models that haven't yet been released in Europe, European Commission spokesman Thomas Regnier said Friday.

Axios first reported the scheduled meeting between Wiles and Amodeli.

When it announced Mythos, Anthropic said it was also forming an initiative called Project Glasswing, bringing together tech giants such as Amazon, Apple, Google and Microsoft, along with other companies like JPMorgan Chase, in hopes of securing the world's critical software from "severe" fallout that the new model could pose to public safety, national security and the economy.

"We're releasing it to a subset of some of the world's most important companies and organizations so they can use this to find vulnerabilities," said the Anthropic co-founder and policy chief, Jack Clark, at this week's Semafor World Economy conference.

Clark added that Mythos, while ahead of the curve, is not a "special model."

"There will be other systems just like this in a few months from other companies, and in a year to a year-and-a-half later, there will be open-weight models from China that have these capabilities," he said. So the world is going to have to get ready for more powerful systems that are going to exist within it." _____

O'Brien reported from Providence, R.I. AP business reporter Kelvin Chan contributed to this report from London.

Oil prices drop 9% and Wall Street rallies to a record after Iran reopens the Strait of Hormuz

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Oil prices dropped back to where they were in the early days of the Iran war, and U.S. stocks raced to another record Friday after Iran said the Strait of Hormuz is open again for commercial tankers carrying crude from the Persian Gulf to customers worldwide.

The S&P 500 leaped 1.2% to an all-time high and closed out a third straight week of big gains, its longest streak since Halloween. A freer flow of oil could take pressure off prices not only for gasoline but also for groceries and all kinds of other products that get moved by vehicles. It could even ultimately help people pay less on credit-card interest and mortgage bills.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average surged as many as 1,100 points before paring its gain to 868, or 1.8%. The Nasdaq composite climbed 1.5%.

The U.S. stock market has jumped more than 12% since hitting a bottom in late March on hopes the United States and Iran can avoid a worst-case scenario for the global economy despite their war. Friday's reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, which may only be temporary, is the clearest signal yet for optimism, and President Donald Trump said late Thursday that the war "should be ending pretty soon."

The price for a barrel of benchmark U.S. crude plunged immediately after Iran's foreign minister, Abbas

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Araghchi, posted on X that passage for all commercial vessels through the strait "is declared completely open" as a ceasefire appears to be holding in Lebanon. He said it would stay open for the remaining period of the ceasefire, and the price for U.S. oil dropped 9.4% to settle at \$82.59 per barrel.

Brent crude, the international standard, fell 9.1% to settle at \$90.38 per barrel. To be sure, it remains above its \$70 price from before the war, indicating some caution is still embedded in financial markets.

Several times since the war began, optimism on Wall Street has quickly deteriorated into doubt about a possible end to the fighting. That in turn has caused vicious and sudden swings of prices for everything from stocks to bonds to oil.

Minutes after the Iranian foreign minister's announcement of the Strait of Hormuz's reopening, Trump said on his social media network that the U.S. Navy's blockade of Iranian ports remains "in full force" until both sides reach a deal on the war. He, though, also suggested that "should go very quickly in that most of the points are already negotiated" and emphasized it by using all capital letters.

Companies with big fuel bills soared to some of Wall Street's biggest gains following the easing of oil prices.

United Airlines flew 7.1% higher, and Southwest Airlines climbed 5.1%. A day earlier, the head of the International Energy Agency had said that Europe has "maybe six weeks or so" of remaining jet fuel supplies.

Operators of cruise ships, which guzzle fuel, also steamed higher. Royal Caribbean Group gained 7.3%, and Carnival rose 7%.

Housing and auto-related companies likewise got some relief from the drop in oil prices.

With less threat of high inflation hurting the economy, a sustained drop in oil prices could convince the Federal Reserve to resume its cuts to interest rates to help the economy. The yield on the 10-year Treasury sank to 4.24% from 4.32% late Thursday, and lower yields can bring down rates for mortgages and other loans going to U.S. households and businesses.

Builders FirstSource, a supplier of windows and other products, rose 5.5%, and homebuilder PulteGroup gained 5% on hopes that lower mortgage rates will spur more people to buy houses. Carvana climbed 7% because lower loan rates can get more customers into new autos.

A strong start to the earnings reporting season for big U.S. companies has also helped support the U.S. stock market, and more financial companies joined the list delivering bigger profits for the start of 2026 than analysts expected.

State Street rose 2.5%, and Fifth Third Bancorp added 1.7% after both reported better results for the latest quarter than expected.

They helped offset a 9.7% slide for Netflix, which fell even though it delivered a better profit than expected. It did not raise its forecast for revenue growth for the full year, which analysts said may have disappointed some investors.

It also said Reed Hastings, cofounder and chairman of the streaming company, will step down from its board of directors in June when his term expires.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 84.78 points to 7,126.06. The Dow Jones Industrial Average jumped 868.71 to 49,447.43, and the Nasdaq composite climbed 365.78 to 24,468.48.

In stock markets abroad, stock indexes leaped in Europe following Iran's announcement about the Strait of Hormuz. France's CAC 40 jumped 2%, and Germany's DAX returned 2.3%.

In Asia, where trading finished for the day before the announcement, indexes were weaker. Japan's Nikkei 225 lost 1.8%, and Hong Kong's Hang Seng fell 0.9% for two of the bigger losses.

