

# Groton Daily Independent

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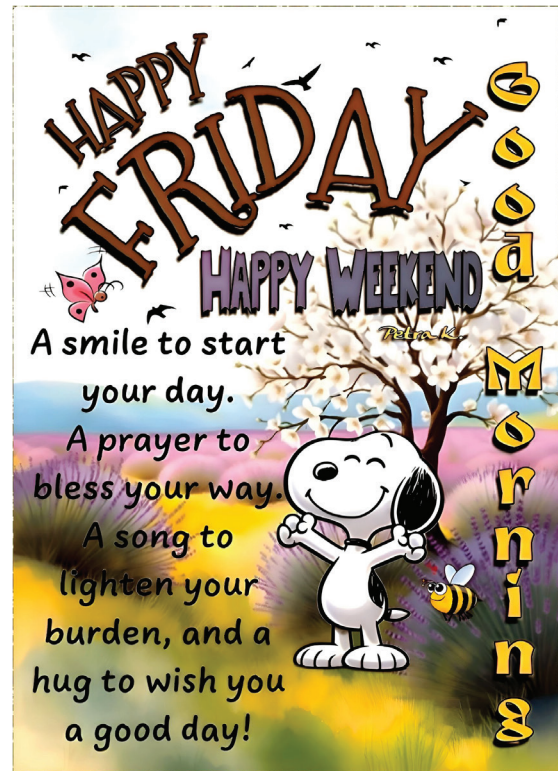
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## Friday, April 24

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.  
Baseball at Miller, varsity at 5:30 p.m. followed by JV.

## Saturday, April 25

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



## Sunday, April 26

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

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

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

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

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

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

JVT Practice, 1 p.m., Arena

Baseball at Lennox: vs. Lennox at 2 p.m. and West Central at 3:30 p.m.

**Groton Daily Independent**  
**PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445**  
**Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460**

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# 1440

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

## Reefer Reclassified

The Justice Department yesterday reclassified state-licensed marijuana as a less dangerous drug, easing federal limits on approved medical products while keeping recreational use illegal.

Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche ordered the shift from Schedule I, alongside heroin and LSD, to Schedule III, alongside codeine, ketamine, and testosterone. The Schedule I status implied "no accepted medical use," hindering research even though 40 states have legalized medical marijuana. The Biden administration recommended the change in 2024, but legal disputes delayed it. President Donald Trump then signed an executive order in December directing agencies to expedite the process. The change does not affect recreational marijuana's broader classification as Schedule I, though the Drug Enforcement Administration will hold a hearing in June to consider revising it.

Advocates say the shift will expand research into medical uses, including for chronic pain, epilepsy, and chemotherapy side effects. A recent poll found 59% of US adults support full legalization and 84% support medical use.

## Hollywood Mega-Merger

Warner Bros. Discovery shareholders yesterday approved an \$81B acquisition by Paramount Skydance—a deal that could unite two of Hollywood's five remaining legacy studios. It would also join streaming platforms Paramount+ and HBO Max, along with leading news outlets CBS and CNN.

The transaction now faces federal antitrust review and may be challenged by California Attorney General Rob Bonta (D). Democratic lawmakers and Hollywood creatives have raised concerns that consolidation could lead to job losses and fewer choices for consumers. In an effort to reassure skeptics, Paramount CEO David Ellison, son of billionaire Larry Ellison, last week pledged to release 30 movies annually between Paramount and Warner, while maintaining the studios as separate operations.

After Netflix struck a \$72B deal for Warner's film and streaming assets last year, Paramount went directly to Warner's shareholders with a competing offer. Following months of public fighting, Netflix withdrew its bid in February.

## Silicon Valley Belt-Tightening

Microsoft is offering 7% of its US employees (more than 8,000 people) voluntary buyouts for the first time in the company's 51-year history. To be eligible, employees' age and tenure at the company must add up to at least 70 years, and the workers must be at a senior director level or below.

The move allows Microsoft to avoid formal layoffs and comes as the company seeks to expand its AI investments beyond OpenAI. That includes a focus on its Copilot products, which have experienced interoperability issues. Meanwhile, OpenAI released its newest AI model yesterday, ChatGPT 5.5, roughly a month after the release of ChatGPT 5.4.

Separately, Meta announced it will be laying off 10% of its employees, impacting roughly 8,000 workers, beginning May 20. The company is also scrapping plans to hire for 6,000 open roles as it continues to move resources toward investments in AI.

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## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Las Vegas Raiders select Indiana University's Fernando Mendoza as No. 1 overall NFL draft pick. Patriots coach Mike Vrabel will miss third day of draft for counseling after vacation photos surfaced of the married father with NFL reporter Dianna Russini.

Taylor Swift tops Spotify's first most-streamed artists of all time list, followed by Bad Bunny; one of the two has held the yearly top spot since 2020.

Grammy-winning conductor Michael Tilson Thomas dies at age 81 after a battle with brain cancer.

Darrell Sheets, star of "Storage Wars" reality TV series, dies at age 67 from an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound.

## Science & Technology

Food and Drug Administration approves first gene therapy for genetic hearing loss; the drugmaker said it will offer the drug for free to US patients.

Neanderthals may have had a biological capacity for complex language, pushing back the timeline for speech development and suggesting Neanderthals were cognitively more similar to humans than long assumed.

Novel map details how Down syndrome alters brain development before birth, potentially informing future therapeutic targets.

## Business & Markets

US stock markets close down (S&P 500 -0.4%, Dow -0.4%, Nasdaq -0.9%).

Tesla shares fall over 3% after missing revenue expectations, though Q1 revenue rose by 16% year over year.

Capital One to pay \$425M settlement in lawsuit alleging the bank paid lower interest rates on older savings accounts while offering a higher rate on new, similarly named accounts.

Netflix authorizes \$25B share buyback plan after failed Warner Bros. Discovery bid.

## Politics & World Affairs

Special forces soldier arrested for allegedly making \$400K bet on Polymarket related to US mission to arrest Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro.

Justice Department internal watchdog launches audit into whether DOJ complied with Congress' Epstein Files Transparency Act.

Gunfight at the Mall of Louisiana in Baton Rouge kills one person, wounds five others; officials say fight broke out between two groups of people.



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## **SDHSAA members to vote on constitutional amendments**

**By Dana Hess**

**For the S.D. NewsMedia Association**

PIERRE — High schools belonging to the South Dakota High School Activities Association will have a chance to vote on three proposed amendments to the association's constitution. Sending the amendments to schools for their vote was approved at the association's annual meeting on Wednesday, April 22.

One amendment clarifies that eligibility for high school activities starts with the completion of the eighth grade. There have been some instances of parents trying to hold their children back after the eighth grade. They want to "reclassify" or "redshirt" their children in hopes of using their high school athletic eligibility when they are a year older.

SDHSAA Executive Director Dan Swartos explained that this usually happens with the parents of wrestlers who want the opportunity for their child to put on more weight before beginning competition in high school.

"You don't get a year off to do club sports," Swartos said.

According to the rationale offered to members, "the whole concept of redshirting or reclassifying for the purpose of sports goes against the concept of education-based activities." Students who must be held back for other reasons will have their high school athletic eligibility decided by the association on a case-by-case basis.

Another amendment clarifies that when a school closes, a student may transfer to another school after the end of the school year. According to the rationale, the amendment is offered to provide clarity to the school districts that must accept students from a closed school. It also provides clarity for parents who, when a school is rumored to be closing, want to transfer their children early to another school.

Swartos said questions about this came up twice in the past year with the closure of Freeman Academy and the vote on closing the Oldham-Ramona-Rutland school.

A third amendment clarifies that students who graduate early lose their eligibility to participate in activities.

Ballots must be returned to the SDHSAA office in Pierre by May 31. In order to pass, an amendment must receive a 60% favorable vote from member schools.

There won't be an election for a new board member as Jeff Kusters of Frederick was the only nominee for an opening on the board to represent small high schools. Kusters, who currently serves on the board, was able to run for a new five-year term as he was filling a term of less than two years.

## **Ending wrestling duals tourney among changes endorsed by SDHSAA board**

**By Dana Hess**

**For the S.D. NewsMedia Association**

PIERRE — At its six regular meetings per year, the board of directors of the South Dakota High School Activities Association is usually concerned with finding more and better ways for students to take part in activities. At its meeting Wednesday, April 22, the board took the rare action to endorse discontinuing the state duals wrestling tournament.

The action was among a variety of first readings of changes to the organization's athletics handbook. Those changes were first considered by each sport's advisory committee. Then the changes go to a meeting of the state's high school athletic directors who vote on the modifications prior to the SDHSAA board meeting.

Discontinuing the state duals wrestling tournament was one of 36 proposals the board considered. A second reading for the proposals approved by the board will be held at its June meeting.

Discontinuing the duals wrestling tournament had wide support among athletic directors with 84% voting to do away with the event. Wrestling was the only sport with two separate statewide events, making it tough to schedule. Schools can take part in a varied number of duals, making the selection of teams for the tournament difficult.



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SDHSAA Executive Director Dan Swartos said the South Dakota Wrestling Coaches Association has expressed interest in sponsoring a dual event.

## **No carts for golf coaches**

One of the ideas brought forward each year is allowing golf coaches to use carts during state and regional tournaments. This year, the request came from Class A coaches with 53% of athletic directors in that division voting in favor the change.

Part of the rationale for the change was that some schools don't have more than one coach for the golf team, making it hard for the coach to keep track of players on the course.

The handbook change would have allowed host golf courses to offer the carts if they wanted to allow them and if they could find enough.

"It's giving the courses an out if they don't want those carts," Swartos said. He explained that he didn't want a policy that mandated that carts be allowed because it was already tough to find courses that would host regional and state events.

The change to the handbook failed for the lack of a motion.

## **No third and fourth place games for soccer**

Athletic directors were split along conference lines about the worth of adding third and fourth place games to the state soccer tournament. The move would put the sport in line with others like basketball and volleyball. Eighty percent of Class AA directors were against the move while 57% of Class A directors were in favor.

While the addition of the games got some approval from athletic directors, that approval came without any indication of when or where the games would be played.

"I have significant concerns about the logistics of this," Swartos said.

The change to the handbook died for the lack of a motion.

## **A change to speed up the pole vault event**

Board members approved a change that would create a two-pit system for the pole vault at the state track meet. Swartos explained that by borrowing equipment from the University of South Dakota and Brandon Valley, the association could avoid the \$60,000 cost of implementing a second pit.

A second pit should allow the event, often at the end of the day, to move along faster as one pit will be used for competition and one pit for practice.

"It will help keep us on time," Swartos said. "At the end of the day, there's hardly anyone there."

## **Too many questions about 'unified' 4x100 event**

No one made a motion to add a non-scored unified 4x100 event to the state track meet. In the event, athletes from the state meet would compete alongside athletes from the Special Olympics.

Athletic directors were split on whether to offer the event with directors from AA schools voting 60% no, A schools voting 52% no and B schools voting 69% yes.

"Some of the trepidation is not understanding how it works," Swartos said, explaining that there were questions about travel, housing, nursing care and how to pick the athletes that would compete.

## **Sit-out rule for basketball officials eliminated**

A change from the Sports Officials Council asks that the rule mandating that basketball officials who work state tournaments sit out every fifth year be scrapped.

Swartos said the council asked why "are you making the best officials sit out every five years? It's one of the hot-button issues in the officials' world."

Swartos said the association uses a basketball officials selection committee to choose officials for state events. The committee is made up of board members, school officials and observers who watch the officials throughout the year. The committee also considers votes from coaches as well as evaluations of the officials.

SDHSAA Assistant Executive Director Randy Soma said the committee has been good about working new officials into the rotation for work at state tournaments. The change was approved by the board on an 8-1 vote.

## Format for AA one-act plays will not change yet

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. NewsMedia Association

PIERRE — It seems the show will go on for AA schools competing in the one-act play festival, even after the South Dakota High School Activities Association board of directors tried to change the format.

In April of 2025 the board approved a change for the festival that would see AA schools compete in four regions, sending 12 schools to the festival. In the past, all 20 AA schools went to the festival while Class A and B schools earned their position at the festival by taking part in regional competitions.

When the change was approved SDHSAA Assistant Executive Director Brooks Bowman said that the judges for the AA plays were working from 8 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. each day with hardly time for a break.

One of the requests from play directors was that the same judges had to see all of the plays for the judging to be fair. Activities directors have since told the association staff that they would prefer using four additional judges. According to SDHSAA Executive Director Dan Swartos, the activities directors said they would handle the concerns of the play directors about adding more judges if it would get their schools out of going to regional competitions and cutting the number of teams they send to the festival.

Swartos said going from 20 schools to 12 would cut out about 300 students.

"It's a significant hit going from 20 to 12 in AA," Swartos said.

The festival uses 12 judges. Bowman said adding four judges wouldn't be easy. "Finding 12 is hard sometimes."

On a 6-3 vote, the board decided to put a hold on the approved changes for AA one-act plays, allowing for continuing discussion of additional ideas.

—30—

## Auditions for All-State Band still vex SDHSAA board, staff

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. NewsMedia Association

PIERRE — After a two-year trial, it's still difficult for the South Dakota High School Activities Association board of directors and staff to agree on how to handle auditions for All-State Band. The policy was a topic of discussion at the board's meeting on Wednesday, April 22.

The policy calls for consulting with the National Weather Service on the Tuesday before auditions are scheduled in January. With the prediction of a large weather event, the SDHSAA fine arts executive, a band representative from the music advisory committee and an audition judge would decide whether to have live auditions or move to the weather contingency plan.

If there is confidence that the in-person auditions would be impacted by weather, auditions would move to a recorded format. In the event weather halts some, but not all auditions, there would be an attempt to reschedule the auditions affected by weather. If rescheduling presents a problem, the remainder of auditions will be recorded.

During the policy's two-year trial, weather conditions caused recorded auditions to be used for some of the participants in the first year. In its second year, there were no weather problems and all of the auditions were held in-person.

The inequity of the auditions in the first year of the policy, with some students performing for the judges live and others recording their auditions, bothers Brooks Bowman, SDHSAA assistant executive director in charge of fine arts.

"These kids who are doing recordings have a significant advantage," Bowman said, explaining that those students may have from nine to 23 days of extra practice time before they have to submit their audition recording.

Bowman said he has no good response for band directors and students who complain about the inequity between live and recorded auditions. "The only explanation is: I'm following the policy," Bowman said.

SDHSAA Executive Director Dan Swartos said the inequity in the policy doesn't bother band directors. The majority of band directors are in favor of live auditions. "Doing this live outweighs the inequity" for band directors, Swartos said.

Bowman asked the board if they wanted to move forward with the plan after two years. "You have a policy in place that's not fair," Bowman said, adding that a policy inequity in athletics would not be allowed. Bowman's argument was disputed by board member Jordan Bauer of Rapid City.

"A live audition is best for kids," Bauer said. "We all have policies we don't agree with but have to follow." The policy will likely be a topic of discussion at a future board meeting.

—30—

## Success factor policy faces uphill battle for SDHSAA

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. NewsMedia Association

PIERRE — The South Dakota High School Activities Association isn't having much success in drumming up interest in a success factor for athletics. Such a policy would allow teams to move up or down in classification based on their success or lack of it.

Creating a success factor is one of this year's goals for the SDHSAA board of directors. They were updated about the goal at their meeting on Thursday, April 23.

In his report, SDHSAA Executive Director Dan Swartos admitted that it's a complicated issue. "It would create a lot of issues, particularly with football."

Football is one of the areas where Swartos said the success factor would help most. He said some teams are blown out in every game. This hurts the program as athletes decide to no longer go out for the sport. "You've got kids saying, 'I don't want to do that again.'"

Using the success factor in football would "throw a lifeline to struggling teams," Swartos said, but also cause scheduling problems. He said football may need a broader discussion about its classification system.

A power point presentation developed by Swartos listed the positives of a success factor as parity and addressing inequities. There were far more negatives including scheduling difficulties, particularly in football; legal or legislative challenges; plentiful appeals; and cycles of small schools moving up and down in classification.

Swartos also shared a survey of 63 high school athletic directors. In the survey, 65% said they were very unlikely or unlikely to support a success factor policy. Just more than 17% said they were likely or very likely to support the policy.

In the survey 35% of ADs said SDHSAA should end the study without a recommendation and another 34% said to drop the study until a policy comes along that better suits the association.

Asked the three most important issues facing SDHSAA right now, the success factor came in last on the list. According to ADs, the most important issues include classification structures and balance, 51%; parent behavior as spectators and toward programs, 44%; eligibility and transfers, 37%; geographic equity, 32%; in and out of season issues like club participation and private lessons, 24%; AD burnout, 22%; privatization of sports, 19%; home schools, micro-schools and academies, 19%; football classification structure, 18%; and success factor, 11%.

The board will consider how to proceed with the success factor at its strategic planning meeting in July.



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(Photo by Tina Kosel)

## Massive 'Superload' Draws Attention as It Moves Through Groton Area

GROTON — A towering piece of industrial equipment turned heads this week as it made its way through the Groton area atop a multi-axle trailer, escorted by support vehicles and pilot cars.

The oversized load, stretching well over 100 feet in length, appeared to be a large industrial pressure vessel—commonly used in facilities such as ethanol plants, refineries or fertilizer operations. The cylindrical structure featured numerous capped openings and connection points, indicating it will play a key role in processing or separating materials once installed at its destination.

Transporting equipment of this size is no small task. The load required a specialized heavy-haul trailer with multiple axles to distribute the immense weight, along with a semi tractor and escort vehicles to guide it safely along highways and through intersections. Moves like this are typically planned well in advance and often travel at reduced speeds to ensure safety.

While the exact origin and destination were not immediately known, loads of this magnitude are often headed to energy or agricultural processing facilities across the region.

Residents who spotted the convoy likely witnessed what is known in the trucking industry as a “superload,” a rare sight that highlights the scale of infrastructure and industry operating behind the scenes in rural communities.

For many, it provided a brief but memorable reminder that even in small towns, big things still roll through.

## Ace of Hearts goes out!

The Ace of Hearts went out Thursday night. Joni Groebelinghoff picked card #41 and it was the Ace of Hearts. The jackpot was \$46,000 and Groebelinghoff will get half of the proceeds. Ticket sales for the week were \$3,400.

## Johnson leads Groton Area at Milbank girls golf meet

MILBANK — Groton Area's girls golf team was led by a top-10 finish from Carlee Johnson during the Milbank Invitational held Thursday, April 23.

Johnson turned in a strong round of 18-over-par 90 to place ninth overall in a competitive field that featured multiple Class A and B programs. The Groton junior stayed consistent throughout her round to secure the Tigers' top individual showing of the day.

Madison's Kenzley Heath of Sisseton claimed medalist honors with a 6-over 78, while Madison's Madison Rummel followed with an 83. Aberdeen Roncalli placed three golfers inside the top six, highlighting the depth of the field.

Groton Area had two additional golfers finish inside the top 25. Rylie Rose carded a 36-over 108 to place 20th, while Halee Harder finished 25th with a 43-over 115. The Tigers' trio provided steady scoring against a large field that included teams from across the region.

## Lake County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash

Where: 451st Avenue and Pelican Point Road, three miles southwest of Madison, SD

When: 2:33 p.m., Tuesday, April 14, 2026

Vehicle 1: 2010 Lincoln MKX

Driver 1: 66-year-old male from Nunda, SD, fatal injuries

Seat belt Used: No

Lake County, S.D. – A Nunda, SD man died last Tuesday in a single-vehicle crash three miles southwest of Madison, SD.

The name of the person involved has not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates that a 2010 Lincoln MKX was traveling westbound across 451st Avenue from Pelican Point Road when the vehicle left the roadway and went into a grass field where it collided with a tree stump, causing the vehicle to overturn.

The driver was not wearing a seat belt. He was pronounced deceased at the scene.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol is investigating the crash. All information released so far is preliminary.

The Highway Patrol is an agency of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.



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## Middle School Spring Concert

The middle school spring concert was held Thursday. The choir was directed by Landon Brown and the band by Sharon Schwan. The choir sang, "Elijah Rock," "Homeward Bound," "Rewrite the Stars" and the girls sang, "Love Story." The band performed, "Blue Sky Horizon," "Stay," "Superheroes R Us," "Looking Up" and "The Avengers." The band photo below was the band performing "Stay" in the dark. (Photos by Paul Kosel)



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

### State constitution allows shielding of officer names in police shootings, SD Supreme Court rules

**Decision cites Marsy's Law, passed by voters in 2016 to grants rights to crime victims**

**BY: JOHN HULT**

Officers who shoot when threatened can shield their names from public view under the victims' rights clause of the South Dakota Constitution, the state Supreme Court has ruled.

The Wednesday decision came in one of the criminal cases filed against Samir Albaidhani, who's been convicted in one county and has an open case in another for a series of interactions with law enforcement last year.

Albaidhani fired on and struck one of the two Sioux Falls police officers who tried to take him into custody on felony warrants last spring, according to an incident report from the South Dakota Division of Criminal Investigation.

Both officers fired back at Albaidhani, who would later lead law enforcement on a 30-mile chase that ended in Union County. There, he fired on Highway Patrol officers but missed. A Union County jury convicted Albaidhani in March of three counts of attempted first-degree murder against law enforcement, three counts of aggravated assault against law enforcement and one count of aggravated eluding.

Thursday's state Supreme Court ruling is linked to the unresolved charges against Albaidhani in Minnehaha County. His attorneys in Sioux Falls say their client's right to a fair trial could be compromised without public disclosure of the names of the Sioux Falls officers.

Early on in the Minnehaha County case, the officers who shot back at Albaidhani invoked their Marsy's Law rights to have their names and initials withheld from public court filings.

Voters approved Marsy's Law in 2016, creating a set of rights for crime victims and their family members that can be invoked upon request to protect them from harassment, keep them notified of court proceedings and be consulted during plea negotiations, among other things.

Since the amendment's passage, police who've shot or shot at members of the public have used it to protect their names from disclosure, arguing they're victims of a crime because they were defending themselves when threatened with violence. The South Dakota Attorney General's Office has ruled every officer-involved shooting in the state justified for more than two decades.

Circuit Court Judge Susan Sabers sided with Albaidhani. She ruled that it would take more than a name to open up the officers to harassment, and that officers cannot be viewed as crime victims when acting in their official capacity. The names and initials were sealed provisionally prior to her ruling, and have remained under seal as the city's local police union appealed it.

The state's high court ruled in favor of the officers, who argued that Albaidhani's lawyers can request and review information about the officers through non-public court filings and, if necessary, question them during closed-door court proceedings.

In a 5-0 ruling authored by Justice Robert Gusinky, the high court decided that names or initials might be used to locate and harass crime victims, overruling the local judge.

"Under the plain reading of Marsy's Law, a victim is 'a person against whom a crime or delinquent act is committed,'" the ruling says. "A law enforcement officer is a 'person' under every reasonable interpretation of the word."

*John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.*

## State's high court says survival bunker owners can pursue eviction for gun incident

BY: JOHN HULT

The owners of a western South Dakota survival bunker community are legally justified in pursuing the eviction of a man who brandished a firearm on the property, the South Dakota Supreme court has ruled.

Daniel Sindorf signed a 99-year lease with the property owner, known as Vivos XPoint Investment Group, in 2020, paying \$35,000 upfront for a bunker.

At the time, the community rules did not mention prohibitions on weapon usage. The property includes a shooting range. The U.S. military used the 575 concrete, earth-covered bunkers on the property near Edgemont between 1942 and 1967 to store bombs and other munitions, but the bunkers sat empty until California-based Vivos purchased the property to create what it billed as the nation's largest survival community.

Following a series of confrontations with neighbors, Sindorf brandished a pistol. He was protecting himself from his neighbors' dogs, he said, but Vivos said he was threatening other residents.

By the time the incident took place, Vivos had adjusted its community rules to bar the brandishing of firearms, a clause that served as justification for an attempted eviction of Sindorf, although the eviction notice cited a vague rule violation.

