

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Thursday, May 7

National Day of Prayer  
Senior Menu: Meatloaf, baked potato, green beans, fruit, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: Biscuits.  
School Lunch: Sloppy joes, square tots.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Nigeria Circle, 2 p.m.  
Girls Golf at Lee Park, Aberdeen, 10 a.m.  
Middle School Track Meet Ellendale, 3 p.m.  
5th Grade Girls Basketball, 4 p.m., Elementary Gym  
Girls Fastpitch Softball in Groton vs. Florence/Henry, varsity DH at 4 p.m.  
Pickleball, 6 p.m., Elementary Gym  
JVT Practice, 7 p.m., Arena

## Groton Daily Independent

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## Friday, May 8

Senior Menu: Chicken strips, tater tots, carrots, fruit.  
School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza.  
School Lunch: Chicken ala king, biscuit.  
Track Meet at Gene Brownell Complex in Aberdeen, 3 p.m.  
JVT Practice, 6 p.m., Arena  
High School Baseball: SBW JV DH at Groton, 5:30 p.m.

## Saturday, May 9

Pickleball, 9:30 a.m., Elementary Gym  
High School Baseball at Milroy, Minn., vs. Madison/Chester DH at noon.

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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.**

## Tsunami Revisited

A tsunami last year in southeastern Alaska was the second-largest in recorded history, a study published yesterday revealed. Waves reached 1,578 feet high, second only to a 1958 tsunami in Alaska that produced up to 1,720-foot waves.

At 5:26 am on Aug. 10, 2025, a mass of rock measuring 83 million cubic yards—24 times the volume of the Great Pyramid of Giza—fell into Alaska's Tracy Arm fjord. The study's authors blamed climate change, saying the melting glacier next to the mountain left the rock unsupported and vulnerable to collapse. Waves sloshed in the fjord for days and produced seismic activity equivalent to a 5.4-magnitude earthquake, shaking the planet.

Three cruise ships pass through the fjord daily, but due to the early hour, no one was injured. See animated reconstruction of the event, from the perspective of a hypothetical jet skier.

## Chinese Agent Trial

The trial began yesterday for Lu Jianwang, a US citizen accused of illegally running a Chinese police station in Manhattan. Prosecutors accuse Lu of harassing Chinese dissidents abroad; a codefendant pleaded guilty in 2024.

Foreign police stations are not without precedent: The New York Police Department has posts across the world. China reportedly has more than 100 stations across 53 countries, though it calls the posts "service centers," and claims they provide consulate-style assistance to Chinese citizens abroad. Lu and his codefendant ran an office in Chinatown called "Fuzhou Police Overseas Service Station" that helped Chinese citizens renew their driver's licenses. However, Lu also stands accused of harassing at least three pro-democracy activists since 2018. One accused Lu of warning him to return to China or his family would be harmed. Lu has pleaded not guilty to charges, including acting as a foreign agent.

## Media Mogul Dies

Ted Turner, the media tycoon who created the 24-hour news cycle when he founded CNN in 1980, died yesterday at age 87.

The Georgia native transformed his late father's billboard company into the media empire Turner Broadcasting System over roughly three decades. After going into debt buying a struggling local TV station, Turner revolutionized TV by using satellites to beam sports and entertainment nationwide. The station's success gave Turner the momentum to launch CNN, the first network to provide nonstop news coverage. Outlets previously aired updates for 30 to 60 minutes once or twice a day. CNN gained credibility during the Persian Gulf War as the only major Western network reporting from inside Iraq. Today, the network is generally more trusted by Democrats and viewed more skeptically by Republicans.

After selling TBS to Time Warner in 1996 for \$7.5B, he became a major philanthropist, investing in land conservation and pledging \$1B to the United Nations.

## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Paris Saint-Germain beats Bayern Munich in UEFA Champions League semifinal, will face Arsenal in the final May 30 in Budapest.

Stefon Diggs found not guilty of assault and strangulation after two days of jury deliberations; the former New England Patriots receiver was accused by his private chef.

Professional Women's Hockey League will expand to Detroit, growing the league to nine teams; up to three more teams may be added before next season.

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## Science & Technology

Google updates AI search to surface insights from web forums like Reddit and highlight content from users' news subscriptions.

CRISPR technology kills sick cells while leaving healthy cells untouched in a petri dish—a potentially revolutionary advance in disease treatment if results can be replicated in living organisms.

Brains of singing mice suggest language is likely enabled by relatively subtle expansions of existing neural pathways; the gap between animals with advanced cognitive abilities and those without may be smaller than previously thought.

## Business & Markets

US stock markets close up (S&P 500 +1.5%, Dow +1.2%, Nasdaq +2.0%) as investors anticipate possible US-Iran peace deal, tech companies report promising earnings.

Semiconductor company AMD shares surge 18.6% on strong first quarter earnings.

Uber and Disney shares rise 8.5% and 7.5%, respectively, as both report rising consumer spending on travel, entertainment, and local commerce.

Anthropic inks data center deal with SpaceX to increase computing capacity of Claude Pro and Claude Max.

Nvidia invests \$500M in Corning to boost manufacturing of fiber optics used to transfer data in AI data centers.

## Politics & World Affairs

Federal judge releases alleged suicide note by late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, apparently found by his cellmate after a July 2019 suicide attempt, weeks before Epstein was found dead in his cell.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio meets with Pope Leo XIV today at the Vatican amid disagreements between the pontiff and President Donald Trump.

FBI raids office of Virginia state Sen. L. Louise Lucas (D) as well as a cannabis dispensary she co-owns; details of the investigation were not publicly available as of this writing.

# GROTON AREA TIGERS

SOFTBALL



GROTON AREA  
TIGERS

VS.



FLORENCE-HENRY  
FALCONS

## FAN APPRECIATION NIGHT!

 VARSITY DOUBLE HEADER  
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The new scoreboard at Locke-Karst Field was installed Wednesday by the City of Groton Electric Department and Locke Electric. There will still need to be wiring done and the top portion to be added.



**The old scoreboard was taken down in four sections.** (Photo from Groton Baseball/Softball Foundation Facebook Page)



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## Tigers JV Dropped Pair of Games to SBW JV

The Groton Area Tigers junior varsity baseball team battled Sisseton-Britton-Waubay in a pair of games Wednesday in Groton, dropping a tight pitcher's duel 1-0 before falling 12-3 in the second contest.

In the opener, strong pitching highlighted the low-scoring affair as the Mallards managed the game's only run in the fifth inning to edge the Tigers.

Jordan Schwan turned in a solid performance on the mound for Groton Area, working five innings while allowing just four hits and one unearned run. He struck out eight batters and walked two. SBW pitcher Drew Heitmann earned the win after tossing five scoreless innings, giving up three hits while striking out six.

Braden Fliehs, Sam Crank and Case Reints each recorded a hit for the Tigers in the loss. Lincoln Kilker led SBW offensively by going 2-for-3 with the game's lone RBI.



**BSM batter swings for a strike with Kason Oswald catching and Braedyn Fliehs looking on at 1st base.** (Photo by Bruce Babcock)



**Jordan Schwan pitches with 2nd baseman Wesley Borg looking on in Mondays Groton vs SBW (Sisseton, Britton, and Waubay).** (Photo

by Bruce Babcock)

Wesley Borg took the loss on the mound for Groton Area, allowing 12 runs, eight earned, over five innings of work.

SBW finished with 12 hits in the game, led by Symens, who went 3-for-3 at the plate. Kilker drove in four runs, while Stickland and Suther each added multiple hits.

Groton Area is scheduled to return to action Monday against W.I.N. JV.

The second game saw SBW jump out quickly with four runs in the opening inning, taking advantage of an error along with RBI hits from Max Suther, Emmett Symens and Nate Schuller.

The Mallards added another run in the second inning before breaking the game open with five more runs in the third. Symens delivered an RBI double during the inning while Jackson Stickland, Kilker, Carter Grobe and Heitmann also drove in runs.

Groton Area collected three hits in the contest from Kolton Antonsen, John Bisbee and Sam Crank. Asher Zimmerman drove in a run for the Tigers, while Zach Fliehs drew two walks as Groton showed patience at the plate with seven total walks. The Tigers also swiped five bases during the game.



**Groton Owen Tewksbury up to bat in 2nd JV game of the night.** (Photo by Bruce Babcock)

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## *Groton Area May Students of the Month*



In back, left to right, are Mia Crank, Leah Jones, Addison Hoeft and Audrey Smalley; in front, left to right, are Cassidy Guthmiller, Brynlee Dunker, Asher Zimmerman and Brody Zimmerman (Courtesy Photo)

Groton Area School works to ensure that all levels of academic instruction also include the necessary life skills teaching, practicing, and modeling that encourages essential personal life habits that are universally understood to facilitate helping our students become good human beings and citizens.

It is learning with our heads, hearts, and hands to be caring and civil, to make healthy decisions, to effectively problem solve, to be respectful and responsible, to be good citizens, and to be empathetic and ethical individuals.

Students are selected based on individual student growth in the areas of: positive behavior, citizenship, good attendance, a thirst for knowledge, and high academic standards.



## Gov. Rhoden Activates State Drought Task Force

PIERRE, S.D. – Governor Larry Rhoden has activated the state Drought Task Force to monitor drought conditions across South Dakota. The task force will hold its first meeting on Thursday, May 7.

The latest U.S. Drought Monitor shows moderate to extreme drought present throughout the lower third of South Dakota with abnormally dry conditions across central parts of the state. Counties in northern South Dakota remain under normal conditions.

"My administration is committed to protecting our farmers, ranchers, and communities across the state. While recent rainfall has provided some relief, drought is still impacting parts of South Dakota," said Governor Larry Rhoden. "The Drought Task Force will help us closely monitor conditions and respond quickly if needed."

The Drought Task Force coordinates the exchange of drought-related information among government agencies and partners to assess potential impacts on agriculture, fire management, and water-supplies. Through this collaboration, the Task Force can more effectively monitor drought conditions, assess drought severity, evaluate impacts, and review available drought-response resources.

State agencies represented on the Drought Task Force include the Governor's Office, Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Department of Public Safety, Department of Game, Fish and Parks, South Dakota National Guard, Department of Social Services, Department of Tourism, and the Department of Tribal Relations. Additional partners include USDA's Farm Service Agency and Natural Resource Conservation Service, South Dakota State University Extension and School of Mines climatologists, the National Weather Service, and South Dakota Rural Water.

Because of the dry conditions, the public is urged to use caution with open burns and other activities that could start fires.

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## Building Permits

**2024 Building Permits: \$2,674,365.23**

**2025 Building Permits: \$1,870,891.02**

**2026 Building Permits to date: \$241,361.59**

Here are the building permits since the last time we published them:

- 1/4/24, K & K Pharis Real Estate, LLC, 24001, Remodeling 4 apartment units, 409 & 410 E 7th Ave, \$20,000.00
- 1/16/24, Greg Heilman, 24002, Office/Studio Apartment, 29 N Main St, \$5,000.00
- 1/17/24, Ron Kroll, 24003, Replace Windows, 203 N 4th St, \$7,000.00
- 2/15/24, Brian Bahr, 24004, Drywall, 501 E 2nd Ave, \$8,000.00
- 2/20/24, Carol McFarland-Kutter, 24005, Bathroom remodel; replace doors and trim, 405 E 7th Ave, \$15,000.00
- 2/29/24, Patrick Foster, 24006, New shed, 1301 N 5th St, \$9,950.00
- 2/29/24, Matthew LaMee, 24007, Shed- gifted, 1502 N Broadway #15, \$-
- 3/11/24, Larry Remington, 24008, Shed-gifted, 406 N 5th St, \$300.00
- 3/22/24, Kara Anderson, 24009, , \$-
- 4/5/24, Marc Johnson, 24010, Shingles, 503 E 6th Ave, \$18,000.00
- 4/5/24, Melanie Johnson, 24011, Shingles, 604 E 16th Ave, \$30,840.00
- 4/5/24, Ann Gibbs, 24012, Remodel bathroom, 406 E 9th Ave, \$8,000.00
- 4/8/24, Jay Johnson, 24013, Shingles, 504 e 6th ave, \$18,000.00
- 4/8/24, Ashley Foster, 24014, Shingles, 1301 N 5th St, \$15,000.00
- 4/9/24, Bruce Shilhanek, 24015, Shingles, 15 W 3rd Ave, \$11,069.00
- 4/9/24, Dale Ringgenberg, 24016, Move in Shed, 17 N 4th St, \$4,000.00
- 4/9/24, Open Heaven, 24017, Porch remodel, 502 N Broadway, \$4,000.00
- 4/9/24, Rodney Boehmer, 24018, Shingles, 908 N 4th St, \$17,500.00
- 4/10/24, Tim Berndt, 24019, Shingles, 101 W 5th Ave, \$11,700.00
- 4/10/24, Deb McKiver, 24020, Shingles, 1310 N 6th St, \$19,003.67
- 4/10/24, Doug Sombke, 24021, Shingles, siding, kitchen remodel, windows, doors, etc., 1102 N Main St, \$95,000.00
- 4/12/24, Shane Clark, 24022, Shingles, 506 W 3rd Ave, \$25,000.00
- 4/12/24, Jayme Boerger, 24023, Shingles, Siding, repair fence, 606 N 2nd St, \$25,500.00
- 4/12/24, Sarah Hofer, 24024, Shingles, 4 Seasons Room remodel, 911 N 5th St, \$40,000.00
- 4/12/24, William Gauer, 24025, Replacing Shingles and Gutters, 1304 N 5th St, \$15,000.00
- 4/15/24, Loren Bahr, 24026, Shingles, 300 N Broadway, \$13,000.00
- 4/15/24, Les Hinds, 24027, Shingles, 305 E 11th , \$18,000.00
- 4/15/24, Kasey Kurtz, 24028, Fence, replace door, 210 N Garfield, \$3,480.00
- 4/16/24, Steve Gebur, 24029, Shingles, 206 N Broadway, \$15,000.00
- 4/19/24, Lucas & Trish Pearson, 24030, Shingles, flooring, kitchen remodel, concrete, 1404 N 5th St, \$25,000.00
- 4/17/24, Jason Wambach, 24031, Shingles, 405 E 15th, \$14,845.70
- 4/18/24, Emily Sternhagen, 24032, Shingles, 504 E 14th Ave, \$40,000.00
- 4/22/24, Barry Smith, 24033, Shingles, \$15,000.00
- 4/22/24, Dale Grenz, 24034, Shingles, \$15,000.00
- 4/22/24, Brock Sandness, 24035, Shingles, \$18,000.00
- 4/22/24, Jess Kroll, 24036, Chicken Coop, \$2,000.00
- 4/22/24, Marie Sternhagen, 24037, Shingles, \$15,011.34
- 4/23/24, Terry Merkel, 24038, Shingles, 9 E 11th Ave, \$15,000.00
- 4/23/24, Hector Hernandez, 24039, Chicken Coop, 1502 N Broadway #7, \$200.00



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4/23/24, Pat Krause, 24040, Shingles, 505 E 8th Ave, \$14,811.42  
4/24/24, Neil Warrington, 24041, Garage, 13424 Sunset Drive, \$50,000.00  
4/24/24, Dave Blackmun, 24042, Shingles, 201 E 11th Ave, \$20,000.00  
4/25/24, Dion Bahr, 24043, basketball hoop cemented in, 307 n 2nd st, \$360.00  
4/26/24, Roger Spanier, 24044, Shingles and gutters, 1001 N 5th ST,  
4/26/24, Bill Kurtenbach, 24045, Shingles, \$9,600.00  
4/29/24, Dan Schinkle, 24047, Shingles and door, 229 E 9th Ave, \$15,000.00  
4/29/24, Jon Voss, 24048, Shingles, sunroom, 1501 N 6th St, \$60,000.00  
4/30/24, David Blackmun Sr, 24049, Shingles, 402 E 7th Ave, \$25,000.00  
5/1/24, Justin Cleveland, 24050, replacing garage door, 26 N 4th St, \$958.00  
5/2/24, Seth Erickson, 24051, Shingles and Siding, 902 N 3rd St, \$14,700.00  
5/6/24, Doug Heinrich, 24052, replace bathroom fixtures; bi fold doors, 112 N 1st St, \$1,000.00  
5/6/24, Travis Kurth, 24053, Shingles, 509 E 9th Ave, \$15,000.00  
5/6/24, Neil & Connie Wagner, 24054, Raised Garden Bed, 425 E 3rd Ave, \$300.00  
5/6/24, Don Kurtz, 24055, Repair Roof, 601 E 16th Ave, \$10,000.00  
5/6/24, Stan Lietchi, 24056, Shingles, 603 E 16th Ave, \$15,000.00  
5/6/24, Brad Waage, 24057, Shingles, 201 E 9th Ave, \$12,500.00  
5/6/24, Ryland Strom, 24058, Shingles, 306 E 9th Ave, \$6,500.00  
5/6/24, David Rice, 24059, Shingles and Gutters, 5 E 11th Ave, \$12,000.00  
5/6/24, Lanace Hawkins, 24060, Shingles, 504 E 9th Ave, \$11,000.00  
5/7/24, Andrew Kappes, 24061, Shingles, 304 N State St, \$8,000.00  
5/7/24, Caralee Heitmann, 24062, Shingles, 1011 N 3rd St, \$21,222.88  
5/8/24, Greg Heilman, 24063, Remove foundation, 105 N 5th St, \$150.00  
5/8/24, Jamie Herron, 24064, Shed, 108 N 6th St, \$5,800.00  
5/9/24, Kellie Locke, 24065, Shed, 208 N 5th St, \$200.00

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5/10/24, John Wheeting, 24066, Shingles, 505 E 16th St, \$24,000.00  
5/10/24, Karla Davidson, 24067, kitchen window, counter top, sink, 305 N 1st, \$2,500.00  
5/13/24, Deb McKiver, 24068, New garage, 1310 N 6th ST, \$38,107.96  
5/13/24, Bill Stolle, 24069, Shingles, 404 E 6th Ave, \$16,000.00  
5/14/24, Craig & Jodi Sternhagen, 24070, Shingles, 1002 N Main Street, \$16,000.00  
5/14/24, Jerry Peltier, 24071, Siding, 127 W 2nd Ave, \$1,161.15  
5/15/24, Randy Stanley, 24072, Shingles, 403 E 6th Ave, \$15,000.00  
5/17/24, Tom Papke, 24073, Shingles, 509 N 6th St, \$35,000.00  
5/20/24, Jeff & LuAnn Steen, 24074, Shingles, concrete slab, 1303 N 5th St, \$11,863.00  
5/20/24, Chad Locken, 24075, Shingles, 508 N Washington, \$20,000.00  
5/20/24, Ella Johnson, 24076, Shingles, 903 n 2nd St, \$10,526.40  
5/21/24, Robert Daly, 24077, Shingles, 405 E 6th Ave, \$7,500.00  
5/22/24, Roger Berreth, 24078, 3 Seasons Room, 203 North 1st, \$700.00  
5/22/24, Amanda Streeter, 24079, Deck, 24 n 5th st, \$720.00  
5/28/24, Scott Althoff, 24080, Shingles and Gutters, 503 E 8th Ave,  
5/28/24, Vance McInerney, 24081, 9x9 Patio, 113 N 1st St, \$1,000.00  
5/28/24, Dale Ringgenberg, 24082, Tin Shingles, 17 N 4th St, \$3,500.00  
6/3/24, Mitch & Heidi Locke, 24083, insulation and vent , 309 N 2nd St, \$1,000.00  
6/4/24, Roger Rix, 24084, Shingles and patio extension, 1305 N 5th St, \$20,000.00  
6/4/24, Jordan & Kayla Hitnz, 24085, Shingles, 1302 N 5th St, \$9,500.00  
6/4/24, Kieth & Jeanette Hughes, 24086, Shingles, 1003 N 2nd St, \$20,000.00  
6/5/24, Brad Larson, 24087, Shingles and Gutters, 1006 N 1st St, \$20,000.00  
6/5/24, Brett Schwan, 24088, Porch Repair, 237 E 2nd Ave, \$750.00  
6/5/24, Shirlee Frohling, 24089, Redo deck, cement work, 207 N Madison, \$4,000.00  
6/5/24, Justin Olson, 24090, New Roof, 811 N 3rd St, \$13,850.00  
6/5/24, Steve O'Neill, 24091, Replace deck floor & railer, 203 W 5th Ave, \$11,000.00  
6/11/24, Angie Sombke, 24092, Shingles and Siding, 10 E 3rd Ave, \$7,000.00  
6/12/24, Spencer and Kellie Locke, 24093, Entry way remodel, 208 N 5th St, \$200.00  
6/13/24, Jarod and Kristie Fliehs, 24094, Reshingle roof, 1103 n 3rd St, \$13,000.00  
6/13/24, Jay Waage, 24095, Reshingle house, garage and shed, 1105 N 3rd St, \$15,000.00  
6/17/24, Amber Daly, 24096, New Shingles, 1106 N Main St, \$14,536.02  
6/18/24, Lorin Fliehs, 24097, Shingles and gutters, 511 N 5th St, \$24,983.50  
6/20/24, Kara Pharis, 24098, Siding and concrete driveways, 409 & 410 E 7th Ave Apts, \$35,000.00  
6/20/24, Rick & Sherry Koehler, 24099, Shingles, 801 N 3rd St, \$30,000.00  
6/21/24, Rathert Construction- N.Kotzer, 24100, Replacing Roof, 9 e 2nd ave, \$9,800.00  
6/21/24, Samantha Weber, 24101, New flooring; landscape, 204 N State St, \$15,000.00  
6/24/24, Doug Hamilton, 24102, Replace siding on west side of porch, 411 N 5th St, \$400.00  
6/25/24, Joe Foertsch, 24103, Add egress window and bedroom in shop, 602 E Railroad Ave, \$1,000.00  
6/26/24, Melinda Eikamp, 24104, Shingles, gutters, repair siding, 306 N 1st St, \$25,000.00  
6/28/24, Groton Vet Clinic, 24105, Replacing Roof, 1503 N Broadway, \$80,000.00  
7/3/24, Beth Gustafson, 24106, Repair porch, latice, 400 N Broadway, \$2,000.00  
7/8/24, Dave & Mary Blackmun, 24107, Repair pavers, 402 E 7th Ave, \$25,000.00  
7/8/24, Becky Clocksene, 24108, Demo house , 207 N Washington, \$4,500.00  
7/9/24, Steven Smith, 24109, Remove shower; install tub, 1104 N Main St, \$1,000.00  
7/12/24, Alex Hughes, 24110, Shingles, 712 N 2nd St, \$16,851.42  
7/15/24, Marc Sippel, 24111, Shingles, 407 E 14th Ave, \$27,000.00  
7/16/24, Groton School, 24112, Repair sidewalk, 502 N 2nd St, \$30,772.00  
7/17/24, Scott Vedvei, 24113, Shingles, 607 N 1st St, \$16,000.00  
7/17/24, Les Hinds, 24114, Replace front step and patio, 305 E 11th Ave, \$10,000.00  
7/19/24, Paul Kosel, 24115, Shingles- garage, 110 N Washington, \$1,000.00



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7/22/24, Terry Kenny, 24116, Gutters, 610 N Main St, \$2,000.00  
7/25/24, Jay Waage, 24117, Kitchen Remodel, 1105 N 3rd St, \$25,000.00  
7/25/24, Susan Fjeldheim, 24118, Shingles, 2 E 11th Ave, \$18,000.00  
7/25/24, Jerry Johnson, 24119, cabinets, 105 N 6th St, \$1,200.00  
7/28/24, Full Circle Ag, 24120, Shingles, 109 E Aspen Ave, \$95,000.00  
8/6/24, Dwight Zerr, 24121, Gutters, 104 N 4th St, \$2,000.00  
8/12/24, Dan Schinkle, 24122, Replace Window, 229 E 9th Ave, \$2,000.00  
8/12/24, The Jungle, 24123, Taking out walls; replacing 1 wall, 9 N Main St, \$200.00  
8/13/24, Don Shanholts, 24124, Replace windows, 405 N 5th St, \$10,000.00  
8/21/24, Matt & Casey Johnson, 24125, Shingles, 225 E 11th Ave, \$14,000.00  
8/26/24, Scott Stoutenburg, 24126, New roof, 401 N 5th St, \$15,000.00  
8/28/24, Nicole Lasse, 24127, Shingles, soffit & Facia, gutters, 304 N Broadway, \$8,000.00  
8/29/24, Connor Hanson, 24128, Cement, 235 E RR Ave, \$5,000.00  
9/3/24, Marian Flitter, 24129, Bedroom remodel, 1121 N 4th St, \$5,000.00  
9/5/24, David Larson, 24130, Shingles and Gutters, 1507 N 6th St, \$10,000.00  
9/6/24, Jamie Cutler, 24131, Shingles and Gutters, 1103 N Main, \$11,000.00  
9/10/24, Marty Bendy, 24132, Shingles, 104 N 6th St, \$9,000.00  
9/24/24, Karyn Babcock, 24133, Shingles, 509 E 5th Ave, \$35,000.00  
9/25/24, Groton American Legion, 24134, Flooring, countertops, carpet, 12 N Main St, \$40,000.00  
9/26/24, Wyatt Larson, 24135, Repair roof and flooring, 25 N Main St, \$22,000.00  
9/26/24, Michaela Merkel, 24136, Shingles, 805 N 1st St, \$15,000.00  
9/30/24, David and Kari Heilman, 24137, bathroom remodel, 6 E 11th Ave, \$8,840.00  
10/4/24, Hope Block, 24138, Shingles, 107 E 2nd Ave, \$8,887.77  
10/4/24, Lauren Wheeting, 24139, Siding and Windows, 11 E 4th Ave, \$15,000.00  
10/11/24, Spencer Locke, 24140, Soffit and Facia, 208 N 5th St, \$2,000.00  
10/4/24, Charles Davis, 24141, Replace roof, demo 2 buildings, 3 E Railroad Ave, \$30,390.00  
10/9/24, Dion Bahr, 24142, Patio and cement pad, 307 n 2nd st, \$5,000.00  
10/10/24, John Premus, 24143, Shed, 110 W 3rd Ave, \$7,000.00  
10/15/24, GDI, 24144, Replace siding, 15 N Main, \$500.00  
10/17/24, Larry Harry, 24145, new garage, bedrom and bathroom, 906 N 2nd St, \$75,000.00  
10/18/24, Cody Hanten, 24146, Shingles, 401 E 7th Ave, \$15,000.00  
10/21/24, Travis Antonsen, 24147, Concrete by garage, basement bathroom, 301 N 1st St, \$22,000.00  
10/21/24, Chelsey Sheridan, 24148, Shingles, 207 N 4th St, \$9,724.00  
10/28/24, Wyatt Larson, 24149, Removal of building, 18 N Main St, \$5,000.00  
11/6/24, Larry Harry, 24150, Concrete for new foundation, \$20,000.00  
11/6/24, Walter Jenkins, 24151, Redo fence, 305 N 5th St, \$600.00  
11/15/24, Larry Harry, 24152, New house and foundations, 903 N 2nd St, \$350,000.00  
11/16/24, Bierman Farm, 24153, repair concrete, 10 S Main, \$10,000.00  
11/20/24, Terry Larson, 24154, Shingles, 1106 N 1st St, \$16,800.00  
12/13/24, Bierman Farm, 24155, Office Remdel/Addition, 10 N Main Street, \$25,000.00  
12/13/24, Steve Simon, 24156, Tin on garage roof and walls; new garage door, 303 N 4th St, \$8,000.00  
12/30/24, St. John's Lutheran Church, 24157, New windows and swing set, 308 N 2nd St, \$25,000.00  
1/13/25, Randy Hoffman, 25000, Replace 2 doors and window, 305 N Main St, \$1,000.00  
1/16/25, Julie Schaller, 25001, Roof Repairs, 101 N Main St, \$7,000.00  
1/27/25, AOK Investments LLC, 25002, Demo House, 608 N 2nd St, \$5,000.00  
1/29/25, Keith Baker, 25003, Replace windows, 206 N 5th St, \$15,000.00  
1/30/25, Matt Jacobsen, 25004, install new garage door, new doors, trim, flooring, 1101 N 3rd St, \$13,500.00  
2/24/25, Michael & Jamie Mitchek, 25005, Move garage in, pour concrete, replace door and window, 603 N 6th St, \$5,000.00