Patients and dental community mourn Dr. Cerina Fairfax, killed by Virginia's ex-lieutenant governor

By BRIAN WITTE Associated Press

Patients and colleagues are remembering Dr. Cerina Fairfax as a devoted mother, a caring dentist and the rock at the center of her family, after police say she was killed by her estranged husband, former Virginia Lt. Gov. Justin Fairfax.

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Police found both dead in their home in the Washington, D.C., suburb of Annandale, Virginia, early Thursday. They believe Justin Fairfax fatally shot his wife and then killed himself. They were going through a divorce and Justin Fairfax had been ordered by a judge to move out of the house by the end of the month.

Cerina Fairfax, 49, ran a thriving family dentistry practice in the nearby city of Fairfax. A profile page on its website 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."

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

Virginia Rep. Jennifer McClellan, who knew Fairfax through her husband's campaign and the time he spent in office, said their two teenaged children were "the people she cherished most."

"Cerina Fairfax was a loving and dedicated mother and the rock at the center of her large family," McClellan wrote in a statement.

Terron Sims II, a friend and patient, remembered her as a quiet and caring friend, whose dentistry was more than a profession.

"It was an expression of love and compassion," Sims told WUSA-TV. "It was her way of service to others."

Fairfax was recognized in 2015 as the Outstanding Graduate of the Last Decade by the Virginia Commonwealth School of Dentistry. Dr. Jeffrey Johnson, the interim dean of the dental school, wrote that her loss is deeply felt by many who knew her.

"As a clinician and alumna, Dr. Fairfax embodied the ideals of our profession — dedication to her patients, commitment to growth, and a deep sense of purpose in her work each day," Johnson wrote. "I know she was a mentor, role model, and friend to many in our school."

Leaders in the state's dental community also praised her accomplishments and commitment to patients.

"In addition to being a beloved practitioner in her community, Dr. Fairfax loved giving back through volunteer work and contributions to local charities focused on helping those in need," said Ryan Dunn, CEO of the Virginia Dental Association, in a statement. "As we remember Dr. Fairfax, we honor the impact she made and the connections she helped build within the VDA and her community."

Cerina and Justin Fairfax met as undergraduates at Duke University and married in 2006.

Justin Fairfax unsuccessfully sought the Democratic nomination for attorney general in 2013, then won the race for lieutenant governor in 2017. He was considered a rising star in the Democratic Party until two women came forward accusing him of sexually assaulting them years earlier, before he and Cerina were married. He denied the allegations and wasn't charged. He left office at the end of his term in 2022, following an unsuccessful run for governor.

Cerina Fairfax said in court filings that they separated nearly two years ago. But they were still living in the same house with their children, who police said were both home at the time of their deaths.

The judge overseeing the divorce had 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." He also noted in a March 30 court order that Cerina "has been the undisputed primary caregiver to the children in all aspects of their lives," and that she had been "a port in a storm for her children."

"Their remarkable resilience and early success in life is down to what can best be described as Mother's grit," Judge Timothy McEvoy wrote.

Amy Spain, Cerina Fairfax's attorney, said her client's death "leaves an immeasurable void in the lives of all who knew and loved her."

"Above all else, Cerina was a devoted mother to her beautiful children, who were the very center of her world," Spain said. "She embodied the true meaning of motherhood through her unconditional and unwavering devotion to her children, providing a constant source of love, protection, and guidance."

Senate extends surveillance powers until April 30 after chaotic votes in House

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate approved a short-term renewal until April 30 of a controversial surveillance program used by U.S. spy agencies, following a chaotic, post-midnight scramble in the House to keep the authority from expiring in a matter of days.

The measure cleared the Senate by voice vote Friday, without a formal roll call — the same way it was approved hours earlier in the House — as Congress raced to meet a Monday deadline and send it to President Donald Trump for his signature.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune gave a nod to the political difficulty ahead as they assess options when the temporary extension expires at the end of the month. “We’ll be preparing accordingly,” the South Dakota Republican said.

It’s all setting up another showdown, in a matter of weeks, as Congress dives into the surveillance tool that pits Americans’ privacy rights against what U.S. officials have long said is a uniquely effective program for the security of the country.

The stopgap came after House Republican leaders hurriedly unveiled an ambitious five-year extension late Thursday with revisions to appease skeptics of the surveillance program — a sharp pivot from the clean 18-month renewal Trump and GOP leaders had pushed all week. But both those Republican bills collapsed, failing to advance, forcing leaders to pivot.

Early Friday, Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., a longtime critic of the surveillance system, stalled further action in the Senate as he pressed for changes.

Wyden said he has never seen this level of support on both sides of the political aisle — and in both chambers of Congress — for real revisions to the surveillance tool, although he did not stand in the way of a short-term extension, for now.

“It’s not making a choice between security and liberty. That’s garbage,” Wyden said. “We’re going to show that the two aren’t mutually exclusive.”

Chaotic, late-night House votes end in failure

Trump, House Speaker Mike Johnson and the White House had spent the week trying to line up support for an 18-month renewal of the spy tool with no changes. But holdouts held firm, forcing a late-night scramble.

GOP leaders in the House rushed lawmakers back into session late Thursday for a series of back-to-back votes that fell apart before pivoting to a stopgap to keep the program from expiring Monday.

First, they came out with a new plan that would have extended the program for five years, with revisions. Among the changes were new provisions to ensure that only FBI attorneys could authorize queries on U.S. people, and to require the Office of the Director of National Intelligence to review such cases, said Rep. Austin Scott, R-Ga., during the debate.

