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Thursday, April 30

Senior Menu: Oven fried chicken, sweet potatoes, green beans, fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Cereal.

School Lunch: Lasagna bake, green beans.

Grades 3-5 ELA & Math Testing

Girls Golf at Redfield, 10 a.m.

5th Grade Girls Basketball, 4 p.m., Elementary Gym

Pickleball, 6 p.m., Elementary Gym

High School Spring Concert/Awards Night/Art Show, 7 p.m., GHS Gym

Friday, May 1

Senior Menu: Tuna salad, California blend, fruit.

School Breakfast: Egg wraps.

School Lunch: Chicken Fajitas.

Grades 3-5 ELA & Math Testing

High School Track at Sisseton, 11 a.m.

Middle School Track at Oakes, 3 p.m.



Saturday, May 2

Citywide Rummage Sale Day

NEC Girls Fast Pitch Softball Tournament at Redfield, 10 a.m.

Baseball at Redfield vs. Rapid City Central and Redfield Area.

Sunday, May 3

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m. (Senior Sunday/Faith Forever Scholarships Awarded).

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

United Methodist: Worship with communion 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.; Cody Swanson Piano Recital, 3 p.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, 10:30 a.m.

JVT Practice, 1 p.m., Arena

Annie, the Musical, 4 p.m., GHS Gym

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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.

Voting Rights Act Curtailed

The Supreme Court yesterday limited the Voting Rights Act, a Civil Rights-era law intended to protect minority voting power. Several states are expected to use the ruling to redraw their maps; within an hour of the decision, Florida lawmakers passed a map possibly eliminating up to four Democrat-held districts, including one that is heavily Puerto Rican.

In a 6-3 decision, the conservative majority struck down Louisiana's second majority-Black electoral district, which stretches diagonally across the state. Black voters had advocated for the district, arguing the previous map diluted their influence by concentrating them into one of six districts despite making up about one-third of the population. The majority, however, cited increased minority voter registration and turnout as evidence that majority-minority districts are no longer necessary. They outlined an updated framework that interprets the Voting Rights Act as only barring maps that intentionally limit minority voting power.

Separately, the court yesterday weighed the Trump administration's effort to remove legal protections from hundreds of thousands of Haitian and Syrian immigrants. A ruling is expected this summer.

Miranda Priestly Returns

The sequel to 2006's "The Devil Wears Prada" debuts this weekend, projected to bring in \$73M-\$80M domestically and \$180M globally in its opening weekend. The first trailer was 20th Century Studios' most-watched in history within 24 hours, reaching 222 million views across platforms.

The original movie was based on the 2003 bestselling novel by Lauren Weisberger, itself allegedly informed by Weisberger's experience working as an assistant for Vogue's long-term editor in chief Anna Wintour. (Wintour stepped down from the role last year after 37 years.) Meryl Streep earned an Oscar nomination for her portrayal of Miranda Priestly, with lines including "that's all" and a monologue on the fashion cycle that produced a mass-market cerulean sweater.

Media outlets like Vogue have been repositioning print magazines as collectibles amid a decadeslong decline in readers' print consumption.

Tupac Shakur Lawsuit

Tupac Shakur's stepbrother filed a wrongful death lawsuit this week against Duane "Keefe D" Davis and dozens of unnamed co-conspirators.

Davis was charged in 2023 with first-degree murder in the rapper's death. He was one of four people allegedly present in the vehicle during the 1996 drive-by shooting in Las Vegas. Police say he planned the hit alongside his since-deceased nephew after a fight with Shakur in a casino. Davis has pleaded not guilty despite previously claiming to have been in the passenger seat; his criminal trial is set to begin in August.

The new lawsuit claims Davis was part of a broader conspiracy and cites statements in a Netflix documentary suggesting Sean "Diddy" Combs offered Davis \$1M to kill Shakur. Combs denies involvement and is not named in the lawsuit.

Tupac Shakur was a six-time Grammy nominee with five No. 1 albums, including three released posthumously.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

DiVine, a Jack Dorsey-backed reboot of 2010s short-form video app Vine, launches to the public. Silent Tactic is the first horse to scratch from Saturday's Kentucky Derby, citing a foot injury. PGA Cadillac Championship begins today, marking the \$20M, 72-player event's first time at Miami's Trump National Doral since 2016.

Science & Technology

Nerve fibers within skin cancer melanoma can slow tumor growth, challenging the conventional view that nervous system drives cancer growth; finding may inspire future anticancer therapies.

Study finds dog brains began shrinking about 5,000 years ago, even though evidence shows they have lived alongside humans for over 15,000 years, suggesting domestication was a more gradual process than previously believed.

Virtual violin uses physics to let violin makers—or luthiers—adjust design and sound before carving; luthiers previously had to wait for the finished product to hear the results of their hard work.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close near flatline (S&P 500 -0.0%, Dow -0.6%, Nasdaq +0.0%).

Federal Reserve holds rates steady, with most dissenting votes since 1992; Chair Jerome Powell to stay as governor after chairmanship ends next month.

Bill Ackman's Pershing Square USA sinks 18% in stock market debut after the combined initial public offering for the closed-end fund and Ackman's alternative asset manager, Pershing Square Inc., raises \$5B.

Finnish elevator maker Kone acquires German rival TK Elevator in roughly \$34B deal, creating the world's largest lift maker.

Uberto add hotel bookings to its app through new Expedia partnership.

Politics & World Affairs

Former FBI Director James Comey appears in court after being indicted on charges of making threats against President Donald Trump last year.

Pentagon official says the Iran war has cost \$25B in testimony before Congress.

Man stabs two Jewish men in London in what police are calling a terrorist incident; one suspect is in custody.



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Dunker claims javelin title as Rob Luecke events conclude in Warner

WARNER — The final events of the Rob Luecke Invitational were completed Wednesday in Warner, where Groton Area's Rylee Dunker added another highlight performance for the Tigers.

Dunker captured the girls javelin title with a throw of 99 feet, continuing her strong season in the event and securing top honors against a competitive field.

Teammate Avery Crank also contributed points for Groton Area, placing sixth with a throw of 83 feet, 7 inches.

The javelin competition wrapped up the final pieces of the Rob Luecke Invitational, which was split between Groton and Warner earlier in the week. Groton Area's strong showing in the field event added to an already impressive overall performance by the Tigers across both the boys and girls divisions.



A vibrant poster for a High School Spring Concert. The title "High School" is in a blue script font, "SPRING" is in large green block letters, and "Concert" is in a purple script font. Below this, "AWARDS NIGHT" and "ART SHOW" are written in bold blue block letters, separated by small stars. To the left of the text is a black treble clef with musical notes. To the right is a gold trophy with a purple "G" on it. At the bottom, there is a purple banner with a play button icon and the text "CONCERT TO BE LIVESTREAMED ON GDILIVE.COM". Below the banner, the date "THURSDAY, APRIL 30" and time "7 P.M." are listed, followed by the location "GHS GYM" with a location pin icon. The poster is decorated with various flowers (pink tulips, yellow daisies, purple tulips, pink daisies) and a painting of a landscape on an easel with a palette and brushes.

High School
SPRING
Concert
**AWARDS
NIGHT
ART SHOW**

CONCERT TO BE
LIVESTREAMED ON
GDILIVE.COM

THURSDAY,
APRIL 30

7 P.M.

GHS GYM

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Groton Area long distance 1600m runners senior Jayden Schwan (above) and freshman Riley Schellenberger (below).



Rob Luecke Photos by Bruce Babcock



Jace Johnson leads the first leg of winning 4x800m relay.



Keegan Tracy, lane 5, and Lincoln Krause, lane 1, start the 100m race.



Junior Taegan Hanten and Freshman Ella Kettner cross the hurdles in the 300m intermediate hurdle race.

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Makenna Krause hands off to Taryn Traphagen during the winning girls Sprint Medley Relay (SMR 1600m)



Senior Keegen Tracy leads around the curve winning the 400m race.



Sophomore Ryelle Gilbert anchors the winning leg of the SMR 1600m relay.



Junior Emerlee Jones crossing the hurdle on the right, places third in the 300m Intermediate Hurdles.

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8th grader Ryder Schwan hands off to Freshman JJ Muller in SMR 1600m.



Sophomore Suri Jetto runs the 200m dash.



Senior Rylee Dunker leads her heat in the 200m dash. Raquel Tracy is in 2nd place behind Riley.



The ever popular Flame Thrower Relay hands off a wrapped hamburger. Only Shot Put/Discuss throwers. 2 girls/2 boys.

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McKenna Tietz leads off, Taryn Traphagen hands off to Ashlynn Warrington, and Ashlynn Warrington hands off to anchor Kella Tracy to finish second in the 4x400m relay.



Brothers Jayden Schwan hands off to Jordan Schwan, Jordan Schwan hands off to Kyson Kucker, and Kyson Kucker hands off to anchor Ethan Kroll to place 4th in the 4x400m relay.

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SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

South Dakota agrees to \$700,000 contract for Rushmore fireworks, including backup light show

BY: MEGHAN O'BRIEN

South Dakota's contract for a July 3 fireworks show at Mount Rushmore is worth twice as much as the last show six years ago.

The state Department of Tourism entered into a \$700,000 contract on April 9 with California-based Pyro Spectaculars to produce the fireworks show, and for "lighting elements that can be utilized if environmental conditions require an alternative to fireworks," according to the department. The contract includes a sliding scale of partial payments if the fireworks are canceled — the later the cancellation, the higher the payment.

Pyro Spectaculars did not directly respond to Searchlight's request for detailed information about what visitors can expect from the "lighting elements," but its website features the company's work on drone shows.

The funding for this year's show is from the Department of Tourism's budget. Department officials have said the fireworks bring worldwide media attention to the state that's equivalent to millions of dollars' worth of free advertising.

The contract authorizes a "go/no-go" protocol, "which may be exercised by oral notice at any time" up to 7 p.m. the day of the show by the National Park Service for inclement weather, including rain, high winds or "other conditions" that could endanger visitors or damage the memorial.

One of the risks from fireworks is falling embers sparking wildfires in the forest surrounding the memorial. Parts of Pennington County, where Mount Rushmore is located, are experiencing some of the most extreme drought conditions in the state, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor. Two recent wildfires in the area burned more than 14,000 acres combined.

The event, officially known as South Dakota's Freedom 250 Mount Rushmore Fireworks Celebration, in honor of the nation's 250th birthday, will have 4,800 attendees who won tickets in an online lottery. That's less than the 7,500 tickets awarded for the 2020 event, which was attended by President Trump. He has been invited to this year's event but has not committed to attending.

The memorial will be closed July 3 except for visitors with tickets for the event.

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

Lab-grown meat could still be a long way from widespread availability when SD's new ban expires

One expert says there's a 'generational-level' amount of time between now and mass market availability

BY: MEGHAN O'BRIEN

South Dakota's new five-year ban on cell-cultured protein targets a product whose path to mass market availability is operating on "generational-level timescales," according to a scientist dedicated to the topic.

Elliot Swartz works for the Good Food Institute, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit that describes itself

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as working to “advance alternative proteins.”

“There might be local retailers that have a few products on store shelves, but there won’t be a nationwide Walmart-, Costco-type of cultivated meat product within the next five years in the United States,” Swartz said. “Over the next five years, more and more products will be reviewed, and we will get an even more thorough understanding.”

Both the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Food and Drug Administration began approving the sale of cell-cultured products in 2023. While a few products have been approved, there’s really only one product for sale now, Swartz said — cell-cultivated salmon — and it’s on the menu at four restaurants.

Rep. Tesa Schwans, R-Hartford, who supported a ban on cell-cultured protein, described the creation process as “a petri dish that’s full of hormones and sludge.” It’s actually more like “a beer brewery,” according to Swartz.

Cell-cultured protein, sometimes described as lab-grown meat, is produced by taking cells from an animal. The cells are grown in a controlled environment and fed nutrients until they become a large enough piece of tissue to be used as a food product.

It’s a relatively new science, according to Christina Bakker, a South Dakota State University Extension meat science specialist.

“Right now, most companies are kind of in that ramping up of the production phase. They’re trying to get it to a point where the product can be affordable,” Bakker said. “You’re not seeing it in your normal grocery stores or anything like that, so for the most part, it’s not widely available.”

SDSU does not do research on cell-cultured protein and does not collaborate with any companies that produce the product.

Moratorium signed after ban was vetoed

State Rep. Julie Auch, R-Lesterville, attempted during the recently concluded annual legislative session to add cell-cultured protein to South Dakota’s list of “adulterated foods,” which would have essentially banned the products permanently. She told fellow lawmakers that she introduced the bill with concern for the destruction of the livestock industry, which she said is being orchestrated by people claiming the industry is bad for the environment.

The bill made it to the governor’s desk, where it was vetoed.

Lawmakers shouldn’t ban a product because they don’t like it, Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden said. He instead signed into law a five-year prohibition on the sale, manufacture and distribution of cell-cultured protein.

“I think we need to tap the brakes on this product and have a little more research,” Rhoden told reporters in February.

The South Dakota Cattlemen’s Association does not support cell-cultured protein, but it testified against a permanent ban.

“Cell-cultivated products are no competition to real beef raised by real producers, and consumers do not need the government to tell them that,” the association’s president Craig Bieber told South Dakota Searchlight in an emailed statement.

The association also advocates at the national level for “an explicit prohibition on the use of any taxpayer dollars being used to purchase these products in schools, the military or in any nutrition program, and more transparency to address concerns rather than relying on a patchwork of state bans and moratoriums.” South Dakota lawmakers approved a law last year with prohibitions on the spending of taxpayer money to support lab-grown meat, with an exception for university research, and also approved a law requiring lab-grown meat to be clearly labeled.

The state’s Animal Industry Board, which oversees the state meat inspection program, spoke in favor of the labeling requirement.

“One of the foundations of meat inspection is truth and accuracy in labeling,” said Mendel Miller, the state veterinarian and executive secretary of the board. “When that customer picks up a package of meat, they know exactly what’s in the product.”

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Motivations, concerns

Cell-cultivated producers don't want to eliminate conventional meat production, according to Tamar Lieberman, a legislative specialist with the Good Food Institute. But she said the availability of cell-cultured protein could help in times of crises like avian flu or other livestock disease outbreaks.

"The way that meat is produced right now is very vulnerable to supply chain disruptions," Lieberman said. "Having additional ways to feed people meat — if they choose it, of course — in times of disruption is going to be critical."

Part of the drive for an alternative protein comes from the global rise in demand for meat products, Swartz said.

"We already know that there's some negative externalities that come alongside meat production, in terms of the amount of land that's used, water that's used, and other resources that are impacted," Swartz said. "This is a way for us to essentially help meet that growing demand for protein, while hopefully taking away some of those negative externalities that exist with the current system."

Opponents of cell-cultured products alleged during South Dakota's legislative session that the products contain carcinogens. Others raised concerns about an alleged lack of studies and transparency about the production process.

Bakker, the SDSU meat science specialist, said future research could unearth concerns, but "right now, what we see is that we're not concerned, from a scientific side, about the safety." The industry will rely on USDA and FDA standards that measure safety from chemical, physical or biological standpoints, Bakker said.

Time to learn

The five-year ban in South Dakota will give researchers more time to help answer questions for shoppers, Swartz said, though the products likely still won't be readily available at mass market stores when the ban expires.

"This is really sort of generational-level timescales that we're talking about here, rather than year over year, suddenly there's going to be cultivated meat at Walmart," Swartz said.

Miller also said the temporary ban could help answer some of the questions people might have about the production process or end product.

"It's a good step to take until we learn a little bit more about the product itself," Miller said. "It's just a matter of the unknowns of what the product is, I guess, from our side of things."

Miller said people should trust inspection systems, but he understands the concern.

"If there's confidence in the system and confidence in the way products are approved, that says a lot right there, that it's been approved," he said. "However, it is kind of on the cutting edge of technology, so there probably are a lot of things that are unique to that product rather than past things that have been approved."

The first products consumers will likely see in stores are crumbled products that replicate chicken nuggets or ground meat — something that is "texturally, a little bit easier to deal with," said Amanda Blair, the assistant director of SDSU West River Research and Extension.

"I don't know when we're going to see a fully formed steak or pork chop made from these types of products" using the cell culture process, Blair said. Replicating a whole "muscle cut" like a steak or pork chop would be more difficult for bioprocessors, she said.

Seven other states have banned cell-cultured proteins. A federal appeals court recently upheld Florida's ban on cell-culture proteins after one of the nation's two approved cell-cultured chicken producers tried to overturn it. A lawsuit against Texas' temporary ban is ongoing.

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

Suspect charged with attempt to assassinate Trump intended mass casualties, prosecutors say

BY: JACOB FISCHLER

The suspect in the attack at the White House Correspondents' Dinner on Saturday night was prepared for a mass casualty event, prosecutors said in a document filed in federal court early Wednesday.

Jeanine Pirro, the U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia, and three assistants in her office signed a memorandum asking a judge to keep 31-year-old Cole Tomas Allen detained as he awaits trial. They said his "actions were premeditated, violent, and calculated to cause death," and he sought to "express his political opinions through violence."

"Had the defendant achieved his intended outcome, he would have brought about one of the darkest days in American history," they wrote. "The defendant traveled across the country with the explicit aim to kill the President of the United States."

A detention hearing is set for Thursday. Allen is charged with attempting to assassinate President Donald Trump, as well as interstate transportation of a firearm with intent to commit a felony and discharge of a firearm during a crime of violence.

He faces up to life in prison if convicted of attempting to kill the president. Trump, first lady Melania Trump and Cabinet members all safely evacuated the Washington Hilton ballroom.

The document lists a host of weapons, ammunition and other supplies Allen had in his possession at the time of his arrest.

He had a "12-gauge pumpaction shotgun with one spent cartridge in the barrel and eight unfired cartridges in the magazine tube," the document reads. He carried additional ammunition in a Velcro strapped to his body and in a separate pouch, the prosecutors said.

He also carried a fully loaded .38 caliber pistol with two additional magazines.

The document also shows a mirror selfie Allen appears to have taken in his hotel room just before the planned attack. He is fully armed and outfitted in the photo.

The White House Correspondents' Dinner, dating back more than 100 years, is an annual black-tie event, often attended by the president, that hosts more than 2,000 journalists, administration officials and other guests at the Washington Hilton.

President Donald Trump, Vice President JD Vance, House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., and members of the Cabinet attended Saturday's dinner, along with many members of Congress.

Allen, who traveled by train from Los Angeles to Washington, D.C., prior to the attack, sent a note just prior to attempting to rush the Capital Hilton ballroom, brandishing a gun.

He did not name Trump but said, "Administration officials (not including Mr. Patel): they are targets, prioritized from highest-ranking to lowest."

Prosecutors argued his intent was to inflict mass harm and disrupt the government.

"Had the defendant successfully made it into the ballroom, he not only could have killed or injured dozens of people, but he could have destabilized the entire federal government, given the number of high-ranking government officials present," the Department of Justice said. "The defendant sought to express his political opinions through violence. The Court should consider the identities of the defendant's intended victims and the significant roles they play in governing this country to assess the nature of the charged offenses."

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 Supreme Court seems to side with Trump actions to strip legal status for Haitians, Syrians

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Supreme Court appeared poised Wednesday to uphold the Trump administration's efforts to end temporary legal protections for 350,000 Haitians and 6,000 Syrians.

The decision could also affect several other lawsuits related to what is known as Temporary Protected Status that are pending in lower courts. The suits challenge the Trump administration's procedures to terminate country protections, which have sharply raised deportation risks for more than 1 million immigrants.

So far, the Trump administration has ended TPS destinations for 13 countries, out of 17 that were active at the start of President Donald Trump's administration.

Arguing on behalf of the Trump administration, U.S. Solicitor General D. John Sauer said that federal courts, under the law, cannot review the executive branch's decision to end or extend a TPS designation.

"They challenge the very kind of foreign policy-laden judgments that are traditionally entrusted to the political branches," Sauer said of TPS recipients who are suing to remain in the United States.