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3/3/25, Evan Erickson, 25006, Replace garage doors, 214 N 6th St, \$600.00  
3/6/25, Charles Dresbach, 25007, 26x30 garage, 716 N Main St, \$120,337.29  
3/11/25, Mark Abeln, 25008, Tear down house, 9 E Railroad Ave, \$10,000.00  
3/12/25, David Dohman, 25009, Replace shingles, 601 W 3rd Ave, \$20,000.00  
3/13/25, Farmers Union Co-op, 25010, Replacing fence, 15 N 6th St, \$11,883.87  
3/21/25, Greg Heilman, 25011, Framing, sheetrock, windows, tin roof, 405 E 1st Ave, \$20,000.00  
3/24/25, Kyle Reif, 25012, Deck on North side of house, 515 E 4th Ave, \$10,000.00  
3/24/25, Laura Hinman, 25013, Extend garden fence by 15 feet, 1103 N Broadway, \$125.00  
3/28/25, Keith Wipf, 25014, New Flooring, kitchen and bathroom remodel, 601 N Main St, \$22,000.00  
3/31/25, Bruce Babcock, 25015, Roof Repair, 30 N Main St, \$40,000.00  
4/1/25, Dick Seuer, 25016, Soffit, Siding, exterior doors, 201 N 3rd St, \$25,000.00  
4/2/25, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, 25017, New siding and window replacement, 107 E 7th Ave, \$100,000.00  
4/2/25, Lynette Grieve, 25018, New Shingles, 200 N 1st St, \$10,693.68  
4/17/25, Brian Bahr, 25019, Turn shake shop to short term stay, 119 N Main St, \$5,000.00  
4/17/25, Deb Fredrickson, 25020, Replacing windows; replacing and reframing, 502 N Main, \$800.00  
4/23/25, Yvonne Lange, 25021, replace shingles on garage, 204 N 4th St, \$2,412.30  
4/24/25, Stan & Wendy Monson, 25022, Residing house, garage windows and door, 202 W 2nd Ave-  
Groton, \$40,000.00  
4/24/25, WW Rentals/Wyatt Larson, 25023, Entryway remodel, 25 N Main St, \$25,000.00  
4/28/25, Shirlee Frohling, 25024, Move in garden shed, 207 N Madison, \$5,100.00  
5/1/25, Amanda Streeter, 25025, Concrete drive way and concrete pad, 24 N 5th St, \$2,500.00  
5/2/25, Doug Sombke, 25026, Replace driveway with asphalt, 1102 N Main St, \$5,500.00  
5/9/25, Alex Hughes, 25027, 12x20 shed w/ foundation, 712 N 2nd Street, \$10,730.00  
5/16/25, Bill Schuck, 25028, Shingle garage, 306 N 4th St, \$5,100.00  
5/28/25, Douglas Heinrich, 25029, wood fence, 112 N 1st st, \$1,000.00  
5/28/25, Steph Morris, 25030, New siding, 708 N Main, \$25,600.00  
5/28/25, Mitch & Heidi Locke, 25031, Repair drain tile, 309 N 2nd St, \$3,500.00  
5/28/25, Ryan Tarpein, 25032, New front deck and storm door, 506 N Broadway, \$6,732.00  
5/28/25, Sherri Profeta, 25033, shingle shed and replace some siding, 507 N 3rd St, \$-  
5/28/25, Jerome Wieseler, 25034, New Shingles, 509 N Washington St, \$9,250.00  
5/28/25, Post Office, 25035, add poles and concrete to mail box in alley, 201 N Main St, \$20.00  
5/29/25, Karen DeBrine, 25036, Deck, bathroom, etc, 116 N 1st St, \$5,000.00  
6/2/25, Landon Johnson, 25037, Reskirting, 516 E 4th ave, \$1,500.00  
6/5/25, Bruce Shilhanek, 25038, 10x12 deck on west side, 15 W3rd Ave, \$275.00  
6/5/25, Emmanuel Lutheran Church, 25039, Repair fascia, gutters, etc., 1006 N 2nd St, \$38,177.00  
6/6/25, Darren Locke, 25040, Replace tub with shower, 231 E 11th Ave, \$3,000.00  
6/12/25, Groton Area School, 25041, Remove and replace crow's next, 502 N 2nd Street,  
6/12/25, James Valley, 25042, Replace driveway and sewer line, 206 E 2nd Ave, \$45,000.00  
6/13/25, Michael Johnson, 25043, RENEWED PERMIT 23045, 402 N Broadway, \$-  
6/13/25, Linda Himanga, 25044, RENEWED PERMIT 23033, 407 N Main Street, \$-  
6/17/25, Dave Blackmun Sr, 25045, Replace garage door driveway, 402 E 7th Ave, \$25,000.00  
6/18/25, Dustin Cooper, 25046, Replace windows and sheetrock in kitchen, 506 N Main St, \$3,000.00  
6/20/25, Jeffrey Larson, 25047, shingles, 202 Meadowbrook Ln, \$10,000.00  
6/20/25, Todd Peterson, 25048, New siding, 511 N 6th St, \$5,600.00  
6/23/25, Cody Swanson, 25049, Finish Basement, 502 E 16th Ave, \$5,000.00  
6/24/25, Kelly Pappas, 25050, replace windows, siding, porch, 603 N 3rd St, \$6,000.00  
6/26/25, Clay Wattier, 25051, Fence, 904 N 2nd, \$6,500.00  
6/30/25, Randy Flitter, 25052, 28x28 garage, 112 N 4th St, 65000-70000  
7/1/25, Brad Olson, 25053, Fence, 403 E 15th, \$5,000.00  
7/2/25, The Jungle, 25054, taking down wall, 9 N Main St, \$100.00



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7/7/25, Doug Hamilton, 25055, replace sheeting on north side of home, 411 N 4th St, \$1,000.00  
7/8/25, Leo Warrington, 25056, Reshingle, 40610 132nd St, \$18,000.00  
7/9/25, Jason Wambach, 25057, New siding and front door, 405 E 15th Ave, \$35,000.00  
7/14/25, Kylie Vogel, 25058, adding pergola, 905 N 2nd St, \$1,000.00  
7/14/25, Shirlee Frohling, 25059, portable carport, 207 N Madison, \$800.00  
7/18/25, Lorin Fliehs, 25060, new bathroom fixtures and flooring, 511 N 5th St, \$30,000.00  
7/23/25, Matt & Nicole Jacobsen, 25061, repair and replace south sidewalk and patio, 1101 N 3rd St, \$12,000.00  
7/25/25, Karen DeBrine, 25062, shed on east side of garage, 116 N 1st St, \$-  
7/25/25, Bill Schuck, 25063, shingle repair, 306 N 4th St, \$500.00  
7/29/25, Roger Overacker, 25064, pole barn, 603 E 5th Ave, \$4,000.00  
7/29/25, Rob & Jeanne Wanous, 25065, 16x38 addition, 201 E 6th Ave, \$50,000.00  
8/1/25, Michael Johnson, 25066, new garage, 402 n broadway, \$20,000.00  
8/1/25, Karen Spanier, 25067, , , ,  
8/1/25, Ray Brandlee, 25068, 12x20 shed, 602 W 3rd Ave, \$7,000.00  
8/6/25, Greg Heilman, 25069, Moving in garage, 207 N 4th St,  
8/6/25, Les Hinds, 25070, landscaping, 305 e 11th ave, \$6,000.00  
8/7/25, Karla Davidson, 25071, front porch repair, 305 N 1st st, \$200.00  
8/12/25, Jerry Peltier, 25072, get rid of trailer , 123 W. 2nd Ave, \$-  
8/13/25, Jana Simunek, 25073, storage shed, 209 E 3rd Ave, \$400.00  
8/14/25, Jesse Anderson, 25074, foundation maintenance, 108 N 2nd St, \$300.00  
8/21/25, Steve Simon, 25075, shipping container, simon insurance, \$5,000.00  
8/25/25, WW Rentals, 25076, Mason work in front of building, 25 N Main St, \$10,000.00  
8/25/25, Dave & Kari Heilman, 25077, bathroom remodel, 6 E 11th Ave, \$4,000.00  
8/28/25, Dollar General, 25078, repair fence, 224 hwy 12, \$9,400.00  
8/29/25, Tanya Johnson, 25079, Move wall and new flooring, 1202 N 1st St #4, \$2,500.00  
9/2/25, Pat Johnson, 25080, deck, patio door, fence, garage steps, etc., 506 E 9th Ave, \$9,827.29  
9/4/25, Anthony Belluso, 25081, fence, 210 N 1st St, \$6,325.12  
9/10/25, JME, 25082, Steel Roof, 1109 N 2nd St, \$10,000.00  
9/15/25, Ardella Theunissen, 25083, Shingles, 208 N Madison St, \$13,000.00  
9/23/25, Krueger Brothers, 25084, Take down shed, 12 N 4th St, \$-  
10/3/25, S&S Lumber, 25085, Shingles, 201 E Hwy 12, \$15,400.00  
10/6/25, Tim Janusz, 25086, fence, 204 N Madison, \$250.00  
10/8/25, Hope Block, 25087, Replace windows and doors, 107 E 2nd Ave, \$24,826.47  
10/20/25, Dan Schinkel, 25088, redo screen porch, 229 E 9th Ave, \$8,000.00  
10/23/25, Fjelstad Brothers, 25089, siding repair, doors, flooring, 20 N 5th St, \$2,000.00  
10/27/25, Scott Hanlon, 25090, concrete, spray foam, 303 N 1st St, \$6,200.00  
11/5/25, Ron Kroll, 25091, Replace windows, 203 N 4th St, \$3,000.00  
12/3/25, Base Kamp Lodge, 25092, reapiers and raise floors, 28 N Main St, \$20,000.00  
12/4/25, Bill Schuck, 25093, New 7' Door, 306 N 4th St, \$1,750.00  
12/8/25, James Thompson, 25094, New windows and bathroom remodel, 805 N 3rd st, \$35,000.00  
12/15/25, Huff Const- JVT, 25095, Remodel interior, replace windows, 234 E 1st Ave, \$703,676.00  
12/19/25, Lance Nehls/ CJ Lane, 25096, Remodel interior, 905 N 3rd St, \$50,000.00  
1/22/26, Vance McInerney, 26000, Countertops and floor, 113 N 1st St, \$2,500.00  
1/28/26, Red Horse, 26001, flooring, ceiling bathrooms, roof and siding, 2 W HWY 12, \$35,000.00  
3/2/26, Lorin Fliehs, 26002, Finish off 1 basement room for bedroom, 511 N 5th St, \$15,000.00  
3/5/26, Randy Flitter, 26003, Garage/Shed roofing and siding, 112 N 4th St, \$5,500.00  
3/5/26, Michelle Fordham, 26004, Fence, 304 N 5th st, \$500.00  
3/10/26, Sarah Wirkus, 26005, shed, 107 N 1st St, \$5,000.00  
3/11/26, Brandon Fish, 26006, shed, 605 E 5th St, \$5,000.00

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3/16/26, Groton Area Fire Dept, 26007, Replace tin on roof, 503 N Railroad Ave, \$20,000.00  
3/18/26, Blake Anderson, 26008, Replace windows, 116 N 2nd St, \$1,500.00  
3/23/26, Steven Montgomery, 26009, New roofing on house and garage, 303 E 6th Ave, \$16,455.66  
3/25/26, First Presbyterian Church, 26010, Soffit, Facia and rain gutters, 209 E 3rd Ave, \$9,000.00  
3/25/26, Emmanuel Lutheran Church, 26011, Patio and rock area, 1005 N 1st St, \$10,005.93  
3/26/26, Steve Smith, 26012, replace driveway and 90' of sidewalk, 1104 N Main St, \$17,300.00  
3/26/26, Groton Vet Clinic, 26013, replace sidewalk in front of clinic, 1503 N Broadway, \$5,650.00  
3/26/26, Aaron Grant, 26014, French Drain, 503 N 3rd St, \$-  
4/2/26, Brian Bahr, 26015, Replace carpet, 409 N Main st, \$4,000.00  
4/8/26, Ashley Bentz, 26016, Bathroom flooring, replace shower, toilet, vanity, 315 E 16th Ave, \$600.00  
4/14/26, Craig Dunker, 26017, Replace existing concrete on driveway/apron, 204 E 7th Ave, \$1,500.00  
4/20/26, Sharon Zoellner, 26018, Shingles, 304 N 2nd St, \$8,000.00  
4/20/26, Jordan Hintz, 26019, Finishing garage, 1302 N 5th St, \$7,000.00  
4/22/26, Tony Madsen, 26020, Siding and Windows, 410 N Lincoln St, \$50,000.00  
4/24/26, Day Day Po, 26021, Repair Fence, 711 N 2nd St, \$50.00  
4/27/26, Brad Henderson/Todd McGannon, 26022, Bathroom remodel, 315 E 4th Ave, \$10,000.00  
4/28/26, Heath Giedt/Keith Wipf, 26023, deck w/ concrete pad, 1313 N 5th St, \$5,000.00  
4/28/26, Tate Carda/Keith Wipf, 26024, repair water damage on west side, 204 E 3rd Ave, \$1,500.00  
4/29/26, James Thompson, 26025, Landscaping and patio, 805 N 3rd St, \$3,000.00  
5/1/26, Michael Johnson, 26026, move shed, 402 N Broadway, \$300.00  
5/4/26, Dion Bahr, 26027, Fence, move shed and pool, 307 N 2nd St, \$2,000.00

HELP  
*Doris Strom*  
CELEBRATE HER  
**101<sup>st</sup>**  
BIRTHDAY

ON MAY 13.

COME GROTON  
AVANTARA  
for cake at 2pm

OR SEND HER  
A CARD AT  
Doris Strom, Avantara  
1106 N 2nd St #103  
Groton, SD 57445





## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### **Tribal law enforcement academy, requested by South Dakota, will be located in North Dakota**

**News comes as part of new push from BIA to address violent crime in tribal areas**

**BY: JOHN HULT**



**Camp Grafton, a National Guard facility near Devils Lake, North Dakota, will be the site of a Bureau of Indian Affairs basic law enforcement academy.**

(Courtesy of North Dakota National Guard)

Tribal police recruits in South Dakota will soon have an option for basic training through the Bureau of Indian Affairs that's closer to home, but it won't be as close as state officials had hoped.

Camp Grafton, a North Dakota National Guard base near Devils Lake, is currently the site of advanced law enforcement training for the BIA. It's now set to host basic law enforcement

training for BIA recruits, as well as for recruits from local tribal police departments, law enforcement communications and correctional agencies.

The news was tucked into a wider-reaching executive order from U.S. Interior Secretary and former North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum to create an Indian Country Violent Crime Task Force. A news release announced the creation of the task force Tuesday, which was the National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous People.

The task force "builds on the first Trump administration's work to bring national attention and resources to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous People crisis," the release says, and "expands that work with a broader focus on violent crime prevention, investigations and public safety across Indian Country."

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Among other things, the task force will focus on opioid trafficking, create a "Predatory Crimes Unit" to focus on child victims of exploitation and "refocus" efforts to solve missing persons and homicide cases.

Three of South Dakota's nine tribes rely on the BIA for local law enforcement. Six others have their own tribal police departments. Misdemeanor-level crimes on tribal land are handled in tribal courts; felony crimes that occur there are prosecuted in federal court, and are often investigated by agents with the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The task force, the release says, will "lead a coordinated effort with federal, tribal and state partners" to address public safety in tribal areas nationwide.

## Earlier efforts from Burgum to bring BIA to Camp Grafton

Burgum advocated to bring BIA basic training to Camp Grafton while serving as North Dakota governor. During a U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs field hearing in 2019 in Bismarck, he said a Camp Grafton BIA academy would help recruit tribal officers across the region.

Tribal recruits nationwide, for local departments or the BIA, have traditionally attended basic training at a federal facility in Artesia, New Mexico.

He said tribal communities face the dual difficulties of high crime rates and a dearth of law enforcement, and that the distance between the training facility and their homes makes recruiting difficult.

"We believe that we can create a premier BIA tribal police officer training facility in North Dakota at Camp Grafton, in conjunction with the Lake Region Law Enforcement Academy in Devils Lake," Burgum told the committee. "This is very close to Spirit Lake Nation, and not only could this help solve the problem in North Dakota, but for South Dakota, Wyoming, Montana, Minnesota, Wisconsin."

The U.S. Indian Police Academy Advanced Training Center at Camp Grafton opened the following year. The facility offers higher-level training for officers who've already completed the 14-week basic law enforcement certification course in New Mexico.

The timeline on the "implementation of basic training" at Camp Grafton is unclear. Burgum's Tuesday executive order directs the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs to "develop basic training curriculum" for police, corrections and communications courses at the site "beginning in the second quarter of fiscal year 2026."

The second quarter of federal fiscal year 2026 began in January.

No contact information beyond a general email address for the Interior Department is listed on the agency's press release about Burgum's order.

The Interior Department did not respond to an email from South Dakota Searchlight with questions about the start of the Camp Grafton basic training program, the number of recruits it could train, and other questions.

Calls to a spokesman for Camp Grafton were not immediately returned.

## Basic training for the Great Plains

Like Burgum, South Dakota's congressional delegation and its state-level leaders have also pushed for the establishment of a BIA training academy for the Great Plains for several years, but had hoped to see it in their state.

U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds and U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson have each argued for Pierre as an appropriate location, as the city already has a state-run law enforcement training academy.

South Dakota's State Tribal Relations Committee twice endorsed a resolution urging the federal government to establish a BIA basic training academy in South Dakota. Lawmakers voted to support those resolutions.

While the executive order places the basic BIA training site in North Dakota, the discussion in South Dakota spurred state-level changes meant to ease the training burden for tribes in its borders.

South Dakota's basic law enforcement certification course for state and local officers is taught in Pierre, and the state recently began offering the course at a satellite site in Sioux Falls.

The academy has always been open to tribal recruits. The availability of the Artesia program for tribal



officers, however, has typically meant that local and state officers are given priority for the limited number of slots in each course.

Former Gov. Kristi Noem and Attorney General Marty Jackley partnered in April 2024 to open an additional basic training cohort that would prioritize tribal recruits. Tribal police need to complete additional coursework on Indian Country law that other state-certified officers do not, but state officials worked with their federal counterparts to include that information in an add-on unit during basic training.

The state began a second tribal-priority basic training class last year.

By the time that second course had begun, 13 tribal officers had graduated and earned certification. At least 25 tribal recruits have completed the 13-week training since 2024, Jackley spokesman Tony Mangan said, including 12 in the second tribal-priority class last year.

Johnson, who's running for governor in South Dakota, told South Dakota Searchlight in a statement that the choice of a North Dakota site isn't ideal, but is welcome.

"Bringing tribal law enforcement training to North Dakota is certainly better than New Mexico, but I'd like to see more of South Dakota's tribal law enforcement officers trained even closer to home at the state academy in Pierre," Johnson said.

Rounds had no such qualification in his statement praising Burgum's executive order.

"I've long called for a tribal law enforcement training curriculum closer to home that gives more South Dakotans the opportunity to serve," Rounds said. "I'm grateful for Secretary Burgum's leadership on this issue."

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

## President signs bill supported by SD delegation to quicken mortgage processing on tribal trust land

BY: SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT STAFF

President Donald Trump has signed a bill into law that its sponsors from South Dakota say will accelerate the review and processing of mortgages on tribal trust land.

Trust land is held by the federal government for the benefit of Native American tribes or tribal members. The Tribal Trust Land Homeownership Act will create legal timelines for the Bureau of Indian Affairs to process mortgages, according to the office of U.S. Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-South Dakota. Additionally, it will enhance the ability of certain federal agencies to operate their tribal housing programs and establish a realty ombudsman within the BIA to improve com-



**Homes on the Pine Ridge Reservation in November 2023.**

(Photo by John Hult/South Dakota Searchlight)

munication with tribes, tribal members and lenders.

The bill passed the Senate in December and the House of Representatives in March.

"For years, affordable housing opportunities on tribal trust land have been hard to come by in South Dakota and across the nation due in part to the BIA's challenging mortgage approval process," said Thune, the bill's main sponsor, in a news release. "With the enactment of our legislation, this mortgage approval process will now be expedited, encouraging homeownership across Indian Country."

Sen. Mike Rounds was a cosponsor, and Rep. Dusty Johnson sponsored a House version. Both are Republicans from South Dakota.

Sharon Vogel, board chair of the South Dakota Native Homeownership Coalition and executive director of the Cheyenne River Housing Authority in Eagle Butte, praised Thune's efforts in the news release.

"From the beginning, he has focused on prioritizing and streamlining mortgage-related processes within the Bureau of Indian Affairs," Vogel said. "The Tribal Trust Land Homeownership Act advances that work."

## Healthcare costs top of mind for voters as midterms approach, survey finds

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — Voters, including those within the Make America Healthy Again movement, say the rising cost of healthcare is a significant concern that will have an impact on whom they support in November's midterm elections, according to a poll released Wednesday by KFF.

Sixty-one percent of respondents to the survey, which asked how important several health-related issues were, said the price of healthcare will have a major impact on which party they support as control of Congress hangs in the balance.

Among MAHA voters, who are predominantly Republicans but also include independents and some Democrats, 42% said cost is their top issue heading into the elections.

"While the issue of health costs is more salient for Democratic voters than for Republicans, larger shares across partisans say health costs will have a major impact on their voting decisions than say the same about vaccine policy or food safety," the survey said.

Seventy-two percent of Democrats, 63% of independents and 47% of Republicans said the cost of healthcare will have a major impact on which party's candidate they vote for.



**Voters say the cost of healthcare will be a major factor in how they vote in this year's midterm elections.** (Getty Images)



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Vaccine policy came in next, with 57% of Democrats, 46% of independents and 32% of Republicans surveyed saying it will have a major impact on their choice.

Issues related to food safety came in third after 43% of Democrats, 40% of independents and 38% of Republicans responded that it will have a major impact on their choice of candidate.

## MAHA issues

For MAHA voters, twice as many listed health costs as their first priority than the next issue: restricting the use of certain chemical additives in food, which was a key concern for 21%.

Ten percent were interested in politicians who will reevaluate vaccine approvals, 8% want lawmakers to limit corporate interest in food and 8% want Congress to limit the use of pesticides in agriculture. Eleven percent said none of those or had no answer.

The survey showed that a significant majority of Americans across the political spectrum believe the government hasn't done enough to address chemical additives in food or pesticide use in agriculture, two core demands of MAHA supporters.

"The public perception that there is not enough regulation may be rooted in broader skepticism toward the industries themselves," the survey said. "Most U.S. adults do not trust pharmaceutical companies, food and beverage companies, or agricultural companies to act in the public's best interest."

Doctors and healthcare providers were the most trusted source of information at 70%, followed by agriculture companies at 40%, food and beverage companies at 25% and pharmaceutical companies at 21%.

Seventy-five percent of those polled said the government hasn't done enough to regulate chemicals in food, while 65% said it should do more to regulate pesticides in agriculture.

The poll of 1,343 U.S. adults took place from April 14 to April 19. It has a margin of error of 3 percentage points for the full sample and 6 percentage points for MAHA supporters.