That plan also would enhance criminal penalties on those who unlawfully conduct such inquiries or disclose the surveillance information, Scott said. It provides a way for members of Congress and certain staff to access the proceedings of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance court, which handles such requests.

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

GOP leaders then tried to salvage a shorter 18-month renewal that Trump had demanded and Johnson had previously backed. It failed as well, with some 20 Republicans joining most Democrats in blocking its advance.

Shortly after 2 a.m., they quickly agreed to the 10-day extension.

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

But Democrats assailed 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.

Tennessee Rep. Andy Ogles, a member of the House Freedom Caucus that helped stall votes throughout the week, said the outcome was predictable after the procedural votes fell short.

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"We warned them that this was gonna happen," Ogles said. "Unfortunately, here we are at 2 in the morning."

Surveillance program fight is a debate over privacy and security

At the center of the standoff 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.

Extending the program is a recurring fight, as lawmakers weigh civil liberties concerns against intelligence officials' warnings about national security risks.

"There are a lot of opinions," Johnson said Thursday. "We want to make sure that we have this very important tool for national security, but we also do it in a way that jealously guards constitutional rights."

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." They didn't.

The Supreme Court hands a win to oil and gas companies fighting environmental lawsuits in Louisiana

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST and JACK BROOK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court handed a win Friday to oil and gas companies fighting lawsuits over coastal land loss and environmental degradation in Louisiana.

The unanimous procedural decision gives the companies a new day in federal court after a state jury ordered Chevron to pay upward of \$740 million to clean up damage to the state's coastline, one of multiple similar lawsuits.

Backed by the Trump administration, the companies said the work in Louisiana started as an effort to quickly increase the supply of aviation gasoline for the U.S. government during World War II and so should be heard in federal court.

The justices agreed. Justice Clarence Thomas, writing for the 8-0 court, noted Congress has long allowed lawsuits against the government and its contractors to be heard in federal court. This suit, he wrote, is clearly related to Chevron's wartime efforts to bolster the U.S. aviation fuel supply. Federal courts are seen as a friendlier venue for the companies.

Louisiana's coastal parishes have lost more than 2,000 square miles (5,180 square kilometers) of land over the past century, according to the U.S. Geological Survey, which has also identified oil and gas infrastructure as a significant cause. The state could lose an additional 3,000 square miles (7,770 square kilometers) in the coming decades, its coastal protection agency has warned.

The litigation over the role of oil and gas companies has crossed typical political lines in Louisiana. The hefty jury award came from a community in one of the most conservative, pro-energy parts of the state, said Republican Attorney General Liz Murrill.

Republican Gov. Jeff Landry, a longtime oil and gas industry supporter, also backed the lawsuits when he was attorney general. Local Louisiana leaders remain determined to keep the litigation alive despite the setback, said attorney John Carmouche.

"Simply changing where the case will be heard, as has happened, will not deter our efforts to have Big Oil held accountable for the damages they caused and the enormous restoration they owe the people of

Louisiana," Carmouche said.

Anne Rolfes, the director of the Louisiana Bucket Brigade environmental group, said the decision is a "bump in the road" in efforts to hold the industry accountable for pipelines and canals carving up the natural coastline that have left residents more vulnerable to hurricanes.

Chevron, on the other hand, applauded the Supreme Court's decision, saying the claims are related to work that the companies did under federal supervision. "Chevron looks forward to litigating these cases in federal court, where they belong," the company said in a statement.

The company denies responsibility for land loss in Louisiana and argues it's wrong to sue over work done before state environmental regulations were in place.

The companies appealed to the high court after jurors in Plaquemines Parish — a sliver of land straddling the Mississippi River into the Gulf — found that energy giant Texaco, acquired by Chevron in 2001, had for decades violated Louisiana regulations governing coastal resources by failing to restore wetlands impacted by dredging canals, drilling wells and billions of gallons of wastewater dumped into the marsh.

The case is one of dozens of lawsuits filed in 2013 alleging oil giants, including Chevron and Exxon, violated state environmental laws for decades. Friday's ruling overturns a 2024 decision from the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit. It will affect about a quarter of the dozens of lawsuits filed against various oil companies, Carmouche said.

The energy industry group Grow Louisiana said the decision should spell the end of the litigation. "These lawsuits have cost Louisiana billions, killed jobs and padded trial lawyers' pockets," Executive Director Marc Ehrhardt said. "Enough is enough. Stop these lawsuits."

The Louisiana Association of Business and Industry called the decision "an important win for legal clarity."

Justice Samuel Alito recused himself from the case, pointing to financial ties to ConocoPhillips. He's previously recused himself from other cases due to his stock holdings.

Takeaways from AP investigation that found problems in the backgrounds of some new ICE officers

By RYAN J. FOLEY Associated Press

Some newly-hired U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers started working before passing background checks and had financial, legal and employment problems in their histories, according to an investigation by The Associated Press.

ICE announced earlier this year that it had completed an unprecedented hiring spree, adding 12,000 new officers and special agents to double the size of its force. Their mission is to help carry out President Donald Trump's mass deportation campaign, financed by a \$75 billion funding infusion from Congress for ICE.

But the speed with which they were brought on to the federal payroll, to jobs that have immense power and are considered important for national security, has raised some alarm inside and outside the agency.

Unlike many local law enforcement agencies, ICE shields the identity of employees, saying that's necessary to protect them from harassment. The secrecy makes 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. Here are some takeaways from AP's investigation:

Some of the newly hired employees have financial problems

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 through a public records request.