But two lawyers, Ahilan Arulanantham, representing Syrians, and Geoffrey Pipoly, representing Haitians, argued that their clients could challenge a lack of proper procedure that then-Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem took in ending those TPS designations.

That would include not undertaking a review of country conditions before making a determination, the lawyers said.

Most of the questioning came from the three liberal justices, who grilled Sauer and pressed him on Trump's racist remarks disparaging Haitians.

The conservative justices, who hold a 6-3 majority, asked Sauer only a handful of questions, and seemed skeptical of Arulanantham and Pipoly's argument, signaling that they may already agree with the Trump administration's position that the courts cannot review TPS terminations.

A decision is not expected until June or early July. Both cases would go back to the lower courts to continue on the merits argument.

But if the Supreme Court agrees with the Trump administration, then TPS holders from Haiti and Syria could be subject to deportation.

The effort to end TPS designation is part of President Donald Trump's broader effort to curtail immigration and strip legal status for people, creating thousands of newly unauthorized immigrants in order to subject them to his mass deportation drive.

How TPS works

TPS is a humanitarian program that Congress created in 1990 to allow for temporary protections for nationals who hail from countries deemed too dangerous to return to due to violence, disasters or other extreme circumstances.

TPS holders must go through vetting to be approved for work permits and legal protections. Each renewal lasts from six to 12 to 18 months.

Those determinations are up to the Department of Homeland Security secretary, who typically consults with the State Department to evaluate country conditions and determine if the status needs to be extended. Decisions would depend upon whether conditions are still unsafe for a migrant's return.

Sauer argued that the courts cannot review that final decision, including procedural ones that lead up to it. Arulanantham contended that position is a "double edged sword." Another administration could easily come in and a new DHS secretary could theoretically use TPS to give legal status to immigrants in the country unlawfully, and that decision would not be subject to review by the courts, Arulanantham said.

The TPS holders before the Supreme Court argue that Noem did not consult with the appropriate agencies, such as the State Department, before deciding to end TPS designation. They say she did not follow proper procedure — but they are not challenging that a decision to terminate a country can be reviewed.

Arulanantham said with Syria, if Noem had reviewed the State Department's report, which advises people

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not to travel to the country because of armed conflict, and still decided against renewing protections, that decision is not reviewable.

"What is reviewable is whether she actually asks anything and gets any information about country conditions," he said.

Sauer said that legal argument was "meritless," because the TPS "statute does not micromanage the degree of consultation with other agencies."

Justice Amy Coney Barrett pressed Arulanantham why a challenge to the review of how a TPS termination is ended would even matter.

"If it's just kind of a box-checking exercise, I mean, why would Congress permit review of the procedural aspect, when really what everybody cares about much more is the substance?" she asked.

Arulanantham said it's "because Congress ... and the millions of people who live with TPS, have some faith in government, and they believe that if there is consultation, the decisions will be better."

He said, "Our view is that even if it comes back like a box-checking exercise, people will at least know that somebody talked to somebody else."

Trump 'racial animus' cited

Pipoly argued that the ending of TPS for Haiti was based on racial animosity toward Haitians, pointing to the president's own words where he referred to the Caribbean island as a "shithole."

"The true reason for the termination is the president's racial animus towards non-white immigrants and bare dislike of Haitians in particular," he said.

Justice Sonia Sotomayor asked Sauer about those comments from Trump.

"We have a president saying at one point that Haiti is a 'filthy, dirty and disgusting s-hole country,' I'm quoting him, and where he complained that the United States takes people from such countries, instead of people from Norway, Sweden or Denmark," she said. "I don't see how that one statement is not a prime example of ... showing that a discriminatory purpose may have played a part in this decision."

Sauer argued that none of those statements "mentions race or relates to race," and instead the president was referring to "problems like crime, poverty, welfare dependence."

In the lower court that blocked the Trump administration from ending TPS for Haiti, federal Judge Ana Reyes found that there was racial animosity in the government's decision to end the humanitarian protections.

This is not the first time Trump has tried to end TPS for Haiti — he did so in his first administration in 2018, but was blocked by the courts.

Haitian workers in the US

The day before Wednesday's oral arguments, a handful of Democratic lawmakers gathered with domestic care advocates outside the U.S. Capitol to stress the importance of TPS workers. More than 20,000 Haitians work in healthcare, according to the immigration advocacy group FWD.us.

"At this moment, over 1 million people are at risk of being removed from their homes, separated from their families, having their lives uprooted because of Trump's cruel and unlawful attempt to terminate their temporary protected status," Massachusetts Democratic Rep. Ayanna Pressley said during the Tuesday press conference.

Pressley said that thousands of TPS holders serve as essential workers, including one recipient from Haiti who took care of the congresswoman's mother, who died from cancer.

"It was Haitian nurses who prayed over my mother, who sang songs to my mother, who oiled her scalp lovingly and braided her hair," Pressley said. "Everyone who calls this country home benefits from TPS, and stands to be harmed by this termination."

Pressley has led the bipartisan push in the House to approve a measure that would extend TPS for Haiti up to three years.

Ten Republicans, including one independent who caucuses with the GOP, joined Democrats in approv-

ing the bill earlier this month.

While it passed in the House, the legislation would need 60 votes in the Senate, which is controlled by Republicans. Additionally, if Congress managed to pass the bill, it would likely be rejected by Trump.

"We are demanding the Supreme Court uphold the law, save lives and protect our communities," Pressley said. "To send vulnerable families to countries like Haiti, Venezuela and Syria that are enduring horrific humanitarian crises is unconscionable, shameful, unlawful and preventable."

Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include immigration, congressional policy and legal challenges with a focus on how those policies impact the lives of immigrants and migrants coming to the U.S.

US Senate panel approves Warsh as new Fed chair, as Americans struggle with soaring costs

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump's pick to lead the Federal Reserve was one step closer to the job Wednesday after North Carolina Republican U.S. Sen. Thom Tillis cast the deciding vote to advance Kevin Warsh's nomination to the full Senate.

Lawmakers on the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs voted 13-11 along party lines to move Warsh to the next step.

The potential turnover at the top of the Fed, which sets monetary policy, comes as Americans see higher costs hit their pocketbooks, particularly soaring prices at the gas pump, as the U.S.-Iran conflict disrupts worldwide energy supplies.

Tillis had withheld his support until the Trump administration announced Friday it would drop what the senator described as a "bogus" investigation of current Fed Chair Jerome Powell.

"It's no secret that the reason that Mr. Warsh's nomination could have been held up is because of my concern with the investigation. I want to thank the Department of Justice for the assurances that they gave me," Tillis, R-N.C., said following the panel's brief morning session that lasted just under 15 minutes.

"The fact of the matter is, this was based on two minutes of testimony. It was not criminal," Tillis said of the DOJ's probe into Powell's June 2025 testimony to Congress on a major \$2.5 billion renovation of the Fed's Washington, D.C., headquarters.

The committee vote comes after Trump's sustained verbal attacks on Powell over several months, including numerous public threats to fire the Fed leader if he did not agree to lower interest rates.

A federal judge last month blocked the administration's subpoenas to probe the Fed and Powell, citing "a mountain of evidence" that Trump was using the investigation to force Powell's hand.

The Fed was scheduled to meet Wednesday afternoon to deliver its latest decision on interest rates, possibly the last under Powell, whose term expires May 15.

Inflation, affordability

The committee's top Democrat, Sen. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, said the vote brings Trump "one step closer to completing his illegal attempt to seize control of the Fed and to artificially juice the economy."

Inflation and affordability are emerging as major issues ahead of the 2026 midterm elections that will determine control of Congress.

Sen. Raphael Warnock, D-Ga., said his constituents in Georgia and beyond "deserve to know that the Fed is on their side, maximizing their chances to keep a good paying job and keeping their lives affordable, not on the side of the president's poll numbers or his political concerns as we approach the midterm."

"Fed independence is not theoretical. It matters to the everyday lives of working families," Warnock said.

According to a Reuters/Ipsos poll taken between April 24-27, 61% of Americans think the U.S. economy is on the wrong track.

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When asked about the costs and benefits of the war in Iran, only a quarter of respondents said they agreed the U.S. military operation was worth it, according to the Ipsos poll.

Americans have watched fuel prices climb in March and April after Iran retaliated against the U.S.-Israeli attacks by choking off the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow maritime passageway where, prior to the war, one-fifth of the world's petroleum passed.

Gas prices climb

The average price across the U.S. for a gallon of regular gas reached \$4.23 Wednesday, not only the highest price point since the U.S. launched operations in Iran on Feb. 28, but also the highest since July 2022, according to GasBuddy.

Prior to the war, a gallon of regular hadn't topped \$3 all year.

A return to normal, free flow in the strait — which was about 140 vessels per day pre-war — appears out of reach at the moment, as Trump announced last weekend his negotiators pulled back again on attending talks in Islamabad.

Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth sidestepped a question Wednesday regarding how much longer the war might last, asked by Rep. Chrissy Houlahan, D-Pa., before the House Armed Services Committee.

During the same hearing however, the Pentagon's Jules Hurst III, acting undersecretary of war who oversees finances, did reveal the war had so far cost the U.S. \$25 billion.

While the Fed's inflation target is 2%, data released at the beginning of April showed prices for all items rose 3.3% over a year ago. The jump was largely driven by a 21% spike in fuel prices from February to March.

The Fed's so-called "dual mandate" is to maximize employment and stabilize prices. The Fed primarily loosens or tightens the economy by adjusting interest rates — lowering them if the economy lags and inflation is too low, and raising them when inflation becomes too high.

Lisa Cook firing

Warren and Warnock also noted Trump's ousting in August of Fed Governor Lisa Cook, appointed to the board by former President Joe Biden. The U.S. Supreme Court is reviewing whether Trump exceeded his authority in firing Cook.

Warnock said he was dissatisfied with Warsh's written responses to additional questions sent after his April 21 nomination hearing before the committee.

"I asked, quote: 'If President Trump, or any future president, attempts to unlawfully fire you without cause, would you leave the Federal Reserve?' His response, quote: 'I will not answer hypothetical questions of this nature,'" Warnock recounted.

"Well, this isn't a hypothetical question. In fact, the president attempted to fire Governor Cook this in the past year, and the president has repeatedly mused about firing Chair Powell because he won't bend to his interest rate demands — doing so as recently as two weeks ago," Warnock said, referring to Trump's comments during an April 15 Fox Business interview.

Asked Wednesday afternoon if he thinks Warsh will persuade the Fed's board of governors to lower interest rates, Trump told reporters, "They should because it's a good time to lower them. We're the most prime country anywhere in the world."

Powell also faced questions Wednesday afternoon.

When asked whether he expects Warsh will remain independent of Trump, Powell said, "He testified very strongly to that effect in his hearing, and I'll take him at his word."

Jennifer Shutt contributed to this report.

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

US Supreme Court limits use of race in congressional district remaps, diluting Voting Rights Act

BY: JONATHAN SHORMAN

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis' office on Monday invoked an upcoming landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision on the role of race in drawing congressional districts to justify the Republican's proposed gerrymander.

"The use of race in redistricting should never happen," the governor's general counsel, David Axelman, wrote in a memo unveiling a map that aims to hand Republicans four additional U.S. House seats in Florida.

On Wednesday, the Supreme Court delivered an opinion sharply weakening a major portion of the federal Voting Rights Act.

Even before the decision, Republicans and Democrats across the country were scrambling to get ahead of the court's anticipated ruling.

The rush comes even as state legislative sessions wind down and the window to redraw maps rapidly closes ahead of the midterm elections in November — likely pushing most redistricting battles into the 2028 election cycle.

The opinion in the case, *Louisiana v. Callais*, could reverberate for decades. The court's conservative majority significantly curtailed the consideration of race when drawing legislative maps.

Until now, Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act has limited states from using maps that dilute the voting power of minority citizens.

"If the Supreme Court does decide to gut or significantly weaken Section 2 of the VRA, we're very concerned that it would give, basically, the green light to states to racially gerrymander," Michael McNulty, policy director at Issue One, a group focused on protecting American democracy, said in an interview ahead of the decision.

Republicans could ultimately secure up to 19 U.S. House seats nationally directly because of the Supreme Court's decision, according to a projection by Fair Fight Action, a Georgia-based progressive voting rights group, and the Black Voters Matter Fund, which advocates on behalf of Black voters. At the state level, the groups have projected that Republicans could gain up to 200 state legislative seats across the South.

"It is hard to overstate what an earthquake this will be for American politics," Rick Hasen, a professor at UCLA School of Law and director of the Safeguarding Democracy Project, wrote in a blog post following the opinion's release on Wednesday.

Louisiana case

A group of white voters challenged Louisiana's congressional map as an unconstitutional racial gerrymander after the state in 2024 created a second district where a majority of voters are Black.

The U.S. Supreme Court's conservative justices agreed, ruling 6-3 that the map is an unconstitutional racial gerrymander because the state didn't need to create a second majority-minority district.

In the majority opinion, Justice Samuel Alito wrote that "none of the historical evidence presented by plaintiffs came close to showing an objective likelihood that the State's challenged map was the result of intentional racial discrimination."

Justice Elena Kagan, one of the court's three liberal justices, wrote in a dissent that the Supreme Court has "had its sights set" on the Voting Rights Act for more than a decade.

"Under the Court's new view of Section 2, a State can, without legal consequence, systematically dilute minority citizens' voting power," Kagan wrote.

Following the opinion, Republican-led legislatures across the South are expected to move to break apart Democratic districts where a majority of residents are Black or from other minority groups.

U.S. Sen. Marsha Blackburn, a Tennessee Republican, called on the state legislature to reconvene and redraw the state's congressional districts to create another Republican-held seat in Memphis. Blackburn, who is running for governor, said an additional seat is essential to cement President Donald Trump's agenda.

Mississippi Republican Gov. Tate Reeves last week announced a special session to redraw the state's Supreme Court districts, to begin 21 days after the court releases its decision.

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"It is a decision that could (and in my view should) forever change the way we draw electoral maps," Reeves said in a statement announcing the session.

Although the Supreme Court case centered on Louisiana, state officials are likely out of time to adopt a new map for this year's election. The primary election is set for May 16.

Still, Louisiana will be free to pursue redistricting next year.

U.S. Rep. Troy Carter, Sr., a Democrat who represents one of the state's two majority-minority districts, said the court's decision was a "devastating blow" to the promise of equal representation.

"This ruling is about far more than lines on a map — it's about whether Black Louisianians will have a meaningful opportunity to make their voices heard," Carter said in a statement.

The redistricting wars of 2026

As of 2024, roughly a third of U.S. House seats represented majority-minority districts — 122 held by Democrats and 26 held by Republicans, according to estimates by Ballotpedia. Texas and California account for nearly half of all the districts.

Seven states have already taken the extraordinary step of redrawing their maps this year after President Donald Trump urged Republicans to draw lines that maximize partisan advantage ahead of the midterms. Maps are typically redrawn every 10 years after the census.

Texas and California struck first, followed by Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio and Utah. Virginia voters last week approved a redraw, and Florida lawmakers approved a new map Wednesday.

All told, Republicans may emerge from the redistricting war with a small net advantage of a handful of seats if the Florida plan is enacted and the other maps are upheld.

The calendar will prove a major obstacle to additional gerrymanders this year. Primary elections have already been held in some southern states and ballots have been distributed in others.

Mississippi, North Carolina and Texas have already held primaries, while ballots have been distributed in Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina.

But after November the clock resets, giving states more than a year to pursue further changes to their maps before the 2028 election.

"We are much more concerned about the impact on 2028 and beyond than that that would have, letting these politicians basically just pick their voters instead of the voters picking them," McNulty said.

John R. Lewis bill

As Democrats look ahead to Callais' likely fallout in the coming years, they have begun urgently calling for action in Congress and at the state level. They also say the decision emphasizes the stakes of this year's elections.

"Today is a devastating day for democracy and a wake-up call for all those who seek to protect it," Heather Williams, president of the Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee, said in a statement.

Democrats in Congress have repeatedly offered the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act. Named after the civil rights activist and Georgia congressman who died in 2020, the legislation aims to strengthen Section 2 and other elements of the current Voting Rights Act, though it's unclear whether the bill would be constitutional under the Callais decision.

The U.S. House, under Democratic control, passed the legislation in 2021 but it was filibustered in the Senate. Some lawmakers are speaking about the measure again, and Democrats may take control of Congress in November's elections—though they would still face President Donald Trump in the White House.

"We can and must revive the Voting Rights Act," Rep. Terri Sewell, an Alabama Democrat and the ranking member of the House Administration Subcommittee on Elections, said at a shadow hearing on voting rights on Monday.

For their part, Republicans hailed the Supreme Court decision as long overdue.

U.S. Rep. Richard Hudson, a North Carolina Republican who chairs the National Republican Congressional Committee, in a statement said "activists" for too long had manipulated the redistricting process to achieve political outcomes, dividing Americans in the process.

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"The Supreme Court made clear that our elections should be decided by voters, not engineered through unconstitutional mandates," Hudson said.

Voting Rights Act over the years

Over more than a decade, the Supreme Court has narrowed the potency of the Voting Rights Act, a 1965 law banning racial discrimination in voting that came as Congress battled Jim Crow laws in southern states.

The measure was intended to help enforce the U.S. Constitution's 14th and 15th amendments, which guarantee equal protection under the law and prohibit denying the right to vote on the basis of race.

In 2013, the court effectively halted preclearance — the requirement that some states and local governments with a history of discrimination obtain federal permission before changing their voting practices. At the time of the decision, most southern states and a handful of others were subject to preclearance.

The Supreme Court in 2019 ruled that federal courts cannot review allegations of partisan gerrymandering. The decision cleared the way for state lawmakers to gerrymander their maps for political advantage without fear they would be second-guessed by federal judges.

The opinion helped empower a wave of gerrymanders after the 2020 census and set the stage for this year's mid-decade redistricting.

Turning to the legislatures

Facing a bleak federal landscape, some voting rights advocates are increasingly turning to state legislatures. The Supreme Court decision undercutting Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act will likely intensify efforts to advance state-level legislation.

"Because political participation is inherently local, it is imperative to press for protections at the ground level," Todd Cox, associate director counsel at the Legal Defense Fund, a racial justice legal organization, said at the shadow hearing.

Some Democratic state lawmakers already introduced measures in anticipation of an unfavorable Supreme Court decision.

The Illinois House last week approved a state constitutional amendment that would require districts to be drawn "to ensure that no citizen is denied an equal opportunity to participate in the political process and to elect representatives of his or her choice on account of race."

The Illinois amendment would also require, where practical, the creation of racial coalition or influence districts — terms that refer to districts where racial minorities together constitute a majority of residents. The measure, which must also pass the state Senate before going to voters, was a pre-response to the Callais opinion.

"This will ensure that Illinois will always recognize the fundamental principle that a democracy of the people, by the people and for the people must include all the people," Illinois Democratic House Speaker Emanuel Welch told reporters after the amendment advanced.

Illinois Republicans have cast the amendment as a Democratic power grab. The state has some of the most gerrymandered maps in the nation, Illinois House Minority Leader Tony McCombie, a Republican, said in a statement. The Princeton Gerrymandering Project has given Illinois' maps an overall "F" grade.

"Let's be clear: this has nothing to do with strengthening democracy," McCombie said. "It's about locking in one-party control at any cost."

