

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Thursday, May 14

NEC Track Meet at Milbank, 2 p.m.  
Fifth grade GBB, 4 p.m., elementary gym  
Middle School Track Meet at Warner, 4 p.m.  
Pickleball, 6 p.m., elementary gym  
Groton Lions Club meeting, 6 p.m., 104 N Main

## Friday, May 15

## Saturday, May 16

Pickleball, 9:30 a.m., elementary gym  
Graduation, 2 p.m., Arena

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

## Sunday, May 17

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Worship with communion at St. John's, 9 a.m., at Zion, 11 a.m.  
United Methodist: Worship at Conde, 8:15 a.m.; at Groton, 9:30 a.m.; at Britton, 11:15 a.m.; Groton Sunday School, 9:30 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 10:30 a.m.  
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m.; SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.  
First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.  
Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship, 10:30 a.m.  
Sign up for swimming lessons at the pool, 4:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.  
North Super Region High School Baseball Tournament

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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.**

## World's First Dentist

The earliest known dental procedure dates back 59,000 years and was conducted by a Neanderthal, a new study reveals.

Archaeologists discovered the molar in a Siberian cave. A deep hole suggests a sharp tool, possibly a toothpick made of local jasper, was used for the beginnings of a root canal. The process would have taken between 35 and 50 minutes, according to researchers, who conducted similar procedures on three modern human teeth. Wear patterns indicate the Neanderthal was able to continue eating with the tooth following the procedure.

The discovery marks the first such procedure by any species other than Homo sapiens. It also challenges prior understandings of Neanderthals' cognitive abilities, showing they could identify a source of pain as well as determine—and administer—proper medical treatment, which would require physical dexterity.

## Locked in the Senate

The Philippines' Senate was in lockdown yesterday after gunfire was heard in the building. It was not immediately clear who fired the shots, and there were no known casualties or arrests as of this writing.

The incident comes as Philippine Sen. Ronald dela Rosa has been holed up in the building since Monday to evade an arrest warrant from the International Criminal Court. Dela Rosa served as police chief during the early years of the country's War on Drugs, which has killed thousands of people. Today, hundreds continue to die annually of drug-related violence.

Former President Rodrigo Duterte has been in The Hague since last year on charges of crimes against humanity. While the current Marcos administration broke with Duterte, national government agents have limited authority in the Senate's chambers.

## Murdaugh Murders Mess Up

South Carolina's Supreme Court yesterday overturned the murder convictions of Alex Murdaugh, a prominent lawyer accused of killing his wife and youngest son in 2021. The court ruled jurors were influenced by comments made during the trial by a court clerk writing a book about the case.

Prosecutors plan to retry Murdaugh, who remains in prison on separate, decades-long sentences after admitting he stole roughly \$12M from clients. They allege the killings were an attempt to divert attention from his financial crimes, which he feared would be exposed in a lawsuit tied to a fatal boat crash involving his 22-year-old son, Paul. Murdaugh maintains his innocence in his son's and wife's deaths.

Disgraced county clerk Becky Hill pleaded guilty to perjury, obstruction of justice, and misconduct last year. Her book has also been pulled from shelves over plagiarism allegations.

## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

PGA Championship begins today at Pennsylvania's Aronimink Golf Club; explore the course hole by hole. The US waives visa bonds for visitors from qualified countries who bought tickets for the World Cup; bonds can cost up to \$15K.

"Big Bang Theory" 10-episode spinoff trailer releases ahead of July 23 premiere (More, w/trailer) | Conan O'Brien is tapped to host the Oscars for a third consecutive year.

Drug addiction counselor who sold "Friends" star Matthew Perry 51 vials of liquid ketamine, including the dose that killed him, is sentenced to two years in prison.

"Revenge of the Nerds" star Donald Gibb dies at age 71.



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## Science & Technology

Wearable polygraph detects underlying stress by measuring heart activity, breathing patterns, blood flow, and more; could help clinicians care for nonverbal patients and monitor mental health over time.

Some living people carry a protein variant discovered in the teeth of the first human species to evolve a humanlike body and gait, *Homo erectus*.

Researchers rapidly rearrange tens of thousands of atoms in a material at room temperature, opening the door to faster innovation in areas like quantum computing .

## Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 +0.6%, Dow -0.1%, Nasdaq +1.2%).

US producer price index, a key inflation metric tracking wholesale product prices, rises 6% year-over-year in April; marks biggest gain since December 2022.

Kevin Warsh confirmed as Federal Reserve chair to succeed Jerome Powell, whose term ends tomorrow.

US average 30-year fixed mortgage rate rises to 6.46%, the highest level in five weeks.

Home sellers stuck without offers are asking Reddit to roast their listings, hoping strangers can spot what they can't.

## Politics & World Affairs

President Donald Trump arrives in Beijing for meetings with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Kouri Richins, Utah woman who wrote a children's book on grief after the death of her husband, is sentenced to life in prison without parole for his murder.

The book has an average of 1.7 stars on Goodreads, as of this writing.

Senate unanimously advances resolution to suspend their own pay in government shutdowns.



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## Tigers Sweep Miller in JV, Varsity Baseball Action

The Groton Area Tigers picked up a pair of baseball victories over the Miller Outlaws on Wednesday at Locke-Karst Field in Groton, with the junior varsity squad cruising to a 7-1 victory before the varsity team earned a dramatic 4-3 walk-off win.

In the JV contest, Groton Area jumped out quickly with two runs in the opening inning after a wild pitch plated both runs. The Tigers added another run in the second inning after a Miller error and pushed their lead to 4-0 in the third when Sam Crank delivered an RBI single to left field.

Groton continued to build its advantage throughout the game while limiting the Outlaws offensively. Tucker Leicht earned the win on the mound, allowing just two hits and one run over three innings while striking out six and walking one. Asher Zimmerman was dominant in relief, tossing two scoreless innings with three strikeouts and no hits allowed.

John Bisbee paced the Tigers offensively with three RBIs, while Kolton Antonsen, Bisbee, Lincoln Shilhanek, and Crank each collected hits. Groton showed patience at the plate with seven walks and aggressive base running with five stolen bases, including two from Wesley Borg.

Defensively, the Tigers played a clean game without committing an error. Bisbee led the defense with nine chances in the field.

In the varsity matchup, Groton Area needed late-game heroics to edge the Outlaws 4-3.

The Tigers struck first in the bottom of the opening inning when Jordan Schwan singled to score a run. Miller answered in the second inning with Groton committing an error that allowed the Outlaws to tie the game at 1-1.

Miller grabbed a 3-1 lead in the third inning behind RBI doubles from Eddie Fritzsche and Tate Bray.

Groton chipped away and tied the game in the fifth inning when Lincoln Krause lined a single down the right field line to bring home a pair of runs.

The game remained tied entering the bottom of the seventh inning before Schwan delivered the game-winning hit, singling to score the winning run and give the Tigers the walk-off victory.

Case Reints earned the win in relief for Groton Area, allowing just one hit over four and one-third shut-out innings while striking out six. Kason Oswald started for the Tigers and struck out five over two and two-thirds innings.

Groton finished with nine hits in the game. Krause, Karsten Fliehs, and Schwan each had two hits, while Krause and Schwan both drove in two runs. Krause also stole two bases as the Tigers swiped four bases overall.

Miller was led offensively by Chase Hurd, who went 2-for-4 at the plate, while Bray and Fritzsche each drove in a run for the Outlaws.



## Next steps for facilities master plan discussed, handful of personnel items approved at Groton School Board meeting

by Elizabeth Varin

Members of the Groton Area School District Board on Tuesday morning continued discussions on the district's long-range facilities master plan, weighing possible paths forward for addressing future building and infrastructure needs.

Since October, district officials have been working with Co-Op Architects to examine the use and condition of the district's current facilities and create a plan moving forward.

The overall master plan presented to the board in April includes three phases

The first phase would include building a two-story addition east of the middle/high school office that includes core academic classrooms. A section on the southern side of the high school known as the 1934 addition would then be demolished.

Phase 2 would include restructuring the southern parking lot, the addition of a commons area/cafeteria east of the old gym and a wing on the southern portion of the building for agriculture/FACS classrooms.

Phase 3 includes renovations of the old gym, CTE shop space, tech and science classrooms, a science lab and music/choir room renovations. A re-roofing item is also included in phase 3.

During Tuesday's meeting, Superintendent Joe Schwan told the board they would now have to decide how they want to move forward. The three phases are estimated to cost \$27 million, and, if the board wants to move forward with something, that price tag would not be able to be covered out of the capital outlay fund.

The board discussed financing options, including bringing a bond issue before voters and combining a bond with capital outlay certificates.

Board member Tigh Fliehs, who sits on the Buildings, Grounds and Transportation Committee for the district, expressed hesitation about strapping down the capital outlay fund with a project like this.