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

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He also had filed for bankruptcy in 2013 in New York, when he listed \$95,000 in liabilities, records show. Gurliacci, who worked for six Georgia law enforcement agencies in three years, declined comment.

The AP found two other new ICE hires with recent bankruptcies, including officer and an agency lawyer. Several other new hires had previously been sued over unpaid debts.

Claire Trickler-McNulty, who served as an ICE official during the Obama, first Trump and Biden administrations, said that financial problems are a "pretty big red flag" for candidates because they might make them susceptible to bribery and extortion attempts.

But it makes sense that ICE would attract some cash-strapped candidates after aggressively advertising signing bonuses of up to \$50,000.

Some new ICE employees have previously been accused of misconduct

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 woman's lawsuit, the agreement shows.

The woman who brought the lawsuit, June Bench, said she was outraged to learn Penland had been hired by ICE. She had unsuccessfully pushed authorities in Kansas to review all of his arrests and take disciplinary action against him.

"That's scary to me. He abuses his power," Bench said of Penland's work for ICE.

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

The AP found two other new ICE employees who had been sued for allegedly improperly using force in prior law enforcement jobs, but those cases were dismissed.

ICE hired some employees before background checks were complete

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 advertised that college degrees were not required.

An internal memo, first reported by Reuters in February, told ICE supervisors that if they receive "derogatory 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.

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.

The truce in Lebanon is key to ending the wider Iran war, but challenges remain

By ABBY SEWELL Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — A truce took hold Friday between Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah, providing relief on both sides of the border and an opening for Iran and the United States to reach a deal to end the wider war.

The ceasefire appears to have led Iran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, easing the global energy crisis.

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But major obstacles remain, as Hezbollah has not formally agreed to the truce and wants Israel to withdraw. Israel says it is "not finished" dismantling the Iran-backed militant group and has announced plans to occupy a swath of southern Lebanon.

The 10-day truce appeared to be mostly holding on its first day, as thousands of Lebanese returned to their homes in the south. Hezbollah had launched missiles into Israel in early March, two days after the U.S. and Israel launched their war on Iran. Israel had responded with heavy bombardment and a ground invasion.

Here's a look at the ceasefire deal.

The agreement says only Israel can act in self-defense

U.S. President Donald Trump announced the ceasefire on Thursday, describing it as a deal between Israel and Lebanon, whose government had been largely sidelined in the war. Israel has long accused Lebanon of failing to disarm Hezbollah in line with previous agreements and the government's own plan.

The U.S. State Department published a text of the deal and described it as a gesture by Israel "to enable good-faith negotiations" toward a permanent peace agreement with Lebanon. It said the 10-day truce could be extended by mutual agreement if the talks progress and "Lebanon effectively demonstrates its ability to assert its sovereignty."

The agreement calls for the Lebanese state to prevent Hezbollah and other armed groups from attacking Israel, as did the ceasefire agreement that halted the last Israel-Hezbollah war in November 2024.

The 2024 agreement stated that both Israel and Lebanon would have the right to act in "self defense," without elaborating. Israel continued to regularly strike what it said were militant targets, often killing civilians, while Hezbollah held its fire until last month.

The new agreement, according to the U.S., gives Israel the "right to take all necessary measures in self-defense, at any time, against planned, imminent, or ongoing attacks." It does not mention any similar right for Lebanon or Hezbollah.

Israel wants Hezbollah disarmed. Hezbollah wants Israel out

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel agreed to the truce at Trump's request but was "not finished yet" with Hezbollah. Israel has said it will occupy a 10-kilometer (6-mile) deep buffer zone in southern Lebanon — and prevent people from returning — until all threats are eliminated.

With elections later this year, Netanyahu is under mounting pressure to show that he vanquished Israel's enemies in the wars sparked by Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack out of Gaza — which happened on his watch.

Israel and the U.S. want Lebanese authorities to disarm Hezbollah, by force if necessary. But while Beirut had taken significant steps to assert its control over southern Lebanon before the war, authorities have been unwilling to risk a civil war by fully confronting the heavily armed militant group.

Lebanon's President Joseph Aoun said his objective is to "secure the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the occupied southern territories" and for the Lebanese army to take control of the border area.

Hezbollah said it will adhere to the ceasefire as long as it is "comprehensive across all Lebanese territories, including border areas, and includes a full halt to hostilities and restrictions on the enemy's freedom of movement, serving as a prelude to Israeli withdrawal."

The statement implied that Hezbollah may resume its rocket attacks if Israel continues to target it and remains in southern Lebanon.

U.S. and Iran claim credit

On Truth Social, Trump said Israel is now "PROHIBITED" by the U.S. from bombing Lebanon, an unusually direct assertion of American control over an ally. The U.S. has portrayed the truce as the result of direct Israeli-Lebanese negotiations held in Washington — the first in decades.

Iran and Hezbollah say the deal is actually the result of the larger negotiations between Tehran and Washington and was brought about by Iranian leverage.

Mohsen Rezaei, a military adviser to Iran's supreme leader, said in a post on X that "while the Lebanese government and Trump are attempting to claim this ceasefire as their own initiative," it was "the resistance of Hezbollah's fighters and Iran's multifaceted pressures" that led to the truce.

Hassan Fadlallah, a member of Hezbollah's parliamentary bloc, told reporters Friday that Iran had in-

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formed Hezbollah leaders of the ceasefire agreement early Thursday, long before Trump announced it.