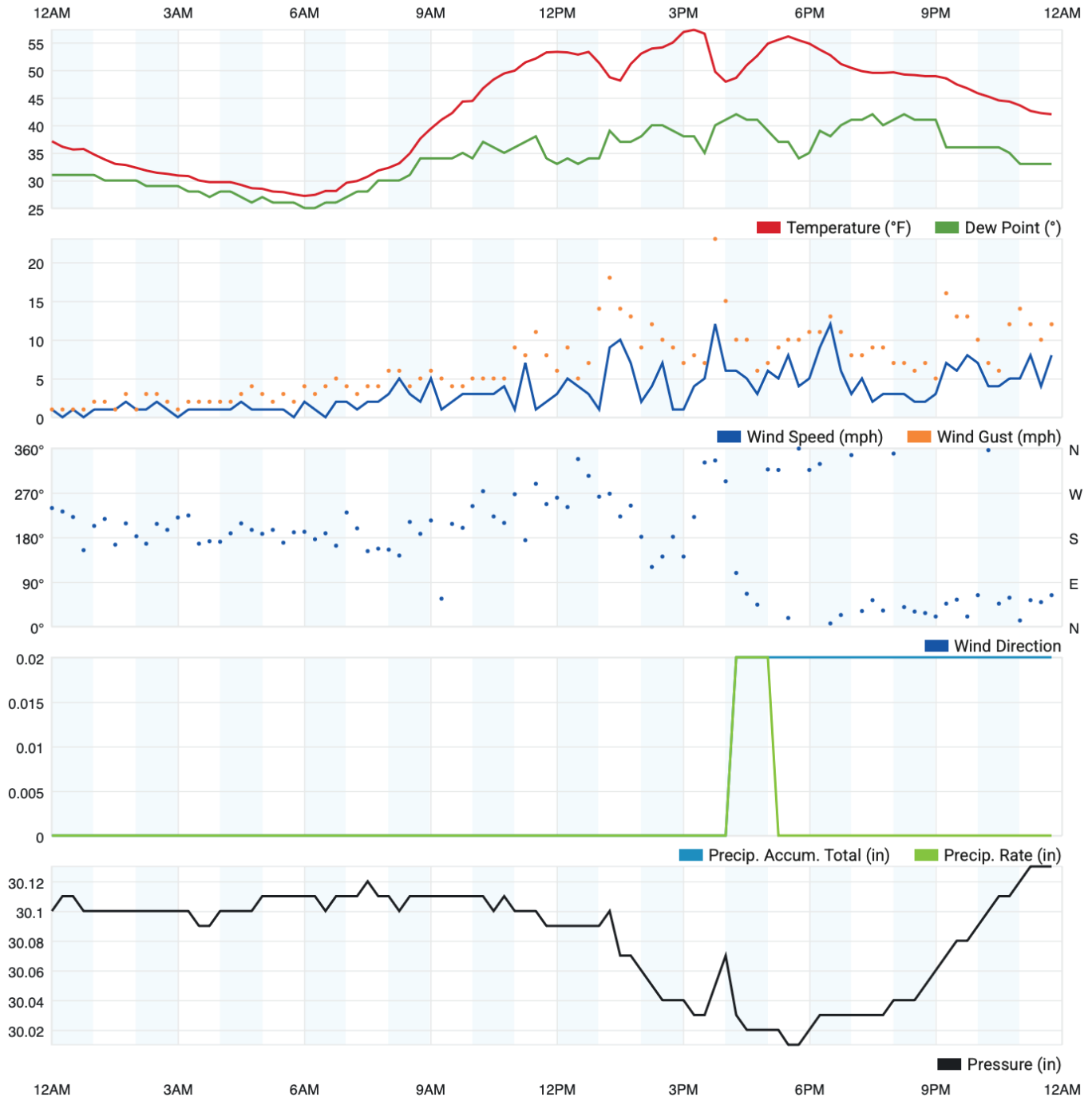
Jonathan Shorman covers democracy for States Newsroom. Based in Kansas City, his coverage area includes elections and voting rights, fights over state and federal power, civil liberties and more. An alumnus of the University of Kansas, he previously covered politics for The Kansas City Star.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

April 29, 2026



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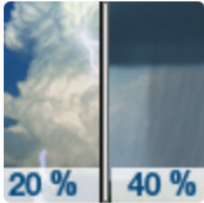
Today

Tonight

Friday

Friday Night

Saturday



High: 54 °F

Slight Chance
T-storms then
Chance
Showers



Low: 29 °F

Slight Chance
T-storms then
Partly Cloudy



High: 55 °F

Mostly Sunny



Low: 32 °F

Mostly Clear



High: 69 °F

Mostly Sunny



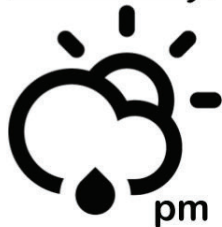
Through Sunday

April 30, 2026

3:11 AM

Forecast For Central - North Central - Northeast South Dakota & Western Minnesota

Thursday



Highs:
47-58°

Grassland Fire Danger



High Grassland Fire Danger
Over Corson County

Friday

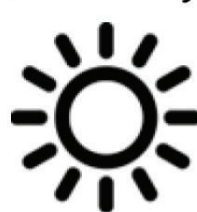


Highs:
48-61°

Grassland Fire Danger



Saturday



Highs:
61-75°

Grassland Fire Danger



Sunday



Highs:
58-68°

Grassland Fire Danger



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

Low Moderate High Very High Extreme

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Cool, and unsettled conditions continue today with an additional round of scattered showers and isolated thunderstorms. Then, expect a few days of mostly dry conditions.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 58 °F at 3:16 PM

Low Temp: 27 °F at 6:01 AM

Wind: 23 mph at 3:37 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 98 in 1992

Record Low: 5 in 1966

Average High: 64

Average Low: 37

Average Precip in April.: 1.91

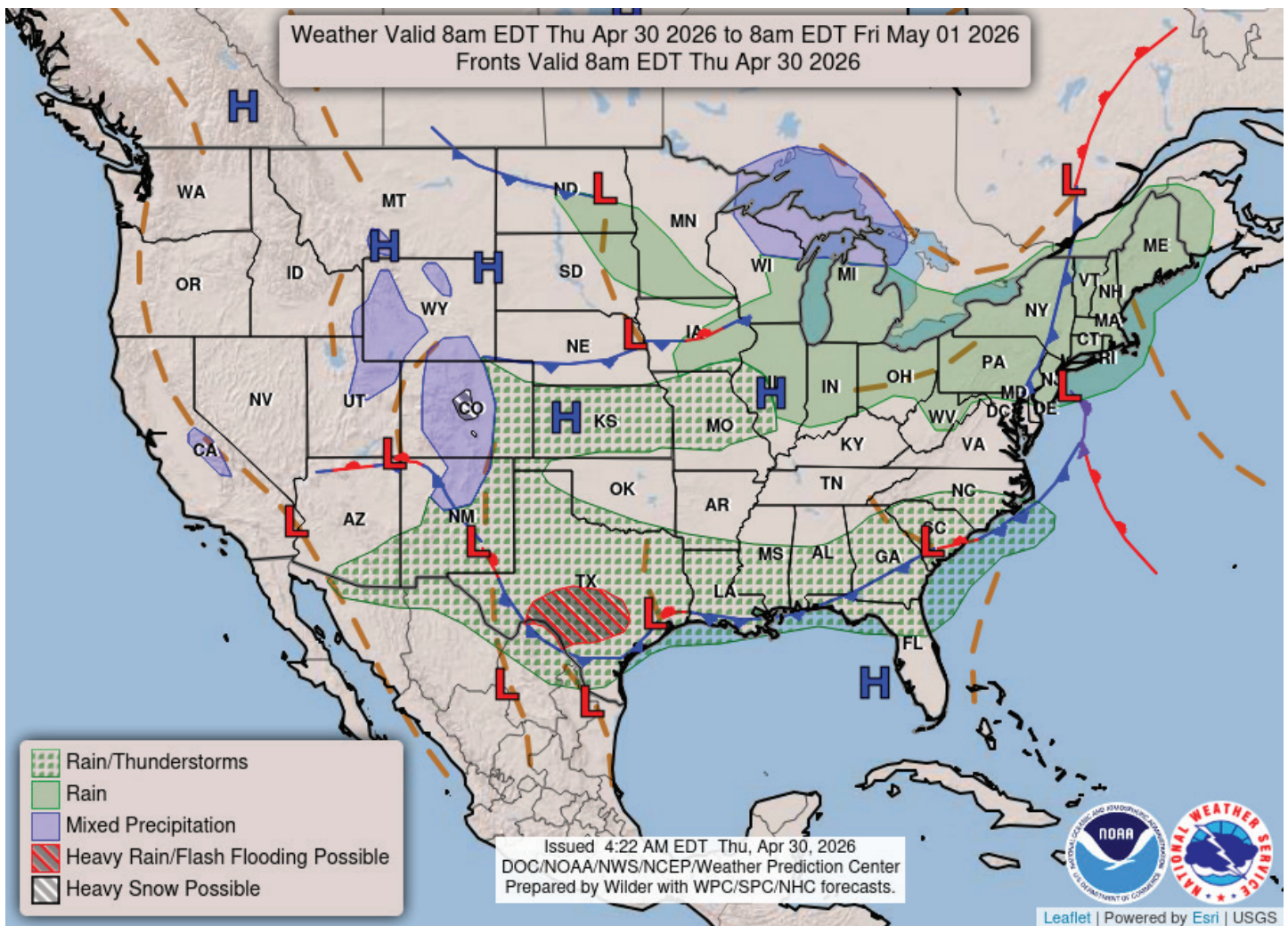
Precip to date in April.: 1.48

Average Precip to date: 3.97

Precip Year to Date: 3.10

Sunset Tonight: 8:37 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:20 am



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Today in Weather History

April 30th, 1942: A tornado hit three farms near the northeastern edge of Castlewood. One barn was blown apart, and debris was swept into the house, killing one person. Damage from the estimated F2 tornado was \$20,000.

April 30th, 2011: A low-pressure system moved across North Dakota and brought high winds to much of the central parts of northeast South Dakota. Northwest winds of 35 to 50 mph with gusts over 60 mph occurred from the morning to the late evening of the 30th. The high winds did cause some property damage across the region. A semi was tipped over on Highway 50 in Buffalo County; a large sign was brought down in Highmore, with some damage to security lights and twisted traffic signals in Pierre. Some of the highest wind gusts included 59 mph at Eagle Butte, 61 mph at Oacoma, 66 mph in Corson County, and 69 mph at Hayes in Stanley County.

1852 — A tornado, following the same track as the famous "Tri-state Tornado" of 1925, struck the town of New Harmony IND. Just sixteen persons were killed by the twister, due to the sparse settlement. The "Tri-state Tornado" killed 695 persons. (David Ludlum)

1953 — A tornado 300 yards in width leveled homes on the north side of Warner-Robins GA, and barracks on the south side of the Warner-Robins Air Force Base. (The Weather Channel)

1987 — Thunderstorms developing along a cold front produced severe weather in Idaho, Utah, Wyoming and Montana. Thunderstorms produced wind gusts to 100 mph in Lincoln, Mineral and Sanders counties. Twenty-three cities in the central and southeastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Memphis TN was the hot spot in the nation with a record high of 94 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — A cold front produced high winds in the southwestern U.S. Winds gusting to 90 mph in southwestern Utah downed power lines, and damaged trees and outbuildings. The high winds also downed power lines in Nevada, completely knocking out power in the town of Henderson. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 — Thunderstorms produced severe weather in central and eastern Texas. Hail three inches in diameter was reported at Cool, and thunderstorm winds gusted to 80 mph at Hillsboro. For the first time of record Oklahoma City went through the entire month of April without a single thunderstorm. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data) (The Weather Channel)

1990 — Late afternoon and evening thunderstorms produced severe weather in southern Virginia and the Carolinas, with tennis ball size hail reported southeast of Chesnee SC. Thunderstorms moving over the Chesapeake Bay flooded U.S. Highway 50 on Kent Island MD with several inches of water resulting in a seventeen-mile long traffic jam. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



When We Face Accusation

**Even when people misunderstand your good intentions,
God sees your heart and blesses your efforts to serve Him.**

Matthew 26:7-13: 7 a woman came to Him with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume, and she poured it on His head as He reclined at the table.

8 But the disciples were indignant when they saw this, and said, ``Why this waste?

9 ``For this perfume might have been sold for a high price and the money given to the poor.”

10 But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, ``Why do you bother the woman? For she has done a good deed to Me.

11 ``For you always have the poor with you; but you do not always have Me.

12 ``For when she poured this perfume on My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial.

13 ``Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her.”

From time to time, undeserved criticism is the lot of every Christian. On occasion, it comes when we offer our best to the Lord and our good intentions are misunderstood. This kind of situation is described in today's passage.

The verses from Matthew describe a woman who took a bottle of precious perfume and poured it on Jesus' head as He reclined at table. There is no record of any great results coming from this loving gesture. No lives were saved, no converts were made, and nothing measurable was obtained. Worse still, the woman was scolded for her actions. Her efforts were viewed as extravagant, unreasonable, and irresponsible. Jesus, however, thought otherwise. The Lord's commendation for this woman's loving sacrifice was astonishing. He said, "What she has done will also be told, in memory of her" (Matt. 26:13 NIV).

We sometimes wonder how much God is noticing our efforts to serve Him. At times some of our greatest sacrifices seem to bring nothing but misunderstanding or criticism from our family members and friends.

But Jesus knows the depths of our soul, and He sees our heart (Jeremiah 17:10). Even if our sacrifices for the heavenly Father make little sense to others, it is His approval that matters.

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:

04.29.26

5 10 17 21 42 2

TOP PRIZE:

\$1,000,000/year

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 42 Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

04.28.26

14 36 41 47 66 15

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$178,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 27 Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

04.29.26

6 19 24 30 48 4

All Star Bonus: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$23,850,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 42 Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

04.29.26

11 14 20 24 30

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$74,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 57 Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

04.29.26

7 52 56 67 69 3

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 26 Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

04.29.26

3 19 35 51 67 15

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 26 Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Brent crude surges over \$120 a barrel on Iran war worries, while world stocks are mixed

By CHAN HO-HIM AP Business Writer

HONG KONG (AP) — The price of Brent crude oil briefly surged past \$126 a barrel early Thursday as stalled U.S.-Iran talks raised doubts over the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz and a permanent end to the Iran war.

Brent crude to be delivered in June jumped 3.3% to \$121.90 after briefly soaring past \$126 per barrel. Brent to be delivered in July rose 1.4% to \$112.02.

Benchmark U.S. crude climbed 1.3% to \$108.28 per barrel.

Before the war began in late February, Brent crude was trading around \$70 per barrel.

There's no clear path to an end to the war. The U.S. has continued its blockade of Iranian ports while the Strait of Hormuz is closed, pushing oil prices higher. Reports Thursday suggesting a possible escalation by U.S. President Donald Trump doused hopes for a quick end to the conflict.

"The breakdown of talks between the U.S. and Iran, along with President Trump reportedly rejecting Iran's proposal for a reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, has the market losing hope for any quick resumption in oil flows," ING Bank strategists Warren Patterson and Ewa Manthey wrote in a research note.

Oil prices vary depending on the type of crude oil, where it is being traded and under what terms, for futures contracts. By some measures, Brent has hit its highest level since its peak of \$147.50 per barrel in 2008 during the global financial crisis.

With the war rattling world markets, the U.S. dollar fell to 160.02 Japanese yen after surging earlier Thursday to its highest level in nearly two years. It closed at 160.44 yen on Wednesday.

The dollar has gained against other major currencies partly due to its status as a safe haven for investors in times of risk, and partly because U.S. interest rates have remained relatively high as the Federal Reserve strives to balance a need to boost the economy with curbing the higher prices that partly are a result of the war.

The Fed's decision to keep interest rates steady at its policymaking meeting Wednesday further supported the dollar. Analysts said Japanese officials will likely intervene if the yen drops much more.

The euro rose to \$1.1686 from \$1.1675.

U.S. futures retreated and world shares were mixed following a muted performance on Wall Street on Wednesday.

In early European trading, Britain's FTSE 100 was up 0.5% to 10,259.08. France's CAC 40 lost 1.1% to 7,985.62, while Germany's DAX traded 0.2% lower at 23,896.19.

Asian stocks mostly fell. Tokyo's Nikkei 225 shed 1% to 59,284.92 and the Kospi in South Korea fell 1.4% to 6,598.87.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng lost 1.3% to 25,776.53, and the Shanghai Composite index closed 0.1% higher at 4,112.16. China's factory activity for April slowed slightly but remained in expansion territory for the second month, despite the global energy shock prompted by the Iran war, an official survey showed.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 was down 0.2% at 8,665.80.

Taiwan's Taiex was 1% lower and while India's Sensex lost 0.5%.

On Wednesday, U.S. stocks were mixed. The benchmark S&P 500 edged down less than 0.1% to 24,673.24. The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 0.6% to 48,861.81, while the Nasdaq composite edged less than 0.1% higher to 24,673.24.

Media organizations call on Israel to allow foreign reporters independent access to Gaza

By DEEPTI HAJELA Associated Press

The leaders of major media companies around the world, including The Associated Press, are calling on Israel's government to lift a ban keeping foreign journalists from being able to independently enter and report from Gaza, a barrier that's been in place since the war's start in 2023 and continues even as a ceasefire has been in place for more than six months.

"Being on the ground is essential. It allows journalists to question official accounts on all sides, to speak directly with civilians and report back what they witness firsthand," said the statement from the executives, released Thursday. "That is why news organizations send their reporters into the field, often at great personal risk."

From the BBC to CNN to MS NOW, from Reuters to German news agency dpa to The Washington Post, the top editors of more than two dozen organizations said the Israeli government has so far not responded to their efforts to discuss the situation. They questioned the country's rationales for why the restrictions are still in place.

The letter was released at 5 a.m. ET.

Israel had said ban was necessary

Initially, Israel said the ban was necessary because foreign journalists allowed into Gaza could give away the positions of Israeli soldiers and endanger them. Other rationales have included that as an active battle zone, it was too dangerous. The army has occasionally brought foreign reporters in on highly controlled trips, but media outlets want independent access.

Currently, "the heaviest fighting is over and there is a ceasefire in place," the editors' statement said. "The hostages have come home. Journalists do not pose a threat to Israeli troops. There is a mechanism in place—however restrictive—that allows aid workers to enter and exit the territory. Why not journalists?"

There have been attempts at legal action to force the issue. The Foreign Press Association, which represents international media in Israel, Gaza and the West Bank, has been waiting on a decision from the Israeli Supreme Court on a petition for independent access to Gaza. That action was filed in 2024, but a ruling has been repeatedly delayed, most recently in January.

With foreign journalists kept out of, coverage of the conditions on the ground there has been possible only for local Palestinian journalists. While covering war would be fraught for any reporter, the Palestinian correspondents have also had to experience it on a personal level — their homes destroyed, their loved ones killed.

Gaza-based reporters face big risks

When access to food became severely restricted last year they also had to deal with hunger, to the point that the Agence France-Presse news agency in July raised an alarm about their Palestinian colleagues' continued survival. That concern was echoed by the AP and Reuters for the reporters in Gaza they work with.

The editors raised that point in the statement Thursday, saying "this has pushed the responsibility for covering this devastating war and its aftermath almost entirely on our Palestinian colleagues ... They should not have to shoulder this burden alone, and they should be protected."

Their lives have also been put at risk from military actions. Well over 200 journalists and media workers have been killed according to a tally from the Committee to Protect Journalists organization, far more than in conflicts elsewhere like the Russia-Ukraine war.

Among them was Mariam Dagga, a 33-year-old visual journalist who worked as a freelancer for the AP and other news organizations. She and four other journalists, including Reuters cameraman Hussam al-Masri and Moaz Abu Taha, a freelance journalist who worked with Reuters, were among those killed last August in an Israeli strike on a medical facility.

The AP's reporting on the strike raised questions about the rationale used by the Israeli government to carry out the action against the hospital, which was known as a place where journalists gathered. AP and Reuters later issued a statement calling on Israel to explain what took place and what steps would

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be taken to protect reporters.

The statement from the editors on Thursday came during Press Freedom Week, which they noted. "Freedom of the press is a basic value in any open society. It is time for the delays to end. Let us into Gaza."

The first direct US-Venezuela commercial flight in 7 years is to land in Caracas

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — The first direct commercial flight between the United States and Venezuela is scheduled to land on Thursday in the Venezuelan capital, Caracas, seven years after the U.S. Department of Homeland Security ordered an indefinite suspension, citing security concerns.