Sindorf disputed Vivos' right to oust him, and the company later pointed to the 2023 altercation as the reason for the eviction. Sindorf no longer lives in the bunker, but has refused to allow Vivos to access the property.

A local judge ruled that Vivos' decision to change the community guidelines mid-lease rendered the lease "illusory" because the lease contract, as signed, did not include such a provision.

As a result, Sindorf maintained possession of the bunker and the right to keep Vivos out. The judge declined to allow the eviction to proceed.

This state's high court overruled the local judge.

The lease noted that "the parties expressly agreed that Vivos would be able to modify the community rules and regulations subject only to 30 days' written notice before the modifications became enforceable," the ruling says.

Sindorf was given notice of the rule change, according to the ruling. The ruling allows the eviction proceedings to reopen in local court.

*John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.*

## South Dakota one of five states without state-funded preschool, report says

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER

South Dakota is one of five states without state-funded preschool, according to a national report released Wednesday.

The Mount Rushmore State is joined by Idaho, Montana, Wyoming and New Hampshire. The number of states without state-funded preschool has dropped from 10 as recently as 2012.

Forty-four states and Washington, D.C., have programs that meet the National Institute for Early Education Research's definition of a state-funded preschool program, according to the institute's new report. Indiana's program does not meet the definition because it has a parental work or school requirement, the report says.

Nationally, 37% of 4-year-olds are enrolled in state-funded preschool. States spent nearly \$14.4 billion on preschool during the 2024-2025 school year, according to the report.



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Investments in preschool programs can produce a “better future for children and taxpayers,” said Steve Barnett, director of the organization, in a news release.

“South Dakota needs to invest in preschool access and quality to help more families prepare their 3- and 4-year-olds for school and life success as the state falls far behind its neighbors in publicly funded early education opportunities,” Barnett said.

About 58% of parents in South Dakota say their children ages 3 to 5 years old are ready for school — one of the lowest percentages in the nation, according to a 2025 report from the National Survey of Children’s Health.

Early child education needs in South Dakota are filled by private and faith-based programs, school districts and through the national Head Start program for low-income children. But in the Sioux Falls School District, nearly 400 children are on waiting lists to participate in early childhood programs.

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

## US Justice Department downgrades risk of state-licensed medicinal marijuana

BY: JACOB FISCHLER

Medicinal marijuana products that are legal at the state level will see looser federal regulation under an order the U.S. Department of Justice published Thursday, while a process that could remove the drug in all forms from the federal list of the most dangerous drugs is set to begin in late June.

The order, signed by acting Attorney General Todd Blanche, shifts many marijuana products from Schedule I — the Drug Enforcement Administration’s list of drugs with the greatest potential for abuse and least legitimate use — to Schedule III.

That will open the door to greater research and provide an effective tax break for businesses that sell medicinal marijuana that is legal under state law.

The move follows President Donald Trump’s executive order last year directing the DOJ to move toward rescheduling.

“The Department of Justice is delivering on President Trump’s promise to expand Americans’ access to medical treatment options,” Blanche said in a statement. “This rescheduling action allows for research on the safety and efficacy of this substance, ultimately providing patients with better care and doctors with more reliable information.”

The order applies to state-licensed medical marijuana products in the states that allow medicinal use of the drug.

The move means those businesses can deduct business expenses from their federal taxes and researchers have access to state-legal products. As a Schedule I drug, only cannabis grown in a federal facility could be studied, severely limiting the supply available to researchers.

The DEA also scheduled a hearing on broader reclassification to begin June 29 and end no later than July 15. That hearing will explore the possibility of rescheduling marijuana products that could include recreational use.

The order likely has no immediate impact on the difficulty marijuana businesses have had accessing the banking system. Institutions that lend to even state-legal businesses could be prosecuted on federal money laundering charges for offering banking services to businesses that violate federal drug laws.

### ‘Historic’ shift

Moving a limited number of products from Schedule I, which includes drugs such as heroin and cocaine,

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to Schedule III, which includes highly regulated prescription drugs such as acetaminophen with codeine, does not satisfy advocates who have called for complete legalization.

But it does represent a major shift in the federal government's official position on cannabis, several pro-legalization groups said.

"It's historic because the federal government, historically, has denied the existence of medical cannabis, even as a concept," Paul Armentano, the deputy director of the advocacy group the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, said in an interview.

The federal government was in recent memory "outright hostile" to medicinal marijuana, Armentano added. The order "finally acknowledges and recognizes not only the legitimacy of marijuana as a medicine, but also the legitimacy of these state programs, and it is trying now to integrate these state programs into our own existing federal regulatory schemes."

Forty states and the District of Columbia allow medicinal marijuana.

Jasmine Johnson, CEO of Florida-based cannabis company GUD Essence, wrote in an email that the federal government's acknowledgement of cannabis' legitimate medical value was the most important part of the order.

"That shift alone helps move the industry out of decades of stigma and opens the door for expanded research, more institutional participation, and a more rational regulatory framework," she wrote.

## Medicinal vs. recreational

Recreational use will see no immediate changes from the order. In the 24 states in which recreational use, also called adult use, is legal, businesses that sell both medicinal and recreational products may experience confusion.

Chuck Smith, the CEO of Colorado Leads, an industry group, said in a statement that for Colorado cannabis businesses, "the immediate effects of this order are significant but relatively narrow."

"Hybrid businesses should expect a transitional period in which federally covered medical activity and federally non-covered adult-use activity may be treated differently for registration, tax, and compliance purposes," Smith said.

Such businesses would likely not see a tax benefit "when it comes to producing and selling, arguably, the products that consist of the majority of their business," Armentano said.

Ryan Hunter, the chief revenue officer for Colorado-based marijuana company Spherex, called the DOJ order "a very silly announcement," noting that it created a third regulatory category of a single plant species.

"Though this is all the same plant," hemp and medical marijuana "are now considered Schedule III substances under the Controlled Substances Act (similar to Tylenol + Codeine)," while non-medical use is still considered Schedule I, he wrote in a statement. "My mind boggles at these arbitrary and artificial distinctions, but here we are."

## Eventual changes

Johnson, the Florida CEO, said she expected regulators to eventually merge how they treat different uses of the drug.

"The distinction between medicinal and recreational use has always been more regulatory than practical. From an operator's standpoint, the same plant, supply chain, and compliance standards exist regardless of how it's categorized," she wrote.

"Over time, we'll likely see a continued shift toward a more unified framework that reflects how consumers actually engage with cannabis, rather than maintaining rigid distinctions that complicate operations.

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

## US Senate GOP adopts budget blueprint laying path for billions for ICE, Border Patrol

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — U.S. Senate Republicans approved a budget resolution early Thursday intended to speed the way for billions for immigration enforcement, sending the measure to the House, where GOP lawmakers in that chamber need to adopt it to unlock the reconciliation process.

The 50-48 vote followed a marathon amendment voting session that Democrats used to highlight policy differences on cost-of-living issues and stalled federal emergency relief dollars for states.

Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski and Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul were the two Republicans to vote against approving the measure. Sens. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, and Mark Warner, D-Va., did not vote.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said just before the vote-a-rama began that Democrats would put Republicans on the record about the soaring cost of living and the Trump administration's immigration crackdown.

"America will see even more clearly tonight where the Republicans are — not on the side of lowering costs, but on the side of masked agents occupying our streets," he said.

Republicans plan to use the complex budget reconciliation process, which avoids the need for Democratic support in the Senate, to provide between \$70 billion and \$140 billion in additional funding for Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Border Patrol.

The money is supposed to cover those agencies for the next three years, avoiding the need for Republicans to negotiate constraints on immigration activities with Democrats, who have been calling for guardrails since federal agents shot and killed two U.S. citizens in Minneapolis in January.

When combined with the Senate-passed bill that funds the vast majority of the Department of Homeland Security for the current fiscal year, the two pieces of legislation are expected to end the ongoing shutdown at that department, which began in mid-February.

### One amendment adopted, 15 turned down

Senators ultimately debated 16 amendments, 12 offered by Democrats and four proposed by Republicans. The only one adopted was from South Carolina Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham, which senators approved on a 98-0 vote.

The proposal would create a reserve fund to bolster federal immigration agents' ability to detain and deport adults who entered the country without proper documentation and were then convicted of rape, murder, or sexual abuse of a minor.

"Everybody in this body should be for this," Graham said. "These people need to be caught, put in jail, or kicked out of our country."

Illinois Democratic Sen. Dick Durbin said he supported the amendment because "under current law, undocumented immigrants who are convicted of rape, murder, or sexual abuse of a minor are subject to mandatory detention and deportation."

"What we object to is what is happening in the streets of Minneapolis and Chicago," he added.

### SAVE America Act sidelined

Louisiana Republican Sen. John Kennedy tried but was ultimately unable to convince his colleagues to add a new set of instructions to the budget resolution that would have allowed the Rules & Administration Committee to write a voter identification law.

Kennedy said he wanted that bill to have three provisions.

"Require that in federal elections, you have to be an American citizen to vote and provide for the provisions to enforce that. Number two, it would require that in federal elections, you have to prove you are who you say you are in order to vote, and it would provide provisions to enforce that," he said. "Number three, it further instructs the Rules Committee that we're going to go back to having an Election Day and



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not an election month, and it instructs the Rules Committee to provide the provisions to enforce that.”

California Democratic Sen. Alex Padilla, the ranking member of the rules panel, opposed the amendment during debate, saying he couldn’t believe lawmakers were once again experiencing a “partisan attempt to rush through what I refer to as a solution in search of a problem.”

“Despite the president’s claims, there is zero evidence of massive voter fraud across the country, which is the premise of these proposals,” he said. “So not only is it a solution in search of a problem, to paraphrase a wise man, this measure is all foam and no beer.”

Padilla added that a provision in Kennedy’s amendment would have required states to count ballots within 36 hours of an election, a new mandate he said could cause considerable problems for larger states with millions of voters.

“It’s unfortunate elections administration has been turned into a partisan issue,” he said. “I actually ask our colleagues to protect the early voters, not just in my state but in yours. Protect vote-by-mail opportunities, not just in my state but in yours. Let’s protect women who are married and change their name and their right to vote, not just in my state but in yours.”

Senators did not agree to waive a point of order against Kennedy’s amendment on a 48-50 vote. Republican Sens. Susan Collins of Maine, Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, Murkowski and Thom Tillis of North Carolina voted with Democrats.

## **Ban on Planned Parenthood funding via Medicaid**

Missouri Republican Sen. Josh Hawley tried unsuccessfully to create a pathway to extend the one-year prohibition on Medicaid funding to Planned Parenthood that the GOP included in its “big, beautiful” law. That funding ban expires on July 4.

Hawley didn’t speak about abortion access during debate but focused his criticism of the organization on gender-affirming health care services for transgender youth.

“Under no circumstance should Medicaid money dedicated to the poor and the needy be used for transgender surgeries and treatments for minor children,” he said. “It is a moral outrage. This body has a duty to stand against it.”

Planned Parenthood’s website states the organization provides surgery referrals as well as hormone therapy, puberty blockers and “transition support.”

Oregon Democratic Sen. Ron Wyden argued the amendment represented “Republicans’ latest attempt to strip women of the health care they need and depend on so that they can go score some political points.”

Senators didn’t agree to waive a point of order against the amendment, which would have allowed it to move forward, by a vote of 50-48. Collins and Murkowski voted with Democrats.

## **Private equity and home ownership**

Senators rejected an amendment from Oregon Democratic Sen. Jeff Merkley that would have addressed the rising cost of housing after he invoked comments President Donald Trump made during his State of the Union address.

“We have an opportunity tonight to send a message that we agree with the president, that we have a challenge in home ownership, because home ownership is dying,” Merkley said. “And one of the factors is private equity buying up the homes.”

Ohio Republican Sen. Bernie Moreno spoke out against adopting the amendment, saying lawmakers have already addressed it in a bipartisan way.

“I obviously urge my colleagues to oppose this amendment, because we’ve already passed it,” he said. “We’ve already solved this problem. In fact, congratulations to all of us. 89 to 10. We banned institutional ownership of single-family homes. I think that’s fantastic.”

The Senate voted in March to approve a bill designed to increase the country’s housing supply, according to reporting from NPR. But since the House has approved a bill of its own, the two chambers will need to work out their differences before any housing bill becomes law.

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Senators did not agree to adopt Merkley's amendment following a 46-52 party-line vote.

## Disaster relief funds from FEMA

California Democratic Sen. Adam Schiff proposed an amendment that would have addressed stalled funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which he said is "holding more than \$3 billion in disaster relief funding for California."

"But as we debate this budget resolution, I know our state of California is not alone," he said. "North Carolina is waiting on millions in relief designated for Hurricane Helene in 2024. Kentucky saw landslides and flooding just weeks after Los Angeles County burned. Florida and the Gulf Coast have also been battered. Texas communities under siege from last year's floods have still not seen the federal relief their communities need and deserve."

Oklahoma Republican Sen. James Lankford opposed the amendment, saying that while he agrees FEMA funds need to get to communities, the best way to do that is for the House to pass the annual funding bill for the Department of Homeland Security, which the Senate already approved.

House GOP leaders are holding on to that bill instead of putting it on the floor as they wait for the reconciliation process to play out. That Senate-passed DHS bill funds FEMA and all of the agencies that make up the department except ICE and Border Patrol.

"Our challenge has been, we've been in a government shutdown on DHS now for two months," Lankford said. "We've got to be able to get those funds released. That means we've got to get DHS funding completely done for all of DHS. We have FEMA employees that are being paid but they don't have program dollars that they can actually release."

The Senate rejected the amendment following a 49-49 vote. Collins, Florida Sen. Ashley Moody and Murkowski voted with Democrats.

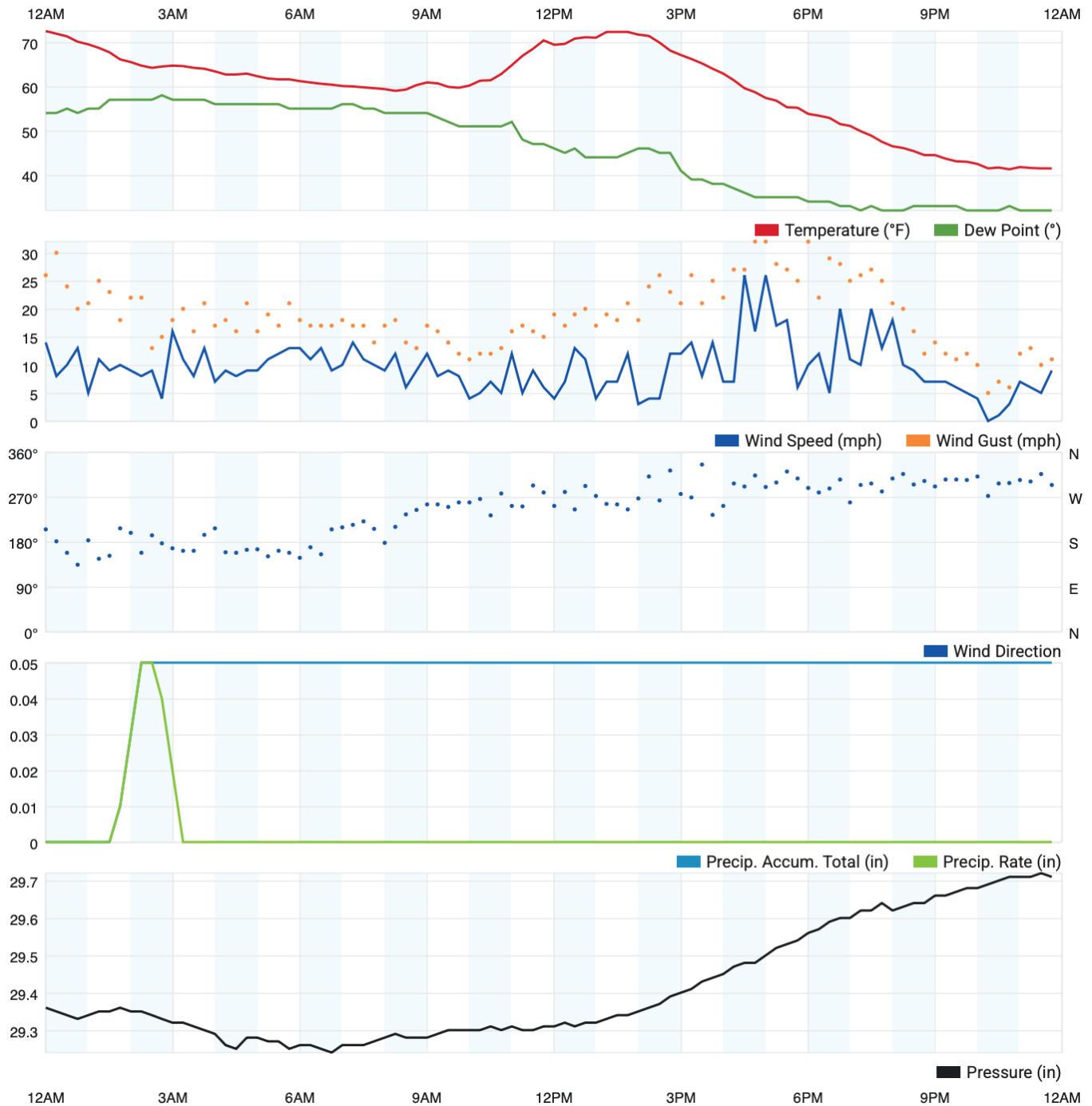
*Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.*

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

April 23, 2026



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Today



High: 56 °F

Partly Sunny

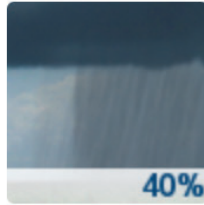
Tonight



Low: 34 °F

Chance  
Showers

Saturday



High: 51 °F

Chance  
Showers

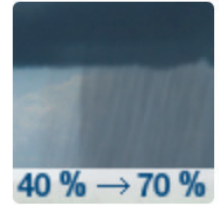
Saturday Night



Low: 35 °F

Slight Chance  
Showers

Sunday



High: 57 °F

Chance  
Showers then  
Showers  
Likely

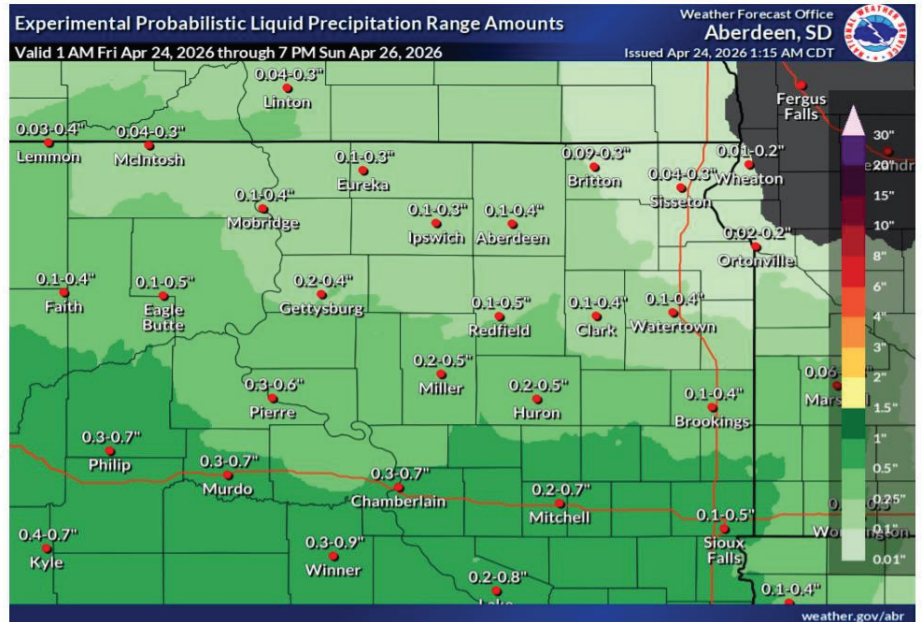


## How Much Rain Is Possible?

April 24, 2026  
2:48 AM

\*\*\*Amounts shown are through 7PM CDT Sunday, April 26th\*\*\*

- Combined precipitation forecast amounts from Friday night and Sunday weather Systems.
  - Additional precipitation is expected Sunday night into Monday.
- Generally up to a couple tenths of an inch of precipitation expected Friday night into Saturday, and mostly south of U.S. Highway 12.
- 0.10-0.50in of precipitation possible during the day on Sunday (highest amounts out across central South Dakota).



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

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

Tonight into Saturday, a trace to up to a couple tenths of an inch of precipitation are possible generally along and east of a line from Pierre to Aberdeen. Another chance for precipitation starts taking shape on Sunday and persists through Monday. Currently, there is a 40 to 70 percent chance of 1.00in of precipitation centered on Sunday through Monday, with the higher probability landing across northeast South Dakota into west central Minnesota.