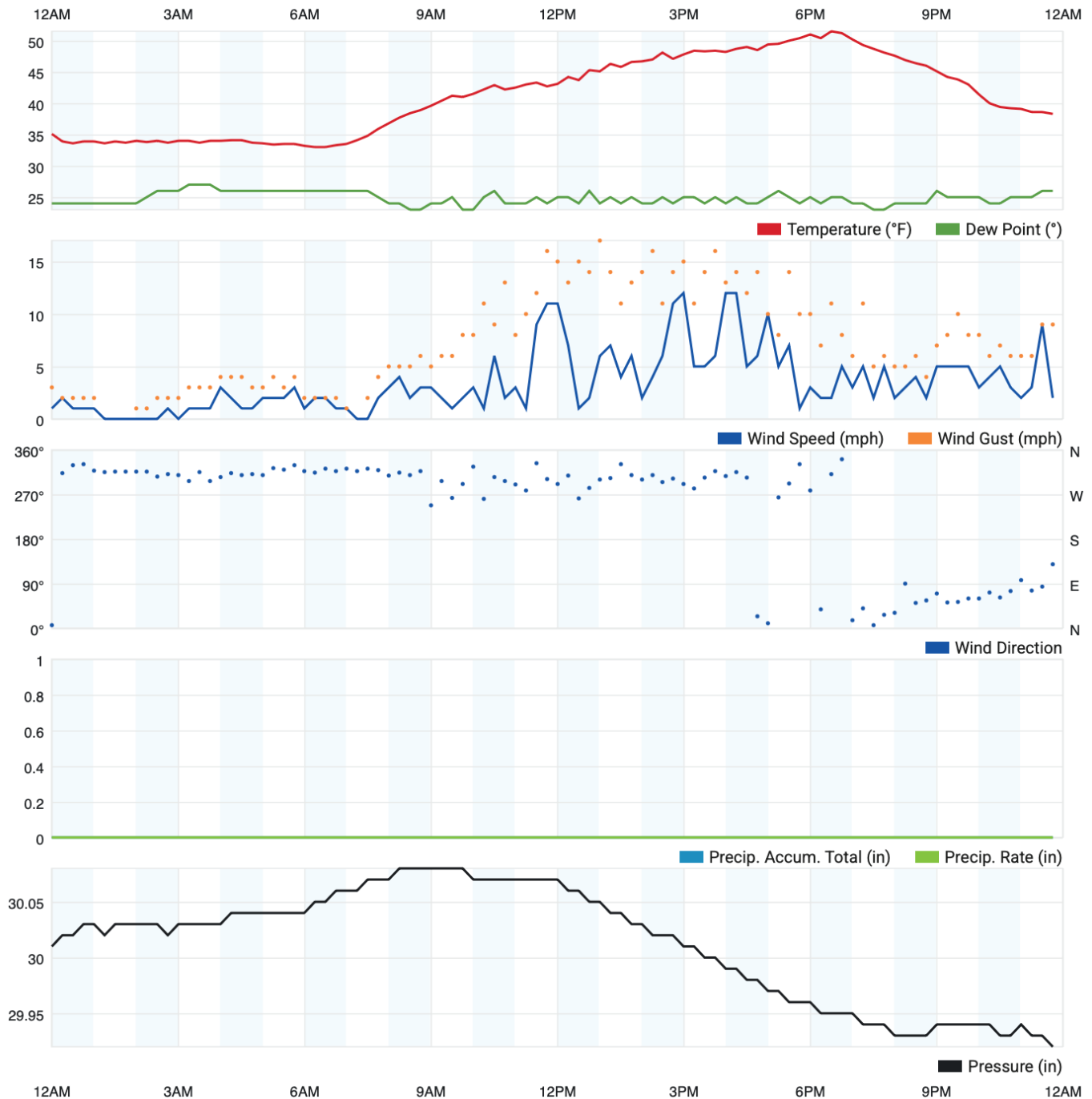
*Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.*

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

May 6, 2026





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Today



High: 62 °F

Sunny

Tonight



Low: 35 °F

Increasing  
Clouds

Friday



High: 70 °F

Becoming  
Sunny

Friday Night



Low: 40 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Saturday



High: 62 °F

Partly Sunny

Today

Highs: 55-65°



Lows: 35-40°



Friday

Highs: 65-75°

Breezy

ELEVATED FIRE WEATHER CONDITIONS



Lows: 40-45°



Saturday

Highs: 57-67°

Breezy



Lows: 31-41°



Sunday

Highs: 60-70°



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

Dry and mild conditions are expected across the region the next few days. The warming trend kicks off today as daytime readings warm into the 50s and 60s, which is still slightly below normal. Above normal temperatures return Friday along with gusty northwest winds. This combination will lead to elevated fire weather conditions. The breezy conditions will spill over into the weekend as slightly below temperatures return.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 52 °F at 6:28 PM**

**Low Temp: 33 °F at 6:17 AM**

**Wind: 17 mph at 12:57 PM**

**Precip: : 0.00**

## Today's Info

Record High: 94 in 1928

Record Low: 24 in 2019

Average High: 67

Average Low: 40

Average Precip in May.: .76

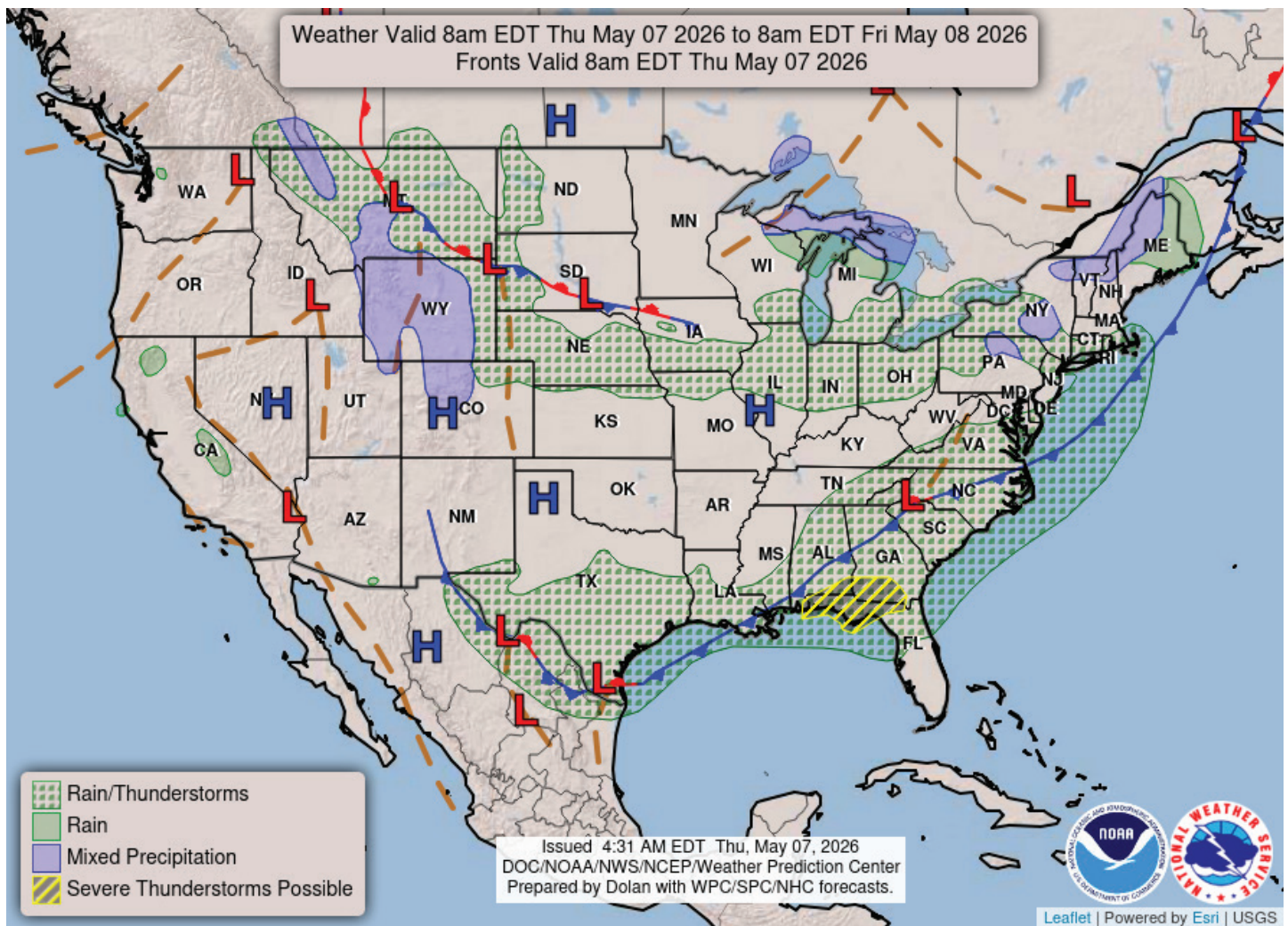
Precip to date in May.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 4.73

Precip Year to Date: 3.12

Sunset Tonight: 8:45 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:10 am





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## Today in Weather History

May 7th, 1896: A strong, estimated F3 tornado moved northeast from 12 miles SSW of Clark to 3 miles west of Watertown, beyond Lake Kampeska. It was estimated to be on the ground for 30 miles. Near the start of the path, a woman was killed, and ten people were injured in one home. Parts of a house were found up to two miles away. The tornado also leveled barns near Watertown.

1840 — A powerful tornado wrecked many boats at the Natchez Landing in Mississippi, then plowed through the city on the bluff. The tornado killed 317 persons, and caused a million dollars damage. The force of the storm caused houses to burst open. The tornado was the most deadly and destructive in early American history. (David Ludlum)

1964 — The temperature at White Mountain 2, located in California, dipped to 15 degrees below zero to set a record for May for the continental U.S. (The Weather Channel)

1987 — Thirty-one cities in the western U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Highs of 93 degrees at Portland OR and San Jose CA were the warmest of record for so early in the season. The high of 92 degrees at Quillayute WA was a record for the month of May. The temperature at Sacramento CA hit 105 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 — A powerful storm in the north central U.S. produced up to three feet of snow in the Bighorn Mountains of Wyoming and the mountains of south central Montana. Up to five inches of rain drenched central Montana in less than 24 hours, and flash flooding in Wyoming caused a million dollars damage. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 — Thirty-two cities in the central and eastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date, and 24 hour snowfall totals of 7.2 inches at Buffalo NY and 10.7 inches at Rochester NY were records for the month of May. While northerly winds ushered unseasonably cold air into the eastern U.S., temperatures warmed rapidly in the Great Plains Region, reaching the 90s in Kansas. The temperature at Manhattan KS soared from a low of 30 degrees to a high of 88 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 — Gale force winds lashed the northern and central Pacific coast. A wind gust of 52 mph at Eureka CA established a record for the month of May. Strong winds over northeastern Colorado, associated with a fast moving Pacific cold front, gusted to 63 mph at Peetz. Snow developed over the northwest mountains of Wyoming late in the day, and Yellowstone National Park was whitened with 6 to 14 inches. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



## God's Love: Our Reason for Hope

**God's love is unconditional, unlimited, and available to all.**

1 John 4:7-10: 7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

8 The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

9 By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.

10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Without a sense of purpose, it can be easy to lose hope. But God created each person for a reason: to love Him and be loved by Him. Let's look at several defining attributes of divine love:

God's love is personal. Christianity stands out among world religions because God desires a personal relationship with us. He loves each and every one of His children.

God's love is unconditional. It's who He is (1 John 4:8) rather than simply something He does. Nothing about your character or behavior can make Him love you less or more.

God's love is available to everyone. It is inexhaustible. The Lord does not have favorites, but He does have intimates. These are followers who spend time with Him, talking and listening, walking in obedience, and desiring to know and love Him with their whole heart. He wants all of us to choose this kind of relationship with Him.

The Father didn't just say He loves you; He proved it by sending His Son to rescue us from sin (Romans 5:8). Those who haven't trusted in the Savior can go through life oblivious to the blessing of His unconditional care. That's why we must live joyously and tell others that God's infinite, eternal love is offered to us all.

*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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## The Groton Independent

Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

05.06.26

6 18 30 32 43 1

TOP PRIZE:

**\$1,000,000/year**

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 34 Mins 11 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

05.05.26

12 22 50 51 55 10

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$215,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 19 Mins 11 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

05.06.26

3 6 7 18 49 10

All Star Bonus: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$25,070,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 34 Mins 11 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

05.06.26

5 6 21 25 27

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$82,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 49 Mins 11 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

05.06.26

4 21 36 48 69 5

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 18 Mins 10 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

05.06.26

18 27 51 65 68 5

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$47,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 18 Mins 10 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)



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

### More than a media mogul, Ted Turner leaves behind a conservation legacy

By SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN and R.J. RICO Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — Ted Turner loved the land, and lots of it: As one of the largest private landowners in the United States, he fueled conservation work across some 3,125 square miles (8,094 square kilometers) of ranchland in several states, aiming to leave it in better shape for future generations.

Framing conservation as essential for human survival, Turner saw habitat restoration, stewardship and endangered species work as ways to address climate change, the loss of biodiversity and resource depletion.

"I want to inspire people to care about the environment," Turner said in a 2016 interview with a travel publication. "When we connect with nature, we heal ourselves. When we protect nature, we heal the planet."

The media mogul's death Wednesday leaves a legacy of conservation work that spanned decades — from when Turner bought his first bison a half-century ago to the large-scale restoration work and species reintroductions ongoing today. His ranches in New Mexico, Montana, Nebraska and elsewhere have become living laboratories. His "estancias" in Patagonia are models of ecotourism.

And according to Turner Enterprises, which manages his land along with his other business interests and investments, Turner ensured that his holdings would continue to be protected from development.

From recreation to restoration

Turner purchased his first bison in 1976, fulfilling a childhood dream.

"When I was a little boy, about 10 years old, I read National Geographic magazine and it had an article about bison, and it said how close they came to extinction. I decided then that, if I could, I would do what I could to help bring the bison back," he said in a 2019 CNN program, "Ted Turner: Captain Planet."

But he said "I had to make a lot of money first. Because ranches are not cheap."

Turner bought his first ranch in 1987. Not long after, he acquired the Flying D Ranch near Bozeman, Montana, which is now one of the largest, most prominent examples of "rewilding."

He initially used his properties for hunting and fishing before working on habitat restoration and the re-introduction of native species. The Flying D, for example, had been overgrazed so he replaced traditional cattle operations with a bison herd to restore the native ecosystem.

At Vermejo Park Ranch, purchased in the mid-1990s from Pennzoil and spanning more than 870 square miles (2,253 square kilometers) near the New Mexico-Colorado border, Turner's team has worked to restore mountainsides and valleys degraded by overgrazing, mining and clear-cutting. It's also home to a herd of what ranch managers describe as genetically pure wild bison.

In all, Turner owned 13 ranches in six states. At some of the ranches, Ted Turner Reserves and Turner Enterprises have woven revenue-generating programs like bison ranching, recreation and tourism with ecology.

"He wanted part of America to still be preserved and in some way protected as it was at the time that the American Indians roamed those lands," former CNN President Tom Johnson said Wednesday. "In this era of development and commercialization and bad zoning, he cleaned up the streams and brought back the gray wolves and the prairie dog. I mean, he really cared about nature and was seeing what was happening."

Jennifer Morris, CEO of The Nature Conservancy, said Wednesday that Turner just didn't believe in protecting nature, he acted on it and did so at a large scale.

"He invested in land, restored ecosystems, and showed what's possible when you pair vision with real commitment," she said in a statement. "His work helped redefine conservation, proving that private lands and private capital can be powerful forces for public good."

Not without controversy

Turner purchased his ranches in Argentina during a privatization wave in the 1990s and 2000s when

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wealthy foreigners bought huge tracts. This sometimes sparked nationalist sentiments and concerns about resource exploitation and public access to rivers and lakes. Turner's celebrity made him a target, but he ultimately drew less criticism as he focused on low-impact ecotourism and conservation.

In the western U.S., not all ranchers were pleased as Turner shifted land management practices on his ranches, including switching from cattle to bison.

His support of wolves, including a Mexican wolf breeding program on the Ladder Ranch in New Mexico, drew the ire of ranching organizations that were raising the alarm about wild wolves killing livestock.

And to the dismay of some cattle ranchers, Turner raised the world's largest bison herd, broadening the species' genetics and boosting markets for their meat as he supplied burgers and steaks to about three dozen Ted's Montana Grill locations in 14 states.

"By making it a commodity, by making a business out of it, it caused people to get into the bison ranching business, which spread the gene pool dramatically and has made the bison herd extremely healthy," restaurateur George McKerrow, co-founder of Ted's Montana Grill, said Wednesday.

From bison to birds

In interviews, Turner described his role as a caretaker, not owner, and stressed that business and conservation could align through "eco-capitalism," a concept he popularized.

What started with bison hooves helping to restore the prairie grass continues through the Turner Endangered Species Fund, which gives the Bolson tortoise — North America's largest and rarest tortoise — a leg up through a captive breeding program at the Armendaris Ranch in New Mexico.

At Vermejo and the Bad River Ranch in South Dakota, Turner's team is partnering with state and federal scientists to recover black-footed ferrets, one of the rarest mammals on the planet with an estimated wild population of less than 300.

From Aplomado falcons and desert bighorn sheep to bats and monarch butterflies, it all mattered to Turner. His philosophy revolved around the interconnection of all living things and the idea that no species should be discounted. It was simple enough to be immortalized by a bumper sticker.

"Save Everything."

## Rubio arrives for audience with Pope Leo XIV to ease tensions after Trump's criticism over Iran

By NICOLE WINFIELD and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio opened a fence-mending visit to the Vatican on Thursday after President Donald Trump's broadsides against Pope Leo XIV and the U.S.-Israeli war in Iran angered the Holy See and sparked ongoing sparring between the two American leaders.

Rubio, a practicing Catholic, had an audience scheduled with Leo, which was complicated at the last minute by Trump's latest criticism of the Chicago-born pope. Leo has pushed back, calling out Trump's misrepresentations of his views on Iran and nuclear weapons and insisting that he is merely preaching the biblical message of peace.

Rubio was also due to meet with the Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, who on the eve of his visit strongly defended Leo and criticized Trump's attacks in understated diplomatic terms. "Attacking him like that or criticizing what he does seems a bit strange to me, to say the least," Parolin said Wednesday.

Parolin said Washington had requested Rubio's audience, and that the pope was open to continued dialogue.

"We cannot ignore the United States," Parolin said. "Despite some difficulties, they certainly remain a key partner for the Holy See, not least because they play a role in almost every situation we face today."

Rubio also has meetings Friday with Premier Giorgia Meloni and Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani. Those meetings might not be much easier for America's top diplomat, given both have strongly defended Leo against Trump's attacks and have criticized the Iran war as illegal — drawing the president's ire.

Rubio insisted this week that the visit had been in the works for a while but that "obviously we had some stuff that happened."



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Rubio looks to smooth ties as Trump lashes out at the pope

The tensions began when Trump lashed out at Leo on social media last month, saying the pope was soft on crime and terrorism for comments about the administration's immigration policies and deportations as well as the Iran war. Leo then said God doesn't listen to the prayers of those who wage war.

Later, Trump posted a social media image appearing to liken himself to Jesus Christ, which was deleted after a backlash. He has refused to apologize to Leo and has sought to explain away the post by saying he thought the image was of him as a doctor.

Rubio said Trump's recent criticisms of Leo were rooted in his opposition to Iran potentially obtaining a nuclear weapon, which he said could be used against millions of Catholics and other Christians.

Trump "doesn't understand why anybody — leave aside the pope — the president and I, for that matter, I think most people, I cannot understand why anyone would think that it's a good idea for Iran to ever have a nuclear weapon," Rubio told reporters Tuesday at the White House.

Leo has never said Iran should obtain nuclear weapons and that the Catholic Church "for years has spoken out against all nuclear weapons, so there is no doubt there."

"The mission of the church is to preach the Gospel, to preach peace. If someone wants to criticize me for announcing the Gospel, let him do it with the truth," Leo said late Tuesday, after Trump again accused him of being "OK" with Iran having a nuclear weapon.

Leo noted that the Catholic Church has always permitted countries to act in self-defense and acknowledged the church's "just war" tradition.

But with the advance of the age of nuclear weapons, "the whole concept of war has to be reevaluated in terms today," he said. "And I always believe that it's much better to enter into dialogue than to look for arms."

Rubio has often been called on to tone down or explain Trump's harsh rhetoric. Trump also has criticized Meloni and other NATO allies for a lack of support for the Iran war, recently announcing plans to pull thousands of troops out of Germany in the coming months.

Vatican seen as willing to have dialogue

Giampiero Gramaglia, former head of the ANSA news agency and its onetime Washington correspondent, said he didn't expect much to come out of Rubio's visit for Italian or Vatican relations. He, and other Italian commentators, believe Rubio instead was looking to smooth over relations with the pope for his own political ambitions as well as the upcoming midterm congressional elections and 2028 presidential race.

"I doubt Rubio has the role of conciliator for Trump," he told Italy's Foreign Press Association. "I have the perception that Rubio's mission is more about himself" and his political ambitions as a prominent Catholic Republican.

The Rev. Antonio Spadaro, undersecretary in the Vatican's culture office, said Rubio's mission wasn't to "convert" the pope to Trump's side. Rather, Washington "has come to acknowledge — implicitly but legibly — that (Leo's) voice carries weight in the world that cannot simply be dismissed."

"The situation created by President Trump's remarks required a high-level, direct intervention, conducted in the proper language of diplomacy: a semantic corrective to a narrative of frontal conflict with the church," he wrote in an essay this week.

Farian Sabahi, a professor of contemporary history at the University of Insubria who is of Iranian descent, said Meloni would be wise to more strongly condemn the war for the sake of putting Italy in a good position to rebuild Iran later. Italy is the No. 2 European Union trading partner with Iran, after Germany, working within EU sanctions.

"From a purely opportunistic standpoint, it would actually be advisable to condemn the Israeli-U.S. aggression precisely to give Italian companies the opportunity to do business, given that there are many other players on the international stage ready to enter the Iranian market," she said.

Cuba is also on the agenda

Rubio said topics other than the Iran war were on the agenda for the Vatican visit, including Cuba. The Holy See is particularly concerned about the Trump administration's threats of potential military action

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there following its January ouster of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

Trump has said frequently that Cuba could be "next" and even suggested that once the war with Iran is over, naval assets deployed in the Middle East could return to the United States by way of Cuba.

Rubio is the son of Cuban immigrants and a longtime Cuba hawk.

"We gave Cuba \$6 million of humanitarian aid, but obviously they won't let us distribute it," Rubio said. "We distributed it through the church. We'd like to do more."

## **Russia says Ukraine launched a major drone attack after Moscow shunned ceasefire offer**

By The Associated Press undefined

Russian air defenses shot down 347 Ukrainian drones overnight, Russia's Defense Ministry said Thursday, in what appeared to be a major attack after Moscow spurned Kyiv's ceasefire earlier in the week and tension mounted over Russia's upcoming Victory Day celebrations.

Incoming drones were destroyed over 20 Russian regions, including Moscow, according to the Defense Ministry, in Ukraine's second-biggest aerial attack since Russia's all-out invasion more than four years ago. The largest was last March when it launched 389 drones.

The attack came ahead of Russia's most important secular holiday, when it marks the anniversary of the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II. Russian authorities have declared a unilateral ceasefire in Ukraine for Friday and Saturday.

Ukraine had responded to that with its own suspension of hostilities from midnight Tuesday. But Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Moscow disregarded the goodwill gesture and launched fresh attacks.

"Russia has not stopped any type of its military activity. Unfortunately, it has not stopped. Ukraine will act symmetrically," Zelenskyy said in his regular evening video address Wednesday.

Tension has grown as Russia's Victory Day celebrations approach and U.S.-led peace efforts gain no traction.

All mobile internet access and text messaging services will be shut down in the Russian capital on May 9, state media reported Thursday, citing the country's Ministry of Digital Development, Communications and Mass Media.

Also, a traditional parade in Moscow won't feature the usual tanks, missiles and other military equipment for the first time in nearly two decades.

Russian authorities say they are concerned about possible Ukrainian attacks, as Kyiv has expanded its long-range drone and missile capabilities.

The Russian Defense Ministry cited the "current operational situation" as a reason for excluding military equipment. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov blamed Ukraine for the scaled-back celebrations and tighter security in Moscow, accusing Kyiv of "terrorist activity," in an apparent reference to the drone strikes.

The restrictions will include websites on the Russian government's so-called "white list," a group of state-approved online services that are kept available during the country's increasingly common connectivity blackouts.

Home internet and Wi-Fi will be unaffected, officials said.

Ukraine's air defense shot down 92 of the 102 drones Russia launched overnight, the military said.

Russia maintains a significant advantage in drone numbers, regularly deploying hundreds in a single attack.

## **Iran reviewing US proposal as Trump pressures Tehran for agreement on deal to end war**

By ADAM SCHRECK and ELENA BECATOROS Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran said it was reviewing the latest American proposals on ending the war, as U.S. President Donald Trump threatened the country with a new wave of bombing unless a deal is reached that includes reopening the crucial Strait of Hormuz to international shipping.

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Hope that the two-month conflict could soon end buoyed international markets on Thursday, even as the U.S. military fired on an Iranian oil tanker attempting to breach an American blockade of Iran's ports hours earlier. The developments followed days of mixed messaging from the Trump administration over its strategy to end the war.

Trump posted on social media that the two-month war could soon end and that oil and natural gas shipments disrupted by the conflict could restart. But he said that depends on Iran accepting a reported agreement that he did not detail.

"If they don't agree, the bombing starts," Trump wrote.

A fragile ceasefire between the U.S. and Iran has largely held since April 8. But in-person talks between the two countries hosted by Pakistan last month failed to reach an agreement. The war began Feb. 28, when the U.S. and Israel launched strikes against Iran.

Pakistan says it expects a deal soon

"We expect an agreement sooner rather than later," Pakistan's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Tahir Andrabi said Thursday. "We hope the parties will reach a peaceful and sustainable solution that will contribute not only to peace in our region but to international peace as well."

But he declined to give a timeline, saying Pakistan would not disclose details of the ongoing diplomatic efforts.

"What I can tell you and this is what I have stated before that we remain positive, we remain optimistic, and we hope the settlement will be soon rather than later," he said.

Asked whether Pakistan was expecting any response from Iran later Thursday, Andrabi said: "I will not comment on specifics or the movement of the messages."

A shifting narrative of the war

The Trump administration's messaging throughout the Iran war has been shifting and often contradictory. This week, the president and his aides presented a dizzying narrative over the U.S. strategy to unblock the Strait of Hormuz and wrap up the war that drastically changed over the course of mere hours.

Iran has effectively shut the strait, a vital waterway for the shipment of supplies of oil, gas, fertilizer and other petroleum products, while the U.S. is blockading Iranian ports.

On Wednesday, a U.S. fighter jet shot out the rudder of an Iranian oil tanker in the Gulf of Oman as it tried to breach the American blockade, U.S. Central Command said in a social media post.

Trump suggests U.S. might force a deal with Tehran

Trump insisted Wednesday that Iranian officials want to end the war.

"We're dealing with people that want to make a deal very much, and we'll see whether or not they can make a deal that's satisfactory to us," the president said.

He suggested the U.S. could ultimately force a settlement.

"If they don't agree, the bombing starts," Trump said on social media, "and it will be, sadly, at a much higher level and intensity than it was before."

The White House believes it is near an agreement with Iran on a one-page memorandum to end the war, according to reporting by the news outlet Axios. Provisions include a moratorium on Iranian uranium enrichment, lifting of U.S. sanctions, distribution of frozen Iranian funds and opening the strait for ships.

The White House did not immediately respond to questions about the possible agreement.

A spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry, Esmail Baghaei, told state TV that Tehran had "strongly rejected" U.S. proposals reported by Axios, but that it was still examining the latest U.S. proposal.

US effort to reopen Strait of Hormuz suspended

Trump has sought to increase pressure on Tehran after suspending on Tuesday a short-lived U.S. effort, dubbed Project Freedom, to force open a safe passage for commercial ships through the Strait of Hormuz.

Only two American-flagged merchant ships are known to have passed through the U.S.-guarded route after it opened Monday. The U.S. military said it sank six Iranian small boats threatening civilian ships.

Hundreds of merchant ships remain bottled up in the Persian Gulf, unable to reach the open sea without passing through the Strait of Hormuz. The strait's closure has sent fuel prices skyrocketing, rattled the



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global economy and put enormous economic pressure on countries, including major powers such as China.

Hapag-Lloyd, one of the world's largest shipping companies, said in a statement that the strait's shutdown is costing it around \$60 million per week, with rising fuel and insurance costs hitting particularly hard.

On Thursday, the price of Brent crude oil stabilized at around \$100 a barrel as investors waited to see whether the strait would reopen.

Meanwhile, French President Emmanuel Macron said Wednesday that France's aircraft carrier strike group was moving into the Red Sea in preparation for a potential French-British mission to restore maritime security in the Strait of Hormuz as soon as conditions allow.

China's foreign minister called for a comprehensive ceasefire Wednesday after meeting in Beijing with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi. Wang Yi said his country was "deeply distressed" by the conflict.

China's close economic and political ties to Tehran give it a unique position of influence. The Trump administration is pressing China to use that relationship to urge the Islamic Republic to open the strait.

**Iranian envoy visits China ahead of Trump**

Araghchi's visit to China came ahead of a planned trip to Beijing by Trump, who is scheduled to attend a high-profile summit on May 14-15 with Chinese President Xi Jinping. Trump was the last U.S. president to visit China in 2017.

Araghchi told Iranian state TV that his visit included discussions about the Strait of Hormuz, Iran's nuclear program and sanctions imposed on Tehran.

Trump has demanded a major rollback of Tehran's disputed nuclear program.

## **Judge releases note cellmate says he found after Epstein's suspected suicide attempt**

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A note Jeffrey Epstein's former cellmate claimed he found after the millionaire sex offender's first suspected jail suicide attempt was made public Wednesday, years after being sealed and locked in a courthouse vault as part of an unrelated legal dispute.

U.S. District Judge Kenneth Karas in White Plains, New York, ordered the release of the note after The New York Times asked him last week to unseal it and other documents in a case involving the former cellmate, Nicholas Tartaglione. Federal prosecutors did not oppose the request.

Few people had known about the note until Tartaglione, a former police officer serving a life sentence for killing four people, mentioned it last year on writer Jessica Reed Kraus' podcast.

Tartaglione claimed he discovered the note in a book after Epstein was found on the floor of their cell at a Manhattan federal jail on July 23, 2019, with a strip of bedsheet around the financier's neck. That was about three weeks before Epstein was found dead in his cell in what authorities concluded was a suicide.

"They investigated me for month -- found nothing!!!" said the short note, which is hard to decipher in some places. "It is a treat to be able to choose" the "time to say goodbye," the note continues. "Watcha want me to do -- Bust out cryin!!"

