

Groton Daily Independent

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Wednesday, April 22

EARTH DAY

Senior Menu: Hot beef combo, mashed potatoes and gravy, carrots, fruit.

School Breakfast: Oatmeal.

School Lunch: Pizza Crunchers, green beans.

Grades 5 & 8 Science Testing

High School Baseball at Britton, DH, 5:30 p.m.

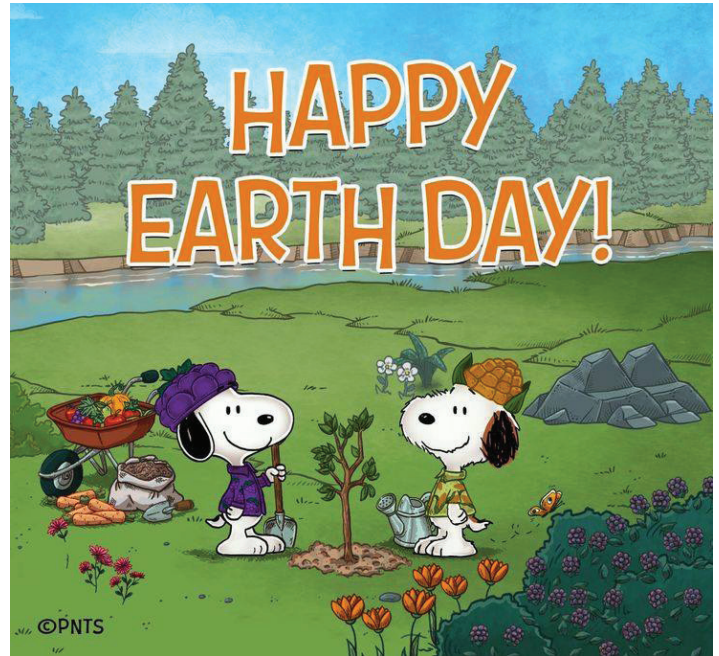
Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

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

JVT Practice, 6 p.m., Arena

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



Thursday, April 23

Senior Menu: Chicken cordon bleu casserole, broccoli, fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Maple French Toast Bake.

School Lunch: Chicken patty, mashed potatoes.

Grades 5 & 8 Science Testing

Track at Redfield, 10 a.m.

Girls Golf at Milbank, 10 a.m.

5th Grade Girls Basketball, 3 p.m., Elementary Gym

Pickleball, 6 p.m., Elementary Gym

Middle School Spring Concert, 7 p.m.

Friday, April 24

Senior Menu: Stuffed pepper soup, ham salad sandwich, fruit, cookie.

School Breakfast: Eggs.

School Lunch: Beef stir fry, rice.

Grades 5 & 8 Science Testing

MS Track at Groton, 2 p.m.

Saturday, April 25

MS NEC Girls Golf at Clark, 10 a.m.

Track at Ipswich, 10 a.m.

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.

Paid Informants Indictment

The Southern Poverty Law Center was indicted yesterday on federal fraud charges tied to its use of paid informants to surveil extremist groups. The Justice Department alleges the Alabama-based legal advocacy center misled donors by channeling millions of dollars to individuals affiliated with the groups, including the Ku Klux Klan.

The SPLC says the program, which reportedly began in the 1980s, was necessary to monitor threats of violence and kept relatively secret to protect informants. It has previously shared gathered intelligence with local and federal law enforcement. The FBI, however, severed decades-long ties with the center in October, with Director Kash Patel calling it partisan and criticizing the center's map of anti-government and extremist groups.

In the late 1990s, an undercover informant working with the SPLC and FBI infiltrated one of the nation's most dangerous hate groups; he's credited with thwarting a plot to assassinate SPLC founder Morris Dees.

Roman Telescope Reveal

NASA unveiled its Roman Space Telescope yesterday, an instrument that could allow researchers to observe an area of the cosmos 100 times larger than the Hubble Space Telescope.

Roman could help scientists find exoplanets by identifying distortions in starlight that may indicate a planet passing in front of stars. The telescope also aims to answer questions about the formation of the universe as well as dark matter and dark energy. The observatory, estimated to cost over \$4B, will be launched on a SpaceX Falcon Heavy from Florida as soon as this fall.

Separately, researchers published a study yesterday on findings from Mars' Curiosity rover. Samples collected from the planet's Gale Crater revealed over 20 chemicals, including a molecule containing nitrogen that resembles proto-DNA. Further research is needed to determine if the compounds came from a meteorite, geological processes, or ancient organisms.

Helmet Heads Home

A 2,500-year-old golden helmet and two golden bracelets were returned to Romania yesterday, ending a 14-month saga that began when the pieces were taken from a Dutch museum. The recovery brings a set of national heirlooms back to Bucharest, though the search for a third missing bracelet is ongoing.

The Coțofenești helmet dates back to the Dacia civilization, a people known for their opposition to the Roman Empire who lived primarily in modern-day Romania. The country had loaned the pieces to the Netherlands' Drents Museum when they were stolen in January 2025. Security footage showed three people using a crowbar to open a museum door before an explosion. Earlier this month, Dutch authorities revealed they had recovered the helmet and two of the three bracelets amid an ongoing trial for the three suspects. The helmet has been slightly dented; the recovered bracelets show no damage.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

South Korean police seek to arrest music executive behind K-pop band BTS over alleged \$100M investor fraud scheme.

Harvey Weinstein's third rape trial in New York begins, tried in 2020 and 2025.

Alan Osmond, the oldest brother in family singing group The Osmonds, dies at age 76; no cause of death was disclosed, though he had multiple sclerosis.

YouTube shares proprietary AI deepfake detection tool with high-profile actors, athletes, musicians, and more.

Chinese streaming platform plans to have AI create most of its new films and TV shows.

Science & Technology

Brain cell mutations linked to cancer may also contribute to Alzheimer's disease; finding could provide new diagnostics and treatments for Alzheimer's.

Tanzanian children living in \$8.8K steel-frame homes see malaria drop by 44%, diarrhea by 30%, and respiratory infections by 18% compared to neighbors in mud-and-thatch huts; research can inform future designs for affordable housing.

OpenAI releases ChatGPT Images 2.0, now able to search the web, generate multiple images from one prompt, and better understand non-Latin text (More, w/prototype images)

Business & Markets

US stock markets close down (S&P 500 -0.6%, Dow -0.6%, Nasdaq -0.6%).

Federal Reserve chair nominee Kevin Warsh faces Senate Banking Committee confirmation hearing, says Fed would be independent of White House; see key takeaways.

Warsh would be richest Fed chair in history if confirmed.

AI startup Anthropic to commit \$100B to Amazon's AWS cloud platform over the next 10 years to train and run its Claude chatbot; Amazon to invest up to another \$25B (on top of previous \$8B investment) in Anthropic.

Politics & World Affairs

Virginia voters accept redistricting map that could give Democrats up to four additional House seats in November.

President Donald Trump extends US-Iran ceasefire while awaiting proposal from Iran; claims Iranian government is fractured and that he agreed to the ceasefire upon Pakistan's request.

Florida opens criminal investigation into OpenAI after messages suggest gunman who allegedly killed two people at Florida State University last year exchanged messages with ChatGPT, including about gun ammunition.



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Groton, Langford students earn State FFA Degrees at convention

BROOKINGS — Area students were among the hundreds of members recognized at the 98th South Dakota State FFA Convention Tuesday, earning one of the organization's highest honors.

A total of 370 members received the State FFA Degree during the convention's second session at First Bank and Trust Arena, an achievement that reflects years of commitment to agricultural education, leadership and community service through their local chapters.

Representing Groton, Logan Warrington was named a State Degree recipient, while Dylan Harmon and Bradyn Small earned the honor from the Langford chapter.

The State FFA Degree is the highest award the South Dakota FFA Association can bestow upon its members. Recipients must demonstrate significant involvement in their Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) programs, along with leadership development and community engagement over multiple years.

As part of the recognition, students received a gold charm and certificate, symbolizing their accomplishments and growth within the organization.

The convention, hosted in Brookings, brought together members from across the state to celebrate achievements and promote agricultural education. The South Dakota association is part of the National FFA Organization, which includes more than one million members nationwide.

South Dakota FFA currently includes more than 6,500 members across 113 chapters, continuing to develop future leaders in agriculture and related industries.

Groton Area Drops Pair at Hanson Despite Early Highlights

ALEXANDRIA — The Groton Area Tigers ran into a tough Hanson squad Tuesday, dropping both ends of a varsity softball doubleheader despite collecting hits and early opportunities in each contest.

In the opener, Groton Area fell 13-1 as Hanson used a big fourth inning to break the game open. The Tigers were competitive early, but a nine-run outburst by the Beavers proved decisive.

Groton Area scattered four hits in the game, with Abby Fjeldheim driving in the lone run while going 1-for-2 at the plate. Kinsley Rowen, Jaedyn Penning, and Jerica Locke each added a hit for the Tigers.

Rowen took the loss in the circle, working four innings while allowing 13 runs (six earned) on 13 hits with three walks.

Hanson was paced by Jozlynn Tegethoff, who had a perfect day at the plate, including an inside-the-park home run in the second inning. The Beavers finished with 13 hits and played clean defensively, not committing an error.

In the second game, Groton Area again battled but came up short in a 7-1 loss.

Hanson jumped out early and steadily added to its lead, while Groton Area continued to put the ball in play. The Tigers finished with four hits, with Neely Althoff, Jaedyn Penning, Libby Cole, and Jerica Locke each recording one. Althoff also drove in Groton's only run, going 1-for-2.

Althoff took the loss in the circle, pitching four innings and allowing six runs (three earned) on six hits while striking out five and walking two.

South Dakota Unified Judicial System Warns Public of Court Notice Scam

PIERRE, S.D.—The South Dakota Unified Judicial System (UJS) is alerting the public to a recent scam involving fraudulent text messages claiming to be from a state or municipal court regarding unpaid traffic violations.

The messages direct recipients to scan a QR code or click a link to pay an alleged fine. Some of the messages reference violations such as unpaid tolls, traffic citations or court enforcement actions. These messages are NOT legitimate.

The South Dakota court system does not contact individuals via text message to demand payment for fines, fees or citations. Official court communications are conducted through formal written notices or in-person proceedings.

Additionally, South Dakota does not have toll roads, and any message referencing unpaid toll violations within the state is a clear indicator of fraud.

Members of the public who receive scam texts or emails are advised to:

Not click links or scan QR codes in unsolicited messages.

Not provide personal or financial information or send money.

Delete the message immediately.

Report the scam to the South Dakota Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division or the Federal Trade Commission.

If you have concerns about a legitimate court matter, please contact your local Clerk of Courts office directly using official court contact information.

The Unified Judicial System encourages all residents to remain vigilant and share this information to help prevent others from becoming victims of fraud. To learn more, visit UJS' web page about South Dakota court scams. View the fraudulent court notice.

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Tracy, Schwan pace Groton Area at Orville Pfitzer Relays

BRITTON — Groton Area turned in a well-balanced performance Tuesday at the Orville Pfitzer Relays in Britton, highlighted by multiple individual champions, strong relay showings and depth across both the boys and girls divisions.

On the boys side, Keegen Tracy delivered one of the top performances of the meet, winning the 400 meters in 50.44 seconds while adding runner-up finishes in both the 100 meters (11.43) and 200 meters (23.49). Lincoln Krause also placed in the 100 with a sixth-place finish in 11.95, while JJ Muller added a 12th-place finish in the 200 with a personal-best time of 25.13.

In the distance events, Jayden Schwan swept both the 1600 and 3200 meters, winning in 4:38.39 and 10:17.46, respectively. Riley Shellenberger provided additional scoring with a fourth-place finish in the 800 meters (2:18.37) and another fourth-place effort in the 1600 (5:03.96), while Jace Johnson placed seventh in the 1600 at 5:23.99.

Groton Area's relay teams were competitive throughout the day. The 4x100 relay team of Krause, Jordan Schwan, Muller and Ethan Kroll placed second in 47.18, while the same group took third in the 4x200 relay in 1:36.26. In the sprint medley relay, Krause, Muller, Jordan Schwan and Johnson combined for a third-place finish in 4:06.43.

In field events, Ethan Kroll recorded a runner-up finish in the long jump with a leap of 19 feet, 8 inches, while Jordan Schwan placed 21st in the discus at 76-0.

For the girls, Groton Area matched the boys' success with multiple event wins and strong relay performances.

Ashlynn Warrington claimed the 400-meter title in 1:05.30, while Ryelle Gilbert dominated the distance races, winning the 800 meters in 2:32.95 and finishing second in the 1600 meters (5:47.40).

McKenna Tietz added another championship for the Tigers, winning the 300-meter hurdles in 48.66, and also contributed to two winning relay teams.

Groton Area's relay squads led the way. The 4x200 relay team of Taryn Traphagen, Kella Tracy, Makenna Krause and Tietz captured first place in 1:48.60, while the 4x400 relay of Tietz, Traphagen, Warrington and Tracy followed with another win in 4:16.08. The sprint medley relay team of Rylee Dunker, Traphagen, Krause and Warrington added a runner-up finish in 4:57.22.

In the sprints, Makenna Krause finished second in the 100 meters (13.10), with Raquel Tracy taking fifth (13.57). Dunker added a fourth-place finish in the 200 meters (29.35) and fifth in the 400 (1:10.09).

The Tigers also picked up points in the hurdles, where Emerlee Jones placed fifth in the 300 hurdles (54.95) and sixth in the 100 hurdles (20.23), while Teagan Hanten was sixth in the 100 hurdles (20.34).

In the field events, Avery Crank led Groton Area with a 12th-place finish in the shot put (27-3.25) and 10th in the discus (76-4). Dunker added an 11th-place finish in the javelin (70-8), while Hanten competed in both the long jump (24th, 12-2) and triple jump (20th, 25-3.25).

Boy's Division

100 Meters: 2. Keegen Tracy, 11.43; 6. Lincoln Krause, 11.95; 42. Tate Johnson, 14.06; 50. David Jetto, 15.58.

200 Meters: 2. Keegen Tracy, 23.49; 12. JJ Muller, 25.13aPB; 40. Tate Johnson, 28.43; 49. David Jetto, 32.34.

400 Meters: 1. Keegen Tracy, 50.44; 28. Wesley Borg, 1:06.07; 30. Briggs Conn, 1:08.04.

800 Meters: 4. Riley Shellenberger, 2:18.37; 17. Briggs Conn, 2:40.70.

1600 Meters: 1. Jayden Schwan, 4:38.39; 4. Riley Shellenberger, 5:03.96; 7. Jace Johnson, 5:23.99.

3200 Meters: 1. Jayden Schwan, 10:17.46.

4x100 Relay: 2. Groton: (Lincoln Krause, Jordan Schwan, JJ Muller, Ethan Kroll), 47.18.

4x200 Relay: 3. Groton: (Lincoln Krause, Jordan Schwan, JJ Muller, Ethan Kroll), 1:36.26.

SMR 1600m - [200-200-400-800]: 3. Groton: (Lincoln Krause, JJ Muller, Jordan Schwan, Jace Johnson), 4:06.43.

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Discus - 1.6kg: 21. Jordan Schwan, 76' 0".

Long Jump: 2. Ethan Kroll, 19' 8".

Triple Jump:

Girl's Division

100 Meters: 2. Makenna Krause, 13.10; 5. Raquel Tracy, 13.57; 26. Suri Jetto, 15.93.

200 Meters: 4. Rylee Dunker, 29.35; 11. Raquel Tracy, 30.99; 30. Suri Jetto, 35.13.

400 Meters: 1. Ashlynn Warrington, 1:05.30; 5. Rylee Dunker, 1:10.09; 14. Suri Jetto, 1:20.44.

800 Meters: 1. Ruelle Gilbert, 2:32.95.

1600 Meters: 2. Ruelle Gilbert, 5:47.40.

100m Hurdles - 33" / 0.838m: 5. Emerlee Jones, 20.23; 6. Teagan Hanten, 20.34.

300m Hurdles - 30" / 0.762m: 1. McKenna Tietz, 48.66; 5. Emerlee Jones, 54.95

4x100 Relay: 5. Groton: (McKenna Tietz, Taryn Traphagen, Kella Tracy, Makenna Krause), 55.94.

4x200 Relay: 1. Groton: (Taryn Traphagen, Kella Tracy, Makenna Krause, McKenna Tietz), 1:48.60.

4x400 Relay: 1. Groton: (McKenna Tietz, Taryn Traphagen, Ashlynn Warrington, Kella Tracy), 4:16.08.

SMR 1600m - [200-200-400-800]: 2. Groton: (Rylee Dunker, Taryn Traphagen, Makenna Krause, Ashlynn Warrington), 4:57.22.

Shot Put - 4kg: 12. Avery Crank, 27' 3.25"

Discus - 1kg: 10. Avery Crank, 76' 4"

Javelin - 600g: 11. Rylee Dunker, 70' 8"

High Jump: 11. Emerlee Jones, J 4' 2"

Long Jump: 24. Teagan Hanten, 12' 2"

Triple Jump: 20. Teagan Hanten, 25' 3.25"



A new outfield softball fence is being installed on Nelson Field. It is a temporary fence for use in softball games. Aaron Severson (red) and Nick Groebelinghoff were taking advantage of a couple of nice days to put up the fence.

Groton City Council approves park bathroom improvements, requests more info for senior nutrition donation request

The Groton City Council covered a mix of maintenance needs, community requests, and future planning during its meeting Tuesday evening.

Among the items discussed were improvements to the city park bathroom.

The Groton Development Corporation is planning a community cleanup project in early May. Volunteers are expected to repaint the park bathroom as part of the effort.

Councilman Mike Shilhanek, who also serves on the GDC board, encouraged the council to look beyond cosmetic updates and consider replacing fixtures and lighting inside the restrooms.

Council members expanded that, also discussing contacting a masonry professional to evaluate options for replacing the building's windows.

Councilman Brian Bahr added that he could apply a layer of polyurea to refinish the restroom floor, providing a more durable surface.

The council approved moving forward with the improvements.

The park bathroom replacement project has been on hold as officials awaited a decision on potential FEMA funding to rebuild the structure into a combined restroom and tornado shelter. The city put in an application in 2023 to help offset the projected \$630,000 cost to build a comfort station at the park.

City Finance Officer Douglas Heinrich told the council there hasn't been an update on the funding request, though state officials have said they won't hear while there is a lapse in funding for FEMA.

The council also considered a request for a donation to support senior meals from Area IV Senior Nutrition Executive Director Marla Kiesz.

Kiesz had originally requested a donation in 2025, but city officials said she didn't reach out afterward to provide more information. A request came in 2026, but council members had questions about the total being requested and potential partnership with a non profit.

Council members again had questions that weren't answered in the letter sent to the council.

Councilwoman Karyn Babcock said she wanted to know more about where the money was going, specifically if it goes to the region offices or directly to the Groton program. She said she's more than happy to donate, but as a business owner she would want the organization to come talk to her instead of just send a letter that doesn't have much information.

"It's not my job to track down Marla if she wants my money," Babcock said.

Councilman Brian Bahr also had questions, specifically if the money raised by the Groton program stays within the local program.

"We don't know," Babcock replied, adding that is why she wants Kiesz to come to the council and discuss it.

The council tabled a decision, and Mayor Scott Hanlon said he would reach out to ask Kiesz to come to the next meeting.

Looking ahead, council members began early conversations about priorities for the 2027 budget, including potential updates to the community center exterior and investing in equipment to develop geographic information system (GIS) mapping capabilities.

The council also approved blocking a section of Main Street by Railroad Avenue and allowing alcoholic beverages within the barrier for a fundraising event. The roadway would be blocked from 3 to 10 p.m. June 27 as organizers host a cornhole tournament to raise funds for Groton Area HOSA.

The council authorized blocking the street and allowing alcohol outside contingent on paperwork being filled out to formalize the request.

SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

State waterfowl refuge status removed from northeastern South Dakota lake

BY: MEGHAN O'BRIEN

PIERRE — A South Dakota lake can be used for hunting by surrounding landowners after a legislative rules committee voted Tuesday to remove its status as a state waterfowl refuge.

The status has prevented landowners whose property completely surrounds the lake from hunting waterfowl such as ducks, said Tom Kirschenmann, director of wildlife for the Department of Game, Fish and Parks.

There is more than one Lake Albert in the state — this one is in Grant County near Milbank.

"In this particular case, there is no habitat work, there's no management activity that has to take place on this particular refuge," Kirschenmann said. "It is simply a status that means waterfowl cannot be hunted in that designated area."

The vote was 3-2 for a rules package that included the change.

South Dakota's Game, Fish and Parks Commission recommended approval of the change earlier this year. The primary goal of state refuges, Kirschenmann said, is to provide a resting spot for waterfowl so hunting pressure doesn't push them out of the area.

After the removal of Lake Albert's refuge status, there are still more than two dozen state waterfowl refuges. A majority are along the Missouri River. There are five federal wildlife refuges and five federal wetland management districts in South Dakota, including areas supporting bald eagles, ducks and other birds.

This is the second state refuge status removal in recent memory for Kirschenmann.

"It is not a common process," he said. Each instance was "driven by the landowners, because the refuge itself was completely surrounded by private land."

Sen. Liz Larson, D-Sioux Falls, voted against approving the change.

"I was just worried that this might set a precedent for other landowners to try and do the same thing," she said. "A lot of different types of waterfowl and songbirds, and even birds of prey, their numbers have just plummeted over the last three to four decades."

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

Republican states, including SD, defend citizenship lists ordered by Trump as 'optional' election help

BY: JONATHAN SHORMAN

A dozen Republican state attorneys general are moving to defend President Donald Trump's executive order on mail ballots from legal challenges mounted by Democrats.

The GOP officials, led by Missouri Attorney General Catherine Hanaway, argued in multiple court filings Monday and Tuesday in response to Democratic lawsuits that the March 31 order provides states with "optional resources" to help secure their elections and doesn't endanger voting rights.

The states "would like to access this resource so they may verify the accuracy of their own voter-registration lists. This flow of information between federal and state agencies is a common and critical feature of our federal system," the Republican officials wrote in a court document.

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The attorneys general of Alabama, Florida, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Montana, Nebraska, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota and Texas joined Hanaway in the effort.

The order directs the postmaster general to put forward rules that would block the U.S. Postal Service from delivering ballots to or from voters not on lists of approved mail voters provided by states. Democrats and postal law experts have said the Postal Service has no authority over elections.