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## Near To Below Normal Temperatures

April 24, 2026  
3:13 AM

Mostly below normal high temperatures throughout the 7-day forecast ↓

	Maximum Temperature (°F) Forecast						
	4/24 Fri	4/25 Sat	4/26 Sun	4/27 Mon	4/28 Tue	4/29 Wed	4/30 Thu
Aberdeen	57	51	57	51	55	57	56
Miller	56	50	56	50	56	58	58
Mobridge	53	51	51	50	53	57	56
Murdo	52	46	50	48	52	59	57
Ortonville	57	51	62	55	53	55	54
Pierre	55	50	54	52	57	62	60
Sisseton	56	50	59	52	53	55	52
Watertown	55	48	58	52	52	54	53

40 45 50 55 60 65 70  
Maximum Temperature Forecast (°F)

Similarly, mostly below normal low temperatures throughout the 7-day forecast ↓

	Minimum Temperature (°F) Forecast						
	4/24 Fri	4/25 Sat	4/26 Sun	4/27 Mon	4/28 Tue	4/29 Wed	4/30 Thu
Aberdeen	35	35	34	38	31	32	33
Miller	34	36	37	39	31	34	34
Mobridge	27	29	34	37	30	31	34
Murdo	34	32	36	37	31	33	34
Ortonville	38	41	41	42	35	35	35
Pierre	37	34	38	39	33	35	36
Sisseton	36	39	39	40	35	35	36
Watertown	34	38	38	39	32	33	34

20 25 30 35 40 45 50  
Minimum Temperature Forecast (°F)

It appears as though temperatures are going to remain on the chilly side of things for the next week or so. Normal high temperatures this time of year are climbing through the upper 50s to mid 60s. Forecast high temperatures currently look to fall short of that. Similarly, normal low temperatures are typically running in the mid 30s this time of year. Forecast low temperatures are generally hovering right around to perhaps a few degrees either side of climate-normal throughout the seven day forecast.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 73 °F at 1:31 PM**

**Low Temp: 41 °F at 10:17 PM**

**Wind: 33 mph at 4:29 PM**

**Precip: : 0.00**

## Today's Info

Record High: 92 in 1962

Record Low: 17 in 1956

Average High: 62

Average Low: 35

Average Precip in April.: 1.36

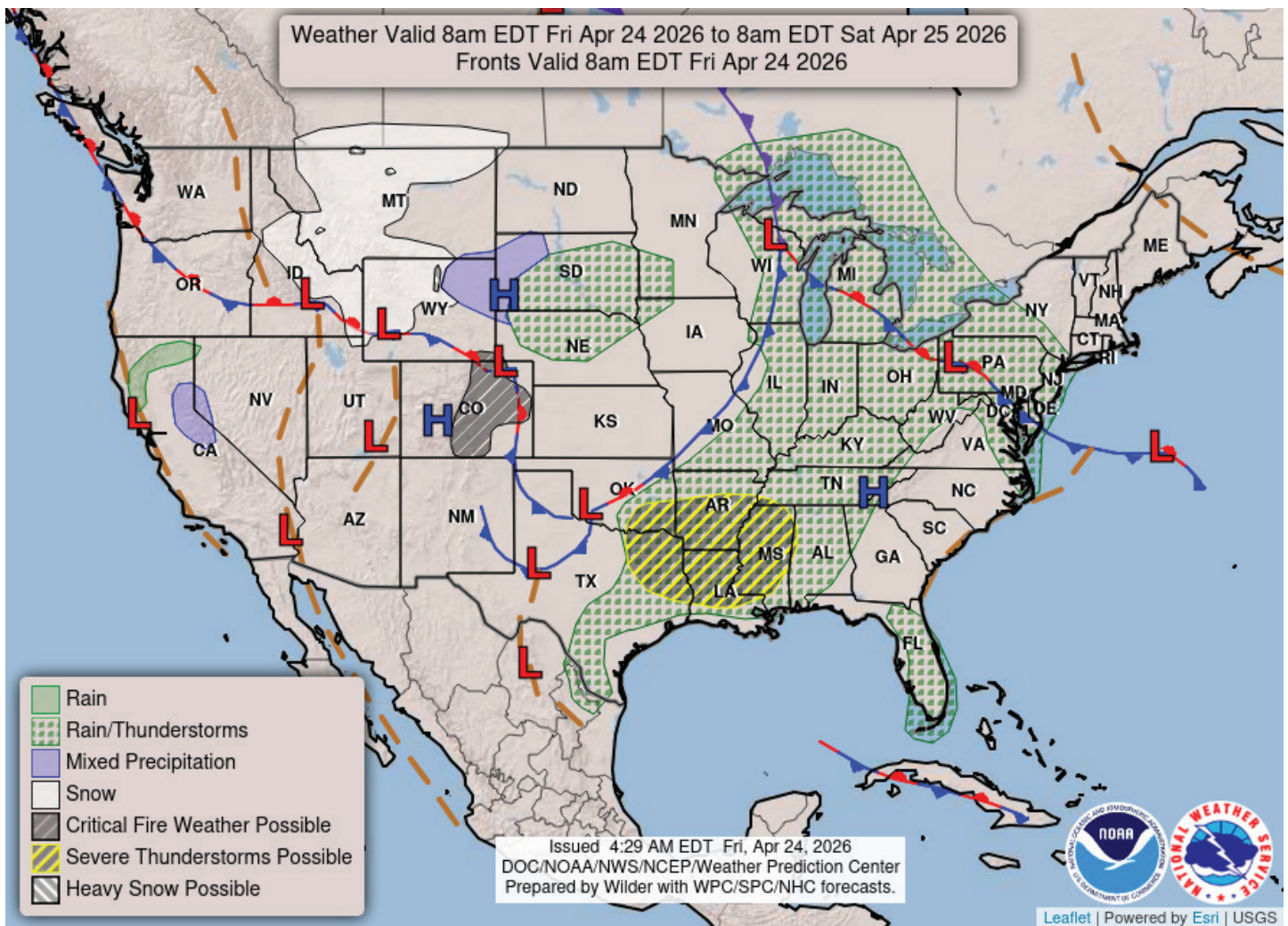
Precip to date in April.: 1.00

Average Precip to date: 3.42

Precip Year to Date: 2.62

Sunset Tonight: 8:29 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:29 am



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## Today in Weather History

April 24th, 1948:

A significant F2 tornado moved northeast from South of Castlewood to near Goodwin. Two farms' barns were destroyed. Also, two other tornadoes were observed in South Dakota on this day. One moved from Turner County on into Minnehaha County, injuring two people. The other touchdown was three miles southeast of Sioux Falls, destroying barns and other buildings on the west edge of Brandon.

1899 — Two women and one son lived to tell the story of being picked up by a tornado and carried more than a fourth of a mile, flying far above the church steeples, before being gently set down again. The young boy and one of the ladies said they had the pleasure of flying alongside a horse. The horse "kicked and struggled" as it flew high above, and was set down unharmed about a mile away. (The Weather Channel)

1908 — Severe thunderstorms spawned eighteen tornadoes over across the Central Gulf Coast States claiming the lives of 310 persons. The state of Mississippi was hardest hit. A tornado near Hattiesburg MS killed 143 persons and caused more than half a million dollars damage. Four violent tornadoes accounted for 279 of the 310 deaths. The deadliest of the four tornadoes swelled to a width of 2.5 miles as it passed near Amite LA. The tornado also leveled most of Purvis MS. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 — Showers and thunderstorms produced heavy rain in the Middle Atlantic Coast Region. Up to seven inches of rain drenched Virginia in three days. Morgantown WV received 4.27 inches in 24 hours, and flooding was reported in south central West Virginia. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — Low pressure produced high winds and severe thunderstorms in the Southern Plains Region. Strong thunderstorm winds destroyed two mobile homes at Whitt TX injuring two persons. Winds associated with the low pressure system gusted to 70 mph at Guadalupe Pass TX. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 — Twenty cities in the central U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Russell KS was the hot spot in the nation with a reading of 101 degrees. Evening thunderstorms produced severe weather from Colorado to Wisconsin. Hail four and a half inches in diameter was reported at Sargeant NE. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 — Thunderstorms produced severe weather from the Southern High Plains to north central Kansas. Thunderstorms spawned ten tornadoes, including one which injured four persons and caused 1.5 million dollars damage at Shattuck OK. Thunderstorms also produced softball size hail at Wheeler TX, wind gusts to 85 mph southwest of Arnett OK, and 13.45 inches of rain near Caldwell TX, which resulted in the worst flooding in recent memory for that area. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2010 — An EF-4 tornado up to 1.75 miles wide travels 149.25 miles through Mississippi, the widest and fourth longest path in Mississippi history. It left behind major destruction to businesses, churches and homes, four fatalities in Yazoo City and ten fatalities across the state.





## What Is Your True Purpose?

**Fulfillment comes not from what we gain or accomplish in life, but from knowing and serving God.**

1 Samuel 16:6-13: 6 When they entered, he looked at Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD'S anointed is before Him."

7 But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

8 Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, "The LORD has not chosen this one either."

9 Next Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "The LORD has not chosen this one either."

10 Thus Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. But Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen these."

11 And Samuel said to Jesse, "Are these all the children?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, and behold, he is tending the sheep." Then Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here."

12 So he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, with beautiful eyes and a handsome appearance. And the LORD said, "Arise, anoint him; for this is he."

13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel arose and went to Ramah.

What do you live for each day? Basing our aspirations on "getting ahead" typically ends in disappointment. Maybe you've already achieved a goal of saving for the future or moving up the corporate ladder. And you might be giving to charity and volunteering at church but somehow still feel unfulfilled.

If so, there is a truth you need to hear: God gives each of us life for a reason—namely, to serve Him. Nobody finds inner peace without understanding this fact. Our society teaches us that pleasure, prosperity, and popularity will make us happy. But living in the service of self always leaves us empty.

Whatever we'll become in this life, we are in the process of developing into that right now, one day at a time. Consider David: He was anointed king long before actually assuming the role of ruler (1 Sam. 16:12). He spent many years serving the purpose of God in insignificant places while developing into a great man. As his story shows, discovering God's purpose for one's life is the surest path to success.

Our Father's purpose for us comes from His love, which is perfect. None of us can know the things He has in store for us, but we can trust His plan. Surrender to the Lord and say, "Not my will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42).

*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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## Winning Numbers

### MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:  
04.23.26

1 25 37 47 53 4

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

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 52 Mins 43 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:  
04.21.26

1 36 43 56 58 7

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$150,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 37 Mins 43 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:  
04.22.26

15 20 32 46 48 4

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$22,990,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 52 Mins 43 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
04.22.26

5 6 9 14 32

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$64,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 7 Mins 43 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
04.22.26

3 9 15 35 57 19

TOP PRIZE:  
**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 36 Mins 43 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:  
04.22.26

24 29 32 49 63 11

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$118,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 36 Mins 43 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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## News from the **AP** Associated Press

### Millions of Americans may now also be considered Canadian under a new law

By SARAH RAZA Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Millions more Americans might qualify for dual Canadian citizenship under a recent change to Canada's requirements that has led to a surge in applications from its southern neighbor.

For people like Zack Loud of Farmington, Minnesota, it was a surprise to learn that under a new law, Canada already considered him and his siblings citizens because their grandmother is Canadian.

"My wife and I were already talking about potentially looking at jobs outside the country, but citizenship pushed Canada way up on our list," he said.

Since the new law took effect Dec. 15, immigration lawyers in the United States and Canada say they have been overwhelmed by clients seeking help submitting proof of citizenship applications. Driven by politics, family heritage, job opportunities and other factors, thousands of Americans are exploring whether the easier process makes now the right time to gain dual citizenship.

Nicholas Berning, an immigration attorney at Boundary Bay Law in Bellingham, Washington, said his practice is "pretty much flooded with this."

"We've kind of shifted a lot of other work away in order to push these cases through," he said.

Immigration attorney Amandeep Hayer said his Vancouver, British Columbia-area practice went from about 200 citizenship cases a year to more than 20 consultations per day.

How the new law works

Canada has been changing its citizenship laws for decades, whether to update historic interpretations of law or to address discrimination issues.

Previously, Canadian citizenship by descent could only be passed down to one generation, from a parent to a child. But the new law opened up citizenship to anyone born before that date who could prove they have a direct Canadian ancestor — a grandparent, great-grandparent or even more distant ancestor.

Those born on or after Dec. 15 need to show that their Canadian parent lived in Canada for 1,095 days.

Under the new law, descendants of Canadians are already considered citizens but must provide proof to obtain a certificate of citizenship. Hayer estimated that there are millions of Americans who are Canadian descendants.

"You are Canadian, and you're considered to be one your whole life," said Hayer, who advocated for the new law in parliament. "That's really what you're applying for, the recognition of a right you already have vested."

"The best way I can put it is like, if a baby's born tomorrow in Canada, the baby's Canadian even though they don't have the birth certificate," he said.

Americans interested in dual citizenship

American applicants have different motivations, but many say President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown and other topics have led them to seek dual citizenship.

Michelle Cunha, of Bedford, Massachusetts, said she decided to move to Canada after reflecting on decades of political activism and deciding she had "nothing left to give."

"I put in my best effort for 30 years. I have done everything that I possibly can to make the United States what it promises the world to be, a place of freedom, a place of equality," Cunha said. "But clearly we're not there and we're not going to get there anytime soon."

Troy Hicks, who had a great-grandfather born in Canada, said he was spurred by an international trip.

"I recently went to Australia and you know, first words out of the first person I talked to in Australia was basically an expletive about Trump and the U.S.," said Hicks, of Pahrump, Nevada. "It was just like, whoa, I walked off a 20-hour flight and literally the first words of somebody's mouth to me were that. ... So the idea of doing that with a Canadian passport just seemed easier, better, more palatable."

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Maureen Sullivan, of Naples, Florida, said she was motivated by the immigration crackdown in Minnesota, which hit home when her teenage nephew encountered federal officers near his high school in St. Paul. Sullivan, whose grandmother was Canadian, said she sees citizenship in Canada as an option in case things in the U.S. "really go south."

"When I first heard about the bill, I couldn't believe it. It was like this little gift that fell in my lap," Sullivan said. "There was kind of this collective excitement amongst the (family) who just felt like, we wanted to feel like we were doing something to take care of our security in the future if needed."

How much will Canadian citizenship cost?

For those with documentation ready at hand, the proof of citizenship application fee is a relatively inexpensive 75 Canadian dollars (\$55).

But costs will climb for those seeking help from an attorney or genealogist to locate records like birth, death and marriage certificates that can establish the lineage to a Canadian ancestor.

Cunha said she used an attorney and estimates the cost will be about \$6,500.

However, Mary Mangan, of Somerville, Massachusetts, filed her application in January using advice from online forums.

"There are some situations where a lawyer might be the right thing, but for many people, I would guess 90% of people can probably do this on their own," Mangan said.

The website for the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada office, which processes applications, says processing times for a certificate is around 10 months, with more 56,000 people awaiting a decision.

The agency said that from Dec. 15 to Jan. 31, it confirmed citizenship by descent for 1,480 people, though not all were Americans. Last year, 24,500 Americans gained dual U.S.-Canada citizenship.

What's the reaction in Canada?

Fen Hampson, professor of international affairs at Carleton University in Ottawa, said Canadians are generally a "welcoming people."

Hampson said some also worry a surge of interest from Americans could delay efforts by refugees and asylum-seekers fleeing vulnerable situations.

"I think where people start looking askance is someone who's never been to Canada, who has very thin ties. They can get a passport, becoming Canadians of convenience. People don't like that," he said.

## **US soldier charged with using classified intel to win \$400K Polymarket bet on Maduro raid**

By HALLIE GOLDEN, KONSTANTIN TOROPIN and HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A U.S. special forces soldier involved in the military operation to capture Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro has been charged with using classified information about the mission to win more than \$400,000 in an online betting market, federal officials announced Thursday.

Gannon Ken Van Dyke was part of the operation to capture Maduro in January and used his access to classified information to make money on the prediction market site Polymarket, the federal prosecutor's office in New York said.

He has been charged by the Justice Department with unlawful use of confidential government information for personal gain, theft of nonpublic government information, commodities fraud, wire fraud and making an unlawful monetary transaction. He could face years in prison.

Van Dyke, 38, was involved in the planning and execution of capturing Maduro for about a month beginning Dec. 8, 2025, according to the federal prosecutor's office. Even though he signed nondisclosure agreements promising to not divulge "any classified or sensitive information" related to the operations, prosecutors say the Army soldier used this information to make a series of bets related to Maduro being out of power by Jan. 31, 2026.

"This involved a U.S. soldier who allegedly took advantage of his position to profit off of a righteous military operation," FBI Director Kash Patel said in a post to social media.

A telephone number listed for Van Dyke in public records was not in service. There was not yet an at-



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torney listed for him in court documents.

Polymarket, one of the largest prediction markets in the world, said it had found someone trading on classified government information, alerted the U.S. Department of Justice and “cooperated with their investigation.”

“Insider trading has no place on Polymarket,” the company said in a statement.

Second complaint filed against the soldier

The Commodity Futures Trading Commission, the federal agency that regulates prediction markets, announced Thursday it had filed a parallel complaint against Van Dyke.

That complaint alleges that Van Dyke moved \$35,000 from his personal bank account into a cryptocurrency exchange account on Dec. 26 — a little over a week before U.S. forces would fly into Caracas and seize Maduro.

Van Dyke used more than \$32,500 to make a series of bets on when Maduro might be removed from power, according to the complaint. He placed those bets between Dec. 30 and Jan. 2, with the vast majority occurring the night of Jan. 2 — just hours before the first missiles would fall on Caracas.

In the early hours of Jan. 3, President Donald Trump posted on his social media platform a photo of the now-captured Venezuelan leader, wearing a gray sweatsuit, headphones and a blindfold.

The bets Van Dyke made on Maduro leaving power resulted in “more than \$404,000 of profits,” the complaint said. Bets on three other Venezuela-related contracts netted the soldier more than \$5,000, according to the document.

“The defendant was entrusted with confidential information about U.S. operations and yet took action that endangered U.S. national security and put the lives of American service members in harm’s way,” said Michael Selig, the commission’s chairman.

The massive profits from the well-timed bets aroused public attention days after the raid and brought bipartisan calls for stricter regulation of the markets where people can wager on just about anything.

Officials allege that shortly after the operation, Van Dyke put most of the money he won in a foreign cryptocurrency vault and then into a new brokerage account. He also asked Polymarket to delete his account, saying he had lost access to his email associated with the account, according to the federal prosecutor’s office.

Trump, when asked about the case Thursday, drew parallels between the embattled soldier and late professional baseball player Pete Rose, who was banned from the sport amid accusations that he placed bets on his own team.

“The whole world, unfortunately, has become somewhat of a casino, and you look at what’s going on all over the world and Europe and every place, they’re doing these betting things,” Trump told reporters.

The Trump administration has been a key ally of the growing prediction market industry in a critical legal fight with states seeking to ban the platforms. The president’s eldest son is an adviser for both Polymarket and its competitor Kalshi, and a Polymarket investor. Trump’s social media platform Truth Social is also launching its own cryptocurrency-based prediction market called Truth Predict.

Nearly two decades in the Army

Van Dyke joined the Army in 2008 and, in 2023, was promoted to the rank of master sergeant, the second-highest enlisted rank in the Army, according to the indictment. Federal prosecutors said he was part of the special forces community and was stationed at Fort Bragg near Fayetteville, North Carolina, but their indictment offered little other details about his military service.

The document said Van Dyke was photographed following the raid on the deck of a ship “wearing U.S. military fatigues, and carrying a rifle, standing alongside three other individuals wearing U.S. military fatigues.”

The Pentagon referred questions on the case to the Army and the Justice Department.

Army officials declined to provide Van Dyke’s service record. Typically, the military services are reticent to offer details about members of the special forces and take measures to keep their identities secret.

Bets on geopolitical tensions draw scrutiny

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The high-profile indictment comes as bipartisan lawmakers are considering legislation to ban prediction markets from allowing bets on war, assassinations or terrorist attacks.

Earlier this month, The Associated Press reported that a group of new accounts on Polymarket made highly specific, well-timed bets on whether the U.S. and Iran would reach a ceasefire on April 7, resulting in hundreds of thousands of dollars in profits for the new customers. On the same day the AP published the report, the White House warned staff against using private information to trade on prediction markets.

On Wednesday, Kalshi fined and suspended three congressional candidates who the company said wagered on the outcome of their own elections.

## **Analysis: The US protected ships from Iran in the Strait of Hormuz in the '80s. Could it again?**

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Naval mines bobbing in the waters of the Persian Gulf, threatening oil tankers. Iranian speed boats raking ships with machine-gun fire in the Strait of Hormuz. And the United States right in the middle of the fight.

This isn't the current conflict between Iran and the U.S., paused by a shaky ceasefire. Instead, it's the "Tanker war," when Iran targeted shipping during its 1980s war with Iraq, and U.S. warships stepped in to escort Kuwaiti tankers to ensure the flow of crude oil to the global market.

The U.S. could follow that model now and become more aggressive to protect ships passing through the strait, through which 20% of the world's traded oil and natural gas passes in peacetime. It conducted more limited escorts of ships that came under attack in the Red Sea in recent years, and President Donald Trump said this week that he has ordered the U.S. military to "shoot and kill" small Iranian boats.

But offering escorts in the Strait of Hormuz wouldn't be so easy. Military technology has advanced since the "Tanker war." The U.S. hasn't defined the same clear, narrow goals in this war as it did in the 1980s. And it's not clear international shippers would feel safe even with an American Navy escort given it is a combatant now.

Small boats, big problems

The U.S. Navy has long been familiar with the small boat tactics deployed by Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, which has adapted to international sanctions blocking its ability to access military vessels by using smaller civilian ships for military purposes.

For years, the Guard has used vessels the size of small commercial fishing boats to shadow American aircraft carriers whenever they pass through the strait. Instead of bearing fishing poles, most have Soviet-era heavy machine guns bolted to their bows with a small rocket launcher atop.

Using those small boats, Iran seized two cargo ships this week. A video released by the Guard showed its forces aboard patrol boats dwarfed by the massive container ships. Guardsmen opened fire on the cargo ships, then stormed the vessels, carrying assault rifles.

Beyond their propaganda value, the seizures showed that nearly eight weeks into the war with the U.S. and Israel, with the American Navy imposing a blockade on Iran's coasts, the Guard can use limited resources to effectively shut down the strait and hold the global economy hostage.

The 'Tanker war'

The "Tanker war" grew out of the fierce eight-year war between Iraq and Iran in the 1980s.

Iraq first targeted Iranian oil infrastructure and tankers in the Persian Gulf. Iran eventually responded with a concerted campaign of its own against ships in the region, including laying mines.

Iraq ultimately would attack over 280 vessels to Iran's 168, according to the U.S. Naval Institute. But Iran's use of mines caused havoc in the region.

The U.S., which supported Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein with intelligence, weaponry and other aid, launched "Operation Earnest Will" and began escorting Kuwaiti oil tankers — which were reflagged as American.

It wasn't without danger. The Kuwaiti supertanker Bridgeton struck a mine while under U.S. escort at

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the start of the operation. An Iraqi missile strike on the USS Stark killed 37 sailors, while an Iranian mine attack wounded 10 on the USS Samuel B. Roberts. The U.S. also mistook a commercial airliner for a fighter jet and shot it down, killing all 290 people aboard Iran Air flight 655.

No easy way out

Despite the challenges, the "Tanker war" operation succeeded as U.S. Navy ships escorted some 70 convoys through the region.

But it would be hard to replicate that today.

The U.S. would have to guarantee that it could create a cordon that Iran couldn't pierce — a tall order since just one Iranian missile, drone or boat-borne attack would bring back the fear that now pervades the strait.

"I think even if you compare it with the 'Tanker war,' I think just in terms of the way military technology has evolved, especially on that asymmetrical side, it's much more difficult to secure a waterway now than it was then," said Torbjorn Soltvedt, an analyst with risk intelligence company Verisk Maplecroft.

"Unless there is some sort of agreement or unless the U.S. can significantly curb Iran's ability to launch fast boats, to launch drones, to launch short-range missiles, then this problem just remains unresolved."

That's one of the reasons European countries, despite pressure from Trump, have said they wouldn't join a mission to escort ships until the war is over.

The Reagan administration also had narrower, clearer goals in its Cold War operation, such as keeping the strait open, according to Tom Duffy, a former U.S. diplomat and naval officer.

"In contrast, the American goals (now) have been sort of a kaleidoscope of regime change to all sorts of very maximalist goals," said Duffy, who recently published a book called "Tanker War in the Gulf."

In recent years, the U.S. Navy offered limited escorts of vessels through the Red Sea corridor to protect them from attacks by Yemen's Iranian-backed Houthi rebels. But the Navy focused on U.S.-flagged ships or those carrying supplies for the American government.

In those operations, the Navy faced its most intense combat at sea since World War II. Using force to make the Strait of Hormuz safe to transit may see a similarly intense fight.

And Duffy noted that it's not clear the Trump administration even wants the fight.

"There's a White House statement this week in which we said that the ceasefire is not in jeopardy because they aren't attacking U.S. and Israeli ships. That's a fundamental shift," he said. "That goes past centuries of U.S. practice and statements about the needs for freedom of the sea."

## In Baltic skies, NATO and Russian pilots size each other up warily but without a tilt into war

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

ŠIAULIAI AIR BASE, Lithuania (AP) — When NATO's call came, the French fighter pilots scrambled with practiced urgency, already suited up to shorten their response times.

They dashed in vans to hangars where their prepped and armed Rafale jets awaited, clambered into the cockpits and fired up the engines, which puffed and screamed.

Within minutes of takeoff from the Šiauliai Air Base in Lithuania, they were over the Baltic Sea, first intercepting a Russian Il-20 reconnaissance aircraft and then tailing supersonic Russian bombers and their fighter escorts that neared the airspace of multiple NATO countries.

In a conflict situation, things could quickly get heated. But for the moment, with Russia and the military alliance at odds over Ukraine but not at war, pilots on both sides just watched and filmed each other — keeping their distance like wary tomcats with claws unsheathed, their missiles visible but not used.

One of the points of the posturing — in aerial ballets that take place away from public gaze hundreds of times a year — is to try to ensure that the frostiness between NATO and the Kremlin over Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine doesn't tilt into open hostility.

Commanders and pilots flying NATO air-policing missions on the eastern flank of the 32-nation military

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alliance say that their goal is to deter, not provoke. They believe their presence is reassuring for Baltic states — Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania — that border Russia and its ally Belarus but don't themselves have airpower to fight off any Russian attack, if it ever came to that.

"It's a game of cat and mouse, or rather cat and cat," said Lt. Col. Alexandre, commander of a French air force wing of four Rafales that is sharing the Lithuanian base with another fighter detachment from Romania. Citing security concerns, the French military withheld the commander's surname.

"We watch each other, scrutinize each other and try to make sure that it doesn't go any further," he said.