The district's capital outlay is used for expenses like text books, technology equipment and facility maintenance. However, since a 2016 state aid calculation change, the district had supplemented the general fund by transferring money from the capital outlay fund into the general fund for operational expenses. That changed after the district proposed and voters approved an opt-out of tax levy limitations in 2024, allowing the district to impose the excess tax – a maximum of \$1.25 million per year.

If capital outlay certificates were included in the funding proposal, Superintendent Schwan said it could bring the district back to a situation where a good amount of capital outlay funds would have to go toward repaying those certificates.

Board members expressed agreement that the construction will have to get done eventually.

"I think it would be ideal to get going because nothing gets cheaper," said Board Vice President Nick Strom. "If we pass it (a bond), it's still going to be a process to get it done."

Board members asked about timelines to put a bond measure up for vote. However, no formal action was taken.

Schwan told the board he would get in touch with Co-Op Architects to determine the next steps, look into the timeline for public meetings and bring more information back about capital outlay certificates vs. a bond.

In other business, the board reviewed a preliminary budget for the upcoming fiscal year and approved several personnel items.

The board approved two retirements – paraprofessional Barb Hoops and high school social studies teacher Scott Thorson – effective at the end of the school year. The board also approved middle school math teacher Eric Swenson's resignation, though soon after they approved hiring him as the new high school industrial technology teacher for the 2026-2027 school year.

The board also approved hiring Jordan Carson as head football coach for the 2026-2027 school year. The position opened up in April when Shaun Wanner submitted his resignation as head football coach, though he will still be a social science teacher at the high school.

The board also approved hiring Shane Macomber as a maintenance team member effective April 29, as

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well as hiring Landon Brown as a summer OST worker.

The board accepted the resignation of Lance Hawkins as junior high football coach pending being able to find a suitable replacement. That does not include Hawkins other role at the school, middle school math/science teacher.

The board also approved summer employment agreements for maintenance help, Connect 4Ed Summer School and Special Education Extended School Year.

Business Manager Becky Hubsch presented an overview of the preliminary 2027 fiscal year district budget. A larger presentation is expected at the district's June meeting.



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### Summit describes new carbon pipeline route as not including South Dakota

**BY: JOSHUA HAIAR AND SETH TUPPER**

The Iowa company attempting to build a multi-billion-dollar pipeline to capture and bury carbon dioxide from ethanol plants described a new route Wednesday that does not include South Dakota.

The language came in a press release about Summit Carbon Solutions' plan to adjust its route in Iowa. "The project will travel west through Nebraska to advance a dedicated sequestration solution in Wyoming as the core of the system," the press release said.

Previously, the company planned to collect carbon dioxide from ethanol plants in Iowa, Nebraska, Minnesota, South Dakota and North Dakota, and transport it via pipeline for underground sequestration in North Dakota.

But the project met fierce resistance in South Dakota, where affected landowners led a property rights revolt that culminated last year in a law banning the use of eminent domain for carbon pipelines. Eminent domain is a legal process for large public-use projects to gain land access when landowners are unwilling to grant it.

A prominent opponent of the project, landowner Jared Bossly, of rural Aberdeen, said he suspects ethanol plants in South Dakota still want the pipeline, and Summit still wants to include South Dakota.

"You know it's not the end," Bossly said.

A spokesperson for Summit issued a statement later Wednesday in response to questions from the North Dakota Monitor.

"North Dakota, South Dakota, and Minnesota remain important for our company," the statement said. "While we are currently prioritizing a westward route through Nebraska to Wyoming, our permitted pipeline and sequestration assets in North Dakota, our South Dakota partners and easements, along with our Minnesota permit, provide valuable optionality for future phases. We remain committed to building systems that support economic growth and long-term U.S. energy production."

The project was proposed to capitalize on federal tax credits incentivizing the prevention of heat-trapping emissions into the atmosphere. Summit has lately signaled that some of its carbon dioxide could be pumped into oil wells to force more oil to the surface, in a process known as enhanced oil recovery. Summit's Wednesday press release said the company is "continuing to evaluate complementary CO2 utilization opportunities, including enhanced oil recovery where appropriate."

The company's proposed reroute in Iowa will result in fewer miles of land, and fewer landowners, being affected by the project, Summit indicated in a regulatory filing.

*The North Dakota Monitor's Jeff Beach contributed to this report.*

*Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.*



## South Dakota judge stepping down to pursue state attorney general nomination

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR

A state circuit court judge is stepping down to pursue the Republican nomination for South Dakota attorney general.

John Fitzgerald announced his candidacy Tuesday. Current Attorney General Marty Jackley is running for the U.S. House of Representatives, which is an open seat because South Dakota's current U.S. representative, Dusty Johnson, is running for governor.

Fitzgerald lives in St. Onge and previously served 42 years as a state's attorney in Butte and Lawrence counties. In November 2022, Fitzgerald was elected as a Fourth Circuit Court judge, serving eight northwestern South Dakota counties.

A press release announcing his candidacy says that "throughout his career, he built a reputation for being tough on violent offenders and committed to protecting victims and property rights."

"Serving as a circuit judge has been an honor and has given me an even deeper appreciation for the rule of law, the Bill of Rights, and the importance of equal justice," Fitzgerald said in the release.

Fitzgerald is a graduate of Black Hills State University in Spearfish and the law school at the University of South Dakota. His wife, Mary, serves in the South Dakota House of Representatives.

Other Republicans vying for the nomination include McPherson County State's Attorney Austin Hoffman, and Lance Russell, the state's attorney for Fall River and Oglala counties and a former legislator.

Republicans choose their attorney general nominee by a vote of state convention delegates. That happens at the South Dakota Republican State Convention, June 25-27 at The Monument in Rapid City.

*Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.*

## How the Strait of Hormuz affects the price of filling your gas tank

BY: DAVID LIGHTMAN

On paper it makes little sense. Ship traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, roughly 7,000 miles from the United States, is restricted and gasoline prices in this country soar?

The strait is the major export route for oil produced by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Iraq, Bahrain and Iran, according to the International Energy Agency. But since Feb. 28, when the Iran war began and the narrow passageway between Oman and Iran became a battleground, U.S. gasoline prices have soared — and the prices of consumer products and services are poised to jump as well.

Most oil passing through the strait goes to Asian markets, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. And due to greater domestic production, the U.S. is importing less crude oil from the Persian Gulf than it has in 40 years, EIA said in a March analysis.

So why are U.S. consumers paying so much more for gasoline? Globalization.

"Supply disruptions anywhere in the world can also affect prices everywhere in the world because we live in a global market," explained Jeff Lenard, a vice president of the trade group National Association of Convenience Stores. "Oil and refined products like gasoline are traded on the commodities markets. Places with short supply are willing to pay more for product. That drives up the global price."

Gas prices are tied to the global supply and demand for crude oil, meaning a disruption to the supply anywhere can have an effect everywhere, said Patrick De Haan, head of petroleum analysis at GasBuddy, which tracks gas prices.

"It's because the price of oil is based on how much is available in total. Since oil from there is in short supply, the rest of the oil all around the world becomes more expensive," De Haan said.

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A gallon of regular gasoline Monday cost an average of \$4.52, according to AAA up from \$4.14 a month ago and \$3.14 a year ago. Consumer prices overall were up 0.9% in March, and were averaging 3.3% higher over the past year.

## Dissecting prices

While the Middle East oil disruption affects prices throughout the world, retail pump costs can vary dramatically from state to state across the U.S.

California's average Monday was \$6.16, the nation's highest, AAA reported. Next were Washington, \$5.76, and Hawaii, \$5.65. The lowest averages were in Oklahoma, \$3.95, Mississippi, \$3.98 and Arkansas, \$4.

The price of crude oil is the biggest part of the price consumers pay at the pump. EIA estimates that it makes up 51% of the retail cost. Distribution and marketing account for 11%, refining costs and profits 20% and federal and state taxes 18%.

That means dramatic changes in the price of crude have a huge impact on retail prices.

The National Association of Convenience Stores estimates that each dollar the price of oil increases could be 2.4 cents a gallon at the pump.

Brent crude, the world benchmark, was \$70.50 the day before the U.S. and Israel struck Iran. Monday morning, it was more than \$104.

The \$34 a barrel increase since the war began would mean a 82-cent per gallon increase.

Competition can keep prices from rising too much. No gas station wants to be an outlier projecting much higher prices than the one across the street.

## Taxes and gasoline prices

There are other factors impacting gasoline prices, notably taxes that vary from state to state.

The federal tax on gasoline has been 18.4 cents a gallon since 1993. President Donald Trump said Monday he supports freezing the tax, though he offered no timeline. A suspension would need congressional approval, and Republican leaders have in the past been reluctant to embrace any pause.