"NO FUN," the note concludes, with those words underlined. "NOT WORTH IT!!"

It is unclear who wrote the note Tartaglione claimed to have found. It wasn't mentioned in the lengthy government reports examining the circumstances of Epstein's death, nor did it surface in the Justice Department's recent release of files on the late financier.

In a written ruling, Karas said he weighed the privacy interests of third parties, including Epstein, before ruling to release the note. He said existing case law suggests that privacy interests of a deceased person, such as Epstein, "are vastly reduced and disclosure of the deceased's information is unlikely to 'work a concrete harm.'"

According to jail records, Epstein had friction marks and skin irritation on his neck from the suspected July 23 attempt. Jail officers said he was breathing heavily but responsive. One officer reported at the time that Epstein said he believed Tartaglione had tried to kill him, according to a memo included in the Justice Department's files.

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Jail officials placed Epstein on suicide watch for 31 hours after the incident before downgrading him to psychiatric observation — his status when he killed himself. According to jail records, he denied trying to harm himself, telling a jail psychologist that suicide was against his Jewish religion and that he was a “coward” who didn’t like pain.

A chronology included in the files states that Tartaglione told his lawyer about the note four days after the suspected July 23 attempt. The note was later submitted as evidence in Tartaglione’s criminal case and was placed under seal amid a dispute over his legal representation.

Both men were interviewed by jail personnel on July 31, 2019, according to jail records.

Epstein said he had never had any issues with Tartaglione, wasn’t threatened by him and didn’t “want to make up something that isn’t there.” Tartaglione said he didn’t have any issues being Epstein’s cellmate, though he said they kept their conversations to a minimum. On July 23, he said, he thought Epstein was having a heart attack because his eyes were open and he appeared to be snoring.

Epstein and Tartaglione shared a cell for about two weeks, beginning soon after Epstein’s July 6, 2019, arrest and ending with the suspected suicide attempt. Both were awaiting trials — Epstein on sex trafficking charges and Tartaglione on charges that in 2016 he killed four men, including a man he tortured and strangled over stolen drug money.

Tartaglione, who had been an officer in the Hudson River Valley village of Briarcliff Manor, was convicted in 2023. He is currently incarcerated at a federal penitentiary in California and has petitioned President Donald Trump for a pardon.

Epstein was without a cellmate when he was found dead at the Metropolitan Correctional Center in Manhattan, on Aug. 10, 2019. Authorities have pointed to a series of missteps by jail personnel — including browsing the internet and sleeping when they should’ve been checking on Epstein — for allowing him to take his own life.

Officials said they found a handwritten note in Epstein’s cell at the time of his death, but that it didn’t appear to be a suicide note. Rather, they said, it appeared to be a list of grievances about conditions at the jail, including about food, showers and the presence of bugs.

## Hopes for reopening the Strait of Hormuz push world shares higher, as Brent crude holds above \$100

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

World shares jumped on Thursday, with Tokyo’s Nikkei 225 gaining almost 6% to a new record as investors waited to see if the U.S. and Iran will strike a deal allowing tankers to deliver crude from the Persian Gulf again.

Japan’s benchmark Nikkei 225 index jumped more than 3,300 points to 63,086.00 as markets in Tokyo reopened following “Golden Week” holidays.

In early European trading, Germany’s DAX edged 0.2% higher to 24,988.08 and the CAC 40 in Paris was up 0.3% at 8,325.55. Britain’s FTSE 100 slipped 0.3% to 10,411.19.

The future for the S&P 500 was up 0.1% while that for the Dow Jones Industrial Average climbed 0.3%.

Japan’s Nikkei 225 has gained nearly 20% in the past three months and more than 70% in the past year, pushed higher by strong buying of tech shares that have benefited from the boom in artificial intelligence.

Computer chip equipment maker Tokyo Electron gained 9% and testing equipment maker Advantest Corp. added 6.8%. Shin-Etsu Chemical gained 8.5%.

“I think it’s a kind of bubble because buying activity concentrated on leading AI, artificial intelligence stock and semiconductor-related stocks. It’s a situation where only semiconductor stocks are being bought,” said Takashi Hiroki, chief strategist at MONEX.

Elsewhere in Asia, the Hang Seng in Hong Kong gained 1.7% to 26,668.37.

The S&P/ASX 200 in Australia was up 0.8% at 8,862.40.

In South Korea, the Kospi reversed early losses, gaining 1.4% to 7,490.05, the second straight day it has closed at a record high. The benchmark jumped nearly 7% on Wednesday to barrel past 7,000 for

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the first time.

Taiwan's TaieX surged 1.9%, lifted by a 3.1% gain for big computer chipmaker TSMC.

On Wednesday, markets rallied worldwide after President Donald Trump said the Strait of Hormuz could be "OPEN TO ALL" if Iran accepts a reported agreement that the U.S. president did not detail.

Oil prices fell nearly 8% and the S&P 500 climbed 1.5% for its best day in nearly a month, setting a fresh record. The Dow industrials jumped 1.2%, and the Nasdaq composite rose 2%.

However, optimism was tempered by continuing tensions. The U.S. military fired on an Iranian oil tanker Wednesday as President Donald Trump sought to pressure Tehran into reaching a deal to end the war. The military said in a social media post that a fighter jet shot out the rudder of the tanker in the Gulf of Oman as the vessel tried to breach an American blockade of Iran's ports.

Early Thursday in Asian trading, Brent crude oil yoyoed on Thursday, shedding early gains to fall 30 cents to \$100.97 a barrel. Benchmark U.S. crude oil slipped 37 cents to \$94.71 a barrel.

Oil prices sank Wednesday and stock markets rallied worldwide on hopes that the United States and Iran were nearing a deal to allow ships to deliver crude through the Strait of Hormuz.

The price for a barrel of Brent crude oil, the international standard, fell 7.8% to \$101.27, down from more than \$115 early this week. But after dipping below \$97 a barrel, it pushed back above \$100 after Trump threatened to start bombing "at a much higher level and intensity" if Iran does not accept his proposed agreement.

The effective closure of the strait due to the war threatens the global economy because the conflict has blocked oil tankers from using it to exit the Persian Gulf. A reopening could allow oil to flow freely again and remove pressure on inflation that's driving prices up for all kinds of products worldwide.

U.S. stocks have remained resilient despite the war thanks partly to strong profit reports by big U.S. companies for the start of 2026.

Chipmaker AMD helped lead the market Wednesday with a surge of 18.6% after it joined the list of big-name companies topping expectations for both profit and revenue.

In other dealings early Thursday, the U.S. dollar fell to 156.39 Japanese yen from 156.40 yen. The euro rose to \$1.1752 from \$1.1747.

## Polls open in UK local elections seen as a verdict on Keir Starmer's leadership

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British voters cast ballots Thursday in local and regional elections that could shake up the country's politics and deliver a heavy blow to embattled Prime Minister Keir Starmer.

Starmer's center-left Labour Party is bracing for big losses in polls that will choose about 5,000 local councilors and a handful of mayors across England, as well as semiautonomous parliaments in Scotland and Wales.

Polls opened at 7 a.m. and will close at 10 p.m. (2100 GMT). Some local authorities will count ballots overnight, but the bulk of the results are likely to be declared on Friday afternoon.

Local elections usually focus on issues like garbage collection, graffiti and potholes, but Starmer's opponents have painted Thursday's vote as a midterm referendum on the prime minister.

A rout could trigger moves by restive Labour lawmakers to oust a leader who led them to power less than two years ago. Even if Starmer survives for now, many analysts doubt he will lead the party into the next national election, which must be held by 2029.

Starmer's popularity has plunged after repeated missteps since he became prime minister in July 2024. His government has struggled to deliver promised economic growth, repair tattered public services and ease the cost of living — tasks made harder by the U.S.-Israeli war with Iran, which has choked off oil shipments through the Strait of Hormuz.

Starmer has been further hurt by his disastrous decision to appoint Peter Mandelson, a scandal-tarnished friend of Jeffrey Epstein, as Britain's ambassador to Washington.



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Labour is defending about 2,500 seats on English local councils, and party members are apprehensive it may lose many of them.

Starmer has already survived a crisis in February, when some Labour lawmakers, including the party's leader in Scotland, urged him to quit over the Mandelson appointment.

Far-right Reform UK expected to win big

Luke Tryl of pollster More in Common said the local elections are likely to see "the total collapse of the traditional two-party system" that was dominated for decades by the Labour and Conservative parties.

The big winner is expected to be hard-right party Reform UK, led by Nigel Farage, which is aiming for working-class, former Labour strongholds in England's north and on London's outer edges with its anti-establishment, anti-immigration message. The Green Party is also likely to gain hundreds of council seats in urban centers and university towns.

The main opposition Conservative Party is also expected to lose ground, with the centrist Liberal Democrats making some gains.

Starmer didn't even mention the Conservatives in his final preelection message, framing it as a choice between "progress and a better future" under Labour and "the anger and division offered up by Reform or empty promises from the Greens."

Farage said on the eve of the election that a strong result for Reform would mean Starmer is "gone by the middle of summer."

Both Reform UK and the Greens have grown rapidly in the last year or two, and are facing increased scrutiny as a result. Farage is facing questions over a 5 million pound (\$6.8 million) donation from a cryptocurrency billionaire that he accepted in 2024, but did not declare. He says it was a personal gift.

The environmentalist Greens, who have stressed their pro-Palestinian credentials under self-described "eco populist" leader Zack Polanski, have fired several candidates for antisemitic social media posts.

Reform also is eyeing breakthroughs in Scotland and Wales, though pro-independence nationalists the Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru are likely to form governments in Edinburgh and Cardiff.

"Labour's going to lose to Reform in some places, Greens in others, and here and there they'll lose one or two seats to the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives as well," said Tony Travers, a professor of government at the London School of Economics. "They're fighting on four fronts in England — five in Wales and Scotland."

## China says ties with US remain stable ahead of Trump visit despite 'disruptions'

BEIJING (AP) — China's top diplomat said Thursday that ties with the U.S. have been in general stable despite "many twists and disruptions," and called on both countries to find a way to contribute to global peace, a week before President Donald Trump is expected to visit.

During a meeting with members of a U.S. bipartisan congressional delegation, led by Sen. Steve Daines, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi credited Presidents Xi Jinping and Trump for "helping steer the direction of bilateral relations at critical moments."

"Over the past year, China-U.S. relations have gone through many twists and disruptions, but we have still managed to maintain overall stability," Wang said.

Daines, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and a strong supporter of Trump, agreed and said that both countries should look for stability.

"I strongly believe that we want to de-escalate, not decouple. We want stability, we want mutual respect," he said.

Daines added that after the leaders meet next week, "perhaps we could see some more Boeing airplanes purchased, which I know would be something we would like to see."

The senator also recognized China's efforts to help reduce tensions in the Middle East and reopen the Strait of Hormuz. He said that Wang's meeting on Wednesday with the Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas

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Araghchi was proof of China's engagement.

Ahead of Trump's visit to China, scheduled for May 14-15, the U.S. government has been pressing Beijing to use its influence with Iran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, where 20% of the world's oil normally flows.

It was Daines' second trip to China since Trump took office last year. He previously visited in March 2025, when the two countries were locked in frictions over trade tariffs and efforts to combat illegal fentanyl trade.

## Pakistan warns of strong response to any attack on anniversary of clash with India

By MUNIR AHMED Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Pakistan's military warned Thursday it would respond strongly against any attack as it marked the anniversary of last year's four-day conflict with neighboring India that brought the nuclear-armed rivals to the brink of war before a U.S.-brokered ceasefire halted the fighting.

The military said that any "hostile design" against Pakistan would be countered with "greater strength, precision and resolve" than what India witnessed during the May 2025 conflict, which Islamabad named "Marka-e-Haq," or "Battle of Truth."

Pakistan and India had exchanged tit-for-tat strikes following an attack by gunmen in the Indian-controlled part of the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir that killed 26 people, most of them Hindu tourists. India blamed Pakistan-backed militants for the massacre, an allegation Islamabad denied while calling for an independent investigation.

India launched strikes inside Pakistan on May 7, triggering retaliatory attacks by Pakistan that included drone incursions, missile strikes and artillery fire. Dozens of people were killed on both sides before a ceasefire was reached on May 10 following U.S. mediation.

Pakistan at the time claimed it shot down at least seven Indian military aircraft, including a French-made Rafale fighter jet. India acknowledged suffering some losses but did not provide details.

U.S. President Donald Trump has repeatedly took the credit for helping avert a wider war.

Pakistan and India have long had strained relations and have fought two of their three wars over Kashmir, which is claimed by both in its entirety.

## In Gaza, some Palestinian children find respite and catharsis in breakdancing

By WAFAA SHURAFU Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — As the music comes on in a Gaza refugee camp, a group of boys and girls start showing off their breakdancing moves, kicking and spinning with intense focus on their fast footwork. Two young girls grin at each other as they nailed a tricky part of the routine.

It's a rare moment of respite and catharsis amid the harsh realities of life in the Gaza Strip. The children, some wearing sliders on their feet, dance next to mangled metal rods jutting out from a mound of rubble and shattered concrete. The school that trains them is in the Nuseirat refugee camp, a crowded, built-up camp in central Gaza dating back to the 1948 Arab-Israeli war.

"I come to this center because I discovered that I have a talent for breakdancing, and I also come here to release the negative energy inside me and to enjoy," said Habiba Abu Khater, one of the children from around five to 14 years old who train at the school. She said she's been attending for four years and is happy about her progress after starting from scratch.

Instructor Fayez Saraj said the school, established in the camp in 2004, helps children build their self confidence and improve their mental health through break dance, gymnastics, and contemporary dance.

The movements "help the child with psychological release, especially from the difficult situations we experienced during the years of war," he said. "We have a significant role in ... moving them from an atmosphere of depression and frustration to one of joy."

Israel's military offensive in Gaza has killed more than 72,600 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health

Ministry, caused widespread destruction and displaced most of the territory's residents.

The ministry, part of the Hamas-led government, maintains detailed casualty records that are seen as generally reliable by U.N. agencies and independent experts. It does not give a breakdown of civilians and militants.

Israel launched the offensive after Hamas-led militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took another 251 hostage in their attack on Oct. 7, 2023.

While the heaviest fighting has mostly subsided since a fragile ceasefire took effect on Oct. 10, deadly Israeli strikes have repeatedly disrupted the truce. Hamas and Israel have accused each other of violating the ceasefire. Palestinians in Gaza are still contending with myriad daily struggles.

## **Hantavirus is on the rise in Argentina, where a stricken cruise ship began its journey**

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — Officials and experts in Argentina are scrambling to determine if their country is the source of a deadly hantavirus outbreak that has gripped an Atlantic cruise.

The health emergency aboard the ship that's moored across the ocean comes as Argentina sees a surge of hantavirus cases that many local public health researchers attribute to the recently accelerating effects of climate change. Argentina, where the cruise to Antarctica departed, is consistently ranked by the World Health Organization as having the highest incidence of the rare, rodent-borne disease in Latin America.

Higher temperatures expand the virus' range because, in part, as it gets warmer and ecosystems change, rodents that carry the hantavirus can thrive in more places, experts say. People typically contract the virus from exposure to rodent droppings, urine or saliva.

"Argentina has become more tropical because of climate change, and that has brought disruptions, like dengue and yellow fever, but also new tropical plants that produce seeds for mice to proliferate," said Hugo Pizzi, a prominent Argentine infectious disease specialist. "There is no doubt that as time goes by, the hantavirus is spreading more and more."

The Argentine Health Ministry on Tuesday reported 101 hantavirus infections since June 2025, roughly double the caseload recorded over the same period the previous year.

A hantavirus found in South America, called the Andes virus, can cause a severe and often fatal lung disease called hantavirus pulmonary syndrome. The disease led to death in nearly a third of cases in the last year, Argentina's Health Ministry said, up from an average mortality rate of 15 in the five years before that.

Hantavirus usually spreads by inhaling contaminated rodent droppings and can spread person-to-person, though that is rare, according to the WHO, whose top epidemic expert said the risk to the public is low. The Andes strain only hantavirus known to spread from human to human.

Authorities said passengers on the MV Hondius ship tested positive for the Andes virus. Argentina on Wednesday said it was sending genetic material from the Andes virus and testing equipment to help Spain, Senegal, South Africa, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom detect it.

The cause of infection remains under investigation

Argentine officials say they're trying to pin down where infected passengers traveled in the country before boarding the Dutch-flagged cruise liner in Ushuaia, a city in southern Argentina known as the end of the world. Once they know the itineraries, they plan to trace contacts, isolate close contacts and actively monitor to prevent further spread.

The U.N. health agency, or WHO, says that the first death on board, a 70-year-old Dutch man, happened on April 11. His 69-year-old wife, also Dutch, died on April 26. The third passenger, a German woman, died on May 2.

The virus can incubate for between one and eight weeks. That makes it hard to know whether the passengers contracted the virus before leaving Argentina for Antarctica on April 1; during a scheduled stop



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to a remote South Atlantic island; or aboard the ship.

The province of Tierra del Fuego, where the vessel docked for weeks before departing, has never seen a case of hantavirus. Before boarding, the Dutch couple went sightseeing in Ushuaia, and traveled elsewhere in Argentina and Chile, WHO said.

The Argentine government's leading hypothesis is that the couple contracted the virus during a bird-watching outing in Ushuaia, according to two investigators who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief the media, with the investigation ongoing. Authorities are also tracing the Dutch tourists' footsteps through the forested hillsides of Patagonia in southern Argentina where some infections are clustered.

Because early symptoms resemble the fever and chills of a flu, "tourists might think they just have a cold and not take it seriously. That makes it particularly dangerous," Raul González Ittig, genetics professor at the National University of Córdoba and a researcher at state science body CONICET, said.

Climate change sends rodents to new frontiers

Argentina in recent years endured a historic drought. But it also had bouts of unexpectedly intense rainfall, part of a broader pattern of wild weather that scientists attribute to climate change.

Some of this variability has created conditions that have allowed hantavirus to flourish, experts say. Dry spells drive animals out of their usual habitats in search of food and water. Huge amounts of rain lead to vegetation growth, scattering seeds that attract leaf-munching rodents.

"When precipitation increases, food availability increases, rodent populations grow, and if there are infected rodents, the chance of transmission between rodents — and eventually to humans — also increases," Ittig said.

Although hantavirus cases once were limited to the southern reaches of Patagonia, now 83% of cases are found in Argentina's far north, according to the Health Ministry.

Argentina issued alerts early this year

The ministry issued an alert in January about several fatal outbreaks, including in the most populous province of Buenos Aires.

With rural hospitals underequipped, residents had no clue what hit them.

Daisy Morinigo and David Delgado said they initially thought their 14-year-old son had the flu when he came down with a fever and body aches. Doctors who first saw Rodrigo in the town of San Andrés de Giles sent him home with ibuprofen and orders to rest.

But the feisty fourth grader's breathing worsened. On Jan. 1, they rushed Rodrigo to intensive care. He died just two hours after a hantavirus test came back positive.

"I wouldn't wish this pain on anyone in the world," Delgado said.

## Russia is ramping up its attempts to kill opponents in Europe, intelligence officials say

By EMMA BURROWS and JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

When Vladimir Osechkin wants to take his children to school or go to the supermarket, he calls the police.

The Russian activist has lived under protection since 2022 because French officials believe Russia is trying to kill him.

In April 2025, a crew of Russian men staked out Osechkin's home and the surrounding area in southwestern France for several hours, taking videos and photos in suspected groundwork for an assassination, according to court documents seen by The Associated Press that are not public. Several years earlier, Osechkin said, a red dot — which he thought was a laser sight for a gun — appeared on his wall.

Elsewhere in Europe, Lithuanian officials disrupted a plot last year to kill a Lithuanian supporter of Ukraine and another against a Russian activist. Officials in Germany have similarly broken up two plots: one to target the head of a German weapons company supplying Ukraine, the other against a Ukrainian military official. Polish authorities arrested a man in 2024 in what they said was a plot to assassinate Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. And that same year, a Russian helicopter pilot who defected was killed in

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Spain — with Russian operatives the prime suspects.

While Russian officials have long been accused of silencing the country's enemies abroad, three Western intelligence officials from different countries told AP that a campaign of targeted killings has ramped up since President Vladimir Putin's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

The officials said Russia's security services are now more brazen in their choice of targets, going after Russian activists and foreign supporters of Ukraine, in addition to the usual suspects like military defectors. All three officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive information.

"This campaign is not by accident or chance," said one of them, a senior European intelligence official. "There is political authorization."

The intelligence officials, a former senior British counterterrorism official and prosecutors in Lithuania see the campaign as connected to Russia's broader efforts to undermine European countries that support Ukraine, including 191 acts of sabotage, arson and other disruption linked to Russia by Western officials that the AP has mapped across Europe since the beginning of the war.

Many accused in that campaign are people who were recruited as cheap proxies for Russian intelligence operatives. Moscow is now using that model to target its perceived enemies abroad, according to the French court documents, officials and information from the Lithuanian prosecutor.

Putin's spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told AP he didn't see "any need" to comment. Russian officials have previously denied that Moscow is behind attempts to kill its opponents abroad.

The AP spoke to three of the people targeted: Osechkin; Lithuanian activist Valdas Bartkevičius; and Ruslan Gabbasov, who advocates for independence for the Russian region of Bashkortostan.

A trip to the seaside

Three of the four men detained by French police in the plot to kill Osechkin traveled to the beach resort of Biarritz, where Osechkin lives, in April 2025, court documents show. They surveilled his house "with a view to assassinating him and subsequently intimidating all political opponents of the Russian authorities living in France," the documents said.

All four were born in Russia's Dagestan region. One has multiple criminal convictions while another said he had been arrested by Russia's domestic security service and fled the country to avoid being sent to Ukraine.

Osechkin founded a rights group for prisoners years ago and runs a project that exposes abuses in Russia's prison system, but he said the threats against him escalated after he began investigating alleged Russian abuses in Ukraine and helping Russian military defectors flee.

He moved to France in 2015 and was put under police protection seven years later when French officials received information that his life was in danger.

"If it weren't for them, I probably would have been killed," he said.

Targets say Moscow wins if they hide

Across the continent in Lithuania, Gabbasov, the activist from Bashkortostan, discovered an Apple AirTag tracker hidden on his car in February 2025. Police told him to leave the device and followed the people following him, he said.

A few weeks later, Gabbasov said he was attending celebrations marking Lithuania's independence from the Soviet Union with his wife and 5-year-old son when officers called and told him not to return home.

The next day, he said officers told him: "Yesterday, a killer was detained near your house; he was waiting for you with a gun. ... He was ready to wait for you all night."

Lithuanian authorities, he said, offered him the chance to completely "disappear" — change his name, move and stop his work.

He turned them down, saying many people from his mainly Muslim home region near Kazakhstan see him as a leader in the campaign for independence. The region is important to the Kremlin, Gabbasov said, because of its gold reserves and because large numbers of its men have been sent to fight in Ukraine.

"I can't betray them all by simply disappearing, especially out of fear," Gabbasov said, adding that would play into Moscow's hands.

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"What difference does it make to them?" Gabbasov asked, referring to Russia's security services. "They could kill me ... or I could hide from everyone and stop engaging in political activity. That's exactly what they want."

A plot to put a bomb in a mailbox

The authorities in Lithuania made the same offer to Bartkevičius, after he said they discovered a plot to kill him with a bomb planted in his mailbox in March 2025.

But disappearing also wasn't an option for the activist who raises money for Ukraine and who gained notoriety for his anti-Russian acts, including urinating on a Russian war memorial.

That, he said, would be "social death."

Lithuanian prosecutors charged 13 people from at least seven countries with involvement in the two plots — among at least 20 people authorities have detained, charged or identified as involved in such plots in Europe over the past year.

The people involved in the Lithuanian cases were directly ordered by Russian military intelligence, prosecutors said, and some had connections to Russian organized crime and could be linked to other arson and espionage plots elsewhere in Europe.

Moscow's switch to relying on such proxies can be traced to a previous attempted assassination, Cmdr. Dominic Murphy told AP before he retired as head of the counterterrorism squad at Britain's Metropolitan Police.

In 2018, former Russian spy Sergei Skripal was poisoned with a nerve agent in Salisbury, England — an attack the U.K. government accused Moscow of carrying out with military intelligence officers.

In response, Britain and other Western nations kicked out hundreds of Russian diplomats — and spies — making it harder for Russian officers to operate in Europe, Murphy, a lead investigator, said.

The fact that most of the plots made public by Western officials since 2022 have been foiled could indicate that it's harder for Moscow to carry them out with proxies, as opposed to its own officers, one of the Western intelligence officials said.

Still, the attempted killings may serve additional purposes, they said, including scaring the Kremlin's opponents into silence and wasting European law enforcement resources.

Pointing to the case of Maxim Kuzminov — the helicopter pilot who defected and was threatened with death by masked men in military fatigues on Russian state television — the official said it's clear Russia's security services can kill someone in Europe if they really want to.

For that reason, the European intelligence official said, targets will never be safe.

"Even if you thwart an operation once, you still need to be ready in case they strike again."

## **Southern Poverty Law Center attorneys make first court appearance in fraud case**

By SAFIYAH RIDDLE Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — Lawyers for the Southern Poverty Law Center will appear in court Thursday for the first time since the civil rights group was charged with defrauding donors by failing to disclose that money would be paid to informants inside extremist groups.

The grand jury indictment filed April 21 by the U.S. Justice Department is an extraordinary strike against the Alabama-based organization, which works to combat discrimination and racism particularly in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana and Mississippi.

The SPLC denies wrongdoing, and no individual is charged.

The group has drawn criticism from conservatives including FBI Director Kash Patel, especially after it included Charlie Kirk's Turning Point USA in a report about "hate and extremism." Kirk was killed during a Utah college appearance in 2025.

Supporters say the SPLC is being unfairly targeted by the Trump administration for its civil rights triumphs.

An arraignment on charges of money laundering conspiracy, wire fraud and false statements to a bank



was set for Thursday in federal court in Montgomery.

The Justice Department accuses the organization of defrauding donors by using their money to fund the same extremism it says it fights. At least \$3 million went to informants affiliated with the Ku Klux Klan, the Aryan Nations, the National Socialist Party of America and other groups between 2014 and 2023, the indictment says.

CEO Bryan Fair said the payments went to confidential informants to monitor threats of violence from the extremist groups. The information gathered helped save lives, he said, and was frequently shared with the FBI.

"We are outraged by the false allegations levied against SPLC," Fair said when the charges were filed.

Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche recently acknowledged that the organization has a history of sharing information with law enforcement after he was challenged for saying the opposite.

"That's well-documented, and there's no dispute there. They aren't charged with any of that conduct," Blanche said.

## Tech is betting on a former executive in the race for California governor

By TRẦN NGUYỄN Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — One tech investor called him "the only sane" Democrat in the race for California governor. Others have dumped millions to boost his campaign, even paying for a Super Bowl ad to introduce him to voters. He's against a proposed billionaires' tax that has the state's wealthiest residents threatening an exodus.

San Jose Mayor Matt Mahan is tech's favorite candidate to be the next leader of California.

The 43-year-old former tech executive jumped into the crowded race in January, touting himself as a pragmatic problem-solver. A moderate Democrat, Mahan has built his statewide profile mainly by criticizing Gov. Gavin Newsom and the Legislature's response to homelessness and crime. His centrist message has appealed to tech leaders who want a business-friendly governor to succeed Newsom, a longtime tech ally who's terming out.