"The Constitution and multiple court rulings put it in stark terms: the President does not have the authority to issue an executive order that attempts to undermine the ability of states to run their own elections," more than 100 U.S. House Democrats wrote in a letter to Trump on Monday.

Trump's order also directs the Department of Homeland Security to compile lists of voting-age U.S. citizens in each state. Democrats allege the Trump administration is building an unauthorized national voter list, despite the U.S. Constitution giving states the responsibility of running federal elections.

The Democratic National Committee, top Democratic lawmakers and Democratic state attorneys general and secretaries of state have all sued to block the order, as have voting rights groups. The Republican state attorneys general are seeking to intervene in those lawsuits.

The GOP officials argue the Democrats lack standing to challenge the Postal Service provisions of the order and that their objections are premature because the Postal Service hasn't finalized any new rules on mail ballots.

The order "simply directs" the Postal Service "to initiate rulemaking—it does not regulate the States directly and it does not directly inhibit anyone's voting rights," a court filing by the state attorneys general says.

The executive order marked Trump's latest attempt to assert power over federal elections. A previous order that sought to require voters to prove their citizenship was blocked in court. Legislation to impose such a requirement is stalled in the U.S. Senate.

The Department of Justice has also sued 30 states and the District of Columbia for access to unredacted state voter lists containing sensitive personal information, including driver's license and partial Social Security numbers. While federal courts have so far rebuffed those lawsuits, at least a dozen states have voluntarily turned over the data.

DOJ plans to share the information with Homeland Security, which will use a computer program to look for possible noncitizen voters.

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

State public defenders deliver their first oral arguments to South Dakota Supreme Court

Questions raised include race in jury selection, hearsay evidence and mental competency

BY: JOHN HULT

Lawyers for the recently created Office of Indigent Legal Services delivered their first oral arguments before the South Dakota Supreme Court on Tuesday in Pierre.

It was a watershed moment for the state's public defense agency, a \$1.5 million, five-attorney operation that the state court system's leaders expect to deliver a net savings to taxpayers and improved legal services for South Dakotans who have the right to a lawyer but can't afford one.

In South Dakota, counties are responsible for the cost of court-appointed attorneys. That typically means contracting with private defense lawyers, who are often paid mileage fees atop hourly rates to represent clients in cases that originate far from their local offices.

When lawmakers began pondering a state public defender's office in 2023, county costs for indigent legal services had doubled in the space of a decade. The Legislature endorsed the office in 2024, and former Minnehaha County Public Defender Christopher Miles was hired to lead it that fall.

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Miles and the appellate public defenders now employed by the office deal with criminal appeals, as well as appeals in abuse and neglect cases. Counties remain responsible for trial-level legal fees, but handing off appeals to the state is expected to save them \$2.1 million a year.

Steven Jensen, chief justice of the South Dakota Supreme Court, signaled in January that the office may look to expand and take on "high-level felony cases" in some counties in the future, in hopes of preventing potential costly errors on the front end and improving efficiencies in the system as a whole.

Miles told lawmakers in January that his attorneys had taken more than 100 cases from all over the state, including four appeals in murder cases.

Questions on juror removal

Deputy Appellate Public Defender Beau Blouin presented a murder case appeal on Tuesday. Blouin represents David Shangreaux Jr., who wants a new trial following his conviction for second-degree murder in a 2023 stabbing death in Pierre.

Shangreaux is Native American, and Blouin argued that the prosecutor improperly dismissed a Native American juror — one of two empaneled for possible selection.

The U.S. Supreme Court barred the practice of striking jurors for race alone in 1986.

The potential juror in the Shangreaux case said he was harassed by police 20 years ago in Rapid City. But he also said he'd have no trouble fairly weighing police testimony in Pierre. When challenged by Shangreaux's trial-level attorney over the decision to strike that juror, the prosecutor cited concerns about a prior criminal history, despite there being no record of the juror having one. The prosecutor later shifted the explanation and said he'd "assumed" the juror was referencing a criminal history while speaking of being handcuffed.

The judge expressed concerns about dismissing one of two Native American jurors, but allowed it.

On Tuesday, Justice Scott Myren asked Blouin why the high court shouldn't defer to the discretion of the trial judge.

Blouin urged the justices to look at "the total picture" of the prosecutor's shifting reasoning, and to ask if the reasons offered were "pretext for racial exclusion." The race-based exclusion of jurors "has been and is a widespread issue and a reoccurring problem," Blouin said.

Assistant Attorney General Erin Handke, however, told the justices that questions about negative interactions with and bias against police officers justified striking the juror, regardless of passing mentions of a potential criminal history.

The judge in Shangreaux's case "evaluated the explanations and determined that a race neutral explanation was given," Handke said.

Hearsay, competency

Deputy Appellate Public Defender Matthew Mirabella argued two cases Tuesday morning. In the first, he argued that prosecutors unfairly introduced new evidence on the second day of a child sexual abuse trial, and that the judge improperly allowed a detective to identify the victim to the jurors based on a pretrial police interview with a woman who wasn't able to confidently identify the victim from the witness stand.

Mirabella also argued on behalf of a man who told police he'd considered hiking to the back of Mount Rushmore to shoot President Trump during the president's July 3, 2020, visit to the national memorial. In 2019, the man called the FBI to say he'd been hearing voices telling him to kill Trump. Law enforcement found weapons and ammunition during a visit to the man's home on June 30, 2020.

A jury failed to convict him in 2023 of making terroristic threats, but the man entered an Alford plea the following year. That plea allows defendants to maintain their innocence but admit that the government has the evidence to convict them. He was sentenced to two and a half years in prison.

Mirabella said his client should've been allowed to withdraw that plea, based on a severe mental illness that calls into question his ability to make a knowing and voluntary plea.

The state's high court will issue rulings at a later date for the three cases argued Tuesday.

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COMMENTARY

Book excerpt: America's 250th, South Dakota meadowlarks and the 'great course of freedom'

by Joseph Bottum

The following excerpt is reprinted with permission from the new book "This Far Country: South Dakota Lines on the 250th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence," by Joseph Bottum with illustrations by Jeanne Bowman. The book is published by the South Dakota Historical Society Press.

The Meadowlark

Springing like daybreak in fields by the river —
The Lac qui Parle River that begs from the dawn
Arrows of sunlight in quivering morning —
An effortless meadowlark sings to the fawn,
Sings to the chipmunks on chokecherry branches,
Sings to the scurrying squirrels on the lawn,
Sings of impossible love to the new day,
Sings to the mallard and trumpeter swan.

Welling like sunrise between the east rivers —
The James and the Big Sioux, now swelling with spring:
Spilling their banks with the wealth of the snowmelt,
Watering marshes where herons take wing —
The chirrups and whistles ascend in the new light:
Airs for the morning, fanfares that ring,
Extolling a world without tremble or worry:
Springs free to flourish, songs free to sing.

Along the Bad River a darker note enters,
A clash in the melodies songbirds perform:
Something of dryland and alkaline gullies,
Winters too bitter, summers too warm.
But there in the thin grass, a meadowlark's singing
Still tells of bright mornings and springs that transform.
Unruffled, unflustered, the meadowlark whistles
The wonder of calm days, the joy of the storm.

Water is life in the breaks and the uplands,
The jumbled and broken terrain of the West:
From Red Canyon Creek to the Redwater River,
Only the drain course and stream bed are blessed.
But under the shadow of towering red rock
The meadowlarks call as they build a spring nest
Dressed with pine needles and fluff from dry grasses,
A song of the spring welling up from their breast.

The crash of the rockets, the tumbledown sparkles,
The flashes and fountains each Fourth of July:
Above the small cities are glittering showers,

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With lights on Mount Rushmore, splashing the sky —
But when I imagine the great course of freedom,
I picture those meadowlarks rising to fly
Across the dry prairie to drink from the river.
I hear the new morning that springs with their cry.

A native of South Dakota, Joseph Bottum is one of the nation's most widely published writers, and author of over a thousand essays, reviews, poems and short stories. With a Ph.D. in medieval philosophy, he has written four books of poetry.

Republicans in US Senate unveil road map for 3 years of immigration crackdown

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — Republican leaders in Congress appeared to be on the same page Tuesday about how to fund immigration activities for the next three years as they released a party-line measure that will pave the way for a special process known as budget reconciliation.

But they weren't unified about another problem — when to clear a bipartisan funding bill for the vast majority of the Department of Homeland Security that would end a shutdown that's been underway since mid-February.

Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., said during a morning press conference he wanted to make sure funding for Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Border Patrol isn't left behind and that's why he's held back a Senate-passed bill that would fund most of the shuttered DHS programs.

"There's some concern on our side that if you do the bulk of the department first before that, then they could be left out. We can't allow for that," Johnson said. "So we're working through that. The sequencing is important."

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., said he "had heard" the House may approve the regular DHS funding bill once the Senate approved the new GOP budget resolution, which it could do as soon as this week. That appeared to be a contrast to the plans Johnson laid out.

Both chambers of Congress must adopt a budget resolution in order to unlock the complex budget reconciliation process they hope to use to fund ICE and the Border Patrol for the next three years.

"I don't think that DHS has the money to fund all those agencies for that long," Thune said, referring to the Trump administration's move to pay employees from the GOP's "big, beautiful" law during the shutdown. "But that's, I guess, a question, you know, they'll have to answer."

White House officials, he added, have been pressing for the House to clear the Senate-passed DHS funding bill that would officially end the shutdown and ensure consistent paychecks for employees at the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Secret Service and Transportation Security Administration.

Thune said it will take the Senate a while to move the actual reconciliation bill across the floor, which can only happen after both chambers agree to a budget resolution.

"I think there's a certain time, as you all know, that it takes to get reconciliation across the floor here," he said. "And I think there is a limited amount of time in which they can continue to fund the various agencies that aren't currently funded."

\$70 billion

Senate Republicans released a budget resolution later in the morning that would give the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee the ability to write a bill that spends up to \$70 billion on immigration enforcement and provides the same limit to the Judiciary Committee.

Budget Committee Chairman Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., wrote in a statement the budget resolution in-

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structs those two committees "to create a reconciliation bill that fully funds Border Patrol and ICE for 3.5 years, which will carry us through the Trump presidency."

Oregon Democratic Sen. Jeff Merkley, ranking member on the panel, wrote in a statement of his own that "Republicans are hellbent on passing another bill to provide even more funds to ICE and (Customs and Border Protection) — agencies that were already funded at multiple times their former budget last year!"

"In addition, Republicans rejected any commonsense reforms for these agencies such as wearing identification or getting a warrant before breaking into homes," Merkley added. "Instead, the Republican plan is more money for more secret police tactics that are terrorizing communities across America."

Democrats began pressing for guardrails on immigration officers after federal agents shot and killed two U.S. citizens in Minneapolis in January.

Vote-a-rama to press GOP

The Senate voted 52-46 in the afternoon to proceed with the budget resolution, setting up a final passage vote later this week.

That Senate process requires a marathon amendment voting session, which Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said during a floor speech the party will use to question Republicans' legislative priorities.

"Americans want to know why Republicans aren't fighting to lower their gas, health care, grocery and housing costs," he said. "During reconciliation, Democrats are going to make sure this majority answers to the American people."

The amendment votes won't be just about policy, especially with Democrats looking to regain control of the Senate during this November's midterm elections.

The Cook Political Report with Amy Walter categorizes Maine Republican Sen. Susan Collins' and Ohio Republican Sen. Jon Husted's reelection bids as "toss-up" races, making them the most at-risk members of their party.

Alaska Republican Sen. Dan Sullivan's race is rated as "lean Republican," making him more vulnerable than many of his colleagues seeking reelection.

Democrats running to unseat those three GOP senators could use their votes on certain amendments in campaign advertisements or debates later this year.

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.

Trump's DOJ sued over campaign to amass data on millions of voters

South Dakota among states identified as willing to turn over information

BY: JONATHAN SHORMAN

Voting rights groups launched a legal challenge Tuesday against the Trump administration's effort to sweep up sensitive data on millions of Americans with the aim of identifying noncitizen voters, arguing that the U.S. Department of Justice is building a dangerous centralized national voter list ahead of the midterm elections in November.

The federal lawsuit, filed in the District of Columbia by the voting rights and civic group Common Cause with help from other organizations, seeks to block the Justice Department from obtaining and analyzing unredacted state voter lists that include driver's license and partial Social Security numbers.

The DOJ plans to share the data with the Department of Homeland Security, which operates a powerful computer program that can verify U.S. citizenship. Democratic election officials say the program has wrongly flagged Americans as possible noncitizen voters and could erode faith in election results.

"This is a blatant, partisan power grab designed to cast doubt on the validity of our elections and whose vote should be counted," Virginia Kase Solomón, Common Cause president and CEO, said in a statement.

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The Justice Department has sued 30 states and the District of Columbia for the data. But at least a dozen other states have provided the data, handing the Trump administration information on millions of registered voters.

The latest lawsuit by Common Cause, with legal representation by the American Civil Liberties Union, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington and other voting rights groups, opens a new front in the legal fight against the Trump administration's campaign for the data. It represents an attempt to halt the administration from using the voter information it's already obtained — and stop it from collecting more.

The suit asks a court to order the Justice Department to halt any actions to compile, use or disclose sensitive voter data. The groups also wants the DOJ to delete the data already in its possession.

Alaska, Arkansas, Indiana, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nebraska, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, and Wyoming have voluntarily provided, or will turn over, their sensitive voter data, according to the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University, which has been tracking the Justice Department's efforts.

Federalization of elections

Since taking office last year, President Donald Trump has moved to assert presidential power over federal elections, which under the U.S. Constitution are run by the states. The president and his allies have framed his moves as necessary to ensure the security of elections by purging noncitizen voters.

Trump issued an executive order a year ago that attempted to impose a nationwide requirement that voters must produce documents proving their citizenship. Federal courts blocked the order. He is also pressuring Congress to pass legislation, the SAVE America Act, containing a similar requirement.

Late last month, Trump signed another executive order clamping down on mail ballots. It directs the U.S. Postal Service to restrict the delivery of ballots and instructs Homeland Security to compile lists of voting-age U.S. citizens in each state, effectively building a national database of voters and would-be voters. Several active lawsuits are challenging the order.

"By attempting to interrogate and exploit voter data for political purposes, President Trump's DOJ isn't just threatening the privacy of every American—they are building a system designed to imprison the ballot box and silence millions of eligible voters," Kase Solomón said. "We won't stand by while Americans' rights to privacy and voting are under attack."

The Justice Department didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

In other lawsuits, Justice Department lawyers have argued the agency is entitled to voter data under the 1960 Civil Rights Act, a federal law to combat voting discrimination. DOJ lawyers have also denied that the agency is building a nationwide voter list — but they have acknowledged voter data will be sent to Homeland Security for analysis by SAVE, an online tool short for Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements.

SAVE was previously used for one-off searches of individual immigrants to check whether they were eligible for government benefits. The Trump administration last year refashioned it into a program capable of checking the citizenship of voters. Some GOP states have begun voluntarily using SAVE to scan their state voter rolls for potential noncitizens.

"That's how we are going to ensure that they have the proper identification as to each and every voter," Justice Department Voting Section acting Chief Eric Neff said in federal court in Rhode Island in March, according to a transcript.

DOJ losing streak

Federal judges have so far uniformly ruled against the Justice Department's efforts to force states to turn over voter data. Federal judges in five states — California, Massachusetts, Michigan, Oregon and Rhode Island — have dismissed the DOJ's lawsuits.

The Justice Department has appealed some of the rulings. Oral arguments in those cases are set for mid-May.

The DOJ's most recent court loss came last week in Rhode Island from Judge Mary McElroy, a Trump

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appointee. In a 14-page order, she ruled that federal voting laws — including the National Voter Registration Act, the Help America Vote Act and the Civil Rights Act — don't empower the Justice Department to demand state voter data.

"Neither the NVRA nor HAVA authorize DOJ to conduct the kind of fishing expedition it seeks here," McElroy wrote.

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

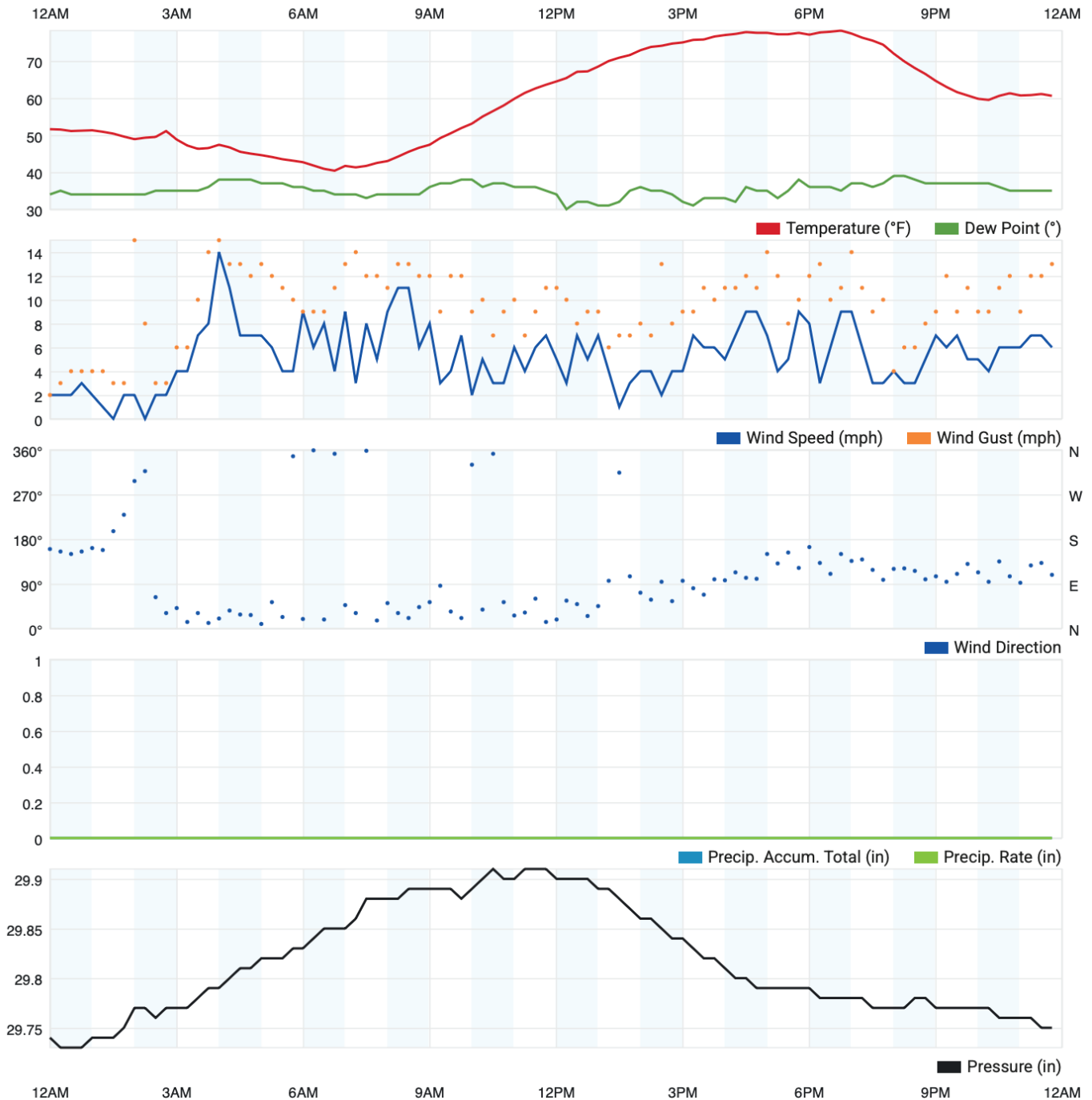
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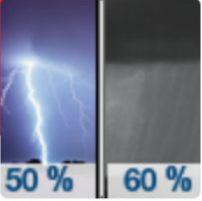



Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

April 21, 2026



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Red Flag Warning				
Today	Tonight	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday
				
High: 91 °F	Low: 57 °F	High: 73 °F	Low: 35 °F	High: 55 °F
Mostly Sunny then Mostly Sunny and Breezy	Breezy. Chance T-storms then Showers Likely	Slight Chance Showers and Breezy	Partly Cloudy and Breezy then Partly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny



Dangerous Fire Weather Wednesday

April 21, 2026
2:31 PM CDT

Critical/near-critical fire weather conditions expected across the region

Key Messages:

- **Red Flag Warning** for areas mainly south of Highway 12 Wednesday afternoon/evening.
- Southerly **wind gusts 30-45 mph** across much of the region.
- **Afternoon humidity between 15 and 20 percent** in the watch area.
- Thunderstorms possible Wednesday night, with **cloud to ground lightning**.

NEW

Important Updates:

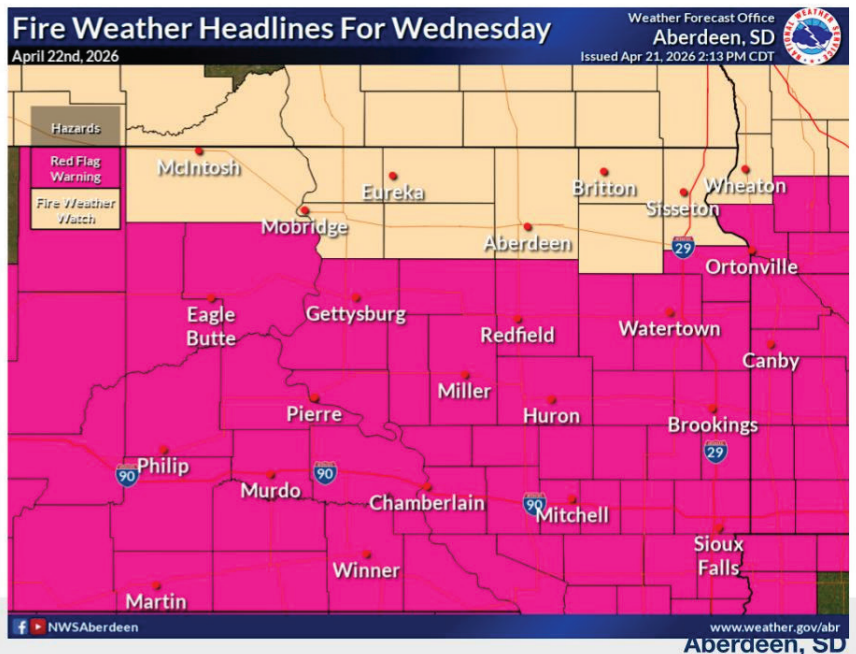
- Initial issuance of **Red Flag Warning**.