While the average state tax is 33.55 cents a gallon, it varies widely. California's taxes and fees are estimated at 70.9 cents a gallon, the nation's highest. The lowest tax and fee rate is in Alaska, 9 cents a gallon.

California's costs are also boosted by other factors, including its tough environmental standards. The state requires a special blend of gasoline that aims to help air quality.

"This fuel burns cleaner but is more expensive to produce because it requires more processing steps and expensive blending components," EIA said.

Another reason for the higher prices is California's reliance on in-state refineries. It doesn't have as much proximity as other states to interstate supply pipelines

## Ripple effects

About 20% of the world's oil passed through the strait prior to the war. But reopening the strait would be unlikely to suddenly bring prices down.

"In complex supply chains, a disruption in one critical link, even if only briefly, can cascade through the system, well beyond the initial event," Pinar Keskinocak, professor at the H. Milton Stewart School of Industrial and Systems Engineering at Georgia Tech, said in an analysis. "As delays persist and compound, interconnected systems often take a long time to recover, rebalance, and return to normal."

"I don't expect there to be an open flooding of barrels just leaving the region," said Jerome Dortmans, co-head of global oil and products trading in Goldman Sachs Global Banking & Markets, in an analysis.

And if the Iran crisis continues and the strait remains restricted, more price pain is probably ahead.

"A prolonged disruption of Middle East oil trade would create oil market conditions for which there is no historical precedent," said a March report from the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service.

*David Lightman has been a reporter or editor for more than 50 years. He's worked for the Hagerstown (Md.) Morning Herald, Riverside (Calif.) Press Enterprise, and then 10 years at the Baltimore Evening Sun, covering*

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*local news and, for six years, state government and the legislature. He spent 23 years as the Hartford Courant's Washington Bureau Chief, and 18 years at McClatchy's Washington bureau, where he covered the White House and Congress. He also served as regional editor, supervising the bureau's seven regional reporters. He was president of Washington's Gridiron Club in 2018 and won the David Lynch award for regional reporting in 2007.*

## Risk low of hantavirus spread, CDC officials say

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT

WASHINGTON — Officials from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Wednesday the risk of a member of the general public contracting hantavirus remains low despite several passengers on a cruise ship becoming infected with the disease.

Dr. Brendan Jackson, an epidemiologist and the agency's team lead in Nebraska, said Americans who were on the MV Hondius cruise ship after others were diagnosed with the illness were flown to the National Quarantine Center at the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

Healthcare providers at the site have been talking with each passenger about whether they may have been exposed to any of the people with confirmed cases. They're also monitoring the Americans for fevers or other symptoms.

"This particular virus has a long incubation period, so the monitoring period is 42 days," Jackson said. "And the 42 days started with the departure of the ship, so May 11 was day one."

Any cruise ship passengers who traveled on commercial flights, leading to possible exposures for others on those planes, left the ship before the infections were diagnosed, he said.

"The passengers that are being monitored who were on shared flights were separate from the passengers who were on the ship at the time the outbreak was detected. So they had actually left the ship before the outbreak was detected," Jackson said.

"All the passengers that were on the ship after that detection phase were transported just several days ago on a private plane directly from the Canary Islands to here in Omaha, Nebraska," he added.

CDC officials are working with local and state public health officials to ensure anyone who may have been exposed outside of the cruise ship isolates at home and monitors themselves for symptoms.

The officials on the call declined to say how many people are being monitored for possible exposure or where they are located in the country, citing privacy concerns.

They also declined to talk about the two cruise ship passengers taken to Emory University Hospital's Serious Communicable Diseases Unit in Georgia.

Dr. David Fitter, incident manager for the agency's hantavirus response, said that unlike the coronavirus pandemic that spread around the world in 2020, hantavirus is not new to public health officials.

"At this moment I want to emphasize that the risk to the general public is low," he said.

In addition to monitoring Americans who were on the cruise ship and anyone they may have come into contact with, CDC officials have been talking frequently with lawmakers.

"We've held two Hill briefings and have just completed a call with the governors from the states of repatriated Americans," Fitter said. "We've also held daily calls with state health officials."

"Our role now is to continue our conversations with each passenger about their potential exposure and work with partners to ensure appropriate monitoring."

CDC officials have encouraged the people at the Nebraska facility to stay there throughout the quarantine period but there are not currently any state or federal quarantine orders in place.

*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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## US Senate again rejects resolution to force authorization for Iran war

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY

WASHINGTON — The seventh effort to stop President Donald Trump's military campaign in Iran until he obtains congressional approval failed Wednesday in the U.S. Senate.

The vote marked the first test for Senate Republicans' support for a War Powers Resolution after the expiration of the statute's 60-day period granted to the president for military operations.

The vote failed 49-51, though notably Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, flipped for the first time to support limiting Trump's unfettered war on Iran. Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, for a second time since April 30, voted in favor.

Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., voted yes, and Sen. John Fetterman, D-Pa., opposed the measure, as they both have done on previous votes.

Sen. Pete Ricketts, R-Neb., did not vote.

House lawmakers are expected to take up a similar War Powers Resolution as soon as Thursday.

The war, which Trump launched on Feb. 28 in conjunction with Israel, cost the lives of 13 American service members. The latest Pentagon figures reveal 404 service members were injured during Operation Epic Fury, the administration's name for the conflict.

### Ceasefire on 'life support'

Despite a recent exchange of fire between Iran and the U.S. in the Strait of Hormuz, the administration maintains the operation is over, and claimed a 60-day clock on hostilities paused when the two countries agreed to a ceasefire in April.

However, Trump told reporters Monday that any ceasefire between the two nations was on "massive life support."

Iranian leaders have contested the existence of a ceasefire because of an ongoing U.S. Naval blockade on Iran's ports.

Pentagon officials testified in both chambers of Congress Tuesday that the war to date has cost \$29 billion, without accounting for Iran's drone and missile damage to U.S. military installations in the region.

### Hostilities ongoing, Dem says

Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., who sponsored the resolution, said Wednesday morning the Iran war has turned out to be "nothing like" the victory Trump promised.

"Both sides are still engaged in hostilities. And so I don't accept that the 60-day clock is suspended," Merkley said.

When asked Wednesday morning whether Republicans were whipping votes ahead of the War Powers Resolution, Senate Majority Leader John Thune said that lawmakers should support the president while he's overseas conducting high-stakes meetings with Chinese officials, including China's leader Xi Jinping.

"He's negotiating with the Chinese on a whole range of issues, some of which bear on national security, and I think it would be best if everybody hung together and supported the president," Thune, R-S.D., said. "But we'll see. ... People have their own minds about some of these issues."

*Ariana Figueroa contributed to this report.*

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

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## US Senate approves Warsh, Trump's pick to replace Powell as Fed chair

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY

South Dakota's votes

FROM SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

Majority Leader John Thune and Sen. Mike Rounds, Republicans from South Dakota, each voted in favor of Kevin Warsh's confirmation as Federal Reserve chairman.

WASHINGTON — Kevin Warsh will officially take the lead at the Federal Reserve after U.S. senators voted Wednesday to confirm the economist and former central bank governor to replace Chair Jerome Powell.

Senators approved Warsh 54-45 nearly along party lines. Democratic Sen. John Fetterman, D-Pa., broke ranks with his party to join Republicans in support of Warsh's nomination. Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., did not vote.

Warsh, of Florida, takes the helm after President Donald Trump spent most of his second term haranguing and threatening to fire Powell if he did not lower interest rates.

Trump is also tangled in litigation over his firing last summer of Fed Governor Lisa Cook. The U.S. Supreme Court is currently reviewing whether Trump's dismissal of Cook exceeded his presidential authority.

### Dropped investigation

Trump's ire for Powell escalated into a Department of Justice investigation in January that even angered some in Trump's own party.

Sen. Thom Tillis, R-N.C., who sits on the narrowly divided Senate Committee on Banking, House and Urban Affairs, withheld his support for Warsh's nomination until the administration dropped its probe into Powell's handling of a multiyear renovation of the Fed's Washington, D.C., headquarters.

The U.S. attorney's office for the District of Columbia scrapped the investigation on April 24, but said the Fed's inspector general would continue to examine cost overruns. The administration had accused Powell of lying to Congress about the price of renovations.

A federal judge dismissed DOJ's criminal subpoenas into the Fed and Powell in March, citing in his order "abundant evidence that the subpoenas' dominant (if not sole) purpose is to harass and pressure Powell either to yield to the President or to resign and make way for a Fed Chair."

Powell's term as chair expires Friday. He will stay on as a sitting governor on the central bank's board.