In just three months, Mahan has raised more than any of his rivals, many of whom have been running for more than a year. (Billionaire Tom Steyer is largely self-funding his campaign.)

During a Tuesday night debate on CNN, he criticized his rivals as career politicians while crafting himself as the candidate with practical solutions to the state's challenges.

"We don't need MAGA values, but we also don't need more of the same," Mahan said, referring to President Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again" movement supported by Republican rivals Chad Bianco and Steve Hilton, whom Trump has endorsed.

But Mahan doesn't appear to have yet gained the momentum he expected or the widespread name recognition to beat his rivals — and he's running out of time to win over voters ahead of the June 2 primary. His ties to tech are of particular concern to labor unions and a segment of Democratic voters who question whether he'll stand up to the industry.

A Silicon Valley mayor

"People do not want somebody who is a puppet of these big tech billionaires, of these AI billionaires — and that's who he has always been," said Lorena Gonzalez Fletcher, president of the California Labor Federation, which has endorsed Steyer, former U.S. Rep. Katie Porter and former Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa.

Mahan said he's the only candidate who has experience with the behemoth industry, pointing to a coalition he created in San Jose where more than 900 public agencies work together to explore responsible ways to implement artificial intelligence in government. In Tuesday's debate, he said he supports taxing AI companies to fund workforce development.

"Voters can see past the kind of, you know, shallow connection that because I'm the mayor of the largest city in Silicon Valley, that might mean that I'm not willing to regulate tech," Mahan told The Associated

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Press. "It's actually been quite the opposite."

Observers note California is known for leading the way on policies aimed at both boosting and reining in its home-grown tech industry.

"If they can ensure that they get a governor in California who's weak on tech accountability, then that can save them a lot of money across the states," J.B. Branch of Public Citizen, a progressive consumer rights advocacy group, said of the Silicon Valley leaders supporting Mahan.

Tech's efforts to exert political influence

Across politics, the tech industry is flexing its political muscle as public skepticism about social media and artificial intelligence rises. Independent groups backed by tech companies and billionaires have already committed at least \$40 million to influence California legislative races.

Political committees backing Mahan have raised more than \$25 million, including donations from Google co-founder Sergey Brin, venture capitalist Michael Moritz and Reddit CEO Steve Huffman.

Some donors, like Brin and Palantir co-founder Joe Lonsdale, are hedging their bets — they also gave to Hilton, the former Fox News host.

Mahan is "focused on actually solving problems — building more housing, improving public safety and making it possible for people to live and work here again," Garry Tan, who leads a startup accelerator that helped launch companies like Airbnb and DoorDash, said through a spokesperson.

From the Ivy League to business and politics

A Harvard graduate, Mahan was classmates with Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg, who he's said persuaded him to go into tech instead of law school.

Mahan was part of the team that built an early Facebook app called Causes that allowed users to promote nonprofit organizations. He then co-founded Brigade, a nonpartisan online voter network.

But that's not at the center of Mahan's campaign. He's focused instead on his upbringing as the son of a postal worker and a schoolteacher. He's the only major Democrat who wants to suspend the state's gas tax.

He defeated a labor-backed candidate for mayor in 2022 after serving two years on the city council. As mayor, he convinced council members to direct more city money toward short-term housing to get homeless people off the streets and made them eligible for arrest for rejecting shelters. Both efforts faced fierce opposition, but San Jose last year saw a drop in the number of people without access to shelters, according to county data.

He bucked Newsom in 2024 by backing a tough-on-crime ballot measure. Mahan has since tamped down his criticism, saying the governor has focused on the right issues.

Tech support is a double-edged sword

Mahan has committed to not raising taxes to fix budget holes — including with a one-time tax on billionaires that most of his rivals are also against. He wants to incentivize elected state officials and appointees by tying future pay raises to improvements on issues like unemployment rates and homelessness.

"Raising taxes isn't always the answer, Tom," he pointedly said Tuesday when Steyer pitched a plan to make corporations pay more in property taxes.

Mahan raised more than \$13 million in 11 weeks, allowing him to launch television ads to reach voters in some of the most expensive markets in the country. Two independent expenditure groups have spent more than \$18 million to boost him.

As of last month, only about 730 donations given to Mahan's campaign were less than \$250, indicating limited grassroots support. In contrast, almost all of Porter's 46,000 donations were under that amount, as were about 5,600 of those to former state attorney general Xavier Becerra.

Still, voters' support for the other Democratic candidates "is very soft" Mahan said of his chance. "Even if people are leaning a certain way, they're still persuadable."

Tech moguls' support of Mahan's candidacy and his plans to regulate them were among the most popular topics during a recent "Ask Me Anything" session Mahan hosted on Reddit, where people can ask questions anonymously.

Several people asked when Mahan would drop out to prevent a catastrophic scenario for Democrats where two Republicans could advance to the November election. One asked which Democrat he would

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endorse after exiting the race.

"I plan to win!" he responded.

## Tennessee poised to vote on new US House map sought by Trump that carves up Memphis

By TRAVIS LOLLER, KIM CHANDLER, JEFFREY COLLINS and DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Republican lawmakers in Tennessee are poised to take up a plan Thursday that could carve up a majority-Black congressional district, reshaping it to the GOP's advantage as part of President Donald Trump's strategy to try to hold on to a slim House majority in the November midterm elections.

The redistricting effort in Tennessee is one of several rapidly advancing plans in Southern states as Republicans try to leverage a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that weakened the federal Voting Rights Act.

The court ruled that Louisiana relied too heavily on race when creating a second Black-majority House district as it attempted to comply with the federal law. The high court's decision altered a decades-old understanding of the law, giving Republicans grounds to try to eliminate majority-Black districts that have elected Democrats.

Louisiana has postponed its congressional primary to give time for state lawmakers to craft a new House map. Legislation awaiting a final vote in Alabama also would upend the state's congressional primaries if courts allow the state to change its U.S. House districts. In South Carolina, meanwhile, Republican lawmakers urged on by Trump have taken initial steps to add congressional redistricting to their agenda.

The states are the latest to join an already fierce national redistricting battle. Since Trump prodded Texas to redraw its U.S. House districts last year, eight states have adopted new congressional districts. From that, Republicans think they could gain as many as 13 seats while Democrats think they could gain up to 10. But some competitive races mean the parties may not get everything they sought in the November elections.

Tennessee Republicans act despite protests

Protesters in Tennessee repeatedly interrupted legislative hearings Wednesday on the redistricting plans, yet Republicans advanced them for a potential final vote in the full House and Senate.

The package of bills would repeal a state law prohibiting mid-decade redistricting and reopen a candidate qualifying window for new people to enter the primary and existing candidates to switch districts. The proposed House map would break up Tennessee's lone Democratic-held district, centered on the majority-Black city of Memphis, creating a ripple effect of alterations to districts throughout the western and central parts of the state.

Republican House Speaker Cameron Sexton said the proposed districts were drawn based on population and politics, not racial data.

Democrats and civil rights activists denounced the efforts.

The proposal "is Black vote dilution at an industrial scale," said Sekou Franklin, a political science professor at Middle Tennessee State University who is part of the Tennessee branch of the NAACP.

Democrats noted that the state Supreme Court in April 2022 rejected a challenge to the current congressional map, finding it was too close to the election to make changes. This year, there's even less time before the Aug. 6 primary, raising the potential of confusion for both candidates and voters, Democrats said.

Alabama presses for changes to primary

The Alabama House passed legislation Wednesday authorizing special congressional primaries as Republicans eye the possibility of getting a different congressional map in place for the November elections. The bill could receive a Senate vote by Friday.

Alabama is seeking to lift a federal court order that created a second House district with a near-majority of Black voters. That map led to the 2024 election of Rep. Shomari Figures, a Black Democrat. Republicans want instead to use a 2023 map drawn by state lawmakers that would give the GOP an opportunity to reclaim Figures' district.



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The legislation won approval on a party-line vote after four hours of fiery debate during which Black legislators recalled the state's history. Democratic state Rep. Juandalynn Givan likened the legislation to poll taxes and counting jelly beans in a jar — a virtually impossible task that was used to suppress Black voters during the Jim Crow era.

"It is a calculated political maneuver born out of fear, a fear that is of Black people and most importantly Black political power," Givan said.

Alabama's primaries are May 19. If a court grants the state's request, the legislation would ignore the results for congressional seats and direct the governor to schedule a new primary under the revised districts.

South Carolina may add redistricting to its agenda

The South Carolina Senate could take up a resolution Thursday giving lawmakers permission to return later, after their regular work ends, to redraw congressional districts that could eliminate the state's only Democratic-held district. The proposal, which passed the House on Wednesday, needs a two-thirds vote in both chambers.

Republican House leaders said after the vote that they plan to introduce a new map Thursday and hold committee meetings on Friday. But during debate Wednesday, Republicans fended off specific questions from Democrats, including why they were willing to stop the June 9 U.S. House primary elections well after candidates filed and how much a rescheduled primary could cost.

Democratic Rep. Justin Bamberg said he felt sorry for Republicans who, he said, were giving up their principles to follow the whims of Trump.

"The president of the United States is a very powerful man. Wields a heavy, heavy thumb — Truth Social, X, Meta, Instagram. To be honest I don't envy our Republican colleagues," Bamberg said.

## Worries about AI's risks to humanity loom over the trial pitting Musk against OpenAI's leaders

By BARBARA ORTUTAY and MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writers

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — At the heart of the trial pitting Elon Musk against OpenAI CEO Sam Altman is a moment when they found common cause on an ever more pressing question: how to protect humanity from the risks of artificial intelligence.

It turned sour, and the jury is charged with settling the ensuing legal dispute between the two Silicon Valley titans.

But the unresolved questions about the dangers of AI have been looming over the federal courthouse in Oakland, California, since the trial began last week. The technology itself is not on trial — the judge has warned lawyers not to get "sidetracked" by questions about its dangers — but witness testimony has touched on concerns around workforce disruptions and the prospect raised by Musk that superhuman AI might one day kill us all.

Musk, the world's richest person, filed the case accusing his fellow OpenAI co-founder of betraying promises to keep the company as a nonprofit. Altman, in turn, accuses Musk of trying to hobble the ChatGPT maker for the benefit of his own AI company.

One witness, AI pioneer Stuart Russell, said that the "winner take all" power struggle over AI's future is itself threatening humanity.

Musk's lawyers brought Russell to the stand as an expert witness, at the rate of \$5,000 an hour. The University of California, Berkeley computer scientist listed a host of AI dangers, from racial and gender discrimination to jobs displacement, misinformation and emotional attachments that take some AI chatbot users down a spiral of psychosis.

"Whichever company develops AGI first would have a very big advantage" and an increasingly big lead over everyone else, Russell told the court, using the initials for artificial general intelligence, a term for advanced AI technology that surpasses humans at many tasks.

A judge's warning hasn't kept out talk of AI's dangers

The trial centers on the 2015 birth of OpenAI as a nonprofit startup primarily funded by Musk.

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Both Musk and Altman, who has not yet testified in the trial, have said they wanted OpenAI to safely develop AGI for the benefit of humanity and not for any one person's gain or under any one person's control. And both camps allege it's the other guy who was trying to control it.

A jury of nine people selected from the San Francisco Bay Area will get to say which one of them is telling the truth.

Early on, Judge Yvonne Gonzalez Rogers warned lawyers, particularly Musk's, not to delve into broader AI concerns that go beyond Musk's claims that OpenAI violated its charitable mission.

"This is not a trial on the safety risks of artificial intelligence. This is not a trial on whether or not AI has damaged humanity," Gonzalez Rogers told lawyers before jurors arrived at the federal courthouse.

Still, Musk managed to skirt that guidance in his testimony last week. Asked to describe artificial general intelligence, Musk said it is when AI becomes "as smart as any human," and added that "we are getting close to that point," and AI will be smarter than any human as soon as next year.

Musk said he has "extreme concerns" about AI and has had them for a long time. Musk said he wanted a "counterpoint" to Google, which at the time had "all the money, all the computers and all the talent" for AI, with no counterbalance.

"I was concerned AI would be a double-edged sword," he said.

Musk and OpenAI each say they are working for humanity's benefit

During his testimony, Musk repeatedly said that he could have founded OpenAI as a for-profit company, just like the other companies he started or took over. "I deliberately chose this," he said, "for the public good."

The judge expressed some skepticism. In comments to lawyers last week before the jury came into the room, Gonzalez Rogers pointed out that Musk, "despite these risks, is creating a company that is in the exact same space," referring to the billionaire's xAI artificial intelligence company, which launched in 2023 and has since merged with Musk's rocket company SpaceX.

OpenAI's side also claims its goals are to benefit the public. OpenAI co-founder and president Greg Brockman, a defendant in Musk's lawsuit along with Altman and their company, said he thought the technology OpenAI was developing was "transformative" — bigger than corporations, corporate structures and bigger than any one individual. It was, he said, "about humanity as a whole."

Brockman testified this week that his No. 1 goal was always the "mission" of OpenAI and it was Musk who sought unilateral control over the company.

Brockman recalled a meeting where at first Musk seemed open to the idea of Altman being OpenAI's CEO. In the end, however, "he said people needed to know he was in charge."

In addition to damages, Musk is seeking Altman's ouster from OpenAI's board. If Musk wins, it could derail OpenAI's plans for an initial public offering of its shares.

## **Ted Turner's vision of news as global and continuous changed both the industry and society itself**

By JOCELYN NOVECK and WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — When the Space Shuttle Challenger exploded in 1986, Beth Knobel, a future TV news correspondent, was in graduate school. Emerging from class, she saw TV sets had been set up in the lobby. They were tuned to CNN, the 24/7 news channel that Ted Turner had launched about five years earlier, which was carrying the launch live.

"Shuttle launches were just kind of routine and the broadcast networks weren't even covering them anymore," says Knobel, who worked for CBS News in the 1990s and now teaches journalism at Fordham University. "CNN did. So when things went so tragically wrong, there they were on top of the story like no one else."

That, says Knobel, who now teaches a class on TV's biggest innovators, is just one example of why Turner was the biggest of them all — huge steps ahead of anyone else in his understanding of how news needed to be delivered.

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Turner's death Wednesday comes at a fraught time for cable news, which has struggled to retain viewership in an era of countless media choices and abundant streaming video. CNN has not been immune; changes in the media ecosystem, the company's financial picture and multiple editorial resets over the years have left it a markedly different entity than the one Turner built.

But that misses an important point: He built it.

"We use the word giant sometimes to describe people that really aren't giant," Knobel says. "Ted Turner truly is a giant. He invented around-the-clock news."

Early on, Turner saw news as something global

Many in and around the news industry struggled Wednesday for big enough words to describe Turner's impact on how we consume news. Longtime TV analyst Robert Thompson said the issue was hyperbole-proof.

"Death and hyperbole often go together," said Thompson, director of Syracuse University's Bleier Center for Television and Popular Culture. "But there is no hyperbole here. I can think of very few other things in the 20th century that so dramatically changed American politics, journalism and civic engagement than the invention of 24-hour cable news."

He does add a caveat: The real impact would not be truly felt until others started doing it. Which, of course, they did. But for a long time, and certainly well into the 90s, "CNN became almost generic for breaking news," Thompson says, "like Kleenex for facial tissues and Xerox for photocopying."

But it isn't just the 24-hour cycle that defines Turner's legacy in news. A number of analysts cited, too, how he conceived of news as a global commodity.

Knobel recalls that when she was Moscow bureau chief for CBS beginning in the early 1990s, she would walk into the Kremlin and see CNN on televisions.

"That was the way in which they came to understand what the world was thinking about Russia," Knobel says. The same was true in other seats of power across the world. "Global programming didn't exist before Ted Turner came along and said, 'Not only am I going to build a new channel for America, but there are a lot of people around the world that will probably want to watch this news channel.'"

All of this has become so ingrained by now that it's hard to convey to younger people that it once didn't exist. Back in the '70s when Turner — an insomniac — was first dreaming of 24/7 news, in many places you'd turn on your TV late at night and would see only static, a test pattern or an American flag until about 6 am.

Former CNN White House bureau chief Frank Sesno, now a media and public affairs professor at George Washington University, tells his students about the "Walter Cronkite era" — when news was delivered at an appointed time, by a voice from on high, in a 30-minute broadcast (which actually doubled the 15-minute broadcasts there once were.)

"I teach these young people and they have no idea who Ted Turner is," Sesno said. "I remind them this was, in fact, the world of Walter Cronkite. Ted Turner came in and CNN was seen as an upstart, as something that wasn't going to succeed." Thus the derisive moniker "Chicken Noodle News," which was echoing across the industry when Sesno joined the network in 1984.

"When they hired me, I had zero television experience," he says.

But CNN wasn't looking for star anchors at the time. The news was supposed to be the star. The stable of stars came later.

The first Gulf War was a turning point

For CNN, a moment of particular success came in October 1987, the year after the Challenger explosion, when 18-month-old Jessica McClure was rescued from a well in Texas after a two-day ordeal. CNN covered not only the outcome but the incremental developments — standard fare today but certainly not so then for TV.

Brooke Erin Duffy, an associate professor of communication at Cornell University, points to public appetite for that story as a key moment for CNN, which covered the "hours and hours of waiting" and allowed audiences to regularly tune in for updates.



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But it was during the first Gulf War with Iraq when the entire foundation of news shifted. When other journalists left Baghdad, CNN stayed. With correspondents Bernard Shaw, John Holliman and Peter Arnett doing reports under siege from Baghdad's al-Rashid Hotel, the network changed war journalism forever.

A key factor was technology. CNN's news managers "went to Turner and said you know, there's a war coming. We need some money to cover it, and Ted Turner said to them well what do you need?" Knobel said. "What they did with that money is to bring in satellite phone technology that no one else had." It enabled CNN to continue to broadcast news when communications were knocked out.

"I'm someone who competed against CNN for many years working for CBS (and) I can say CNN always had a technological advantage over everybody else," she said, crediting Turner for giving his network the edge.

The 24/7 schedule of broadcasting continuous developments also vastly reshaped what it was like to actually work in the TV news industry. Journalist were increasingly expected to "be available 24/7 to satiate the public's appetite for news," Duffy said.

After CNN found success, more and more outlets followed suit. The uptick in competition for around-the-clock content made time even more of a currency when it came to breaking news.

"I think one of the consequences is the race for eyeballs within the saturated media landscape," Duffy said. "Time is the currency in news media."

## Chief Justice John Roberts says Supreme Court is not political

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

HERSHEY, Pa. (AP) — Supreme Court justices are not "political actors," Chief Justice John Roberts said Wednesday, insisting unpopular court decisions are based solely on the law.

"I think, at a very basic level, people think we're making policy decisions, we're saying we think this is how things should be, as opposed to what the law provides," he said. "I think they view us as purely political actors, which I don't think is an accurate understanding of what we do."

His remarks to a conference of judges and lawyers from the 3rd U.S. Circuit in Pennsylvania came at a time of low public confidence in the court, and about a week after the court handed down a decision that hollowed out the Voting Rights Act.

The high court struck down a majority-Black congressional district in Louisiana, finding it was an unconstitutional gerrymander based on race. The decision weakened the Civil Rights era law that has increased minority representation in Congress, and it opened the door for more redistricting across the country that could aid Republican efforts to control the House.

In recent years, the conservative majority court has also handed down landmark rulings overturning the constitutional right to abortion, expanding gun rights and ending affirmative action in higher education.

Roberts didn't reference any specific decisions in his remarks, but said the court is "simply not part of the political process."

Opinions, he said, are based on the Constitution — though he acknowledged disagreement with some outcomes. "One thing we have to do is make decisions that are unpopular," he said.

Criticism, he said, should focus on rulings rather than personal attacks. He condemned the targeting of lower-court judges, a sentiment he's repeated amid rising threats to the judiciary. "That's not appropriate and it can lead to very serious problems," he said.

High-profile criticism of judges in personal terms has come from Republican President Donald Trump, who also targeted Roberts and other justices who voted against him in the opinion that struck down tariffs the president levied under an emergency-powers law.

## Justice Department can keep 2020 election ballots seized from Georgia's Fulton County, judge rules

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — The federal government doesn't have to return the 2020 election ballots from Georgia's Fulton County that were seized by the FBI from a warehouse near Atlanta, a judge ruled Wednesday.

U.S. District Judge J.P. Boulee's decision came after lawyers for the county had argued that the ballots and other election materials, as well as any electronic copies the Justice Department has made, should be returned because the seizure was improper and unconstitutional.

The Jan. 28 seizure by the FBI targeted the elections hub in Georgia's most populous county, which is heavily Democratic and includes most of the city of Atlanta. Fulton County has been at the center of unfounded claims by President Donald Trump and his allies that widespread election fraud cost him the 2020 election.

The Justice Department has said it is investigating "irregularities that occurred during the 2020 presidential election in the County" and identified two laws that might have been violated. One requires election records to be maintained for 22 months, while the other prohibits procuring, casting or tabulating false, fictitious or fraudulent ballots.

Georgia's votes in the 2020 presidential race were counted three times, including once by hand, and each count affirmed Democrat Joe Biden's win.

Fulton County Board of Commissioners Chairman Robb Pitts said he strongly disagrees with the judge's denial of the county's request to return the election records.

"We will continue, as always, to stand by our election workers and the voters of Fulton County," he said in an emailed statement. "We intend to vigorously pursue all available legal options."

The Justice Department did not immediately respond to emails seeking comment on the ruling Wednesday evening.

"The seizure in this case was certainly not perfect," Boulee wrote in his 68-page ruling. But he went on to say that Fulton County did not establish that its rights were callously disregarded "either through the lack of probable cause, omissions in the Affidavit or by the manner of the execution of the seizure."

The county also failed to show that it needs the documents or will be irreparably harmed if they are not returned, he wrote, noting this is particularly true because the Justice Department has given the county copies of the documents.

Months after the January seizure of ballots and other election materials, the Justice Department in April obtained a grand jury subpoena for the names and personal contact information of Fulton County employees and volunteers involved in the 2020 election. Fulton County filed a motion Monday to quash that subpoena, arguing that it is overly broad and meant to harass the president's political opponents.

The Trump administration has also taken moves to obtain past election records from other critical swing states. The FBI used a subpoena in March to get records related to an audit of the 2020 presidential election in Maricopa County in Arizona. And in April, the Justice Department demanded that Michigan's Wayne County turn over its 2024 election ballots.

The Justice Department is also fighting numerous states in court for access to voter data that includes sensitive personal information. Election officials, including some Republicans, have said handing over the information would violate state and federal privacy laws.

Democrats have raised concerns that the Trump administration is weaponizing federal law enforcement to pursue the president's personal grievances and is planning ways to interfere in this year's midterm elections. The administration has said it is looking into allegations of past problems and seeking to protect future elections.

During a March 27 hearing on Fulton County's demand that the FBI return its ballots and other materials, lawyers for the county argued that the seizure was improper and unjustified and demonstrated "callous disregard" for the Fourth Amendment protection against unreasonable search and seizure. They suggested that the Trump administration decided to use a criminal search warrant to obtain the materials

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because it had grown tired of waiting for the outcome of the civil litigation the Justice Department had filed last year to obtain them.

Justice Department attorneys argued that they took the appropriate steps to get a warrant and then take the documents. They said it is not uncommon for parallel civil and criminal investigations to be going on at the same time.

The judge agreed that the affidavit was "defective in some respects" and that some of the statements included in it were "troubling." But he noted that the FBI agent who wrote it also included "facts that both hurt and helped him." He concluded that the document's shortcomings don't amount to callous disregard.

He also agreed that the government can pursue civil and criminal proceedings on the same matter and said the timeline of the investigation weighs against the county's theory that the Justice Department "created an 'ongoing investigation' to sidestep procedural hurdles" in civil cases.

## US fires on Iranian oil tanker as Trump pressures Tehran for deal to end war

By JOSHUA BOAK, BEN FINLEY and RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. military fired on an Iranian oil tanker Wednesday as President Donald Trump sought to pressure Tehran into reaching a deal to end the war. The Islamic Republic said it was reviewing the latest American proposals.

A fighter jet shot out the rudder of the tanker in the Gulf of Oman as it tried to breach the American blockade of Iran's ports, U.S. Central Command said in a social media post.

The attack occurred as Iran and the U.S. are officially in a ceasefire. Trump threatened Tehran with a new wave of bombing if a deal is not reached that includes opening the critical Strait of Hormuz.

Trump posted on social media that the two-month war could soon end and that oil and natural gas shipments disrupted by the conflict could restart. But he said that depends on Iran accepting a reported agreement that the president did not detail.

"If they don't agree, the bombing starts," Trump wrote.

Israel hits Beirut for first time since last month's ceasefire

Meanwhile, Israel struck Beirut's southern suburbs for the first time since a ceasefire between Israel and the Iranian-backed Hezbollah militant group was announced April 17. Fighting has continued since then in southern Lebanon.

The last strikes in Beirut were on April 8, when a series of massive Israeli attacks killed more than 350 people. More than 2,500 have died in Lebanon since fighting began March 2, two days after Israel and the U.S. launched the war on Iran.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said Wednesday's strike, which came without warning, targeted a commander in Hezbollah's Radwan Force. Hezbollah did not immediately comment.

Trump suggests U.S. might force a deal with Tehran

Trump insisted Wednesday that Iranian officials want to end the war.

"We're dealing with people that want to make a deal very much, and we'll see whether or not they can make a deal that's satisfactory to us," the president said.

He suggested that the U.S. could ultimately force a settlement.

"If they don't agree, the bombing starts," Trump said on social media, "and it will be, sadly, at a much higher level and intensity than it was before."

The White House believes it is near an agreement with Iran on a one-page memorandum to end the war, according to reporting by Axios. There is no deal yet, but provisions include a moratorium on Iranian uranium enrichment, lifting of U.S. sanctions, distribution of frozen Iranian funds and opening the strait for ships.

The White House did not immediately respond to questions about the possible agreement.

A spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry, Esmail Baghaei, told state TV that Tehran had "strongly rejected" U.S. proposals reported by Axios, but that it was still examining the latest U.S. proposal.



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A shaky ceasefire between the U.S. and Tehran has largely held since April 8. Pakistan hosted in-person talks last month between the two countries, but they failed to reach an agreement.

Trump suspends short-lived effort to force open safe passage

Trump sought to increase pressure on Tehran the day after he suspended a short-lived U.S. effort to force open a safe passage for commercial ships through the strait. The waterway was a vital passage for oil and gas supplies, fertilizer and other petroleum products before the war.

Only two American-flagged merchant ships are known to have passed through the U.S.-guarded route after it opened Monday. The U.S. military said it sank six Iranian small boats threatening civilian ships.

Iran's effective closure of the strait has sent fuel prices skyrocketing, rattled the global economy and put enormous economic pressure on countries, including major powers such as China.

China's foreign minister called for a comprehensive ceasefire Wednesday after meeting in Beijing with Iran's top envoy. Wang Yi said his country was "deeply distressed" by the conflict, which began Feb. 28 when the U.S. and Israel launched strikes against Iran.

China's close economic and political ties to Tehran give it a unique position of influence. The Trump administration is pressing China to use that relationship to urge the Islamic Republic to open the strait.

Iranian envoy visits China ahead of Trump

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi's visit to China came ahead of a planned trip by Trump to Beijing.

Trump is scheduled to attend a high-profile summit on May 14-15 with Chinese President Xi Jinping. Trump was the last U.S. president to visit China in 2017.