Next Scheduled Briefing:

- Wednesday Morning.



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



A Red Flag Warning has been issued for Wednesday. Hot and dry conditions return, with highs in the upper 80s to low 90s. Southerly winds increase through the day, up to 30 to 45 mph. Afternoon humidity values fall to 15-25% across the most of the region.

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THREAT ASSESSMENT

HIGHEST LOCAL RISK

1

WHAT THIS MEANS:
Isolated Severe Storms
Possible

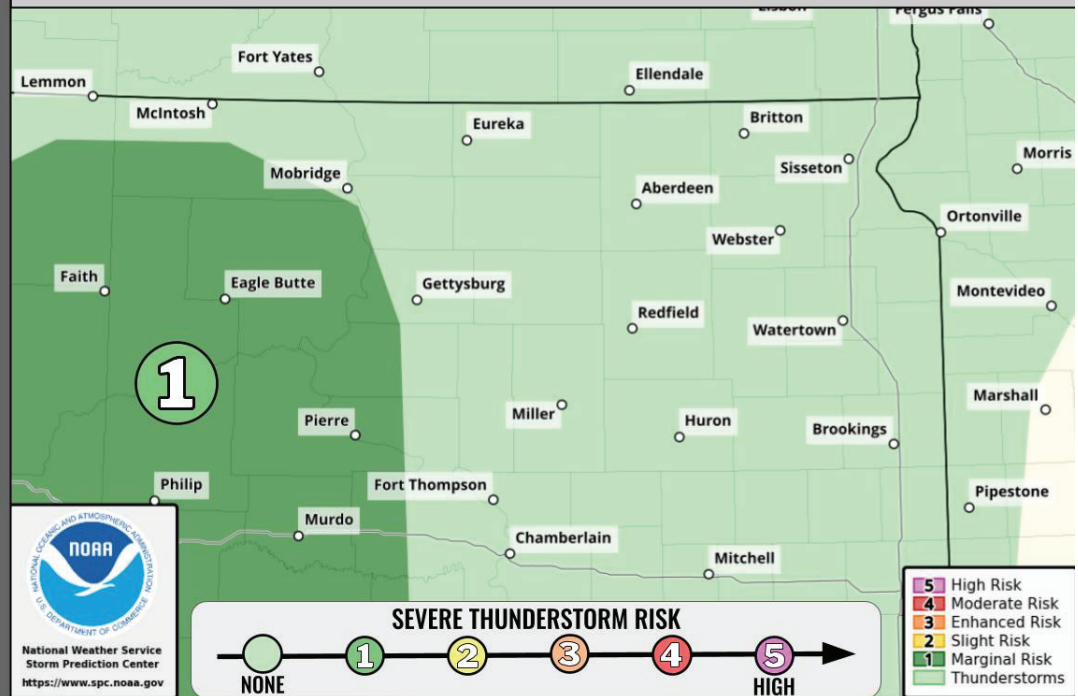
By Wednesday
evening

PRIMARY THREATS



DAMAGING
WIND GUSTS
of 60 mph

Marginal Risk for Severe Storms Wednesday Evening and Overnight



SEVERE THUNDERSTORM RISK



5 High Risk
4 Moderate Risk
3 Enhanced Risk
2 Slight Risk
1 Marginal Risk
Thunderstorms



Humidity and Wind Timing Forecast

April 21, 2026
2:50 PM CDT

Dry and windy conditions will be present Wednesday afternoon

- Red boxes highlight times and locations of greatest concern for **critical fire weather conditions**.
- In these areas, **relative humidity (RH)** is below 20 percent **while** winds are gusting generally between 35 and 45 mph.

		4/22 Wed								4/23 Thu								4/22 Wed								4/23 Thu										
		12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm			
Aberdeen	WindGust	16	15	16	22	29	34	36	36	36	32	28	30	32	37	37	35	McIntosh	WindGust	21	20	19	24	29	31	25	24	24	23	26	36	44	51	45		
	RH	53	61	65	53	37	21	21	27	43	68	90	56	35	28	33	46		RH	52	57	56	47	33	18	20	29	53	56	53	57	51	53	60	67	
Britton	WindGust	20	20	20	23	29	33	35	38	38	36	31	33	35	36	35	34	Milbank	WindGust	15	16	17	21	28	31	31	33	33	32	30	31	31	31	27	29	
	RH	54	56	59	53	37	25	25	31	41	61	83	65	41	34	39	55		RH	46	61	68	64	40	27	28	36	46	63	83	70	41	33	38	51	
Brookings	WindGust	16	19	22	28	33	37	37	38	39	37	35	33	31	31	29	30	Miller	WindGust	24	24	23	26	33	40	39	39	35	30	25	31	35	40	40	37	
	RH	51	59	63	62	39	28	27	37	54	72	87	78	46	33	34	45		RH	43	45	54	49	30	18	17	29	44	70	75	48	31	28	34	48	
Chamberlain	WindGust	20	17	16	24	34	40	38	36	31	24	20	26	31	37	38	34	Mobridge	WindGust	18	17	16	21	28	31	29	29	24	21	21	27	33	39	41	37	
	RH	38	42	55	48	26	15	18	31	51	67	64	46	30	26	30	45		RH	51	59	66	57	32	18	19	36	56	69	73	59	44	41	47	62	
Clark	WindGust	24	27	28	30	33	37	37	39	40	37	35	33	32	36	37	36	Murdo	WindGust	24	21	18	25	36	40	36	38	24	25	26	29	34	37	43	44	38
	RH	48	54	57	57	41	27	25	32	44	70	89	67	40	34	37	52		RH	34	40	46	39	23	15	20	44	57	55	44	43	37	33	39	49	
Eagle Butte	WindGust	23	20	20	24	30	32	28	25	24	24	27	34	41	46	47	43	Pierre	WindGust	19	16	13	18	28	35	31	29	23	18	20	28	34	40	40	35	
	RH	41	46	52	49	31	17	18	37	55	55	49	50	44	45	52	60		RH	41	45	54	53	28	15	19	44	56	64	62	47	37	34	39	52	
Ellendale	WindGust	16	14	14	20	28	33	33	36	36	32	28	31	35	39	38	37	Redfield	WindGust	22	23	23	28	34	40	40	39	37	32	29	32	35	39	40	37	
	RH	60	66	71	57	41	23	24	30	44	64	85	65	42	34	41	56		RH	50	56	63	55	36	20	18	27	41	67	89	54	31	27	32	48	
Eureka	WindGust	21	21	21	25	32	37	36	33	30	24	22	29	35	43	45	39	Sisseton	WindGust	17	19	20	23	28	31	31	35	36	35	31	32	32	33	31	31	
	RH	55	54	56	49	34	19	19	33	53	70	79	60	40	36	45	60		RH	48	54	66	59	40	26	26	30	41	60	80	63	40	33	38	51	
Gettysburg	WindGust	24	24	22	25	32	38	33	33	28	24	23	31	37	44	41	60	Watertown	WindGust	18	21	22	26	30	34	34	37	38	36	33	33	32	32	31	32	
	RH	47	47	54	51	33	16	17	39	64	77	75	57	41	41	47	60		RH	47	55	61	57	41	29	27	34	45	68	89	70	42	33	35	47	
Huron	WindGust	21	22	24	28	34	39	38	38	37	32	28	29	35	43	45	39	Webster	WindGust	21	23	23	26	30	33	34	37	37	36	31	32	32	33	33	33	
	RH	45	55	63	60	35	22	20	32	49	72	83	60	34	26	29	45		RH	50	56	59	55	38	27	26	30	42	65	87	67	42	34	37	53	
Kennebec	WindGust	24	20	16	23	36	44	40	37	32	25	25	32	36	43	44	38	Wheaton	WindGust	18	20	21	25	28	30	29	32	32	32	31	32	31	31	30	27	27
	RH	37	43	54	47	24	15	17	33	56	67	61	41	30	28	32	46		RH	48	59	66	57	35	27	30	33	44	62	78	70	44	36	39	51	

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 78 °F at 6:41 PM

Low Temp: 40 °F at 6:43 AM

Wind: 16 mph at 4:03 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 90 in 1990

Record Low: 15 in 2015

Average High: 61

Average Low: 34

Average Precip in April.: 1.19

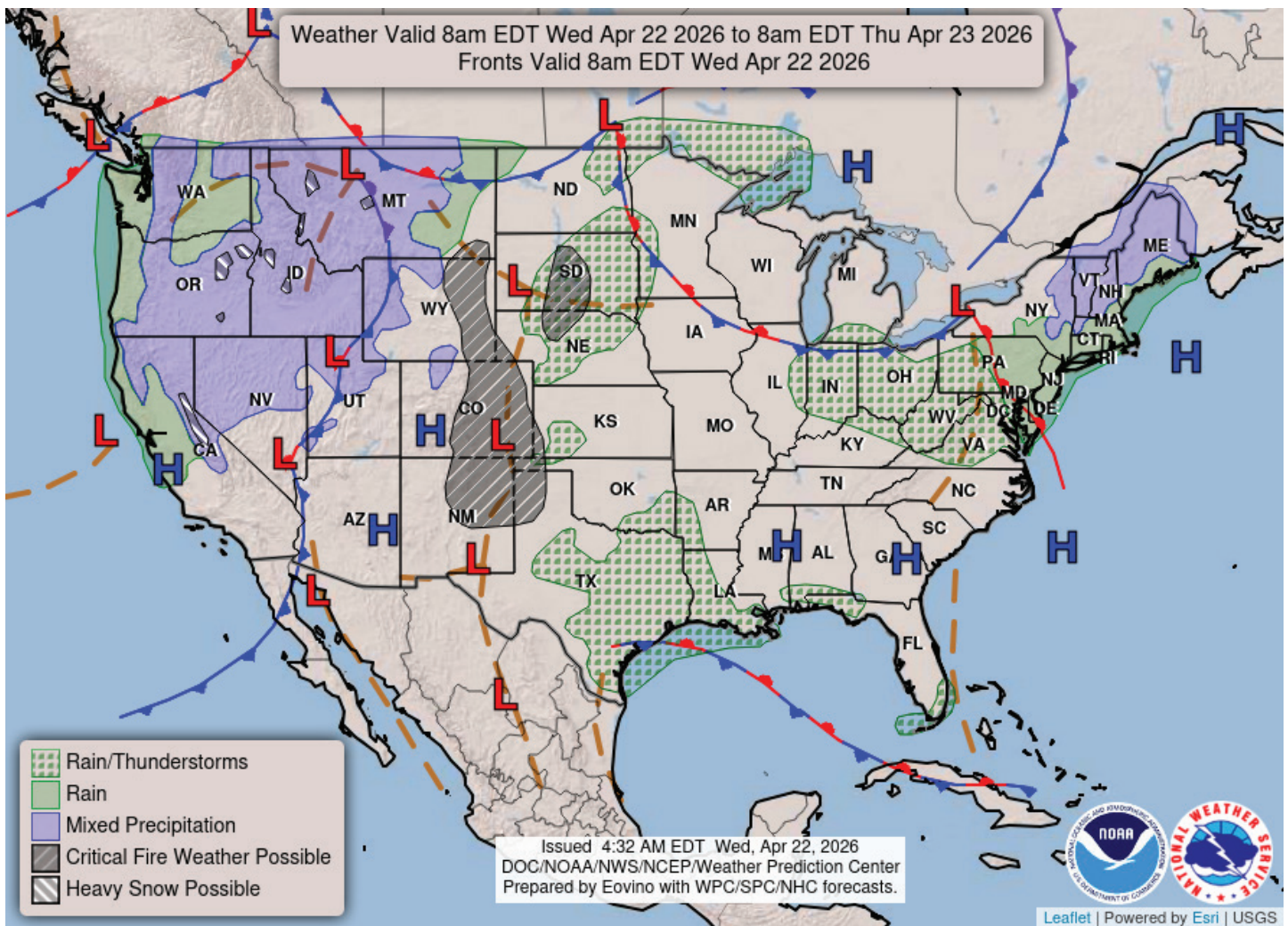
Precip to date in April.: 0.95

Average Precip to date: 3.25

Precip Year to Date: 2.57

Sunset Tonight: 8:26 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:33 am



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Today in Weather History

April 22nd, 1968: A late-season snowstorm affected most of South Dakota, with the heaviest snowfall measuring 18 inches at Eagle Butte. Localized icing damaged utility lines, and 40 mph winds caused localized blizzard conditions. Some calf losses were reported.

April 22nd, 2001: Heavy snow of 7 to 15 inches fell across much of central and northeast South Dakota from early on the 22nd to early on the 23rd. Some freezing rain also brought heavy icing in Buffalo, Eastern Lyman, and far southern Roberts counties, resulting in downed trees and branches and downed power lines. This late-season snowstorm caused many travel problems along with some accidents. There were many vehicles in the ditch along Interstate 29 in Roberts County. Many schools and events were canceled or delayed on the 22nd and 23rd. The heavy snow also caused problems with ranchers and their livestock, with some calves lost in the storm. Around 9:30 am on the 23rd in Kennebec, the heavy snow resulted in the roof of the 40 by 64-foot feed and seed warehouse to collapse. Late-season record snowfalls were set at Aberdeen and Pierre. Some snowfall amounts included 7 inches at Timber Lake and Leola, 8 inches at Eagle Butte, Mobridge, and Aberdeen, 9 inches at Kennebec and Pollock, 10 inches at Gettysburg, Selby, Redfield, and Webster, and 11 inches at Onida, Mission Ridge, Hosmer, and Columbia. Locations with snowfall amounts of a foot or more included 12 inches at Britton, Ree Heights, Highmore, Blunt, Seneca, and Pierre, 13 inches at Murdo, Presho, Miller, and Wilmot, 14 inches at Roy Lake and southwest of Harold, and 15 inches at Saint Lawrence.

1883 — An outbreak of tornadoes from Louisiana to Kansas claimed the lives of 200 persons. One of the tornadoes destroyed the town of Beauregard MS. (David Ludlum)

1980 — A record April heat wave sent the mercury up to the 100 degree mark in Iowa. (The Weather Channel)

1987 — Fifteen cities in the southeastern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 96 degrees at Pensacola FL established a record for the month of April. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 — Heavy snow fell over northern Nebraska, with 15 inches reported at Mullen. Heavy snow also blanketed the mountains of northern Arizona, with 16 inches reported at Munds Park. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 — Twenty-seven cities in the central U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. The high of 96 degrees at Omaha was an April record, and the high of 100 degrees at Lubbock TX equalled their record for April. Hill City KS and Liberal KS tied for honors as the hot spot in the nation with afternoon highs of 103 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 — Thunderstorms produced severe weather from the Southern and Central High Plains to north-west Florida during the afternoon and evening. Thunderstorms produced wind gusts to 67 mph at Gillette WY, hail two inches in diameter west of Roswell NM, and deluged Cheyenne OK with 8.68 inches of rain leaving some parts of the town under five feet of water. Temperatures reached the low 90s in the north central U.S. Chamberlain SD and Pickstown SD tied Presidio TX for honors as the hot spot in the nation with afternoon highs of 94 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2011 — Lambert International Airport in St. Louis experiences extensive damage as it is hit by a group of tornados, blowing out windows in the main terminal and tearing the roof off Concourse C. Five people were taken to the hospital with minor injuries from shattered glass and flying debris.

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Daily Devotion

Praying on Our Knees

Only God can soften a heart and open a mind—let's pray and watch Him work.

Hebrews 4:16: 16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Have you ever been in a situation where people reacted negatively towards you? Maybe at this very moment you're dealing with a difficult home life, work relationship, or situation at school.

The way to handle troubles is on our knees before the Lord. The heavenly Father waits for us to approach His throne through prayer so we can gain His divine perspective and receive instruction on how to proceed. But in our prayer time, a battle often takes place between what we want (avoiding conflict) and what the Lord has planned for us (to move through it in faith).

When we humbly seek the Lord through prayer, we invite Him to take the lead in our situation and to accomplish His plan. Scripture promises that He is our refuge, strength, and help (Psalm 46:1). He may direct us in ways we find surprising, but we can trust they will be for our good and His glory.

Praying on our knees is a gesture of humility, which reminds us God is the Master and we're His servants. In fact, He can also see a humble attitude in those who cannot kneel. He knows all things, whereas our perspective is narrow. What's more, He is all-powerful. He can soften hard hearts and open closed minds. We cannot. Let's make prayer a regular part of our day and watch what God does, in both our life and the lives of those around us.

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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Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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- ☐ 9 Months.....\$52.00
- ☐ 12 Months.....\$60.00

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Pay with Paypal. Type the following into your browser window:

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WINNING NUMBERS

MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

04.21.26

1 4 40 47 58 4

TOP PRIZE:

\$1,000,000/year

NEXT 17 Hrs 34 Mins 52
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

04.21.26

1 36 43 56 58 7

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$150,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 19
DRAW: Mins 52 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

04.20.26

5 7 31 41 43 7

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$22,680,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 34 Mins 52
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

04.18.26

11 14 17 25 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$60,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 49 Mins 52
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

04.20.26

4 29 35 40 43 21

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 17 Hrs 18 Mins 52
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

04.20.26

9 17 36 47 64 26

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$100,000,000

NEXT 17 Hrs 18 Mins 52
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

College student from China charged with illegally taking photos of US military planes

By ED WHITE Associated Press

A college student from China has been charged with illegally taking photos of U.S. military planes in Nebraska during a multistate road trip that included a stop at an Air Force base in South Dakota.

Tianrui Liang, 21, was arrested April 7 at a New York airport while trying to leave the U.S. for Glasgow, Scotland, where he attends school, the FBI said in a court filing.

Liang admitted that he got out of a car on a public road in late March and took photos of an RC-135, a reconnaissance aircraft, and an E-4B at Offutt Air Force Base near Omaha, the FBI said.

The E-4B, known as the "Nightwatch", can serve as an airborne command center for a president and military officials in times of emergency, according to the Air Force.

The FBI said it's illegal to photograph or sketch defense installations without approval. Images of both planes are available online.

Liang told investigators that it was "legal to take pictures of the sky, but he knew it was illegal to take pictures of the planes on the ground," the FBI said. He said they were for his personal collection, the FBI said.

Liang's attorney, Jeff Thomas, declined to comment Tuesday. Liang has not appeared yet in federal court in Omaha.

Liang flew to Vancouver, British Columbia, in Canada on March 26 and met a friend who is a college student in New York, the FBI said. They drove across the U.S. border in Washington state before Liang drove alone to see Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota, according to the affidavit. The FBI said he was also interested in going to Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma.

Other cases involving military sites have been filed against college students from China.

Five men were charged with lying and trying to cover their tracks after they were confronted in the dark in 2023 near a Michigan military site where thousands of people had gathered for drills. They graduated from the University of Michigan and apparently returned to China months before they were charged and have never appeared in court.

In 2020, two Chinese nationals who were pursuing master's degrees at the University of Michigan were sentenced to prison for illegally taking photographs at a naval air station in Key West, Florida.

The Iran war could make petroleum products from clothes to crayons more costly

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — It might be hard to imagine the Iran war weighing on stuffed toys with names like Snuggle Glove, Bizzikins and Wobblies, but even plush playthings are not immune when oil shipments from the Middle East are constrained.

Like many soft toys, the creatures developed by a manufacturer in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, are made with polyester and acrylic, synthetic fibers derived from petroleum. Three weeks after the war started, suppliers in China notified Aleni Brands that getting the materials already was costing them 10% to 15% more, CEO Ricardo Venegas said.

"I think this situation demonstrates how much oil permeates throughout our system, and we can't get away from it," said Venegas, who founded Aleni Brands last year and is in the process of adding product lines. "Who would have thought that the price of a toy would have a direct relationship with oil?"

It's not just toys. Petrochemicals derived from oil and natural gas go into making more than 6,000 consumer products, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. Computer keyboards, lipstick, tennis rackets,

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pajamas, soft contact lenses, detergent, chewing gum, shoes, crayons, shaving cream, pillows, aspirin, dentures, tape, umbrellas and nylon guitar strings are just a few of them.

So far, the war's most tangible and immediate effect for many people outside the conflict zone has been spiking gasoline prices. Travelers also are seeing higher airfares and flight fees as airlines respond to the rising cost of jet fuel. Consumers may find themselves paying more for food, furniture or any of the myriad of goods transported by trucks that run on diesel.

But crude oil isn't just refined as fuel. It gets turned into chemicals, waxes, oils and other mixtures that appear in a vast array of everyday items, including most made with plastic and rubber. Petroleum derivatives also are used in a lot of packaging. With disruptions to global oil supplies now in their eighth week, higher production costs also could make things more expensive for shoppers, according to trade groups and some companies.

Venegas, a 30-year toy industry veteran, said he would absorb higher material costs for now but expects to increase prices for customers by early 2027, if the war goes on another three to six months.

From crude oil to T-shirts and rugs

While 85% of global oil consumption is in the form of fuel, the rest goes into a wide range of consumer products, according to Gernot Wagner, a climate economist at Columbia University's School of Business.

Crude oil is mostly a complex mixture of hydrocarbons, which are compounds made of carbon and hydrogen atoms. Refineries and chemical plants separate and break them down to convert them into smaller chemical building blocks known as petrochemicals.

Six petrochemicals — ethylene, propylene, butylene, benzene, toluene and xylenes — are the major foundations of plastics and synthetic materials like nylon and polyesters, which manufacturers in turn use to design and deliver products. More from the Department of Energy: Automobile parts, ballpoint pens, curtains, dice, eyeglasses, fertilizer, golf balls, hearing aids, insect repellent, kayaks, luggage, mops and nail polish.

Materials account for a big share of production costs for many manufacturers, including those that supply carpets, clothing and tires, according to Andrew Walberer, partner and global lead in the chemicals practice of global strategy and management consultancy Kearney.

Take a button-down shirt, for example. Walberer estimated that materials account for 27%-30% of how much it costs a manufacturer to make one. Labor costs contribute 10% to 30%. Business expenses tied to marketing, distribution and administration comprises the rest, he said.