The resumption of a commercial flight between the two countries comes in the wake of the U.S. capture of Nicolás Maduro in a stunning nighttime raid on his residence in Caracas, Venezuela's capital, in early January.

It also comes a month after the U.S. formally reopened its embassy in Caracas following the restoration of full diplomatic relations with the South American country.

Flight AA3599 operated by Envoy Air, a subsidiary of American Airlines, was scheduled to depart from Miami at 10:16 a.m. local time and arrive three hours later in the Venezuelan capital, returning to Florida later in the afternoon.

Earlier, the airline said a second daily flight between Miami and Caracas will start on May 21.

In late January, U.S. President Donald Trump said he informed Venezuela's acting President Delcy Rodríguez that he would open up all commercial airspace over Venezuela, allowing Americans to visit.

"American citizens will be very shortly able to go to Venezuela, and they'll be safe there," Trump said at the time.

The flights mark the resumption of nonstop travel between the U.S. and Venezuela for the first time since diplomatic ties were severed in 2019. For the past seven years, passengers have relied on international airlines and indirect routes through neighboring Latin American countries.

In January, when the airline announced the resumption of flights it said it would give customers the opportunity to reunite with families and pursue new business opportunities.

American Airlines was the last U.S. airline flying to Venezuela. It suspended flights in 2019 between Miami and Caracas, as well as flights to the oil hub city of Maracaibo. Delta and United Airlines pulled out in 2017 amid a political crisis that forced millions to flee the country.

UK vows to tackle antisemitism 'emergency' as police probe double stabbing attack

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The British government Thursday called antisemitism in the U.K. an "emergency," and said it would spend millions increasing security around Jewish sites after a string of arson attacks and a double stabbing.

The government announced 25 million pounds (\$34 million) for more police patrols and protection around synagogues, schools and community centers after two Jewish men were stabbed and seriously injured in London's Golders Green neighborhood on Wednesday. The victims, aged 34 and 76, are in stable condition.

Police arrested a 45-year-old man on suspicion of attempted murder and labeled the attack an act of terrorism. Detectives are working to determine a motive, and whether there could be a link to Iranian proxies.

Counterterrorism police are investigating whether the stabbings are linked to recent arson attacks on synagogues and other Jewish sites in the British capital.

Police said the suspect, whose name hasn't been released, had "a history of serious violence and mental health issues." Police searched a property in southeast London after reports the suspect was involved in an "altercation" in the area hours before the Golders Green attack.

Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood said she was treating antisemitism as "an emergency," calling it "the

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top pressing issue in relation to security" she faced.

Britain's Jewish community is long established, but tiny as a percentage of the population, numbering about 300,000. The northwest London suburb of Golders Green is one of its epicenters, home to kosher restaurants, Jewish schools and several dozen synagogues, as well as large Asian and Middle Eastern communities.

The number of antisemitic incidents reported across the U.K. has soared since the attack by Hamas-led militants on southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, and the subsequent war in Gaza, according to the Community Security Trust charity. The group recorded 3,700 incidents in 2025, up from 1,662 in 2022.

In October 2025, an attacker drove his car into people gathered outside a Manchester synagogue on Yom Kippur and fatally stabbed one person. Another person died during the attack after being inadvertently shot by police.

Some Jews and others say pro-Palestinian protests have gone beyond criticism of Israel's actions to foster an atmosphere of intimidation and hatred against Jews.

The protests have been overwhelmingly peaceful, but some say chants such as "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" incite anti-Jewish hatred. Some protesters have been arrested for displaying support for Hamas, a banned organization in the U.K.

Jonathan Hall, the government's former reviewer of terrorism legislation, called for pro-Palestinian marches to be temporarily banned, saying they had helped "incubate" antisemitism.

Opposition Conservative Party leader Kemi Badenoch backed calls for a ban, saying the marches "are used as a cover for violence and intimidation against Jews."

Since the start of the Iran war on Feb. 28, there have been a string of arson attacks on Jewish sites and opponents of the Iranian government. Several people, ranging in age from teens to people in their 40s, have been arrested and charged over the arsons, which haven't caused injuries.

Several of the attacks have been claimed online in the name of Harakat Ashab al-Yamin al-Islamia. Israel's government has described the group, whose name means the Islamic Movement of the Companions of the Right, as a recently founded group with suspected links to "an Iranian proxy" that has also claimed responsibility for synagogue attacks in Belgium and the Netherlands.

An online claim in the same name also took responsibility for Wednesday's stabbing. Mahmood said authorities were investigating whether that claim was credible or "opportunistic."

The government said Thursday it would bring in legislation to prosecute "individuals and groups acting on behalf of state-sponsored organizations."

Powell plans to remain on Fed board, cites legal actions by Trump administration

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Jerome Powell said Wednesday he plans to remain on the board of the Federal Reserve after his term as chair ends next month "for a period of time, to be determined," saying the "unprecedented" legal attacks by the Trump administration have put the independence of the nation's central bank at risk.

"I worry these attacks are battering this institution and putting at risk the things that really matter to the public," Powell said in remarks at a press conference after the Fed announced its decision to keep its benchmark interest rate unchanged.

Powell's decision to stay — the first time a Fed chair will remain on the board as a governor since 1948 — denies President Donald Trump a chance to fill a seat on the central bank's seven-member governing board with his own appointee. The Senate Banking Committee earlier approved Powell's successor as chair, Trump appointee Kevin Warsh, on a party-line vote. Powell will continue as a Fed governor, possibly until January 2028. Warsh, if confirmed, will take a seat currently held by Stephen Miran, a previous Trump appointee, whose term ended in January.

Powell's move could make it a bit harder for Warsh to engineer the rate cuts that Trump has demanded,

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and Warsh advocated for last year, economists say.

"It probably means it will take Warsh a little bit longer to build the consensus he is trying to build," said David Seif, chief economist for developed markets at Nomura, an investment bank.

U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia Jeanine Pirro said on X Friday that her office was ending its probe into the Fed's extensive building renovations because the Fed's inspector general would scrutinize them instead. But she added that her office could reopen the investigation if "the facts warrant doing so." And Pirro had said previously that she would appeal a court ruling that threw out subpoenas her office had issued.

Powell said Wednesday he had been assured by the Justice Department that the appeal wouldn't result in a reopening of the probe unless a separate investigation by the Fed's inspector general finds evidence of criminal activity.

Apparently, that didn't bring Powell the closure he felt is needed.

"I'm waiting for the investigation to be well and truly over with finality and transparency," he said. "I'm waiting for that and I will leave when I think it appropriate to do so."

The Fed Wednesday left its benchmark interest rate unchanged for the third straight meeting but signaled it could still cut rates in the coming months, moves that attracted the most dissents since October 1992. Three officials dissented in favor of removing the reference to a future cut, while a fourth, Miran, dissented in favor of an immediate rate cut.

The dissents underscore the level of division on the Fed's 12-member rate-setting committee ahead of the end of Powell's term as chair on May 15.

"Developments in the Middle East are contributing to a high level of uncertainty about the economic outlook," the Fed said in a statement after its two-day meeting. "Inflation is elevated, in part reflecting the recent increase in global energy prices."

Trump responded to Powell's decision late Wednesday on his social media website: "Jerome 'Too Late' Powell wants to stay at the Fed because he can't get a job anywhere else — Nobody wants him," Trump posted, using his nickname for the Fed chair.

Warsh has promised "regime change" at the central bank and may make sweeping changes to its economic models, communications strategies, and balance sheet. He has argued in favor of rate cuts, as Trump has demanded, but he will likely find it harder to implement them with inflation topping 3%, above the Fed's target of 2%.

When asked if he believed Warsh would stand up to political pressure from Trump, Powell answered, "He testified very strongly at his hearing, and I take him at his word."

The three officials who dissented against hinting that the Fed may reduce borrowing costs were Beth Hammack, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland; Neel Kashkari, president of the Minneapolis Fed; and Lorie Logan, president of the Dallas Fed. The regional Fed bank presidents have historically been more likely to dissent, while the Washington-based governors more often support the chair.

The dissents could renew tension between the Trump administration and the bank presidents, who White House officials have previously criticized.

Beth Ann Bovino, chief economist at US Bank, said the dissents demonstrated that Fed policymakers are "very independent" and will likely be on hold for months longer. She has forecast a rate cut in December but now isn't sure. Wall Street investors on average don't expect a reduction until well into next year, according to futures pricing.

Powell's decision to stay on could worsen tensions with the Trump administration and would create what some analysts refer to as a "two Popes" scenario, with a chair and former chair both on the Fed's board. In that case, divisions among policymakers could increase, if some decided to follow Powell's lead rather than Warsh's.

Powell dismissed the notion that his staying on could cause dissension, saying, "My intention is not to interfere," later adding that, "I'm not looking to be a high profile dissident or anything like that."

Still, Powell said he remained concerned about the Fed's independence from the White House, which he

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said is essential to its ability to set rates to benefit the public, rather than in response to political pressure. When the Fed raises or cuts its short-term rate, over time it affects the cost of mortgages, auto loans, and business borrowing.

Fed independence remains "at risk," he said. "We're having to resort to the courts to enforce our ... ability to make monetary policy without political considerations. We've had to do that and we've been successful so far, but that's not over, none of that has concluded yet."

The unusual situation comes while the economic picture remains unusually murky, putting the Fed in a difficult spot. Inflation has jumped to 3.3%, a two-year high, as the war has sharply raised gas prices. That makes it harder for the central bank to reduce rates. The Fed typically leaves rates unchanged, or even raises them, if inflation is worsening.

At the same time, hiring has ground almost to a halt, leaving those without jobs frustrated by the difficulty of finding new ones. Typically, the Fed cuts rates when the job market is weak, to spur more spending and job gains.

But layoffs also remain low, as employers appear to be following a "low-hire, low-fire" strategy. Many Fed officials have suggested that as long as the unemployment rate is low, the central bank doesn't need to cut rates to spur more spending and hiring. Unemployment declined to 4.3% in March, from 4.4%.

David Allan Coe, who wrote 'Take This Job and Shove It' and other country hits, dies at 86

By The Associated Press undefined

David Allan Coe, the country singer-songwriter who wrote the working class anthem "Take This Job and Shove It" and had hits with "You Never Even Called Me By My Name" and "The Ride" among others, has died. He was 86.

Coe's wife, Kimberly Hastings Coe, confirmed his death to Rolling Stone on Wednesday.

She described him as one of the best singers and songwriters of our time.

"My husband, my friend, my confidant and my life for many years. I'll never forget him and I don't want anyone else to ever forget him either," she wrote to the publication.

A statement from a Coe representative to People said he died around 5 p.m. Wednesday. The cause of death wasn't disclosed.

Whether he was labeled outlaw or underground, Coe was clearly an outsider in Nashville's music establishment, even throughout his successes as an in-demand songwriter and singer, eventually developing a core following around his raw, often obscene lyrics and a checkered and somewhat mysterious past.

His wife posted on Facebook in September 2021 that he had been hospitalized with COVID-19 and he made few appearances since then.

He did concert tours with Willie Nelson, Kid Rock, Neil Young and others. He wrote "Take This Job and Shove It," a hit by Johnny Paycheck in 1977, and "Would You Lay With Me (in a Field of Stone)," a hit by Tanya Tucker in 1974. He was also the first country singer to record "Tennessee Whiskey," penned by Dean Dillon and Linda Hargrove, that has since become a genre standard and hits for George Jones and Chris Stapleton.

His own country hit recordings included "You Never Even Call Me by My Name," written by Steve Goodman and an uncredited John Prine; "The Ride," and "Mona Lisa Lost Her Smile." Coe also appeared in a handful of movies, including "Stagecoach" and "Take this Job and Shove It," which was named after his song.

Coe, born in Akron, Ohio, spent time in reformatories as a youngster, and served time in an Ohio prison from 1963 to 1967 for possession of burglary tools. He also has said he spent time with the Outlaws motorcycle club, but some of the tales about his prison time and his personal life have been wildly exaggerated over the years.

"I'd have never made it through prison without my music," he said in an AP interview in 1983. "No one could take it (music) away from me. They could put me in the hole with nothing to do but I could still make up a song in my head."

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He recorded his first album, a blues album called "Penitentiary Blues," using songs that he wrote in prison. He later told reporters that he tried not to lean too heavily on prison as a topic for songs because of the similarities to the backstory of Merle Haggard, but that his criminal history was all people seemed interested in focusing on.

Coe recorded next for Columbia Records and did the album "The Mysterious Rhinestone Cowboy," which became his nickname after performing in a rhinestone suit and wearing a mask.

During the heyday of the outlaw movement, Coe placed himself at the center of the scene, with songs like "Longhaired Redneck," which featured lyrics about performing in dive bars, "Where bikers stare at cowboys who are laughing at the hippies who are praying they'll get out of here alive."

He was featured in the acclaimed documentary about the outlaw country movement called "Heartworn Highways," in which he performs a concert at a Tennessee prison.

Coe, himself heavily tattooed and sporting long hair, claimed a diverse fan base that included bikers, doctors, lawyers and bankers. His last record, released in 2006, was a collaboration with Dimebag Darrell and other former members of the heavy metal group Pantera.

He released two R-rated albums, 1978's "Nothing Sacred" and 1982's "Underground Album," that he sold via biker magazines. The songs on these albums have been criticized for being racist, homophobic and sexually explicit. He told "Billboard" magazine in 2001 that author and songwriter Shel Silverstein convinced him to record the songs he had written, something he had come to regret.

"Those were meant to be sung around the campfire for bikers, and I still don't sing those songs in concert," he said.

In 2016, Coe was ordered to pay the IRS more than \$980,000 in restitution for obstructing the tax agency and was sentenced to three years' probation. Court documents say Coe earned income from at least 100 concerts yearly from 2008 through 2013 and either didn't file individual income tax returns or pay taxes when he did file.

The AP Interview: Ukraine bets on battlefield AI as the race for weapons autonomy intensifies

By DEREK GATOPOULOS and HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Rapid military adoption of artificial intelligence is becoming essential to Ukraine's survival, even as full integration across the battlefield may still be several years away, according to a senior AI official.

Danylo Tsvok said AI is already helping Ukraine hold territory, while reducing risks to its soldiers as it faces a larger, better-resourced adversary.

"We need to be faster than the enemy in decision-making," he told The Associated Press, adding that AI is "not only a competitive advantage. It's about our survival."

Tsvok, 35, leads the Defense Artificial Intelligence Center, which was established last month by the Defense Ministry. He previously served in the government's top civilian AI role.

Ukraine and Russia are locked in an intensifying race to deploy increasingly automated systems — from aerial drones to ground and maritime platforms. At the center of that race is the ability to maintain operations under heavy electronic warfare.

Many newer systems are designed to shift toward autonomous functionality, maintaining target focus even under hostile jamming.

Ukraine's rapidly expanding domestic arms sector now includes more than 2,000 manufacturers and military technology firms. Developers are testing tools that enable coordinated drone swarms, aiming to boost efficiency while easing the burden on human operators.

"We need to understand that the future belongs to autonomous systems," Tsvok said. "AI makes it possible to automate parts of the kill chain."

In its more mature form, he said, AI could underpin a networked battlefield in which smart weapons operate in coordination under a unified assessment platform.

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"That could happen within three to five years," he said. "Within that time frame, front lines could be secured by tightly integrated hardware and software systems."

In the nearer term, he pointed to wider deployment of autonomous interceptors, expanded use of ground-based robotic systems, and an escalation in electronic warfare capabilities.

Some elements are already in place. Unmanned ground platforms are increasingly used in logistics, evacuation and combat roles.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy recently said land drones supported more than 20,000 battlefield missions — including medical evacuations, supply runs and direct combat — over a three-month period this year. Among them, he said, was a successful attack carried out without any human soldiers.

Tsvok insisted the objective is not fully autonomous 'killer robots,' but a more coordinated system that accelerates decision-making and integrates more closely with Western partners.

"It's not about reaching 100% autonomy, it's about being efficient on the battlefield," he said.

Ukraine is deepening partnerships with Western allies and Gulf states to secure funding, scale production and embed itself in security alliances, while also opening access to its extensive battlefield data.

Tsvok's department receives financial support from the U.K. Ministry of Defence — the type of relationship he described as both militarily and politically significant.

"Democracies must develop strong defensive capabilities," he said. "Without AI, they cannot effectively protect peace. This is not only about Ukraine. It's about global security."

10 current and former Mexican officials accused in US indictment of aiding drug trafficking

By MEGAN JANETSKY, MICHAEL R. SISAK and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The governor of Sinaloa and nine other current and former Mexican officials were charged with drug trafficking and weapons offenses in a U.S. indictment unsealed Wednesday in New York, accused of aiding in the massive importation of illicit narcotics into the United States.

Some officials were members of Mexico's progressive ruling party, Morena, posing a political conundrum for Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum as she seeks to offset mounting pressures from the Trump administration. Some of those politicians called the indictment a political attack on their party.

U.S. federal officials announced the charges in a news release. None of the defendants were in custody, but Mexico's government said shortly afterward that it had received multiple extradition requests from the U.S. without identifying those requested. It did not say how it would respond.

Morena party members indicted

The 10 people charged in Manhattan federal court are current and former government or law enforcement officials in Sinaloa, including Rubén Rocha Moya, 76, who has been governor of Mexico's Sinaloa state since November 2021.

Charges against Moya included narcotics importation conspiracy and possession of machine guns and destructive devices, along with another conspiracy count. If convicted, he could face life in prison or a mandatory minimum of 40 years behind bars.

Rocha was a staunch ally of Sheinbaum's mentor, former President Andrés Manuel López Obrador. The governor enthusiastically backed the ex-president's "Hugs, Not Bullets" policy, which involved avoiding direct confrontation with powerful drug cartels. López Obrador built a political platform by railing against endemic corruption plaguing Mexican politics.

Rocha, the highest profile official charged, said he "categorically and completely rejects" the accusations as baseless and called them an "attack" on Mexico's ruling party and its leaders.

"It is part of a perverse strategy to violate (Mexico's) constitutional order, specifically on national sovereignty," he wrote in a post on X on Wednesday afternoon. "We will show them that this slander doesn't have any sort of foundation."

Later in the day, he told reporters that he planned to stay in Sinaloa and wasn't worried.

Ties to Sinaloa Cartel

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Some of those named, according to the indictment, have themselves participated in the Sinaloa Cartel's campaign of violence and retribution.

Those charged included a Mexican senator, a Sinaloa state deputy attorney general, a former Sinaloa secretary of public security, a former deputy director of the Sinaloa State Police and the mayor of Culiacan.

According to the indictment, the defendants shielded cartel leaders from investigation, arrest, and prosecution, fed the cartel with sensitive law enforcement and military information, directed members of state and local law enforcement agencies to protect drug loads and let the cartel commit brutal drug-related violence without consequence. In return, it said, the defendants received millions of dollars in drug money.

The indictment alleged that they were closely aligned with the Sinaloa Cartel faction known as "Los Chapitos," which is run by the sons of Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, the ex-cartel leader now serving a life sentence in a U.S. prison.

Authorities said the defendants played critical roles in helping the cartel ship fentanyl, heroin, cocaine and methamphetamine from Mexico into the U.S. The Sinaloa Cartel is among eight Latin American crime groups designated as terrorist organizations by the U.S. government.

"As the indictment lays bare, the Sinaloa Cartel, and other drug trafficking organizations like it, would not operate as freely or successfully without corrupt politicians and law enforcement officials on their payroll," U.S. Attorney Jay Clayton said in a release.

The indictment of Rocha, who was born in the same town as "El Chapo," was particularly notable because the governor was embroiled in a scandal in 2024 involving the Sinaloa Cartel. His name was published in a letter written by a then-Sinaloa Cartel capo who was kidnapped by leaders of a rival faction of the cartel and handed off to law enforcement in the U.S. In the letter, the capo said that when he was kidnapped he believed he was on his way to meet with Rocha.

In the years since, the cartel's two warring factions have ravaged the northern Mexican state in their struggle for territorial control.