Alliance members take turns policing Baltic skies around the clock, seven days a week. The French inherited the building that now serves as their temporary headquarters from a Spanish detachment. They will hand it over to Italian replacements in August. Successive teams leave plaques and badges on a wall that records their passage.

NATO scrambles jets to identify and possibly take other action when Russian planes fly in Baltic airspace without switched-on transponders and without filing flight plans or communicating by radio with air traffic controllers.

"There are plenty of times in which, on purpose or not, they're not really respecting the ICAO — the International Civil Aviation Organization — rules, regarding flight plans and behavior," said Col. Mihaita Marin, commanding the Romanian detachment of six F-16s.

"So obviously we are forced to take off and just make sure that they are who they say they are and their intention is peaceful," he said.

The arrival of spring, bringing better flying conditions, means French and Romanian flyers have been busy since they deployed at the start of April on four-month NATO rotations.

Marin said interceptions "are getting close to daily" and "that will definitely increase as the weather is getting better."

French aircrews — watched by an Associated Press journalist who was reporting at the airbase — had their busiest day so far on Monday.

Scrambled under NATO command, French Rafales met and observed a pair of Russian Tu-22M3 bombers carrying supersonic, anti-ship missiles from their bellies that Russia has also used in Ukraine, repurposing them to attack ground targets, and which can be equipped to carry a nuclear warhead.

The strategic bombers' more than four-hour flight from an airbase near St. Petersburg, escorted by Su-30 and Su-35 fighters, remained in international airspace but took them past the coasts of NATO countries Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, doubling back when they approached Denmark.

The French detachment said the Russian planes didn't have switched-on transponders, file flight plans or enter into radio contact. Fighter jets from Sweden, Finland, Poland, Denmark and Romania also went airborne to keep watch, according to the French. NATO didn't respond to requests for comment.

The French commander, Lt. Col. Alexandre, said it isn't clear why Russian pilots behave in ways that could endanger other users of Baltic airspace.

"We don't know if it's lack of professionalism or just a means for them to test us," he said.

"But what is sure is that we need to go every time," he added. "We cannot say, 'OK, that's usual, this time we will just let them pass.'"

## **QB Fernando Mendoza, edge rusher David Bailey, running back Jeremiyah Love go 1-2-3 in the NFL draft**

By ROB MAADDI AP Pro Football Writer

PITTSBURGH (AP) — Fernando Mendoza's journey from overlooked two-star recruit to the top of the NFL draft is complete after the Las Vegas Raiders took him with the first pick Thursday night.

Turning the Raiders into a contender is the next challenge for the Heisman Trophy winner who led Indiana to its first national championship.

The 22-year-old quarterback wasn't in the Steel City for the festivities, choosing instead to celebrate with family and friends at home in Miami.



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Mendoza flashed a big smile after Commissioner Roger Goodell announced his name, put a Raiders cap on and began hugging his family while seated on the couch, saving the warmest embrace for his mother.

He'll be heading to Las Vegas on Friday to begin an NFL career that may have seemed improbable when few colleges were interested in him coming out of high school.

"The last five months have been such a blessing by God, and I can't thank Him enough," Mendoza said. "I'm just looking forward to get to work, prove it at the next level. College was fantastic. I'm so blessed to have that career, but now I step into a great game, the NFL. Look forward to proving and earning it every single day."

Mendoza wasn't even a prominent prospect at this time last year. But he had a sensational season with the Hoosiers, completing 72% of his passes for 3,535 yards, 41 touchdowns and just six interceptions.

Still, there are plenty of doubts about him in a quarterback-thin draft class. He's determined to prove any critics wrong again.

The Los Angeles Rams surprised draft experts by taking Alabama quarterback Ty Simpson with the 13th pick. Simpson, who started just 15 games in college, was among 16 prospects who came to Pittsburgh even though many draft boards had him going in the second round.

Simpson exuded confidence when he walked the red carpet.

"Absolutely, I am confident," Simpson said. "That's why I decided to come out. You know with the offensive infrastructure we had in Alabama with other coaches and the offensive system, the weight room, everything was set up to better you for the NFL. And that's why I stayed at 'Bama."

Mendoza's selection was expected for months. The intrigue began at No. 2 with the New York Jets, who selected Texas Tech edge rusher David Bailey over Ohio State edge Arvell Reese.

"It's surreal to me," Bailey said. "It's an awesome opportunity. I just want to get in there and be a sponge and soak up everything."

Arizona took Notre Dame running back Jeremiyah Love with the third pick. Love is the highest running back selected since Saquon Barkley went No. 2 to the New York Giants in 2018.

Ohio State wide receiver Carnell Tate was picked fourth by Tennessee in a surprise move that gives QB Cam Ward — last year's No. 1 overall pick — a top target.

The Giants took Reese at No. 5, adding a potential elite rusher less than a week after trading three-time Pro Bowl defensive tackle Dexter Lawrence to Cincinnati.

The Chiefs traded up to No. 6 to take LSU cornerback Mansoor Delane. Kansas City sent Cleveland the ninth pick along with Nos. 74 and 148 to move up.

Ohio State linebacker Sonny Styles went seventh to Washington, improving a defense that allowed the most yards in the league last season.

New Orleans selected Arizona State wide receiver Jordyn Tyson at No. 8, giving QB Tyler Shough a 1-2 punch with Chris Olave.

Utah's Spencer Fano was the first offensive lineman chosen, going to Cleveland with the ninth pick.

The Giants followed up with another offensive tackle, taking Miami's Francis Mauigoa at No. 10.

The Cowboys moved up one spot to select versatile Ohio State safety Caleb Downs at No. 11. Dallas sent Miami a pair of fifth-rounders and the 12th pick. The Dolphins took Alabama offensive tackle Kadyn Proctor.

Baltimore chose Penn State guard Olaivavega Ioane at No. 14 with a pick they had traded to the Raiders for Maxx Crosby but regained when they voided the trade.

Miami edge rusher Rueben Bain Jr. was selected by Tampa Bay with the 15th pick, giving the Buccaneers' dismal pass rush a possible game-changer who was considered a top-10 talent.

"I know I'm the best in the country," Bain said. "I can do anything I put my mind to because of my mindset."

The Jets selected the top tight end in the draft at No. 16, taking Oregon's Kenyon Sadiq.

Detroit took Clemson offensive tackle Blake Miller with the 17th pick. The Vikings chose Florida defensive tackle Caleb Banks next at No. 18.

Georgia offensive tackle Monroe Freeling, once expected to be a top-10 pick, was chosen by Carolina

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at No. 19.

The Eagles moved up to 20th in another pick swap involving division rivals and took USC wideout Makai Lemon. Dallas got Philadelphia's 23rd pick plus two fourth-rounders for No. 20 and a seventh.

Lemon thought he was heading to the Steelers.

"Pittsburgh called me and I thought they were going to draft me and then the Eagles called at the same time. I guess it was meant to be. I'm super excited to be in Philly," Lemon said.

Mendoza won't be rushed into the starting lineup by the Raiders, who haven't won a playoff game in 24 years. He'll get a chance to learn from four-time Pro Bowl QB Kirk Cousins and Raiders part-owner Tom Brady, the seven-time Super Bowl champion who Mendoza grew up idolizing.

Mendoza is the fourth straight quarterback selected No. 1 overall following Cam Ward, Caleb Williams and Bryce Young. It's the 10th time in 12 years a QB was the first pick.

None of those 10 have won a Super Bowl, though Jared Goff and Joe Burrow each started one.

In 2024, six QBs were among the top 12 picks. Four have already won playoff games and Drake Maye was 2025 MVP runner-up and started the Super Bowl.

Goodell kicked off the night by walking on stage with Steelers stars T.J. Watt and Cam Heyward, earning the customary boos that greet him each year at the draft. The players waved yellow Terrible Towels while Goodell held his.

"C'mon, you can do better than that," Goodell said about the boos. "We have over 300,000 people. Let's go. Let's hear you."

Heyward then introduced franchise greats Lynn Swann, Hines Ward and Terry Bradshaw as a sea of Steelers fans roared.

The hometown fans seemed disappointed when the Steelers selected Arizona State offensive tackle Max Iheanachor 21st. It's the third time in four years Pittsburgh has drafted an offensive tackle in the first round and fans were hoping for a playmaker.

A pair of edge rushers went back-to-back to the Los Angeles Chargers and Cowboys. Miami's Akheem Mesidor went at No. 22 to LA and Dallas took Central Florida's Malachi Lawrence.

The Browns got Texas A&M wideout KC Concepcion with the 24th pick, giving Shedeur Sanders or De-shaun Watson a potential top target.

Oregon safety Dillon Thieneman went to Chicago at No. 25, bolstering a secondary that's lost several starters.

Houston took Georgia Tech guard Keylan Rutledge with the 26th pick. San Diego state cornerback Chris Johnson went to Miami at No. 27.

Another trade between divisional rivals moved the Patriots up to Buffalo's spot and New England selected Utah offensive tackle Caleb Lomu with the 28th pick.

Patriots coach Mike Vrabel spoke to reporters before the draft, saying he is taking accountability for actions that have created a distraction for the organization without addressing specifics about photos published recently of him with longtime NFL reporter Dianna Russini at an Arizona resort.

Vrabel will not be with the team for Day 3 of the draft on Saturday because he plans to begin counseling this weekend.

The Chiefs chose Clemson defensive tackle Peter Woods 29th. The Jets made a deal to add a third first-rounder, acquiring San Francisco's 30th pick. New York took Indiana wideout Omar Cooper Jr., drawing loud cheers from fans chanting "J-E-T-S! Jets! Jets! Jets!"

The Titans traded back into the first round, getting pick No. 31 that the Bills acquired from New England and chose Auburn edge Keldric Faulk.

The Super Bowl champion Seahawks finished the draft by taking Notre Dame running back Jadarian Price. He'll replace Super Bowl MVP Kenneth Walker, who signed with the Chiefs.

Teams had eight minutes between picks, down from the previous 10, and the draft finished in less than 3 1/2 hours.

## Businesses dole out up to \$4 million to cross Panama Canal during Strait of Hormuz chokehold

By ALMA SOLÍS and MEGAN JANETSKY Associated Press

PANAMA CITY (AP) — Businesses have doled out up to \$4 million to move boats through the Panama Canal with the Strait of Hormuz effectively closed, according to the Panama Canal Authority, in a move that has created a seismic shift in global trade flows.

While passage through the waterway usually comes at a flat rate via reservations, companies without reservations can cross by paying an additional fee in an auction for slots, which are awarded to the highest bidder rather than waiting for days off the coast of Panama City.

That price has ballooned in recent weeks as Iran and the United States have bottlenecked the key shipping route, the Strait of Hormuz, and demand for those slots has skyrocketed. Ships have increasingly traveled through the Panama Canal as shipments are rerouted and buyers purchase from other countries to avoid commerce through now-treacherous Middle Eastern waterway.

"With all the bombings, the missiles, the drones ... companies are saying it's safer and less expensive to cross through the Panama Canal," said Rodrigo Noriega, said lawyer and analyst in Panama City. "All of this is affecting global supply chains."

Meanwhile, Noriega said Panama's government is "maximizing what it can earn from the Panama Canal."

The average price to cross through the canal ranges between \$300,000 and \$400,000 depending on the vessel. Previously, to get an earlier crossing, businesses would pay an additional \$250,000 to \$300,000. In recent weeks, the average additional cost has jumped to around \$425,000.

Ricaurte Vásquez, the canal's administrator, said another company that he would not name paid an extra \$4 million when its fuel vessel had to change its destination because of ongoing geopolitical tensions.

"It was a ship carrying fuel to Europe, and they redirected it to Singapore, and it needed to get there because Singapore is running out of fuel," he said.

Other oil companies paid an excess of \$3 million in addition to the crossing fee to accelerate their passage in the face of soaring oil prices.

Vásquez said that ships have not piled up at the canal, but rather the costs can be attributed to last-minute shifts and greater urgency by vessels needing to get from one point to another faster in the wake of larger trade chaos.

Vásquez emphasized that the costs were not a blanket market rate, but rather a temporary toll shouldered by companies.

"They decide how high a price to go," Vásquez said.

At the same time it's earning more money from the new business, Panama's government has also been dealt a blow by the geopolitical struggle.

On Wednesday, the country's foreign ministry accused Iran of illegally seizing a Panama-flagged vessel from the Italian company, MSC Francesca, in the Strait of Hormuz.

Panama, a country with one of the world's largest ship registries, said the ship was "forcibly taken" by Iran. It wasn't immediately clear if the boat remained in Iranian custody.

"This represents a serious attack on maritime security and constitute an unnecessary escalation at a time when the international community is advocating for the Strait of Hormuz to remain open to international navigation without threats or coercion of any kind," it said.

Noriega, the analyst, said that the amount companies are paying to cross the Panama Canal may only go up if the conflict continues to stretch on, as oil prices are already skyrocketing. The price of a barrel of Brent crude oil briefly jumped above \$107 this week, soaring from around \$66 a barrel a year ago.

"No one really foresaw the potential effects (the war) would have on global trade," Noriega said.

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## What to know if your flight is canceled amid rising jet fuel costs

By RIO YAMAT AP Airlines and Travel Writer

Airlines worldwide have begun canceling flights as the war in the Middle East strains jet fuel supplies and pushes up prices — but the disruption doesn't end there.

For travelers, it can mean having to navigate a confusing web of passenger protections that vary widely depending on where they're flying.

And the timing is amplifying the impact.

"These pressures are arriving at a time when summer travel demand is ramping up, with major events such as the World Cup expected to put additional strain on airports," said Eric Napoli, chief legal officer at AirHelp, a company that helps travelers secure compensation for flight disruptions and advocates for passenger rights.

Here's what to know if your flight is canceled.

Are these cancellations happening at the last minute?

In most cases, no. At least for now, fuel-related cuts are often being made days or weeks in advance. Lufthansa Group, for example, said this week it is cutting 20,000 short-haul flights across its network through October.

That gives you more time to adjust plans than you'd typically get with weather-related disruptions, which tend to trigger last-minute cancellations.

My flight was canceled. What should I do first?

Check your airline's app or website immediately for rebooking options. If you're flying on a U.S. carrier, that's often the fastest and easiest way to secure a new seat, according to Tyler Hosford, security director at International SOS, a global risk management and travel security company.

Non-U.S. carriers tend to have fewer digital tools, Hosford said, so it's worth trying multiple channels, including the airline's customer service lines or airport desks.

Do I have the right to a refund or a new flight?

In most cases, yes. Airlines typically offer either a refund or a rebooking on the next available flight. The exact rules vary by country, but those are the baseline options you can expect.

In the U.S., for example, if your flight is canceled and you choose not to travel, the airline must refund you, regardless of the reason. Airlines may offer travel credits instead, but you're entitled to a full refund for airfare and any extras you didn't use, such as baggage fees or seat upgrades.

Are passenger rights the same everywhere?

No, and protections vary widely by region — from the Montreal Convention, which governs airline liability across more than 140 countries, to specific consumer protection laws in the U.S., Canada, the European Union, the United Kingdom, Turkey and Brazil.

Europe has some of the strongest protections, including compensation in certain cases. And they apply to any flight departing from an EU airport, regardless of the airline, as well as to passengers flying on an EU-based carrier into the EU — even if the journey starts outside Europe. The United Kingdom maintains a similar framework.

The U.S. and Canada offer more limited protections. Policies vary widely across Asia, and in some cases travelers may need to rely more on airline policies than formal regulations.

To get a clearer picture, experts recommend searching the name of the country you're departing from and "passenger rights" before your trip.

What protections apply?

It depends.

Airlines may cite fuel shortages or rising fuel costs as the reason for cancellations. But whether you're entitled to compensation often comes down to if the disruption is considered within the airline's control under local laws.

Regardless of the cause, Napoli said, airlines in the European Union, for example, still have a "duty of care," meaning they must provide "necessary support" to travelers, including rebooking.

"While airlines are citing fuel shortages as a reason for upcoming cancellations, travelers need to know



that this does not automatically waive their rights” under EU laws, Napoli said.

How can I prepare before a trip to avoid headaches?

A few steps can make disruptions easier to manage.

Sign up for flight alerts to stay informed, and book directly with the airline when possible — it’s much easier to resolve issues with the carrier directly than through a third-party booking site.

Knowing your options ahead of time and having a backup plan can make a significant difference if plans change.

What do I need for a claim or complaint?

Documentation is critical. Save everything: boarding passes, receipts, cancellation notices and any communication from the airline.

Take screenshots of app or website updates and any communication taking place online, and jot down key details from phone calls.

Napoli also recommends asking the airline for written confirmation of a flight disruption, including the stated reason.

Should I accept the first alternative flight the airline offers?

Not necessarily.

Experts say one of the most common mistakes travelers make is taking the first option without checking alternatives. Look at other flights, routes or even nearby airports because you may find a faster or more convenient way to reach your destination.

Can I book a different flight myself?

Yes, but proceed carefully.

If the airline’s rebooking option doesn’t meet your needs — especially if your new flight isn’t for several days — you can look for alternatives and request a refund instead.

Just be aware you may need to pay any fare difference up front, and you might not be reimbursed later.

Any other tips to avoid getting stuck?

— Book flights earlier in the day so you have more rebooking options if something goes wrong.

— Set up flight alerts through tracking apps such as Flighty to get early notice of cancellations or delays. In some cases, Hosford said, notifications arrive before the airline’s.

— Consider nearby airports as backup options.

— Be kind. Airline agents may be more willing to help when interactions stay calm and respectful.

“Ultimately, the shortage is squeezing the entire system, from travelers to airlines, and is something to watch as the industry looks for any relief ahead of the summer travel season,” Napoli said.

## Reclassifying marijuana as a less dangerous drug might only be the first step for Trump

By GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — President Donald Trump’s decision to reclassify state-licensed medical marijuana as a less dangerous drug is a boon for the industry: It gives dispensaries a big tax break, eases some barriers to researching cannabis and could even allow the export of marijuana to other countries.

But that might only be Trump’s first step. A new administrative hearing slated for the end of June could result in the reclassification of marijuana more broadly, granting tax and other benefits to state-licensed recreational markets, too.

“This is a signal that this administration means business on getting this done,” said Boston-based cannabis industry attorney Jesse Alderman, of the firm Foley Hoag.

The order issued Thursday does not legalize marijuana for medical or recreational use under federal law, and it is likely to face legal challenges.

But it does change the way marijuana is regulated, shifting licensed medical marijuana from Schedule I — reserved for drugs without medical use and with high potential for abuse — to the less strictly regu-

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lated Schedule III.

A long-sought shift

It was a significant policy shift for a U.S. government that has been steadfast in its prohibition of pot, even as all states but two — Idaho and Kansas — have approved cannabis in some form since California became the first to OK the medical use of marijuana in 1996.

Two dozen states plus Washington, D.C., have authorized adult recreational use of marijuana, raising billions in tax revenue. Forty have medical marijuana systems, and eight others allow low-THC cannabis or CBD oil for medical use.

The order noted that regulation of medical marijuana has come a long way, with comprehensive licensing policies from cultivation to sales in most states.

Douglas Hiatt, a longtime Seattle marijuana defense attorney, recalled the height of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s and '90s, when police regularly raided grow operations designed to support patients.

He joined one client, a disabled medical marijuana activist named JoAnna McKee, as she met in the woods with members of the Hells Angels motorcycle club to procure cannabis for other patients after a police raid — just one example of the desperate lengths that were sometimes required to procure pot back then, he said.

"We were watching all these guys die from this horrible disease, and the only thing that helped them keep their pills down was marijuana, and the cops were going after anyone who helped them get it," Hiatt said in a phone interview Thursday. "It was crystal clear from the beginning that it had medical uses. For the feds to admit that now is great. It's surreal."

Critics express doubts

Some health experts have suggested that legalization in the states has led to stronger and stronger cannabis products, which need to be researched rather than categorized less strictly than before.

Taking marijuana from a Schedule I drug to a Schedule III drug implies that it's useful as a treatment, but there are no "massive medical indications for cannabis," said Dr. Smita Das, an addiction psychiatrist at Stanford University. Further, cannabis use disorder — which affects about 3 in 10 people who use pot, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — has been on the rise, she said.

"We've already had kind of a decrease in risk perception related to cannabis over the years with the state legalization," Das said. "This will probably just add to that."

The reclassification is a far cry from what many critics of the drug war still long to see: full legalization, with measures to address the harms caused by prohibition, especially in minority communities that were disproportionately affected. Many states have already taken steps such as expunging criminal records.

There is confusion for some dispensaries

Now, state-licensed medical operators can finally deduct business expenses on their federal taxes, a crucial financial benefit.

But in a number of recreational pot states, licensed dispensaries serve both markets — making it an accounting nightmare to ascertain how much of their business expenses might stem from the medical side, and thus be deductible.

"If this artificial distinction between medical and recreational is maintained, it raises all sorts of questions," noted sociology professor Josh Meisel, who co-founded the Humboldt Institute for Interdisciplinary Marijuana Research at California State Polytechnic University, Humboldt.

Trump told his administration in December to work as quickly as possible to reclassify marijuana, following up on stalled efforts launched during the Biden administration. On Saturday, as the Republican president signed an unrelated executive order about psychedelics, he seemed to express frustration that it was taking so long.

'Giving a tax break to Big Weed'

The president of the American Trade Association for Cannabis and Hemp, Michael Bronstein, called the order "the most significant federal advancement in cannabis policy in over 50 years."

But marijuana legalization opponent Kevin Sabet, CEO of Smart Approaches to Marijuana, said that while marijuana research is necessary, "there are many ways to increase our knowledge without giving a tax

break to Big Weed.”

Trump has made his crusade against other drugs, especially fentanyl, a feature of his second term, ordering U.S. military attacks on Venezuelan and other boats the administration insists are ferrying drugs.

## **Q&A: Apollo astronaut Schmitt talks about getting back to the moon and life in the universe**

By SUSAN MONTTOYA BRYAN Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — It was 1972 and Apollo astronauts Harrison “Jack” Schmitt and Eugene Cernan had just stepped onto the moon’s surface to begin collecting rock and soil samples.

The mission would mark the end of an era for the American space program, but Schmitt already was looking to the future. His voice crackling over a high-frequency radio signal that day, he shared his thoughts with Cernan and those listening in at Mission Control.

“Well, I tell you Gene, I think the next generation ought to accept this as a challenge. Let’s see them leave footsteps like these someday,” Schmitt said.

Schmitt, 90, is one of the four Apollo moonwalkers still alive today. A field geologist, he was the first scientist to set foot on the moon and his expertise helped answer questions about the origin of that big rock up there and what it tells us about the solar system.

Schmitt felt the thrill again when the Artemis II crew rocketed into space on a historic lunar flyby. Pure excitement and the potential for so much more. And he’s hopeful as new generations get back to the moon and beyond.

Interviewed by The Associated Press, the former U.S. senator from New Mexico spoke about everything from the importance of having a lunar base to tapping new energy sources and whether we’re alone in the universe. Dark matter and quantum entanglement also were mentioned, with Schmitt saying many discoveries are yet to come.

“You’ve just got to remember,” he said, “what used to be called supernatural probably should be called unknown physics.”

This interview has been edited for brevity.

Q: What about having a lunar base?

Well, I think a lunar base makes a lot of sense and it always has for a lot of reasons. One is geopolitical. Probably the most important one is a geopolitical presence in deep space — and in preparation for going on to Mars.

The moon has resources that are going to reduce the cost of actually going to Mars and it gains experience. One of the things people keep forgetting about is you’ve gone through several generations and the new generation has to gain experience — psychologically as well as practically about how you work in deep space. And they’re doing that. That was probably the most important part of Artemis II, is it gave the ground people, Mission Control and others, the experience now to really have the risk as real rather than as part of a simulation.

Q: What was your mission during Apollo 17?

I had a lot of understanding of what other crews had learned, what had been learned from some of the early sample analyses and so we were trying to put sort of the frosting on the cake of answering questions in a very complex geologic area called Taurus-Littrow.