"We believe that a comprehensive ceasefire is urgently needed, that a resumption of hostilities is not acceptable," Wang said in a video of the meeting.

The Chinese foreign minister said the conflict "has not only caused serious losses to the Iranian people, but also had a severe impact on regional and global peace."

Araghchi told Iranian state TV that his visit included discussions about the Strait of Hormuz, Iran's nuclear program and sanctions imposed on Tehran.

Trump has demanded a major rollback of Tehran's disputed nuclear program.

A statement published on the Chinese Foreign Ministry's website said China values Iran's pledge not to pursue nuclear weapons while affirming its "legitimate right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy."

Shipper says strait shutdown costing \$60M per week

Hundreds of merchant ships remain bottled up in the Persian Gulf, unable to reach the open sea without passing through the Strait of Hormuz.

A cargo container ship operated by the CMA CGM Group was damaged, and multiple crew members were wounded when it came under attack while transiting the strait Tuesday, the French shipping company said. It said the injured crew members were taken off the ship and received medical treatment.

Oil prices and shipping will not likely return to normal until the risk of attacks in the strait has receded, said Kaho Yu, head of energy and resources at risk intelligence company Verisk Maplecroft.

"Refiners, shippers and commodity traders will remain cautious until there is clearer evidence that Hormuz disruptions will not re-escalate," he said.

Hapag-Lloyd, one of the world's largest shipping companies, said in a statement that the strait's shutdown is costing it around \$60 million per week, with rising fuel and insurance costs hitting particularly hard. The company said alternate routes to other harbors or over land are limited.

The spot price of Brent crude oil, the international standard, fell to around \$100 per barrel Wednesday, easing significantly from big price jumps earlier in the week. Crude sold for roughly \$70 a barrel before the war began.

## France moves aircraft carrier group toward Strait of Hormuz for possible defensive mission

By THOMAS ADAMSON Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — France's aircraft carrier strike group is moving south of the Suez Canal and into the Red Sea in preparation for a potential French-British mission in the Strait of Hormuz, French President Emmanuel Macron said Wednesday.

The deployment puts Europe's most powerful warship closer to the strait whose effective closure has come to epitomize the war in Iran, stranding hundreds of ships and triggering what the International Energy Agency calls the largest supply disruption in the history of the global oil market.

The defensive effort is distinct from the U.S. "Project Freedom" that launched Monday and was paused by President Donald Trump on Tuesday evening.

The repositioning of the nuclear-powered Charles de Gaulle and its escorts comes as part of a proposed mission championed by France and Britain to restore maritime security in the Strait of Hormuz as soon as conditions allow.

It "may help restore confidence among shipowners and insurers," Macron said on X. "It remains distinct from the parties at war."

Macron, who spoke with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on Wednesday, said he also intends to raise the matter with Trump.

"A return to calm in the Strait will help advance negotiations on nuclear issues, ballistic matters, and the regional situation," Macron wrote. "Europeans... will play their part."

Col. Guillaume Vernet, spokesperson for the French armed forces chief of staff, stressed that the Hormuz coalition — drawn up by France, Britain and more than 50 nations — will not begin operating until two thresholds are cleared: The threat to shipping must come down, and the maritime industry must be reassured enough to use the strait.

Even then, he told The Associated Press, any operation would require the agreement of neighboring countries. That would include Iran, which borders the strait and effectively closed it by attacking and threatening ships after the war began on Feb. 28 with attacks by the U.S. and Israel.

Vernet did not specify when the carrier would reach its destination. He said the carrier was being positioned to be close enough to act if and when the conditions are met: "The French position is the same since the beginning — defensive posture, respecting international law."

War-risk insurance premiums for transits of the strait have risen four to five times above preconflict levels, according to industry estimates.

For now, insurance premiums are so high that "not a single ship will jeopardize their trip or go there," Vernet said.

Washington has not been part of the French-British planning, which observers have said echoes the European "coalition of the willing" that Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer assembled to support Ukraine.

"We want to send the message that not only are we ready to secure the Strait of Hormuz, but that we are also capable of doing so," a French top official said, speaking anonymously in line with the French presidency's customary practices.

Early in the war, France sought a multinational initiative to reestablish freedom of navigation in the strait. Macron and Starmer hosted dozens of countries at a Paris summit on April 17, and military planners from more than 30 nations later finalized operational details.

The Charles de Gaulle had been ordered from the Baltic to the eastern Mediterranean soon after the war began in what the French presidency described as an "unprecedented" mobilization that also includes eight frigates and two Mistral-class amphibious assault ships.

Meanwhile, French Rafale fighters based at Al Dhafra airbase in the United Arab Emirates have been intercepting Iranian drones and missiles over the Gulf state since the war began under a long-standing defense pact with Abu Dhabi that puts some 900 French personnel on the Gulf's southern shore.

## Southern Republicans press ahead with election-year redistricting of US House despite protests

By TRAVIS LOLLER, KIM CHANDLER, JEFFREY COLLINS and DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Republicans in several Southern states pressed ahead with an aggressive election-year redistricting effort Wednesday, undeterred by demonstrations and objections to their plans to reshape majority-Black congressional districts that have suddenly become vulnerable because of a U.S. Supreme Court ruling.

In Tennessee, protesters repeatedly interrupted legislative hearings on the redistricting plans, yet Republicans advanced them for a potential final vote Thursday.

Despite passionate pleas from Black Democratic lawmakers, Republicans in the Alabama House approved a measure to upend the state's congressional primaries if courts allow them to switch their U.S. House districts. In South Carolina, Democrats chided Republican colleagues for abiding by President Donald Trump's desires as they took an initial step toward redrawing a district long held by a Black Democratic lawmaker.

The stakes are high for minority voters who stand to lose their preferred representatives and for any Republican lawmakers reluctant to follow Trump's wishes. In Republican primary elections Tuesday, Trump-endorsed challengers defeated at least five of the seven Indiana state lawmakers targeted by the president's allies for refusing to support a congressional redistricting effort last year.

The Supreme Court ruled last week that Louisiana relied too heavily on race when creating a second Black-majority House district as it attempted to comply with the Voting Rights Act. The ruling significantly altered a decades-old understanding of the law, giving Republicans in Louisiana and elsewhere grounds to try to eliminate majority-Black districts that have elected Democrats.

The ruling intensified an already fierce national redistricting battle ahead of a November midterm election that will determine control of the closely divided House.

Since Trump prodded Texas to redraw its U.S. House districts last year, eight states have adopted new congressional districts. From that, Republicans think they could gain as many as 13 seats while Democrats think they could gain up to 10. But some of the new districts could be competitive in November, meaning the parties may not get all they sought.

Tennessee plan splits up Memphis district

Republicans on Wednesday proposed a new U.S. House map that would split Memphis' home of Shelby County into three districts, instead of the current two. The map would break up Tennessee's lone Democratic-held district, centered on the majority-Black city, creating a ripple effect of alterations to districts throughout the western and central parts of the state.

"Tennessee is a conservative state, and our congressional delegation should reflect that. This bill ensures it does," Republican state Sen. John Stevens said.

Republican House Speaker Cameron Sexton said the proposed districts were drawn based on population and politics, not racial data.

To adopt new House districts, Tennessee lawmakers also are seeking to repeal a state law prohibiting mid-decade redistricting.

Democrats and civil rights activists denounced the efforts during Wednesday's committee hearings.

The proposal "is Black vote dilution at an industrial scale," said Sekou Franklin, a political science professor at Middle Tennessee State University who is part of the Tennessee branch of the NAACP.

Protesters interrupted a Senate committee meeting, loudly chanting "Hands off our vote!" After senators suspended the hearing, state troopers cleared people from the room. Senators resumed their work elsewhere, advancing the legislation.

Later Wednesday, protesters in the hallway beat on the walls and doors of a committee room where senators were meeting. A House committee also paused its work as state troopers escorted chanting protesters from the room.

The candidate qualifying period in Tennessee ended in March, but legislation would reopen it to allow new candidates to join the races and existing candidates to switch districts. The primary election is Aug. 6.



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Democrats noted that the state Supreme Court in April 2022 rejected a challenge to the current congressional map, finding it was too close to the election to make changes. This year, there's even less time before the primary elections, raising the potential of confusion for both candidates and voters, Democrats said.

Alabama House backs a new primary

The Republican-led Alabama House on Wednesday passed legislation authorizing special congressional primaries as Republicans eye the possibility of getting a different congressional map in place for the November elections. The bill now moves to the state Senate.

Alabama is seeking to lift a federal court order that created a second congressional district with a near-majority of Black voters. That map led to the 2024 election of Rep. Shomari Figures, a Black Democrat. Republicans want instead to use a 2023 map drawn by state lawmakers that would give the GOP an opportunity to reclaim Figures' south Alabama district.

The legislation won House approval on a party-line vote after four hours of fiery debate during which Black legislators said the moment calls back to the state's shameful Jim Crow-era history.

"It's a tragic step backward for Black Alabama voters. But we've been here before, and we will not give up this fight," Democratic state Rep. Adline Clarke said.

Democratic state Rep. Juandalynn Givan likened the legislation to poll taxes and counting jelly beans in a jar — a virtually impossible task that was used to suppress Black voters during the Jim Crow era.

"It is a calculated political maneuver born out of fear, a fear that is of Black people and most importantly Black political power," Givan said.

Tensions rose later Wednesday as dozens of protesters temporarily blocked a hallway outside the Senate, singing "We Shall Overcome" and shouting "we're not going back" as security officers tried to get them to leave.

Alabama's legislation hinges on the U.S. Supreme Court or a district court agreeing to lift the injunction.

"We're going to be ready if the court hands down a favorable ruling," said Republican state Rep. Chris Pringle, who sponsored the bill.

Alabama's primaries are May 19. If a court grants the state's request, the legislation would ignore the results for congressional seats and direct the governor to schedule a new primary under the revised districts.

South Carolina moves toward redistricting

The South Carolina House on Wednesday approved a resolution giving lawmakers permission to return later, after their regular work ends, to redraw congressional districts that could eliminate the state's only Democratic-held district. The proposal now goes to the Senate, where it would need a two-thirds vote.

Republican House leaders said after the vote that they plan to introduce a new map Thursday and hold committee meetings on Friday. But during debate Wednesday, Republicans fended off specific questions from Democrats, including why they were willing to stop the June 9 U.S. House primary elections well after candidates filed and how much a rescheduled primary could cost.

Democratic Rep. Justin Bamberg said he felt sorry for Republicans who he said were giving up their principles to follow the whims of Trump.

"The president of the United States is a very powerful man. Wields a heavy, heavy thumb — Truth Social, X, Meta, Instagram. To be honest I don't envy our Republican colleagues," Bamberg said.

Democratic Rep. Leon Stavrinakis said democracy will die if lawmakers redraw voting districts for political reasons every time power changes or to protect someone in office.

## **FBI searches Virginia Senate leader's office as part of corruption probe, AP sources say**

By ERIC TUCKER, ALLEN G. BREED and JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

PORTSMOUTH, Va. (AP) — The FBI searched the Virginia state Senate leader's hometown office and her neighboring cannabis shop Wednesday, bringing into public view what two people familiar with the matter told The Associated Press was a corruption investigation.

One of the people said the investigation into Democratic Sen. L. Louise Lucas was opened during Demo-

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cratic former President Joe Biden's administration. Both spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss an ongoing criminal investigation.

While the probe apparently has spanned administrations of different political parties, Democrats viewed it against a backdrop of recent, politically charged inquiries during President Donald Trump's tenure. Lucas, who has been a senator for 34 years, was a prominent voice in Virginia's recent redistricting effort, a Democrat-led initiative to counter Republican redrawing pushed by Trump.

"Today's actions by federal agents are about far more than one state senator; they are about power and who is allowed to use it on behalf of the people," Lucas said in an evening statement. "What we saw fits a clear pattern from this administration: when challenged, they try to intimidate and silence the voices of those who stand up to them."

The FBI said only that it was conducting a court-authorized search in Portsmouth. Such searches require approval from a judge and for investigators to assert that they believe they have identified probable cause of a crime.

Besides the search at Lucas' office, which houses her disabilities services business and is her political base in Portsmouth, agents in FBI T-shirts also went into the nearby cannabis store, which she opened in 2021. Several entrances to the Cannabis Outlet's parking lot were blocked by unmarked vehicles with flashing blue lights, as was an entrance to the politician's office.

By evening, agents were carrying boxes and bags out of the shop's back door.

Lucas, a prominent backer of legalizing marijuana, has said the store sells legal hemp and CBD products. It has drawn scrutiny from local media amid allegations that some products were mislabeled.

Virginia has legalized pot possession, but retail sales of recreational marijuana remain illegal in the state.

A woman who identified herself as Lucas' granddaughter, Nicole Bremby, came by after agents left to check on the Cannabis Outlet. She declined to discuss the raids.

"I've had better days," she said. "It's all good. Everyone is home."

Virginia Democrats point to other recent prosecutions

State House Speaker Don Scott said he was deeply concerned by the FBI search.

"Right now, there is far more theatrics and speculation than actual information available to the public," Scott, a Democrat, said in a statement, adding that more facts were needed "before anyone rushes to political conclusions."

Gov. Abigail Spanberger declined to comment.

Other Virginia Democrats were quick to note that the search comes as the FBI and Justice Department have opened a spate of investigations into perceived adversaries of Trump.

Last week the Justice Department charged former FBI Director James Comey with making a threatening Instagram post against Trump, an accusation that Comey — who for nearly a decade has drawn the president's ire — has denied. A court dismissed federal prosecutors' earlier case accusing Comey of lying to Congress.

A separate mortgage fraud case, also ultimately dismissed by a court, targeted Democratic New York Attorney General Letitia James, who brought a major civil fraud lawsuit against Trump and his business. Both she and Comey, a longtime Republican who split from the party in the past decade, denied the charges and said the prosecutions were vindictive.

Such cases "have undermined public confidence" in federal prosecutors in Virginia, Democratic state Attorney General Jay Jones said in a statement.

The FBI and Justice Department have also provoked concerns among Democrats about ongoing election-related investigations, including the seizure by agents of ballots and other information from Fulton County, Georgia.

Lucas has been a vocal leader of Virginia's redistricting effort, which voters approved last month. A sign urging people to "vote yes" to "stop the MAGA power grab" still hung Wednesday on a fence separating her office's parking lot from that of the cannabis shop.

Lucas played a leading role in Virginia redistricting

Amid a national, state-by-state partisan redistricting fight kicked off by Trump's desire to aid his fellow

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Republicans, Virginia voters OK'd a Democrat-backed constitutional amendment authorizing new U.S. House districts. The plan could help the party win up to four additional seats.

"We are not going to let anyone tilt the system without a response," Lucas said after the vote. Trump, meanwhile, denounced the results.

The state Supreme Court let the referendum proceed but has yet to rule on whether the effort is legal. The court is considering an appeal of a lower court judge's ruling that the amendment is invalid because lawmakers violated procedural requirements.

Voting districts typically are redrawn once a decade, after each census. But Trump last year urged Texas Republicans to redraw House districts to give the GOP an edge in the midterms. California Democrats reciprocated, and redistricting efforts soon cascaded across states.

Lucas, 82, has been a figure in Virginia politics since the 1980s, when she became the first Black woman elected to a city council seat in her native Portsmouth. She now is the first woman and first African American to serve as the Senate's president pro tempore.

Earlier in life she was the Norfolk Naval Shipyard's first female shipfitter, according to her biography in the state library. The job entails making, installing and repairing sometimes enormous metal assemblies for vessels.

In recent years she has been the CEO of a Portsmouth business that runs residences, day programs and transportation for intellectually disabled adults.

## Paris Saint-Germain returns to Champions League final as Dembélé goal stifles Bayern Munich

MUNICH (AP) — Ousmane Dembélé scored early and Paris Saint-Germain eliminated Bayern Munich with a 1-1 draw to reach the Champions League final again on Wednesday.

Khvicha Kvaratskhelia raced clear after playing a simple one-two with Fabián Ruiz in midfield, then picked out the unmarked Dembélé to sweep the ball in under the crossbar in the third minute of the semifinal second leg.

By the time Harry Kane equalized in stoppage time it was too late to keep alive Bayern's dream of a Bundesliga, German Cup and Champions League treble.

The draw gave PSG, the defending champion, a 6-5 win on aggregate after edging their encounter 5-4 in the first leg in Paris last week.

The French league leader will face Arsenal in the final in Budapest, Hungary, on May 30, after the Gunners defeated Atletico Madrid 1-0 on Tuesday to progress 2-1 on aggregate.

"It's magnificent, two finals," PSG president Nasser Al-Khelaifi said. "Now we will go there and try to fetch a second star. I said to the players we are warriors."

PSG's defense — breached four times in Paris last week — kept Bayern's much vaunted attack of Kane, Luis Díaz and Micheal Olise largely in check.

"We know how to suffer and we're ready for what we have to face," PSG midfielder João Neves said. "We're very proud of how far we've come."

By the time Kane let fly for his 55th goal across all competitions including the German Supercup for Bayern this season, PSG's substitutes were already lining up to celebrate.

The England captain's goal ensured Bayern has scored in every competitive match this season. Bayern coach Vincent Kompany struck an optimistic tone despite the disappointment.

"We made progress this season," Kompany said. "We have to do it again."

Real Madrid was the last team to achieve back-to-back titles — winning three in a row from 2016-18.

"Shoot us into the final," the Bayern fans had urged their team with a huge choreography as the combatants emerged on the field.

Bayern only needed one goal to level the tie, but it soon turned to two after Fabián sent Kvaratskhelia on his way.

If the Georgia star was surprised by how much space he was offered by the absent defense, he didn't



stop to question it. Desiré Doué was another option queuing beside Dembélé to take a shot with Luis Díaz the closest Bayern player back.

Bayern's players complained the already-booked Nuno Mendes should have been booked again when the ball hit his arm in the first half, but referee João Pinheiro blew instead for a handball from Konrad Laimer.

There were more protests shortly afterward when Vitinha struck teammate João Neves' arm with the ball in the penalty area with a clearance.

Kompany played down the importance of the referee's calls, though he also said more time should have been played in stoppage time.

While Bayern dominated possession, PSG was more efficient, with Doué and Kvaratskhelia keeping Bayern goalkeeper Manuel Neuer alert after the break.

"PSG were killers with their five goals and how they scored (last week)," Neuer said. "That's what we needed today. I think we were close to the final but couldn't finish the job."

PSG already had good memories of Munich. The city was the scene of PSG's triumph in the final last season when it demolished Inter Milan 5-0 to fulfill its Qatari owners' quest to become European champion for the first time. A relatively unchanged team is well-placed to deliver the second title.

## Cruise ship with hantavirus outbreak heads to Canary Islands after 3 are evacuated

By ANNIE RISEMBERG, MISPER APAWU, ALEKSANDAR FURTULA and ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press PRAIA, Cape Verde (AP) — Two patients with hantavirus and one suspected of infection were evacuated Wednesday from a cruise ship at the center of a deadly outbreak, the U.N. health agency said. The ship then departed Cape Verde with nearly 150 people on board — isolated in their cabins — and headed to Spain's Canary Islands.

Associated Press footage showed health workers in protective gear evacuating three patients. Two arrived at Amsterdam's airport Wednesday evening and were taken to separate hospitals.

Three people have died, and one body remained on the ship, the World Health Organization said. Of eight recorded cases, five were confirmed by laboratory testing.

Hantavirus usually spreads by inhaling contaminated rodent droppings and can spread person-to-person, though that is rare, according to the WHO, whose top epidemic expert said the risk to the public is low.

Health officials in Europe and Africa are trying to identify people who may have had contact with people who earlier left the ship, which departed April 1 from South America for stops in Antarctica and several remote Atlantic islands.

Two Argentine officials investigating the origins of the outbreak said the government's leading hypothesis is that a Dutch couple contracted the virus while bird-watching in the city of Ushuaia before boarding.

They said the couple visited a landfill during the tour and may have been exposed to rodents. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief the media, with the investigation ongoing.

Officials say those still on board show no symptoms

The Dutch foreign ministry said the three people evacuated Wednesday were a 41-year-old Dutch national, a 56-year-old British national and a 65-year-old German national. WHO said testing in Senegal confirmed that two of the evacuees were infected with hantavirus.

Two of the evacuees were in "serious condition," Dutch ship operator Oceanwide Expeditions said, and the third had no symptoms but was "closely associated" with a German passenger who died on the MV Hondius ship on Saturday.

Upon arriving in Amsterdam, one of the evacuated patients was taken to a specialized hospital in Dusseldorf, Germany; the other was taken to a hospital in Leiden, the Netherlands.

Health officials said passengers and crew members still on the ship were without symptoms. Their journey to the Canary Islands will take three or four days, Spain's health ministry said. Their arrival "won't represent any risk for the public," the ministry said.

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Still, the Canary Islands regional president, Fernando Clavijo, said he worried about the risk to the public and demanded a meeting with Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez.

WHO expert says this is 'not the next COVID'

Authorities said passengers tested positive for the Andes virus, a species of hantavirus found in South America, primarily in Argentina and Chile. The virus can spread between people, though that's rare and only through close contact, according to the WHO. The health agency has never seen a hantavirus outbreak on a ship.

"This is not the next COVID, but it is a serious infectious disease," the WHO's top epidemic expert, Maria Van Kerkhove, said. "Most people will never be exposed to this."

Two Dutch infectious diseases experts were joining the ship, Van Kerkhove said. Access to clinical care is important, she said, because infected people can develop severe acute respiratory distress and need oxygen or mechanical ventilation. There is no specific treatment or cure, but early medical attention can increase the chance of survival.

The hantavirus incubation period can be one to six weeks, or more, she said.

The ship's itinerary included stops across the South Atlantic, including mainland Antarctica and the remote islands of South Georgia, Nightingale Island, Tristan da Cunha, St. Helena and Ascension.

Officials rush to determine passenger's travel after leaving ship

Authorities in Switzerland said a former passenger who tested positive was being treated at a Zurich hospital. South African authorities earlier said two passengers who were transferred there tested positive. One, a British man, was in intensive care; the other collapsed and died in South Africa.

Swiss health office spokesperson Simon Ming said the patient there had left the ship during its St. Helena stop. It was not clear when or how he traveled to Switzerland and how many other countries he might have passed through.

The patient's wife hasn't shown symptoms but is self-isolating as a precaution, a statement by the office said.

South Africa looks for people who had possible contact

At St. Helena, the body of the Dutch man suspected to be the first hantavirus case on board was taken off the ship. His wife flew to South Africa, where she collapsed at the Johannesburg airport and died.

Later, a British man was evacuated at Ascension Island and taken to South Africa.

The ship's operator has not said if other people left at those or other locations.

The South African health ministry says officials have traced 42 out of 62 people, including health workers, they believe had contact with the two infected passengers who traveled there. The 42 tested negative for hantavirus.

British health officials said two passengers who flew home earlier in the ship's journey are self-isolating but do not have symptoms. The U.K. Health Security Agency said "a small number" of contacts of the two are also self-isolating but also are not showing symptoms.

## Lutnick's testimony about Epstein draws praise from GOP chair and derision from Democrats

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick appeared Wednesday before a House committee investigating sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, trying to explain to lawmakers his contact with the financier after Epstein's 2008 conviction for soliciting prostitution from an underage girl.

The Cabinet member was the latest powerful political figure to appear before the House Oversight Committee. He has previously given contradictory statements about his relationship with Epstein, but he said he has done nothing wrong and welcomed the closed-door interview with lawmakers.

The transcribed interview is a test of how much scrutiny lawmakers will apply to powerful men who kept company with Epstein even after his conviction. Trump's administration has tried unsuccessfully for more than a year to move past the issue.

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Lawmakers emerged from the private interview with vastly different assessments of Lutnick's answers. The committee chairman, GOP Rep. James Comer of Kentucky, said Lutnick had been "forthcoming" in describing limited interactions with Epstein. Democrats accused Lutnick of lying and evading their questions.

Lutnick is the highest-ranked administration official, besides President Donald Trump, to be named in the Epstein case files. The Republican president has consistently denied any knowledge of Epstein's crimes and has said he ended their relationship years ago. Epstein died in a New York jail cell in 2019 while awaiting trial on sex trafficking charges.

Several Democrats have called for Lutnick to resign. A few Republicans, including Rep. Nancy Mace of South Carolina, have said he should at least testify before the committee.

"He was evasive, nervous. He was dishonest," said Rep. Suhas Subramanyam, D-Va. "He would not admit to lying, which he clearly did."

Epstein's private island

Lutnick has played down his ties to Epstein, who was once his neighbor in New York City. Under questioning from Democrats during an unrelated hearing earlier this year, Lutnick described their contact as a handful of emails and a pair of meetings in 2011 and 2012.

But that admission came after Lutnick had previously claimed on a podcast last year that he had decided to "never be in the room" with Epstein after a 2005 tour of Epstein's home, which included a massage table, disturbed Lutnick and his wife.

In 2008, Epstein pleaded guilty to state sex offense charges in Florida, including soliciting prostitution from an underage girl.

"I did not have any relationship with him. I barely had anything to do with him," Lutnick told senators in February when he was asked about Epstein during a subcommittee hearing of the Senate Appropriations Committee.

But Lutnick, who was previously the head of brokerage and investment bank Cantor Fitzgerald, actually had an hourlong engagement at Epstein's home in 2011. His family then visited Epstein's private island in 2012 for lunch.

Committee Democrats asked Lutnick repeatedly about that visit, but came away from the interview frustrated with Lutnick and accused him of evading their questions. They said Lutnick said he remembered little about the island visit and did not see anything that raised concern.

During a break in the interview, Rep. James Walkinshaw, D-Va., said Lutnick "claims that when he said, 'I would never be in a room again with Jeffrey Epstein,' he meant only him and Jeffrey Epstein."

The federal release of case files on Epstein also showed that Epstein and Lutnick had kept in contact through email. Lutnick in 2018 emailed Epstein about a proposed expansion of a museum in their neighborhood that would have blocked the view from their homes. Epstein also gave \$50,000 to a 2017 dinner honoring Lutnick, while Lutnick invited Epstein to a 2015 fundraiser for Hillary Clinton. In 2013, they both invested in the same business venture.

"I haven't seen wrongdoing in the email correspondence, but he wasn't 100% truthful with whether or not he had been on the island," Comer said. He added that the committee planned to later release the transcript of the interview and "let the American people judge whether the credibility was damaged or not."

Democrats said Lutnick also backed away from his statement in an interview last year that Epstein was the "greatest blackmailer ever."

Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Calif., said Lutnick told him that he was only "speculating" when Lutnick made the blackmail claim.

No video recording of the interview

The interview was not recorded on video, as the committee has done with depositions for others, including former President Bill Clinton and Hillary Clinton, a former secretary of state. Comer said the decision not to video the interview, for which Lutnick volunteered, was keeping with the committee's practice.

To Democrats, that decision allowed Lutnick to escape the same kind of scrutiny as others had.

"The level of the lies that are taking place inside that room without video is unbelievable and part of this



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egregious cover-up," said Rep. Yassamin Ansari, D-Ariz.

Comer said Democrats were only trying to score political points. "This is a serious investigation," he said.

The chairman argued it made the committee's inquiry easier when subjects consented to an interview, rather than resist congressional demands.

"Nobody wants to be videoed. If you come in, you work with us, then you know, you might not have to be videoed," he said.

The White House has continued to express support for Lutnick, who is one of the biggest boosters of Trump's tariff strategy. He has been close to Trump for years and helped raise money for his 2020 and 2024 campaigns.