The ripple effect

Experts say if oil holds above \$90 per barrel for the next several months, cost pressures will accelerate throughout the supply network.

Footwear Distributors and Retailers of America CEO Matt Priest said most of the trade organization's members keep a two- to three-month inventory of finished products, providing a temporary cushion against higher materials costs.

Roughly 70% of the materials in synthetic shoes are petrochemical-based, and 30% of the costs for those materials are directly tied to oil price rate swings, according to a report the organization published last month on the U.S. footwear industry's "exposure to oil prices & the impact on shoe costs."

The FDRA analysis estimated that between materials, factory energy and transportation, companies paying more for petroleum could translate into a 1.5% to 3% increase in the price shoppers pay for a pair of shoes by late summer and the fall.

By the end of April, U.S. shoe and clothing manufacturers need to start signing contracts with suppliers, mostly outside the U.S., for orders of polyester staple fiber and polyester filament yarn to get their designs on retail shelves and online for the holiday shopping season, according to Nate Herman, executive vice president of the American Apparel & Footwear Association.

One kilogram, or a little over two pounds, of the materials used in polyester textiles, has increased in price from an average of 90 cents before the U.S. and Israel attacked Iran to \$1.33 per kilogram, Herman said. He estimated that each garment will cost 10 cents to 15 cents more to produce as a result.

Another cost for importers

Some businesses are looking for ways to offset rising costs.

Lisa Lane is the founder of Rinseroo, which sells portable shower head, bathtub and sink attachments for cleaning, pet grooming, and bathing. She recently tripled the number of the slip-on hoses she procures from China each month after her manufacturer said the cost would be 30% higher in another 30 days. She had a few days to decide whether to place a three-month advance order.

The components of Rinseroo's products include petroleum derivatives like polyvinyl chloride, Lane said. After purchasing 240,000 units instead of her usual 80,000, she is also evaluating cost-cutting options.

Lane said she wants to hold off on increasing prices for retailers that sell the attachments since Rinseroo did that last year to offset higher U.S. tariffs on imports from China. For example, a hose for washing pets in a bathtub went up to \$33.95 from \$29.95 on retail websites, she said.

"We want to stay at that sweet spot where people want to continue to buy from us and feel like they're getting a good value," Lane said.

Another company, which sells wound care products like bandages, dressings, pads and sponges to nursing homes and other medical facilities, plans to raise its prices by 15% in a matter of weeks. Gentell CEO David Navazio noted that adhesives in the products rely on several petrochemicals.

Including energy for production and materials, Navazio estimated the company's costs are going up by 20%.

Gentell, which is based in Yardley, Pennsylvania but has its main manufacturing location in Toronto, also makes private label products for other companies, including a medical technology firm that supplies retail stores like CVS.

Because bandages and dressings are necessities, Navazio said he doesn't think his business will suffer if it raises customer prices. Less certain is whether prices will come down once the war ends and oil shipments stabilize.

"In the past, I've seen transportation costs come down, but I've never seen prices of raw material come down," he said.

Iranians have long sought work and relative stability in Turkey. The war could force some to return

By SERRA YEDIKARDES Associated Press

ISTANBUL (AP) — Sadri Haghshenas spends her days selling borek — a layered, savory pastry — at a shop in Istanbul, but her mind is on her daughter in Tehran.

The family had to send her home to Iran after they ran into difficulties renewing her visa, despite fears that a shaky ceasefire could soon collapse.

For years, short-term residency permits have allowed tens of thousands of Iranians to pursue economic opportunities and enjoy relative stability in neighboring Turkey. But it's a precarious situation, and the war has raised the stakes.

"I swear, I cry every day," Haghshenas said, raising her hands from behind the counter of the pastry shop. "There is no life in my country, there is no life here, what shall I do?"

A daughter sent back

Haghshenas and her husband moved to Turkey five years ago with their then-teenage daughters and have been living on tourist visas renewable every six months to two years.

They could not afford a lawyer this year, because her husband is out of work due to health problems. As a result, they missed the deadline to apply for a new visa for their 20-year-old daughter, Asal, who is still in her final year of high school.

Asal was detained at a checkpoint earlier this month and spent a night at an immigration facility. Her mother found a friend to take her back to Tehran rather than face deportation proceedings that could complicate her ability to return to Turkey. They hope she can come back on a student visa.

Haghshenas has been unable to talk to her daughter since she left because of a monthslong internet blackout in Iran.

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Many Iranians have temporary status

Turkey has not seen an influx of refugees, as most Iranians have sought safety within their country. Many who have crossed the land border were transiting to other countries where they have citizenship or residency.

Nearly 100,000 Iranians lived in Turkey in 2025, according to the Turkish Statistical Institute. Around 89,000 have entered Turkey since the start of the war, while around 72,000 have departed, according to the United Nations' refugee agency.

Some Iranians have used short-term visa-free stays to wait out the war, but there are few options for those who want to stay longer.

Sedat Albayrak, of the Istanbul Bar Association's Refugee and Migrant Rights Center, said that getting international protection status can be difficult, and the system encourages Iranians to apply for short-term permits instead.

"There are people who have lived on them for over 10 years," he said.

If the war continues, more may have to return

Nadr Rahim came to Turkey for his children's education 11 years ago. Now, the war may force him to go home.

Because of the difficulty of getting a permit to start a business or work legally in Turkey, he lived off the profits of his motorcycle salesroom in Iran. But there have been no sales since the war started, and international sanctions — and the internet outage — make it extremely difficult to transfer funds.

His family only has enough money to stay in Turkey a few more months. His children grew up in Turkey and don't read Farsi or speak it fluently. He worries about how they would adapt to living in Iran, but said "if the war continues, we will have no choice but to return."

In the meantime, he spends most of his days scrolling on his phone, waiting for news from his parents in Tehran or discussing the war over waterpipes with Iranian friends.

'A bad life' in Turkey and Iran

A 42-year-old Iranian woman came to Turkey eight months ago, hoping to make money to support her family. She and her daughter registered as university students to get study visas. She attends classes in the morning to keep her legal status before rushing to service jobs, sometimes working until 3 a.m.

They share a room with six other people at a women's boarding house, she said, speaking on condition of anonymity out of fear for her security should she return to Iran.

"I truly love Iran. If necessary, I would even go and defend it in war," she says. But she sees no future there, while in Turkey, she's barely scraping by and only able to send small amounts of money to her parents.

"I have a bad life in Turkey, and my parents have a bad life in Iran," she said. "I came to Turkey with so much hope, to support my parents and build a future. But now I feel hopeless."

From one temporary refuge to another

A 33-year-old freelance architect from Tehran traveled to Turkey during Iran's violent crackdown on mass protests in January. She had planned to return after the situation calmed down, but then the United States and Israel went to war with Iran at the end of February.

"I started to believe that it's a very bad situation, worse than I expected," she said, speaking on condition of anonymity for fear of persecution if she returns to Iran.

She has been unable to work for her usual clients back in Iran because of the internet blackout. With the end of her 90-day visa-free window approaching, she can't afford to apply for a longer stay in Turkey.

Instead, she has decided to go to Malaysia, where she will get free accommodation in return for building shelters during a month of visa-free stay.

She has no plan for what comes next.

Iran attacks ship in Strait of Hormuz, complicating diplomatic efforts to resume talks

By JON GAMBRELL and DAVID RISING Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran opened fire on a container ship Wednesday in the Strait of Hormuz, underscoring the danger to commercial vessels in a waterway crucial to global energy supplies as plans for ceasefire talks between Tehran and the United States in Islamabad faltered.

The morning assault by Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard came after U.S. President Donald Trump indefinitely extended the ceasefire with Iran due to expire within hours, giving Tehran time to come up with a "unified proposal" ahead of possible negotiations.

A second ship came under fire in the strait a short time later with no reported damage, according to the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations Center.

The maritime monitoring center did not immediately identify who fired on the second vessel, but suspicion immediately fell on Iran, whose leaders appear poised to drive a harder bargain with American negotiators this time after two other rounds of talks with the Trump administration ended in open warfare.

Hard-line supporters of Iran's theocracy held rallies across the country late Tuesday that included the Revolutionary Guard moving missiles and launchers into public places for the first time since the ceasefire started in a sign of defiance to Israel and the U.S., which devoted much of their airstrike campaign to destroying the country's ballistic missile arsenal.

While American and Israeli airstrikes have stopped in Iran — and Tehran's missile attacks no longer target Israel and the wider Middle East — Wednesday's attack in the strait and earlier American interdictions of Iranian ships suggest the threat remains at sea. Without any diplomatic agreement, those attacks may continue and further squeeze global energy supplies.

Trump said the U.S. would continue its blockade of Iranian ports, which Iran has called "unacceptable," and has indicated was a reason it had not yet agreed to join talks in Islamabad.

The Revolutionary Guard vowed Wednesday to "deliver crushing blows beyond the enemy's imagination to its remaining assets in the region."

Iran claims ship ignored warnings before attacked

Wednesday's attacks in the Strait of Hormuz came after the U.S. seized an Iranian container ship after shooting it this past weekend and boarded an oil tanker associated with Iran's oil trade in the Indian Ocean.

The UKMTO, the monitoring agency that first reported the attacks, said the first ship was attacked at 7:55 a.m. by a Revolutionary Guard gunboat that did not hail the ship before firing. It added that nobody was hurt in the attack.

Iran's Nour News, however, reported that the Guard only opened fire on the ship after it had "ignored the warnings of the Iranian armed forces." Iran's semiofficial Fars news agency described the attack as Iran "lawfully enforcing its control over the Strait of Hormuz.

In peacetime, about 20% of the world's oil and natural gas transits the strategic waterway, which leads from the Persian Gulf to the open oceans and was fully open until the U.S. and Israel attacked Iran on Feb. 28 to start the war.

Since then Tehran has throttled shipping traffic through the strait, causing oil prices to skyrocket and impacting global economies.

In early trading on Wednesday, Brent crude oil, the international standard, was trading at close to \$98 a barrel, up more than 30% since the day the war started.

Pakistan forges ahead with diplomatic efforts

Pakistan has been working tirelessly to bring both sides together for a second round of talks.

So far, Iran has not committed but Pakistani officials there have expressed confidence that Tehran will send a delegation to resume negotiations. The first round April 11 and 12 ended without an agreement.

Over the weekend, Iran said that it had received new proposals from Washington, but also suggested that a wide gap remains between the sides. Issues that derailed the previous round of negotiations included Iran's nuclear enrichment program, its regional proxies and the strait.

Following Trump's announcement of the ceasefire extension, U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres said he hoped it would create "critical space for diplomacy and confidence-building between Iran and the United States," according to his spokesman, Stephane Dujarric.

One killed in drone attack in Lebanon

In Lebanon, where between Israel and the Iran-backed Hezbollah broke out two days after the U.S. and Israel launched joint strikes on Iran to start the war, the state-run National News Agency said a morning Israeli drone strike on the village of Jabbour killed one and wounded two others.

Israel's military denied that it had attacked the area.

Since a 10-day ceasefire went into effect there on Friday, there have been several Israeli strikes while Hezbollah claimed its first attack on Tuesday.

Since the war started, at least 3,375 people have been killed in Iran, according to authorities. More than 2,290 people have been killed in Lebanon, 23 people have died in Israel and more than a dozen have died in Gulf Arab states. Fifteen Israeli soldiers in Lebanon and 13 U.S. service members throughout the region have been killed.

Pope visiting Equatorial Guinea prison in spotlight after US migrant deportations

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

MALABO, Equatorial Guinea (AP) — Pope Leo XIV is visiting one of Equatorial Guinea's notorious prisons Wednesday, drawing attention to human rights abuses that campaigners have denounced for years and especially after the U.S. began deporting third-country migrants here.

Leo's visit to the prison in Bata, the central African country's port city, continues the tradition of Pope Francis, who made prison visits a priority of his pontificate. Francis' aim was to give prisoners hope and to remind them the church was with them, while also shining a spotlight on judicial abuses, overcrowding and other injustices.

The visit caps Leo's last full day in Africa, rounding out a marathon 11-day, four-nation tour that took him from Algeria in the north to Angola in the south, with Cameroon in between.

He was due to open the day with a Mass in Mongomo, in the far east, before arriving in Bata, the country's most populous city on the coast. Also on the agenda was a moment of prayer at a memorial to victims of a 2021 explosion in a military barracks in Bata that has been blamed on negligence.

Judicial abuses documented

The U.N. human rights office in 2022 welcomed the abolition of the death penalty in Equatorial Guinea, but its prisons and justice system overall have been repeatedly faulted by the U.N. and condemned by human rights groups and the U.S. State Department.

In its 2023 report on the country, the U.S. listed a host of abuses: arbitrary or unlawful killings and arrests, political detentions, torture, life-threatening prison conditions and "serious problems" with the independence of the judiciary.

"Amnesty International has serious concerns about the human rights situation in Equatorial Guinea," said Marta Colomer Aguilera, senior campaigner at Amnesty's West and Central Africa office.

She said torture had been used to extract confessions or to punish, human rights defenders are harassed, and the lack of judicial independence compromised the right to a fair trial.

Equatorial Guinea is led by President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, who has been in power since 1979 and is accused of widespread corruption and authoritarianism.

Equatorial Guinea is also one of several African nations that have been paid millions of dollars in controversial deals with the Trump administration to receive migrants deported from the U.S. to countries other than their own.

AP reporting shows that at least 29 such migrants with no ties to the country have been deported here. They were not sent to the prison in Bata. Some remain in detention in Malabo with restrictions on legal and medical support, while others have been forcibly returned to their countries where they face persecution.

The Equatorial Guinea government has denied rights abuses and hasn't commented when asked to respond to questions about abuses involving the U.S. migration deportation deal.

Leo, the U.S.-born pope, has criticized the Trump administration's overall migration deportation policy as "extremely disrespectful."

Human rights groups want pope to speak out

On the eve of his prison visit, 70 human rights organizations published an open letter to Leo, urging him to speak out especially about U.S. deportation of migrants here and encourage African nations to not be complicit in the practice.

"These practices circumvent humanitarian protections, expose refugees to detention and coercion, and subject individuals to refoulement, in direct contravention of international law," they wrote, referring to the legal concept that prohibits countries from sending people to places where their lives or freedoms are at risk.

"The conditions under which these deportations have been carried out have also reflected a very troubling disregard for human life and safety. We call for the intercession of Pope Leo XIV to discourage African countries from being complicit in these violations and instead to protect these individuals," the groups said.

One of the signatories was EG Justice, which has repeatedly denounced the detention of political prisoners in Equatorial Guinea. The group urged Leo to use his moral authority to speak out about it.

"There are individuals — prisoners of conscience, and human rights activists — in detention whose cases raise serious humanitarian and due process concerns," said Tutu Alicante, a U.S.-based activist who runs the EG Justice group. "At moments like this, sentence review and a real commitment to reform the judiciary can send a powerful signal of a willingness to turn a page toward justice and reconciliation."

Alicante said the government had taken "cosmetic steps" in recent months to improve certain detention facilities but he said they were temporary.

"The real test will be whether humane conditions, access to medical care, and basic rights are sustained long after the papal visit concludes," he said.

2 US officials killed in Mexico crash after anti-drug operation worked for CIA, AP sources say

By MEGAN JANETSKY, DAVID KLEPPER and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Two U.S. officials killed in a vehicle crash as they returned from destroying a clandestine drug lab in northern Mexico over the weekend were working for the CIA, according to a U.S. official and two other people familiar with the matter.

Two Mexican investigators also were killed in the crash, which Mexican authorities said occurred while the convoy was returning from an operation to destroy drug labs of criminal groups. There have been discrepancies in the public accounts of what happened from U.S. and Mexican officials, which experts say underscores heightened American involvement in security operations in Mexico and across the region.

The CIA's involvement was confirmed Tuesday by the three with knowledge of the crash, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive intelligence matters. That the U.S. officials worked for the CIA was reported earlier by The Washington Post.

It comes after days of contradictions from Mexican and U.S. authorities about the role that American officials played in an operation to bust a narco-laboratory in northern Chihuahua state.

The lack of clarity from authorities reignited a debate over the extent of U.S. involvement in Mexico's security operations as Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum faces extreme pressure from U.S. President Donald Trump's administration to crack down on cartels. Trump has taken a more aggressive stance toward Latin America than any leader in recent U.S. history, capturing Venezuela's president, blockading oil shipments to Cuba and launching joint military operations in Ecuador, a country also marked by criminal violence.

Trump has repeatedly offered to take action on Mexican cartels, an intervention that Sheinbaum has said was "unnecessary."

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The CIA officers were initially identified as U.S. embassy personnel by U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Ron Johnson, who is himself a former CIA employee.

The U.S. Embassy declined Monday to identify the individuals or which entity of the U.S. government they worked for, but said the officials were "supporting Chihuahua state authorities' efforts to combat cartel operations." The embassy, State Department and CIA declined to comment on the identities of reports of CIA involvement in the operation.

Local Mexican officials originally claimed they were working with the U.S. on an operation, but later walked those comments back after the effort came under scrutiny from Sheinbaum.

Sheinbaum said she knew nothing of a joint operation between Chihuahua's government and the U.S. despite reports that the Mexican army was also involved in the raid on the lab.

She maintained in a Tuesday press briefing that she didn't know if the officials were part of the CIA but acknowledged that state officials and the U.S. "were working together."

It's a sensitive issue for the Mexican leader as she walks a careful line with the Trump administration, working to maintain a strong relationship to offset threats of U.S. intervention on cartels and tariffs while also underscoring Mexico's sovereignty.

The CIA has recently expanded its collaboration with Mexican authorities, part of the Trump administration's effort to stop the flow of illicit drugs.

The presence of U.S. intelligence officials in Mexican territory has been the subject of ongoing debate, which has only intensified after Trump's military actions in Venezuela and Iran.

Last year, Sheinbaum said the U.S. had conducted surveillance drone flights at Mexico's request after a series of conflicting public statements.

The most recent controversy surfaced in January over the detention in Mexico of former Canadian athlete Ryan Wedding, one of the United States' most wanted fugitives. While Mexican officials claim he surrendered at the U.S. Embassy, U.S. authorities have described his capture as the result of a binational operation.

"There is a rise of hidden operations by the United States in Mexico under Trump," said David Saucedo, a Mexican security analyst. "They're hidden because ... the Mexican government has a discourse that they can't permit the presence of armed U.S. agents — it's a kind of violation of sovereignty. The Mexican government has always tried to hide this collaboration."

The AP Interview: Cyprus president says EU needs a clear playbook on helping members under attack

By MENELAOS HADJICOSTIS Associated Press

NICOSIA, Cyprus (AP) — European Union leaders meeting in Cyprus need to start preparing a playbook on what should happen if an EU country under attack puts out a call for help from bloc partners, the president of Cyprus said.

In an exclusive interview with The Associated Press on Tuesday, President Nikos Christodoulides said EU leaders will discuss "giving substance" to Article 42.7 of the bloc's treaties, which oblige all 27 member states to assist each other in times of crisis.

The article states that if a nation is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, its partners should provide "aid and assistance by all the means in their power." It has never been used before so there's no hard and fast rules on how EU members should respond to any call for assistance.

"We have Article 42.7 and we don't know what is going to happen if a member state triggers this article," Christodoulides said ahead of an EU-Mideast summit he is also hosting later this week, expected to focus on the Iran war and its fallout. "So we're going to have a discussion and prepare, let's say, an operational plan of what is going to happen in case a member state triggers this article, and there are a number of issues."

The issue resonates particularly with Christodoulides, who appealed for help from fellow EU countries last month when a Shahed drone struck a British air base on the island's southern coastline. Cypriot officials said the drone was launched from Lebanon whose capital is just 207 kilometers (129 miles) away

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from Cyprus' southern coast. Greece, France, Spain, The Netherlands and Portugal dispatched ships with anti-drone capabilities to help defend the island.

Clarification needed on countries that are also NATO members

Christodoulides said since many EU countries are also members of NATO, the playbook should clarify how those countries would respond to a call for help from an EU partner without conflicting with their obligations under the military alliance.

NATO's own security guarantee, Article 5, states an attack on one ally is deemed an attack on them all, requiring a collective response.

"So what is going to happen in this situation if a member state is both NATO member state and an EU member state? What is going happen?" Christodoulides said.

Another issue that needs to be addressed under the Article 47.2 is whether a response would be a collective one in the NATO mold or just one for states neighboring the country in distress. There's also the issue of what means would need to be used to deal with varying types of crises.

Forging closer EU ties to the Mideast

Christodoulides said he's pleased to see that fellow EU leaders now "understand the importance" of bringing the bloc closer to the Middle East with such initiatives as the Mediterranean Pact that implements specific projects on a range of issues including health, education and energy in Middle Eastern countries.

Closer EU ties to the Middle East has been a key priority for Cyprus' EU presidency, which Christodoulides said offers a "very good opportunity ... to give substance" to that objective. Attending the informal EU leaders' summit later this week will be the leaders of Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, affording the opportunity "not just to exchange ideas but to see in action how we elevate our cooperation in a strategic level."

"We can represent the interest of the countries of the Greater Middle East to Brussels, but at the same time, and this is very, very important, the countries in the region, they trust Cyprus to represent them in the European Union," he said.

Bringing India to Europe

Christodoulides is a strong proponent of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), a trade, energy and digital connectivity corridor that would link the continent with the world's largest democracy and is hoped to usher peace and stability in the Middle East.

Christodoulides said under the Cypriot EU presidency, a "Friends of IMEC" group has been set up to promote the initiative, which still lacks what he said are more specific projects. One such project is the Great Seas Interconnector, an electricity cable connecting the power grids of Greece and Cyprus and eventually Israel that has been plagued by delays.

"We can work together with the Americans, with the U.S. Government, with President Trump in order to give substance because it will be a win-win situation for both the European Union and the United States" with additional concrete projects, Christodoulides said.

On the lookout for new energy sources

The Iran war again brought the need for the EU to diversify its energy source into sharp relief. Christodoulides said he's in talks with the EU's executive arm on how Cyprus' own offshore natural gas deposits can help the bloc find alternative energy sources and routes.

He said Commission President Ursula von der Leyen will unveil on Friday "very specific proposals" regarding energy costs and how the bloc can become more energy independent.

The Cypriot president said the EU has made significant strides in hastening its decision on making mechanisms but has failed to deliver on its pledge to add new members in the last two years, diminishing the trust that prospective member nations have in the union.