Taurus-Littrow actually is deeper than the Grand Canyon and so it has a three-dimensional aspect to it that we hadn’t had on other missions. And plus having a field geologist like myself on board meant that we should be more efficient at gathering samples that had a meaningful aspect to our further understanding of the origin of the moon, its relationship to the Earth and, it turns out, also its relationship to the history of the sun.

Q: So we’re building upon our knowledge of the universe around us?

Well there’s no question that the moon has a history to tell us.

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It's been recording the history of the solar system ever since the solar system formed about 4.5 billion years ago. That is really what the moon gives us — that library of knowledge, of potential knowledge about how the solar system evolved and then what the sun has been doing in that 4.5 billion years.

In the recent work that I've been doing in that layer of debris, the regolith, we find that the sun became even more active than it had been about the same time as we had an explosion of life in the oceans on Earth, and so the oceans may have been and almost certainly were warming to that more active sun and life likes warmth. So it multiplied not only in quantity but in diversity. The mammals started to appear soon after that, life started to move up onto the continents that had formed so things were really starting to move about a half-billion years ago.

Q: Tell us about the moon rocks

This is a sample of a basalt lava and we have a lot of basalt lavas here in New Mexico. This is different in that it is rich in titanium, more rich than most terrestrial basalts. And that titanium turns out to be very important in terms of the resources that are available on the moon. It has a property of concentrating some of those resources, particularly hydrogen and helium.

There's an isotope called helium-3 and that is going to be, I think, ultimately very, very important in the production of energy. It's going to be extremely useful in quantum computing, in cancer therapy and other things here on Earth. We just don't have much on Earth, so the moon is going to be a our reservoir, our source of this very important isotope of helium-3.

Q: How important will this isotope be in the future?

Helium-3 offers a possibility of having nuclear energy without nuclear waste. We've known that for decades, and so the moon now offers that opportunity to begin to substitute a nuclear form of energy that doesn't produce nuclear waste for what we have today.

Q: Is it just as much an energy race as a space race?

There's no question about it. China is interested in it, we're interested in it. And that's probably one of the big technological drivers of this new race to the moon, a new space race, a Cold War that's on now primarily involving China and I think helium-3 is a big actor in that right now.

Q: What was it like in the Taurus-Littrow Valley?

First of all, we were in a valley deeper than the Grand Canyon. The mountains on either side were as high as the Grand Canyon from the bottom. Secondly, you're in one-sixth gravity so that means you can walk much more easily than you could here on Earth. Now we were covered by a pressure suit but still walking around was like being a kid again, just one-sixth of your height and if you fell you didn't fall very hard and you certainly didn't cry about it. But the moon is really a very easy place to work so as long as you have the right equipment surrounding you. You have to have that atmosphere of course to breathe.

Q: Any downsides to working in a weightless environment?

For me, it was a very comfortable environment to be in and you get a little bit lazy. For example, if you're taking notes with a pad of paper and a pen or pencil and somebody says would you take the SCS switch to off, well you just let go and it floats there and you go over to the switch and come back and start to dictate those notes again.

You've got to be careful though because you're brain gets lazy. When I got on the carrier after splash-down, I was taking my first drink of water and I just let go of the cup and of course it broke on the floor. Human beings tend to take advantage of their environment very quickly and the brain does get a little bit lazy like that. It took about three days to get comfortable again back here on Earth.

Q: So we'll have no problem living on the moon?

No, I think living on the moon is going to be very good. Now long term civilization on the moon, there's still some major issues. The radiation issue has to be dealt with and we can. There are ways to do that. Going to Mars is another issue and that's why you'll almost certainly need fusion rockets to cut that time frame.

Q: We've heard a lot lately about UFOs. What are your thoughts on that?

Well there are billions of sunlike stars out there and so you just have to imagine that life may have origi-



nated on some other planet, although the conditions for life to originate here on Earth are really unique. Everything sort of fit together and creation for us sort of leads to you thinking of an infinitely intelligent being that made it all happen. But the technical potential statistically is very high that you could have had the similar kind of conditions develop elsewhere in the universe.

Now are they visiting us? My feeling is if they're really so advanced they could be here, they'd communicate better than they have and so I just don't know. But it's plausible. Let's put it that way. Unlikely maybe, but plausible.

Q: Would you take the opportunity to go back to the moon or to Mars?

Oh surely. Teresa, my wife, would like very much to go with me — that would be one condition. But I think a trip to Mars is going to be fantastic for those people.

So youth is extremely important and the education of those youth particularly in mathematics is extraordinarily important, and NASA now has a younger agency than they had grown to be during the shuttle era.

Look what has happened since Apollo. The commercial sector has developed new technologies, new ways of doing things and NASA is now trying to integrate those into a new approach to deep space exploration.

## Georgia blaze shows how climate change has led to more wildfires in the East

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

Often considered more a problem for Western North America, wildfires are becoming more intense, frequent and damaging in the East, such as this week's blaze that destroyed more than 50 homes in Georgia, fire scientists said.

Researchers blame a number of factors including climate change causing fuel to dry out and be more flammable, a record drought, tens of millions of tons of dead trees from Hurricane Helene and just the large area where dense forests and high numbers of people try to coexist.

So far this year, 2,802 square miles (7,258 square kilometers) of the United States has burned in wildfires — much of it in Nebraska, an unusual area for massive wildfires — that's 88% more than the 10-year average for this time of year, according to the National Interagency Fire Center. That's happening as significant chunks of the country set records for the warmest winter and March and April drought.

"The warmer we get, the more fire we see. Longer fire seasons, more lightning possibly, and drier fuels," said fire scientist Mike Flannigan of Thompson Rivers University in British Columbia, Canada. "I think we're going to see more fire in the East. We're seeing more intense fires."

Fires are increasing in the East

The number of large fires, likelihood of them happening and amount of land burned has increased in most of the Southeast United States from 1984 to 2020, according to a 2023 study by University of Florida fire ecologists Victoria Donovan and Carissa Wonkka.

"The fires in the East historically and today are a lot smaller than in the Western United States, so they might not always grab as much attention as those out West. But we're starting to see now this shift in dynamics in the East, we're starting to quantify it," Donovan said Thursday. "Even though the changes that we're seeing in the East are much smaller than we're quantifying out West, we think it's extremely important to start to get ahead of this problem now."

Three months ago, Donovan, Wonkka and other fire scientists created a new network for fire researchers to study Eastern fires because some of the issues that experts have learned out West may not apply in the East, Wonkka said.

Even though the West has bigger and more noticeable fast-spreading fires, the East has more people in the way of flames in something scientists call the wildland-urban interface or WUI.

"We found that 45% of all large wildfires in the East burn some portion of the wildland-urban interface and 55% of the area burned so that a lot of these large wildfires are associated with WUI fires," Donovan said.

Add to that the forests in the East are denser and less likely to be thinned out than those in the West,

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Donovan said.

Hurricane Helene created a 'ticking time bomb'

A week ago, federal and state officials looked at the drought, the weather and the millions of dead trees from Hurricane Helene in 2024 and issued an advisory to watch out for fires, said Nick Nauslar, a National Weather Service fire science and operations officer at the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho.

"They are thinking, you know, they could see more fires, more resistance to control with the fires that they get," Nauslar said. "It has been warmer and drier than normal across many of the areas where Helene caused damage. So there's the potential there. You have an excess of fuel available because now (the trees are) dead and at the mercy of weather and climate. And then if you get dry and windy conditions, if you get an ignition, it's more likely to ignite and spread."

In Georgia alone, 13,954 square miles (36,142 square kilometers) of forest land was hit by Hurricane Helene, downing more than 26 million tons of pine and 30 million tons of hardwood, according to a November 2024 University of Georgia and Georgia Forestry Commission timber damage assessment.

"Many of us have worried about fuel buildup post-Helene. It's a ticking time bomb," University of Georgia meteorology professor Marshall Shepherd said.

Dry air makes it worse

But it's not just downed trees — it's also dry air increasing the likelihood of fires. It's not just a lack of rain, but the air itself is less humid, which causes problems, Nauslar and Flannigan said.

"As we warm ... the atmosphere's ability to suck moisture out of dead fuel, not live fuel, but dead fuel, increases almost exponentially as temperature increases," Flannigan said. "The drier the fuel, the easier it is for a fire to start, means more fuel dried and is available to burn, which leads to higher intensity fires that are difficult to impossible to extinguish."

"That's what we're seeing now starting to make inroads into the East," Flannigan said. Human-caused climate change is clearly playing a role, he said.

## EU approves a \$106 billion loan package to help Ukraine after Hungary lifts its veto

By LORNE COOK, JUSTIN SPIKE and KAREL JANICEK Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — The European Union on Thursday approved a 90-billion-euro (\$106-billion) loan package to help Ukraine meet its economic and military needs for two years after oil began flowing through a key pipeline to Hungary and Slovakia, ending months of political deadlock.

The EU also approved a new raft of sanctions against Russia over its war on Ukraine. The measures were prepared early this year and had been set to be announced in February to mark the fourth anniversary of the conflict, but Hungary and Slovakia opposed the move.

Hungary and Slovakia have been locked in a feud with Ukraine since Russian oil deliveries to the two EU countries were halted in January after a pipeline was damaged. Ukrainian officials blamed the damage on Russian drone attacks. Both countries confirmed Thursday that deliveries have resumed.

Ukraine desperately needs the loan package to prop up its war-ravaged economy and help keep Russian forces at bay. Hungary angered its EU partners by reneging on a December deal to provide the funds. The loans are expected to be available in coming weeks and months.

"Promised, delivered, implemented," European Council President António Costa posted on social media. A few hours later, as he arrived to chair a summit of EU leaders in Cyprus, Costa told reporters that the priority now must be to advance Ukraine's quest to join the bloc.

Standing alongside him, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy thanked his European partners for their support. "We will work to make sure the funds are delivered as soon as possible," he said. "This will strengthen, of course first of all our army, Ukrainian forces, and allow us to boost production."

Pipeline breakthrough

The political greenlight for the loan package came after Russian oil began flowing to Hungary and Slovakia again through the Druzhba pipeline that crosses Ukraine. Populist Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico

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welcomed that development as “good news.”

“Let’s hope a serious relation between Ukraine and the European Union has been established,” Fico said.

Hungarian energy group MOL said it had “received crude oil at the Fényeslitke and Budkovce pumping stations earlier Thursday. Crude oil deliveries via the Druzhba pipeline system have thus resumed to Hungary and Slovakia after a hiatus of nearly three months.”

Ukraine and most of its European backers oppose imports of Russian oil which have helped to fund Russian President Vladimir Putin’s war against Ukraine, now in its fifth year. But unlike the rest of the European Union, Hungary and Slovakia still depend on Russia for their energy needs.

Hungary’s nationalist Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who was recently defeated in an election, had accused Ukraine of deliberately delaying repairs — an allegation that Zelenskyy denied.

Fico said Thursday he still didn’t believe the pipeline was damaged at all and alleged that the pipeline and oil “were used in the current geopolitical battle.”

Another EU voting hijack

The row has raised yet more troubling questions about decision-making in the EU, which can often be held hostage to national interests when unanimous votes are required. Several top officials have in recent months called for more majority voting.

The 27-nation bloc had originally intended to use frozen Russian assets 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, who has repeatedly blocked EU aid to Ukraine, angered the other 24 countries by later renegeing on that deal over the pipeline dispute and as campaigning heated up ahead of the April 12 election that he lost in a landslide.

More sanctions on Russia

The EU has also been trying since February to push through a new raft of sanctions against Russia to undermine its war effort, but Hungary and Slovakia were also blocking those measures over the oil feud.

More than 40 ships believed to be part of Russia’s shadow fleet illicitly transporting oil were targeted.

Oil revenue is the linchpin of Russia’s economy, allowing Putin to pour money into the armed forces without worsening inflation for everyday people and avoiding a currency collapse.

A number of banks were targeted, and a ban was imposed on Europeans using Russian crypto currency.

Asset freezes were slapped on around 60 more “entities” — often companies, government agencies, banks or other organizations — adding to a growing list of more than 2,600 Russian officials and entities already under sanctions, including Putin, his political associates, oligarchs, and dozens of lawmakers.

## Trump orders US military to ‘shoot and kill’ Iranian small boats choking Strait of Hormuz

By JON GAMBRELL, JAMEY KEATEN and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — President Donald Trump has ordered the U.S. military to “shoot and kill” small Iranian boats that deploy mines in the Strait of Hormuz, announcing the move Thursday a day after Iran again displayed its ability to thwart traffic through the channel.

Trump also announced that a ceasefire in Lebanon would be extended by three weeks.

His post on social media about the small boats came shortly after the U.S. military seized another tanker associated with the smuggling of Iranian oil, ratcheting up a standoff with Tehran over the strait through which 20% of all crude oil and natural gas traded passed during peacetime.

“I have ordered the United States Navy to shoot and kill any boat, small boats though they may be ... putting mines in the waters of the Strait of Hormuz,” Trump posted, adding that U.S. minesweepers “are clearing the Strait right now.”

“I am hereby ordering that activity to continue, but at a tripled up level!” he added.

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The decision to extend a pause in fighting between Israel and the Hezbollah militant group in Lebanon came during a meeting at the White House between the Israeli and Lebanese ambassadors to the United States.

Meanwhile, it was still unclear when, or if, the U.S. and Iran would meet again in the Pakistani capital, Islamabad, where mediators are trying to bring the countries together to reach a diplomatic deal ending that conflict.

Negotiations initially planned this week have not happened. Iran insists it will not attend until the U.S. ends its blockade on Iranian ports and ships. The White House insists it will not take part until Tehran opens the strait to international traffic.

Pope Leo XIV, returning home from a trip to Africa, urged the U.S. and Iran to return to talks to end the war.

Footage shows US forces on deck of tanker

The Defense Department released video footage of U.S. forces on the deck of the oil tanker Majestic X, which was seized in the Indian Ocean. The ship had been flying a Guyanese flag, though the South American nation of Guyana said it was not registered there.

The footage emerged a day after Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard attacked three cargo ships in the strait, capturing two of them, in an assault that raised new concerns about the safety of shipping through the waterway.

The powerful head of Iran's judiciary, Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei, said three "violating ships" in the strait were "subject to enforcement" Wednesday.

"The show of strength by the armed forces of Islamic Iran in the Strait of Hormuz is a source of pride," he wrote Thursday on X, claiming the Americans "lack the courage" to approach the strait.

Ship-tracking data showed the Majestic X in the Indian Ocean between Sri Lanka and Indonesia, roughly the same location as the oil tanker Tifani, seized earlier by American forces. It had been bound for Zhoushan, China.

Majestic X previously was named Phonix and had been sanctioned by the U.S. Treasury Department in 2024 for smuggling Iranian crude oil in contravention of U.S. sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

Guyana said in a statement the Majestic X was not registered in the South American nation.

"While the name of the vessel has changed, the (International Maritime Organization) number remains recorded in the international database as PHONIX. There is no record of this vessel or name in Guyana's registry. Therefore, the ship is FRAUDULENTLY flying the Guyana flag," Guyana's Maritime Administration Department said.

There was no immediate response from Iran about the seizure.

Trump claims leadership rift in Iran

Trump this week extended a ceasefire to give the Iranian leadership more time to come up with a "unified proposal" on ending the war, while maintaining an American blockade of Iranian ports.

In a post Thursday, Trump claimed a leadership rift between moderates and hard-liners was confounding Iran. "Iran is having a very hard time figuring out who their leader is! They just don't know!" Trump said.

Trump has repeatedly said during the ceasefire that began April 8 that his team is dealing with Iranian officials who want to make a deal, while acknowledging that his decision to kill several top leaders has come with complications.

Iran's president and its parliament speaker posted statements on social media declaring the country has no hard-liners or moderates.

"We are all Iranians and revolutionaries," they said.

A spokesperson for the Iranian Foreign Ministry said Trump's claim of a leadership rift was a "deflection." Other Iranian officials said on social media that the country was united.

Trump, while speaking to reporters at the White House, pushed back against questions about the conflict exceeding the four-to-six-week timeline that he and aides previously set for the war.

"I don't want to rush myself," Trump said, adding that the U.S. "took the country out" militarily in the first four weeks.



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"Now all we're doing is sitting back and seeing what deal" can be made. "And if they don't want to make a deal, then I'll finish it up militarily," Trump said.

He said he would not use a nuclear weapon against Iran.

Meanwhile, three aircraft carriers were in the region after the USS George H.W. Bush arrived in the Indian Ocean. One carrier was in the Arabian Sea and another was in the Red Sea, military officials said.

Talks between Lebanon and Israel lead to truce extension

Trump said a second round of talks between Israel and Lebanon in Washington "went very well" and resulted in a ceasefire extension for Israel and the Hezbollah militant group.

"The United States is going to work with Lebanon in order to help it protect itself from Hezbollah," Trump said on his Truth Social platform.

The latest war between Israel and Hezbollah started after Israel and the U.S. launched attacks on Iran and the Tehran-backed militants fired rockets into northern Israel. The ceasefire first took effect for a 10-day period starting Friday.

Underscoring the truce's fragility, Israel's military said it struck missile launchers in Lebanon that had fired into its borders. Hezbollah said it fired at the Israeli town of Shtula in response to Israeli attacks on the Lebanese village of Yater.

Lebanon's public health ministry said an Israeli airstrike killed three people further north, in the area of Nabatiya. The Israeli military said it killed three militants who launched a missile toward an Israeli warplane.

Each side has accused the other of breaching the truce.

Trump reiterated that the U.S. continues to demand that Iran stop its backing of Iranian-allied militias in the Mideast, including Hezbollah in Lebanon, as part of any deal between Washington and Tehran to end the U.S. war on Iran.

"Yeah, they'll have to cut that," Trump said to a reporter's question about aiding Hezbollah. "That's a must."

Threats to shipping persist

Since the Feb. 28 start of the war between Iran, Israel and the United States, over 30 ships have come under attack in the waters of the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf of Oman.

The threat of attack, rising insurance premiums and other fears have stopped traffic from moving through the strait. Iran's ability to restrict traffic through the strait, which leads from the Persian Gulf to the open ocean, has proved a major strategic advantage.

Jakob Larsen, the head of maritime security for BIMCO, the largest international association representing shipowners, said in a note Thursday that most shipping companies need a stable ceasefire and assurances from both sides of the conflict that the strait is safe for transit.

The threat of mines, he wrote, was a "particular concern" if traffic might return to normal levels one day.

## **Pope urges US and Iran to return to peace talks and condemns capital punishment**

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ABOARD THE PAPAL PLANE (AP) — Pope Leo XIV urged the United States and Iran to return to talks to end the war Thursday and condemned capital punishment, in a wide-ranging press conference en route home from his trip to Africa.

Leo also asserted that countries have the right to control their borders but mustn't treat migrants worse than "animals," and lamented that the church's morality teaching is often reduced to sexual issues.

On Iran, capital punishment and peace

After a trip that was dominated by the very public back and forth between Leo and U.S. President Donald Trump over the war, Leo urged the United States and Iran to return to negotiations.

He called for a new "culture of peace" to replace the recourse to violence whenever conflicts arise.

He said the question wasn't whether the Iran regime should change or not. "The question should be about how to promote the values we believe in without the deaths of so many innocents."

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He revealed that he carries with him the photo of a Muslim Lebanese boy who had been killed in Israel's recent war with Hezbollah. The boy had been photographed holding a sign welcoming the pope when he visited Lebanon last year.

"As a pastor I cannot be in favor of war," he told reporters aboard his plane. "I would like to encourage everyone to find responses that come from a culture of peace and not hatred and division."

Asked if he condemned Iran's recent executions, Leo said he condemned "all actions that are unjust" and included capital punishment in the list.

"I condemn the taking of people's lives. I condemn capital punishment. I believe human life is to be respected and that all people from conception to natural (death), their lives should be respected and protected.

"So when a regime, when a country takes decisions which take away the lives of other people unjustly, then obviously that is something that should be condemned," he said.

Pope Francis changed the church's social teaching to declare capital punishment immoral in all cases.

On migration and the rights of states

Leo affirmed the right of countries to impose immigration controls on their borders and acknowledged that uncontrolled migration had created situations "that are sometimes more unjust in the place where they arrive than from where they left."

"I personally believe that a state has the right to impose rules for its frontiers," he said. "But saying this, I ask: 'What are we doing in the wealthier countries to change the situation in poorer countries' to provide opportunities so that people aren't compelled to leave?'"

Regardless, he said migrants are human beings and deserve to be respected in their human dignity and not be treated "worse than house pets, animals."

On LGBTQ+ blessings and morality

Leo was asked about the recent invitation by Cardinal Reinhard Marx, archbishop of Munich, for the priests and pastoral workers in his archdioceses to adopt a set of guidelines formalizing and ritualizing blessings of same-sex couples.

The guidelines were approved last year by a controversial German church governing body made up of the German bishops' conference and a Catholic lay group that has been working to have a greater say in church decision-making.

The Vatican in 2023 allowed for such blessings, but it made clear that they were not to be formalized or ritualized. The Vatican allowed them to be offered spontaneously and informally, as a priest gives a final blessing to all people at the end of Mass.

Leo said the Holy See had made clear to German bishops that "we do not agree with the formalized blessing" of gay couples or couples in other "irregular situations."

The Vatican's 2023 declaration allowing an informal blessing, promulgated with virtually no consultation outside the Vatican, sharply divided the church, with African bishops delivering a continent-wide dissent and refusing to implement it. Homosexual activity is criminalized in several African countries.

Asked how he would handle keeping the church unified over such a divisive issue, Leo spoke broadly about how culture war questions of sexual morality had dominated church discourse, particularly in the West, far too much.

"I think it's very important to understand that the unity or division of the church should not revolve around sexual matters," he said. "We tend to think that when the church is talking about morality, that the only issue of morality is sexual.

"And in reality, I believe that there are much greater and more important issues such as justice, equality, freedom of men and women, freedom of religion that would all take priority before that particular issue."

The comment was significant because it suggested that even though he is American, Leo believes the church in the U.S. and the West has excessively reduced its moral teachings to revolve only around sex at the expense of other pressing issues.

A pope who keeps an eye on how he's being covered

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History's first U.S. pope showed himself keenly aware of how his Africa trip had been reported and interpreted, including about his sometimes tame public addresses to African leaders who are accused of corruption or authoritarianism.

With a few notable exceptions, Leo kept his political remarks to the leaders largely diplomatic, using a language of encouragement and subtle messaging rather than headline-grabbing condemnations.

He also allowed some of the circumstances of his visit to speak louder than his words: a choreographed song and dance routine by prisoners in a country known for gross human rights abuses, or the extravagant luxury of a president's hometown in a country where more than half the population lives in poverty.

Leo insisted that his primary reason for visiting Algeria, Cameroon, Angola and Equatorial Guinea was as a pastor, to accompany his flock in their faith.

He added that the Holy See can sometimes achieve more behind the scenes via its diplomatic work, including through the release of political prisoners, than with "great proclamations criticizing, judging or condemning."

## Exchange of gunfire inside Mall of Louisiana leaves 1 person dead and 5 wounded

By SARA CLINE Associated Press

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — An exchange of gunfire at a food court inside a Louisiana mall on Thursday killed one person and wounded five others and sent workers and shoppers scrambling for safety, police and witnesses said.

Authorities described the shooting inside the Mall of Louisiana in Baton Rouge as a confrontation between two groups of people and not a random attack. Louisiana Attorney General Liz Murrill said some innocent bystanders were struck by gunfire.

Police Chief TJ Morse said five people were in custody, and there was no ongoing threat to the public.

"This was a disagreement, a fight, between two different groups of people that we are still trying to unravel, and unfortunately innocent victims got caught in the crossfire," Morse said in a news conference.

Three high school seniors from Ascension Episcopal School were among the victims of the shooting, according to a Facebook post from Lafayette Parish President Monique Blanco Boulet.