Among those indicted, at least three officials — Rocha, the mayor of Sinaloa's capital, and a senator — were affiliated with Sheinbaum's party, Morena. A number of other officials held positions unaffiliated with Mexican parties.

It's not the first time the U.S. has brought drug trafficking charges against ranking Mexican officials. Genaro García Luna — a former Mexican public security secretary under former President Felipe Calderón — was convicted by a U.S. court and sentenced to 38 years in prison after he was accused of taking bribes from the Sinaloa Cartel. He denied the allegations and is appealing his conviction.

Another balancing act for Sheinbaum

The indictment unsealed Wednesday came after U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Ron Johnson last week said that the U.S. administration would launch an anti-corruption campaign targeting Mexican officials he said were linked to organized crime.

"Corruption not only hinders progress, it distorts it. It increases costs, weakens competition, and erodes the trust upon which markets depend. It is not a problem without victims," Johnson said.

Sheinbaum responded Monday by saying her government has not seen "any evidence" of the charges of corruption.

"Any investigation in the United States against any person in Mexico must have evidence reviewed by the (Mexican) Attorney General's Office," Sheinbaum said.

Sheinbaum's government has already detained several local officials across Mexico in its ongoing crack-down against the cartels, fueled by pressure by the Trump administration.

The indictment has once again forced the Mexican leader to walk a political tightrope, said Vanda Felbab-Brown, a senior fellow in foreign policy at the Washington-based Brookings Institution who specializes in organized crime.

If Sheinbaum doesn't go after Rocha, it will put strain on relations with the U.S. ahead of renegotiations of a free-trade agreement with the U.S. crucial to the Mexican economy, the analyst said. If she does arrest him, "it carries tremendous consequences for her politically" ahead of next year's midterm elections

in Mexico.

"Is she going to move to arrest Gov. Rocha and the other eight indicted politicians and attempt to extradite him to the United States? This is certainly what the United States wants," Felbab-Brown said.

Supreme Court weakens the Voting Rights Act and aids GOP efforts to control the House

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Wednesday hollowed out a landmark Civil Rights-era law that has increased minority representation in Congress and elsewhere, striking down a majority Black congressional district in Louisiana and opening the door for more redistricting across the country that could aid Republican efforts to control the House.

In a 6-3 ruling, the court's conservative majority found that the Louisiana district represented by Democrat Cleo Fields relied too heavily on race. Chief Justice John Roberts had described the 6th Congressional District as a "snake" that stretches more than 200 miles (320 kilometers) to link parts of Shreveport, Alexandria, Lafayette and Baton Rouge.

"That map is an unconstitutional gerrymander," Justice Samuel Alito wrote for the six conservatives.

The effect of the ruling may be felt more strongly in 2028 because most filing deadlines for this year's congressional races have passed. Louisiana, though, may have to change its redistricting plan to comply with the decision.

It is unclear how much of the provision — known as Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 — remains.

When he signed the bill — the main way to challenge racially discriminatory election practices — into law more than 60 years ago, President Lyndon Johnson called it "a triumph for freedom as huge as any victory on any battlefield."

In her dissent for the three liberal justices, Justice Elena Kagan wrote that the court's "gutting of Section 2 puts that achievement in peril."

Her sentiment was shared by former President Barack Obama, who said the decision showed "how a majority of the current Court seems intent on abandoning its vital role in ensuring equal participation in our democracy."

In a statement, Fields said the decision's "practical effect is to make it far harder for minority communities to challenge redistricting maps that dilute their political voice."

Potential political fallout

The voting rights law succeeded in opening the ballot box to Black Americans and reducing persistent discrimination in voting. Nearly 70 of the 435 congressional districts are protected by Section 2, election law expert Nicholas Stephanopoulos has estimated.

Alito wrote that "allowing race to play any part in government decisionmaking represents a departure from the constitutional rule that applies in almost every other context." He said Section 2 is effectively limited to instances of intentional discrimination, a very high standard.

Kagan said the upshot of the decision is that states "can, without legal consequence, systematically dilute minority citizens' voting power."

Reaction to the decision broke along partisan lines.

"This is a complete and total victory for American voters. The color of one's skin should not dictate which congressional district you belong in. We commend the court for putting an end to the unconstitutional abuse of the Voting Rights Act and protecting civil rights," White House spokeswoman Abigail Jackson wrote in an email.

The chair of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee called the decision "appalling." Rep. Suzan DelBene of Washington state said it was the latest in a long line of attacks by President Donald Trump and the conservative court "against the fundamental right of every American citizen to vote."

She said Democrats remained poised to regain the House majority in November "despite this corrupt and targeted assault on the voting rights of Black and Brown Americans from the Supreme Court."

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A ruling Trump likes

Trump had touched off a nationwide redistricting competition this year to boost Republican chances of preserving their House edge. The president said some states should redraw their maps and he called the decision the "kind of ruling I like."

Legislatures already are free to draw extremely partisan districts because of a 2019 Supreme Court decision.

Wednesday's ruling came out as Florida legislators debated a proposed redrawing of the state's congressional lines, submitted by Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis and intended to give the GOP a chance to pick up as many as four seats in the state's U.S. House delegation.

Democrats in the Florida Senate urged the Republican supermajority to delay debate, at least long enough to allow lawmakers to read the decision and consult lawyers about how it might affect DeSantis' proposal. Republicans refused and the Legislature approved the new map.

In the Supreme Court's Louisiana ruling, the justices did an about-face from a decision in a similar case from Alabama less than three years ago that led to a new congressional map for the state that sent two Black Democrats to Congress.

The Alabama decision also prompted Louisiana lawmakers to add a second majority Black district. About a third of Louisianans are Black and they now form majorities in two of the state's six congressional districts. Alabama has a separate appeal pending at the Supreme Court.

Roberts and Justice Brett Kavanaugh joined the three liberals to form a majority in the Alabama case, the same term in which the conservative-dominated court ended affirmative action in college admissions. Both joined Alito's opinion Wednesday.

Roberts has long eyed Voting Rights Act

The chief justice has been at the center of the effort to limit the use of race in public life. He has had the Voting Rights Act in his sights since his time as a young lawyer in the Reagan-era Justice Department.

"It is a sordid business, this divvying us up by race," Roberts wrote in a dissenting opinion in 2006 in his first major voting rights case as chief justice.

In 2013, Roberts wrote for the majority in gutting the law's requirement that states and local governments with a history of discrimination, mostly in the South, get approval before making any election-related changes.

"Our country has changed, and while any racial discrimination in voting is too much, Congress must ensure that the legislation it passes to remedy that problem speaks to current conditions," Roberts wrote.

Barring extraordinary action, the broader impact probably will be felt in 2028, when Republicans potentially can replace more than a dozen Democratic-held House districts that were previously protected under the Voting Rights Act.

"The Voting Rights Act as a means to protect minority voters from vote dilution is essentially dead," said Jonathan Cervas, a political scientist at Carnegie Mellon University who has served as an outside legal expert in multiple Voting Rights Act cases.

Hegseth faces a second day of Democrats grilling him over the Iran war

By BEN FINLEY and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth will face a second day of grilling from Democrats on Capitol Hill, with senators getting their first opportunity on Thursday to confront or praise the Pentagon chief over his handling of the Iran war.

Hegseth battled with Democrats — and some Republicans — a day earlier during a nearly six-hour House Armed Services Committee hearing, where he faced sharp questioning over the war's costs in dollars, lives and the diminishing stockpiles of critical weapons.

The Senate Armed Services Committee will hear a similar presentation on the Trump administration's

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2027 military budget proposal, which would boost defense spending to a historic \$1.5 trillion. Hegseth and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Dan Caine, will again stress the need for more drones, missile defense systems and warships.

They are now also likely to face tough questions about American troop levels in Europe after President Donald Trump on Wednesday leveled a new threat against NATO ally Germany, suggesting he could soon reduce the U.S. military presence in the country as he feuds with Chancellor Friedrich Merz over the Iran war.

If Wednesday is any indication, Republican senators may focus on the details of military budgeting and voice support for the operation in Iran. Democrats are expected to press for answers on strategy in the conflict, now in a tenuous ceasefire, and Hegseth's firing of top military leaders.

Democrats call it a costly war of choice that lacks congressional approval or oversight. But Congress has failed to pass multiple war powers resolutions that would have required lawmakers to approve military action.

Questions that lawmakers have wanted to ask since the war began on Feb. 28 were answered — or evaded — at Wednesday's hearing.

For example, the war has cost \$25 billion so far, mostly in munitions, Pentagon officials said. But Hegseth refused to answer questions about how much longer the war would last or how much more it could cost.

Hegseth also said a deadly strike on an Iranian elementary school that killed more than 165 people, including many children, remains under investigation. The Associated Press has reported that growing evidence pointed to U.S. culpability for the strike, which hit a school adjacent to a Revolutionary Guard base.

Democratic Rep. Pat Ryan questioned Hegseth over whether the deaths of six American soldiers by a drone strike in Kuwait could have been prevented. Hegseth didn't answer the question directly but said the military took proactive measures to protect American forces.

In another tense exchange, Hegseth told Democratic Rep. Adam Smith that Iran's nuclear facilities were obliterated in U.S. strikes last June. That led Smith to question the Trump administration's reasoning for starting the war in Iran less than a year later.

"We had to start this war, you just said 60 days ago, because the nuclear weapon was an imminent threat," said Smith, the ranking Democrat on the committee. "Now you're saying that it was completely obliterated?"

Hegseth responded by saying that the Iranians "had not given up their nuclear ambitions" and still had thousands of missiles.

Smith said the war "left us at exactly the same place we were before."

The defense secretary also faced questions about his decision to oust the Army's top uniformed officer, Gen. Randy George, one of several top military officers to be dismissed since Trump returned to office.

Hegseth said "new leadership" was needed, a claim that failed to satisfy Rep. Chrissy Houlahan, a Pennsylvania Democrat.

"You have no way of explaining why you fired one of the most decorated and remarkable men," Houlahan began before Hegseth interrupted her. "We needed new leadership," he repeated.

King Charles III and Queen Camilla honor 9/11 victims on visit to New York

By PHILIP MARCELO, ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE and DAVE COLLINS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — King Charles III and Queen Camilla visited the site of the Sept. 11 attacks, met with schoolchildren and business titans and socialized with celebrities during a busy swing through New York City on Wednesday — the first visit to the city by a reigning British monarch in 16 years.

Charles laid flowers at the National 9/11 Memorial and the royal couple spoke with victims' relatives, first responders and local dignitaries before traveling to other events midway through a four-day diplomatic trip to the U.S. to mark 250 years of American independence.

The royal couple capped their whirlwind day in the city with an appearance at an early evening reception for one of the king's charities, the King's Trust, where Charles spoke of the enduring cultural bond between

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the people of the U.K. and U.S. as one “rooted in shared creativity, enterprise, and values.

“Reminding us that we are truly greater together, that’s the point,” he said.

The four-day trip is Charles’ first state visit to the U.S. since he became king. His mother, Queen Elizabeth II, made four state visits to the U.S. Her last visit to New York was in 2010.

Honoring victims at the 9/11 memorial

Charles and Camilla began their public schedule in the city by paying tribute to the nearly 3,000 people killed in the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, including 67 British nationals.

They were greeted at the National 9/11 memorial plaza in Lower Manhattan by former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, then walked to one of the memorial’s two pools, where parapets bear the names of the victims of the attacks. Charles placed an arrangement of flowers on a parapet before the couple silently bowed their heads in a moment of reflection.

The king and queen then shook hands and exchanged pleasantries with a group of attack survivors, first responders and victims’ relatives, some of whom held photos of their lost loved ones. The gathering came ahead of the 25th anniversary of the attacks.

The visit to the memorial took place under the usual security precautions New York affords visiting world leaders and heads of state. Police snipers perched on rooftops. Heavy trucks were used as blockers to close off intersections. The memorial plaza and streets surrounding it were closed to the public.

Meeting New York’s mayor

Among the crowd at the memorial were New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, New Jersey Gov. Mikie Sherrill and New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani, all Democrats.

Mamdani — who was born in Uganda to parents from India, both former parts of the British Empire — shook hands with the king, and the two appeared to greet each other warmly. They spoke only for a few seconds.

Earlier in the day, Mamdani said he hoped to keep the event’s focus on 9/11 victims and not pursue a political conversation. But pressed by a reporter, Mamdani had said that if he were to speak with Charles under different circumstances, “I would probably encourage him to return the Koh-i-Noor diamond.”

The gem, one of the largest cut diamonds in the world, is part of the Crown Jewels. Seized by the East India Co. after the Second Anglo-Sikh War of 1849, it was given to Queen Victoria and is on display in the Tower of London. Countries including India, Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan have claimed ownership.

Spending time with 9/11 victims’ loved ones

Anthoula Katsimatides was among the Sept. 11 victims’ relatives who spoke with the royal couple. Her brother, John Katsimatides, died at the World Trade Center.

“I found it extremely sweet that I was allowed to hug the queen,” she said. “She was quite endearing, as was the king. I also told him that I thought he was adorable.”

Katsimatides said the queen asked her if she came to the memorial often.

“I said that I do because I find it to be a place of peace and calm and also remembrance,” Katsimatides said.

King visits an urban farm, queen goes to the library

The king also toured an after-school, urban farming effort in Harlem that works with young people affected by food insecurity.

At Harlem Grown’s 134th Street Farm, he planted lavender and mustard seeds with children, saw a chicken coop and watched a live food demonstration that educated children about food and nutrition.

“I like your hair,” a student told the king, who replied, “Do you? Good.”

Later, the king attended a gathering of business leaders at Rockefeller Center, including executives from top American companies, including Google, OpenAI, JPMorgan Chase, and Comcast.

The queen, meanwhile, visited the New York Public Library, where she chatted with actress Sarah Jessica Parker during a walk through the building as a crowd of onlookers watched from across Fifth Avenue.

Camilla delivered a new Roo doll to add to the library’s famed collection of Winnie-the-Pooh stuffed animals, as the beloved children’s character turns 100 this year.

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The five dolls currently on display — Winnie-the-Pooh, Piglet, Tigger, Eeyore and Kanga — were the inspiration for the characters in A.A. Milne's children's books. They were owned by the English author's son, the real-life Christopher Robin, in the 1920s. The dolls were donated to the library in 1987 and are a centerpiece of the library's collection of children's literature. Roo, in the books, was a small brown kangaroo and the son of Kanga.

A charity gala

Earlier in the week, the king and queen joined President Donald Trump and first lady Melania Trump for events at the White House. The king delivered a rare speech before Congress -- the first by a British monarch since his late mother in 1991 -- followed by a formal state dinner at the White House.

The monarchs are expected to make stops in Virginia before wrapping up their U.S. visit back at the White House on Thursday with a formal farewell from Trump. Charles then travels solo to Bermuda on his first visit as king to a British overseas territory.

In their last public event of the day in New York on Wednesday, the king and queen attended a gala reception at Rockefeller Center.

Singer and songwriter Lionel Richie, who has worked with the King's Trust for four decades, introduced the royal. Also present were Vogue editor-in-chief Anna Wintour, lifestyle icon Martha Stewart and fashion designer Donatella Versace.

The king closed his brief remarks in a packed wing of the gallery space by joking that he was disappointed he wouldn't get to hear Richie sing.

"I don't know how he does it. He must gargle with port or something."

Hegseth faces withering questions about Iran in first congressional appearance since war began

By BEN FINLEY, STEPHEN GROVES, DAVID KLEPPER and KONSTANTIN TOROPIN Associated Press
WASHINGTON (AP) — Making his first appearance before Congress since the Trump administration went to war against Iran, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth faced withering questioning Wednesday from skeptical Democrats over a costly conflict being waged without congressional approval.

The war has cost \$25 billion so far, according to Pentagon numbers presented to the House Armed Services Committee during a contentious hearing ostensibly focused on the administration's 2027 military budget proposal. It would boost defense spending to a historic \$1.5 trillion.

While Republicans focused on the details of military budgeting and voiced support for the Iran operation, Democrats grilled Hegseth and Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, about the ballooning costs of the war, the huge drawdown of critical U.S. munitions and the bombing of a school that killed children. Some lawmakers also questioned President Donald Trump's dealings with allies and his shifting justification for the conflict.

Hegseth dismissed the criticism as political and rebuked lawmakers who pushed him for answers.

"The biggest challenge, the biggest adversary we face at this point are the reckless, feckless and defeatist words of congressional Democrats and some Republicans," Hegseth said.

Democrats press Hegseth over reasons for war

Wednesday's hearing stretched nearly six hours as Democrats and some Republicans questioned Hegseth over the war and his ouster of several top military leaders.

In one tense exchange, Hegseth told Democratic Rep. Adam Smith that Iran's nuclear facilities were obliterated in 2025 strikes by the U.S., prompting Smith to question the Trump administration's reasoning for starting the Iran war less than a year later.

"We had to start this war, you just said 60 days ago, because the nuclear weapon was an imminent threat," said Smith, the ranking Democrat on the committee. "Now you're saying that it was completely obliterated?"

Hegseth responded that Iran "had not given up their nuclear ambitions" and still had thousands of missiles.

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Smith said the war "left us at exactly the same place we were before."

Iran's closing of the Strait of Hormuz, a vital shipping corridor for the world's oil, has sent fuel prices skyrocketing and posed problems for Republicans ahead of the midterm elections. The U.S. has imposed a naval blockade of Iranian shipping and three American aircraft carriers are in the Middle East for the first time in more than 20 years.

Democrats accused Hegseth of misleading Americans about the reasons for the conflict and said rising gas prices are now threatening the pocketbooks of millions of people in the U.S.

"Secretary Hegseth, you have been lying to the American public about this war from day one and so has the president," said Rep. John Garamendi of California, who called the war "a geopolitical calamity," a "strategic blunder" and a "self-inflicted wound to America."

Hegseth blasted Garamendi's remarks.

"Who are you cheering for here?" he asked the lawmaker. "Your hatred for President Trump blinds you" to the success of the war.

Hegseth defends firings of top military officers

The defense secretary faced intense questions from Rep. Chrissy Houlahan, a Pennsylvania Democrat, about his decision to oust the Army's top uniformed officer, Gen. Randy George, one of several top military officers to be dismissed since Trump took office again.

Houlahan said George was deeply respected by members of the military and Congress and asked why Hegseth fired him. Hegseth's response that "new leadership" was needed failed to satisfy Houlahan.

"You have no way of explaining why you fired one of the most decorated and remarkable men," Houlahan began, before Hegseth interrupted her. "We needed new leadership," he repeated.

The Pentagon also announced this month that Navy Secretary John Phelan was stepping down. Hegseth previously removed Adm. Lisa Franchetti, the Navy's top uniformed officer, Gen. Jim Slife, the Air Force's No. 2 leader and others, while Trump fired Gen. Charles "CQ" Brown Jr. as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Republican Rep. Don Bacon of Nebraska said that while Hegseth is empowered to make personnel changes, he shared what he called "bipartisan concern" about the firings.

"We had a huge bipartisan majority here that had confidence in the Army chief of staff and the secretary of the navy," Bacon said. "And I would just point out it may be constitutionally right ... but it doesn't make it right or wise."

Hegseth has said the changes are part of building a "warrior culture" at the Pentagon.

Republican Rep. Nancy Mace of South Carolina defended Hegseth's personnel moves, saying he is "trying to innovate and trying to change the way we do business."

"I'm glad that you're firing people," Mace said. "There are people there that are getting in your way. They need to go."

Democrats ask about war's cost, while Republicans back Trump on Iran

Hegseth detailed plans to increase pay for service members and upgrade munitions while also announcing that, as of Tuesday, the Pentagon had released \$400 million in previously appropriated military aid for Ukraine in its fight against Russia.

But the Iran war dominated the debate.

While a fragile ceasefire is in place, the U.S. and Israel launched the war Feb. 28 without congressional oversight. House and Senate Democrats have failed to pass multiple war power resolutions that would have required Trump to halt the conflict until Congress authorizes further action.