Lebanon truce appears to be part of the wider ceasefire

Iran — as well as the mediator, Pakistan — had said Lebanon was included in the wider ceasefire reached with the U.S. in separate negotiations earlier this month. That was denied by the U.S., as well as Israel, which launched a massive bombardment of Beirut after it took effect.

Two Pakistani officials told The Associated Press on Friday that Pakistan played a role in securing the ceasefire in Lebanon. They spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the closed-door talks.

Lebanon's government has been against the war from the beginning and was eager to end it but had little leverage over Hezbollah. Instead, the task fell to Iran, which many Lebanese will see as yet another infringement on their sovereignty.

In a speech Friday, Aoun thanked the U.S. and Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, for their efforts to secure a ceasefire. He did not mention Iran.

Tehran appears to have used its control over the Strait of Hormuz, and Trump's desire to end an increasingly unpopular and economically painful war, to halt Israel's campaign against its proxy.

As the Lebanon truce went into effect, both Trump and Iran's foreign minister, Abbas Araghchi, announced that the strait had been reopened, something the U.S. had been unable to do through weeks of heavy bombardment and the sinking of much of Iran's navy.

Araghchi directly linked it to the Lebanon ceasefire.

Pope urges Africa's youth to resist dual temptations of migration and corruption in Cameroon

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

DOUALA, Cameroon (AP) — Pope Leo XIV urged Cameroon's young people on Friday to resist the temptation to migrate and instead work for the common good at home, as he called for morally upright citizens to combat corruption plaguing many African countries.

Leo highlighted two of the big problems facing the continent during a Mass and a meeting with students and faculty at the Catholic University of Central Africa: the corruption that keeps countries in poverty and the brain drain of their brightest children who leave rather than fight the corruption at home.

They're themes Leo has highlighted during his visit to Cameroon, a mineral-rich Central African nation which has been ruled since 1982 by 93-year-old President Paul Biya, who last year secured an eighth consecutive term with a disputed election.

Friday marked the half-way point in Leo's 11-day tour of four African nations. He leaves Saturday for Angola, another country blessed with oil and other natural resources, but where a third of the population lives on less than \$2.15 a day.

"Africa, indeed, must be freed from the scourge of corruption," Leo told the university students and their teachers in the capital Yaounde.

"The greatness of a nation cannot be measured solely by the abundance of its natural resources, nor even by the material wealth of its institutions," he said. "No society, in fact, can flourish unless it is grounded in upright consciences, formed in the truth."

A big Mass to start the day

Leo began the day celebrating Mass in the port city of Douala, Cameroon's financial and economic hub on its western coast. The Vatican had expected as many as 600,000 would attend, but only around 120,000 made it.

Cameroonian organizers suggested that security limitations and closed roads may have prevented many people from getting to the field, which was located well outside of town next to the Japoma sports stadium.

Some of those who did make it had spent the night on the ground, battling mosquitoes. But they 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 ac-

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comply should truly come to life," said Alex Nzumo, who arrived at the Mass on crutches.

The field was nevertheless buzzing with people singing, swaying 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 at the field, where young people ran to keep up with his popemobile as he looped through the crowds.

In his homily, delivered in French and English, Leo urged young people to look beyond the poverty and disillusionment many experience and instead look to the future with hope.

"Do not give in to distrust and discouragement," he said. "Do not forget that your people are even richer than this land, for your treasure lies in your values: faith, family, hospitality and work."

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.

An attention to young people

Leo had already offered words of encouragement to Cameroon's youth, including in his opening speech to Biya, in which he demanded the "chains of corruption" in Cameroon be broken. But with Biya entrenched in power, 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.

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 trained doctors who graduate from medical school in Cameroon leave the country, according to the Ministry of Higher Education.

Pope urges young people to stay, and humanize artificial intelligence

In his remarks at the university, Leo urged the students to resist the temptation to leave and to instead use their educations to improve life for themselves and their fellow citizens at home. Africa, he said, needs them.

"In the face of the understandable tendency to migrate — which may lead one to believe that elsewhere a better future may be more easily found — I invite you, first and foremost, to respond with an ardent desire to serve your country and to apply the knowledge you are acquiring here to the benefit of your fellow citizens," he said.

Among the most pressing issues they must address, he warned, is the advance of artificial intelligence and how it is altering the very relationship of people with the truth. As digital environments replace human encounters, people resort to self-referential bubbles where polarization, conflict and fear can spread.

"What is at stake is not merely the risk of error, but a transformation in our very relationship with truth," he warned.

Starmer rejects calls to resign over Mandelson appointment as pressure builds

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British Prime Minister Keir Starmer on Friday resisted demands he resign over revelations that his scandal-tainted pick for U.K. ambassador to Washington was appointed despite failing security checks.

Starmer says he was not informed that the Foreign Office had overruled the recommendation of security officials in early 2025 not to give Peter Mandelson the job. Many considered Mandelson a risky appointment because of his past friendship with convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein and alleged business links

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to Russia and China.

Starmer said he was "absolutely furious" that he had been kept in the dark, calling it staggering" and "unforgivable." He said he would "set out all the relevant facts in true transparency" to Parliament on Monday.

The top Foreign Office civil servant, Olly Robbins, took the fall for the decision and resigned.

The PM's job is in peril

The prime minister's job has been endangered by his fateful decision to appoint Mandelson, a trade expert and elder statesman of the governing Labour Party, as envoy to the Trump administration. It was a calculated risk that backfired spectacularly, and could bring down the prime minister.

Opposition politicians expressed disbelief that Starmer could have been unaware Mandelson had failed security vetting. Starmer said he only found out on Tuesday of this week.