"We are heartbroken by the senseless violence that happened today at the Mall of Louisiana in Baton Rouge," she said, adding that she was asking her community to "join us in holding all of these families close in prayer."

Rachel Delcambre, a spokesperson for the school, said in an email that the school would not be giving additional information at this time "out of deep respect for the families and the sensitivity of this situation."

Authorities initially said as many as 10 people had been injured but later revised that number. Morse did not immediately say what set off the shooting at the mall in the Louisiana capital. He said police would not release the names of victims until families have been notified.

Alex Theriot, a commercial electrician, was working on a construction project in the mall a few hundred feet from the food court when gunfire erupted and he heard what sounded like plates of glass shattering. Thinking a shooter might be going store to store, he quickly screwed the door shut of his work site and hunkered down with two other workers. They waited and hoped for the best.

"Everybody was running and screaming," Theriot told The Associated Press. "I thought it could have been a terrorist attack."

Desire Batton, who works at a clothing store, said she and other workers dashed inside a breakroom to protect themselves.

"We hid in there until cops came and got us," Batton said.

The shooting began around 1:30 p.m. when the two groups argued inside the food court and started shooting at each other, Morse said. An officer was already present at the mall and ran toward the gunfire, he said. The chief made public appeals for witnesses to come forward with any video of the shooting.

By late afternoon, dozens of police cars still were clustered in the parking lot, multiple helicopters hovered

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overhead and armed officers in bulletproof vests patrolled the area.

Mall spokesperson Lindsay Kahn called it a "frightening day" for everyone there and said the mall would not reopen Thursday.

Kennedy Barnum, 22, said she had gone to the mall to get lunch at the food court when she heard a woman on the phone outside say, "I'll call you back. There's an active shooter in the mall."

Within five minutes, Barnum said, law enforcement had swarmed the mall. She saw people running and crying, including one girl she described as "hysterical."

"We spoke to a security guard there and she told us that there was an active shooter there, people were shot and injured, and we should leave immediately," Barnum said.

It's at least the second high-profile case of gun violence in Louisiana this week. A father fatally shot eight children, including seven of his own, in an attack on his family Sunday morning that stretched across two houses in a Shreveport neighborhood, police said. Two women, including the gunman's wife who was the mother of their children, were critically wounded.

## Trump says Lebanon and Israel agree to extend Israel-Hezbollah ceasefire by 3 weeks

By MATTHEW LEE and BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

Washington (AP) — President Donald Trump said Israel and Lebanon have agreed to extend a ceasefire between Israel and the Hezbollah militant group by three weeks after talks at the White House on Thursday.

Trump said the meeting between the Israeli and Lebanese ambassadors to the United States, the second in the past week, went "very well," but during an Oval Office gathering he acknowledged that "they do have Hezbollah to think about." The Iranian-backed group has opposed the talks, and since the initial ceasefire went into effect last Friday, there have been multiple violations by both sides.

Despite that, these were the first direct diplomatic talks in decades between Israel and Lebanon and represented a major step for neighboring countries that officially have been at war since Israel's inception in 1948. The initial 10-day ceasefire had been due to expire Monday.

"The United States is going to work with Lebanon in order to help it protect itself from Hezbollah," Trump said in a social media post. He added later in the Oval Office that he expects to meet in Washington with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Lebanese President Joseph Aoun in the next couple of weeks.

Trump told reporters, while surrounded by the ambassadors as well as Vice President JD Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio, that Israel has a right to defend itself "if they're shot at, and they will."

"We hope that together, under your leadership, we can formalize peace between Israel and Lebanon in the very near future," Israeli Ambassador Yechiel Leiter said.

Lebanese Ambassador Nada Hamadeh Moawad thanked Trump "for all your effort to help and to support Lebanon." She referenced his "Make America Great Again" slogan when she said, "And I think with your help, with your support, we can make Lebanon great again."

Lebanon presses wider-reaching negotiations

Aoun, the Lebanese president, said a day earlier that during the talks Hamadeh would ask for an end to Israeli home demolitions in villages and towns occupied by Israel after the latest war broke out on March 2.

Preparations were being made for wider-reaching negotiations. The aim of the future talks is to "fully" stop Israeli attacks, the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon, release of Lebanese prisoners held in Israel, deployment of Lebanese troops along the border and beginning the reconstruction process, Aoun said in comments released by his office.

Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar has called on Lebanon to work with Israel to disarm Hezbollah.

"We don't have any serious disagreements with Lebanon. There are a few minor border disputes that can be solved," Saar said during Independence Day remarks to Israel's ambassadors and diplomatic corps. He described the neighboring country as a "failed state."

"The obstacle to peace and normalization between the countries is one: Hezbollah," he said, adding that



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Lebanon could have “a future of sovereignty, independence and freedom from the Iranian occupation.”

Renewed fighting in Lebanon was tied to Iran war

The latest war started when Hezbollah fired rockets into northern Israel, two days after Israel and the U.S. launched attacks on Iran. Israel responded with widespread bombardment of Lebanon and a ground invasion, capturing dozens of towns and villages along the border.

Israel’s military occupies a buffer zone stretching as far as 6 miles (10 kilometers) into southern Lebanon. Israel says it aims to remove the threat of short-range rockets and anti-tank missiles being fired toward northern Israel.

Hezbollah has not been a participant in the diplomacy. Wafiq Safa, a high-ranking member of the militant group’s political council, has told The Associated Press that it will not abide by any agreements made during the direct talks.

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

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

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

Despite the ceasefire that was later reached, an Israeli strike Wednesday killed Amal Khalil, a well-known Lebanese journalist covering southern Lebanon. Lebanese health officials said the Israeli military opened fire on an ambulance that responded, preventing rescuers from reaching her. Her body was pulled from the rubble of a collapsed building several hours later.

The Israeli military denied that it had deliberately targeted journalists or fired on rescuers, but the case sparked widespread anger in Lebanon ahead of the Washington talks.

After a Cabinet meeting Thursday, Lebanon’s Deputy Prime Minister Tarek Mitri said the government is working on a report documenting alleged war crimes by Israel and that ministers had discussed joining the International Criminal Court.

The latest Israel-Hezbollah war has killed around 2,300 people in Lebanon, including hundreds of women and children, and displaced over 1 million people.

## Firefighter heard ‘stop, stop’ before LaGuardia jet crash, but didn’t know who it was for, NTSB says

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and JOSH FUNK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A firefighter whose truck collided with an Air Canada Express jet last month on a runway at New York’s LaGuardia Airport, killing both pilots, heard an air traffic controller warn “stop, stop” but didn’t know who it was for, federal investigators said Thursday.

Just seconds earlier, the controller had cleared the fire truck to cross the runway, but the truck started moving while warning lights that act as a stop sign for crossing traffic were still lit, the National Transportation Safety Board said in a preliminary report on the March 22 crash.

Because the truck lacked a transponder, a surface monitoring system in the control tower was unable to reliably determine its position, “did not predict a potential conflict” with the landing plane and did not generate an audio or visual alert, the report said, pointing to a series of failures that contributed to the crash.

“There were so many opportunities where this accident could have been prevented,” aviation safety expert Jeff Guzzetti said after reviewing the report.

In addition to the control tower and truck driver, he said the report suggests the pilots had a chance to recognize the danger and pull up. But, he said, they may have been too dialed into landing.

After the air traffic controller’s initial stop warning, the fire truck’s turret operator heard the controller

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say, "Truck 1, stop, stop, stop," and realized he was telling the truck to halt, the report said. By then, the truck was already on the runway as Air Canada Express Flight 8646 was landing and speeding toward it.

Aviation safety consultant John Cox, CEO of Safety Operating Systems, said it might be understandable that the truck driver didn't recognize the first "stop" call was meant for him because the controller had just been directing a plane on a taxiway and didn't say Truck 1 at the start of the command.

The turret operator, one of two crew members in the fire truck, told investigators that as the vehicle turned left, he saw the airplane's lights on the runway, the report said. The plane registered a speed of 104 mph (167 kph) just before the collision. The truck was going about 30 mph (48 kph).

The fire truck was leading a convoy of vehicles, including four fire trucks, a police car and a stair truck, responding to an emergency involving a strong odor that was making flight attendants feel ill aboard a departing United Airlines jet.

The air traffic controller cleared the truck to cross the runway just 12 seconds before the plane touched down, investigators said. About eight seconds later, the controller frantically began calling for the truck to stop.

Pilots killed, 39 people hurt, including fire crew members

The plane, a CRJ900 regional jet from Montreal, was carrying 76 people. Pilots Antoine Forest, 30, and Mackenzie Gunther, 24, were killed. It was the first deadly crash at LaGuardia in 34 years.

In addition, 39 people were taken to hospitals, including six described as seriously injured. The two fire truck crew members are recovering at home after being released from the hospital, according to the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which operates LaGuardia.

A flight attendant still strapped in her seat survived after being thrown onto the tarmac.

Another flight attendant reported taking his seat in the rear of the plane for landing and described the flight as normal until he felt an impact, the report said. He didn't know what had happened and attempted to call the pilots but received no response, the report said.

The Port Authority said it is conducting a comprehensive review of the NTSB's initial findings. "Our focus is straightforward: ensure our safety procedures and protocols are as strong as they can be and take action to strengthen them as needed," the agency said.

LaGuardia was busier than usual the night of the crash because flight delays pushed the number of arrivals and departures after 10 p.m. to more than double what was scheduled, according to aviation analytics firm Cirium. Two air traffic controllers were on duty, consistent with normal scheduling, the report said.

Planes were landing every few minutes, with a dozen flights arriving between 11 p.m. and when the crash happened less than 40 minutes later. At the same time, the controllers had to shuffle their duties because of the odor issue on the United plane.

While the more senior controller coordinated the United emergency response, the other controller took over directing vehicles on the ground while continuing to authorize takeoffs and landings.

"These controllers were just way busy, just too busy," Guzzetti said.

Airport had technology designed to prevent crashes

The warning lights — known as runway entrance lights — were lit until the fire truck reached the edge of the runway, about three seconds before the collision, the report said. By design, they turn off two or three seconds before a plane reaches a runway intersection, the report said.

The runway warning lights in place at 20 of the nation's busiest airports are one of the backup systems designed to help prevent a crash. Cox said the truck should have never entered the runway while the warning lights were illuminated.

"That's an automated system so even though the controller says you're cleared to cross, the lights mean that there's an airplane that is either on the runway or about to be," Cox said. "So the truck driver is going to have some questions to answer there."

LaGuardia is one of 35 major U.S. airports with an advanced surface surveillance system that combines radar data with information from transponders inside planes and ground vehicles to help prevent runway incursions. Controllers have a display in the tower that's supposed to show the location of every plane

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and vehicle.

The system, known as ASDE-X, didn't sound an alarm partly because the radar had trouble distinguishing the closely spaced trucks and the radar targets intermittently merged on the display. Only two targets were displayed just before the crash, even though there were seven vehicles. None were equipped with transponders that would have helped the system to precisely track their movements.

According to air traffic control transmissions, Flight 8646 was cleared to land on Runway 4 at 11:35 p.m.

About two minutes later — and 25 seconds before the crash — the fire crew asked to cross the same runway, which was between the airport's fire station and where the United Airlines jet had parked.

Five seconds later, with Flight 8646 approaching the runway a little more than 100 feet (30 meters) above the ground, an air traffic controller cleared the fire truck to cross.

Then, just nine seconds before the crash, the controller frantically told the fire crew: "Stop, stop, stop, stop. Truck 1. Stop, stop, stop, stop." A second later, the plane's landing gear touched down.

## Republican proposes giving Democratic-leaning part of Virginia back to DC after redistricting vote

By JESSE BEDAYN and MIKE CATALINI Associated Press

Virginia's redistricting referendum, which could net Democrats a 10-1 House seat advantage, is spurring Republican legislation that would expand the borders of Washington, D.C., and cost the state Democratic voters.

Georgia Republican Rep. Rich McCormick said Thursday he introduced the Make DC Square Again Act, a bill that would undo the 19th century return of the southwestern part of the district to the state of Virginia, known as retrocession.

"The Make DC Square Again Act restores the original ten-mile-square District and ends the artificial advantage Virginia Democrats have recently gained from all the federal bureaucrats moving into Virginia," McCormick said in a statement.

The measure's prospects are unlikely in a Congress that can barely keep the lights on. But it's the latest partisan salvo in an effort to gain the upper hand in the closely divided House ahead of this year's contested midterms elections.

Proponents of statehood for the federal district are critical of the measure, saying it shows how Washington can be used as a "political football."

"The residents of the district are not fully participating in the democracy of this country because we are not allowed to," said Alicia Yass, advocacy director at the American Civil Liberties Union of D.C. "Bills like this that mess around with the district just show how important it is for D.C. to have the full benefits and rights of a democracy."

Critics of Virginia's referendum are calling on President Donald Trump to issue an executive order declaring the pre-Civil War return of Alexandria and Arlington to Virginia unconstitutional.

"This order would be on better legal footing than many of President Joe Biden's most egregious orders," former Trump Justice Department chief of staff Chad R. Mizelle wrote in a Fox News opinion article.

Here's a closer look at the issue.

What even is this? Retro-retrocession?

Retrocession refers to the reincorporation into Virginia of the land it gave for the federal capital. Beginning in 1846, Congress voted to allow 31 square miles (80 square kilometers) of the District of Columbia to return to Virginia. That included the City of Alexandria and the areas that now include the Pentagon and Arlington National Cemetery.

Virginia and Maryland had given over the land decades before to form the nation's capital, but resident's rumblings over a trailing local economy and fears that Congress would ban slavery in the district fueled the return to Virginia in 1847, according to the City of Alexandria. Virginia would go on to secede from the United States, with the Confederacy's capital in Richmond.

The discussion over reversing retrocession has kept up in the decades since. Proponents argue that

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Congress never had the power to cede back the land and that the local referendum failed to meet the voting requirements outlined by Congress for retrocession.

Whether Congress could vote to bring parts of Virginia back into the federal district isn't clear. George Derek Musgrove, an associate professor of history at the University of Maryland Baltimore County, was skeptical of McCormick's effort because the congressman said the measure stemmed from the results of the Virginia referendum, which could benefit Democrats.

"It's not even a retrocession bill. It's really a Virginia voter suppression bill," he said.

The text of the measure wasn't immediately available.

Why does it matter now?

The area holds the separate municipalities of the City of Alexandria and Arlington County, which are packed with Democratic voters. In the 2024 presidential election in both places, Democratic candidate Kamala Harris won 77% of the votes cast, with Donald Trump pulling only about 20%.

The region's blue voters helped bolster Virginia's redistricting referendum, approved by voters Tuesday to boost Democrats' chances of winning four additional seats in the U.S. House. But if the entire area was ceded back to the District of Columbia, the electoral advantage in the new districts would be dulled and new districts would be drawn in light of the state's shrunken footprint.

The region's approximately 400,000 residents would also likely lose full representation in both the U.S. Senate and House.

Other possible pathways

McCormick's legislation invokes making the district "square" again and refers to how the boundaries would look on the map if they're restored. It's not the only proposal out there.

The American Capital Project, a little-known group that advocates for the land to be returned to the District of Columbia, says the path forward is through a presidential executive order declaring the original law void. That would eventually push the question in front of the U.S. Supreme Court, forcing it to rule on the legality of the original law.

It's unclear who funds or manages the American Capital Project. Its website does not list any contact information nor the names of the people or groups behind it.

There have also been efforts, pushed by Democrats, to grant the district statehood. In 2021, the Democrat-led House passed such a bill, but it did not advance out of the Senate. At the time some Senate Republicans suggested returning the current district to Maryland as a way to give voters their a chance for full representation in Congress.

## Trump unveils deal with Regeneron to lower drug prices as part of most-favored-nation initiative

By ALI SWENSON Associated Press

President Donald Trump on Thursday announced a deal with drugmaker Regeneron to lower the cost of its pharmaceutical products as part of the White House's signature drug pricing initiative.

The deal involves Regeneron lowering the prices of all its current and future drugs on Medicaid, according to Trump. It also involves selling a cholesterol drug called Praluent for \$225 on the White House's discounted drug website TrumpRx, according to the agreement first outlined by NOTUS and confirmed in a White House fact sheet.

The deal comes as the Trump administration has been touting efforts to provide economic relief ahead of November's midterm elections, with Americans saying high costs for health care, gas, groceries and other basic needs are straining their budgets.

It's one of many so-called most-favored-nation deals the Trump administration has made with drug companies to bring U.S. pharmaceutical prices to the same level as other developed nations. Last July, Trump publicly sent letters to executives at 17 major pharmaceutical companies about the issue. Regeneron is the final one of those companies to strike a deal with his administration.

Speaking at the White House on Thursday to announce the deal, Trump touted the discounts on drugs



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and said, "It should be front page news." He said voters in this November's midterm elections should reward his party because of the agreements with drugmakers.

"We should win the midterms, but it doesn't work that way, unfortunately," Trump said.

Trump also has a notable history with the drugmaker.

During his first term in 2020, when he was hospitalized with COVID-19, he was given a dose of a drug that Regeneron was testing to supply antibodies in order to help his immune system.

After he was released, Trump posted a video of himself standing outside the White House in which he repeatedly lavished praise on Regeneron.

As part of the new deal, Regeneron has also committed to spending \$27 billion in research, development and manufacturing in the U.S., according to the White House fact sheet. Trump's deals have historically offered companies relief from his tariffs if they make such commitments.

Regeneron also announced Thursday that Otarmeni, its new gene therapy for a rare form of congenital hearing loss, had been approved by the Food and Drug Administration and would be made available to clinically eligible individuals in the U.S. at no charge. The therapy received expedited approval from the FDA under the agency's so-called Commissioner's National Priority Voucher program.

The program, which was not authorized by Congress, has been under scrutiny from Democrats in Congress for months. House and Senate lawmakers have noted that FDA vouchers have repeatedly gone to companies that agree to pricing concessions sought by the White House.

Even as Trump and his Department of Health and Human Services have touted his drug-pricing deals as transformative, the details of the agreements have so far not been made public.

Pressed by members of Congress to share the contracts this week, Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. said his team would share whatever details it could that didn't include proprietary information or trade secrets. Trump and Kennedy have urged Congress to codify the deals into law.

The deals have occasionally run into roadblocks. A centerpiece of the agreements with weight-loss drugmakers Eli Lilly and Novo Nordisk fell apart earlier this week when Medicare delayed implementation of a program for insurers to cover the GLP-1 drugs.

Drug prices for patients in the U.S. can depend on a number of factors, including the competition a treatment faces and insurance coverage. Most people have coverage through work, the individual insurance market or government programs like Medicaid and Medicare, which shield them from much of the cost.

Patients on Medicaid, the state and federally funded program for people with low incomes, already pay a nominal co-payment of a few dollars to fill their prescriptions, but lower prices could help state budgets that fund the programs.

## What a combined Paramount-Warner would mean

By WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — HBO Max, "Harry Potter" and CNN may soon find themselves under a new roof: Paramount.

That's because shareholders of Warner Bros. Discovery approved an \$81 billion sale of the company on Thursday. Including debt, the proposed buyout valued at nearly \$111 billion based on Warner's current outstanding shares.

While the deal still faces regulatory review, the megamerger would vastly reshape Hollywood and the wider media landscape, further consolidating power in an industry already run by just a handful of major players. Paramount itself was acquired by Skydance just last year.

Here's what a Paramount-Warner combo could mean for streaming, movies, news and more.

### Streaming

Paramount Skydance would own both Paramount+ and, with the sale approved by shareholders Thursday, Warner's HBO Max. Company executives have said that they would combine these streamers into one platform.

What that combined service would look like (or be named) is unclear. But Paramount CEO David Ellison

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suggested that HBO could still have some level of independence, at least production-wise.

"Our view point is, HBO should stay HBO," Ellison said during a conference call last month. "They built a phenomenal brand, they are a leader in this space and we just want them to continue doing more of it. But by bringing the platforms together, all of our content will be able to reach even a broader audience than we can do standalone."

Warner and its HBO streaming platform have a powerful lineup that includes "The Pitt," "Game of Thrones" and "Sex and the City." And beyond "Harry Potter," Warner's library lists blockbuster films such as "Sinners," "Barbie" and "Superman" (the company also owns DC Studios). Titles like "Top Gun," "Titanic," "The Godfather" and "Yellowstone" fill Paramount's catalog.

In the U.S., according to streaming guide JustWatch, HBO Max controlled about 12% of on-demand subscriptions in the first quarter of this year — compared to 3% for Paramount+. Combining those two services would still fall slightly below Prime Video's 17% market share, and the 19% of the market commanded by Netflix. Disney owns about 27% of the market between Hulu and Disney+.

Beyond HBO Max, Paramount would also acquire Warner's smaller Discovery+ streamer. And apart from Paramount+, Paramount owns Pluto TV and BET+, too.

Critics are skeptical of consumer benefits touted by Paramount. While company executives have continued to laud larger content libraries and the potential for Paramount to better compete with bigger rivals, a combination with Warner Bros. would mean fewer platform choices when it comes to streaming overall. Critics warn that could actually mean higher prices at a time when the price of almost all subscriptions continues to tick higher.

Moviemaking and theatrical releases

Paramount and Warner Bros. are two of Hollywood's oldest studios. A merger would mean fewer companies control legacy film production.

Ellison has said he wants the combined company to grow a slate to more than 30 movies a year, keeping Paramount and Warner Bros. as stand-alone operations. And in a star-studded CinemaCon appearance last week, he promised a 45-day exclusive window for films in theaters, pledging a "complete commitment" to the industry.

Still, others are wary about what further consolidation could mean for jobs and which projects are greenlit down the road. Regulatory filings have indicated that the new ownership will be looking for ways to cut costs — including layoffs and downsizing some overlapping operations. Paramount is taking on billions of dollars in debt to finance the deal.

Warner Bros. just had a banner year of both major blockbusters and critical successes. The studio racked up 30 Oscar nominations thanks to "Sinners," "Weapons," and "One Battle After Another" (which took home the top best picture slot). Paramount received zero. And in 2025, Warner Bros. movies — including "A Minecraft Movie," "Superman" and "Sinners" — accounted for 21% of the domestic box office. Paramount's market share was only 6%, driven largely by "Mission: Impossible — The Final Reckoning."

The industry has already experienced a sizeable consolidation. Almost 10 years ago, Hollywood's big six became the big five when Disney bought most of 20th Century Fox. If the Warner sale goes through, a new "big four" era would be underway — with a bigger Paramount standing alongside Disney, Universal and Sony.

News

CNN would come under the same roof as Paramount-owned CBS. That would bring together two of America's biggest names in television news, although whether CNN would continue to operate as a separate brand from CBS has yet to be confirmed.

Regardless, there is a lot of anxiety about Paramount taking control of CNN — a network that has long attracted ire from President Donald Trump and his allies. Critics point to Trump's close relationship with the Ellison family, particularly billionaire Oracle founder Larry Ellison, who is putting up billions of dollars to back the bid by his son's company.

Since coming under Skydance ownership less than a year ago, CBS has already seen significant shifts in editorial leadership. It's taken steps to appeal to more conservative viewers in its news operations, nota-

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bly with the installation of Free Press founder Bari Weiss as editor-in-chief of CBS News. If the company's proposed Warner takeover is successful, many expect similar changes at CNN.

Some officials in the Trump administration have also made their opinions very clear about CNN's future ownership. In March, the White House attacked CNN for its coverage of the U.S. and Israel's war against Iran — and Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth told reporters that "the sooner David Ellison takes over that network, the better."

Ellison has said that editorial independence "will absolutely be maintained" under Paramount ownership. "It's maintained at CBS. It'll be maintained at CNN," Ellison told CNBC's "Squawk on the Street" in March, while noting that his company wants to speak to "the 70%" of viewers who he said identify as center-left or center-right.