"So we have a strong geopolitical tool that we are losing mainly because of our mistakes. The situation today is much better. We are deciding in a much faster, let's say, pace," said Christodoulides. "And enlargement is one of the geopolitical tools that, as a European Union, we need pretty soon to have specific decisions."

Texas can require public schools to display Ten Commandments in classrooms, court rules

By JAMIE STENGLE Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — Texas can require the Ten Commandments to be displayed in public schools, a U.S. appeals court ruled Tuesday in a victory for conservatives who have long sought to incorporate more religion into classrooms.

The 9-8 decision by the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals delivered a boost to backers of similar laws in Arkansas and Louisiana. Opponents have argued that hanging the Ten Commandments in classrooms proselytizes to students and amounts to religious indoctrination by the government.

In a lengthy majority opinion, the conservative-leaning appeals court in New Orleans rejected those arguments in Texas, saying the requirement does not step on the rights of parents or students.

"No child is made to recite the Commandments, believe them, or affirm their divine origin," the ruling says.

The American Civil Liberties Union and other groups that challenged the Texas law on behalf of parents said in a statement that they anticipate appealing the ruling to the U.S. Supreme Court.

"The First Amendment safeguards the separation of church and state, and the freedom of families to choose how, when and if to provide their children with religious instruction. This decision tramples those rights," they said in the statement.

The mandate is one of several fronts in Texas that opponents have fought over religion in classrooms. In 2024, the state approved optional Bible-infused curriculum for elementary schools, and a proposal set for a vote in June would add Bible stories to required reading lists in Texas classrooms.

The decision over the Ten Commandments law reverses a lower federal court ruling that had blocked about a dozen Texas school districts — including some of the state's largest — from putting up the posters. The Texas law signed by Republican Gov. Greg Abbott took effect in September, marking the largest attempt in the nation to hang the Ten Commandments in public schools.

From the start, the law was met almost immediately by a mix of embrace and hesitation in Texas classrooms that educate the state's 5.5 million public school students.

The mandate animated school board meetings, spun up guidance about what to say when students ask questions, and led to boxes of donated posters being dropped on the doorsteps of campuses statewide. Although the law only requires schools to hang the posters if donated, one suburban Dallas school district spent nearly \$1,800 to print roughly 5,000 posters.

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, a Republican, called the ruling "a major victory for Texas and our moral values."

"The Ten Commandments have had a profound impact on our nation, and it's important that students learn from them every single day," he said.

Tuesday's ruling comes after the appeals court heard arguments in January in the Texas case and a similar case in Louisiana. In February, the court cleared the way for Louisiana to enforce its law requiring the display of the Ten Commandments in classrooms.

Republican Louisiana Attorney General Liz Murrill said the Texas ruling "adopted our entire legal defense" of the law in her state. In Alabama, Republican Gov. Kay Ivey also signed a similar law earlier this month.

"Our law clearly was always constitutional, and I am grateful that the Fifth Circuit has now definitively agreed with us," Murrill said in a statement posted to social media.

Judge Stephen A. Higginson, in a dissenting opinion joined by four others on the court, wrote that the framers of the Constitution "intended disestablishment of religion, above all to prevent large religious sects from using political power to impose their religion on others."

"Yet Texas, like Louisiana, seeks to do just that, legislating that specific, politically chosen scripture be installed in every public-school classroom," Higginson wrote.

The law says schools must put donated posters "in a conspicuous place" and requires the writing to be a size and typeface that is visible from anywhere in a classroom to a person with "average vision." The

displays must also be 16 inches wide and 20 inches tall (40 centimeters wide and 50 centimeters tall).

Texas' law easily passed the GOP-controlled Legislature and Republicans, including President Donald Trump, have backed posting the Ten Commandments in classrooms.

Virginia voters approve redistricting plan that could boost Democrats' seats in Congress

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

Virginia voters approved a mid-decade redistricting plan Tuesday that could boost Democrats' chances of winning four additional U.S. House seats in November's midterm elections that will decide control of the closely divided Congress.

The constitutional amendment narrowly backed by voters bypasses a bipartisan redistricting commission to allow the use of new districts drawn by Virginia's Democratic-led General Assembly. But the public vote may not be the final word. The state Supreme Court is considering whether the plan is illegal in a case that could make the referendum results meaningless.

The Virginia redistricting referendum marked a setback for President Donald Trump, who kicked off a national redistricting battle last year by urging Republican officials in Texas to redraw districts. The goal was to help Republicans win more seats in the November elections and hold on to a narrow House majority in the face of political headwinds that typically favor the party out of power during midterm elections.

But the Virginia redistricting referendum could help nullify Republican gains elsewhere.

"Virginia just changed the trajectory of the 2026 midterms," Democratic state House Speaker Don Scott said in a celebratory statement. "At a moment when Trump and his allies are trying to lock in power before voters have a say, Virginians stepped up and leveled the playing field for the entire country."

Democratic Virginia Gov. Abigail Spanberger, who campaigned for the new map, quickly shifted her attention to the November election.

"I understand the urgency of winning congressional seats as a check on this President, and I look forward to campaigning with candidates across the Commonwealth working to earn Virginians' trust," she said in a statement.

Virginia vote is part of a national redistricting battle

The redistricting in Texas led to a burst of redistricting nationwide. So far, Republicans believe they can win up to nine more House seats in newly redrawn districts in Texas, Missouri, North Carolina and Ohio. Democrats think they can win up to five more seats in California, where voters approved a similar mid-decade redistricting effort last November, and one more seat under new court-imposed districts in Utah.

Democrats hope to offset the rest of that gap in Virginia, where they decisively flipped 13 seats in the state House and won back the governor's office last year.

Tuesday's narrow victory for Democrats contrasted with last fall's vote in California, where a Democratic redistricting plan passed by a nearly 29-point margin.

"As we saw in California, when voters have a say, they are rejecting Republicans' attempt to rig the system," said U.S. Rep. Suzan DelBene, of Washington state, who is chair of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee.

Republicans pledged to continue the battle over Virginia's new map in court.

"Serious legal questions remain about both the wording of this referendum and the process used to put it before voters," Virginia House Republican Minority Leader Terry Kilgore said. "Those questions have not been resolved, and they now move where they belong: to the courts."

U.S. Rep. Richard Hudson, of North Carolina, who is chair of the National Republican Congressional Committee, said the "close margin reinforces that Virginia is a purple state that shouldn't be represented by a severe partisan gerrymander."

The back-and-forth redistricting battle also could continue in Florida, where the Republican-led Legislature is to convene April 28 for a special session that could result in more favorable congressional districts

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for Republicans.

Voters focus on fairness, with different perspectives

The campaign over Virginia's redistricting referendum focused heavily on fairness.

Republicans argued that it was unfair to gerrymander Virginia's districts to Democrats' advantage. But Democrats argued that they were creating a fairer election landscape nationally by counteracting Republican gerrymandering elsewhere.

Matt Wallace, of Alexandria, said he voted for the Democratic redistricting amendment "to help balance the scales a bit until things get back to normal."

But Ruth Ann McCartney, who voted in the town of South Hill just a few miles north of the North Carolina border, said she cast her ballot against the amendment.

"I look at it more as we don't have the population as northern Virginia," she said. "And as a rural area, we just need to be heard."

A lobsterlike district could aid Democratic efforts

In Virginia, Democrats currently hold six of the 11 U.S. House seats under districts that were imposed by the state Supreme Court in 2021 after a bipartisan commission failed to agree on a map based on the latest census data.

The new plan could help Democrats win as many as 10 seats. Five seats are anchored in the Democratic stronghold of northern Virginia, including one stretching out like a lobster to consume Republican-leaning rural areas. Revisions to four other districts across Richmond, southern Virginia and Hampton Roads dilute the voting power of conservative blocs in those areas. And a reshaped district in parts of western Virginia lumps together three Democratic-leaning college towns to offset other Republican voters.

Democrats portrayed the Virginia redistricting as a response to Trump. Ads for the "yes to redistricting" campaign featuring former President Barack Obama flooded the airwaves.

But opponents of the redistricting also distributed campaign materials citing statements from Obama and Spanberger, who had both criticized gerrymandering in the past.

Virginia court weighs whether lawmakers acted illegally

Congressional redistricting typically is done once a decade after each census.

In 2020, Virginia voters approved a constitutional amendment meant to diminish political gamesmanship by shifting redistricting responsibilities away from the legislature.

But lawmakers endorsed a new constitutional amendment allowing mid-decade redistricting last fall, then passed it again in January as part of a two-step process that requires an intervening election in order for an amendment to be placed on the ballot. The measure allows lawmakers to redistrict until returning the task to a bipartisan commission after the 2030 census.

In February, they passed a new U.S. House map to take effect pending the outcome of the redistricting referendum.

Republicans have filed multiple legal challenges against the redistricting effort.

A Tazewell County judge ruled that the redistricting push was illegal for several reasons. Circuit Court Judge Jack Hurley Jr. said lawmakers failed to follow their own rules for adding the redistricting amendment to a special session. He ruled that their initial vote failed to occur before the public began casting ballots in last year's general election and thus didn't count toward the two-step process. And he ruled that the state failed to publish the amendment three months before that election, as required by law.

If the state Supreme Court agrees with the lower court, the referendum results could be rendered moot.

Democrat Cherfilus-McCormick of Florida resigns before the House can sanction her in ethics case

By KEVIN FREKING and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democratic Rep. Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick of Florida resigned from office on Tuesday moments before the start of a hearing that could have led to a recommendation that she be expelled from Congress.

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Cherfilus-McCormick was the subject of a more than two-year investigation by the House Ethics Committee, which had determined recently that she had violated multiple federal laws and House rules. Support from her own party was increasingly in doubt.

It's the third resignation in a little more than a week from a House lawmaker. Reps. Eric Swalwell, a California Democrat, and Tony Gonzales, a Texas Republican, announced within hours of each other that they were leaving Congress. Both men were facing sexual misconduct allegations and possible expulsion.

In a statement, Cherfilus-McCormick said the House committee denied her new attorney's request for more time to prepare a defense. She also said she would not pretend that the investigation had been anything other than a "witch hunt," and rather than play political games, she would resign, effective immediately.

"But let me say this plainly: we should be very careful about the precedent we are setting in this country, we do not punish people before due process is complete," she said. "We do not allow allegations alone to override the will of the people. That is a dangerous path, and one that should concern every American, regardless of party."

Cherfilus-McCormick is also facing federal criminal charges accusing her of stealing \$5 million in federal disaster funds and using the money to buy items such as a 3-carat yellow diamond ring.

She has pleaded not guilty to the criminal charges and says she is not guilty of ethics violations, either.

The allegations against the congresswoman center on how she received millions of dollars from her family's health care business after Florida mistakenly overpaid the business by roughly \$5 million with COVID-19 disaster relief funds. She is accused of using that money to fund her 2022 congressional campaign through a network of businesses and family members.

Cherfilus-McCormick declined to testify during a previous Ethics Committee hearing, citing her Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination. Her attorney, William Barzee, sparred with some of the lawmakers and argued that they should have allowed a thorough ethics trial, at which he could present witnesses and evidence to counter the conclusions of House investigators.

Some supporters weighed in against expulsion

A group of supporters in Cherfilus-McCormick's congressional district had weighed in on her behalf with the lawmakers who lead the Ethics Committee, urging committee leaders to proceed with caution in sanctioning her.

"Our communities deserve stability. Our voices deserve to be heard. And our right to representation must be protected," said one of the letters signed by about a dozen local faith leaders, union officials and others.

Rep. Yvette Clarke, D-N.Y., chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, along with other members of the caucus, issued a statement that praised Cherfilus-McCormick's time in Congress. They said Cherfilus-McCormick "worked to uplift her constituents and elevate issues impacting underserved communities at home and abroad."

"We extend our appreciation for her service and offer our prayers for her and her family," the caucus members said.

In all, the Ethics panel's more than two-year investigation led to the issuance of 59 subpoenas, 28 witness interviews and a review of more than 33,000 pages of documents.

House Democratic leaders had declined to condemn Cherfilus-McCormick, saying they wanted to see the ethics process play out.

Still, leadership had been in conversations with her for weeks, ever since the Ethics committee released its findings, about the situation and the likelihood of an expulsion vote.

A high threshold for expulsion

The House has historically been reluctant to serve as the final arbiter of a lawmaker's career, preferring to give that final say to the voters.

Of the six House members expelled, the first three fought for the Confederacy during the Civil War and were expelled for disloyalty. The next two had been convicted of crimes. The final one was George Santos, the scandal-plagued freshman who was the subject of a blistering ethics report on his conduct as well as a federal indictment.

Santos, a New York Republican, served time in prison for ripping off his campaign donors before President Donald Trump granted him clemency, and he has apologized to his former constituents.

Under the Constitution, at least two-thirds of the House has to vote for expulsion for it to occur, a high threshold that requires enormous bipartisan support.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., told reporters last week he believed the House would move to expel Cherfilus-McCormick.

"The facts are indisputable at this point," Johnson said.

House Majority Leader Steve Scalise, R-La., took exception to Cherfilus-McCormick's characterization of the Ethics Committee's investigation.

"Well, if you steal money, it's called theft. It's not called a witch hunt, and stealing taxpayer money is not going to be tolerated," Scalise said.

In reversal, Justice Department withdraws subpoenas in John Brennan investigation, AP sources say

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department has withdrawn subpoenas issued in the investigation of former CIA Director John Brennan, with officials asking for voluntary interviews instead of testimony before a grand jury, two people familiar with the matter said Tuesday.

A small handful of subpoenas were known to have been issued over the weekend for witnesses to appear before a grand jury in Washington. But investigators on Monday evening informed lawyers that the subpoenas were being withdrawn in favor of requests for voluntary interviews, said the people, who spoke on condition of anonymity to The Associated Press to discuss developments in an ongoing investigation.

The reason for the reversal in course was not immediately known.

The months-old Brennan investigation is one of several criminal probes the Justice Department has opened over the last year against President Donald Trump's perceived adversaries. It centers on one of the Republican president's chief grievances — a U.S. intelligence community finding that Russia interfered on his behalf during his successful 2016 presidential campaign.

The subpoenas were issued after a shake-up in the Justice Department team leading the investigation. A career national security prosecutor in Florida who had been handling the inquiry recently left the case after expressing doubt about the legal viability of a potential criminal prosecution, according to another person familiar with the matter.

The Justice Department on Monday installed a Trump loyalist, Joe diGenova, who served as U.S. attorney in Washington during the Reagan administration, as a counselor to the attorney general who will now work on the Brennan investigation. The 81-year-old former prosecutor supported Trump's failed legal campaign to undo the results of the 2020 presidential election and has also been an outspoken critic of Trump foes like Brennan, saying in a television interview years ago that the former CIA director was "at the head" of a conspiracy to falsely link Trump to Russia.

At an unrelated news conference on Tuesday, acting Attorney General Todd Blanche brushed aside questions about whether diGenova's past comments could create a conflict of interest and leave him susceptible to claims of bias.

"The mere fact that he has spoken about his perception — he didn't have access to grand jury information, he didn't have access to witnesses. And so, like any prosecutor, I expect that he will follow the facts. And those facts come from witnesses and grand jury information," Blanche said.

Brennan served as CIA director under President Barack Obama and was in that role when the intelligence community in January 2017 published an assessment detailing Russian interference aimed at helping Trump defeat Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton in 2016. An investigation led by special counsel Robert Mueller concluded that Russia meddled on Trump's behalf and that his campaign welcomed the assistance, but it did not find sufficient evidence to prove a criminal conspiracy.

The Justice Department last year received a criminal referral from Rep. Jim Jordan, the Republican chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, alleging that Brennan made false statements in 2023 about the preparation of the intelligence community assessment. Brennan and his lawyers have vigorously denied any wrongdoing and have called the investigation politically motivated.

The investigation has been led by prosecutors in Florida, with investigators lining up interviews and issuing subpoenas for records. The latest subpoenas sought grand jury testimony in Washington, a possible indication that prosecutors believe they might need to bring any criminal case in Washington, where Brennan's testimony took place.

Gunman who fired on tourists at Mexican pyramid carried materials related to 1999 Columbine massacre

By MARÍA VERZA Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — The gunman who opened fire on tourists at Mexico's iconic Teotihuacan pyramids carried materials that were apparently related to the 1999 shooting at Columbine High School, authorities said Tuesday, a day after the attack that killed a Canadian woman and left at least 13 people injured.

Although officials did not mention Columbine by name, they referred to several books and handwritten notes that belonged to the gunman and referenced attacks in the United States in April 1999. Monday was the 27th anniversary of the massacre in Colorado.

Among the gunman's belongings was a photo modified by artificial intelligence showing him alongside the Columbine attackers, according to a state official who spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity because the official was not authorized to address the media.

Seven people were wounded by gunshots at the archaeological site north of the Mexican capital, the local government said. The nature of the other injuries was not disclosed, but some people fell when the shooting started, including some who were climbing on the pyramids.

The assailant, who acted alone, shot and killed himself, authorities said, and security officials found a gun, a knife and ammunition at the scene.

Attack came before World Cup tournament

The attack happened less than two months before Mexico co-hosts the 2026 FIFA World Cup soccer tournament. Mexico's security secretary, Omar García Harfuch, said major tourist destinations would see a heightened presence of both ground forces and digital "cyber patrols" to prevent threats.

"Yesterday's attack highlights the urgent need to strengthen our security protocols," Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said. She also noted the importance of analyzing "external influences" that may provoke such violence within the country.

While such attacks are uncommon in Latin America, they are not unheard of. Earlier this month, Argentine authorities linked a teenager to the "true crime community" after the teen killed one student and wounded eight others at a school in the central province of Santa Fe. The community is an online subculture that emerged from forums established after the Columbine massacre to discuss and, in some cases, glorify such violence.

Taken to hospitals after the Mexico attack were six people from the U.S., three from Colombia, one from Russia, one from Brazil, one from the Netherlands and one from Canada, the local government said. The youngest person who was hurt was 6; the oldest was 61, Mexican authorities said.

Shooter scouted tourist site ahead of attack

Authorities identified the attacker as 27-year-old Julio César Jasso Ramírez, a native of Guerrero, Mexico, who, they said, arrived in Teotihuacan a day earlier in an Uber and stayed in a hotel.

Then on Monday shortly before noon, while atop the Pyramid of the Moon, he began firing at tourists with an old revolver while holding a plastic bag containing 52 .38-caliber cartridges in his other hand, said José Luis Cervantes Martínez, the attorney general of the state of Mexico, which includes Teotihuacan.

From the summit of the pyramid, the attacker opened fire on tourists and targeted approaching security forces. Some people threw themselves to the ground and lay motionless to avoid detection. Others fled

down the structure as gunshots echoed, Cervantes Martínez said.

National Guard members eventually scaled the pyramid and wounded the attacker in the leg. Witnesses said the gunman shot and killed himself once he felt cornered, according to Cervantes Martínez.

The assailant carried a tactical-style backpack containing an analog cellphone and bus tickets, Cervantes Martínez said.

The attorney general also noted the presence of "literature, images and manuscripts" that related to "violent incidents known to have occurred in the United States in April 1999," a likely reference to the Columbine attack in which 12 students and a teacher were killed.

Investigators built "a psychopathic profile" of the suspect that was "characterized by a tendency to copy situations that occurred in other places, at other times and involving other figures," he added.

Greg Magadini, of Boise, Idaho, was with a tour group on top of the pyramid when he heard a loud crack followed by screaming. The gunman was about 40 feet (12 meters) away on the same platform with roughly 60 tourists, he said.

Magadini jumped down a ledge and scrambled for cover while two of his friends stayed on the platform above trying to hide.

Witnesses said everyone was a target

Shots seemed to ring out every five seconds, Magadini said, as he and the others jumped down more ledges to reach the ground. Then they ran through a field behind the pyramid, carrying one of his friends who badly injured her ankle on one of the jumps.

Magadini, who came away with scrapes and cuts, said he did not see the shooter, but his friends said the gunman seemed to fire randomly in all directions. "Everyone was a target," he said.

Later at the hospital, they talked with other tourists, who said the shooter at one point played strange music and taunted them, saying he hated tourists, Magadini said.

The Teotihuacan pyramids, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, are a series of ancient structures on the outskirts of Mexico City. As one of Mexico's most popular tourist destinations, the site drew more than 1.8 million international visitors last year, according to government figures.

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney offered condolences to the family and friends of the Canadian tourist who was killed. He said Canadian authorities were working with those in Mexico.

"It's a terrible circumstance," Carney said.

Gun used to kill 8 children was stolen from truck, Louisiana man tells investigators

By SARA CLINE and JACK BROOK Associated Press

A man who previously had the assault-style gun used to kill eight children in Louisiana told investigators he believes Shamar Elkins stole it from his truck in the weeks before the rampage in a Shreveport neighborhood, according to court documents released Tuesday.

Charles Ford told investigators he suspected Elkins, who was the father of seven of the children killed, because he was one of the few people to ride with him, according to a criminal complaint filed in Louisiana federal court. Ford allegedly said it was around March 9 when he noticed the gun was missing.

Ford said he confronted Elkins about the missing weapon. But when Elkins became "offensive," Ford "let it go," according to a court affidavit filed Tuesday.

The affidavit is in support of federal charges that accuse Ford of being a felon in possession of a firearm and making a false statement to federal agents. He originally denied having the gun when first approached by investigators after the shooting Sunday, according court records.

"Elkins' death means that our community will never see him face justice," U.S. Attorney Zachary A. Keller said in a statement. "Our hope, as we continue to investigate and prosecute this case alongside our law enforcement partners, is that holding the person whose gun Elkins used to perpetrate the crime accountable will give some small bit of solace to our Shreveport community."

Ford does not currently have an appointed legal representative and is expected to receive a federal

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public defender, according to federal court records.

An attorney who previously represented Ford could not immediately be reached for comment. Efforts to reach family members of Ford could not be immediately contacted at other phone numbers associated with him.

Elkins died after fleeing and a police pursuit. It was not clear whether he was killed by officers who fired or from a self-inflicted gunshot, according to police.

Elkins' wife and another woman were also shot and wounded in the rampage, which unfolded across two houses before dawn.

Officials said the children who died — three boys and five girls — ranged in age from 3 to 11 years old.