Republicans say they back Trump's wartime leadership for now, citing Iran's nuclear program, the potential for talks to resume and the high stakes of withdrawal. Still, GOP lawmakers are eager for the conflict to end, and some are eyeing future votes that could become an important test for the president if the war drags on.

Democrats questioned Hegseth over the war's economic impact and rising gasoline costs, noting Trump's promise to lower consumer costs. Hegseth responded by citing the threat posed by Iran.

"What is the cost of Iran having a nuclear weapon that they wield?" he said.

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The U.S. and Iran appear locked in a stalemate. Trump told Axios on Wednesday that he is rejecting Iran's proposal to reopen the Strait of Hormuz in exchange for lifting the U.S. blockade.

Texas tornado leaves 5 injured, buildings collapsed and homes without roofs

By JULIO CORTEZ and RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

MINERAL WELLS, Texas (AP) — Vicious winds burst through the front door of Christopher Hester's duplex apartment, then started ripping the roof apart. Hester and his wife grabbed their dog and ducked into a hallway to the sound of breaking glass, furniture hitting the walls and a howl like a monstrous vacuum cleaner.

"It was kind of hard to see because of the debris," Hester, 33, said Wednesday, standing amid the ruins of his home. "I was able to see the tornado. And all of my stuff go into the sky."

Officials confirmed that a tornado on Tuesday tore through this small Texas city, sending five people to a hospital as it flattened buildings used for manufacturing and ravaged nearby homes. Police and firefighters said they feared the worst when they first saw the damage in Mineral Wells, home to about 15,000 people.

"We are most grateful for no loss of life in this event yesterday," Mayor Regan Johnson told a news conference Wednesday. "When you see the destruction that's here, you can tell that's really amazing."

Hester and his wife searched through overturned furniture and scattered debris Wednesday for their two missing cats and any belongings they could salvage. Their roof was gone and the windows were blown out, along with the apartment's front and back walls.

"By the grace of God we are still standing here today," Hester said.

Allison Prater, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Fort Worth, said the tornado touched down in Mineral Wells with winds of at least 120 mph (193 kph). The weather service sent a team Wednesday to survey the destruction 80 miles (130 kilometers) west of Dallas.

Stormy week kills at least 3 people in Texas, Michigan

Violent weather has been plaguing parts of the South and Midwest. Two people died in North Texas last weekend as thunderstorms spawned destructive tornadoes, and a Michigan man was killed on Monday by a tree that toppled in a storm.

A hail storm damaged roofs, skylights and parked vehicles Tuesday at a zoo in Springfield, Missouri, and also killed one of its large birds. A female emu named Adam died from head trauma as hail fell at the Dickerson Park Zoo, spokesperson Joey Powell said Wednesday.

More severe storms were possible Wednesday across the South and parts of the Mid-Atlantic. The weather service said there was a slight chance of damaging winds and large hail across portions of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama.

Tornado damage forces manufacturer to shut down

In Mineral Wells, local officials spoke with reporters Wednesday in a subdivision strewn with splintered lumber, fallen trees and other debris.

Fire Chief Ryan Dunn said five people injured in the storm went to a hospital for treatment. Others were treated for minor injuries by first responders.

"As we arrived on scene, we noticed there was a lot of debris, a lot of roofs off," Dunn said. "And then we started seeing buildings collapse."

Dunn said most of the area struck by the tornado is used for commercial and industrial purposes, though some homes were also damaged. At least two manufacturers suffered heavy damage.

One was Ventamatic, which makes large fans and other ventilation equipment in Mineral Wells. The company said on its website that employees evacuated ahead of the storm and none were injured. Operations were shut down Wednesday "due to severe damage and ongoing safety hazards," the company said.

More than 9,000 homes and businesses were without electricity across Texas on Wednesday afternoon, according to the tracking site PowerOutage.us. About 230 of those outages were in the Mineral Wells area.

Mineral Wells officials declared a local state of disaster and imposed an overnight curfew that will remain

in place Wednesday, Police Chief Tim Denison said.

Man charged with trying to kill Trump took hotel room selfie before rushing gala, investigators say

By ED WHITE Associated Press

The man charged with trying to storm the White House Correspondents' Association dinner and kill President Donald Trump took a picture of himself in his hotel room just minutes earlier, outfitted with an ammunition bag, a shoulder gun holster and a sheathed knife, authorities said Wednesday in a new court filing.

Cole Allen wore black pants, a black shirt and a red tie as he snapped the image in his room at the Washington Hilton, where Trump and hundreds of journalists were meeting for a gala Saturday night, authorities say.

The 31-year-old from Torrance, California, was captured when he tried to race past security barricades near the hotel's ballroom, prompting an exchange of gunfire with Secret Service agents tasked with safeguarding the event, investigators say.

New details emerged in a court filing made by prosecutors who want Allen to remain in custody. A hearing is set for Thursday.

The government said Allen repeatedly made online checks to keep track of Trump's status that night, including live coverage of the president exiting his vehicle at the Hilton hotel. Investigators said preset emails with an "Apology and Explanation" attachment were sent at approximately 8:30 p.m.

"He intended to kill and fired his shotgun while trying to breach security and attack his target. Put simply, the defendant poses an uncommonly serious danger to the community if released pending trial. The defendant's lack of criminal history and other personal circumstances do not alter this conclusion," Assistant U.S. Attorney Charles Jones wrote.

Trump, a Republican, was uninjured. A Secret Service officer wearing a bullet-resistant vest was shot in the vest and survived.

Allen appeared in court on Monday and was charged with the attempted assassination of the president as authorities suggested an attack that disrupted one of Washington's glitziest events had been planned for at least several weeks. Tezira Abe, a member of the defense team, said he "is presumed innocent at this time."

Meanwhile, ahead of the Thursday hearing, a magistrate judge ordered a District of Columbia jail to allow Allen to have unrestricted visits with his lawyers. The attorneys complained that they hadn't been able to meet him privately.

"Mr. Allen was forced to sit inside of a locked cage in full, five-point restraints, and speak over a phone — of which there is only one — to be able to confer with counsel," Abe and co-counsel Eugene Ohm said in a court filing. "Counsel were forced to sit in an open lobby area with jail staff and other attorneys standing nearby who could overhear the entirety of counsel's side of the conversation."

An FBI affidavit filed Monday revealed other details about the planning behind the hotel assault, with authorities alleging that Allen on April 6 reserved a room for himself at the Hilton where the event would be held weeks later under its typical tight security. He traveled by train cross-country from California, checking himself into the hotel a day before the dinner with a room reserved for the weekend.

Trump was rushed off the stage by his security team Saturday night and appeared at the White House two hours later, still in his tuxedo.

"When you're impactful, they go after you. When you're not impactful, they leave you alone," the president said. "They seem to think he was a lone wolf."

Elon Musk tells his side of OpenAI's beginnings in trial pitting him against CEO Sam Altman

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — Elon Musk took the stand for the second day Wednesday in the landmark trial that pits the world's richest person against Sam Altman, a fellow OpenAI co-founder he accuses of betraying promises to keep the company as a nonprofit dedicated to humanity's benefit.

The trial centers on the 2015 birth of the ChatGPT maker as a nonprofit startup primarily funded by Musk before evolving into a capitalistic venture now valued at \$852 billion.

Musk, who invested about \$38 million in OpenAI from December 2015 through May 2017, gave his account of OpenAI's early years, recounting how he lost confidence that Altman would keep it a nonprofit. Questioned by his lawyer Steven Molo, Musk said by late 2022 he was concerned Altman was trying to "steal the charity."

"It turned out to be true," Musk said on the witness stand, wearing his usual courtroom attire of a black suit and tie.

Altman, OpenAI's CEO, was in attendance at the federal courthouse in Oakland, California, although he was not scheduled to testify on Wednesday. The trial started Monday and is expected to last about four weeks.

Lawyers for OpenAI have rejected the allegations brought in Musk's civil lawsuit and said there were never promises that the company would remain a nonprofit forever. The company has argued Musk's legal challenge is aimed at undercutting OpenAI's rapid growth and bolstering Musk's xAI, which he launched in 2023 as a competitor.

During cross-examination, Musk repeatedly pushed back on questions. OpenAI lawyer William Savitt was asking about emails Musk wrote before OpenAI's founding in 2015 on whether it would be better to make it a standard for-profit company and about tax deductions from his donations to the nonprofit.

"Your questions are not simple," Musk said. "They are designed to trick me essentially." Any simple answer, he said, would be misleading the jury.

Judge Yvonne Gonzalez Rogers stepped in, asking Musk to answer whether it's true or false that OpenAI was formed as a nonprofit in December 2015. Musk said in that case, the answer was yes, but added that it is not always simple, comparing it to asking "have you stopped beating your wife?"

"We are not going to go there," the judge replied, to laughs in the courtroom.

Despite moments of levity, the stakes are high at the trial, which could sway the balance of power in artificial intelligence. Musk's lawsuit seeks Altman's ouster from OpenAI's board. If Musk wins, it could derail OpenAI's plans for an initial public offering of its shares.

Musk's decision to stop funding the company contributed to a bitter falling out between the former allies that's been evident throughout the trial. On Wednesday, Musk said his views on Altman and his OpenAI cofounders had three phases — from initial excitement to losing confidence to a period in late 2022 when he thought "wait a second, these guys are betraying their promise."

Lawyers for OpenAI have said Musk sought to control the company for himself.

Musk repeatedly testified that while he initially sought a majority stake in OpenAI and control of four out of seven board seats, this would eventually be diluted when OpenAI grew and gained more shareholders. He compared it to his stake in Tesla, which he said is now around 15% after he initially had a majority stake when the electric car maker was founded over two decades ago.

OpenAI, however, claims there were no assurances that he would eventually relinquish his board majority.

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Oil prices keep spurting higher, but US stocks hold near their records

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — More jumps for oil prices sent tremors through the U.S. bond market on Wednesday, along with hints that some Federal Reserve officials don't want to cut interest rates any time soon. But fat profit reports from Starbucks and other big companies helped the U.S. stock market remain resilient despite that.

The S&P 500 finished nearly unchanged and edged down by less than 0.1%, a day after slipping from its latest all-time high. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 280 points, or 0.6%, while the Nasdaq composite inched up by less than 0.1%.

The action was more dramatic in the oil market, where the price for a barrel of Brent crude to be delivered in July jumped 5.8% to settle at \$110.44 per barrel. That's where most of the trading is happening in the Brent market, and it got as high as \$111.84 later in the afternoon.

The highest price since the war with Iran began is \$119.50 for the most actively traded Brent contract, reached last month. On Wednesday, the price for a barrel of Brent crude for delivery in June, which is getting less trading action than July's contract, briefly breached that mark and got above \$120.

Oil prices have jumped this week as President Donald Trump appears willing to maintain the U.S. blockade of Iranian ships, which is preventing the country from making money by selling oil. Iran, in turn, is keeping the Strait of Hormuz closed to other oil tankers hoping to carry crude to customers worldwide as long as the blockade continues.

High oil prices helped push the Federal Reserve to announce Wednesday that it's continuing to hold off on cuts to interest rates. While lower rates could give the economy a boost, they simultaneously risk worsening inflation.

Three Fed officials said they did not want to include anything suggesting more cuts may be coming in the central bank's statement announcing the decision.

Treasury yields climbed in the bond market immediately afterward, adding to gains from earlier in the day due to rising oil prices. The yield on the 10-year Treasury rose to 4.41% from 4.36% late Tuesday.

The two-year Treasury yield, which more closely tracks expectations for Fed action, climbed more. It jumped to 3.93% from 3.84%, which is a notable move for the bond market.

Traders still largely expect the Fed to hold the federal funds rate steady through the end of this year, according to data from CME Group. But they eliminated nearly all their bets for a cut to rates in 2026 in favor of a small chance for a hike.

Still, the U.S. stock market held near its records as more companies joined the procession reporting stronger profit growth for the start of 2026 than analysts expected.

Visa jumped 8.3% after delivering stronger results than analysts expected, and CEO Ryan McInerney said consumer spending remained resilient in the quarter.

Starbucks climbed 8.4% after likewise reporting better results than expected, while saying customers spent more at each visit, particularly at its North American stores.

But those not meeting expectations have gotten punished. GE Healthcare Technologies dropped 13.2% after falling short of analysts' forecasts. Robinhood Markets sank 13.2% after reporting growth in profit that was not as strong as analysts expected.

Booking Holdings swung between losses and gains and finished with a gain of 0.3% after the online travel company reported better results than analysts expected. It said the war with Iran is affecting its results and kept some potential customers from booking rooms during the quarter.

The company behind Booking.com, Priceline and other brands said it expects the conflict to continue affecting its business through the end of June. It could affect travel not only in the Middle East but also in major transit corridors, such as between Europe and Asia.

All told, the S&P 500 slipped 2.85 points to 7,135.95. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 280.12 to 48,861.81, and the Nasdaq composite added 9.44 to 24,673.24.

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In stock markets abroad, indexes fell in Europe following a stronger finish in Asia. Hong Kong's Hang Seng jumped 1.7% for one of the world's strongest moves, while London's FTSE 100 fell 1.2%.

Florida legislature approves new congressional map intended to boost Republicans in midterms

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — The Florida Legislature approved a new congressional map intended to maximize Republicans' advantage in the state as part of the national redistricting battle that President Donald Trump launched ahead of this year's midterms.

The vote came just two days after Gov. Ron DeSantis unveiled his proposal and the same day that the U.S. Supreme Court rolled back a key provision of the Voting Rights Act. The decision could make it harder for Democrats to challenge Republican efforts to redraw congressional districts in ways that limit the influence of nonwhite voters.

DeSantis' map could increase Republicans' advantage in Florida's House delegation to 24 to 4, up from the current split of 20 to 8. The potential four-seat gain is the same as what Virginia Democrats expect from a recent redistricting referendum, which is being challenged in state court there.

Florida's new districts are certain to face lawsuits as well, especially because the state constitution prohibits redistricting for explicitly partisan purposes. DeSantis and his aides believe those provisions will not be a legal barrier because they have been weakened previously by the Florida Supreme Court and again by Wednesday's U.S. Supreme Court ruling.

Florida Republicans, comfortable in their supermajority in both legislative chambers, said little about the new districts during the whirlwind special session. The measure's sponsor, Rep. Jenna Persons-Mulicka, R-Fort Myers, limited her remarks to careful answers about an "evolving legal landscape" as Democrats' asked her about the redistricting effort.

"I believe that there is a likelihood that that map will be upheld against legal challenge," Persons-Mulicka said.

Opposition was vocal but futile

Democrats, activists and some citizens to decried the process as a partisan power play to satisfy Trump, boost DeSantis' future ambitions and hurt the majority of registered Florida voters who are not Republicans.

"Y'all are doing this because y'all's daddy in the White House is injecting national political objectives into what should be a state-driven process," Rep. Michele Rayner, D-St. Petersburg, told her Republican colleagues before an 83-28 vote in favor of the measure.

The Florida Senate later approved the plan in a 21-17 vote.

Rep. Angie Nixon, a Jacksonville Democrat, chided Republicans for yielding the redistricting process to DeSantis, whose second term expires in January.

"Last time I checked, we're the ones who were supposed to be drawing the map," she said, "and yet we are allowing y'all to continue to hold the water of the governor, who is a lame duck and just trying to figure out what his next job is going to be."

Democrats diminished in metro areas

The new map reshapes districts in Democratic areas around Orlando, the Tampa-St. Petersburg area and in south Florida around Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale and Miami. The changes could cost Reps. Jared Moskowitz and Debbie Wasserman Schultz, among others, their seats.

DeSantis and his aides said before and during the session that new map is necessary to account for population growth in suburban and exurban areas since the 2020 census and to ensure Florida has a "race-neutral" congressional plan.

The proposal presumed the outcome of the U.S. Supreme Court's Wednesday decision, which specifically struck down a Louisiana congressional district drawn for the electorate to be majority Black. Historically, Black voters have aligned more with Democrats, while a majority of white voters lean toward Republicans.

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The changes in Florida include the effective elimination of one nearly majority Black south Florida district that was represented by Rep. Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick, a Black Democrat, until her resignation earlier this month.

Lawmakers fast-tracked the measures

From the session's opening bell Tuesday morning, Republican leaders moved swiftly.

In one of just two committee hearings, Senate Rules Chair Kathleen Passidomo, R-Naples, said she wanted "everybody who has taken the time and effort to come to Capitol to have an opportunity to speak." Then she declared each speaker would have 30 seconds.

"I know that doesn't seem like a lot but it actually is, uh, if you're concise," she said.

Deborah Courtney drove more than two hours from Jacksonville and noted that all citizen speakers expressed opposition.

"Why are you doing this redistricting now?" she asked senators. "I doubt that your phone have been ringing off the hook from your constituents going, hey, we need some new maps."

Rob Woods came from the Tampa area, which under the new map could have no Democratic representation in the U.S. House. A Black man, Wood told senators he was a veteran who said he "bought in from elementary school" on notions of the U.S. as an equal-opportunity democracy.

Now, he said, "it seems as if we are back in that period of Reconstruction, moving back to Jim Crow."

On the House floor, Persons-Mulicka, R-Fort Myers, sidestepped specifics about what factors went into the map. She repeatedly called it "race-neutral," citing testimony from DeSantis aide Jason Poreda, who took sole credit for the map during the session and did not disclose the names of any architects. But asked about Poreda's admission that he examined party affiliation and voting patterns, Persons-Mulicka balked.

"I cannot speak to the intent of the map drawer," she said.

DeSantis unveiled the map on Fox News

Persons-Mulicka and Sen. Don Gaetz, who sponsored the map in the Senate, deflected questions about why DeSantis unveiled the plan on Fox News.

Gaetz, a Crestview Republican, confirmed he had no part in drafting the map and forwarded the governor's proposal to other senators as soon as he received it late Monday morning.

There's no guarantee that new maps across the country will play out the way two parties hope. For example, Texas based its revised lines largely on Trump's performance in 2024, redistributing the president's voters across more districts to pull them into the Republican column. But Trump's popularity has waned since his reelection, including among Latino voters who figure prominently in the state.

Florida could face a similar conundrum. Creating more majority-Republican districts could leave margins thin enough to allow for Democratic victories, especially if there's an anti-Trump backlash at the polls this year.

Some Republicans have expressed worry about that possibility, and a handful voted against the measure in the Florida legislature.

The governor already took a hit because of the session. He had wanted lawmakers to adopt state regulations on artificial intelligence, ostensibly protecting minors from harmful material, while rolling back vaccine mandates for students in Florida's public schools. House Speaker Daniel Perez, a Republican but not a DeSantis ally, spiked both ideas.

DeSantis called it "political shenanigans."

House Minority Leader Fentrice Driskell, D-Tampa, lamented that Republicans still delivered DeSantis the big-ticket item that he wanted.

"On destroying our democracy, they've been aligned," she said, "and that's what we did here today."

Iran's rial currency hits record low as a shaky ceasefire with the US and Israel holds

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran's national rial currency dropped to a record low Wednesday while a U.S. naval blockade has increased pressure on its already battered economy amid a fragile ceasefire.

Experts warn that the rial's slide is likely to further fuel inflation in a country where many imported goods, from food and medicine to electronics and raw materials, are affected by the dollar rate.

The blockade has cut into a key source of government revenue and hard currency by stopping or intercepting oil shipments. Iran's leaders are betting that an economy built to be self-reliant under decades of international sanctions can endure the pain.

Four weeks into the ceasefire that has largely halted fighting in Iran, the U.S. and Iran remain locked in a standoff over the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's traded oil and gas passes in peacetime.

Iran's closure of the strait has put pressure on both sides and impacted the world economy, pushing up prices for food, fuel and other products made from petroleum. Frustration is mounting, as dozens of nations this week repeated calls to open the critical waterway for both humanitarian and economic relief.

Trump rejects Iran's proposal

Meanwhile, U.S. President Donald Trump rejected Iran's proposal to reopen the Strait of Hormuz in exchange for the U.S. Navy lifting its blockade of Iranian ports, he told Axios on Wednesday.