Darren Jones, the chief secretary to the prime minister, said Friday that "the recommendation was to not appoint Peter Mandelson to the role," and that the Foreign Office ignored it. He said that was "astounding," but within the rules.

He said no government minister had been told of the security assessment. People familiar with the process said that is standard practice because of the sensitive personal information involved.

Jones said the checks, carried out by a department known as U.K. Security Vetting, "go through financial, personal, sexual, religious and other types of background information, and that is why it is kept extremely private on a portal that only a few people have access to."

Opposition Conservative Party leader Kemi Badenoch said claims the prime minister didn't know were "completely preposterous."

"This story does not stack up. The prime minister is taking us for fools," she told the BBC. "All roads lead to a resignation."

Ed Davey, the leader of the centrist Liberal Democrats, said Starmer "must go" if he misled Parliament and lied to the British public. The Lib Dems asked the prime minister's ethics adviser to investigate whether Starmer broke the government code of conduct by misleading Parliament.

Starmer has repeatedly insisted that "due process" was followed in the appointment, which was announced in December 2024. Mandelson took up the Washington post in February 2025, after undergoing security vetting.

Mandelson had known Epstein links

Mandelson's expertise as a former European Union trade chief was considered a major asset in trying to persuade the Trump administration not to slap heavy tariffs on British goods, and seemed to pay off when the countries struck a trade deal in May 2025.

But documents released by the government in March, after being forced to by Parliament, showed Starmer ignored red flags raised by his staff about the appointment. He was warned that Mandelson's friendship with Epstein, who died in prison in 2019, exposed the government to "reputational risk."

Starmer fired Mandelson in September 2025 after evidence emerged that he had lied about the extent of his links to Epstein.

The release of millions of pages of Epstein-related documents by the U.S. Department of Justice in January revealed more and showed Mandelson's relationship with the financier continued even after Epstein's conviction in 2008 for sexual offenses involving a minor.

Emails suggested Mandelson had passed on sensitive, and potentially market-moving, government information to Epstein in 2009 after the global financial crisis.

British police subsequently launched a criminal probe. Mandelson was arrested on Feb. 23 on suspicion of misconduct in public office.

He has been released without bail conditions as the police investigation continues. Mandelson has previously denied wrongdoing and hasn't been charged. He does not face allegations of sexual misconduct.

King Charles III's brother, Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, formerly known as Prince Andrew, is also under police investigation over his friendship with Epstein. He, too, has been arrested but not charged.

Starmer's recent setbacks

The prime minister has apologized to the British public and to Epstein's victims for believing what he has termed "Mandelson's lies."

The Mandelson revelations are among a string of setbacks Starmer has faced since he led the Labour Party to a landslide election victory in July 2024. He has struggled to deliver promised economic growth, repair tattered public services and ease the cost of living, and has been beset by missteps and U-turns.

The prime minister defused a potential crisis in February, when some Labour lawmakers called for him to resign over the Mandelson appointment. But he could face a leadership challenge after local and regional elections on May 7, in which Labour is expected to do badly.

Despite his struggles on the homefront, Starmer has been praised for his work on the world stage. He has played a key role in maintaining European support for Ukraine, and was in Paris on Friday to host a summit alongside French President Emmanuel Macron on reopening the Strait of Hormuz, the oil shipping route choked off by the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran.

Macron and Starmer welcome Hormuz reopening and push for permanent navigation security

By SYLVIE CORBET and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — The leaders of France and the U.K. on Friday welcomed the announcement by Iran and the U.S. that the Strait of Hormuz is open, but said freedom of navigation must be permanently restored to the key oil route choked by the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran.

President Emmanuel Macron and Prime Minister Keir Starmer said they would keep planning an international mission to restore maritime security, which Starmer said will be deployed "as soon as conditions allow." They said military planners will meet in London next week.

Speaking after a gathering of some 50 countries and international organizations, Macron said "we all demand the full, immediate and unconditional reopening of the Strait of Hormuz by all parties."

As the meeting was underway, U.S. President Donald Trump and Iran's foreign minister declared the strait open to commercial vessels. Oil prices plunged after Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi posted on X that passage for commercial vessels would remain "completely open" for the duration of a 10-day ceasefire in Lebanon.

Trump in an all-caps social media post said that the U.S. Navy's blockade of Iranian ships and ports would remain in force "UNTIL SUCH TIME AS OUR TRANSACTION WITH IRAN IS 100% COMPLETE."

Starmer cautiously welcomed the announcement, but said it must become "both lasting and a workable proposal."

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. Petroleum prices soared after the war started on Feb. 28, when 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, which Macron said would be "a neutral mission, entirely separate from the beligerents to escort and secure the merchant ships transiting the Gulf."

Starmer, facing political troubles at home, was greeted by Macron in the courtyard of the Elysee presidential palace on Friday afternoon. German Chancellor Friedrich Merz and Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni also attended in person. Others, including the prime ministers of Australia and Canada, the South Korean and Ukrainian presidents and representatives of China and India, joined by video.

Military planning underway

In an echo of the "coalition of the willing" assembled to provide security for Ukraine in the event of a ceasefire in that war, Starmer said that along with France, the U.K. will lead a multinational mission to protect freedom of navigation as soon as conditions allow.

"This will be strictly peaceful and defensive, as a mission to reassure commercial shipping and support mine clearance," he said.

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He said more than a dozen countries had agreed to contribute assets, far fewer than in the wider Hormuz coalition.