Elkins plead guilty in 2019 to a felony of illegal use of weapons, according to court documents. As a result, a Caddo Parish district judge sentenced Elkins to 18 months of supervised probation, and Elkins turned his handgun into police as a condition of probation, court filings show.

Under Louisiana law, a person convicted of certain violent felonies — including illegal use of weapons — are banned from having a gun for at least 10 years after completing their sentence and probation.

Officials have not addressed whether Elkins was legally prohibited from having a weapon.

The tragedy in Louisiana is one of the nation's deadliest mass shootings in recent years.

"Families should be able to feel safe at home, but this tragedy shows how gun violence can shatter lives in an instant," said Lindsay Nichols, policy director for Giffords Law Center, which is an organization that aims to curb gun violence.

For years, advocates for stronger gun control have sought to tighten Louisiana's loose firearm regulations. Democrats routinely propose red flag laws, but Republicans in the reliably red state block the measures.

What to know about the Southern Poverty Law Center

By REBECCA BOONE Associated Press

The Southern Poverty Law Center was indicted Tuesday on federal fraud charges alleging it improperly paid informants to infiltrate extremist groups without disclosing the payments to donors, acting Attorney General Todd Blanche said.

The center's CEO Bryan Fair said the payments went to confidential informants in order to monitor threats of violence from the extremist groups — and that the information the center received was frequently shared with the FBI and other law enforcement agencies. The information gathered by the informants helped save lives, Fair said Tuesday.

"We are outraged by the false allegations levied against SPLC," Fair said.

The Justice Department alleged that the civil rights group defrauded donors by using their money to fund the same extremism that it claimed to be fighting. The indictment says payments of at least \$3 million went to informants affiliated with the Ku Klux Klan, the Aryan Nations, the National Socialist Party of America and other groups between 2014 and 2023.

The charges, filed in Alabama where the center is based, include wire fraud, bank fraud and conspiracy to commit money laundering.

Here are some things to know about the Southern Poverty Law Center's history and controversies:

The center was created 55 years ago to support civil rights

Alabama lawyer Morris Dees founded the organization in 1971, starting a civil rights-focused law practice for people who were poor or disenfranchised. At the time, federal laws and U.S. Supreme Court rulings designed to end Jim Crow-era segregation were still fairly new, and widespread resistance to desegregation persisted in the South.

People who faced continued discrimination often struggled to find attorneys who were willing to represent them in court; lawyers were reluctant to bring the first lawsuits to test the civil rights laws.

Dees and another attorney, Joe Levin, took on some of those cases, representing their clients for free. Some of those earliest cases resulted in the desegregation of recreational facilities, the integration of the Alabama state trooper force and other reforms, according to the center's website.

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Southern Poverty Law Center expands to label and track hate groups

By the 1980s, the civil rights group was monitoring white supremacist organizations in the U.S. The effort, initially called "Klanwatch" and focused on the Ku Klux Klan, was later renamed the "Intelligence Project," and expanded to include other extremist groups.

Many of the groups did not appreciate being called out, monitored and sometimes sued by the center. Members of the KKK tried to burn down the center's Montgomery offices on July 28, 1983, in retaliation for lawsuits filed against Klan groups.

The fire damaged the building, office equipment, the center's law library and files. More than a year later, three KKK members were arrested in connection with the blaze, and all three plead guilty and were sentenced to prison.

The center previously used paid informants to infiltrate extremist groups and gather information on their activities, often sharing it with local and federal law enforcement, Fair said. They were used to monitor threats of violence, he said, adding that the program was kept quiet to protect the safety of informants.

The center has a big purse

The nonprofit organization gets most of its funding from donor contributions, and those contributions have added up. Its endowment had just under \$732 million in hand as of last October, according to the center.

Conservatives criticize SPLC and FBI cuts ties

The center's "Intelligence Project" has grown over the years, and the organization has faced criticism for some of the groups it has added to the tracker. Conservatives have said adding some groups unfairly maligns them because of their viewpoints. The conservative religious organization Focus on the Family was added in part because of its anti LGBTQ+ rhetoric, for instance.

That criticism escalated after the September 2025 assassination of conservative activist Charlie Kirk at a college campus in Utah. That brought renewed attention to the center's inclusion of Kirk's group, Turning Point USA.

The center included a section on Turning Point in a report titled "The Year in Hate and Extremism 2024" that described the group as "A Case Study of the Hard Right in 2024."

A month after Kirk's death, FBI Director Kash Patel announced that the bureau would sever its relationship with the center, asserting that the organization had been turned into a "partisan smear machine" and criticizing it for its use of a "hate map."

That move marked a dramatic rethinking of longstanding FBI partnerships with prominent civil rights groups.

Indictment alleges the center 'fraudulently obtained' donated money

The indictment says the center told donors the money would be used to help dismantle violent extremist groups, but did not disclose that some of the funds would actually be used to pay members of those groups. Some legal experts say it's an unusual legal approach.

"That's a new way of going after a charity — I'm somewhat surprised," said Phil Hackney, a law professor at the University of Pittsburgh. Typically, when a nonprofit group is charged with fraud, it's because someone is accused of pilfering donated funds to line their own pockets, Hackney said.

But in this case, the government is targeting the method and intent in which a nonprofit used its money, he said.

The government is looking at the informant payments "as an intent to further hate — and I doubt Southern Poverty Law Center had that intent," Hackney said.

The law has never required nonprofit groups to hand donors a line-item receipt for every sensitive operation, said Todd Spodek, a federal criminal defense attorney with Spodek Law Group P.C. in Manhattan.

"From a defense perspective, this isn't a fraud case. It is a political attack on standard investigative tradecraft," said Spodek. "We are talking about high stakes intelligence work where discretion isn't a form of deception, it is a matter of survival."

In order to win a conviction, the government will have to prove the center engaged in a deliberate scheme to lie, Spodek said.

"They simply cannot. Silence of tactical details is not a crime, and you don't get to call it fraud just because

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the government dislikes the methods used to get results," he said. He later continued, "The prosecution is trying to turn operational discretion into a felony, which is a massive overreach."

Other organizations also have relied on undercover workers

Other nonprofit groups also have sent people undercover or used confidential informants to get information. For instance, the nonprofit conservative group Project Veritas, founded in 2010, is best known for conducting hidden camera stings that have embarrassed news outlets, labor organizations and Democratic politicians.

The anti-abortion organization Center for Medical Progress was behind secretly recorded videos of Planned Parenthood executives in California. The videos were then edited in a way to falsely suggest that the executives were selling fetal remains. The videos triggered several investigations, and Planned Parenthood was cleared of any wrongdoing but two of the activists with Center for Medical Progress were ultimately convicted of illegally recording someone without consent.

The center says the informants helped monitor threats of violence

Fair says the organization began working with informants to monitor threats of violence during a time of increased risk, and the program was kept quiet to protect informants' safety.

"When we began working with informants, we were living in the shadow of the height of the Civil Rights Movement, which had seen bombings at churches, state-sponsored violence against demonstrators, and the murders of activists that went unanswered by the justice system," Fair said. "There is no question that what we learned from informants saved lives."

Trump says the US will extend its ceasefire with Iran at Pakistan's request

By MUNIR AHMED, JON GAMBRELL and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — President Donald Trump said Tuesday the United States was indefinitely extending its ceasefire with Iran — a day before it was to expire — as a new round of peace talks was on hold. The announcement appeared to ease fears that the fighting, which had shaken energy markets and the global economy, would promptly resume.

Pakistan had planned to host a second round of talks, but the White House put on hold Vice President JD Vance's planned trip to Islamabad as Iran rebuffed efforts to restart negotiations.

Iran has not yet responded to Trump's announcement of the ceasefire extension. Both countries have warned that, without a deal, they were prepared to resume fighting.

Pakistan scrambles to get US and Iran to negotiate

Pakistani leaders, including Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, worked intensively to get both sides to agree to a second round of ceasefire talks, according to two officials who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the media.

Sharif later thanked Trump for his "gracious acceptance" of Pakistan's request, saying the ceasefire extension would allow ongoing diplomatic efforts to proceed.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei told Iran's state TV there has been "no final decision" on whether to agree to more talks because of "unacceptable actions" by the U.S., apparently referring to the U.S. blockade of Iranian ports.

In a Truth Social post announcing the ceasefire extension, Trump said the U.S. would continue the blockade.

As Vance put on hold a return trip to Islamabad, Pakistan's capital, Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff and son-in-law Jared Kushner were expected in Washington on Tuesday afternoon for consultations about how to proceed, said a U.S. official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal administrative deliberations.

The official cautioned that Trump could change his mind on negotiating with Iran at any time, and declined to predict what would happen. The official said Trump has options short of restarting airstrikes.

Both sides remain dug in rhetorically

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Before announcing the ceasefire extension, Trump had warned that "lots of bombs" will "start going off" if there's no agreement before the Wednesday deadline, while Iran's chief negotiator said that Tehran has "new cards on the battlefield" that haven't yet been revealed.

A senior commander in Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps threatened to destroy the region's oil industry if war with the U.S. resumes. "If southern neighbors allow the enemy to use their facilities to attack Iran, they should say goodbye to oil production in the Middle East region," Gen. Majid Mousavi told an Iranian news site.

Strait of Hormuz control key to negotiations

Iran's envoy to the United Nations said Tuesday that Tehran has "received some sign" that the U.S. is ready to stop its blockade of Iranian ports.

Ambassador Amir Saeid Iravani said ending the blockade remains a condition for Iran to rejoin peace talks. When that happens, he said, "I think the next round of the negotiations will take place."

The U.S. imposed the blockade to pressure Tehran into ending its stranglehold on the Strait of Hormuz, a key shipping lane through which 20% of the world's natural gas and crude oil transits in peacetime.

Iran's grip on the strait has sent oil prices soaring. Brent crude, the international standard, was trading at close to \$95 per barrel on Tuesday, up more than 30% from Feb. 28, the day that Israel and the U.S. attacked Iran to start the war.

Before the war began, the Strait of Hormuz had been fully open to international shipping. Trump has demanded that vessels again be allowed to transit unimpeded.

Over the weekend, Iran said that it had received new proposals from Washington, but also suggested that a wide gap remains between the sides. Issues that derailed the previous round of negotiations included Iran's nuclear enrichment program, its regional proxies and the strait.

The US says its forces board sanctioned oil tanker

On Tuesday, the U.S. said its forces boarded an oil tanker previously sanctioned for smuggling Iranian crude oil in Asia. The Pentagon said in a social media post that U.S. forces boarded the M/T Tifani "without incident."

The U.S. military did not say where the vessel had been boarded, though ship-tracking data showed the Tifani in the Indian Ocean between Sri Lanka and Indonesia on Tuesday. The Pentagon statement added that "international waters are not a refuge for sanctioned vessels."

The U.S. military on Sunday seized an Iranian container ship, the first interception under the blockade. Iran's joint military command called the armed boarding an act of piracy and a violation of the ceasefire.

Pakistan hopeful talks will proceed

Pakistani officials have expressed confidence that Iran will also send a delegation to resume the talks — the highest-level negotiations between the U.S. and Iran since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The first round April 11 and 12 ended without an agreement.

Pakistan said Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar met Tuesday separately with the U.S. and China's top diplomats in Islamabad. China is a key trading partner of Iran.

Security has been tightened across Islamabad, where authorities have deployed thousands of personnel and increased patrols along routes leading to the airport.

U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres said the ceasefire extension was "an important step toward de-escalation" that will create "critical space for diplomacy and confidence-building between Iran and the United States," according to his spokesman, Stephane Dujarric.

Talks between Israel and Lebanon are to resume

In Lebanon, the Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah said in a statement it had fired rockets and drones at Israeli forces for the first time since 10-day truce took effect last Friday "in response to the blatant and documented violations" by Israel.

Those violations, it said, included "attacks on civilians and the destruction of their homes and villages in southern Lebanon."

The Israeli army said it responded by striking the group's rocket launcher. Israeli officials have said they

intend to maintain a buffer zone in southern Lebanon — an area that includes dozens of villages whose residents have not been allowed to return.

Historic diplomatic talks between Israel and Lebanon are to resume on Thursday in Washington, an Israeli, a Lebanese and a U.S. official said. All three spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the behind-the-scenes negotiations.

The Israeli and Lebanese ambassadors met last week for the first direct diplomatic talks in decades. Israel says the talks are aimed at disarming Hezbollah and reaching a peace agreement with Lebanon.

Fighting between Israel and the Iran-backed Hezbollah broke out two days after the U.S. and Israel launched joint strikes on Iran to start the war. In Lebanon, the fighting has killed more than 2,290 people.

Since the war started, at least 3,375 people have been killed in Iran, according to authorities. Additionally, 23 people have died in Israel and more than a dozen in Gulf Arab states. Fifteen Israeli soldiers in Lebanon and 13 U.S. service members throughout the region have been killed.

Judge postpones OxyContin-maker Purdue Pharma's sentencing to let opioid victims attend in person

By GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

A judge on Tuesday delayed the criminal sentencing of OxyContin maker Purdue Pharma in order to allow victims to attend the court proceeding in person.

U.S. District Judge Madeline Cox Arleo originally planned to hand down the sentence Tuesday during a court hearing conducted only by videoconferencing. But she said she changed her mind after seeing some victims of the opioid crisis protesting outside her courthouse in Newark, New Jersey. She said they should be allowed to attend in person, too, and moved the hearing to next Tuesday.

When it happens, Arleo is expected to order the company to forfeit \$225 million to the Justice Department, clearing the way for the company to finalize a settlement of nearly all of the thousands of lawsuits it faces over its role in the opioid crisis.

The penalty was agreed to in a 2020 pact to resolve federal civil and criminal probes it was facing. If the judge signs off, other penalties will not be collected in return for Purdue settling the other lawsuits.

After years of legal twists and turns, the settlement was approved by another judge last year and Purdue said it could still be effective May 1 if the sentence is given on the scheduled date. The settlement requires members of the Sackler family who own the company to pay up to \$7 billion to state, local and Native American tribal governments, some individual victims and others.

A sentence years in the making

Purdue pleaded guilty to three federal criminal charges in November 2020.

The Stamford, Connecticut-based company admitted that it did not have an effective program to keep its powerful prescription painkillers from being diverted to the black market, even though it told the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration that it did.

It also admitted that it paid doctors through a speakers program to prescribe the drugs and paid an electronic medical records company to send doctors information on patients that encouraged more opioid prescriptions.

Although Purdue produced only a fraction of the opioid pills that flooded the market in the 2000s, advocates have long seen aggressive sales of OxyContin as one of the touchstones of the crisis. At a 1996 event to rally Purdue's sales force, Richard Sackler, then a top Purdue executive and later president of the company, called for a "blizzard of prescriptions."

While Purdue is expected to pay \$225 million, the government agreed in the plea deal not to collect \$5.3 billion in criminal forfeitures and fines and \$2.8 billion in civil liabilities. Instead, portions of that money are considered part of the broader settlement — and the federal government will receive a small slice of that.

Up to \$7 billion from Sackler family members

The broader settlement calls for members of the Sackler family who own the company to contribute up to \$7 billion over 15 years. Most of the money is to go to government entities to use to fight the opioid crisis.

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It's among the largest in a series of settlements by drugmakers, wholesalers and pharmacies in recent years — and the only major one that includes payments for some individual victims or their survivors.

Together, the settlements are worth more than \$50 billion, and most of the money is to be used to address the overdose epidemic.

Under the Purdue deal, members of the Sackler family would be shielded from lawsuits over opioids from those who agree to the payments.

Purdue itself would cease to exist and be replaced by a new company, Kinoa Pharma, which would operate for the public benefit and have a board appointed by the states.

The reorganization is considered one of the most complicated ever. By the end of last year, Purdue had paid law firms and other professionals working on all sides of the case more than \$1 billion, according to a court filing.

The sentencing doesn't include the company's owners

Members of the Sackler family have long been cast as villains in the opioid crisis, seeking to increase profits even as it became clear people were becoming addicted to OxyContin and overdosing.

But no members of the family were charged.

Family members received \$10.7 billion in payments from Purdue from 2008 to 2018 -- with nearly half of it used to pay taxes on behalf of Purdue. They have not been paid by the company since 2018 — and the last of the family members left Purdue's board in 2019.

Under the settlement, they would not object if their names are removed from museums and other institutions they've supported — something that's already happening.

Some victims want people prosecuted

More than 54,000 people with personal injury claims against Purdue voted to accept the settlement, and 218 voted against it.

Still, some victims and their family members have been pushing back for years, asserting that the settlement and the guilty plea stop short of justice for victims of a crisis that has been linked to 900,000 deaths in the U.S. since 1999.

The sentencing will give them another chance to make that case.

Outside the courthouse Tuesday, Stacy Schwab said she was dependent on OxyContin 20 years ago, that opioids killed one family member, and that another is struggling with addiction and insurance doesn't cover the treatment she needs. That makes Schwab furious at Sackler family members.

"My family just doesn't have the money to pay for private treatment for her, while they're sitting on billions of dollars," Schwab said.

Like others, she said it's good that the judge is giving victims a chance to be heard.

Meanwhile Tuesday, a lawyer filed a request that the federal government's expected \$225 million be used for victims' medical care.

Alan Osmond, the eldest member of the Osmonds, has died at 76

By MARIA SHERMAN AP Music Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Alan Osmond, the eldest member of the chart-topping family act The Osmonds, died Monday after decades with multiple sclerosis. He was 76.

According to a family spokesperson, Alan's wife, Suzanne Osmond, and their eight sons were with him at his home in Lehi, Utah, at the time of his death. Prior to his passing, Alan used a wheelchair and spent a week in intensive care before returning home Thursday on hospice.

A talented songwriter and performer, Alan Osmond helped write some of the Osmond Brothers' biggest hits, including "One Bad Apple," "Crazy Horses" and "Are You Up There?"

Born in Ogden, Utah, on June 22, 1949 and raised in a Mormon household, Alan Osmond's storied musical career began in the 1950s, when he and his brothers Wayne, Merrill and Jay formed a barbershop quartet. He was the oldest of the performing group and the third oldest of his siblings.

The brothers worked the state fair circuit in Utah until a visit to Disneyland led to a television debut on

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"Disney After Dark" in 1962.

The group became regulars on "The Andy Williams Show," where they made their name and forged their wholesome and peppy image, peaking as a quintet in the early 1970s, as younger brother Donny Osmond became the breakout star. In 1971, the Osmonds tallied nine gold records, surpassing single-year bests by Elvis and the Beatles.

In the mid-to-late 1970s, Alan became a principal producer on ABC's hit television show "The Donny and Marie Show," starring his brother and sister.

The original Osmond Brothers — Alan, Wayne, Merrill and Jay — returned to the stage in 1982 as a country group and had a handful of hits, including "I Think About Your Lovin'." At the time, Alan told The Associated Press he switched from recording rock to country music because it better fit their wholesome image.

"Country music really is the backbone of America," he said. "It doesn't just come and go. And we're kind of flag-wavers. You find that in the country area, too."

In 1987, Alan Osmond was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS). It caused him to retire from performing with his family.

His brother Wayne Osmond died at the age of 73 in 2025 after having a stroke.

"He is my hero," Doug Osmond, one of Alan's sons, told The Associated Press over the phone Tuesday. "I've never met anyone more positive in my life. I never once heard him complain, not once. He would say, 'I may have MS, but MS does not have me.' That was his motto and he always was worried about everyone else. ... Family always took priority and his faith was in everything he did."

In terms of his musical accomplishments, Doug recalled witnessing other famous musicians gush over his father. "I saw that with Steven Tyler, I saw that with Brad Paisley. I saw that with Justin Timberlake and Donnie Wahlberg," he said. "They all knew of his genius and ability."

In a statement on social media Tuesday, Donny Osmond called Alan Osmond his "protector" and "guide," saying he was "the one who quietly carried so much responsibility so the rest of us could shine."

Merrill Osmond also paid tribute in a social media post, explaining that he saw his ailing brother two days prior.

"We talked as brothers do, heart to heart. He was struggling, but when I shared a joke or two, he found the strength to chuckle ... and then he smiled," he wrote on Facebook. "I need you to know this ... he has not left me. I have felt him. I have felt his quiet encouragement telling me to keep going ... to keep building faith ... to keep sharing light."

Alan is survived by his wife, Suzanne; his eight sons, Michael, Nathan, Doug, David, Scott, Jon, Alex, and Tyler; 30 grandchildren; five great-grandchildren; brothers Virgil, Tom, Merrill, Jay, Donny and Jimmy; and sister Marie.

Service plans are forthcoming.

Trump's approval on economy falls in AP-NORC poll, showing new warning signs for president

By JOSH BOAK, JESSE BEDAYN and LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's approval rating on the economy has slumped over the past month as the Iran war drives prices higher, according to a new AP-NORC poll, with even Republicans showing less faith in his leadership.

The findings from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research show a president who is struggling with unfulfilled promises to tame inflation and testing Americans' patience with a conflict in the Middle East that has dragged on longer than expected.

Trump's approval rating on the economy dropped to 30% in April from 38% in a March AP-NORC poll. A similarly low share of U.S. adults, 32%, approve of the president's leadership on Iran, which is unchanged since last month.

The poll was conducted April 16-20, during which time the Strait of Hormuz was reopened by Iran, then

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closed again, an example of the whiplash that has characterized the conflict.

The president's policies and pronouncements have often been at odds with each other. Gasoline prices — which he promised to slash — jumped after the U.S. attacked Iran in February. His tariffs have kept much of the economy in limbo and hiring has slowed despite his boasts of a "golden age."

Only 33% of U.S. adults approve of Trump's overall job performance, down slightly from 38% last month. Trump's falling approval ratings could create problems for his party as it tries to defend House and Senate majorities in the midterm elections. The poll finds that Trump is especially weak on cost of living, and enthusiasm about Trump's performance has waned over the past year among his own supporters.

Kathryn Bright, 60, a retired captain in the U.S. Air Force, regrets that she supported Trump in the last election.

"I feel disgusted with myself, I feel betrayed, like he was a wolf in sheep's clothing," she said.

Bright lives in a small town far out on Colorado's prairie and has several disabling medical conditions. She was initially drawn to Trump because of his vows to support veterans, avoid foreign wars and lower costs.

"It's like high school class president: 'I'm gonna promise we are going to get pizza every single day,'" Bright said. "Then as soon as they get elected they are like, 'Oh, I lied.'"