Iran's proposal, shared with U.S. leaders this week, sought to postpone discussions around Iran's nuclear program, leaving unresolved the disagreements that led the U.S. and Israel to go to war on Feb. 28.

"The blockade is somewhat more effective than the bombing," Trump told Axios. "And it is going to be worse for them. They can't have a nuclear weapon."

The Iranian proposal would have pushed negotiations on the country's nuclear program to a later date, two regional officials said earlier this week. The officials with knowledge of the proposal spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the closed-door negotiations between Iranian and Pakistani officials.

One of the major reasons Trump has said he went to war was to deny Iran the ability to develop nuclear weapons.

Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said Wednesday his government was continuing efforts to help ease tensions between the U.S. and Iran following an initial round of direct talks on April 11.

Trump welcomes the UAE decision to exit OPEC

The United Arab Emirates decision to leave OPEC on May 1 could help calm the world's volatile oil market shaken by the war, Trump said.

"I think ultimately it's a good thing for getting the price of gas down, getting oil down, getting everything down," Trump said in an exchange with reporters in the Oval Office.

Oil prices have been climbing steadily, and continued to surge on Wednesday.

Iran's currency plummets after holding steady

Iran's rial had remained stable in the early weeks of the war, in part because there was little trading or imports. It's slide began this week, hitting a record low Wednesday of 1.8 million to the dollar.

The hit comes months after a currency shock helped fuel nationwide protests in January, deepening public anger over rising prices and fears about the country's economic future.

Iran's economy has faced decades of sanctions, chronic inflation and a widening gap between official and open-market exchange rates.

Prices of basic household goods had already been rising before the rial's latest fall, adding to pressure on families. Over the past two weeks, people buying daily essentials have faced higher prices for milk, yogurt, cooking oil, bread, rice, cheese and detergents.

The increases point to broader inflationary pressure in the economy driven by uncertainty, supply disruptions, higher transport and production costs and the continuing impact of the U.S. blockade. The rial's latest slide is likely to add further pressure particularly on goods tied to imports, packaging and raw materials.

The cost of the war hits \$25 billion for the US

The U.S. has spent an estimated \$25 billion so far on the Iran war, a top defense official said during a Congressional hearing Wednesday.

Much of that has gone toward munitions, but the expenses also include running the operations and replacing equipment, Jules Hurst III, the acting undersecretary of war for finances, told the House Armed Services Committee.

Another Russian oil facility burns as Zelenskyy touts Ukraine's drone reach

By The Associated Press undefined

Another oil facility deep inside Russia was reportedly on fire Wednesday after what Ukraine's president claimed was his country's latest long-range drone attack.

Ukraine's Security Service, known as the SBU, said it struck an oil pumping station near the city of Perm as part of efforts to target Russia's energy infrastructure. The area is more than 1,500 kilometers (900 miles) from Ukraine.

Russian media reported the attack, though Perm Gov. Dmitry Makhonin said only that a drone hit an unspecified industrial facility, sparking a fire.

Russian officials have not been forthcoming about Ukrainian claims that Kyiv is carrying out more long-range attacks and that its domestically developed drones are increasingly accurate.

Speaking about Ukraine during a call with U.S. President Donald Trump, Russian President Vladimir Putin said Kyiv was inciting other European leaders and "prolonging the conflict," presidential aide Yuri Ushakov said.

Advanced drone technology has become a defining feature of the war as Russia's bigger army presses its more than four-year invasion of its neighbor.

Ukraine claims it hit a key Russian oil hub

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy posted a video on Telegram showing a large plume of black smoke rising in countryside near a built-up area. Without specifying it was the Perm attack or what was hit, Zelenskyy said Ukraine was expanding the range of its long-distance strikes.

He called them a new phase in efforts to limit Russia's ability to wage war by denying it crucial oil revenue.

It was not possible to independently verify the video.

The SBU claimed that most oil storage tanks were ablaze at the facility, which it said is owned by Russia's pipeline operator Transneft and a key hub in the oil transportation system. The claims could not be independently verified.

The attack came a day after Ukraine struck the Tuapse oil refinery and terminal on the Black Sea for the third time in less than two weeks, prompting what Putin said could be "serious environmental consequences." Local authorities said the fire had been "contained" by Wednesday.

Ukrainian drones exploit Russian vulnerabilities

Ukraine has escalated its long-distance strikes against Russian oil facilities in an effort to stop Moscow from gaining a financial windfall from a U.S. waiver on sanctions amid global supply restrictions caused by the Iran war, according to the Institute for the Study of War.

Kyiv is exploiting the vulnerabilities of Russia's large land mass, the Washington-based think tank said.

"Ukrainian forces will likely continue to exploit the large attack surface of Russia's deep rear and overstretched Russian air defenses to launch more frequent and larger strikes against Russian oil infrastructure and military assets, supported by increased Ukrainian domestic drone production," the institute said late Tuesday.

The Russian Defense Ministry said Wednesday its air defenses overnight intercepted 98 Ukrainian drones over Russian regions and Crimea, which Russia illegally annexed in 2014.

Ukraine's weapon surplus could go to partner countries

After years of relying heavily on foreign military support, Ukraine is poised to export its sought-after

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drone know-how. Zelenskyy said Ukraine is producing a surplus of up to 50% in some types of weapons. Military cooperation "is already underway" with countries in the Middle East, the Gulf, Europe and the Caucasus, he said on Telegram late Tuesday.

The deals involve the production and supply of drones and missiles as well as software and technology, according to Zelenskyy.

Kyiv has also handed a proposal to the United States for cooperation on drones, defense systems and other types of weapons for use in the air, on land and at sea, he said.

Russian nighttime attacks wound civilians

Russia hasn't eased up on its own long-range attacks on Ukraine's civilian areas, damaging homes and infrastructure, regional authorities said.

Eight people were injured in an overnight attack on the northeastern Kharkiv region, the regional prosecutor's office said.

In the northeastern Sumy region, officials said a 60-year-old woman died of carbon monoxide poisoning as a result of an attack.

In the southern Odesa region, Russian forces struck Izmail, damaging infrastructure facilities, according to the local administration. A district hospital building was damaged.

Ukraine's air force said it shot down 154 of the 171 drones launched by Russia overnight.

Supreme Court sides with anti-abortion center raising First Amendment fears about state probe

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Wednesday sided with a faith-based pregnancy center that raised First Amendment concerns about an investigation into whether it misled people to discourage abortions.

The high court's unanimous ruling is a procedural victory for First Choice Women's Resource Centers, which is challenging a New Jersey investigation of its practices.

The conservative-majority court has given abortion opponents high-profile wins in recent years, most notably the watershed case that overturned the nationwide right to abortion in 2022. First Choice, though, had also drawn support from the American Civil Liberties Union, which supports abortion rights but backed the group's First Amendment concerns.

The Supreme Court's decision lets First Choice sue over a state-issued subpoena in federal court, though the ruling does not resolve the underlying case.

Lawyer Erin Hawley with the Alliance Defending Freedom argued the case, and said the group looks forward to taking up the case in federal court if New Jersey's attorney general decides to "continue these efforts on remand."

Facilities often known as "crisis pregnancy centers" have been on the rise in the United States as Republican-controlled states enforce bans or restrictions on abortion and some steer tax dollars to the centers, which provide prenatal care and steer women to carrying pregnancies to term.

As Democratic-leaning states seek to protect abortion access, several have investigated whether the anti-abortion centers mislead women, including by implying they offer abortions.

In New Jersey, then-Democratic Attorney General Matthew Platkin sent a subpoena asking for donor lists and other information.

First Choice pushed back, arguing the investigation was baseless and the demand for donor lists threatened their First Amendment rights to free speech and association. They tried to challenge the subpoena in federal court, but a judge found the case was not yet far enough along. An appeals court agreed.

First Choice then turned to the Supreme Court.

They argued access to federal court is important in cases where government investigators are accused of misusing state power, and the ACLU agreed that subpoenas seeking donor information can scare away supporters.

The state argued that the information would only be used to ask donors whether they had been deceived about First Choice's services, and the subpoena could not have threatened their First Amendment rights because the group hadn't yet been required to turn over any information.

A court order is required to enforce the subpoena, and the judge overseeing the underlying case has so far only ordered the two sides to negotiate.

New Jersey also argued that allowing First Choice to sue could usher in a glut of lawsuits from the thousands of businesses that get similar subpoenas.

The Trump administration weighed in to support First Choice. The Justice Department argued that any impact would be relatively small since the decision would only apply to groups with similar First Amendment arguments.

Transponders to be installed on New York area airport ground vehicles following deadly collision

By BRUCE SHIPKOWSKI Associated Press

Transponders that might have helped pinpoint the location of a fire truck that collided with a landing Air Canada jet in New York will soon be installed on ground vehicles at the region's three major airports.

The trackers will be put on fire trucks and other rescue vehicles, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey said Tuesday. The transponders can provide air traffic controllers with more precise information about the vehicles and their locations by constantly sending signals to the control tower.

The National Transportation Safety Board noted the lack of transponders in a preliminary report it issued last week about the March 22 accident at LaGuardia Airport. An Air Canada jet collided with a fire truck on the runway, killing two pilots and injuring several other people.

An air traffic controller had cleared the vehicle to cross the runway. According to the report, the truck drove past red warning lights. There was also extra heavy air traffic and an emergency involving another plane at the time.

LaGuardia is one of 35 airports that have Airport Surface Detection Systems, known as ASDE-X. They combine radar data with information from transponders inside planes and ground vehicles along with other data to create a display in the tower showing controllers where every plane and vehicle is. The system will also sound an alarm in the tower when it anticipates a potential collision.

The Federal Aviation Administration has recommended that major airports nationwide install the transponders and has offered to help pay for them. Many airports have followed the guidance.

James Allen, the Port Authority's chief communications officer, said the agency has made "targeted investments in safety technology" for its airfield vehicles, including systems designed to track vehicle movements and support operator awareness across the airfield. Besides LaGuardia, the authority operates Kennedy Airport in New York and Newark Liberty Airport in northern New Jersey.

"We recognize that transponder technology can provide an additional layer of visibility on top of existing surface-surveillance systems that already track ground movements," Allen said. "We will continue to work closely with the NTSB as its investigation proceeds and remain focused on working with the FAA to strengthen safety across our airfield operations."

Push for raw milk intensifies across the US, despite illness outbreaks and scientists' warnings

By LAURA UNGAR and JONEL ALECCIA Associated Press

Backers of raw milk are pushing to make the potentially dangerous product more widely available and easier to obtain, even as a new disease outbreak — one of at least five in the past year — sickens U.S. children.

More than three dozen bills supporting raw milk have been introduced in statehouses across the nation, The Associated Press found. A growing number of states are making it legal to sell. Dairy farmers say they

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can barely keep it in stock, even though prices can exceed \$10 or \$20 a gallon.

Top government officials and internet influencers are helping drive this momentum. U.S. Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. downed shots of raw milk at the White House last May and previously promised to halt “aggressive suppression” of the product. On social media, posts about raw milk have surged in recent months, often touting unproven claims about its health benefits.

All of this alarms public health officials, who have long warned that unpasteurized milk can harbor risky germs. The current outbreak — tied to raw milk cheddar cheese from California-based Raw Farm — has sickened nine people with E. coli, half of them children younger than 5. One victim developed a serious complication that can impair kidney function for life.

Petra Anne Levin, a biology professor at Washington University in St. Louis, said she doesn’t understand the products’ appeal.

“If you wouldn’t lick a cow’s underneath, why would you drink raw milk?” she said. “There’s a reason pasteurization is around.”

Pasteurization kills germs by heating the milk, commonly to at least 161 degrees Fahrenheit (71.7 degrees Celsius) for at least 15 seconds. Experts say it has no significant impact on milk’s nutritional quality and has saved millions of people from foodborne illness.

But some consumers would rather drink their milk raw despite the risk. Recognizing this trend, advocates and critics alike are increasingly calling for federal regulation of the product.

“People want access,” said Mary McGonigle-Martin, co-chair of Stop Foodborne Illness, a consumer advocacy group. “Public health has lost the battle on raw milk.”

Raw milk legislation pops up across the nation

Bills favoring raw milk have been introduced in the current legislative session in 18 states, including those controlled by Democrats and Republicans.

AP searched legislation in all 50 states using the bill-tracking software Plural and analyzed bills for whether they expand or streamline access to unpasteurized milk or products made from it. More than 40 bills introduced as of late April would make it easier to buy, sell or consume raw milk.

Some would allow raw milk to be sold for human consumption for the first time. A bill in New Jersey’s Senate, for example, would create a raw milk permitting program.

“You can buy cigarettes. You can buy alcohol. You can buy quote-unquote legalized marijuana,” said state Sen. Michael Testa, a Republican sponsor. “Why shouldn’t someone be able to consume raw milk?”

If the bill becomes law, New Jersey would join more than three dozen states in allowing raw milk sales. Wider access will probably mean more outbreaks, said Donald Schaffner, a Rutgers University food science professor.

Other bills seek to manage, guide or expand already legal sales. A bill advancing in the Iowa House would make it easier for farmers to sell unpasteurized products by offering them at farm stores alongside foods like meat.

Its sponsor, Republican state Rep. Chad Ingels, said he was initially opposed to legalizing raw milk because of safety concerns.

“But it’s law now, and I’m very pro-local foods,” said Ingels, who expects the current bill to pass. “I just thought it made sense to allow those farm businesses to sell all their products in one location.”

Two bills in Missouri would allow unpasteurized dairy products to be sold in grocery stores, farmers’ markets or similar places as long as they include a label warning of the potential for harmful bacteria and herds are tested.

“We just want to make it more accessible, so that way, people have the freedom of choice,” said Republican state Rep. Bryant Wolfen, who sponsored one of the bills.

The legislation specifically invokes the Raw Milk Institute, defining “retail raw milk or cream” as being produced on dairy farms that in one bill meet standards set by the California-based organization, and in the other “have obtained listed status” from the institute.

The organization, headed by Raw Farm owner Mark McAfee, says its mission is to improve the safety and quality of raw milk, which is how Wolfen sees it. But Schaffner said the organization focuses on raw

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milk advocacy rather than managing risk. He pointed out that McAfee's farm has been linked to numerous outbreaks.

It's unclear how many raw milk bills will pass in statehouses this year. But there is also legislation being considered on a national level.

A bipartisan bill in the U.S. House would prevent federal departments, agencies or courts from restricting the movement of raw milk between two states where its sale is legal. Called the Interstate Milk Freedom Act, it was introduced in March by Kentucky Republican Thomas Massie and Maine Democrat Chellie Pingree.

Whether it passes or not, there are steps the federal government could take to make raw milk more available, legal experts say. The FDA could revoke the ban on interstate sales. The agency could also create national raw milk standards and urge or incentivize states to enforce them.

FDA officials did not respond to questions about whether such actions are likely.

Raw milk risks are well-documented

Despite raw milk's popularity, scientists and public health experts warn against drinking it. Websites run by the FDA and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention point to the well-documented risks of serious illness from a host of germs, including campylobacter, listeria, salmonella and E. coli.

A CDC review counted more than 200 outbreaks tied to raw milk that sickened more than 2,600 people and sent 225 to hospitals between 1998 and 2018.

Another analysis found that raw dairy products cause 840 times more illness and 45 times more hospitalizations than their pasteurized counterparts.

Children are especially vulnerable to such illness, because their immune systems are immature and because they drink milk frequently, noted Alex O'Brien, food safety and quality coordinator for the Center for Dairy Research in Madison, Wisconsin.

Before milk standards were adopted more than a century ago, about 25% of foodborne illnesses in the U.S. were related to dairy consumption, O'Brien said. Now, dairy products account for about 1% of such illnesses. In European and American societies of the early and mid-19th century, research shows infant mortality rates were 30-60 times greater than today. In one example, thousands of infants died every year from a condition known as "summer diarrhea," which was primarily caused by bacterial contamination in milk that worsened in the heat.

O'Brien, who grew up on a farm, said he knows people who drink raw milk and has consumed it himself in the past. Drinking it once might not hurt you, he said, but the risk increases with every exposure.

Understanding and accepting the risks of raw milk has become more difficult in this political climate, said Martin, the consumer advocate.

"They can't grasp it, or they think it's so rare it won't happen to them," she said.

Martin's son, Chris, nearly died in 2006 after drinking raw milk contaminated with E. coli sold by Organic Pastures, Raw Farm's previous name. For two decades, Martin has worked to raise awareness of the dangers and hold suppliers accountable.

Mari Tardiff, of Ashland, Oregon, was hospitalized for five months after drinking raw milk contaminated with campylobacter in 2008. She said she tried it because she was interested in "a natural probiotic."

Doctors diagnosed her with Guillain-Barré syndrome, caused by her campylobacter infection. She spent time on a ventilator and was temporarily paralyzed and unable to talk. When she got home, she used a wheelchair and slept in a hospital bed, relying on her husband to turn her every two hours so she wouldn't get pressure sores.

"Your whole life is completely blown apart," she said.

Still, she said she wouldn't tell other adults whether to drink raw milk — although she worries about giving it to kids.

"If you make a mistake, it's one thing to come to terms with when you're the one dealing with the consequences," said Tardiff, now 70. "But holy moly ... if I did something like that and one of my kids or my grandchildren was going through what I went through, I would never forgive myself."

Raw milk supporters see an 'exciting' future, but concerns remain

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Proponents of raw milk are gratified that it's becoming more available. Even in states where it can't be sold in stores for human consumption, people can get raw milk marketed for pets or join a "herd share" in which consumers buy a partial ownership in a dairy herd.

"I've been involved in raw milk for roughly 14 years," said Ben Beichler, of Creambrook Farm in Middlebrook, Virginia, which relies on herd shares. "To see how public perception and political perception has altered over the years with raw milk is quite exciting."

Beichler said safety is key.

"My family and my wife, who's currently pregnant, drink about a gallon of our own raw milk every single day," he said. "So if there's anybody who has a vested interest in making sure our milk is safe, it is us."

Beichler said his 150-cow farm works with a veterinarian on regular herd checks and has a safety process that includes sending milk samples to labs every week to test for common germs.

In Foristell, Missouri, Tony Huffstutter said his family tests their milk daily for bacteria in an on-site lab at their Twisted Ash Farm & Dairy, where they keep 15 cows and sell raw milk for \$29 a gallon.

"You can't just go out there, throw a bucket under the cow and start milking it," he said. "There are so many steps in doing it right."

He said raw milk shouldn't be treated differently from other natural products such as spinach, which has been associated with past foodborne outbreaks.

"They don't pasteurize the salad," he said. "They don't force you to only buy cooked salad."

With raw milk gaining a foothold, Martin said she believes that the best action might be for the FDA to regulate it as strictly as pasteurized dairy products.

McAfee agrees. "High standards and testing should be part of that," he said.

Schaffner, the food safety expert, also favors regulation. Although he has serious reservations about giving raw milk to kids, he calls himself "a raw milk libertarian" when it comes to adults.

"It's kind of like legalization of weed, right?" he said. "If people want it, we should find a way to regulate it and do it safely."

Then again, he said, there's already a dependable way of making raw milk safe.

"It's called pasteurization," he said. "And it works really well."

In one state, voters will get to decide whether to eliminate the income tax. Will more follow?

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (AP) — It's not every day — or even every decade — that voters are presented a decision like this: Should the state's individual income tax be eliminated?

When that question appears on a Missouri ballot later this year, it will mark the first time since the modern income tax began over a century ago that a U.S. state legislature has asked voters whether to eliminate the tax. If they say "yes," they will also be authorizing a sales tax expansion.

Missouri's unique proposal caps a five-year tax-cutting binge in states that flourished while governments were flush with cash during the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and only recently abated as some Democratic-led states embraced higher tax rates on millionaires. During that time, almost every state made either permanent or temporary reductions to some type of tax, whether on income, sales, property or gas. And more than half the states that levy income taxes reduced their top tax rate.