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

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

Meloni said she had expressed Italy's "willingness to make its naval units available," while Merz said Germany could contribute mine clearance and maritime intelligence capabilities to such a mission, but would need parliamentary support and a "secure legal basis" such as a U.N. Security Council resolution.

He said Germany, "if possible, would also like to see the United States of America participate; we believe this would be desirable."

That's a departure from Macron, who has said the mission will involve countries not involved in the conflict.

Macron's office said roles for members of the coalition could include "intelligence, mine-clearing capabilities, military escorts (and) communication procedures with coastal states."

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.

Trump dismisses NATO as 'paper tiger'

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.

The operation is partly a response to Trump, who has berated allies for failing to join the war. 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."

Kaushal said European countries were likely trying "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."

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

Trump appeared dismissive of European offers of help, though he referred to NATO rather than the Franco-British-led coalition.

"Now that the Hormuz Strait situation is over, I received a call from NATO asking if we would need some help. I TOLD THEM TO STAY AWAY, UNLESS THEY JUST WANT TO LOAD UP THEIR SHIPS WITH OIL," he posted on social media.

"They were useless when needed, a Paper Tiger!"

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 Mar-a-Lago estate on a recent Sunday.

It wasn't the Iran war, nor the partial government shutdown over Department of Homeland Security funding. He was focused on a monumental issue of a different kind, hoisting 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

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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 another of his splashy projects: 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 last fall's 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.

Republicans have been loath to question Trump, though notably there has been little criticism of a federal judge's ruling that work on the project must stop until it has congressional approval. The GOP-controlled House and Senate also haven't prioritized legislation to move the ballroom project forward.

"I'm not much into architecture," Republican Sen. John Kennedy of Louisiana said last fall.

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 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

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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 adorned 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."

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."

Singer D4vd is arrested in the killing of 14-year-old Celeste Rivas Hernandez

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. D4vd's 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 Attorney's Office on Monday. The office said in its own statement that it is aware of the arrest and its Major Crimes

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Division will review the case to determine whether there is enough evidence to file charges.

"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," the defense lawyers added.

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.

Wanna bet? Washington steps up scrutiny of prediction markets

By STEVEN SLOAN and KEN SWEET Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As the United States was preparing a daring mission to rescue an airman whose fighter jet was shot down by Iran, there was money to be made.

Users on Polymarket, the world's largest prediction market, could place bets on when the airman would be rescued. When Rep. Seth Moulton, D-Mass., shared a screenshot of the activity on social media, an April 3 rescue was trading at 15% compared with 63% who were betting on April 4.

After Moulton posted the screenshot and blasted this "dystopian death market," Polymarket stopped the betting, saying the market "does not meet our integrity standards."

A former Marine who served four tours in Iraq, Moulton said he was "absolutely not satisfied with Polymarket's response" and blamed the site for being "completely unwilling to self-regulate when it comes to betting on the lives of our service members."

"This is war profiteering and Congress needs to step in and stop it," he said.

A confrontation is brewing in Washington over prediction markets, the online exchanges that allow users to bet on the outcome of everything from a baseball game to when Jesus Christ will return.

In a highly polarized Congress, the need to guard against the prediction markets being used for insider

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trading has become rare common ground. Members of both parties pressed the leader of a typically low-profile regulatory agency on the issue during a hearing on Thursday. The market debate is also drawing in the White House, potential presidential candidates and state leaders.

"It's a national conversation about what it means to have market integrity," said Kristin Johnson, a former commissioner at the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, which regulates prediction markets in the U.S.

In a capital that was slow to respond to the perils of tobacco, opioids and social media, the push to put guardrails on prediction markets has been uncommonly swift.

The markets, which include Polymarket and its chief rival Kalshi, have been criticized for everything from undermining the integrity of sports to contributing to an online betting addiction crisis among young men. Polymarket has come under particular scrutiny as a venue for offshore trades that are beyond the reach of U.S. regulators.

Donald Trump Jr., the president's son, is on Polymarket's advisory board and is a paid adviser for Kalshi. 1789 Capital, the venture capital firm where Trump Jr. is a partner, has invested in Polymarket.

Well-timed trades catch Washington's attention

The Associated Press reported this month that a group of new accounts on Polymarket made highly specific, well-timed bets on whether the U.S. and Iran would reach a ceasefire on April 7, resulting in hundreds of thousands of dollars in profits for these new customers.

On the same day the report was published, the White House warned staff against using private information to trade on prediction markets.

Earlier this year, an anonymous Polymarket user collected more than \$400,000 on a January bet predicting the ouster of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, prompting concerns that someone with access to private U.S. government information may have engaged in insider trading.

Sen. Todd Young, an Indiana Republican and former Marine, said he had been concerned about trading in the sports market, "but I became especially concerned about market distortions, improper decision making, and undermining of public trust through self-enrichment after the news broke about Venezuela."

Young and Sen. Elissa Slotkin, D-Mich., have introduced a bill that would bar federal employees from using nonpublic information to make bets on prediction markets. Their bill is among several bipartisan efforts in Congress to regulate prediction markets.

As he eyes a potential presidential campaign, Democrat Rahm Emanuel proposed a ban on prediction market bets by all federal employees and their families. On Wednesday, he suggested a 10% fee on those markets and online gambling to fund science and health research.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom, another potential Democratic presidential candidate, issued an executive order barring his appointees from using nonpublic information to trade on prediction markets.