The vast majority of Americans disapprove of Trump on cost of living

In a sign of just how unpopular Trump's approach on prices has become, the poll found that only about one-quarter of U.S. adults approve of his handling of the cost of living.

The consumer price index climbed 3.3% in March from a year ago, and inflation is slightly higher than the 3% that Trump inherited upon returning to the White House last year. Yet Trump has shown little interest in inflation and played down the rising energy costs caused by the war prompting Iran to effectively shutter the Strait of Hormuz to oil and natural gas tankers.

Trump on Tuesday dismissed the war as a "little journey" and portrayed the roughly 35% jump in oil prices as a positive compared to what he thought would happen.

He told CNBC in an interview that he was "surprised" that oil prices were only around \$90 a barrel, compared to the \$200 that he claimed to have expected.

Public disenchantment with that attitude is visible among his own supporters. Only about half of Republicans approve of Trump's handling of the cost of living.

Younger Republicans are particularly unhappy. About 6 in 10 Republicans under 45 disapprove of how Trump is handling costs, compared to about 4 in 10 older Republicans.

Most Republicans who identify as supporters of the Make America Great Again movement are still largely behind the president. About 9 in 10 MAGA Republicans approve of Trump's job performance, compared to 44% of non-MAGA Republicans, although only about 7 in 10 MAGA Republicans approve of him on cost of living.

Miguel Cortes, a 67-year-old retired aircraft mechanic in South Carolina, believes the increase in prices from tariffs and the Iran war is simply a temporary price to pay. As for gasoline costs rising, "it is what it is, I'm not going to complain," he said. "People are just going to have to deal with it."

"From deep in my soul, I believe God put him there for a reason," said Cortes, who has a tin sign of "Make America Great" in his garage near a National Rifle Association plaque.

Americans are gloomier about the U.S. economy

About three-quarters of U.S. adults described the U.S. economy as "very" or "somewhat" poor in April, up from about two-thirds in February.

The drop in confidence comes as the economy remains unsettled, with gasoline prices higher than they were, as the financial markets for stocks, bonds and oil continues on a rollercoaster ride that veers wildly based on Trump's claims of a coming peace with Iran one day and a threat to destroy the entire civilization the next.

Americans such as Heidi Bunting, 35, a student with two children, see an economy in which basic needs such as health care and transportation are unaffordable.

"It's awful, and not just for me," said Bunting, who lives in Bowling Green, Ohio. "I'm sure the only people

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doing well in this economy are those who started with a lot of money.”

Falling approval on the economy among independents and Republicans

Despite efforts to tout last year's tax cuts and brush off economic concerns, Trump's economic approval remains low among independents and has even eroded among Republicans.

About 2 in 10 independents approve of Trump's performance on the economy in the new poll, down slightly from about 3 in 10 in March. Far more Republicans, 62%, have a positive view of the way Trump is handling the economy, but that's also down from 74% last month.

In general, Republicans are less enthusiastic about Trump's overall performance than they were shortly after he took office. In March 2025, 51% of Republicans "strongly" approved of the way he was handling the presidency, a figure that has dropped to 38% now.

Immigration, another signature issue of Trump's, is a relative bright spot for the president. About 4 in 10 U.S. adults approve of his performance on that issue, which is unchanged from last month and higher than his overall approval.

Trump's approval ratings are in line with his predecessor Joe Biden's lowest approval rating in AP-NORC polling — 36% — which came during July 2022 after inflation spiked to a four-decade high. Biden's approval ratings recovered slightly as inflation eased, raising a question as to whether Trump can quickly regroup to show tangible progress.

Trump came into office last year with relatively low approval — 42% in March 2025 — which has until now remained fairly stable.

Teen charged with killing Florida stepsister on cruise ship pleads not guilty

MIAMI (AP) — A teenager charged with killing his stepsister on a Carnival Cruise ship filed a not-guilty plea Tuesday and waived his appearance at a hearing in Miami federal court.

Timothy Hudson has received the indictment and is waiving his appearance at an arraignment scheduled for Wednesday, defense attorney Eric Cohen said in a court filing. The 16-year-old also signed the one-page document.

Cohen didn't immediately respond to an email seeking further comment

Hudson is being prosecuted as an adult in the death of 18-year-old Anna Kepner, whose body was found under a bed in a Carnival Horizon room that she was sharing with him and another teen during a family trip in November.

Hudson is charged with murder and aggravated sexual abuse. He has been free in the care of an uncle since his arrest in February, though prosecutors now want a judge to lock him up while the case unfolds. That issue is unsettled.

Kepner was a high school cheerleader at Temple Christian School in Titusville, Florida, about 40 miles (65 kilometers) east of Orlando. The cause of her Nov. 6 death was determined to be mechanical asphyxia, which is when an object or force stops someone from breathing.

Records and hearings in the case were closed to the public for weeks because Hudson was initially charged as a minor. But U.S. District Judge Beth Bloom granted the government's request to have him prosecuted as an adult. The case was unsealed on April 10.

Florida's attorney general launches criminal probe into ChatGPT over FSU shooting

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — Florida's attorney general on Tuesday opened a rare criminal investigation into OpenAI's ChatGPT over whether the artificial intelligence app offered advice to a gunman who killed two people and wounded six others last year at Florida State University.

Attorney General James Uthmeier said that prosecutors had done an initial review of chat logs between

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ChatGPT and the gunman, Phoenix Ikner, to determine if the AI app aided, abetted or advised the commission of a crime.

Prosecutors believe the chatbot advised Ikner on what type of gun and ammunition to use, whether a gun would be useful at short range, and what time of day and at which location would allow for the most potential victims, Uthmeier said.

"My prosecutors have looked at this, and they've told me if it was a person at the other end of that screen, we would be charging them with murder," Uthmeier said at a news conference in Tampa. "Now, of course, ChatGPT is not a person, but that does not absolve our office and my prosecution team from our duty to investigate whether there is criminal culpability here."

Florida's Office of Statewide Prosecution has subpoenaed OpenAI for records of its policies and training materials regarding threats to harm others, and for its policies on reporting "possible past, present, or future crime," according to the attorney general's office.

OpenAI spokeswoman Kate Waters called the FSU shooting a tragedy but said the company had no responsibility. The company proactively shared information with law enforcement and continues to cooperate with investigators, she said Tuesday.

"In this case, ChatGPT provided factual responses to questions with information that could be found broadly across public sources on the internet, and it did not encourage or promote illegal or harmful activity," Waters said in an email.

Uthmeier conceded that his office was venturing into "uncharted territory" by launching a criminal probe into whether a chatbot contributed to the commission of a crime. His office also has initiated a civil probe, he said.

Several civil lawsuits have sought damages from AI and tech companies over the influence of chatbots and social media on loved ones' mental health. Last month, a jury in Los Angeles found both Meta and YouTube liable for harms to children using their services. In New Mexico, a jury determined that Meta knowingly harmed children's mental health and concealed what it knew about child sexual exploitation on its platforms.

Also last month, a man sued Google for the wrongful death by suicide of his son and product liability claims, the latest in a growing number of legal challenges against AI developers that have drawn attention to the mental health dangers of chatbot companionship.

Ikner faces two counts of first-degree murder and several counts of attempted first-degree murder in the shooting that terrorized the campus in Florida's capital city.

Ikner is the stepson of a local sheriff's deputy, and investigators say he used his stepmother's former service weapon to carry out the shooting. Prosecutors in the case intend to seek the death penalty.

Uthmeier, a Republican, was named to the position by Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, after the GOP governor appointed then-Attorney General Ashley Moody to the U.S. Senate seat vacated by Marco Rubio when he became the secretary of state in President Donald Trump's second administration.

Uthmeier is running in November to be elected to the position on his own.

DeSantis has called a special session for the end of the month to consider an "Artificial Intelligence Bill of Rights," as well as redraw congressional districts.

US forces board a sanctioned oil tanker in the Indian Ocean, the Pentagon says

By BEN FINLEY, KONSTANTIN TOROPIN and BILL BARROW Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. forces have boarded an oil tanker previously sanctioned for smuggling Iranian crude oil in Asia, the Pentagon said Tuesday, as it puts into place a global warning to track down vessels tied to Tehran.

U.S. forces "conducted a right-of-visit maritime interdiction" of the M/T Tifani "without incident," the Pentagon said on social media.

The tanker was captured in the Bay of Bengal — between India and Southeast Asia — and it was car-

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rying Iranian oil, according to a U.S. defense official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss an ongoing military operation. The military will decide in the next four days what to do with the vessel, such as tow it back to the U.S. or turn it over to another country, the official said.

It's the latest move by the U.S. to stop any ship tied to Iran or those suspected of carrying supplies that could help its government, from weapons and oil to metals and electronics. The tanker was seized before President Donald Trump announced that the U.S. was extending a tenuous ceasefire in the Iran war at mediator Pakistan's request but was keeping the blockade in place.

The tanker is the second vessel linked to Iran that has been interdicted by the U.S. military. The U.S. Navy attacked and seized an Iranian-flagged cargo ship on Sunday that it said had tried to evade its blockade of Iranian ports, with Trump saying an American destroyer blew a hole in the ship's engine room.

Targeting Iran-linked ships in international waters

The Pentagon on social media described the Tifani as "stateless" despite it being a Botswana-flagged vessel.

"As we have made clear, we will pursue global maritime enforcement efforts to disrupt illicit networks and interdict sanctioned vessels providing material support to Iran — anywhere they operate," the Pentagon announcement said, echoing previous statements from Trump administration officials. "International waters are not a refuge for sanctioned vessels."

Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said last week that the enforcement actions would extend beyond Iranian waters and the area under control of U.S. Central Command.

U.S. forces in other areas of responsibility, he told reporters at the Pentagon, "will actively pursue any Iranian-flagged vessel or any vessel attempting to provide material support to Iran." He specifically pointed to operations in the Pacific and said the U.S. would target vessels that left before the blockade began outside the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial waterway for energy and other shipments.

The military also detailed an expansive list of goods that it considers contraband, declaring that it will board, search and seize them from merchant vessels "regardless of location." A notice published Thursday says any "goods that are destined for an enemy and that may be susceptible to use in armed conflict" are "subject to capture at any place beyond neutral territory."

Blockades can be lawful in wartime, expert says

The U.S. military's actions against Iranian-linked vessels, namely the attack over the weekend on the cargo ship named the Touska, have raised questions about the two-week ceasefire.

The U.S. and Iran are operating in "an awkward space where the law doesn't give you a clean yes-or-no answer" on whether the ceasefire was violated, said Jason Chuah, a law professor at the City University of London and the Maritime Institute of Malaysia.

"The United States seems to take the line that the conflict never fully switched off — that is there is still a state of armed conflict," Chuah said. "By saying that, it can keep doing things like enforcing a blockade and even using limited force at sea."

Iran is treating the ceasefire as a pause on all hostile acts, Chuah said.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi on Tuesday called the U.S. blockade a breach of the ceasefire and said "striking a commercial vessel and taking its crew hostage is an even greater violation." In a letter, Iran's U.N. Mission asked the U.N. Security Council and U.N. chief António Guterres to condemn the U.S. for seizing the Touska and its crew.

The U.S. earlier had instituted a blockade against sanctioned oil tankers linked to Venezuela but had never fired on those vessels.

Blockades and even limited attacks on vessels can be lawful in wartime, with merchant vessels becoming legitimate targets if they contribute to military actions, carry contraband or are incorporated into enemy logistics, Chuah said.

It's harder to prove that a ship such as the Touska is realistically contributing to military action against the U.S., Chuah said.

"The whole dispute really turns on a deceptively simple question: Did the ceasefire actually suspend the

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right to use force?" Chuah said. "If it did, then firing on vessels or seizing them is very hard to square with the United Nations Charter."

Mark Cancian, a retired Marine colonel and a senior defense adviser with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said a violation of the ceasefire is up for interpretation because there were no defined terms.

"Trump announced it. The Iranians agreed. But there's no formal agreement," Cancian said. "So whether it broke the ceasefire or not depends on your perspective. ... Nothing was written down."

Michael O'Hanlon, a defense and foreign policy analyst at the Brookings Institution, said the U.S. did not violate the ceasefire because it was limited to bombing Iran, not the blockade.

"We agreed to stop dropping bombs on them, and that's the basic thing they wanted," O'Hanlon said, adding that the U.S. still had to enforce the blockade "if you're going to make it mean anything."

Stocks slip and oil prices rise on uncertainty about US-Iran ceasefire talks

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. stocks and oil prices flip-flopped Tuesday as uncertainty rose about what will happen following a ceasefire in the war with Iran, which had been set to expire Wednesday.

The S&P 500 erased an early rise to fall 0.6% after U.S. Vice President JD Vance called off a trip to Pakistan, where he was expected to lead U.S. negotiators in talks with Iran to extend the ceasefire.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 293 points, or 0.6%, after erasing an earlier gain of 400 points, while the Nasdaq composite slipped 0.6%. Less than 10 minutes after the U.S. stock market finished trading for the day President Donald Trump said he would extend the ceasefire to give Iran time to submit a proposal to end the war.

Oil prices also wavered before Trump announced the extension, and the price for a barrel of Brent crude went from less than \$95 to roughly \$100 during the day. It settled at \$98.48, up 3.1%.

The moves were mostly more modest than the vicious swings that rocked Wall Street earlier in the war, when the price for a barrel of Brent crude briefly topped \$119 and the S&P 500 dropped nearly 10% below its prior all-time high. The U.S. stock market remains near its most recent record, which was set Friday, indicating optimism still remains in financial markets that the United States and Iran will avoid a worst-case scenario for the economy.

"It's become cliché to say that the economic hit will depend on the duration of the Middle East conflict, but that cliché does ring true," according to Brian Jacobsen, chief economic strategist at Annex Wealth Management.

Much of the tension in financial markets has focused on what will happen to the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow waterway off Iran's coast that oil tankers use to exit the Persian Gulf. A long-term closure would keep crude oil pent up in the gulf and away from customers worldwide.

Helping to limit Wall Street's losses were UnitedHealth Group and other big companies that reported bigger profits for the latest quarter than analysts expected.

UnitedHealth jumped 7% after also raising its forecast for profit over the full year of 2026. That's big because stock prices tend to follow the path of corporate profits over the long term, and it's a double-plus when companies not only top earnings estimates but also forecast better growth ahead.

Quest Diagnostics rose 4.4% after likewise reporting fatter profit for the latest quarter than analysts expected while also raising its profit forecast for the full year.

Amazon added 0.7% after Anthropic said it signed a new agreement and is committing more than \$100 billion over the next 10 years to AWS technologies to train and run its Claude chatbot.

But they were all nevertheless overshadowed by a 2.5% drop for Apple, which was the day's heaviest weight on the S&P 500. It fell in its first trading after Tim Cook said he'll step down as CEO on Sept. 1 and become the iPhone maker's executive chairman.

Cook is handing control over to John Ternus, a company veteran who rose through Apple's hardware

engineering ranks.

Tractor Supply, meanwhile, dropped 11.7% after reporting profit and revenue for the latest quarter that fell short of expectations.

All told, the S&P 500 fell 45.13 points to 7,064.01. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 293.18 to 49,149.38, and the Nasdaq composite sank 144.43 to 24,259.96.

In stock markets abroad, indexes fell in Europe following a stronger finish in Asia. South Korea's Kospi rallied 2.7% for one of the world's biggest moves.

In the bond market, Treasury yields rose after a report on Tuesday morning showed that U.S. retailers made more money in March, the first full month of the war, than analysts expected. Growth was even relatively stable for retail sales when not including those from gasoline stations.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury climbed to 4.31% from 4.26% late Monday, and the gains accelerated late in the day with oil prices.

Kevin Warsh, Trump's nominee to chair the Federal Reserve, said that he never promised Trump he would cut interest rates, even though Trump has angrily been calling for the central bank to do so. Warsh is facing a tightrope walk as U.S. senators consider his nomination because investors want him to maintain the Fed's independence from political meddling.

Warsh says he got no pressure from Trump to cut rates even as president publicly pushes for them

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's nominee to chair the Federal Reserve said Tuesday that he never promised the White House that he would cut interest rates, even as the president renewed his calls for the central bank to do so.

"The president never once asked me to commit to any particular interest rate decision, period," Kevin Warsh, a former top Fed official, said under questioning by the Senate Banking Committee. "Nor would I ever agree to do so if he had. ... I will be an independent actor if confirmed as chair of the Federal Reserve."

Warsh's comments came just hours after Trump, in an interview on CNBC, was asked if he would be disappointed if Warsh didn't immediately cut rates and responded, "I would."

The comments underscore the challenge faced by Warsh, 56, a financier and former member of the Fed's board of governors whom Trump named in January to replace the current Fed chair, Jerome Powell. Democrats on the committee accused Warsh of flip-flopping on interest rates over the years, supporting higher interest rates under Democratic presidents and advocating rate cuts during Trump's time in office. Investors are watching the hearing closely to see how Warsh balances Trump's demands with worsening inflation, as the war in Iran pushes up the price of gasoline.

Higher inflation typically leads the Fed to raise rates, or at least keep them unchanged, rather than cut them. When the Fed changes its key rate, it can affect mortgages, auto loans, and business borrowing.

Yet Warsh's account was challenged by Sen. Ruben Gallego, an Arizona Democrat, who said that Wall Street Journal reporting last year found that Trump had urged Warsh to reduce borrowing costs.

"Who's lying here? Is it you or the president?" Gallego asked.

"I think those reporters need better sources," Warsh responded.

For all the back and forth, the hearing didn't appear to advance Warsh's nomination, which has been delayed by a Justice Department investigation into the Fed and Powell, over brief testimony Powell gave last June before the same panel about a building renovation.

Sen. Thom Tillis, a North Carolina Republican on the committee, reiterated Tuesday he wouldn't vote for Warsh until the investigation is dropped. With the committee closely divided and all Democrats opposed to his nomination, Tillis' opposition is enough to bottle it up in committee.

"We have got to get rid of this investigation," Tillis said, "so I can support your nomination."

Tillis has previously said that all seven Republicans on the committee have signed a letter stating that Powell did not commit a crime when he testified before the panel last June. Federal prosecutors, led by

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Assistant U.S. Attorney Jeannine Pirro, are investigating his testimony for potential perjury, though a judge said last month they offered no evidence to support the charge when he threw out subpoenas Pirro had issued.

Prosecutors from her office as recently as last week sought access to the Fed's building project but were turned away, revealing that the Trump administration has not reversed course despite opposition from members of his own party that are essential to Warsh's confirmation.

In his opening remarks, Warsh told the Senate Banking Committee that one of his top goals would be to fight inflation, which remains elevated at 3.3% annually.

"Congress tasked the Fed with the mission to ensure price stability, without excuse or equivocation, argument or anguish," Warsh said. "Inflation is a choice, and the Fed must take responsibility for it."

Warsh would be in a tough spot if confirmed. Inflation is worsening, making it much harder for the Fed to implement the interest rate cuts Trump so desperately seeks. The conflict could also slow the economy, as well as hiring. And if Warsh ultimately becomes chair, he may very well find his predecessor, Powell, still sitting on the Fed's governing board, an uncomfortable arrangement that hasn't occurred since the late 1940s.

Warsh said the Fed's political independence is "essential," and that the central bank wasn't threatened when "elected officials — presidents, senators, or members of the House — state their views on interest rates." Trump has repeatedly urged Powell to cut the Fed's key rate from its current level of about 3.6% to as low as 1%, a view almost no economist shares.

Sen. Elizabeth Warren, a Massachusetts Democrat, said that Trump has not just stated his opinions on rates, but has sought to fire a Fed governor and is investigating Powell.

"The Senate should not be aiding and abetting Donald Trump's illegal takeover of the Fed by installing his chosen sock puppet as chair," she said Tuesday.

Warren also noted that Warsh has not disclosed all of his financial holdings, which include investments in start-ups and private companies, or the size of those financial stakes. For example, Warsh has said he has holdings in SpaceX and Polymarket, but has not said how large those investments are.

Warren charged that Warsh is not in compliance with ethics requirements. Warsh argued that the Office of Government Ethics has signed off on his plan to sell all his assets within 90 days of his confirmation.

The turmoil could make a potential transition from Powell to Warsh an unusually turbulent one for the world's most pivotal central bank, which has historically experienced smooth transfers of power. Should the change in leadership prove particularly bumpy, it could unnerve markets and lift longer-term interest rates.

Powell's term as chair ends May 15. He said last month that he would remain as chair until a successor is named. Powell also is serving a separate term as a member of the Fed's governing board that lasts until January 2028. Fed chairs typically leave the board when their terms as chair end, but Powell said last month he would remain on the board, even if a new chair is approved, until the investigation is dropped.

Trump said he would fire Powell if he attempted to remain at the Fed. Yet Trump's previous attempt to remove a Fed governor, Lisa Cook, has been tied up in court. During oral arguments in January, a majority of justices on the Supreme Court appeared to lean toward leaving Cook at the Fed.

Ukraine completes Druzhba pipeline repairs, hoping to unlock blocked EU loan

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine has completed repairs on a damaged oil pipeline and is preparing to resume flows, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Tuesday, while warning that there is no guarantee Russia will not target the infrastructure again.

Repairs to the Druzhba pipeline became a contentious issue, delaying approval of a major 90 billion euro (\$106 billion) EU loan intended to support Ukraine's military and economic needs over the next two years. Zelenskyy said repairing the pipeline was linked to freeing the funds, which had been blocked by Hungary and Slovakia.

But top EU officials are now cautiously optimistic that the massive loan scheme might be approved as

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soon as Wednesday, ending months of political deadlock.

"Ukraine has completed repair work on the section of the Druzhba oil pipeline that was damaged by a Russian strike. The pipeline can resume operation," Zelenskyy said in a post on X. "Although no one can currently guarantee that Russia will not repeat attacks on the pipeline infrastructure, our specialists have ensured the basic conditions for restoring the operation of the pipeline system and equipment."

"We connect this with the unblocking of the European support package for Ukraine, which had already been approved by the European Council," he added.

Russian oil supplies to Hungary and Slovakia have been halted for two months after what Ukrainian officials say were Russian drone attacks that damaged the pipeline, which crosses Ukrainian territory, and that continuous strikes risk the lives of technicians trying to repair it.

The war in Ukraine that began in February 2022 with Russia's invasion of Ukraine has killed thousands, forced millions to flee their homes and turned cities into rubble.