The committee is also scheduled to hear testimony on May 29 from Pam Bondi, who was pushed out as attorney general last month.

## **CNN founder Ted Turner, a brash and outspoken television pioneer, has died at age 87**

By DAVID BAUDER and JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Ted Turner could never be defined by just one role. He was a media mogul, philanthropist and conservationist. A yachtsman who won boating's most famous race and owner of a baseball team that captured the World Series trophy.

The brash television pioneer who died Wednesday made his greatest mark on the news business when he launched CNN nearly a half-century ago and with it, the 24-hour cable news cycle — a revolutionary moment that transformed the industry.

His media empire grew to include CNN International, the Cartoon Network, TNT and Turner Classic Movies. Then he used his riches to become one of America's most extensive landowners, dedicating his final years to preserving natural habitats, saving endangered species and reducing nuclear weapons.

Turner died at age 87 while surrounded by his family, according to Turner Enterprises, which oversees his vast businesses and investments. A cause was not released. He was diagnosed in 2018 with Lewy body dementia, a progressive neurological disorder.

A Southerner with outspoken wit, he earned the nicknames "Captain Outrageous" and "The Mouth of the South" during his youthful years.

"If only I had a little humility, I'd be perfect," he once bragged.

Turner was a celebrity in his own right when he married actor Jane Fonda in 1991, just before being named Time magazine's Man of the Year.

"He swept into my life, a gloriously handsome, deeply romantic, swashbuckling pirate and I've never been the same," Fonda wrote Wednesday on Instagram.

Slowed late in life by his illness and long out of the television business, Turner concentrated on philanthropy — donating a stunning \$1 billion to United Nations charities — and his more than 2 million acres (800,000 hectares) of property, including the nation's largest bison herd.

His garrulous personality sometimes overshadowed a driven, risk-taking business acumen. By the time he sold his Turner Broadcasting System to Time Warner Inc. in a 1996 media megadeal, Turner had turned his late father's billboard company into a global conglomerate that included seven major cable networks, three professional sports teams and a pair of hit movie studios.

President Donald Trump on Wednesday called him "one of the Greats of All Time."

The creation of CNN

Turner's signature achievement was creating CNN, the first 24-hour, all-news television network in 1980. It was born of frustration — he often worked late after network newscasts had gone off the air, and was in bed by the time his local stations did their own news.

He took a chance by launching what some called the "chicken noodle network" in the early days of cable television, living in an apartment above its Atlanta office.

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"I was going to have to hit hard and move incredibly fast and that's what we did — move so fast that the (broadcast) networks wouldn't have the time to respond, because they should have done this, not me," Turner recalled in a 2016 interview with The American Academy of Achievement. "But they didn't have the imagination."

CNN's breakthrough came during the Gulf War with Iraq in 1991. Most television journalists fled Baghdad. CNN stayed, capturing images of the war's outbreak, with anti-aircraft tracers streaking across the sky and correspondents flinching from the concussion of bombs.

"His first love was family and he had five children. But very close behind, he's always told me that his greatest achievement was CNN. But he had so many over the years," Tom Johnson, CNN's president from 1990 to 2001, told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

Turner was promised a role in CNN after his company's sale to Time Warner for \$7.3 billion in stock but was gradually pushed out, much to his regret.

"I made a mistake," he later said. "The mistake I made was losing control of the company."

That same year — 1996 — saw the birth of Fox News Channel and arrival of a new dominant mogul in cable news, Rupert Murdoch. Turner once compared Murdoch to Adolf Hitler. The bitter rivals later reconciled over environmental concerns.

Warner Bros. Discovery CEO David Zaslav on Wednesday called Turner a visionary and a trailblazer.

"Ted's entrepreneurial spirit, creative ambition and willingness to take risks changed the media industry forever," Zaslav said in a note to employees at Warner, CNN's parent company, which is nearing a mega merger with Paramount.

Building TBS Superstation

Robert Edward Turner III was born Nov. 19, 1938, in Cincinnati. When he was 9, his family moved to Savannah, Georgia. After being expelled from Brown University for sneaking a female student into his room, Turner came to Atlanta to work for his father's billboard company.

His ambitions at that point were broad, he later recalled: "I used to tell people I wanted to become the world's greatest sailor, businessman and lover all at the same time."

After his father's 1963 suicide, Turner took over the company. In 1970, he bought an independent UHF station with a signal so weak it didn't even cover Atlanta.

On Dec. 17, 1976, he began transmitting the station to cable systems across the country via satellite. It became TBS Superstation. "It was the start of something bigger than we ever imagined," Turner said.

TBS' collection of old movies and "The Andy Griffith Show" reruns was augmented by Turner's acquisition of baseball's Atlanta Braves, which slowly attracted fans across the nation and declared themselves "America's team."

Major League Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred said Turner transformed how fans experience sports.

In the 1980s, Turner went deeply into debt to buy MGM, another move greeted with skepticism.

But the acquisition gave his company a huge library of vintage movies that eventually launched the TNT and Turner Classic Movies networks. His devotion to older movies earned Turner a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 2004. He was also criticized for adding color to classic movies like "Casablanca," which he said he did to appeal to a younger audience.

TBS also acquired the Hanna-Barbera animation library, which led to the Cartoon Network.

"He sees the obvious before most people do," Bob Wright, former president and CEO of NBC, told The New Yorker in 2001. "We all look at the same picture, but Ted sees what you don't see. And after he sees it, it becomes obvious to everybody."

Asked to share the secret to his success, Turner said: "Early to bed, early to rise, work like hell and advertise."

Acquiring sports teams and land

Married three times, the mustachioed Turner wooed beautiful women with a roguish charm. He was married to Fonda from 1991 to 2001. She quit acting while married to Turner, but tired of his philandering and divorced him, although they remained friends.

"He was sexy. He was brilliant. He had 2 million acres by the time I left. It would have been easy to

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stay," Fonda once said.

He struck up friendships with world leaders, bonding with Cuban leader Fidel Castro over hunting and arguments about politics.

Turner's sports empire included professional baseball, basketball and hockey teams in Atlanta, but he was best remembered at the helm of the Braves, turning the perennial doormats into World Series champions in 1995. Their former stadium, built for the 1996 Olympics, was named Ted Turner Field.

He acquired millions of acres in ranches complete with roaming buffalo. He spoke often of reviving the West's bison herds, and in 2002 started a restaurant chain serving bison burgers, Ted's Montana Grill.

Forbes estimated his net worth at \$2.8 billion at the time of his death.

He had enough time, and money, to devote his energy to such lofty goals as promoting world peace and protecting the environment.

"See, my life is more an adventure than a quest to make money. Adventure is going out and doing something for the pure hell of it," Turner once said. "You just want to see if you can do it, period. There's no thought of gain other than your own satisfaction."

'The Mouth of the South'

Through the years, Turner's antics occasionally overshadowed his business activities.

Fresh from skippering his boat "Courageous" to the 1977 America's Cup title, a very inebriated Turner was captured by TV cameras stretched out on the floor at the victory celebration.

Turner managed to insult many with his shoot-from-the-lip style. An atheist since his only sister died of lupus at age 17, he called Christians "losers" and "Jesus freaks," later apologizing.

He once suggested in a speech that unemployed Black people be used to haul mobile missiles with ropes "like the Egyptians building the pyramids." He said he was joking after civil rights leaders demanded an apology. And he once told an audience in Berlin that "you Germans had a bad century."

"You were on the wrong side of two wars. You were the losers. I know what that's like. When I bought the Atlanta Braves, we couldn't win, either. You guys can turn it around. You can start making the right choices. If the Atlanta Braves could do it, then Germany can do it," Turner said, according to The New Yorker.

Dedication to humanitarian causes

Turner's 1997 pledge to give \$100 million a year for 10 years to United Nations charities made him a leader in American philanthropy. He made good on his promise even as his fortune shrank after the AOL Time Warner merger, calling it the best hope for peace.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Wednesday called Turner "a visionary whose conviction, generosity and audacious spirit left a lasting imprint on the United Nations and our world."

Turner promoted a range of humanitarian causes. He joined former U.S. Sen. Sam Nunn to start the nonprofit Nuclear Threat Initiative.

"If I had to predict, the way things are going, I'd say the chances are about 50-50 that humanity will be extinct in 50 years," Turner said in 2003. "Weapons of mass destruction, disease, I mean this global warming is scaring the living daylights out of me."

## Police announce arrest in Oklahoma party shooting that left 1 dead, 22 injured

By HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

An 18-year-old man was arrested Wednesday in connection with a weekend shooting that left one woman dead and 22 other people wounded during a nighttime party beside an Oklahoma lake, police said.

Jaylan A. Davis was arrested on a charge of assault with a deadly weapon in the wake of Sunday night's shooting, which erupted after an apparent argument broke out amid a large crowd gathered at Arcadia Lake in the north Oklahoma City suburb of Edmond, its police chief said.

Edmond Police Chief J.D. Younger announced the arrest at a news conference and said the initial charge against Davis was in the process of being upgraded to felony murder following the death of an 18-year-old



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woman who was shot. Police identified the woman as Avianna Smith-Gray.

Davis was being held in the Edmond jail on a \$1 million bond. He was listed in jail records as an Oklahoma City resident.

There was no lawyer listed for Davis in court documents, and the Oklahoma County Public Defender's Office said Davis would not be assigned an attorney until the upgraded charges have been filed.

Detectives believe the incident began with an argument between two women attending the gathering and escalated into an altercation between rival gang members, the police chief said. Younger also said police think there is at least one more suspect.

In addition to the 18-year-old woman killed, authorities said, others suffered gunshot and shrapnel wounds as dozens of shots were fired at the popular boating, fishing and swimming lake some 20 miles (32 kilometers) north of downtown Oklahoma City.

Six of the victims are juveniles, some as young as 15, Younger said.

Davis turned himself in Wednesday morning after police produced an arrest warrant, the chief said.

"We're trying to find justice for 23 people that were shot, one that's deceased and even the people that were involved. I think it's important not to demonize or separate the parties here," Younger said.

He added that multiple people discharged weapons and that more than 80 rounds were fired.

The woman who died, Smith-Gray, was a high school senior who was looking forward to walking the stage at her upcoming graduation, her family said on a fundraising page for her funeral expenses. The family said she loved to dance, sing, do hair and much more. Her sisters described her as a loving, smart person who was good with kids and "so full of life."

The party had been promoted across social media and drew a large crowd of mostly young adults from around the Oklahoma City area to a picnic pavilion beside the lake. The shooting occurred just as officers were responding to a noise complaint about the party, police said.

Authorities noted that organizers hadn't sought the necessary reservations for such an event.

## Man charged in DC shooting was walking along the path of Vance's motorcade, agent says

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A man accused of firing a gun at law enforcement officers near the Washington Monument this week was walking along the path of Vice President JD Vance's motorcade before the shooting and made a vulgar remark about the White House after the confrontation, according to a court filing Wednesday.

Michael Marx, 45, of Midland, Texas, was shot multiple times during Monday's confrontation and was in the back of an ambulance on his way to a hospital when he said, "F—k the White House" and "Kill me, kill me, kill me," a Secret Service agent said in an affidavit.

The sworn statement does not specify whether investigators believe Marx had a particular target.

U.S. Attorney Jeanine Pirro said in a statement that her office "will pursue the most serious charges available against anyone who brings gun violence to our streets, particularly when that violence unfolds steps from the seat of our government and the path of the Vice President of the United States."

Marx was walking along the path of Vance's motorcade when officers spotted him near the intersection of 15th Street and Independence Avenue. The officers were responding to a Secret Service agent's report that Marx was seen near the White House complex with a firearm concealed on the right side of his body, the affidavit says.

Marx pulled a firearm from his waistband as he ran away from Secret Service officers and fired at one of them, but a bystander behind the officer was shot in the leg, the affidavit says. Officers returned fire and struck Marx in his abdomen, a hand and his left arm, according to the filing. It says Marx spit at officers as they provided him with aid after the shooting.

The teenage bystander was not seriously injured and has been released from a hospital, ABC News reported. ABC was first to report what the suspect allegedly said after the shooting.

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Marx was charged in a complaint with assaulting officers with a dangerous weapon, discharging a firearm during a violent crime and being a felon in possession of a firearm and ammunition.

The shooting came just over a week after a California man tried to storm the White House Correspondents' Association dinner while armed with guns and knives. Cole Tomas Allen has been charged in that incident with attempting to assassinate the president and firing a gun at a Secret Service officer.

Around the time of Monday's shooting, President Donald Trump was holding a small business event at the White House, which was briefly locked down as authorities investigated.

Online court records did not immediately list the name of a lawyer representing Marx.

Marx has used aliases, including Michael Patrick and Michael Zavici, according to the affidavit. It says Marx had a 2011 drug trafficking conviction in Florida that made it illegal for him to possess a firearm.

## Oil prices sink and stocks leap worldwide on hopes for a reopening of the Strait of Hormuz

By STAN CHOIE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Oil prices sank Wednesday, and stock markets rallied worldwide with hopes that the United States and Iran are nearing a deal to allow ships to deliver crude from the Persian Gulf once again to their customers.

The price for a barrel of Brent crude oil, the international standard, fell 7.8% to \$101.27, down from more than \$115 early this week. It dropped as President Donald Trump said the Strait of Hormuz could be "OPEN TO ALL" if Iran accepts a reported agreement that the U.S. president did not detail.

The small strait has caused big trouble for the global economy because the war with Iran has blocked oil tankers from using it to exit the Persian Gulf. A reopening could allow oil to flow freely again and remove upward pressure on inflation that's driving prices up for all kinds of products worldwide.

On Wall Street, the S&P 500 climbed 1.5% for its best day in nearly a month and hit another all-time high. The Dow Jones Industrial Average jumped 612 points, or 1.2%, and the Nasdaq composite rose 2% to its own record.

Stock markets abroad had even bigger gains, with indexes leaping 6.5% in Seoul, 2.9% in Paris and 2.1% in London.

Of course, hopes have risen several times already on Wall Street about a possible end to the war with Iran, only to get dashed each time. That could happen again, and oil prices pared some of their steepest losses from Wednesday morning.

The price for a barrel of Brent briefly dove below \$97 before returning above \$100 after Trump threatened to start bombing "at a much higher level and intensity" if Iran does not accept the agreement.

Wall Street nevertheless latched onto some potentially encouraging signals. Trump said Tuesday he was pausing his effort to forcefully reopen the Strait of Hormuz to commercial ships. And China's foreign minister called for a comprehensive ceasefire following a meeting with Iran's foreign minister. That could be influential because of how closely tied Iran is to China economically and politically.

In the meantime, big U.S. companies continue to turn in much stronger profits for the start of 2026 than analysts expected. That's supporting the stock market despite all the uncertainties created by the war.

AMD helped lead the market with a surge of 18.6% after it joined the list of big-name companies topping expectations for both profit and revenue. CEO Lisa Su said the chip company benefited from continued growth from artificial-intelligence technology, which is demanding tremendous amounts of computing power from data centers.

AMD also said its revenue growth could accelerate in the current quarter to roughly 46% from a year earlier.

Another company enmeshed in the AI industry, Super Micro Computer, rallied 24.5% after likewise delivering stronger earnings than analysts expected. Nvidia, the chip company that became the poster child of the AI boom, rose 5.7% and was the single strongest force lifting the S&P 500 because of its immense size.

CVS Health climbed 7.6% after delivering better results for the first quarter than analysts expected and

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raising its financial forecasts for the full year. The Walt Disney Co. gained 7.5% after saying its "Zootopia 2" movie helped draw people to its streaming business, parks and cruise ships, while delivering a better-than-expected profit. Uber Technologies drove 8.5% higher after giving a bookings forecast for the spring that was higher than analysts expected.

Outside of earnings reports, companies with big fuel bills jumped on hopes that oil prices will continue to ease. That included gains of 6.8% for United Airlines, 6.8% for Carnival and 8.8% for Royal Caribbean.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 105.90 points to 7,365.12. The Dow Jones Industrial Average jumped 612.34 to 49,910.59, and the Nasdaq composite climbed 512.82 to 25,838.94.

In the bond market, Treasury yields sank as falling oil prices took pressure off inflation. The yield on the 10-year Treasury dropped to 4.35% from 4.43% late Tuesday. That's a notable move for the bond market.

Lower yields can bring down rates for mortgages and other kinds of loans going to U.S. households and businesses, which in turn can give the economy a boost. Lower yields also tend to push upward on prices for stocks and other kinds of investments. The 10-year yield, though, remains well above its 3.97% level from just before the war.

In stock markets abroad, South Korea's Kospi jumped above the 7,000 level for the first time to a record thanks to big gains for AI winners, including Samsung Electronics and SK Hynix.

## **Man accused in Dallas-area shootings that killed 2 and injured 3 charged with capital murder**

CARROLLTON, Texas (AP) — A man who police said shot five people, killing two, in back-to-back shootings at a shopping center and an apartment building in suburban Dallas has been charged with two counts of capital murder, police said Wednesday.

Seung Ho Han, 69, has also been charged with three counts of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon following Tuesday's shootings in the Koreatown neighborhood of Carrollton, police said.

Police said Han acknowledged he was the shooter in an interview with detectives and said he was angry at the people he shot because of financial disagreements over their business dealings. They declined to release the names of the victims and said they were still investigating the motive.

Carrollton, with about 130,000 people, is 20 miles (32 kilometers) north of Dallas. More than 4,000 residents are of Korean descent, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Han was being held Wednesday in Denton County Jail. Jail records did not list an attorney for him.

The first shooting happened just before 10 a.m. Tuesday at a shopping center, police said. When police arrived, they found four adults who had been shot, including a man who died. While they were investigating, another shooting was reported at an apartment complex roughly 4 miles (6 kilometers) away. Responding officers found a dead man inside one of the apartments.

Police said Wednesday that the three injured people were hospitalized in stable condition.

Investigators determined that Han carried out both of the shootings, police said. He was arrested at a nearby grocery store after a short chase on foot.

## **Kentucky Derby winner Golden Tempo is not running in the Preakness**

By STEPHEN WHYNO AP Sports Writer

Kentucky Derby winner Golden Tempo will not run in the Preakness Stakes next weekend, trainer Cherie DeVaux announced Wednesday.

DeVaux and owners decided to skip the Preakness and set their sights on the Belmont Stakes on June 6 at Saratoga Race Course in upstate New York. DeVaux, who became the first woman to train a Derby winner, is from Saratoga Springs, which is hosting the Belmont for a third and final time this year.

"We are incredibly appreciative of the excitement and support surrounding the possibility of a Triple Crown run," DeVaux said in a statement. "Golden gave us the race of a lifetime in the Kentucky Derby,



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and we believe the best decision for him moving forward is to give him a little more time following such a tremendous effort. His health, happiness and long-term future will always remain our top priority.”

Golden Tempo is the third Derby winner in the past five years not to be entered in the Preakness. For various reasons, it is the sixth time in eight years the Preakness will happen with no chance of a Triple Crown on the line. American Pharoah in 2015 and Justify in 2018 are the only horses to sweep all three races over the past four decades.

The two-week turnaround from the Derby to the Preakness, which used to be commonplace, is considered a nonstarter for many trainers and owners given that most elite thoroughbreds now typically go a month or more between races. It has caused endless debate in horse racing circles about the spacing of the Triple Crown in modern times.

Maryland racing officials are considering moving the Preakness back from the third Saturday in May to the fourth to increase the chances of not just the winner but other horses from the Derby being considered for the second leg of the Triple Crown. None of the 18 who ran this year at Churchill Downs are heading to the Preakness, with Golden Tempo the only one considered.

The Preakness is taking place at Laurel Park between Baltimore and Washington, D.C., this spring while its longtime home, Pimlico Race Course, is rebuilt as part of a massive construction project that included demolishing the debilitating old structure. Pimlico is set to become the site for year-round racing in Maryland beginning next year when the state takes control from 1/ST Racing, with Laurel becoming a training venue.

Golden Tempo won the Kentucky Derby as a 23-1 long shot in spectacular fashion, making a charge from the back of the pack down the stretch to the finish line a neck ahead of morning line favorite Renegade. DeVaux and co-owner Daisy Phipps Pulito said they would see how the colt came out of the race before making any decisions.

They followed the lead of trainer Bill Mott and Godolphin Racing, which last year chose to bypass the Preakness with Derby champion Sovereignty to give him extra rest for the Belmont. Sovereignty rewarded them by winning the Belmont and the Travers Stakes and is back racing as a 4-year-old.

## Shipping firms are being whipsawed by changing stances and risks as they wait for Hormuz to reopen

By MAE ANDERSON and DAVID MCHUGH AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — With hundreds of vessels still stuck in the Persian Gulf and costs piling up, shipping companies are being whipsawed by uncertainty over how and when the Strait of Hormuz might reopen more than two months into the Iran war.

On Sunday, President Donald Trump announced “Project Freedom,” a way for the U.S. to “guide” ships to exit the strait. Two ships made the transit, but by Tuesday Trump abruptly paused the effort to allow time for a deal to end the war.

Meanwhile, the risks for ships and crew haven’t faded. A cargo container ship operated by the CMA CGM Group was damaged when it came under attack while attempting to transit the strait, the French shipping company said Wednesday, and concerns about Iranian speedboats and drones are leading major ship owners and operators to say the strait remains too dangerous.

“Ultimately, it’s still going to come back to the primary issues of risk and safety,” that shippers have to evaluate, said Sean Pribyl, a maritime attorney at Holland & Knight in Washington, D.C. “It seems as though we’re not anywhere near to returning to a free flow of traffic and navigation through the strait,” he added.

Costs pile up as goods, oil and ship workers remain stranded

Before the Iran war, 100 to 135 vessels passed through the Strait of Hormuz daily, according to research firm Lloyd’s List Intelligence, but that has slowed to a trickle as Iran has demanded that vessels go through a vetting process run by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps to receive safe passage. The process requires ships to follow a route near Iran’s coast, submit information on crew and cargo, and in at least some cases, pay a fee. Meanwhile, paying the IRGC risks running afoul of sanctions from the U.S. and the EU, which have designated it a terrorist organization.

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Goods stranded in the strait include oil and oil products such as fertilizer, not to mention thousands of ship workers. Air Force Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Tuesday there are more than 1,550 vessels with about 22,500 mariners on them inside the Persian Gulf.

To pressure Iran, the U.S. Navy is blockading Iran's ports, enforcing the blockade outside the strait in the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.

Holland & Knight's Pribyl said shippers and ship insurers are likely still assessing the scenario in the strait. Ships carry two main types of insurance: protection and indemnity, which covers property and third-party liabilities, and — during a conflict — war risk insurance that covers damage and losses due to war.

Insurance costs have shot up for vessels in the region due to the risk of attack, jumping from less than 1% of the value of goods on a ship to anywhere from 3% to 10% during the conflict, said Ed Anderson, a professor of supply chain and operations management for the McCombs School of Business at the University of Texas. But even with insurance, most shippers have deemed the crossing too unsafe.

"Ferrying out a couple of ships has not really affected the shipping industry in any way whatsoever," he said.

Companies weigh costs and risks

Hapag-Lloyd AG, one of the world's largest container shipping companies, says the Hormuz situation is costing it \$60 million a week, particularly in skyrocketing prices of fuel and insurance. It has a fleet of 301 ships, including four stranded in the Persian Gulf. The company has also had to suspend some of its transport services and find alternate routes either to safe harbors or over land. "These options are however limited in capacity and cannot completely replace the regular maritime routes through the region," the company said in a statement.

The Maersk shipping company said its U.S.-flagged Alliance Fairfax vehicle carrier exited the Persian Gulf through the Strait of Hormuz "accompanied by U.S. military assets" on Monday. "The transit was completed without incident, and all crew members are safe and unharmed," the company said in a statement.

A long return to normal

Oil prices and shipping are unlikely to return to normal until it's clear the risk of attacks in the Strait of Hormuz have receded, cautioned Kaho Yu, head of energy and resources at risk intelligence company Verisk Maplecroft.

"Even with diplomatic engagement continuing, energy markets are unlikely to return quickly to precrisis assumptions," he said. "Refiners, shippers, and commodity traders will remain cautious until there is clearer evidence that Hormuz disruptions will not re-escalate."

A meeting on Wednesday between Iranian and Chinese diplomats emphasized de-escalation. But "Hormuz remains the real metric that will be watched," Yu added. "Tanker traffic and energy flows over the coming weeks and months are likely to matter more than diplomatic language in assessing whether Beijing can translate influence with Tehran into practical stability."

If the ceasefire holds and ships gradually begin transiting the Strait of Hormuz again, shipping won't "snap back overnight," warned Razat Gaurav, CEO of Kinaxis, a supply chain management company.

"Even when conditions improve, carriers, insurers, and shippers need confidence that stability will hold before capacity and routes fully normalize," he said. "Air cargo can recover relatively quickly, but ocean shipping typically takes weeks or months because of longer lead times and contractual constraints."

He said shipments of certain categories like liquid natural gas and sulfur, where the Middle East is a major source of supply, are likely to move more quickly as backlogs clear, but "most shippers will remain cautious until stability proves durable," he said.

## Lower-income Americans hit hardest by gas price spike, widening inequalities, study finds

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Lower-income Americans sharply reduced their gas consumption in the month following the Iran war, yet spiking prices still forced them to spend more at the pump, worsening the

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economy's economic disparities, new research released Wednesday showed.

Higher-income households, meanwhile, ratcheted up their spending on gas while barely reducing their consumption, according to a report from the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. Middle-income households fell in-between.

The gaps between how each group reacted were larger than in 2022, when a similar gas-price shock occurred after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the report found. Higher-income households cut back more on their gas consumption four years ago than in March, while poorer households likely benefited more from government stimulus programs in 2022. Wealthier households have seen significant increases in the value of their stock and real estate holdings since then as well.

The figures suggest the gas-price surge has worsened what many economists call the "K-shaped economy." The K-shape label refers to upper-income Americans continuing to do well while lower-income households fall behind. The disparate outcomes can help explain the generally gloomy attitude most Americans have toward the economy even as headline figures, such as the unemployment rate and economic growth, remain mostly solid.

"We find that households had very different experiences with gasoline spending," researchers at the New York Fed wrote. "With the sharp increases in gasoline prices in March, a K-shaped pattern in gasoline consumption emerged—showing faster consumption growth for high income households relative to low-income households."

The Iran war began Feb. 28, and by the end of March gas prices had risen about 25%, according to government consumer price data. Overall gas consumption, according to the New York Fed, fell 3% that month. As of Tuesday, gas prices have leapt 50% since the war began.

Poorer households, defined as those earning less than \$40,000, cut their gas consumption by 7%, the report found, but still spent 12% more on gas in March. Higher-income households, defined as those earning \$125,000 a year or above, lifted their spending on gas 19% in March, while reducing their overall consumption of gas just 1%. The report didn't specify the middle-income figures.

The figures suggest lower-income Americans have cut back on driving, perhaps by carpooling, taking public transportation, or combining errands into fewer trips, while richer Americans have had to make few, if any, changes.

The New York Fed report estimates that total spending at gas stations jumped 15% in March from the previous month. If sustained, that extra spending on gas will siphon money away from other areas, reducing overall inflation-adjusted spending and slowing the economy. So far, there are only limited signs that is happening. Americans do spend less on gas than in previous decades as cars have become more efficient.

Consumer spending, adjusted for price changes, ticked up 0.2% in March, slightly below February's 0.3% gain, the government said last week.