### Democratic critique

Sen. Chris Van Hollen, D-Md., criticized Warsh on the Senate floor ahead of Wednesday's vote. Van Hollen said Warsh has done a "180-degree flip" on inflation since his time of arguing for higher interest rates as a Fed board governor during the 2008 financial crisis. The Maryland senator said Warsh is now a "super dove on interest rates."

"Markets need confidence that monetary policy decisions are being made on the basis of economic evidence, not on the basis of political pressure or convenience," Van Hollen said.

"That is especially important now, as prices are rising too fast and President Trump is still demanding a big cut in interest rates," he added.

Inflation data released Tuesday showed a 3.8% increase year over year, the highest jump since 2023.

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

## US Speaker Johnson wants Secret Service funding but noncommittal on Senate bill

**Majority Leader Thune says most GOP senators will ultimately support additional security money**

**BY: JENNIFER SHUTT AND ARIANA FIGUEROA**

WASHINGTON — U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson on Wednesday pressed for increased funding for the Secret Service, arguing most of the money Senate Republicans included for the agency in their immigration enforcement bill is for security needs, not building a new ballroom at the White House.

But the Louisiana Republican added during a morning press conference he didn't want to "prejudge" the \$72 billion package before the Senate approves a final version this month and sends it to the House.

"I don't have the pen in the Senate. They're writing the bill," he said. "We'll see what we get."

Johnson noted there are several more steps the legislation must go through in the Senate, including a review by the parliamentarian to make sure all of the provisions fit within the strict rules of the reconciliation process, committee debate and a marathon amendment voting session on the floor.

Johnson said that President Donald Trump "is excited about building a ballroom with private funding," though that project comes with some additional needs that will likely require taxpayer dollars.

"The Secret Service says that as we enhance the White House grounds and the modernization there that obviously we have to think differently about security," he said. "We live in a very dangerous time and there are new and increasing threats that we have never faced before. And so Congress has a role in funding that and we'll have to see how it all works out."

### **'Urgent request'**

Johnson asserted the bill Senate Republicans released last week "very specifically defined" how the Secret Service could use the additional funding.

The legislation would provide \$1 billion that would be available until Sept. 30, 2029 for "security adjustments and upgrades ... to support enhancements by the United States Secret Service relating to the East Wing Modernization Project."

The bill would limit the Secret Service from using any of the funding "for non-security elements."

Johnson said GOP lawmakers added the funding to the immigration enforcement spending bill after the Secret Service "put in an urgent request for additional security measures."

"We've needed some of these security measures for a long time," he said. "And that's what this is all about."

Congress provided the Secret Service with \$3.25 billion in the annual funding bill for the Department of Homeland Security that lawmakers passed in late April.

Republicans approved an additional \$1.17 billion for the Secret Service in their "big, beautiful" law that the agency can use through September 2029 for personnel, training, technology as well as performance, retention and signing bonuses.

Normally, the White House budget office would publicly send Congress a supplemental spending request, asking lawmakers to approve the additional money. That would then be vetted by the Appropriations Committees, though that didn't happen in this case.

The Trump administration also could have included a boost in funding to the budget request officials sent Congress in early April that asked members to approve \$3.5 billion for the Secret Service in the annual funding bill for the agency that's due by the end of September.

### **Funding breakdown**

Secret Service Director Sean Curran gave Republican senators more details about how the agency plans to use the additional funding during a closed-door lunch this week, though the bill wouldn't actually require the agency to spend the money as outlined.



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A breakdown obtained by States Newsroom showed:

\$220 million would go to "hardening" the East Wing Modernization Project with additional bulletproof glass, drone detection technologies and filtration systems designed to detect chemical or other contaminants.

\$180 million would go toward construction of a "long overdue" White House visitor screening facility.

\$175 million would bolster Secret Service training as well as its training facilities.

\$175 million would help the agency "secure frequently visited venues facing heightened risk due to their public visibility and static nature."

\$150 million would go to the branch of the Secret Service that focuses on drones, aircraft incursions, biological threats and "other emerging threats through investments in state-of-the-art technologies."

\$100 million for "high-profile national events that require significant planning."

Republican senators said after that meeting they wanted more information from the Secret Service on exactly how the agency would spend the additional funding before they vote on the package.

## Thune predicts passage next week

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., said Wednesday morning most GOP senators will ultimately support the additional funding for the Secret Service "that's needed to enable them to do their jobs."

"Obviously there are security implications related to the modernization of the East Wing. And that represents, I think, of the total request that Secret Service made, about 20%," he said. "The balance of it, I think, are things that they've been putting off for a long time, but need to be done, especially in a modern threat environment where you've had, you know, now, three assassination attempts in the last two years."

Thune said his "aspirational timeline" is to have committees debate their bills early next week, followed by floor action on the full package later in the week.

"It can always be affected by other factors," he said. "But I think at least right now, that's the goal."

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said during a floor speech that Trump's focus on building a "gilded ballroom" shows the president "is living in the theater of the absurd."

Schumer said Americans don't want to see government leaders focused on the ballroom project when inflation, food costs and gasoline prices have all increased.

"I would say Trump has completely lost touch with the American people, but that would assume that Trump was ever in touch with the American people to begin with," he said. "And on this issue he sure as heck isn't."

*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.*

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

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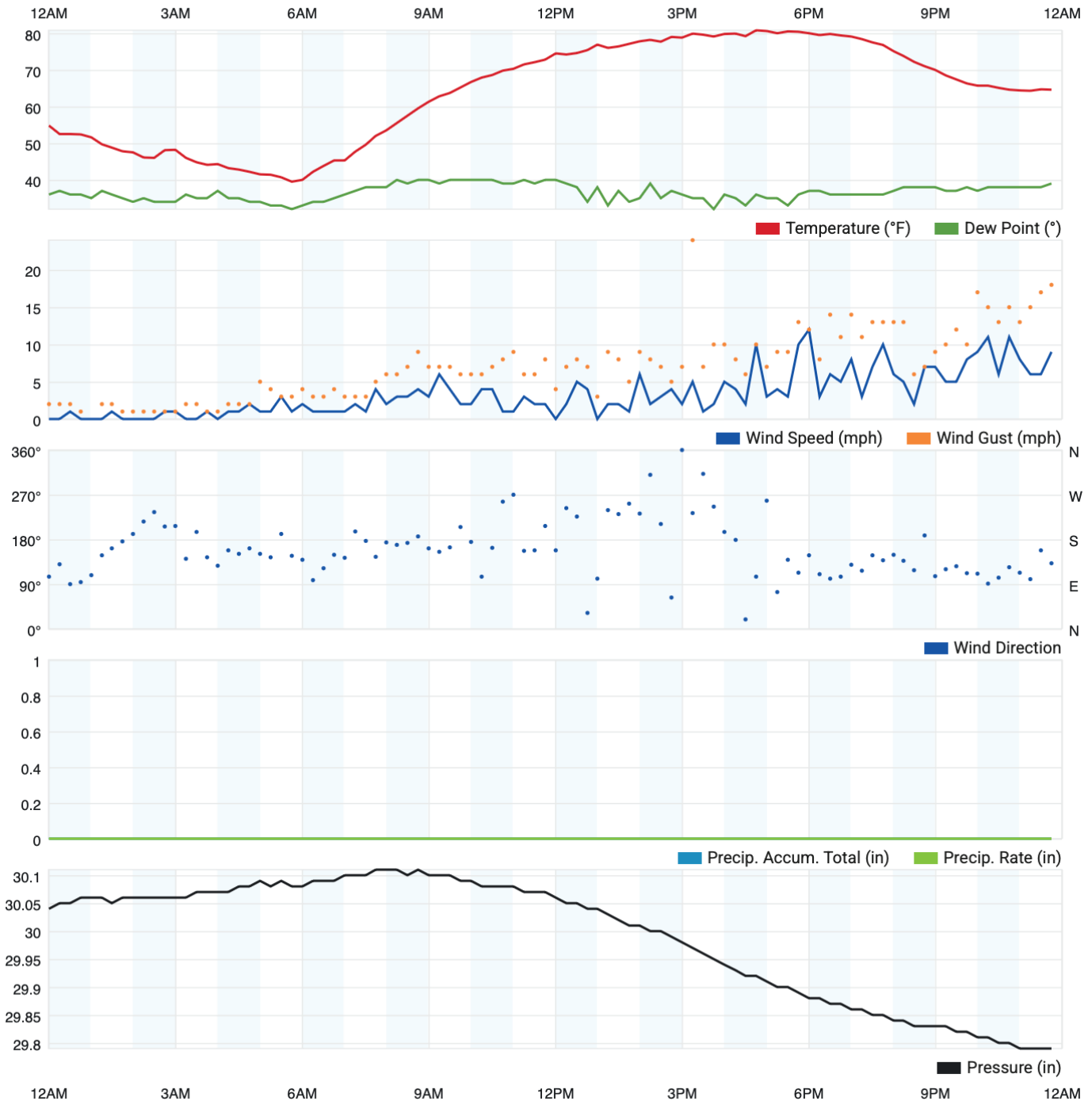
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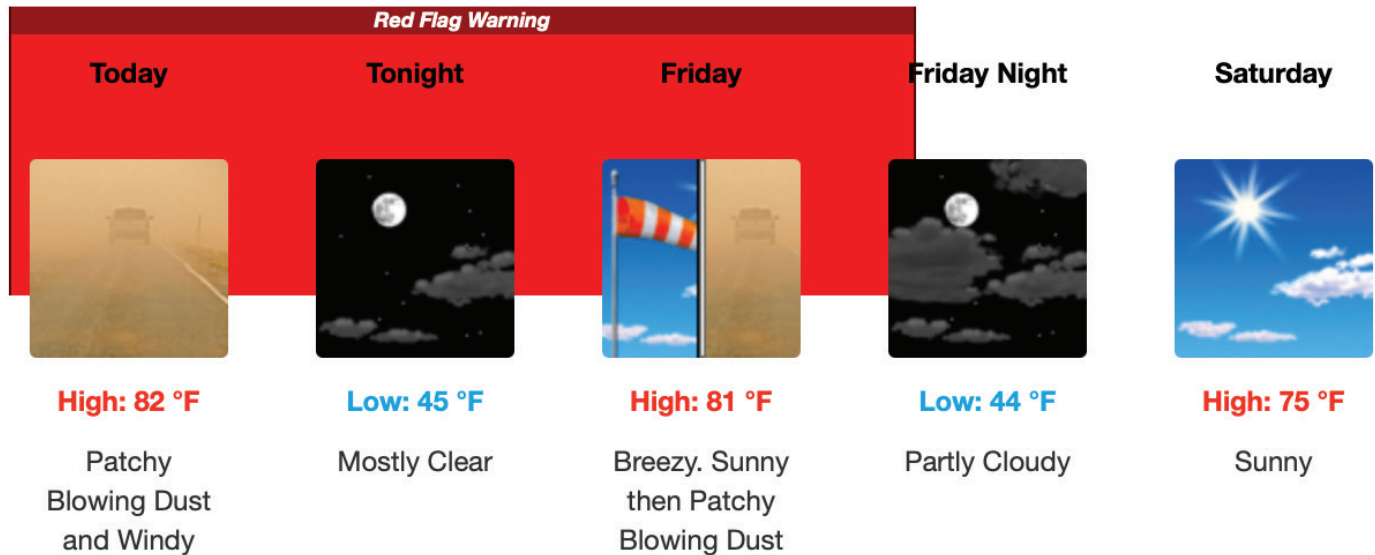
## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