The acting head of the U.S. Justice Department's antitrust division has also said that its regulatory review will not be political. Still, critics are skeptical — particularly following Skydance's acquisition of Paramount. That merger was approved by the Federal Communications Commission just weeks after the company agreed to pay Trump \$16 million to settle a lawsuit over editing at CBS' "60 Minutes" program. The president has continued to publicly lash out at "60 Minutes" programming since.

Other TV and cable networks

CNN is just one of the cable operations that Warner is selling. And the proposed merger would make Paramount's TV footprint even bigger.

The company also owns Discovery, TNT, TBS, Food Network, Cartoon Network and Animal Planet, among other networks — all of which would come under Paramount ownership if the deal goes through. Meanwhile, Paramount already has its own sizeable broadcast lineup. Beyond CBS, that includes Nickelodeon, MTV, BET, Comedy Central, Showtime and more.

## What to know about a kidnapping case involving a child flown back to the US from Cuba

By MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

A couple from Utah face parental kidnapping charges after federal authorities said they took a 10-year-old child to Cuba in the midst of a complicated custody fight involving the child's gender identity.

The child was returned to their biological mother this week when President Donald Trump's administration took the unusual step of sending a government plane to Cuba to retrieve the child. Federal officials cited concerns that the child had been taken to Havana for gender transition surgery.

It's not clear from court documents if the defendants, Rose Inessa-Ethington — a transgender woman and the child's biological father — and partner Blue Inessa-Ethington actually planned on getting the child surgery, which isn't legal for children in Cuba.

A Canada camping trip turns into a flight to Cuba

Rose Inessa-Ethington had shared custody under a court agreement and had arranged to take the child along with Blue Inessa-Ethington and Blue's 3-year-old child to Calgary, Canada, last month, ostensibly to go camping, authorities said.

Instead they went hundreds of miles away to Vancouver, Canada, and boarded a flight to Mexico City. On April 1, they flew to Cuba, authorities said.

When the group failed to return as expected on April 3, the child's mother contacted police in Logan, Utah, alleging Rose Inessa-Ethington, her ex-spouse, had violated their custody agreement. Police found out the group had not gone to Calgary, and reached out to the Department of Homeland Security's investigations branch for assistance, according to court documents.

Investigators, who determined the group had walked into Canada at the Peace Arch Bridge south of Vancouver, obtained search warrants for Rose and Blue Inessa-Ethington's emails, cellphones and social media accounts. Then investigators used their internet activities to track the group to Cuba.

On April 8, at the request of Cache County Attorney Dane Murray, a Utah state judge issued arrest warrants for the couple alleging custodial interference, a third-degree felony. Judge Brian Cannell set bail at

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\$5,000 each.

Logan City Police spokesperson Sgt. Brandon Bevan said that during interviews with the family of the child, one person raised the possibility that the missing child could be subjected to gender affirming surgery. Bevan said there was no physical evidence offered.

On April 13, Cannell issued an order for the child to be returned immediately and granting the biological mother sole custody.

How did this become a federal case?

Three days after Cannell's order, an FBI agent filed an affidavit in U.S. District Court in Utah alleging Rose and Blue Inessa-Ethington were likely not planning to return to the U.S.

The affidavit requested a federal warrant for Rose and Blue Inessa-Ethington's arrest on charges of international parental kidnapping.

The return of kidnapped children taken overseas often is settled through negotiations, or by the aggrieved parent filing a civil petition under an international agreement, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.

But in the Utah case, federal officials worked with Cuban law enforcement to locate and deport Rose and Blue Inessa-Ethington. DOJ officials sent one of its aircraft to Cuba to retrieve the child.

The use of the plane came as the Trump administration has sought to block access to gender-affirming care for minors and pressured health care providers over the issue.

What evidence has been released showing surgery was the goal?

The child, identified in court documents as MV 1, was assigned male at birth but identifies as a girl because of what family members believed to be "manipulation" by Rose Inessa-Ethington, according to the affidavit.

The affidavit stated that "concerns exist that MV 1 was transported to Cuba for gender reassignment surgery prior to puberty."

The FBI said that Blue Inessa-Ethington withdrew \$10,000 from her checking account before leaving. Agents also found at the couple's home a note with instructions from a mental health therapist in Washington, D.C., "to send the therapist the \$10,000.00 and instructions on gender affirming medical care for children." The note didn't mention Cuba.

Officials have not said whether the couple actually planned on getting the child gender-affirming surgery in Cuba or how they would get it.

Federal officials have declined to comment on the case beyond what's contained in court documents and a news release issued upon the child's return.

Gender-affirming surgery is rare among U.S. children, research shows. Among the youngest patients, the most common surgeries are breast and chest procedures — most likely transgender males who graduated from high school and have breast removals. Major medical organizations call for caution around surgery for minors.

In Cuba, gender-affirming surgeries are performed for adults through the public health system under strict supervision. They must be authorized by a medical commission following a comprehensive review of the patient's file. That process often takes years and requires a wide range of medical and psychological evaluations.

Back to Utah to face charges

After being flown back to the U.S., the two defendants made an initial appearance Tuesday in federal district court in Richmond, Virginia, and were ordered to be detained.

A court-appointed attorney for Blue Inessa-Ethington declined to comment. The Associated Press left email and telephone messages for Rose Inessa-Ethington's public defender.

Richmond is only a temporary stop until the defendants are returned to Utah to face charges. The timing for that is uncertain.



## Civil rights groups condemn Southern Poverty Law Center's indictment and prepare for legal fights

By MATT BROWN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The criminal indictment of the Southern Poverty Law Center this week was met with much outrage but little surprise from civil rights leaders, who have for more than a year prepared for heightened legal scrutiny from the Trump administration, and how to mount a coordinated response.

In rounds of calls immediately following the indictment, advocates discussed how to support the SPLC, a Montgomery, Alabama-based civil rights group founded in 1971 that has tracked white supremacist groups and been outspoken on voting rights, immigration and policing. Organizers on one call agreed that winning in the court of public opinion would be crucial as judicial proceedings began, leading to dozens of public statements of support and planned rallies.

And legal advisors to civil rights groups urged organizers to prepare for similar criminal indictments, protracted legal action that may exhaust their resources and audits of their staff and internal documents.

The flurry of behind-the-scenes coordination represented a marked mobilization by activist groups that, like many universities, law firms and non-profits, have been at odds with the federal government since President Donald Trump's return to the White House last year.

"There's a muscle that has been built among these organizations learned from the law firm debacle," said Vanita Gupta, a former associate attorney general of the Justice Department during the Biden administration, referring to deals some major law firms made with the administration. Gupta led one of the calls that convened activists.

"The government's goal is often to shut down and paralyze an organization, so that their work has to stop while they defend themselves. And the hope here is that with this broad effort to defend the SPLC, that will not happen," said Gupta.

Organizers say they are prepared to back the SPLC in its legal fight.

"It's a blatantly obvious attack on civil rights and civil liberties to whitewash the foot soldiers of the great replacement theory and other extremists. This coalition isn't going silent," said Maya Wiley, president and CEO of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, an umbrella organization of hundreds of civil rights groups.

Without addressing the indictment, a coalition of more than 100 activist groups on Tuesday published a letter vowing solidarity with groups that are "unjustly targeted" by the federal government. SPLC was a signatory to the pact.

"An attack on one is an attack on all," the coalition declared. "We will share knowledge, resources, and support with any organization threatened by abuses of power."

DOJ alleges criminal conduct in SPLC's longtime informant network

The Justice Department alleges that the SPLC, which rose to prominence for its work prosecuting and tracking hate groups like the Ku Klux Klan, violated federal law through its network of paid informants in extremist groups. The DOJ claims the payments funded hate groups and misled the SPLC's donors.

The SPLC now faces charges of wire fraud, bank fraud and conspiracy to commit money laundering in the case brought in the federal court in Alabama, where the organization is based.

"The SPLC is manufacturing racism to justify its existence," said Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche at a press conference announcing the charges. Blanche promised the department "will hold the SPLC and every other fraudulent organization operating with the same deceptive playbook accountable."

Longtime civil rights activists found the claims to be a disingenuous and partisan move that may empower extremist groups.

"The indictment is nakedly political and represents the Justice Department turning on itself," said Marc Morial, president of the National Urban League. "It places the Justice Department in the posture of, in effect, defending white supremacist groups like the Ku Klux Klan and others."

Advocates also view the indictment as part of the administration's broader upending of civil rights law and the Justice Department's prosecution of Trump's political opponents.

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The SPLC in recent years became a bogeyman among conservatives who resented that the watchdog designated several rightwing organizations that engage in Republican politics as hateful or extremist.

Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council, which the SPLC has designated as a hate group, said the government should not only pursue convictions, but also restitution for those the SPLC has harmed.

"For years, the SPLC has used its platform to label and target organizations with whom it disagrees, often blurring the line between legitimate concern and ideological attack," Perkins said in a statement. "That kind of reckless characterization doesn't just damage reputations, it has put lives at risk."

In October, FBI Director Kash Patel cancelled the agency's longtime anti-extremism partnerships with the SPLC and the Anti-Defamation League, which combats antisemitism. Patel at the time called the SPLC a "partisan smear machine."

The Justice Department and SPLC did not respond to requests for comment.

Indictment represents marked shift for civil rights work

Advocates dispute the DOJ's characterization of the SPLC's work.

"The problem is that the indictment essentially claims that it was a fraud on SPLC's donors to use their funds to fight the Klan, the Neo Nazis and other white supremacist groups, when that is exactly why people gave to the organization," said Norm Eisen, founder of Democracy Defenders Action, a group that works with organizations in legal disputes with the Trump administration.

Eisen added: "The notion that there's something wrong with using informants and protecting their identities to prevent white supremacist violence is belied by the fact that that is not only what the SPLC did, but it is also the stock and trade of the FBI itself."

Civil rights organizations are now preparing for further legal action. Organizations have reviewed their document retention, tax compliance and auditing policies over the last year to safeguard against any probes or lawsuits.

Some civil rights organizations have also floated creating new organizational structures that may better withstand legal scrutiny. On another recent call, activists floated restructuring some groups into for-profit entities, or potentially crafting new financial conduits for donors to ensure that staff could receive pay if an organization's assets were seized or frozen.

The preparations represent a marked shift for many civil rights leaders, who in recent years counted the Justice Department under both Democratic and Republican administrations as a reliable ally in key civil rights battles.

"What we are seeing in real time is an administration seeking to leverage its position to target individuals and organizations that do not agree with its political thought," said NAACP President Derrick Johnson, who said the Justice Department has been "weaponized by dangerous forces."

But for other leaders, the SPLC indictment raised the specter of a return to a previous era, when the Justice Department monitored civil rights leaders to disrupt their activities.

"We're not backing down, but we are clear-eyed. Everyone could be in some form of jeopardy if you're in the crosshairs of this administration," said Juan Proaño, CEO of the League of United Latin American Citizens, a civil rights group suing the Trump administration over executive orders addressing birthright citizenship and mail-in voting.

"That's what they're looking for; they want this to have a chilling effect," Proaño said.

## **Evidence against singer D4vd in killing of 14-year-old girl will be revealed in court within days**

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Lawyers for singer D4vd insisted Thursday on forcing prosecutors to show what evidence they have, and a judge set a hearing for next week for them to lay it out publicly in the killing and dismemberment of Celeste Rivas Hernandez.

The 21-year-old whose legal name is David Burke appeared in a small Los Angeles courtroom in orange

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jail clothes sitting next to his attorneys, exactly one year after authorities say Rivas Hernandez, a 14-year-old from Lake Elsinore, California, was last known to be alive.

Burke was brought into court wearing handcuffs that were removed when he sat. He spoke only to say "yes, ma'am" to a procedural question from Superior Court Judge Charlaine F. Olmedo, who set the four-to-five-day preliminary evidentiary hearing to start May 1. She will determine whether there is probable cause to send Burke to trial.

Deputy District Attorney Beth Silverman said the prosecution has voluminous evidence that will take time to share, including child sex abuse images taken from Burke's phone with a warrant that must be handled sensitively.

"I cannot turn that type of materials over," Silverman said.

But she said the prosecution is fine with working on an incredibly tight timeline for the hearing, which usually comes many months after defendants are arrested and charged.

"We'll be ready," she said.

"Today it's been exactly one year since the death of Celeste," the prosecutor said. "We're eager to set this case for trial."

Burke was arrested on April 16 and pleaded not guilty Monday to first-degree murder, lewd and lascivious acts with a person under 14 and mutilating a dead body.

His lawyers spoke only about the exchange of evidence at Thursday's hearing and declined to comment outside court. But at his arraignment, defense attorney Blair Berk told a judge, "We believe the actual evidence will show David Burke did not murder Celeste Rivas Hernandez."

In a rare move, the singer is exercising his right in California to have the preliminary evidence hearing within 10 court days of his arraignment. It is not entirely clear why his lawyers are pursuing the strategy. Berk said in court previously that with all the secret evidence gathered in the case, they simply want it seen.

The body of Rivas Hernandez, with the head and arms cut off, was found in two bags in a seemingly abandoned Tesla registered to Burke that was towed from the Hollywood Hills while he was on tour.

In an autopsy report unsealed Wednesday, the LA County Medical Examiner determined that she died from two penetrating wounds to her upper body. The decomposing body made the examination difficult. Investigators did not determine how she got the wounds, and no weapon was recovered, the report said.

Prosecutors allege Burke had been sexually abusing Rivas Hernandez for at least a year starting when she was 13; killed her on or around April 23, 2025, after she threatened to report the relationship; and dismembered her body about two weeks later.

Silverman said the evidence includes the contents of his phone and iCloud accounts, items seized from many search warrants and a huge amount of forensic material. And it includes witness testimony given to three different grand juries, whose existence she confirmed for the first time publicly Thursday.

Silverman said the grand juries, which have subpoena power, were called only for investigative reasons. Defense attorneys and court observers have questioned why no grand jury indictment was issued against Burke before his arrest.

"It's been an informative hearing," Berk, the defense attorney, told the judge.

The girl's parents, Jesus Rivas and Mercedes Martinez, made their first public statement in the case on Tuesday, calling their daughter "a beautiful, strong girl who loved to sing and dance" and saying "All we want is justice for Celeste."

D4vd, pronounced "David," gained popularity among young fans for his blend of indie rock, R&B and lo-fi pop. He went viral on TikTok in 2022 with the hit "Romantic Homicide," which peaked at No. 4 on Billboard's Hot Rock & Alternative Songs chart. He released his debut EP "Petals to Thorns" and a follow-up, "The Lost Petals," in 2023. His debut full-length album, "Withered," was released in 2025.

## What to know about a federal order reclassifying medical marijuana as a less dangerous drug

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

President Donald Trump's administration has reclassified medical marijuana, which is already licensed in most states, as a less dangerous drug.

The order signed Thursday by the nation's acting attorney general is a first step toward broader federal acceptance of one of the nation's most commonly used drugs.

The action could facilitate new research on medicinal uses and make the marijuana industry more profitable. But it does not legalize marijuana under federal law.

Here are some things to know about the issue:

What's the federal policy on marijuana?

Possessing marijuana is a federal crime punishable by fines and prison time. Selling or cultivating marijuana is a more serious offense, punishable by prison sentences of five years to life, depending on the quantity of the drug. That will not change under the new Department of Justice order.

Rather, the order changes the way that state-licensed medical marijuana is regulated by the federal government.

It shifts medical marijuana from a Schedule I controlled substance — alongside drugs such as heroin and LSD that have a high potential for abuse and no recognized medical use — to the less strictly regulated Schedule III, alongside substances such as ketamine and some anabolic steroids. Schedule III drugs are defined as having moderate to low potential for physical and psychological dependence.

Marijuana that's sold for recreational purposes — even in states that legally allow it — will remain a Class I drug under Thursday's order. But the Department of Justice has scheduled a hearing June 29 to consider a general reclassification of marijuana to Schedule III.

What does reclassification mean for cannabis shops?

Federal income tax deductions for business expenses aren't available to enterprises involved in "trafficking" any Schedule I or II drug.

Changing medical marijuana to a Schedule III drug could save millions of dollars for businesses licensed to sell it by allowing them to claim tax deductions for expenses such as advertising, marketing, rent and labor costs associated with sales.

But many licensed businesses sell cannabis both for medical and recreational purposes, making it hard to distinguish which costs could be tax-deductible.

"In a lot of ways, it's kind of nonsensical because these medical products are the same cannabis, the same methods of creation," said Chicago attorney Irina Dashevsky, who oversees cannabis-related business for the Greenspoon Marder law firm.

"From a business perspective, there's a lot of complications," added Rachel Gillette, a Denver attorney who leads that cannabis industry practice at the Holland & Hart law firm. "It just makes it extremely messy."

Also unclear is whether the tax deductions will apply only from the date of the order. The Justice Department has recommended that the Treasury Department apply them retroactively to the full tax years for which businesses operated under a state medical marijuana license.

How does the public view marijuana?

Public views of marijuana generally have grown more positive over time, though not among everyone. Support for marijuana legalization rose from just 23% in 1985 to 64% last year, according to polling from Gallup.

That's down slightly from 70% support just a couple years earlier, primarily because of declining enthusiasm among Republicans. Support among Republicans for legalizing marijuana dropped from 55% to 40% since 2023, Gallup said. By comparison, support shifted only slightly among Democrats, from 87% to 85% during that same period, and inched down from 69% to 66% among independents.

More than 20 Republican U.S. senators, several of them staunch Trump allies, signed a letter last year urging the president to keep marijuana a Schedule I drug. They asserted that marijuana remains danger-



ous and argued that reclassifying it would “undermine your strong efforts to Make America Great Again.”

How has marijuana use changed?

The medical use of marijuana already is allowed in 40 states and Washington, D.C. Over the past dozen years, the number of jurisdictions legalizing recreational marijuana for adults rose rapidly to 24 states and Washington, D.C.

As more states have embraced marijuana, more people have used it.

More than 64 million Americans ages 12 and older — 22% of people — used marijuana during the previous year, according to a 2024 national survey by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. That was up from 19% of people in 2021.

Reclassifying marijuana could cause that figure to grow.

Dr. Smita Das, an addiction psychiatrist at Stanford University, said cannabis use disorder has been on the rise in the U.S.

“We’ve already had kind of a decrease in risk perception related to cannabis over the years with the state legalization, both for medical and recreational purposes, and this will probably just add to that,” Das said.

## **Trump reclassifies state-licensed medical marijuana as a less-dangerous drug in a historic shift**

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump’s acting attorney general on Thursday signed an order reclassifying state-licensed medical marijuana as a less-dangerous drug, a major policy shift long sought by advocates who said cannabis should never have been treated like heroin by the federal government.

The order signed by Todd Blanche does not legalize marijuana for medical or recreational use under federal law. But it does change the way it’s regulated, shifting licensed medical marijuana from Schedule I — reserved for drugs without medical use and with high potential for abuse — to the less strictly regulated Schedule III. It also gives licensed medical marijuana operators a major tax break and eases some barriers to researching cannabis.

The Trump administration also said it was jump-starting the process for reclassifying marijuana more broadly, setting a hearing to begin in late June.

Trump told his administration in December to work as quickly as possible to reclassify marijuana. On Saturday, as the Republican president signed an unrelated executive order about psychedelics, he seemed to express frustration that it was taking so long.

Blanche said Thursday that the Department of Justice was “delivering on President Trump’s promise” to expand Americans’ access to medical treatment options. “This rescheduling action allows for research on the safety and efficacy of this substance, ultimately providing patients with better care and doctors with more reliable information,” he said in a statement.

What the marijuana reclassification order does

Blanche’s action largely legitimizes medical marijuana programs in the 40 states that have adopted them. It sets up an expedited system for state-licensed medical marijuana producers and distributors to register with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.

It makes clear that cannabis researchers won’t be penalized for obtaining state-licensed marijuana or marijuana-derived products for use in their work, and it grants state-licensed medical marijuana companies a windfall by allowing them, for the first time, to deduct business expenses on their federal taxes.

Any marijuana-derived medicine approved by the Food and Drug Administration is similarly listed in Schedule III, it said.

Since 2015, Congress has prohibited the Justice Department from using its resources to shut down state-licensed medical marijuana systems. But the order nevertheless represents a major policy shift for the U.S. government, which has continued its longstanding marijuana prohibition — dating to the Marihuana Tax Act of 1937 — even as nearly all the states have approved cannabis use in some form.

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Two dozen states plus Washington, D.C., have authorized adult recreational use of marijuana, 40 have medical marijuana systems, and eight others allow low-THC cannabis or CBD oil for medical use. Only Idaho and Kansas ban marijuana outright.

The regulation of medical marijuana has come a long way since California became the first state to adopt it in 1996, Blanche wrote.

"Today the vast majority of States maintain comprehensive licensing frameworks governing cultivation, processing, distribution, and dispensing of marijuana for medical purposes," Blanche wrote. "Taken as a whole, they demonstrate a sustained capacity to achieve the public-interest objectives ... including protecting public health and safety and preventing the diversion of controlled substances into illicit channels."

The president of the American Trade Association for Cannabis and Hemp, Michael Bronstein, called it "the most significant federal advancement in cannabis policy in over 50 years."

"This action recognizes what Americans have long known, cannabis is medicine," he said in a written statement.

Critic calls the order 'a tax break to Big Weed'

The Trump administration's decision drew derision from marijuana legalization opponent Kevin Sabet, the chief executive of Smart Approaches to Marijuana. Sabet said that while marijuana research is necessary, "there are many ways to increase our knowledge without giving a tax break to Big Weed and sending a confusing message about marijuana's harms to the American public."

"With this move, we are now confronted with the most pro-drug administration in our history," Sabet said in a text message. "Policy is now being dictated by marijuana CEOs, psychedelics investors, and podcasters in active addiction."

Marijuana or marijuana-derived products that are not distributed through a state medical marijuana program will continue to be classified in Schedule I.

Schedule III drugs are defined as having moderate to low potential for physical and psychological dependence. Some critics of the industry have suggested that legalization in the states has led to stronger and stronger cannabis products, which need to be researched rather than categorized less strictly than before.

The efforts to reclassify marijuana

The Justice Department under President Joe Biden, a Democrat, had proposed to reclassify marijuana, eliciting nearly 43,000 formal public comments. The DEA was still in the review process when Trump succeeded Biden, and Trump ordered that process to move along as quickly as legally possible.

Blanche's order sidestepped the review process by relying on a provision of federal law that allows the attorney general to determine the appropriate classification for drugs that the U.S. must regulate pursuant to an international treaty.

It was unclear how the order might affect operations in states where licensed recreational marijuana shops also sell to medical patients. In Washington state, which in 2012 became one of the first states to legalize the adult use of marijuana, 302 of 460 licensed stores have endorsements allowing them to sell tax-free cannabis products to registered patients.

Many Republicans oppose loosening marijuana restrictions. More than 20 Republican senators, several of them staunch Trump allies, signed a letter last year urging the president to keep the current standards.

Trump has made his crusade against other drugs, especially fentanyl, a feature of his second term, ordering U.S. military attacks on Venezuelan and other boats the administration insists are ferrying drugs. He signed another executive order declaring fentanyl a weapon of mass destruction.

## More countries are turning to nuclear power 40 years after the Chernobyl disaster

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV Associated Press

The 1986 Chernobyl disaster fueled global fears about nuclear power and slowed its development in Europe and elsewhere. Four decades later, however, there's a revival around the world, a trend that has been given a big boost by war in the Middle East.

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Over 400 nuclear reactors are operational in 31 countries, while about 70 more are under construction. Nuclear power accounts for producing about 10% of the world's electricity, equivalent to about a quarter of all sources of low-carbon power.

Nuclear reactors have seen steady improvements, adding more safety features and making them cheaper to build and operate.

While Chernobyl and the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan diminished the appetite for such power sources, it was clear years ago that there probably would be a revival, said Fatih Birol, executive director of the International Energy Agency.

With the war in the Middle East, "I am 100% sure nuclear is coming back," he added.