For now, there's no immediate path to passage for any of the bills. But the scrutiny has drawn focus to the differing approaches of the main prediction markets.

Polymarket officials say little publicly and didn't comment for this story. The market, founded in 2020, operates largely offshore with limited functions in the U.S. that were allowed only after President Donald Trump returned to office.

Kalshi, meanwhile, says it already bans many of the most extreme betting markets and welcomes regulation.

"We support Congress and regulators taking action to police insider trading, keep prediction markets onshore and under federal regulation," said Kalshi spokesperson Elisabeth Diana. "Not all prediction markets are the same."

White House spokesman Davis Ingle said Trump has been clear that "members of Congress and other government officials should be prohibited from using nonpublic information for financial benefit."

Prediction markets bring CFTC into the spotlight

The bet-the-event activity is drawing attention to the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, which oversees the vast trading contracts industry, including prediction markets.

Dennis Kelleher, the president and chief executive of Better Markets, a Washington nonprofit that has pressed for stronger oversight of prediction markets, said the agency "certainly has no experience, ex-

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expertise, budget, technology to actually in any way supervise, regulate or police gambling on everything from whether it's Iran, Venezuela, whether it's reality TV, whether Christ is going to come back before the end of the year."

The agency, which by law is supposed to have a five-member board including representatives of both political parties, is served now by only one member, Michael Selig, a former CFTC law clerk who went on to represent cryptocurrency clients before Trump appointed him to lead the agency.

That's sparked concern among congressional Democrats. Sen. Richard Durbin, D-Ill., sent Selig a letter in February noting that the number of enforcement attorneys at the agency's Chicago office had declined from 20 to zero.

During a Thursday hearing of the House Agriculture Committee, which oversees the CFTC, Selig said the agency was hiring new staff and operating more efficiently. He refused to hold off on completing new regulations until new members were added to the board but insisted he was taking the potential of insider trading seriously.

"Nothing is more important than protecting market integrity," he said.

Still, the agency's enforcement authority extends only to prediction markets regulated in the U.S.

For now, that distinction largely applies to Kalshi, which was established in 2018 and promotes its status as a regulated prediction market. Eager to reach American customers, Polymarket has introduced a U.S.-only prediction market platform to conform with U.S. regulations, but that platform currently has a waitlist to participate and is a small fraction of the size of its offshore counterpart.

CFTC's leadership criticizes Biden and takes on states

Asked at a recent Vanderbilt University forum about the CFTC's approach to insider trading in unregulated offshore prediction markets, Selig blamed the Biden administration for creating a regulatory environment that he said discouraged companies from operating in the U.S.

As the debate plays out in Washington, multiple states have tried to curtail prediction markets, arguing they are essentially operating as unlicensed gambling platforms. But the CFTC has responded forcefully to assert itself as the sole regulator, suing Connecticut, Arizona and Illinois this month.

That leaves Washington at a strange juncture, with widespread agreement among lawmakers that something should be done to address the issue of prediction markets. But there are differing thoughts on the scope of a solution.

Young acknowledged his proposal is just a first step, and said lawmakers have a lot to learn about prediction markets.

"But I think we can all agree at this early stage, as usage of these platforms grows and real money is put at stake, that this is a measure that should be taken immediately," he said.

Today in History: April 18, the 1906 San Francisco earthquake

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Saturday, April 18, the 108th day of 2026. There are 257 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On April 18, 1906, the deadliest earthquake in U.S. history struck San Francisco, followed by raging fires across the city. More than 3,000 people are believed to have been killed by the quake, which was estimated to have reached as high as 7.9 magnitude.

Also on this date:

In 1775, Paul Revere began his famous ride from Charlestown to Lexington, Massachusetts, warning colonists that British Regular troops were approaching.

In 1942, in the first World War II attack on the Japanese mainland, 16 U.S. Army Air Force B-25 bombers conducted an air raid, led by Lt. Col. James Doolittle, over Tokyo and several other Japanese cities.

In 1955, physicist Albert Einstein died in Princeton, New Jersey, at age 76.

In 1978, the Senate approved the Panama Canal Treaty, providing for the complete turnover of control of the waterway to Panama on the last day of 1999.

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In 1983, 63 people, including 17 Americans, were killed at the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, Lebanon, by a suicide bomber driving a van laden with explosives.

In 2015, a ship carrying migrants from Africa sank in the Mediterranean off Libya. As many as 700 people are believed to have drowned.

In 2016, "Hamilton," Lin-Manuel Miranda's hip-hop stage biography of America's first treasury secretary, won the Pulitzer Prize for drama.

In 2023, Fox and Dominion Voting Systems reached a \$787.5 million settlement in the voting machine company's defamation lawsuit, averting a trial in a case that exposed how the top-rated network promoted falsehoods regarding the 2020 presidential election.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Hayley Mills is 80. Actor James Woods is 79. Actor Rick Moranis is 73. Actor Eric Roberts is 70. Actor Jane Leeves is 65. Ventriloquist-comedian Jeff Dunham is 64. Talk show host Conan O'Brien is 63. Actor Eric McCormack is 63. Actor Maria Bello is 59. Football Hall of Famer Willie Roaf is 56. Actor David Tennant is 55. Filmmaker Eli Roth is 54. Football Hall of Famer Derrick Brooks is 53. Filmmaker Edgar Wright is 52. Actor Melissa Joan Hart is 50. Former MLB All-Star Miguel Cabrera is 43. Actor America Ferrera is 42. Actor Vanessa Kirby is 38. Actor Lillee Jean is 25.