May 13, 2026



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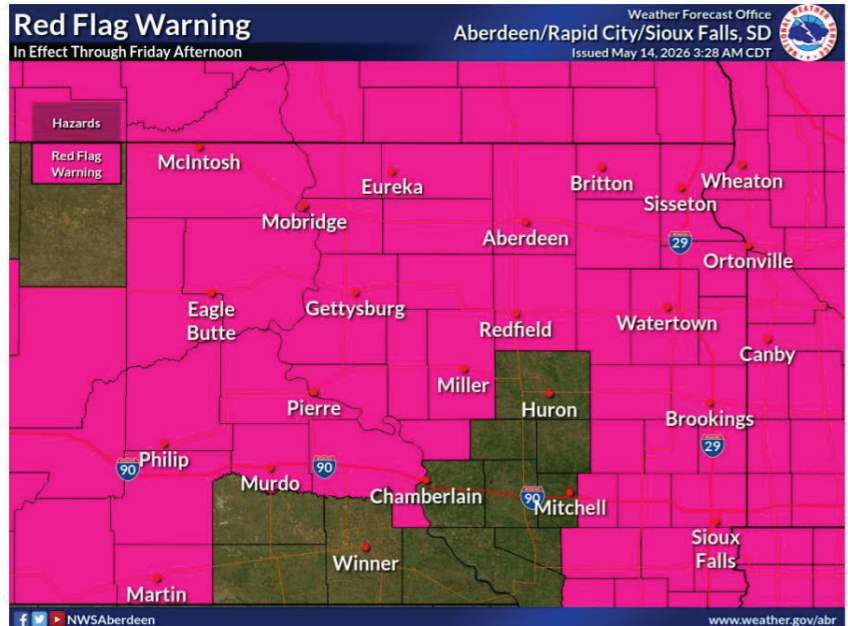
## Red Flag Warning Through Friday

May 14, 2026  
3:58 AM CDT

Strong winds combine with low humidity to create near critical fire weather conditions.

### Key Messages

- Red Flag Warning in 2 segments
  - North of Hwy 212/Bad River in effect until 3 PM CDT Friday
  - South of Hwy 212/Bad River in effect until 9 PM CDT Friday
- Humidity between 14 to 22 percent
  - Poor RH recovery overnight
- Strong southerly to westerly winds will gust 35 to 50 mph
  - Strongest winds today over north central SD and the Coteau**
  - Strongest winds Friday north of Hwy 12**
- High to Very High Grassland Fire Danger Today and Friday



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

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

Dry and windy conditions will persist through Friday afternoon, especially north of Hwy 212. High to very high grassland fire danger is expected. Any fires that ignite will spread quickly as winds gust 35 to 50 mph.



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## Winds Through Friday

May 14, 2026  
4:03 AM CDT

Strong westerly gusts expected both Thursday and Friday afternoons.

- Strong southerly winds ahead of a front today shift to the west behind the front
  - Gusts this afternoon broadly reach 35 to 45 mph, with some isolated gusts around 50 mph possible.
- After a brief lull overnight, winds increase once again Friday.
  - Gusts 30 to 45 mph are once again expected.
  - Strongest gusts north of Hwy 12.

	5/14 Thu								5/15 Fri							
	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm		12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm
Aberdeen	24	45	44	38	31	32	23		17	20	25	29	35	36	33	21
Britton	37	47	48	46	36	30	24		18	22	26	31	36	38	35	24
Chamberlain	38	38	39	36	30	21	9		6	6	9	17	20	21	17	10
Clark	29	47	49	46	38	29	16		12	13	17	26	30	30	26	16
Eagle Butte	20	35	40	38	39	39	25		18	23	29	33	36	35	30	22
Eureka	36	40	37	36	39	41	30		21	26	31	36	43	44	43	28
Gettysburg	35	38	36	35	35	33	21		13	20	25	31	33	33	30	20
McIntosh	25	36	41	44	51	49	33		26	30	32	41	47	48	46	29
Milbank	23	36	40	40	36	30	18		17	20	22	25	29	29	28	17
Miller	38	45	44	38	32	28	15		13	17	21	28	29	29	23	14
Mobridge	38	33	32	32	37	38	26		16	21	26	31	35	36	36	23
Murdo	39	36	36	35	29	21	13		9	12	16	21	23	21	18	16
Pierre	30	30	32	31	29	24	10		5	8	13	21	24	23	18	9
Redfield	31	46	47	43	33	29	17		15	18	23	28	32	32	28	16
Sisseton	21	40	44	43	37	29	21		18	22	25	30	33	35	32	22
Watertown	31	45	47	46	39	30	17		13	14	20	25	29	29	26	15
Webster	23	45	47	45	36	29	21		18	20	23	28	31	33	30	21
Wheaton	23	39	40	39	36	28	20		18	20	24	26	30	30	30	21

Strong southeast winds this morning ahead of a passing dry front shift to the west by afternoon. Gusts of 35 to 50 mph are expected today. Winds diminish overnight briefly before increasing again on Friday, especially north of Hwy 12. If any fires start, the strong winds will cause rapid fire spread.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 81 °F at 5:40 PM**