Before being unseated by centrist challenger Péter Magyar, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán had threatened to cut gas supplies to Ukraine. Both Hungary and Slovakia accused Kyiv of deliberately obstructing Russian deliveries.

Zelenskyy said earlier this month he is reluctant to allow Russian oil to continue transiting through his country.

Speaking to reporters in Luxembourg after chairing a meeting of EU foreign ministers, the bloc's foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said the loan saga had taken many twists and turns. "We expect an agreement in 24 hours, so I don't want to jinx it," she said.

EU envoys are due to meet Wednesday in hopes of ending the standoff.

European Council President Antonio Costa, who will chair a summit of EU leaders starting Thursday, took to social media to thank Zelenskyy "for delivering, as agreed: repairing the Druzhba pipeline and restoring its operation."

The 27-nation EU had originally intended to use Russian assets frozen in Europe as collateral for the loan. But that option was blocked by Belgium, where the bulk of the frozen assets are held.

In December, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia agreed not to stop their EU partners from borrowing the money on international markets as long as the three countries did not have to take part in the scheme.

But Orbán angered the other 24 countries by later reneging on that deal over the pipeline dispute and as campaigning heated up ahead of elections earlier this month, which the veteran Hungarian leader lost in a landslide.

Takeaways from former top UK official's testimony on the Mandelson appointment scandal

By SYLVIA HUI and BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — A former top British official on Tuesday revealed behind-the-scenes details about how scandal-tainted politician Peter Mandelson, a friend of Jeffrey Epstein, came to be approved as Britain's ambassador to Washington despite failing security checks.

Olly Robbins, the former head of the Foreign Office, was fired by Prime Minister Keir Starmer last week over his decision to approve Mandelson for the top diplomatic job despite being briefed about security concerns.

In his defense, Robbins told lawmakers Tuesday that his department followed the correct procedure. But his comments did little to dispel months of questions surrounding Starmer's judgment in appointing Mandelson, and led to renewed calls for Starmer to step down.

The fallout for Starmer has rumbled on even though he fired Mandelson last year after documents showed the ambassador had maintained much closer ties to Epstein than previously thought.

Here are some key takeaways from Robbins' testimony to Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee:

Robbins says the Prime Minister's office was 'dismissive' of security vetting

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One of the most damaging revelations for Starmer was Robbins' description of the political pressure to push through Mandelson's security vetting.

Robbins told lawmakers there was a "very, very strong expectation" from Downing Street that Mandelson "needed to be in post and in America as quickly as humanly possible."

Robbins said security vetting was underway but not yet complete when he took up his job, about two weeks after Mandelson's appointment was announced in December 2024. The U.S. government had accepted the nomination and Mandelson was granted access to classified briefings.

Downing Street took a "dismissive attitude" to Mandelson's security vetting, Robbins said.

There was "never any interest, as far as I can recall, in whether, but only an interest in when," he said.

Robbins says Starmer misunderstood his obligation to relay details

Starmer said he was "furious" he wasn't told Mandelson had failed security clearance and that he fired Robbins for withholding that information. The government said Starmer only found out last week that United Kingdom Security Vetting, the team carrying out highly sensitive security checks on officials, had advised against granting Mandelson clearance.

Robbins said Foreign Office confidentiality rules barred him from telling the prime minister he had approved Mandelson for the posting despite the team's advice to the contrary, and that the vetting process is so secretive that even he was not shown the panel's report on Mandelson.

The government has said vetting officials give their recommendations on a document with three boxes — green, yellow and red — to indicate if clearance should be approved or denied. It's not known what risks were flagged by the vetting officials, nor whether Robbins knew what they were.

Robbins said he never saw the document but that he was briefed that the vetting officials considered Mandelson a "borderline case" and were "leaning towards recommending that clearance be denied."

Nonetheless, Foreign Office officials decided those risks could be managed or mitigated.

The security concerns were not related to Mandelson's ties to Epstein

The furor over the appointment arose earlier this year when new files released in Washington suggested Mandelson sent market-sensitive information to Epstein following the 2008 financial crisis when he was the U.K. government's business secretary.

But Robbins said explicitly that concerns raised in Mandelson's security screening had nothing to do with his ties to the convicted sex abuser.

Alarms, however, were sounded in a "due diligence report" when Mandelson was first named as the future ambassador. The report released to Parliament last month showed civil servants raised concerns about the "reputational risk" the elder statesman posed for the government if appointed to the high-profile diplomatic post.

In addition to citing the Epstein relationship, the report outlined Mandelson's troubling business ties to Russia and China and noted his resignations from two previous Labour governments because of scandals over money and ethics.

Starmer apologized and blamed Mandelson for lying about the extent of his ties to the convicted sex offender.

Mandelson's appointment continues to haunt Starmer

Robbins' testimony that Mandelson was appointed despite significant security concerns has heaped new pressure on a beleaguered Starmer to defend himself from rivals calling for his resignation.

Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch said it was "inconceivable" that nobody in Starmer's office knew Mandelson had flunked the security clearance, and she accused him of misleading Parliament.

"The evidence from Olly Robbins is devastating to Keir Starmer," Badenoch said. "It is clear that No. 10 not only made the appointment before vetting was completed, but that Mandelson was already acting as the ambassador before the vetting, even seeing highly-classified documents. ... It is now absolutely clear that 'full due process' was not followed."

Polling has consistently shown support for Starmer is falling. Keiran Pedley, director of politics at the polling firm Ipsos, said the latest revelations could entrench the public's negative views about his leadership.

"Recently it had been suggested that Starmer's response to the Iran war had put questions about his future on the back burner," Pedley added. "That may no longer be the case."

Upcoming local elections in England, Scotland and Wales could deliver a more resounding referendum on his leadership if they are, as expected, particularly bad for the Labour Party.

Retail sales up 1.7% in March from February driven by a spike in gas prices due to the Iran war

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Shoppers accelerated their spending in March from February, but they spent a good chunk of their money at the gas pump.

A spike in gas prices due to the Iran war, now in its eighth week, resulted in a hefty 1.7% gain in retail sales in March after a revised 0.7% increase in February, according to the Commerce Department's report on Tuesday. The figure marked the fastest one-month increase in retail sales in more than three years.

The report marks the first read on spending to capture the effects of the Iran war.

Excluding gas prices, retail sales were up 0.6%, helped in part by government tax refunds and warm weather.

Business at gas stations rose 15.5% percent.

Elsewhere, shoppers were still willing to spend. Sales at department stores rose 4.2%, while sales at furniture and home furnishings stores were up 2.2%. Online retailers saw a 1% gain. Consumer electronics and appliance stores posted a 0.9% increase. The only area that saw a decline for March was miscellaneous retailers, according to the Commerce report.

The snapshot offers only a partial look at consumer spending and doesn't include things like travel and hotel stays. The lone services category — restaurants — registered a more modest gain of 0.1%.

The so-called control group—which excludes food services, autos, building materials and gas station sales and is used to calculate economic growth—rose 0.7%. That offered a good sign of broad spending by consumers, economists said.

"It's a blowout retail sales figure for March," Heather Long, chief economist at Navy Federal Credit Union, wrote in a report.

She noted that the impact of tariffs is visible in the high spending on electronics and appliances due to higher prices. A small increase at restaurants may indicate some early signs of pullback as consumers have to spend more at the pump, she said.

"Overall, the American consumer is still healthy," she added. "Extra income from tax refunds is helping many households weather this oil shock, but that extra money won't last forever."

The Iran war began Feb. 28 and has shut down the Strait of Hormuz, cutting off one-fifth of the world's oil supply.

Late last month, U.S. gas prices jumped past an average of \$4 a gallon for the first time since 2022.

Economists had believed that an unusually large jump in tax refunds would kick start spending at the start of the year. But spiking gas prices are taking a bite out of that money. And the Iran war is also further dampening shoppers' mood. Consumer sentiment plunged to a record low in April, according to a survey released earlier this month by the University of Michigan, largely because of the Iran war and concerns over higher gas prices.

Shoppers aren't just feeling it at the gas pump, but are also starting to see unforeseen costs everywhere, including when they travel such as higher baggage fees. They will also likely see higher prices on different products ripple through the supply chain as companies start to pass on higher transportation costs to shoppers, analysts said.

The jump in gas prices caused a sharp spike in inflation last month, creating major challenges for the inflation-fighters at the Federal Reserve and increasing already significant political hurdles for the White House.

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Consumer prices rose 3.3% in March from a year earlier. On a monthly basis, prices rose 0.9% in March from February, the largest such gain in nearly four years.

Heading into the war, shoppers were already cautious. But Bryan Eshelman, Americas leader of retail and a partner and managing director at consultancy AlixPartners, noted his retail clients see their customers pulling back even more now.

"Particularly in the low-end economy, people are shifting from wants to needs," he said.

R.J. Hottovy, head of analytical research at Placer.ai, noted that for seven straight weeks, traffic at non-discretionary retailers like grocers outpaced that of discretionary merchants. That trend was reversed the week of April 6, helped by the distribution of tax refunds and spending tied to spring break and Easter.

But after the data goes past Easter trends, future visits will largely depend on consumer sentiment regarding broader macroeconomic conditions and gas prices, Hottovy said. The firm tracks people's movements based on cellphone usage.

Iran's leadership survived US-Israeli bombardment. But talks to end the war present a new challenge

By AMIR-HUSSEIN RADJY and LEE KEATH Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — After U.S.-Israeli bombardment eliminated Iran's supreme leader and much of its top echelons, the Islamic Republic's leadership didn't fall apart — but negotiations to end the war offer a new test.

For decades, the supreme leader successfully managed several powerful factions, bringing to heel those who challenged his authority while listening to rival opinions. It's now unclear who wields that kind of authority over the collection of civilian figures and powerful generals from the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard who appear to be in charge.

They have found unity — for now — by taking a tough line. But disagreements over how much to concede in negotiations with the United States could reveal fault lines, as Pakistani mediators try to host a new round of talks this week.

A committee now appears to be in charge

In the past, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was able to impose his will on the Islamic Republic's disparate power centers. After Israeli strikes killed him on the first day of the war, his son Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei succeeded him.

But doubts continue to swirl over the younger Khamenei's role after reports he was wounded in the strikes. Still in hiding, he has not appeared in public since becoming supreme leader and how he gives orders to top leaders is a mystery.

At the center of power now is a politburo-like body known as the Supreme National Security Council, which includes Iran's top civilian and military officials. Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, the parliament speaker and a veteran insider with strong contacts on all sides, has emerged as its face and the chief negotiator with the U.S.

The late Khamenei began giving more authority to the council before his death, but the war has consolidated its power.

The council contains a range of political opinions and often acute rivalries. A political rival of Qalibaf and uncompromising opponent of the U.S., Saeed Jalili, represents the supreme leader on the council, while the body's nominal head is reformist President Masoud Pezeshkian.

Hard-liner members include the Guard's new chief commander, Ahmad Vahidi, and the council's new secretary, Mohammad Bagher Zolghadr, also a commander in the Guard.

But Israel's strategy of eliminating top leaders points to a misreading of how the Islamic Republic works, experts say.

Iran's leadership survived "precisely because there are multiple power centers with overlapping authorities," said Ali Vaez, Iran director at the International Crisis Group. "Factionalism is just built into the DNA of this system."

But since the war, the Guard's growing clout on the council has also stoked speculation that a funda-

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mental change could be coming.

Negotiations with the US will stress test the power structure

The council now faces potentially divisive questions over how far to go to reach a deal with the U.S., which is demanding Iran make major concessions aimed at ensuring it is never able to develop a nuclear weapon. Iran has long insisted its program is peaceful while saying it has the right to uranium enrichment.

In an interview with Iranian state TV on Sunday, Qalibaf said Iran wants a comprehensive accord that brings "a lasting peace" where the U.S. no longer attacks the country.

"This dangerous loop needs to be cut," he said. The U.S. has twice launched strikes on Iran during high-level negotiations: once in the 12-day war in June, then again in the current conflict.

Council members have projected confidence that Iran holds the upper hand now, particularly because its grip on the Strait of Hormuz — a crucial passage for the world's oil — enables it to drive up fuel prices, thus threatening the global economy and exerting political pressure on U.S. President Donald Trump back home.

Senior officials have insisted they can hold out for assurances that Iran won't be attacked again — even risking the war reigniting — because they believe Iran can endure the pain longer than the United States and its allies.

But ultimately, the leadership's priority remains its own survival. The war and the U.S. blockade — which is threatening Iran's oil trade — are tightening the screws on the country's cratering economy.

Economic hardship has fueled waves of unrest over the past two decades, including protests in January that openly called for the Islamic Republic's overthrow. A deal with the West lifting sanctions could help it keep its grip at home.

"It is easier to imagine that the regime would try to make a concession to the West in order to ensure its survival than to its own people," Vaez said.

Signs of disagreement

Events over the weekend surrounding the Strait of Hormuz gave an indication of serious differences over how much to concede in negotiations. Engagement with Washington has long divided Iran's top ranks, despite a shared deep mistrust of the U.S.

On Friday, Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi announced in a posting on X that Iran was opening the strait to commercial traffic as part of the ceasefire agreement with the U.S. Hours later, Trump proclaimed that the U.S. would continue its blockade to keep pressure on Iran to reach a deal over its nuclear program.

On Saturday morning, Iran's military announced that it was reclosing the strait in retaliation for the blockade.

Some Iranian media criticized Araghchi, suggesting his post created the impression Iran was showing weakness — and revealing the differing positions behind the scenes. A report by the Tasnim news agency, seen as close to the Guard, said the position on the strait should have come from the National Security Council itself.

Araghchi's office pushed back, saying the Foreign Ministry "does not take any action without coordinating with higher-level institutions."

In his interview Sunday, Qalibaf tried to paper over any divisions, emphasizing that everyone in the leadership was on the same page on Iran's strategy in U.S. talks.

A possible bridge builder

The 64-year-old Qalibaf is best positioned to bridge divides among Iran's factions, said Arash Azizi, an Iranian journalist and columnist at The Atlantic who has written on the insider politician and the Guard.

Qalibaf is a former general in the Guard and national police chief and kept close to the Guard throughout his long political career. As Tehran's mayor from 2005 to 2017, Qalibaf gained a reputation as a pragmatist able to get things done — like overhauling an ailing public transport system — even as he faced major corruption and human rights abuse allegations.

Qalibaf has political currency within the Guard, "and he has the conservatives on his side. But he also now has very robust backing from the reformists and the centrists," Azizi said.

Ali Rabie, a well-known reformist and an assistant to the president, wrote last week in a newspaper

editorial that Qalibaf was “the representative of the country and the regime.”

At the same time, Qalibaf is close to the Khamenei family both hailing from the area of the eastern shrine city of Mashhad, said Mohsen Sazegara, one of the founders of the Revolutionary Guard in the 1980s who is now an opposition figure living in the U.S. During his father’s rule, Mojtaba Khamenei backed Qalibaf’s several unsuccessful attempts to run for president.

Qalibaf is also close to the senior Guard figures who stepped in to replace those killed by Israel — and who are widely seen as holding the key to any future agreement with the U.S. His cross-factional backing could enable him to ensure support at home for a deal against blowback from ideologues who will resist compromise.

Japan scraps a ban on lethal weapons exports in a change of its postwar pacifist policy

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japan on Tuesday scrapped a ban on lethal weapons exports, a major change in its postwar pacifist policy as the country seeks to build up its arms industry amid worries over Chinese and North Korean aggression.

The approval by Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi’s Cabinet of the new guideline clears a final set of hurdles for many arms sales, including of Japanese-developed warships, combat drones and other weapons.

It has been largely welcomed by Japanese defense partners like Australia and attracted interest from Southeast Asia and Europe. U.S. Ambassador to Japan George Glass on X called the move a “historic step” that will help enhance the defense capabilities between the allies.

China criticized the change in policy. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said the global community including China will “resolutely resist Japan’s reckless moves toward a new type of militarism.”

Opponents at home also say the change violates Japan’s pacifist constitution and will increase global tensions and threaten the safety of the Japanese people.

The new policy will “ensure safety for Japan and further contribute to the peace and stability in the region and the international society as the security environment around our country rapidly changes,” Chief Cabinet Secretary Minoru Kihara told reporters. “The government will strategically promote defense equipment transfers to create a security environment that is desirable for Japan and to build up the industrial base that can support fighting resilience.”

Japan could start selling weapons like missiles and destroyers

Japan has long prohibited most arms exports under its post-World War II pacifist constitution. It has made recent changes because of rising global and regional tensions, but exports were limited to five areas: rescue, transport, alerts, surveillance and minesweeping.

The new guidelines scrap those limits and allows the export of equipment such as fighter jets, missiles and destroyers. That’s a major change from existing exports such as flak jackets, gas masks and civilian-use vehicles that Japan has sent to Ukraine and intelligence radars sold to the Philippines.

For now, such exports will be limited to 17 countries that have signed defense equipment and technology transfer agreements with Japan. They also must be approved by the National Security Council, and the government will monitor how the weapons are managed afterward.

Japan remains committed to strict screening and export controls to third countries and will not offer lethal weapons to countries at war, officials said, but granted that exceptions could be made to that limit.

Japan began to export some non-lethal military supplies in 2014, and in December 2023 it approved a change that would allow sales of dozens of lethal weapons and components that it manufactures under licenses from other countries back to the licensors, clearing the way for Japan to sell U.S.-designed Patriot missiles to America to make up for munitions that Washington sent to Ukraine.

The 2023 revision also paved the way for Japan to jointly develop and sell a sixth-generation fighter jet with Britain and Italy, and for Japan’s biggest arms deal ever, which was formalized last week with Australia. It calls for Japan to deliver the first three of a \$6.5 billion fleet of Japanese-designed frigates for the

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Australian navy and jointly build eight others in that country.

Japan aims to build up its arms industry

Japan's domestic defense industry was long seen as a bad investment, limited to catering only to the Self-Defense Force and Defense Ministry. Dozens of former defense contractors have withdrawn from the market.

That is changing as Japan accelerates a buildup of its military and defense industry to play more offensive roles in the face of threats from China, North Korea and Russia.

The defense industry is one of 17 strategic areas targeted for growth under the Takaichi government. A growing number of major companies and startups are showing interest, especially in dual-use goods and drones.

The government also has increased funding for startups and academic research.

Officials say they believe Japan's new arms transfer rules would contribute to deepening of military and defense equipment cooperation with Japanese partners and to the regional deterrence.

"No country today can defend peace and safety by itself and needs partners to support each other," Takaichi said on X. "There is no change to our 80-year history as a pacifist nation and its pledge," she said, promising strict standards to its promotion of arms exports.

Outlook for potential customers

Australia on Saturday signed an agreement with Japan for delivery of three of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries' upgraded Mogami-class frigates and to jointly produce eight others. It welcomed Tokyo's new policy as a move to deepen their defense partnership.

New Zealand has also showed interest in the Japanese frigates. Several other countries have also expressed interest in Japanese defense equipment, including the Philippines, which is seeking to buy used destroyers, officials said.

Last week, a group of 30 NATO representatives visited Japan to discuss further deepening ties as the U.S. commitment to the military alliance has been shaken by U.S. President Donald Trump. They visited a subsidiary of Mitsubishi Electric Corp., which is part of the trilateral fighter jet project and also known for its satellite technology.

Today in History: April 22, the Oklahoma Land Rush of 1889

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Wednesday, April 22, the 112th day of 2026. There are 253 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On April 22, 1889, the Oklahoma Land Rush began at noon as thousands of homesteaders staked claims to nearly 1.9 million acres (770,000 hectares) of land that was formerly part of Indian Territory. By the end of the day, the cities of Oklahoma City and Guthrie were established with as many as 10,000 settlers each.

Also on this date:

In 1915, German forces unleashed their first full-scale use of chlorine gas against Allied troops at the start of the Second Battle of Ypres (EE'-preh) in Belgium during World War I. Thousands of Allied soldiers are believed to have died from the poison gas attacks.

In 1954, the publicly televised sessions of the Senate Army-McCarthy hearings began, probing Wisconsin U.S. Sen. Joseph McCarthy's allegations of communist influence within the federal government, the U.S. Army and other spheres of American life.

In 1970, an estimated 20 million Americans took part in the first Earth Day, a series of events proposed by Sen. Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin to promote environmental protection. It marked the start of the modern environmental movement.

In 1994, Richard M. Nixon, the 37th president of the United States and the first to resign from office (after the Watergate scandal), died at a New York hospital four days after suffering a stroke. He was 81.

In 2000, in a dramatic predawn raid, heavily armed immigration agents seized 6-year-old Elian Gonzalez, the Cuban boy at the center of an intense international custody dispute, from his relatives' home in Miami.

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Elian was reunited with his father at Andrews Air Force Base near Washington and returned to Cuba in June.

In 2005, Zacarias Moussaoui (zak-uh-REE'-uhs moo-SOW'-ee) pleaded guilty in a federal courtroom outside Washington, D.C., to conspiring with the Sept. 11 hijackers to kill Americans. (Moussaoui was sentenced to life in prison in May 2006.)

In 2010, the Deepwater Horizon oil platform, operated by BP, sank into the Gulf of Mexico two days after a massive explosion that killed 11 workers. The explosion and fire touched off one of the largest environmental disasters in U.S. history, spewing hundreds of millions of gallons of oil over pristine Gulf coasts and fragile wetlands.

In 2016, the bodies of eight members of a single family were discovered shot at four homes in a southern Ohio county. Authorities later said a custody dispute triggered by a young mother's refusal to give up her daughter prompted the massacre; four people were convicted in the case.

In 2025, gunmen shot and killed 26 tourists at a resort in Indian-controlled Kashmir. Police blamed militants fighting against Indian rule for the attack near the disputed region's resort town of Pahalgam.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Jack Nicholson is 89. Singer Mel Carter is 87. Author Janet Evanovich is 83. Filmmaker John Waters is 80. Basketball Hall of Famer Spencer Haywood is 77. Singer Peter Frampton is 76. Actor-comedian Ryan Stiles is 67. Actor Jeffrey Dean Morgan is 60. Actor Sheryl Lee is 59. Actor-talk show host Sherri Shepherd is 59. Actor Eric Mabius is 55. Entrepreneur Sam Altman is 41. Actor Amber Heard is 40. Former NFL running back Marshawn Lynch is 40. Rapper-singer Machine Gun Kelly is 36. NFL wide receiver Rashee Rice is 26.