Still, there is evidence that for many lower-income people, the spike in gas prices is a big drag on their finances. A separate report from the Bank of America Institute, released last week, found that among the poorest one-third of households, one-tenth now spend 10% of their incomes on gas. The figure is far above the average for higher-income households, who spend just 2.7% of their incomes on gas.

Data from the Institute, which compiles reports from the anonymous accounts of its customers, also showed that more expensive gas has pulled some spending away from discretionary items, defined as those outside groceries, gas, and utilities. The annual growth in poorer households' discretionary spending slowed in March from February, while it rose for middle- and upper-income households.

## Russia snubs Ukraine's unilateral ceasefire and fires dozens of drones

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia fired dozens of drones at Ukraine in nighttime attacks, Ukrainian officials said Wednesday, disregarding a unilateral ceasefire announced by Kyiv that began at midnight.

The Russian Defense Ministry claimed that Ukraine hadn't abided by its own ceasefire, saying that air



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defenses shot down 53 Ukrainian drones over Russian regions, the illegally annexed Crimean Peninsula and the Black Sea between Tuesday evening and dawn Wednesday.

Five people were killed by a Ukrainian drone strike on the city of Dzhankoi in Crimea, according to Russia-installed Gov. Sergei Aksyonov. He reported the casualties just after midnight, but posted about the attack itself more than 90 minutes earlier.

There had been no official sign from Moscow that it would heed Kyiv's ceasefire, and there was little hope for a pause in hostilities as the war stretches into its fifth year following Russia's all-out invasion of its neighbor. U.S.-led diplomatic efforts to stop the war over the past year have come to nothing.

On Tuesday, Russian drone and missile strikes on Ukraine killed 27 people and wounded 120 others, all of them civilians, according to Ukrainian Interior Minister Ihor Klymenko. On Wednesday, two Russian drones hit a kindergarten in the downtown area of Sumy city in northeastern Ukraine, killing a security guard and wounding two others, officials said. No children were there at the time.

Russian attacks since last Friday have killed at least 70 civilians and wounded more than 500, the U.N. Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine said Wednesday, as the strikes hit 14 regions.

"What is particularly alarming is both the scale of civilian casualties and the extent of territory affected in only a few days," said Danielle Bell, the mission's head.

The war has killed more than 15,000 civilians, according to the United Nations.

Despite Kyiv's open-ended suspension of hostilities, Russia has continued shelling, with aerial strikes using drones and powerful glide bombs, and has attempted to break through Ukrainian defenses on the front line, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Wednesday on X.

"Russia's choice is an obvious spurning of a ceasefire and of saving lives," Zelenskyy said.

"Russia must end the war it is currently waging," he said, urging Moscow to call off its invasion. "The Russian side has our diplomatic proposals, and the only thing needed is Russia's willingness to move toward real peace."

Both sides have kept up long-range strike campaigns. On the roughly 1,250-kilometer (800-mile) front line, meanwhile, Russia's bigger army remains engaged in a slow-moving and costly slog against Ukraine's drone-heavy defenses.

Zelenskyy had announced the unilateral ceasefire after Russia said it would hold its own pause of hostilities on Friday and Saturday while it marks the 81st anniversary of the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II. The Ukrainian leader said any breach of the ceasefire would trigger a military response.

European officials had welcomed Ukraine's unilateral move as a goodwill gesture illustrating its readiness for a peace settlement.

Russian forces launched 108 drones and three missiles overnight, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha said, with attacks continuing throughout the night and into Wednesday morning.

"Moscow once again ignored a realistic and fair call to end hostilities, supported by other states and international organizations," Sybiha said in a post on X.

Moscow's proposal to stop fighting later this week follows a pattern of Russia declaring short unilateral ceasefires during the war timed to coincide with various holidays, most recently Orthodox Easter.

Those suspensions of combat don't produce any tangible results amid deep mistrust between the warring sides.

Sybiha said Russia's actions exposed its calls for a separate ceasefire around May 9 as insincere. "Putin only cares about military parades, not human lives," he said.

The diplomat called for increased international pressure on Moscow, including new sanctions, diplomatic isolation, accountability measures for war crimes and expanded military and civilian support for Ukraine.

## Georgia officials knew chemicals from carpet mills were polluting local water. The people did not

By DYLAN JACKSON/THE ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION, JASON DEAREN/AP and JUSTIN PRICE/THE ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION The Atlanta Journal-Constitution and Associated Press

CALHOUN, Ga. (AP) — Growing up in northwest Georgia, Stormy Bost lived her life in the water. During summers she plucked crawdads from the neighborhood creek and played in its cool depths, racing home for dinner to beat the setting sun.

Waiting for her were pitchers of sweet tea, which her family brewed using tap water.

"Your family's going through a gallon every day or two, and it's cheap," Bost said. "But it comes from the faucet."

As a parent, Bost made sweet tea the same way for her own children — until a few years ago when she learned the local tap water contained toxic chemicals called PFAS.

Bost and her husband are raising two daughters in Calhoun, the same small river town dominated by the region's multibillion-dollar carpet industry where she was reared. For decades, textile mills relied on PFAS in popular brands like Stainmaster and Scotchgard for stain resistance. Some of the chemicals that didn't stick on carpets were flushed with the industry's wastewater into local sewer pipes and, eventually, the region's rivers.

The same odorless, colorless chemicals in tap water here have accumulated in Bost's body, blood tests show. Her PFAS levels are higher than national health guidelines consider safe and, at 34, she has been diagnosed with liver and thyroid conditions — the types of ailments that research has linked to PFAS.

Bost is not alone. Everyone in the region seems to know someone whose health problems, including certain types of cancer, could be caused by PFAS, which are commonly known as forever chemicals because they persist in people and take decades or more to break down in the environment.

This crisis was predictable. For more than two decades, scientists have warned of the risks to humans and animals posed by the kinds of chemicals spreading out of the mills.

Even without federal limits on chemicals like PFAS, states have the authority to protect public health and the environment. Instead, Georgia's Environmental Protection Division did little to confront the problem, issuing neither fish advisories nor do-not-drink orders to the public even as concerns grew among scientists and federal regulators about the dangers of PFAS, an investigation by The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, The Associated Press and FRONTLINE (PBS) has found.

Testing by the University of Georgia that alerted the industry and state in 2008, when Bost was in her teens, showed the local Conasauga River that supplies the region's drinking water was polluted. That same year, the state's environmental director told carpet manufacturers the agency would not take action on the chemicals.

The state's own testing, which did not occur until 2012 and 2016, when Bost was a young mother, confirmed the university's results. In 2019, as her daughters turned 8 and 9, federal tests still detected PFAS.

Along the way, Georgia's EPD deflected efforts by neighboring Alabama and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to track the chemicals more closely, even as PFAS migrated more than 100 miles (160 kilometers) downriver and across the state line, according to detailed court records and interviews with former regulators.

Today, Georgia is still not regulating PFAS, in contrast to other states that have invested tens of millions of dollars in cleanups and sued polluters to recoup costs.

Georgia environmental officials gave several reasons for their approach. In an interview, EPD Deputy Director Anna Truszczynski said her agency looked to federal regulators for guidance and waited for scientists to better understand the risks of PFAS. She said EPD helped several cities struggling with contamination by providing testing support, connecting them to potential funding sources and advising them on possible filtration technologies.

"We believe that there can be a good balance between environment and economy," Truszczynski said. "We don't have to sacrifice one for the other."

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The agency is also considering rules limiting the amount of certain PFAS in public drinking water, following federal standards set to take effect in several years. The federal rules would place drinking water safety limits on two of the forever chemicals once relied on by the carpet industry.

PFAS is a catchall term for thousands of related lab-made compounds more formally known as perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances. The carpet industry used the chemicals for decades for stain resistance, even after learning, starting in the late 1990s, that they carried health risks as they spread and persisted in the environment.

Although officials with major carpet manufacturers say they stopped using PFAS in 2019, without extensive cleanup the chemicals will remain in the region's water and soil for generations.

No one has taken responsibility to date. The country's two largest carpet companies, Shaw Industries and Mohawk Industries Inc., both based in the region, blame their chemical suppliers, which they said for years hid the dangers of PFAS in their products. The carpet companies said they followed regulators' guidance and pointed out that there are still no enforceable limits on the chemicals. Neither Shaw nor Mohawk had further comment for this story.

In court filings, chemical suppliers 3M and DuPont said it was ultimately the carpet industry, not them, that put PFAS in the water of northwest Georgia. Neither 3M nor DuPont responded to requests seeking comment for this story.

At EPA, a spokesperson said the federal agency is working to offer technical and financial support in the region.

"EPA's focus today is forward-looking: working with Georgia, Alabama, affected communities, and water systems to identify PFAS contamination, reduce exposure, and hold polluters accountable where the law supports it," agency spokesperson Jake Murphy wrote in an email.

While tracing the cause of Bost's thyroid and liver conditions is difficult, what she and her doctor know is that the drinking water and the river contained PFAS.

"There's a lot of us and we're sick," Bost said. "We don't know what's next."

Red alert in Alabama

When PFAS started showing up in Alabama's drinking water in 2016, local water utility officials looked to Georgia for answers.

Eastern Alabama and northwest Georgia share a river system that originates in the Blue Ridge Mountains and flows through both states on the way to Mobile Bay. This watershed feeds the region's carpet mills, which use vast amounts of water, especially in the dyeing process. It is also the source of drinking water for utilities downriver that serve hundreds of thousands of people.

After tests showed PFAS in water at levels exceeding EPA's voluntary health guidelines at the time, Alabama's environmental regulators alerted their federal counterparts and asked Georgia's EPD for help identifying the source.

Georgia had known for years that the waters flowing from Dalton, the hub of the state's dominant carpet industry, contained high levels of PFAS, including versions that research showed were linked to some types of cancer.

Despite Alabama's urgent request, Georgia's environmental regulators did not respond in kind, according to interviews and internal government records obtained through the Freedom of Information Act.

At the time, "EPD was very defensive," said Jim Giattina, former director of EPA's Water Protection Division who organized a call between the two states to coordinate. "There was certainly no commitment on their part to do any more monitoring."

After the call EPA initiated with the two states, Alabama sent letters to Georgia in 2017 and 2018 requesting data. In one research brief, Alabama officials noted that Georgia's environmental regulators did not require industrial users to monitor for PFAS.

EPD's Truszczynski, who joined the agency in 2016, said she found no record of Georgia's response to Alabama.

"We're always very happy to work with our friends in Alabama," she said.

Alabama's Department of Environmental Management did not respond to multiple requests for an in-



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terview or comment.

For years, testing in Georgia by industry, academics and government showed the chemicals continued flowing toward Alabama.

In 2008, the University of Georgia study found “staggeringly high” levels of PFAS in the water downriver from Dalton-area carpet mills. By that time, an EPA panel had determined the type of stain-resistant chemicals used by carpet manufacturers were likely carcinogenic. Georgia’s environmental regulators, concerned the levels in the river were much higher than what early research considered safe, funded a subsequent UGA study that found the chemicals in the river’s fish, state records show.

Absent guidelines from the federal government, EPD did not make any recommendations or issue advisories, the agency said.

Environmental groups wrote a letter imploring EPA leaders and then-EPD Director Carol Couch to regulate PFAS more aggressively. They noted state regulators elsewhere had begun to act.

“The residents of Georgia deserve no less protection than what has been afforded to residents in other states,” the coalition of 21 organizations wrote in March 2008.

Months later, Couch met privately with carpet company representatives and their trade association, the Carpet and Rug Institute, according to records of testimony given during lawsuits against the companies.

Werner Braun, then the carpet institute’s director, later informed his board about the meeting with Couch, noting EPD “has no plans to initiate regulatory action” on PFAS, according to two court deposition transcripts. Braun told his board that Couch also indicated EPD “would probably look at the issue again in five years.” Braun noted the subject of drinking water never came up, according to one of the depositions.

The meeting with Couch went so well that one carpet executive thanked the attendees for “gaining this good outcome,” according to the transcripts.

In response to a request for comment, Couch wrote in a text message that PFAS were only an “emerging concern” at the time and that EPA had not established drinking water standards. EPA’s first guidance about PFAS levels came in 2009.

“To the Carpet and Rug Institute I offered no respite from state regulation of PFAS,” Couch wrote to the AJC and AP. She added that the five-year time frame was typical for new water rules and that, in 2008, EPD “had neither the sufficient science, expertise nor resources to undertake action independent of USEPA.”

A representative for the carpet institute declined to comment. Braun did not respond to a request to comment for this story.

It would be another four years until EPD tested the Conasauga River.

‘Smoking gun’

During the nearly two decades since that meeting with carpet executives in 2008, Georgia regulators intermittently tested the waters south of Dalton, confirming time and again the extensive contamination.

Despite these results, and the discovery of PFAS in the drinking water of several northwest Georgia towns, EPD did not post this data on its website until 2020.

By that time, EPD testing had found PFAS in Calhoun’s drinking water — the same water that Bost, her husband and two daughters relied on. When EPA in 2022 issued stricter guidelines for the amount of PFAS in drinking water it considered safe, the city of about 20,000 was several times above this new limit.

The local riverkeeper, Jesse Demonbreun-Chapman, took action.

On a cold, drizzly December day in 2022, Demonbreun-Chapman idled his boat on the Coosawattee River, a waterway that feeds into the Conasauga near Calhoun.

The rain made conditions ideal to test for PFAS pollution flowing into the river, a task riverkeepers have taken on elsewhere. He watched as ribbons of water ran off the riverbank from a local farm.

Demonbreun-Chapman suspected the massive farm was contaminated by PFAS-laden sludge used as fertilizer. The sludge, also known as biosolids, was made from wastewater sent to the local utility and spread on land throughout the area.

Downstream from the farm is the spot where Calhoun’s municipal water system draws river water to treat and eventually deliver to the taps of thousands of customers.

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The test results alarmed Demonbreun-Chapman. The water running off the farm tested thousands of times higher than federal drinking water standards for forever chemicals. The city had no effective system to remove PFAS when treating it for the tap. The riverkeeper believed he had found a major source of contamination.

"That was the smoking gun," Demonbreun-Chapman said.

The samples collected that rainy day became key to a lawsuit his organization, the Coosa River Basin Initiative, filed along with the Southern Environmental Law Center against Calhoun more than a year later.

The complaint alleged stain-resistant chemicals used by carpet mills in Calhoun had contaminated the sludge, which in turn polluted the water.

In a victory for environmental groups, Calhoun settled the case in 2024 and agreed to filter its water for PFAS, stop spreading sludge, test private drinking wells and keep the community informed of risk. The city did not admit liability.

EPD requires none of these actions. Years of static budgets, staffing turnover, a culture of industry deference and a sluggish response by federal regulators have left the agency unprepared to address a contamination crisis of this size and scope, said Demonbreun-Chapman and others.

"Nobody else was coming," he said.

EPD has a broad mandate, tasked with issuing permits, conducting inspections and providing emergency response to hazardous spills. The agency's \$128 million budget comes from fees as well as state and federal funds. EPD is overseen by the Board of Natural Resources, whose members are appointed by the governor. A spokesperson for Gov. Brian Kemp said in a statement that PFAS contamination is a problem facing states across the U.S.

"Addressing this issue has been a top priority for the state and EPD for several years," said Kemp spokesperson Andrew Isenhour.

In 2022, then-EPD Director Richard Dunn told state lawmakers the agency sees so many annual departures that it turns over its entire staff every five or six years. Most leave to take other positions with EPA or in the private sector, often for higher pay, he said.

"Having a lot of institutional knowledge is critical," Dunn said, adding: "Having a turnover rate that high is almost an existential challenge for us."

Truszczynski, EPD's deputy director, said in an interview that the agency is adequately funded and has made strides over the past few years in keeping staff. She added that the agency took action to address Calhoun's PFAS contamination, contacting city officials in 2022 and putting the city on a drinking water monitoring plan.

"My perspective is that EPD is really directly involved," she said.

Georgia defiant

In the vacuum left by the state, questions about who is responsible and who should pay for cleanup are being hashed out in the courts as cities and counties face hundreds of millions of dollars in costs to filter drinking water.

In 2016, the Alabama cities of Gadsden and Centre sued Mohawk, Shaw, 3M, DuPont and others to fund advanced filtration systems, ultimately settling for an undisclosed sum and no admission of wrongdoing by the companies.

Other cities in Alabama and northwest Georgia have followed. Rome prevailed in its own lawsuit, filed in 2019, and is using the funds to build a \$100 million water treatment plant. Calhoun, following its settlement with the Southern Environmental Law Center and Demonbreun-Chapman's group, turned around and sued carpet manufacturers and their chemical suppliers in 2024, as did Dalton.

"It remains our goal to hold those that contaminated our water supply with PFAS responsible for all past, present, and future costs associated with removing their PFAS contamination from our drinking water," Calhoun Water and Wastewater Director Erik Henson wrote in an email.

Shaw and Mohawk in court papers and in statements to the AJC and AP said they are not to blame. They point the finger at chemical companies, who they say assured them their products were safe. The

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carpet giants say they followed state and federal regulations.

EPD said in a statement that it is tracking the litigation in northwest Georgia. The wave of lawsuits has expanded in recent years as dozens of residents and farmers allege PFAS contamination has devalued their properties and put their health and livelihoods at risk.

"People don't want to put their health on the line and wait for the state to catch up," said April Lipscomb, an attorney for the Southern Environmental Law Center.

Some northwest Georgia lawmakers have sought to counter these lawsuits by introducing state legislation that would restrict the ability of cities and residents to sue carpet companies.

The bills drew bipartisan condemnation when they were introduced earlier this year, as PFAS emerged as a key issue in elections locally, including the contest to replace former U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene. Increased attention on PFAS came after a recent AJC/AP/FRONTLINE (PBS) investigation detailed how carpet companies continued to use forever chemicals for years, despite growing concerns about the health risks.

Residents protested in February at the Dalton restaurant of Republican Rep. Kasey Carpenter, who sponsored a bill to shield carpet companies from legal liability. Carpenter has said chemical manufacturers, not carpet manufacturers, are to blame. His legislation didn't pass.

A few weeks later, locals trekked to the Capitol for a hearing on a bill co-sponsored by state Sen. Chuck Payne, another Dalton Republican, that would have given authority to EPD and Georgia's attorney general to handle PFAS lawsuits brought by local government.

Backers said the approach would create a more coordinated response. Critics said it would slow drinking water improvements by shifting litigation to an agency that does not have the resources to handle the cases. That bill also failed. Payne did not respond to a request for comment.

In March, convention halls in Rome and Dalton erupted in applause as speakers, including environmental activist Erin Brockovich, cast the legislative efforts as a dire threat to accountability. The pair of town hall meetings hosted by law firms operating under the name PFAS Georgia turned out nearly 1,000 people and served as an informal campaign stop for about a dozen political candidates — a nod to the grassroots outrage over the topic.

"You need to rise up," Brockovich told one crowd. "That's the only way this is going to work, and it's the only way it has ever worked."

Other states are taking a more aggressive approach to PFAS.

Wisconsin, Michigan and Maine each have committed millions of dollars for cleanup, started robust testing programs and sued to hold polluters and manufacturers accountable. Throughout the U.S., PFAS have been manufactured and used in a variety of products, including nonstick cookware, waterproof sunscreen, firefighting foam, dental floss and microwave popcorn bags.

A bipartisan group of Wisconsin lawmakers earlier this year approved \$133 million for PFAS cleanup. That vote capped a long journey for Jill Billings, a Democratic state assembly member. In 2019, a town in her district discovered its drinking water was contaminated. Residents have been drinking bottled water provided by the state since 2021.

Billings said state-led action becomes more important as the federal government retreats from environmental regulations, including on PFAS. While EPA has still not put enforceable limits on forever chemicals, the agency's proposed limits include the two that carpet manufacturers used most. Those limits are set to go into effect in 2031.

"I think it's up to us to solve the problems of regular folks because the federal government seems to be struggling," Billings said in an interview. "That's fine. We're ready."

'I was screwed'

Today, even though northwest Georgia's major carpet manufacturers said they stopped using PFAS in their U.S. production several years ago, the Conasauga River south of Dalton is still being polluted.

The major source is a 9,600-acre (3,900-hectare) tract latticed by a tangle of pipes and sprinklers along the river. Each year, this "land application system" operated at Loopers Bend by the local water agency, Dalton Utilities, sprays the soil with billions of gallons of treated wastewater, most of it from the carpet

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industry.

The concept — much celebrated during the development of Loopers Bend in the 1980s, before PFAS were widely known — was that the soil and vegetation would filter out pollutants before they reached the Conasauga.

Yet design flaws led to consistent leaks and broken pipes, state and federal regulatory records show. Dead fish bobbed on the river's surface as wastewater ran off directly into the Conasauga. Scott Gordon, chief of water enforcement for EPA's regional office at the time, toured the site in 2000 and said he was shocked by how the industrial water found its path into the river, sometimes through gullies cut by the flow.

The utility said it redesigned its wastewater treatment program years ago and has remained compliant and transparent with regulators.

EPA inspectors in 2001 pushed to bring the site under the permitting system of the federal Clean Water Act.

That permit, administered by the state in partnership with EPA, would require Dalton Utilities to report pollution levels and chemical discharges to regulators. It would have also empowered citizens to sue in federal court if the utility or the government didn't comply with environmental laws.

"That ability for citizens to take matters into their own hands is an extremely powerful tool," said Gordon, who led EPA negotiations with Georgia.

Congress wrote the Clean Water Act to delegate to states a powerful role in the federal permit process, giving Georgia's regulators the final say at sites like Loopers Bend. The agreement was in its last stages when EPD's lawyers sent it back to EPA and asked for a few tweaks, Gordon said. One change to the wording required Dalton Utilities merely to submit the application, rather than to obtain a permit, as EPA had urged.

Gordon did not catch the significance of the change and signed off on it, he said in a recent interview.

Seemingly a bureaucratic detail, the new language sidelined EPA.

Days after Gordon approved the changes in 2001, EPD rejected the application, saying Dalton Utilities didn't require EPA oversight.

"I was screwed in my federal career twice by state agencies. This is one of them," Gordon remembered.

In a statement, Georgia's EPD said PFAS were not regulated in 2001 and neither a federal nor state permit would have included limits on the chemicals.

Today, under EPD oversight, PFAS levels at Loopers Bend remain largely unmonitored.

"They remained in the complete shadows," said Gordon, referring to Dalton Utilities and the carpet industry. "And, honestly, they still are."

## Man charged in US with stealing \$450 million from Mexican billionaire in loan scheme

By DAVE COLLINS Associated Press

A man with multiple aliases used the name of the famed Astor family to dupe a Mexican billionaire out of around \$450 million in a bogus stock-backed loan scheme, according to a newly unsealed U.S. indictment and other court records.

Vladimir Sklarov, 63, also known as Gregory Mitchell and Mark Simon Bentley, set up a sham company, Astor Asset Group, that purported to be a legitimate and experienced loan provider that was connected to the Astors, federal prosecutors said. The storied New York family included John Jacob Astor, one of the wealthiest men in America in the mid-19th century.

Although the indictment unsealed on Monday does not name the victim, court records in litigation in England show it was Ricardo Salinas Pliego, the Mexican TV, retail and banking magnate. Salinas also confirmed he was ripped off by Astor Asset Group in an interview with The Wall Street Journal last year.

"I feel like an absolute idiot. How could I fall for this?" Salinas Pliego told the newspaper.

Sklarov was arrested in Chicago on Saturday on the indictment by a federal grand jury in New York



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City, prosecutors said. A detention hearing is scheduled for Friday in federal court in Chicago, according to court records.

A public defender representing Sklarov in Chicago did not immediately return phone and email messages Tuesday.

"As alleged, Vladimir Sklarov represented his company to be affiliated with, and have the financial backing of the famed New York Astor family in order to burnish his brand," Jay Clayton, U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York, said in a statement. "That was a complete lie. Sklarov used false prestige to gain control of hundreds of millions of dollars in stock and then liquidated those shares for his own benefit."

In 2021, Salinas was seeking a \$100 million loan that he intended to secure with shares of a company he owned, according to the indictment. Sklarov — using the name Gregory Mitchell and claiming he was "managing director" of Astor — and other, unnamed co-conspirators convinced Salinas that Astor was willing and able to provide the loan, prosecutors said. The other conspirators included a man who also used an alias, Thomas Mellon, whose last name is also that of a prominent and wealthy American family.

Sklarov and other conspirators told Salinas that Astor was originally established from the wealth of John Jacob Astor and that the company had high-profile clients including universities and investment funds, prosecutors said.

Under a deal signed around July 2021, Sklarov agreed to lend Salinas at least \$115 million, claiming the money would come from the Astor family, the indictment says. Salinas secured the loan with company shares worth at least \$450 million that were supposed to be held but not sold.

Sklarov then sold the company shares, used some of the proceeds to fund the loan to Salinas and kept the remaining hundreds of millions of dollars for himself and other conspirators, federal prosecutors said.

It wasn't until July 2024 that Salinas learned the company shares had been liquidated, the indictment says. A day later, Salinas received a letter from Astor falsely claiming that Salinas had defaulted on the loan, according to the document. A month earlier, Astor wrongly informed Salinas that it had the right to sell the shares, prosecutors said.

Authorities listed Sklarov's hometown as Athens, Greece. The Wall Street Journal reported that Sklarov is a Ukrainian-born American who had been convicted of fraud in the past.

## Today in History: May 7

### RMS Lusitania torpedoed, sunk by German submarine

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, May 7, the 127th day of 2026. There are 238 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On May 7, 1915, a German U-boat torpedoed and sank the British liner RMS Lusitania off the southern coast of Ireland, killing 1,198 people, including 128 Americans, out of the nearly 2,000 on board.

Also on this date:

In 1945, Nazi Germany signed an unconditional surrender at Allied headquarters in Rheims, France, ending its role in World War II.

In 1954, the 55-day Battle of Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam ended with Vietnamese insurgents overrunning French forces; it would be the last major battle of the First Indochina War.

In 1975, President Gerald R. Ford formally declared an end to the "Vietnam era." In Ho Chi Minh City — formerly Saigon — the Viet Cong celebrated its takeover.

In 1977, Seattle Slew won the Kentucky Derby, the first of his Triple Crown victories.

In 1984, Monsanto and six other chemical companies agreed to pay a \$180 million settlement to Vietnam veterans who were exposed to the chemical herbicide Agent Orange during the Vietnam War.

In 2020, Georgia authorities arrested a white father and son and charged them with murder in the February shooting death of Ahmaud Arbery, a Black man they pursued in a truck after spotting him running in their neighborhood near the port city of Brunswick. (The two men and a third white man would be

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convicted of murder in state court and hate crimes in federal court.)

In 2025, cardinal electors began a conclave at the Sistine Chapel in Rome to choose a successor to Pope Francis, who died on April 21 at age 88. Over a two-day gathering, they choose Cardinal Robert Prevost as the first U.S.-born pontiff and he took the name Leo XIV.

Today's Birthdays: Rock musician Bill Kreutzmann (Grateful Dead) is 80. Actor/former boxer Randall "Tex" Cobb is 76. Actor Breckin Meyer is 52. Reggaeton musician J Balvin is 41. Actor-comedian Aidy Bryant is 39. Actor-writer Maya Erskine is 39. Actor Alexander Ludwig is 34. YouTube personality MrBeast (Jimmy Donaldson) is 28. Actor Elijah Nelson is 27. Boxer Tommy Fury is 27. Actor and model Jake Bongiovi is 24. Actor Julia Antonelli is 23.