**Low Temp: 39 °F at 5:44 AM**

**Wind: 25 mph at 3:12 PM**

**Precip: : 0.00**

## Today's Info

Record High: 94 in 2001

Record Low: 24 in 2004

Average High: 70

Average Low: 44

Average Precip in May.: 1.54

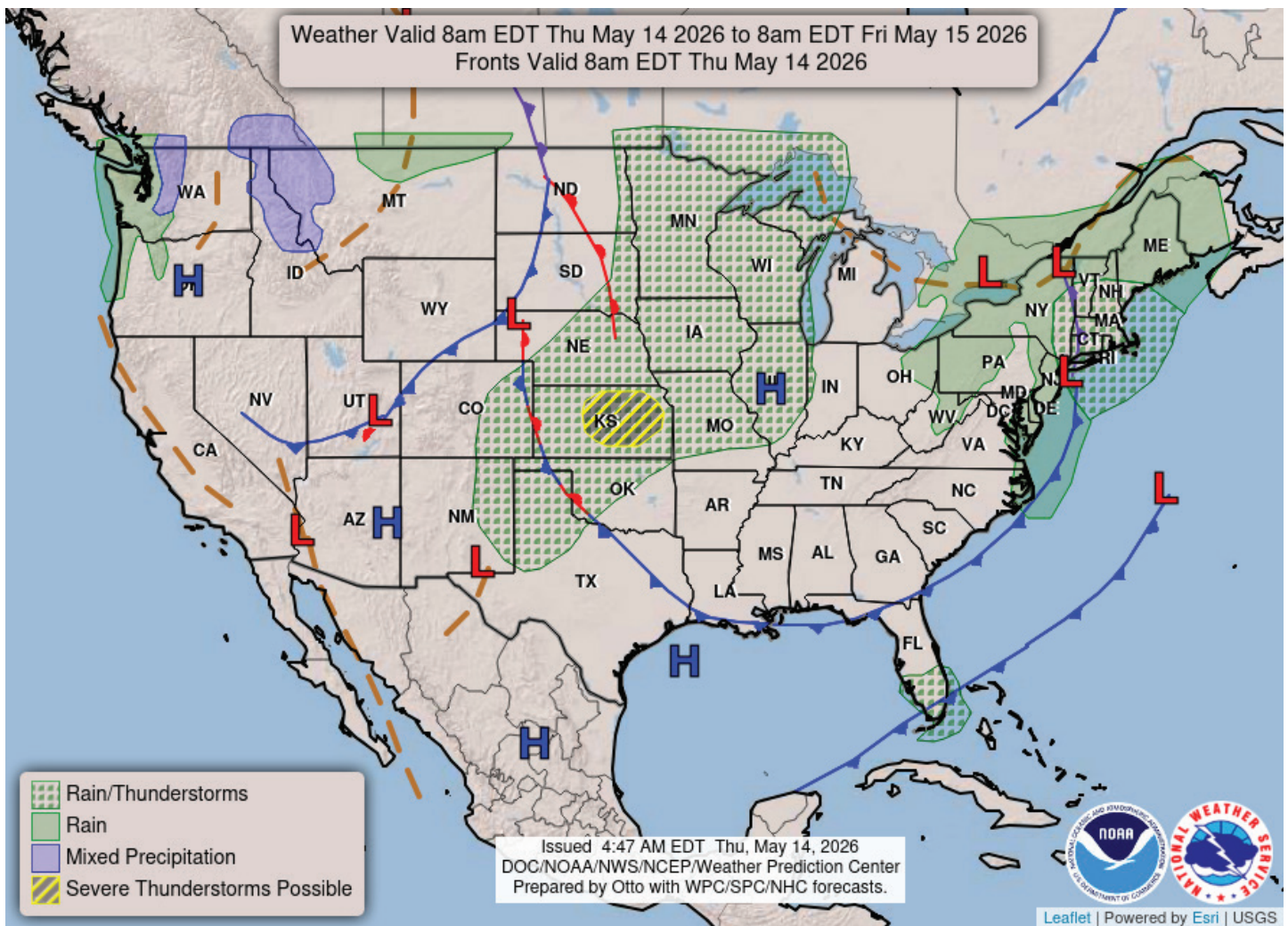
Precip to date in May.: 0.03

Average Precip to date: 5.51

Precip Year to Date: 3.15

Sunset Tonight: 8:54 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:02 am



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## Today in Weather History

May 14th, 1982: Torrential rains pushed the Bad River over the banks at Fort Pierre. One house four miles outside of Fort Pierre had to be sandbagged. A rainfall of 3.83 inches was recorded in Pierre.

1896 — The mercury plunged to 10 degrees below zero at Climax, CO. It was the lowest reading of record for the U.S. during the month of May. (David Ludlum)

1898 — A severe thunderstorm, with some hailstones up to 9.5 inches in circumference, pounded a four mile wide path across Kansas City MO. South-facing windows were broken in nearly every house in central and eastern parts of the city, and several persons were injured. An even larger hailstone was thought to have been found, but it turned out to be a chunk of ice tossed out the window of a building by a prankster. (The Kansas City Weather Almanac) ([The Weather Channel](http://www.weather.com))

1987 — Seven cities across the western U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date as unseasonably hot weather made a comeback. The record high of 103 degrees at Sacramento CA was their ninth in eleven days, and also marked a record seven days of 100 degree heat for the month. Their previous record was two days of 100 degree heat in May. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 — Sunny and dry weather prevailed across the nation. Temperatures warmed into the 80s and lower 90s in the Great Plains Region and the Mississippi Valley. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 — Thunderstorms developing along a stationary front produced severe weather in south central Texas and the Southern High Plains Region during the afternoon and evening hours. Thunderstorms produced softball size hail at Spearman and Hitchcock, TX. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 — Thunderstorms developing ahead of a cold front produced severe weather from northwest Texas to western Missouri. Severe thunderstorms spawned seventeen tornadoes, including nine in Texas. Four tornadoes in Texas injured a total of nine persons. Thunderstorms in Texas also produced hail four inches in diameter at Shamrock, and hail four and a half inches in diameter near Guthrie. Thunderstorms over northeastern Kansas produced more than seven inches of rain in Chautauqua County between 9 PM and midnight. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)



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## Daily Devotion

Matthew 14:22-32: 22 Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away.

23 After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone.

24 But the boat was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary.

25 And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea.

26 When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear.

27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid."

28 Peter said to Him, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water."

29 And He said, "Come!" And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

30 But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!"

31 Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

32 When they got into the boat, the wind stopped.

God wants to do far more in believers' lives and through their witness than many actually believe. That is, we know He can do great things, but we may not be sure He will do them for us.

Wavering between faith and doubt makes for a tired Christian. If we want our fears calmed, we must first decide to act out of obedience rather than make choices according to our feelings. Peter walked on water because he chose to proceed by trust instead of by reason. Likewise, for our faith to strengthen, we must recognize that believing God is a choice.

A second action of a faithful believer is to concentrate on God. Otherwise, when we look at our circumstances, we're restricted to our own limited view of the situation. Peter's feet stayed on the water's surface as long as he was staring at Jesus. But the moment he focused on the wind's violence, he began to sink.

Finally, a good way to maintain our focus on the Lord is by keeping our mind in the Word. Scripture will remind us of God's faithfulness and help us overcome worries in those moments when it would be easy to lose sight of the truth.

Choose to believe that the Lord will work on your behalf (Isaiah 64:4), and focus on Him. He will help you as He has promised—and will honor your steadfast faith.

*We all need the encouragement, comfort, and peace that comes through God's grace. Our daily devotionals, known as Seeds of Hope, have been a means through which thousands of people have experienced this grace. Each devotional comes from God's Word and we pray this good "seed" finds good soil in your heart. Our aim is that the Seeds of Hope will be a great source of daily encouragement to you and that God will use them to draw you near to Him*



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Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MILLIONAIRE FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.13.26

21 24 29 42 49 1

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

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 40 Mins 47 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.12.26

17 32 35 40 47 17

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$251,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 25 Mins 48 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.13.26

17 18 28 37 42 4

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$25,750,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 40 Mins 47 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.13.26

7 16 29 31 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$90,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 55 Mins 47 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.13.26

8 13 39 63 66 2

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

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 24 Mins 47 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.13.26

22 31 52 56 67 15

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$86,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 24 Mins 47 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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

### Postal Service releases special edition bald eagle stamps for America's 250th

By SARAH RAZA Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — For America's 250th birthday, the U.S. Postal Service is releasing special edition stamps featuring one of the nation's icons: the bald eagle.

The stamps unveiled Thursday at the National Eagle Center in Wabasha, Minnesota, showcase the bird across five major life stages, from a fuzzy hatchling to the iconic white-headed adult depicted on the country's seal. They were available for immediate purchase across the United States.

"The fact that we're seeing the eagles in all different stages of its life, it's sort of making us look back at the stages of the life of our country," said Steve Kochersperger, a historian at the Postal Service. "At one time, we were just fuzzy little hatchlings, too."

The bald eagle has been a national emblem since Congress adopted the Great Seal in 1782, though it wasn't designated the national bird until 2024.

The bird has long symbolized American values like strength, freedom and independence, said Kochersperger. At the top of the food chain, the bald eagle dominates in the sky alone with its impressive wingspan and sharp talons.

Some believe Benjamin Franklin wanted the wild turkey to be the national bird because the eagle steals food from other birds, but Kochersperger said that's a myth.

There's another reason why it makes a strong American symbol: the bald eagle is a major conservation success story. In the 1960s, eagles became a rare sight in the U.S. because of poisoning by the pesticide DDT.

But that decline was reversed, thanks to a 1972 DDT ban and the bald eagles' listing as an endangered species in 1978.