"It's seen as a secure electricity generation system, and we will see that the comeback of nuclear will be very strong, both in (the) Americas, in Europe and in Asia," Birol told The Associated Press.

**Nuclear energy reliance stays strong**

The United States is the world's largest producer of nuclear power, with 94 operational reactors accounting for about 30% of global generation of nuclear electricity. And it is increasing efforts to develop nuclear energy capacity with a goal to quadruple it by 2050.

"The world cannot power its industries, meet the demands of artificial intelligence, or secure its energy future without nuclear power," U.S. Undersecretary of State Thomas DiNanno said last month.

China operates 61 nuclear reactors and is leading the world in building new units, with nearly 40 under construction with a goal to surpass the U.S. and become the global leader in nuclear capacity.

European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen has acknowledged that it was Europe's "strategic mistake" to cut nuclear energy and outlined new initiatives to encourage building power plants.

Russia, meanwhile, has taken a strong lead in exporting its nuclear know-how, building 20 reactors worldwide.

Chernobyl's Reactor No. 4 exploded on April 26, 1986, while Ukraine was still part of the Soviet Union. The accident contaminated nearby areas and spewed radiation across Europe.

Ukraine still relies heavily on nuclear plants to generate about half of its electricity. Those plants have played a vital role after Russia sent troops into Ukraine in 2022. Moscow's forces have captured Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, and Kyiv accused Russia of a drone attack on the protective containment structure covering the damaged Chernobyl reactor.

Japan has restarted 15 reactors after reviewing the lessons of the earthquake and tsunami that damaged the Fukushima plant, and 10 more are in the process of getting approval to restart.

South Africa has the only nuclear power plant on the African continent, although Russia is building one in Egypt, and several other African nations are exploring the technology.

"The momentum we are seeing today is the result of a growing recognition that reliable, low-carbon electricity will be essential to meet the world's rising energy demand," said Rafael Grossi, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

**EU eyes nuclear expansion**

Europe sought to wean itself off Russian energy after the Ukraine conflict, but its dependence on hydrocarbons was underlined by the war in the Middle East.

The European Commission has shifted its perception of nuclear energy and views it as part of clean energy, along with wind and solar power, to achieve climate goals.

In 1990, nuclear energy accounted for about a third of Europe's electricity; now it's only about 15%, and von der Leyen has acknowledged that its reliance on imported fossil fuels puts it at a disadvantage.

"I believe that it was a strategic mistake for Europe to turn its back on a reliable, affordable source of low-emissions power," she said recently. "In the last years, we see a global revival of nuclear energy. And Europe wants to be part of it."

The EU is considering the development of Small Modular Reactors. Expected to become operational in the early 2030s, they are seen as cheaper and faster to build and more flexible than traditional reactors.

France and a few other EU members, including Sweden and Finland, have spearheaded nuclear power. On the other hand, Germany, Austria and Italy are among the EU members that outlawed its use.

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In a major policy reversal last year, Belgium repealed a law that demanded the closure of its reactors and extended their lifespan. Spain, meanwhile, still plans to phase out its nuclear capacity and shut down its seven operational reactors between 2027 and 2035.

France remains a nuclear powerhouse

With 57 reactors at 19 plants, France relies on nuclear power for nearly 70% of its electricity.

Successive governments have backed nuclear power as central to France's energy independence, undeterred by the Chernobyl disaster. In 2022, President Emmanuel Macron announced plans to build six new pressurized water reactors, aiming to cut greenhouse gas emissions and support the transition to low-carbon energy.

The COVID-19 pandemic, combined with the gas supply crunch triggered by the conflict in Ukraine, "revealed the limits of deploying renewable electricity and Europe's dependence on gas," said Nicolas Goldberg, a partner at Paris-based Columbus Consulting.

"France has therefore been reinforced in its strategy of maintaining its existing nuclear plants, which means extending their lifespan as much as possible," he said.

Germany stands firm in phasing it out

Decades of anti-nuclear protests in Germany, stoked by past accidents, had pressured successive governments to end using a technology that critics saw as unsafe and unsustainable. Germany switched off its last three nuclear reactors in 2023, the final step in plans that had been drawn up by governments of various political stripes over two decades.

A significant nuclear revival in Europe's biggest economy still looks far-fetched, despite recent talk among some in Chancellor Friedrich Merz's center-right bloc about being open to a possible future generation of small modular reactors.

"The decision is irreversible — I regret it, but that's how it is," Merz said, noting the plant operators's "consistent answer was: 'We are too far along with demolition.'"

Russian domestic nuclear expansion and exporting reactors

Russia has aggressively expanded its nuclear power capacity both domestically and internationally.

It has 34 operational reactors, including eight Chernobyl-type RBMK reactors, known as the light water graphite reactors, which account for about a quarter of all nuclear power generation. They have seen extensive modernizations, adding safety features to fix the inherent design flaw that, coupled with human error, triggered the Chernobyl disaster.

Key projects under construction include new units at the Kursk, Leningrad and Smolensk sites, a prospective plant in the Far East, and prospective floating nuclear units.

Russia also is building 20 reactors in Europe, Africa, Asia and the Middle East, and has signed contracts to launch construction in several other countries.

Russia has built the first nuclear reactor for neighboring ally Belarus, which has seen a third of its territory contaminated from the Chernobyl accident.

"Belarusian authorities are using the changed context and the so-called 'nuclear renaissance' to claim that we are acting like everyone else in the world, rather than solving the problems of Belarusians in the contaminated territories," said Irina Sukhiy, founder of the Belarus ecological group Green Network.

## Archaeological digs in Amazon provide clues about Indigenous inhabitants before colonization

By GABRIELA SÁ PESSOA and ERALDO PERES Associated Press

MACAPA, Brazil (AP) — Paving roads in the Amazon rainforest has long brought deforestation that threatens the people who live there. The same roadwork, however, has also allowed archaeologists to get glimpses of the region's past long before Europeans arrived to reshape it.

The construction often requires archaeological surveys before the paving starts, and some of the latest discoveries have emerged along the BR-156 highway in Brazil's northern state of Amapa. Among the findings so far from nine dig sites: pottery vases that may be funerary urns, as well as small artifacts that



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resemble human faces.

"What we now about the region's past is also tied to the opening created by these projects, which gives our relationship with them a somewhat ambivalent character," said Lúcio Flávio Costa Leite, who manages the Archaeological Research Center at Amapá's Institute for Scientific and Technological Research. "At the same time, the knowledge we gain about these sites leads us to pay closer attention to these regions, including by adopting permanent protection measures."

Scientists say recent research has reinforced understanding of the region's past not as a human desert, but rather as a landscape shaped by interconnected societies long before Columbus arrived. The material found along BR-156, for example, included pottery in multiple styles and techniques that reflected influences from communities ranging from Brazil's Para state to the Caribbean.

It's been cleaned and analyzed by a team working for the National Department of Transport Infrastructure. One of the archaeologists, Manoel Fabiano da Silva Santos, said the layers of the Amazon soil he excavated are a historic timeline.

In the upper layers, he found items such as Portuguese porcelain and nails linked to European occupation.

"Digging deeper, we uncovered pottery and ceramics associated with earlier Indigenous presence, marking the site's transition before and after the arrival of colonizers," Santos said.

The artifacts will eventually go to Amapá's state collection, overseen by Costa Leite, which includes about 530,000 pieces. The oldest piece is around 6,140 years old, confirming a long human presence across Amapá, he said.

The artifacts offer insight into how ancient Indigenous societies lived, died and interacted with the rainforest.

"Here is something I often debate with my students -- we usually think of technology as computers and microchips," Costa Leite said, walking through shelves of ancient pottery. "But all of this required careful reading of the landscape and deliberate choices of materials."

Indigenous design behind an intriguing monument

One of the most impressive historic areas in Amapá is in the city of Calcoene, where a 1,000-year-old stone monument made up of 127 carved monoliths arranged in a circle about 30 meters (98 feet) in diameter, set in open grassland amid the rainforest and bordered by a slow river.

Some have dubbed the Archaeological Park of the Solstice the "Stonehenge of the Amazon" for its resemblance to the British monument. Researchers found that the stones were positioned so that during the winter solstice in the Northern Hemisphere they marked the exact point where the sun rises, said archaeologist Mariana Petry Cabral, a professor at the Federal University of Minas Gerais who was part of the team that began digging at the site some two decades ago.

"It's hard to say exactly what all the stones mean, but what we do know is that they are not from the site itself. They were brought from other nearby locations," she said.

Subsequent research and excavations found the site also served as a burial ground. Radiocarbon dating showed it was occupied for hundreds of years, beginning around 1,100 years ago, she said.

The site, discovered by scientists in 2005, can be visited with prior approval from Amapá's Institute for Scientific and Technological Research. At the same time, the site is going through the process to become a national park, which will allow more people to visit.

Such archaeological sites are protected by Brazilian law, which prohibits them being altered. That adds a layer of protection for surrounding rainforest.

Ancient roads point to connected Amazon societies

Modern archaeological and historical ecology research shows that Indigenous peoples not only lived in the Amazon for centuries but also shaped it. They managed and cultivated the landscape through long-term, sustainable practices, said Eduardo Neves, an archaeologist professor at the University of Sao Paulo.

Neves has studied the Amazon rainforest for more than 30 years and, since 2023, has led the Amazon Revealed project, which uses satellite scans to identify archaeological sites hidden beneath the forest canopy.

Scans have revealed roads linking archaeological sites and buried patterns in the rainforest that point to

repeated occupation and deliberate landscape modification. Together, Neves said, the features suggest large settlements.

Archaeologists had long suspected such connections, Neves added, but technology has made it possible to see their broader geographic reach. The scans show networks of roads connecting clusters of settlements across the forest, most clearly in southern Amazonas state and Acre.

"When people think of an Indigenous tribe, they often imagine a small village isolated in the middle of the forest. But evidence shows a high degree of interconnectivity linking different settlements," Neves said.

"Amapa is a key piece that helps us see how dynamic and active these populations were, and how they maintained networks of exchange that have been in place for millennia," Cabral said.

## **Navy Secretary John Phelan is leaving in the latest departure of a top defense leader**

By KONSTANTIN TOROPIN and BEN FINLEY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Navy Secretary John Phelan is leaving his job, the Pentagon abruptly announced Wednesday, the first head of a military service to depart during President Donald Trump's second term but just the latest top defense leader to step down or be ousted.

No reason was given for the unexpected departure of the Navy's top civilian official, coming as the sea service has imposed a blockade of Iranian ports and is targeting ships linked to Tehran around the world during a tenuous ceasefire in the war. Another Trump loyalist is taking over as acting head of the Navy: Undersecretary Hung Cao, a 25-year Navy combat veteran who ran unsuccessful campaigns for the U.S. Senate and House in Virginia.

Phelan's departure is the latest in a series of shakeups of top leadership at the Pentagon, coming just weeks after Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth fired the Army's top uniformed officer, Gen. Randy George. Hegseth also has fired several other top generals, admirals and defense leaders since taking office last year.

The firings began in February 2025, when Hegseth removed military leaders, including Adm. Lisa Franchetti, the Navy's top uniformed officer, and Gen. Jim Slife, the No. 2 leader at the Air Force. Trump also fired Gen. Charles "CQ" Brown Jr. as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Showing how sudden the latest move was, Phelan had addressed a large crowd of sailors and industry professionals on Tuesday at the Navy's annual conference in Washington and spoke with reporters about his agenda. He also hosted the leaders of the House Armed Services Committee to discuss the Navy's budget request and efforts to build more ships, according to a social media post from his office.

Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell said in a post on X that Phelan was "departing the administration, effective immediately."

John Phelan had been a major Trump donor

Phelan had not served in the military or had a civilian leadership role in the service before Trump nominated him for secretary in late 2024. He was seen as an outsider being brought in to shake up the Navy.

Phelan was a major donor to Trump's campaign and had founded the private investment firm Rugger Management LLC. According to his biography, Phelan's primary exposure to the military came from an advisory position he held on the Spirit of America, a nonprofit that supported the defense of Ukraine and the defense of Taiwan.

The Associated Press could not immediately reach Phelan's office for comment. The White House did not answer questions and instead responded by sending a link to Parnell's statement.

Phelan is leaving during a busy time for the Navy. It has three aircraft carriers deployed in or heading to the Middle East, while the Trump administration says all the armed forces are poised to resume combat operations against Iran should the ceasefire expire.

The Navy also has maintained a heavy presence in the Caribbean, where it has been part of a campaign of strikes against alleged drug boats. It also played a major role in the capture of Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro in January.

Hung Cao, new acting Navy secretary, ran unsuccessful bids for Congress

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Taking over as acting secretary is Cao, who ran a failed U.S. Senate bid in Virginia to try to unseat Democratic Sen. Tim Kaine in 2024. He had Trump's endorsement in the crowded Republican primary and gave a speech at the 2024 Republican National Convention.

Cao's biography includes fleeing Vietnam with his family as a child in the 1970s. In a campaign video for his Senate bid, he compared Vietnam's communist regime during the Cold War to the administration of Democratic President Joe Biden.

During his one debate with Kaine, Cao criticized COVID-19 vaccine mandates for service members as well as the military's diversity, equity and inclusion efforts.

"When you're using a drag queen to recruit for the Navy, that's not the people we want," Cao said from the debate stage. "What we need is alpha males and alpha females who are going to rip out their own guts, eat them and ask for seconds. Those are the young men and women that are going to win wars."

Trump and Hegseth have railed against DEI in the military, banning the efforts and firing people accused of supporting such programs.

When he ran for Congress in Virginia in 2022, Cao expressed opposition to aid for Ukraine during a debate against his Democratic opponent.

"My heart goes out to the Ukrainian people. ... But right now we're borrowing \$55 billion from China to pay for the war in Ukraine. Not only that, we're depleting our national strategic reserves," Cao said.

Cao graduated from the prestigious Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology in Alexandria, Virginia, before attending the U.S. Naval Academy.

He was commissioned as a special operations officer and went on to serve with SEAL teams and special forces in Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia before retiring at the rank of captain, according to his Senate campaign biography.

Cao also earned a master's degree in physics and had fellowships at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University.

Since becoming Navy undersecretary, Cao has championed returning to duty service members that refused a Biden-era mandate to take the COVID-19 vaccine.

## **Trump threats against Iran are a boon for prediction markets, including some backed by his son**

By BERNARD CONDON AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Will President Donald Trump send troops into Iran? Will he rename the Strait of Hormuz after himself? Will he post again praising Allah?

No one knows the answers, but online betting companies that allow people to wager on Trump policies and statements are profiting — including some backed by his oldest son.

Prediction markets love the president's unpredictability, his need to keep people guessing about his next move or social media post, leading to more wagers in these betting venues and more fees for them. That includes Polymarket, a company Donald Trump Jr. has a stake in, and Kalshi, a company he advises.

These sites have to come up with new betting lines on current events everyday, and Trump Jr.'s famously fickle father has proven to be a rich source of will-he-or-won't-he questions.

When a wagering event on Polymarket asked whether Trump was likely to send troops into Iran, nearly 100,000 bets were placed on April 8, leading to the biggest trading day of the year up to then.

And Trump's policies and social media comments generate bets beyond the war-related ones: Who will Trump back to run Venezuela? Will his insults of Pope Leo XIV continue? Will he seize Greenland?

"Trump is the guy. He makes the market possible," said Kwok Ping Tsang, a Virginia Tech economist who has studied Polymarket. "He's so unpredictable."

Sports wagers make up the largest portion of the volume on prediction markets, but politics runs a close second, according to crypto analysis firm Dune.

People are also betting "Yes" or "No" on all kinds of other things — the price of gold, the winner of "Survivor," even the weather. The cost of the wager, in cents per dollar, reflects the number of people making

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the same bet, with a price of 49 cents for "Yes," for instance, reflecting 49% odds.

The betting has drawn bipartisan criticism for inviting insider trading but the president seems to be a big fan, applying a light regulatory touch and helping the industry expand. His family company, the Trump Organization, is even working on opening its own prediction market, called Truth Predict.

One of the biggest fee generators lately has been Trump's approach to the Iran war, notably his Truth Social post on April 5 demanding the country "Open the F— Strait."

Trading on Polymarket soared with "Yes" or "No" wagers on whether an invasion was imminent, according to Dune, only to be surpassed on April 7 by betting on another question — Will there be a ceasefire? — when Trump posted ominously that a "whole civilization will die tonight."

In total, 413 million bets on the Iran war were made risking more than \$100 million from Sunday, April 5, through Wednesday, April 8, the day after Trump announced a ceasefire, according to Dune.

In a report after the surge, Dune called Trump an "unpredictability machine" and marveled at how his "governing-by-tweet" style sends trading volumes soaring.

Asked whether the president's son should be profiting from a business benefitting from his father's actions, a Trump Jr. spokesman called the question "fact-free Democratic propaganda."

"Don does not interface with the federal government as part of his role with any company that he invests in or advises and has no influence or involvement with administration policies relating to prediction markets," said the spokesman, Andrew Surabian.

Polymarket didn't respond to a request for comment.

The betting venues have jumped in popularity since Trump was reelected in November 2024 in part because they correctly predicted, unlike many pundits, that he would win decisively.

Since then the Trump administration has sued states trying to ban prediction markets under no-gambling laws. The head of the industry's chief regulator, the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, has even promoted the business publicly, calling the online bets in a Wall Street Journal op-ed "exciting products."

Benefiting particularly has been Polymarket, which was banned from operating anywhere in the U.S. in 2022 after the Biden administration fined it for running an unregistered exchange. It recently got permission to return, and its value has soared.

The company is now worth \$9.6 billion, according to research firm PitchBook, a nearly tenfold increase in eight months since a venture capital fund in which Trump Jr. is a partner last invested.

Just how much Trump Jr. is benefiting from the increase in value is unclear because Polymarket is private and doesn't release ownership stakes. Kalshi, which took on Trump Jr. as an adviser last year, is also private.

As for profiting off turmoil and war, Trump Jr. has other possible ways besides the prediction markets.

Through his venture capital fund he also owns pieces of aerospace, defense and technology companies seeking Pentagon contracts and other federal agency dollars. Separately, he and his brother, Eric, just struck a deal giving them stakes in a military drone maker not just selling to the U.S. forces but also pitching to Gulf countries under Iranian attack and beholden to their father for U.S. military protection in a war he started.

Asked last month about the drone company potentially profiting off his father's position as president, Eric Trump sent The Associated Press a statement saying, "I am incredibly proud to invest in companies I believe in."

Critics in Congress, virtually all Democrats, have decried what they believe is blatant profiting off the presidency, and are waiting for the midterms to do something about it, possibly voting for impeachment.

But whether that happens is anyone's guess — or to be more specific, tens of thousands of guesses.

In Polymarket trading, those betting that Trump would get impeached by the end of his term were putting the chances at 13% at the start of the year. But that has changed dramatically after his "civilization wipe out" threat and calls from Democrats to oust him from office.

By Tuesday, the odds had jumped to 66%.



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## US military says it seizes another oil tanker associated with Iran

By JON GAMBRELL and JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The U.S. military on Thursday seized another tanker associated with the smuggling of Iranian oil, ratcheting up a standoff with Iran a day after its paramilitary Revolutionary Guards took control of two vessels in the crucial Strait of Hormuz.

The Defense Department released video footage of U.S. forces on the deck of the oil tanker Majestic X, which was seized in the Indian Ocean.

"We will continue global maritime enforcement to disrupt illicit networks and interdict vessels providing material support to Iran, wherever they operate," a Pentagon statement said.

Ship-tracking data showed the Majestic X in the Indian Ocean between Sri Lanka and Indonesia, roughly the same location as the oil tanker Tifani, earlier seized by American forces. It had been bound for Zhoushan, China.

There was no immediate response from Iran on the news of the seizure.

The seizure comes a day after Iran attacked three cargo ships in the strait, capturing two of them, in a move that intensified its assault on shipping in the key waterway through which 20% of the world's traded oil passes in peacetime.

The Majestic X is a Guyana-flagged oil tanker. It previously had been named Phonix and had been sanctioned by the U.S. Treasury Department in 2024 for smuggling Iranian crude oil in contravention of U.S. sanctions on the Islamic Republic.

On Tuesday, U.S. President Donald Trump extended a ceasefire while maintaining an American blockade of Iranian ports.

The standoff between the U.S. and Iran has effectively choked off nearly all exports through the strait with no end in sight.

The conflict has already sent gas prices skyrocketing far beyond the region and raised the cost of food and a wide array of other products. The price of Brent crude oil, the international standard, nosed over \$100 per barrel, marking a 35% increase from prewar levels, but stock markets still appear to be shrugging it off.

The European Union energy commissioner, Dan Jørgensen, warned Wednesday of lasting impact for consumers and businesses, likening it to other major energy crises over the last half-century. He said the disruption is costing Europe around 500 million euros (\$600 million) each day.

## Today in History: April 24, the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, April 24, the 114th day of 2026. There are 251 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On April 24, 1916, Irish republicans launched the Easter Rising, a rebellion against British rule in Ireland. Though the rebels surrendered to British forces six days later, the uprising set the stage for republican victories in the Irish general election of 1918 and the establishment of the Irish Free State via the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1922.

Also on this date:

In 1800, President John Adams signed legislation providing \$5,000 for books for use by Congress, effectively launching the Library of Congress that would later become one of the world's largest public collections of millions of cataloged items including manuscripts, maps, sheet music and sound recordings.

In 1915, in what is considered the start of the Armenian genocide, the Ottoman Empire began rounding up Armenian political and cultural leaders in Constantinople.

In 1960, rioting erupted in Biloxi, Mississippi, after Black protesters staging a "wade-in" at a whites-only beach were attacked by a crowd of white people.

In 1967, Soviet cosmonaut Vladimir Komarov was killed when his Soyuz 1 spacecraft smashed into the Earth after his parachutes failed to deploy properly during reentry. He was the first human spaceflight

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fatality.

In 1980, the United States launched Operation Eagle Claw, an unsuccessful attempt to free 53 American hostages in Iran that resulted in the deaths of eight U.S. service members.

In 1990, Space Shuttle Discovery blasted off from Cape Canaveral, Florida, carrying the \$1.5 billion Hubble Space Telescope.

In 1995, the final bomb linked to the Unabomber exploded inside the Sacramento, California, offices of the California Forestry Association, killing chief lobbyist Gilbert B. Murray. (Theodore Kaczynski was later sentenced to four consecutive life terms in prison for a series of bombings that killed three people and injured 23 others; he died by suicide in 2023.)

In 2013, in Bangladesh, a shoddily constructed eight-story commercial building housing garment factories collapsed, killing more than 1,100 people.

In 2018, former police officer Joseph DeAngelo was arrested at his home near Sacramento after DNA linked him to crimes attributed to the Golden State Killer; authorities believed he committed 13 murders and more than 50 rapes in the 1970s and 1980s. (DeAngelo would plead guilty in 2020 to 13 counts of murder and be sentenced to life in prison without parole.)

In 2021, the United States formally declared the systematic killing and deportation of more than a million Armenians by Ottoman Empire forces in the early 20th century was "genocide." President Joe Biden used that exact word after the White House had avoided it for decades for fear of alienating its ally Turkey.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Shirley MacLaine is 92. Actor-singer-filmmaker Barbra Streisand is 84. Fashion designer Jean Paul Gaultier is 74. Actor Eric Bogosian is 73. Actor Michael O'Keefe is 71. Actor-comedian Cedric the Entertainer is 62. Actor Djimon Hounsou (JEYE'-mihn OHN'-soo) is 62. Actor Aidan Gillen is 58. Actor Rory McCann is 57. Latin pop singer Alejandro Fernandez is 55. Baseball Hall of Famer Chipper Jones is 54. Actor Derek Luke is 52. Singer-TV personality Kelly Clarkson is 44. Country singer Carly Pearce is 36. Actor-musician Joe Keery is 34. Actor Jack Quaid is 34. Actor Jordan Fisher is 32. Golfer Lydia Ko is 29. Singer Skylar Simone is 24.