Those tax cuts seldom were offset by increasing other types of taxes. But Missouri's new measure implicitly acknowledges that it's hard to eliminate an income tax without raising other revenues to keep government running.

When did the income tax begin?

Congress gained the power to tax income with the ratification of the 16th Amendment in 1913. Many states adopted their own income taxes over the ensuing years, including Missouri in 1917.

But some states — Florida, Nevada, South Dakota, Texas and Wyoming — never adopted an individual income tax, instead relying on sales taxes, oil taxes or other sources. New Hampshire and Tennessee,

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which taxed income from interest and dividends but not wages, each ended those taxes within the past five years.

Alaska is the only state so far to impose a general individual income tax and then repeal it. Lawmakers eliminated the tax in 1980 while rich with oil revenues.

Massachusetts voters rejected an income tax elimination in 2008 and 2002. But those ballot measures were initiated by citizens, not lawmakers responsible for building the state budget.

Which states are trying to phase out their income tax?

A 2022 Kentucky law reduced the state's income tax rate and set a series of revenue-based benchmarks that could gradually lower the tax to zero. It also expanded the sales tax to some services, such as personal fitness training and website design. But the revenue triggers aren't automatic, meaning the General Assembly must approve each additional income tax rate reduction.

A Mississippi law enacted last year gradually reduces the income tax rate from 4% to 3% by 2030 and sets revenue growth benchmarks that could trigger additional cuts. It could take over a decade to eliminate the tax, if all the benchmarks are hit.

Oklahoma also enacted a law last year that would trigger gradual income tax rate reductions based on revenue growth, until the tax is phased out. But the state won't know until next year whether it's met the revenue mark to trigger the first tax-rate reduction.

South Carolina joined the trend a month ago, when Republican Gov. Henry McMaster signed a law that could eventually phase out the individual income tax as revenues grow.

What does the Missouri proposal say?

Missouri's proposed constitutional amendment directs the General Assembly to eliminate the individual income tax through gradual reductions based on revenue growth. To spur that along, it gives lawmakers the authority to raise revenues by imposing the sales tax on "any goods and services" — sidestepping a constitutional ban on expanding the sales tax base that voters approved in 2016.

The legislature would have five years to decide which additional sales to tax without needing another vote of the people.

But some voters may not realize they are authorizing more sales taxes. The ballot wording asks whether to phase out the income tax and "modify" the sales tax — avoiding the words "increase" or "expand."

The amendment, which was approved last week by the legislature, will appear on the November ballot, unless Republican Gov. Mike Kehoe sets an election sooner.

A businessman explains his move

Kehoe has made the individual income tax repeal a priority, arguing it will spur the economy while attracting businesses and new residents.

At a House committee hearing earlier this year, Will Spartin said he attended business college in St. Louis but located the headquarters of his beverage businesses in Florida because that state has no individual income tax. He would love to return to Missouri, but only if it makes financial sense, Spartin said.

"If Missouri moves in this direction, even gradually, it would be a meaningful signal to people like us that Missouri wants to compete for modern industries," Spartin told lawmakers.

A retiree raises sales tax concerns

Retired elementary school teacher Sharon Wells, of suburban St. Louis, said she paid a few hundred dollars in state income tax this past year. She's worried her overall tax bill could rise if the income tax is replaced with a broader sales tax.

Wells pays someone to mow her lawn. She goes to a hair salon twice a month. She has periodic medical and dental visits and a car that needs maintenance. None of those services currently are taxed. But they all could be under the Missouri proposal.

"I think it's a huge mistake," she said. "We're already paying far more than we have in the past for groceries, medicine, all kind of services. Everything has gone up."

What does the data say?

A family earning between \$49,000 and \$78,000 annually would pay an average of \$535 more in taxes

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if Missouri's income tax is repealed and replaced with higher sales taxes, according to an estimate by the nonprofit Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. Those earning less would pay even more, the group said.

"Pretty clearly, this is going to be a tax increase for most people," said Carl Davis, the institute's research director.

Other data suggest that income tax policies — though not the primary motivation — can play a role in attracting people to states. Texas, Florida and Tennessee all ranked in the top five for net interstate migration of federal income tax filers in 2023, while the higher-tax states of California, New York and New Jersey ranked near the bottom, according to an analysis of IRS data by the nonprofit Tax Foundation.

If Missouri's referendum is approved by voters, "it could embolden other states to accelerate their own planned income tax reductions," said Katherine Loughhead, the foundation's director of state tax projects.

Takeaways from AP's report on the push for raw milk intensifying

By LAURA UNGAR and JONEL ALECCIA Associated Press

Backers of raw milk are pushing to make the potentially dangerous product more widely available and easier to obtain, even as a new disease outbreak — one of at least five in the past year — sickens U.S. children.

More than three dozen bills supporting raw milk have been introduced in statehouses across the nation, The Associated Press found. A growing number of states are making it legal to sell. Dairy farmers say they can barely keep it in stock.

Top government officials and internet influencers are helping drive this momentum. U.S. Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. downed shots of raw milk at the White House a year ago and previously promised to halt "aggressive suppression" of the product. Social media posts about raw milk have surged in recent months, often touting unproven claims about its health benefits.

All of this alarms public health officials, who have long warned that unpasteurized milk can harbor risky germs. The current outbreak — tied to raw milk cheddar cheese from California-based Raw Farm — has sickened nine people with E. coli, half of them children younger than 5.

Here are some key takeaways from AP's report on raw milk.

Raw milk legislation is popping up across the nation

Bills favoring raw milk have been introduced in the current legislative session in 18 states, including those controlled by Democrats and Republicans. AP searched legislation in all 50 states using the bill-tracking software Plural and analyzed bills for whether they expand or streamline access to unpasteurized milk or products made from it. More than 40 bills introduced as of late April would make it easier to buy, sell or consume raw milk.

Some would allow it to be sold for human consumption — something more than three dozen states have already done. Others seek to manage, guide or expand already legal sales.

National legislation is also being considered. A bipartisan bill in the U.S. House would prevent federal departments, agencies or courts from restricting the movement of raw milk between two states where its sale is legal.

Wider access will probably mean more outbreaks, said Donald Schaffner, a Rutgers University food science professor.

Raw milk risks are well-documented

Despite raw milk's popularity, scientists and public health experts warn against drinking it. Websites run by the FDA and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention point to the well-documented risks of serious illness from a host of germs, including campylobacter, listeria, salmonella and E. coli.

A CDC review counted more than 200 outbreaks tied to raw milk that sickened more than 2,600 people and sent 225 to hospitals between 1998 and 2018.

Another analysis found that raw dairy products cause 840 times more illness and 45 times more hospitalizations than their pasteurized counterparts.

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Children are especially vulnerable to such illness, because their immune systems are immature and because they drink milk frequently, noted Alex O'Brien, safety and quality coordinator for the Center for Dairy Research in Madison, Wisconsin.

But adults can also get very sick.

Mari Tardiff, of Ashland, Oregon, was hospitalized for five months after drinking raw milk contaminated with campylobacter in 2008.

Doctors diagnosed her with Guillain-Barré syndrome, caused by her campylobacter infection. She spent time on a ventilator and was temporarily paralyzed and unable to talk.

"Your whole life is completely blown apart," said Tardiff, now 70.

Some raw milk supporters favor regulation

Proponents of raw milk are gratified that it's becoming more available. Even in states where it can't be sold in stores for human consumption, people can get raw milk marketed for pets or join a "herd share" in which consumers buy a partial ownership in a dairy herd.

Farmers who sell it say safety is key.

"My family and my wife, who's currently pregnant, drink about a gallon of our own raw milk every single day," said Ben Beichler, of Creambrook Farm in Middlebrook, Virginia, which relies on herd shares. "So if there's anybody who has a vested interest in making sure our milk is safe, it is us."

Beichler said his 150-cow farm works with a veterinarian on regular herd checks and has a multistep safety process that includes sending milk to food safety labs every week to test for common germs.

With raw milk gaining a foothold, people on all sides of the issue are now favoring regulation.

"It's kind of like legalization of weed, right?" said Schaffner, the food safety expert. "If people want it, we should find a way to regulate it and do it safely."

Kevin Warsh is one step closer to top job at the Fed after Trump's pick approved by Senate committee

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate Banking Committee voted on party lines Wednesday to approve Kevin Warsh as the next chair of the Federal Reserve to replace Jerome Powell, a longtime target of President Donald Trump's insults for not cutting borrowing costs as far as the president wanted.

The vote was 13-11, with all Republican senators voting in favor and Democrats opposed.

Warsh is a former top Fed official but has also been a sharp critic of the institution and Powell's leadership. He has called the inflation spike to 9.1% in 2022 the central bank's biggest policy mistake in four decades. A vote on his nomination probably won't take place until next month, but he could be confirmed by the time Powell's term as chair ends May 15.

The Senate Banking vote is the first of two key events surrounding the future of the Fed's leadership. Also Wednesday, Powell is presiding over what will probably be his last meeting of the Fed's interest rate-setting committee. At a news conference Wednesday afternoon, Powell may indicate whether he will remain as a member of the central bank's board of governors after his term as chair ends.

It would be unusual for Powell to stay, but doing so would deprive the Trump administration of an opportunity to appoint a new member to the board. Powell may choose to stay if he sees it as necessary to protect the Fed's independence, which has become part of his legacy as its leader.

Sen. Tim Scott, a South Carolina Republican and chair of the committee, said Warsh is "battle tested" and added that, "It is incredibly important that we break the bind of Bidenomics on households across this nation."

Sen. Elizabeth Warren, a Democrat from Massachusetts, criticized the banking panel for voting on Warsh's nomination. Doing so "will bring the president one step closer to completing his illegal attempt to seize control of the Fed and artificially juice the economy," she said, citing Trump's effort to fire Fed governor Lisa Cook and investigate Powell.

The Fed on Wednesday is widely expected to leave its key rate unchanged at about 3.6% for its third

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straight meeting, defying Trump's calls for lower rates.

Warsh has called for "regime change" at the Fed and could alter many of its practices, including the economics models it focuses on, how it communicates with the public, and how large its bondholdings will be in the long run.

Those changes could affect financial markets, but otherwise won't necessarily be visible to the general public. But Warsh has also advocated for additional interest rate cuts, which could potentially lower borrowing costs for mortgages, auto loans, and business loans. He will face barriers to implementing those cuts anytime soon, however, largely because the Iran war has caused a spike in gas prices, pushing inflation to a two-year high of 3.3%.

The Fed typically keeps rates elevated, or even raises them, to combat worsening inflation.

Most of the other 11 members of the Fed's rate-setting committee have indicated they would prefer to wait and evaluate where inflation and the economy are headed before making any changes to rates. It could take time for Warsh to build up enough influence to push for rapid rate cuts. He will also replace Stephen Miran, a member of the Fed's rate-setting committee who was appointed by Trump last September and is the most consistent advocate for rate reductions at the central bank.

Warsh also faces questions about his independence from the White House, a key issue that dogged him during a Senate Banking hearing last week. On Wednesday, Warren said, "Mr. Warsh is a Trump sock puppet who is so cowed by the president that he could not even say that Trump lost the 2020 election."

Last December, Trump called for much lower interest rates in a social media post, and added that "anyone who does not agree with me will never be Fed chair!" And just last week he told Fox Business that he expects rates to head lower, "when Kevin gets in."

Warsh denied at his hearing, however, that Trump had ever pressured him directly to cut rates.

Rare earth mining is poisoning Mekong River tributaries, threatening 'the world's kitchen'

By ANTON L. DELGADO and ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL Associated Press

CHIANG SAEN, Thailand (AP) — Perched on the bow of his long-tail fishing boat, 75-year-old Sukjai Yana untangled a handful of small fish from his net, disappointed by his catch and fretting over whether he can sell them.

Some days Yana earns nothing: demand for fish is falling due to worries over contamination of the Mekong River and its tributaries by toxic runoff from rare earth mines upstream that is threatening millions who rely on those waters for farms and fisheries.

Chiang Saen, a fishing hub in northern Thailand, has been Yana's family's home for decades. "I don't know where else I'd go," he said.

Yana is one of 70 million people in mainland Southeast Asia who depend on the nearly 5,000-kilometer (3,100-mile) Mekong River. Rising demand for rare earth materials is driving an unregulated mining boom centered in war-torn Myanmar, to the west, that is spreading to Laos, in the east.

The Mekong has long faced mounting pressures, from plastic pollution to hydropower dams hemming it upstream and sand mining devouring its banks. But experts warn that the toxic runoff from the mines could pose an existential threat.

Exposure to heavy metals such as arsenic, mercury, lead and cadmium raises risks of cancer, organ failure and developmental harm, especially for children and pregnant women.

Thailand is bearing the brunt of the mining boom as such toxins imperil its global food exports — from bags of rice in U.S. supermarkets to edamame snacks served in Japan and garlic used in Malaysian kitchens. Responses remain local and limited, while smuggling and Myanmar's civil war complicate regional fixes, raising concerns for downstream Cambodia and Vietnam.

Agriculture is the backbone of Southeast Asia's economies, said Suebsakun Kidnukorn of Mae Fah Luang University in northern Thailand's Chiang Rai, warning that rare earth mines are destroying "the world's

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kitchen.”

Toxic runoff seeps into Thailand

While cutting banana bunches on a farm in the hilly Thai village of Tha Ton, 63-year-old Lah Boonruang taps his fingers to count the toxin-exposed crops he harvests — rice, garlic, corn, onion, mangoes and bananas.

He irrigates his fields with water from the Kok River, a Mekong tributary that flows into Thailand from Myanmar and is laden with toxins.

“Everyone is afraid of the toxins,” he said. “If we can’t export, a farmer is the first to die.”

Thailand is one of the world’s top rice exporters along with India and Vietnam. It exported over \$10 billion worth of rice and fruits in 2024, according to trade figures that rank the U.S. as the top rice importer.

“Our worry is that toxins accumulate in the rice we export. This would make our rice farming industry, which is our culture, collapse,” said Niwat Roykaew, founder of the environmental institute The Mekong School in northern Thailand’s Chiang Khong.

Thai scientists have found elevated heavy metal pollution in other Mekong tributaries, like the Sai and Ruak rivers.

The Mekong starts in China and flows through five Southeast Asian nations before emptying into the sea. Millions rely on fish from the Mekong Basin for protein.

Warnings to ethnic minorities in the hills of northern Thailand to avoid using river water are painful for the Lahu, who are famed as fisher people, said Sela Lipo, 56, a Lahu elder.

“The Lahu’s way of life is always with a river,” he said. “The contaminated river has cut off our lifeline.”

Solutions are local and limited

Thailand’s government says it has little leverage against mining operations across the border in strife-torn Myanmar and Laos. The Thai response has also been constrained by limited expertise, information and funds, said Aweera Pakkamart of Thailand’s Pollution Control Department.

Instead, public universities, local governments and regional organizations like the Mekong River Commission, have mainly focused on monitoring levels of heavy metals and educating communities about risks.

Recent water, fish and sediment samples from Mekong tributaries had high levels of dangerous heavy metals, such as arsenic, mercury, lead and cadmium, from rare earth mining, said Warakorn Maneechuket, a researcher at Thailand’s Naresuan University.

In a lab, she uses a scalpel to point out tell-tale signs of contamination — tumor-like growths, discolored scales, and unusual eye coloration — before dissecting a catfish caught from the Kok River.

The accumulation of heavy metals is insidious. Arsenic can cause organ failure. Mercury damages the nervous system. Lead impairs cognition and cadmium harms the kidneys.

To raise awareness of health risks, Tanapon Phenrat of Naresuan University helped develop a smartphone fish safety app, training fishers in Chiang Saen to use it to identify and upload images of suspicious fish. Building a citizen-science database for northern Thailand can help quantify the scale and spread of contamination, he said.

“Each and every sample is very important,” he said.

Rare earth demand rises

The ubiquity of rare earth elements means demand keeps rising.

Rare earths are vital to modern technology, from smartphones and electric vehicles to missiles and jets. Despite the name, they are common. It is the costly mining and complex refining process, concentrated in China, that makes them scarce.

The U.S.-based Stimson Center has used satellite photo analysis to identify nearly 800 suspected unregulated rare earth and other mining sites along Mekong tributaries in Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia.

Many in Myanmar are in areas of active fighting. The war has driven a “diversification of mines” geographically, according to Regan Kwan of the Stimson Center, who has tracked expansion of mining to 26 sites along rivers in Laos.

Rare earths are mined by digging up rock or washing chemicals through soil to extract the minerals,

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creating toxic waste. The physical footprint of this process is recognizable in satellite data, Kwan said.

Myanmar is China's leading supplier of heavy rare earths, exporting more than \$4.2 billion worth of such materials to China between 2017 and 2024, mostly after a military takeover in 2021.

U.S. President Donald Trump made securing America's supply of critical minerals and rare earths a key foreign policy objective. Used in fighter jets like the F-35, submarines, Tomahawk missiles, radar systems and smart bombs, according to the U.S. government, the need for more supplies is growing as the U.S. replenishes and expands military stockpiles drawn down by the wars in Iran and Ukraine.

This is bad news for the river that sustains mainland Southeast Asia.

Conflicts in the last century — which include the Vietnam War and the Khmer Rouge genocide — were the most devastating for the Mekong region, but toxic runoff ranks a close second, said Brian Eyster of the Stimson Center, who called it an "atomic bomb" for the river basin.

It's far more damaging than other threats like large dams and "it is not stopping."

Today in History: April 30, Vietnam War ends

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, April 30, the 120th day of 2026. There are 245 days left in the year.

On April 30, 1975, the Vietnam War ended as the South Vietnamese capital of Saigon fell to Communist forces.

In 1789, George Washington took the oath of office at Federal Hall in New York as the first president of the United States.

In 1803, the United States completed its purchase of the 828,000 square-mile (2,140,000 square-kilometer) Louisiana Territory from France for 60 million francs, the equivalent of about \$15 million at the time; the acquisition roughly doubled the size of the United States.

In 1900, engineer John Luther "Casey" Jones of the Illinois Central Railroad died in a train wreck near Vaughan, Mississippi, staying at the controls to slow his passenger train before it struck a stalled train near an approaching station; Jones was the only fatality of the accident.

In 1945, as Soviet troops approached his Berlin bunker, Adolf Hitler took his own life, as did Eva Braun, whom Hitler married the previous day.

In 1973, as the Watergate scandal deepened, President Richard Nixon announced the resignations of top aides H.R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman, Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst and White House counsel John Dean (though Dean was actually fired by Nixon).

In 1993, top-ranked women's tennis player Monica Seles was stabbed in the back during a match in Hamburg, Germany, by a man who described himself as a fan of second-ranked German player Steffi Graf. (The man was convicted of causing grievous bodily injury, and was only given a two-year suspended sentence.)

In 1993, the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) announced that the World Wide Web, which was invented at CERN four years earlier by Tim Berners-Lee, was free for anyone to use, and released its source code to the public domain.

In 2013, millions of Dutch people dressed in orange flocked to celebrations for a once-in-a-generation milestone for the Netherlands' ruling House of Orange-Nassau: after a 33-year reign, Queen Beatrix abdicated in favor of her eldest son, Willem-Alexander, who became king.

In 2019, Japan's 85-year-old Emperor Akihito abdicated his throne, ending his three-decade reign; his son Crown Prince Naruhito ascended to the Chrysanthemum Throne. (Japan's last abdication was when Emperor Kokaku abdicated in 1817.)

Today's Birthdays: U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres is 77. Filmmaker Jane Campion is 72. Filmmaker Lars von Trier is 70. Basketball Hall of Famer Isiah Thomas is 65. Actor Johnny Galecki is 51. Actor Sam Heughan is 46. Actor Kunal Nayyar is 45. Rapper Lloyd Banks is 44. Actor Kirsten Dunst is 44. Basketball Hall of Famer Seimone Augustus is 42. Actor Gal Gadot is 41. Actor Dianna Agron is 40. Actor Ana de Armas is 38. Rapper-producer Travis Scott is 35. Rapper Lil Tjay is 25. Actor Emily Carey is 23.