"The public relations campaign brought greater awareness that, 'Hey, this is our national symbol, but they may all be gone if we don't change our ways,'" Kochersperger said. "And that turned out to be very effective."

In 2007, the bald eagle was removed from the endangered list, and there are now more than 300,000 eagles in the continental United States, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

David Sibley, the Massachusetts-based artist and bird watcher behind the stamp collection, said the conservation story is part of what makes him think of the bald eagle as a symbol.

"Maybe seeing a bald eagle on the stamp as a bird, living its life from nestling to adult, will hopefully make people think about the natural world and how important things like eagles are, not as a symbol but as part of the ecosystem around us," he said.

Sibley spent nearly a year working on the digital illustrations for the collection. As someone who usually draws life-sized birds, the tiny stamp size was perhaps the biggest challenge, so he chose to focus on the bald eagle's head to show as much detail as possible.



**This image provided by the United States Postal Service shows a new stamp being released Thursday, May 14, 2026, featuring an adult bald eagle.** (United States Postal Service via AP)

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Postage stamps have long served as a way to celebrate holidays and highlight American culture, but they can also be educational, if you look closely.

"A stamp does not demand your attention, but it rewards it," Kochersperger said. "A tremendous amount of planning and effort went into producing that tiny little piece of paper."

## Ship is reported seized off the coast of the UAE and is heading toward Iran

By ADAM SCHRECK and NATALIE MELZER Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — A ship anchored off the east coast of the United Arab Emirates has been seized and is heading toward Iranian waters, the British military said Thursday.

The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center said it received reports that the vessel was taken by unauthorized personnel while anchored 38 nautical miles (70 kilometers, 44 miles) northeast of the UAE port of Fujairah, near the Strait of Hormuz.

The seizure comes as U.S. President Donald Trump was meeting with Chinese leader Xi Jinping on a much-anticipated visit to Beijing. The leaders' talks are expected to focus on the war with Iran, which has seriously disrupted trade in oil, gas and other products and rattled the global economy.

It happened hours after Israel said Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had quietly visited the UAE during the Israeli-U.S. war with Iran, though the UAE swiftly denied that any secret visit had occurred.

The Gulf nation normalized relations with Israel in 2020. Iran has criticized that agreement and has repeatedly suggested over the years that Israel maintained a military and intelligence presence in the UAE.

Israeli leaders have made occasional visits to the UAE in recent years after normalizing relations.

UKMTO did not name the ship and said it is investigating. There were no immediate claims of responsibility for the seizure.

Fujairah is an important oil export terminal and the UAE's main port outside of the Persian Gulf. It has been repeatedly attacked during the war with Iran.

Iran has seized a number of ships, including a tanker identified as the Ocean Koi last week, saying it was attempting to disrupt oil exports and Iranian interests, according to the official IRNA news agency. It said the tanker was seized in the Gulf of Oman and was carrying Iranian oil when it was boarded and taken to Iran's southern coast.

The U.S. sanctioned the Ocean Koi in February as part of a "shadow fleet" that has been transporting Iranian oil.

3 Israelis injured by a Hezbollah drone

A Hezbollah drone exploded inside Israel, injuring three civilians, two of them severely, according to the Israeli military and hospitals. Israel and Hezbollah have traded near-constant fire across the border despite a U.S.-brokered ceasefire on April 17.

Hezbollah has frequently used drones to attack Israeli forces in southern Lebanon and over the border in northern Israel. The Israeli air force has struck areas across southern Lebanon.

Lebanon and Israel are scheduled to hold another round of direct talks in Washington on Thursday, as the Trump administration pushes for a breakthrough between the two neighbors that have been in a state of war since Israel was created in 1948.

The United Nations has also accused Hezbollah of drone strikes near its peacekeeping forces in southern Lebanon. Secretary-General António Guterres' message to both sides is that they must observe the ceasefire and stop all attacks, U.N. deputy spokesperson Farhan Haq said.

Lebanon's Health Ministry said Wednesday that since the war began on March 2, 2,896 people have been killed and 8,824 wounded. Eighteen Israeli soldiers and a defense contractor have been killed in southern Lebanon.



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## Dust storms and lightning kill at least 96 people in northern India

By BISWAJEET BANERJEE Associated Press

LUCKNOW, India (AP) — Dust storms, heavy rain, and lightning damaged homes and other structures and killed at least 96 people in northern India, officials said Thursday.

The storms also injured more than 50 people as they swept across several districts late Wednesday in Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state.

Officials said some deaths were caused by falling trees, collapsing structures and lightning. Police and disaster response teams used chainsaws and cranes to clear fallen trees from roads and railway tracks in several districts.

Storms are common in northern India during the hot season from March to June, before the annual monsoon rains arrive.

Narendra N. Srivastava, an administrative official, said emergency teams were deployed across the affected areas and that homes, crops and power infrastructure were widely damaged, particularly in rural districts.

In Prayagraj district, residents described panic as strong winds tore through neighborhoods.

"The storm came suddenly and the sky turned completely dark within minutes," Ram Kishore said. "Tin roofs were flying and people ran indoors. We could hear trees falling throughout the evening."

In neighboring Bhadohi district, Savitri Devi said her family narrowly escaped after strong winds damaged their mud house.

"We rushed outside when the walls started shaking because of the wind. Our roof collapsed moments later. We spent the night at a relative's house," she said.

Uttar Pradesh's Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath ordered officials to complete relief operations within 24 hours and directed authorities to provide compensation and emergency aid to affected families.

## Asian stocks are mixed as investors watch takeaways from Trump-Xi summit

By CHAN HO-HIM AP Business Writer

HONG KONG (AP) — Asian shares were mixed Thursday and Chinese stocks traded lower after Wall Street set more records, as investors closely monitored takeaways from U.S. President Donald Trump's summit with Chinese leader Xi Jinping in Beijing.

Trump met with Xi at the Great Hall of the People and they talked about U.S.-China relations and Taiwan, but analysts did not expect major breakthroughs.

U.S. futures edged higher.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 index was down 1% to 62,654.05, after briefly reaching another all-time intraday record at above 63,700, partly supported by robust corporate results. South Korea's Kospi closed 1.8% higher at 7,981.41 at a fresh record helped by technology-related stocks on the artificial intelligence boom.

The Shanghai Composite index lost 1.5% to 4,177.92. Hong Kong's Hang Seng gained 0.1% to 26,426.06.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 edged up 0.1% to 8,640.70.

Taiwan's Taiex was up 0.9%, and India's Sensex climbed 1%.

Oil prices were trading higher, with no clear ending to the Iran war after more than two months. Some were hoping the Trump-Xi meeting could bring results, after U.S. officials said Beijing could use its close economic ties with Tehran to press Iran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

Brent crude, the international standard, was up 0.3% at \$105.95 per barrel. It was around \$70 a barrel before the war in Iran started late February. That also came after the International Energy Agency said Wednesday that supply losses from the strait were "depleting global oil inventories at a record pace."

Benchmark U.S. crude was up 0.4% to \$101.44 per barrel.

Investors are also watching for updates on China's imports of Nvidia's advanced H200 chips, after Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang was confirmed to be a part of Trump's China trip alongside other top executives including Tesla's Elon Musk and Apple's Tim Cook.

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On Wednesday, technology stocks led Wall Street gains. The benchmark S&P 500 climbed 0.6% to 7,444.25 and reached another all-time high. The Dow Jones Industrial Average edged down 0.1% to 49,693.20, while the technology-heavy Nasdaq composite rose 1.2% to 26,402.34 and set its own record.

In other dealings, the yield on the U.S. 10-year Treasury edged down to 4.46% from 4.47% though still significantly above around 3.97% from before the Iran war began.

A report Wednesday showed that U.S. wholesale prices surged in April, fueled by impacts from the Iran war-caused energy shock. On Wednesday, the U.S. Senate also confirmed Kevin Warsh, Trump's nominee, to lead the Federal Reserve. He would be take over from Jerome Powell, who had been criticized by Trump repeatedly for not cutting rates faster or deeper.

The U.S. dollar rose to 157.92 Japanese yen from 157.86 yen. The euro was unchanged at \$1.1711.

## **BRICS foreign ministers meet in India as Iran war, oil prices and divisions test the bloc's unity**

By SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Foreign ministers from the BRICS nations began a two-day meeting in New Delhi on Thursday as the expanding bloc faces divisions over the war in Iran, rising energy prices and growing global economic uncertainty.

The meeting brings together diplomats from Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa along with newer member countries. It comes as the war in Iran has disrupted global energy supplies and driven up oil prices and coincides with U.S. President Donald Trump's meeting with Chinese leader Xi Jinping in Beijing.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and Russia's top diplomat Sergey Lavrov are attending. China is represented by Ambassador Xu Feihong while Foreign Minister Wang Yi remains in the Chinese capital during Trump's visit.

India Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said the talks would focus on global and regional challenges and ways to deepen cooperation among member nations.

In opening remarks, Jaishankar said BRICS could help developing countries more effectively respond to the health and financing challenges they face as well as high prices for energy, food and fertilizer.

"We meet at a time of considerable flux in international relations," he said, adding that emerging and developing countries increasingly expect BRICS to play a "constructive and stabilizing role."

Iran urges BRICS to condemn U.S. and Israel

At the meeting, Araghchi urged BRICS nations to condemn the U.S. and Israel over what he called their "unlawful aggression" against Tehran. He called on the bloc members and other countries to "take practical steps to stop warmongering" and end what he described as impunity for violations of the U.N. Charter.

Araghchi also urged the bloc members to stop what he called the politicization of international institutions. He said Iran appreciated the support shown by BRICS countries but called for stronger action.

"It is necessary for all of us to intensify our efforts to end this sense of superiority and impunity on the part of the United States — a notion that has no place in today's world," he said.

BRICS has sought to expand its influence

Founded by Brazil, Russia, India and China, BRICS was formed as a grouping of major emerging economies seen as a counterbalance to Western-led institutions such as the G7. South Africa joined in 2010 and the bloc expanded further in 2024 with the addition of Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates. Indonesia became a full member in 2025.

The group has sought to expand its influence by pushing for a bigger role in a global order long dominated by the United States and its Western allies. It has gained support across parts of the Global South, where many countries have criticized Western-led financial institutions.

But BRICS nations remain divided on key issues.

India and China continue to compete for regional influence, while member countries often differ in their ties with the West. Russia's war in Ukraine has further exposed those differences.

New divisions test global ambitions

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The bloc's expansion also has added strains. Competing regional interests have increased the difficulty of presenting a unified position.

Divisions have sharpened further during the growing conflict in the Middle East. Iran and the UAE are BRICS members despite pursuing competing interests in the region.

Iran's deputy foreign minister said Wednesday that disagreements within BRICS over the conflict had prevented the bloc from reaching a unified position.

Kazem Gharibabadi told news agency Press Trust of India that "one member country" had pushed for language condemning Iran, complicating efforts to build consensus within the grouping.

"We want India's BRICS chairship to be successful. It is not a good approach to send a signal to the world that the BRICS is divided. One country is insisting on condemning Iran," Gharibabadi said.

## Trump offers platitudes while Xi warns of possible confrontation during China summit

By WILL WEISSERT and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese leader Xi Jinping offered stark warnings about avoiding possible clashes between his nation and the U.S. on Thursday, and even cautioned visiting President Donald Trump that Washington's handling of its relations with Taiwan could lead to "conflicts."

His tone was a sharp contrast to Trump, who opened the highly anticipated summit with Xi by praising his Chinese counterpart and declaring that "it's an honor to be your friend."

It underscored just how far apart the leaders remain on thorny issues including the war in Iran, trade disputes and Taiwan — and suggested that Trump's three-day visit to China is likely to be longer on pageantry and symbolism than major bilateral breakthroughs.

The pair met for about two hours behind closed doors at the Great Hall of the People and discussed trade and other issues. According to a readout posted on X by Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning, Xi told Trump that "the Taiwan question is the most important issue in China-U.S. relations."

"If it is handled properly, the bilateral relationship will enjoy overall stability. Otherwise, the two countries will have clashes and even conflicts, putting the entire relationship in great jeopardy," she wrote.

That came after a brief public exchange before the meeting began in which Trump offered platitudes, telling Xi: "You're a great leader. Sometimes people don't like me saying it, but I say it anyway, because it's true."

"It's an honor to be with you. It's an honor to be your friend," Trump said before promising that "the relationship between China and the USA is going to be better than ever before."

Xi was darker in his opening remarks, expressing hope that the U.S. and China could avoid conflict and asking "whether the two countries can transcend the 'Thucydides Trap' and forge a new model for relations between major powers."

He used a term popular in foreign policy studies, referring to the idea that when a rising power threatens to displace an established power, the result is often war.

"Cooperation benefits both sides, while confrontation harms both," Xi said. "The two countries should be partners rather than rivals."

Xi has mentioned "Thucydides Trap" before with regards to U.S.-China relations, dating back to as early as 2014.

Sharp comments follow elaborate welcome ceremony

Trump was welcomed before the meeting with an elaborate ceremony featuring booming cannons and a band playing "The Star-Spangled Banner" and China's national anthem.

Hundreds of school children performed a welcome routine, jumping as the girls waved flowers and the boys hoisted American and Chinese flags while Trump and Xi walked past them.

After the meeting, the leaders visited the Temple of Heaven, a religious complex dating to the 15th century. Trump was later set to attend a state banquet with Xi.

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Taiwan issues remain contentious

Xi's warning about Taiwan reflects China's displeasure with a U.S. plan to sell weapons to the island. The Trump administration has approved an \$11 billion weapons package for Taiwan, but has yet to begin fulfilling it. Trump has also demonstrated greater ambivalence toward Taiwan, an approach that's raising questions about whether he might dial back support for the island democracy.

Trump didn't immediately offer comments on what was said during the closed portion of the meeting. But Xi said that, together with Trump, the two agreed to establish a new orientation for U.S.-China relations, one that is "constructive, strategic and stable" according to the official Xinhua News Agency.

Taiwan, meanwhile, said it was grateful for Washington's "long-term support."

"The government views all actions that contribute to regional stability and the management of potential risks from authoritarian expansion positively," Michelle Lee, a spokesperson for Taiwan's premier, told reporters. She added that the U.S. "has also repeatedly reiterated its firm and clear position of support for Taiwan."

US hopes to secure trade wins

The White House has insisted that Trump wouldn't be making the trip without an eye toward securing results before he leaves, suggesting there could be announcements coming on trade. That could include a Chinese commitment to buy U.S. soybeans, beef and aircraft. Trump administration officials also want to work toward establishing a Board of Trade with China to address commercial differences between the countries.

But neither side has yet offered concrete details on what might come out of Trump's trip at a time when Beijing's close economic ties to Iran could complicate matters.

In the meeting, the leaders discussed trade, with Xi saying that China's door of opportunity will open wider and wider. Xi also met with a collection of U.S. business leaders who accompanied Trump to China.

The U.S. and China reached a trade truce last year that calmed each side's threats to impose steep tariffs on the other. The White House says there have been ongoing discussions and mutual interest in extending the agreement.

George Chen, a partner at The Asia Group consultancy, said Xi has made his "red line" crystal clear on Taiwan. But Chen said Xi also signaled a welcoming tone on the economic front and a desire to ensure the U.S. business community that China is a place where profits can flow.

Economic questions sparked by Iran war still loom

Trump's trip comes as Iran continues to dominate his domestic agenda and stoke fears about the prospect of a weakening U.S. economy as the election season ahead of November's midterms — when Republicans will be looking to maintain control of Congress — begins heating up.

The U.S. and Israel's war in Iran has led to the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz, stranding oil and natural gas tankers and causing energy prices to spike, threatening global economic growth.

China is the largest purchaser of Iranian oil, and Secretary of State Marco Rubio said in an interview with Fox News' Sean Hannity that Trump will make the case for Beijing to exert its influence on Iran, noting that administration officials would underscore that "economies are melting down because of this crisis" which means consumers are "buying less Chinese product."

That contradicted Trump, who has downplayed suggestions that he would ask Xi to pressure Iran to open the strait and even told reporters that concerns about the U.S. economy wouldn't influence his approach to Iran.

## Russia hits Kyiv with drones and ballistic missiles, killing 1 and injuring 33

By SAMYA KULLAB and VASILISA STEPANENKO Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia targeted Ukraine's capital with a mass drone and missile attack early Thursday morning that killed at least one and injured 33 people, local authorities said.

Ukraine's Air Force said its air defenses shot down or jammed 693 targets overnight, including 41 mis-



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siles and 652 drones of various types across the country. Fifteen missiles and 23 drones scored direct hits across 24 locations, the Air Force said. Debris from downed drones fell across an additional 18 locations.

The attack, in which Kyiv was the primary target, came hours after a rare daytime mass drone barrage Wednesday. Ukrainian officials said the attack was Russia's response to U.S. President Donald Trump's rare trip to China to talk with its leader, Xi Jinping.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said ballistic and cruise missiles were used in the mass attack. "These are definitely not the actions of those who believe the war is coming to an end," he said, urging partners not to stay silent and calling for continued support for Ukraine's air defenses. He said Russia has used more than 1,560 drones against Ukrainian cities and communities since the start of Wednesday.

The attack struck civilian infrastructure and residential buildings across multiple cities, Ukrainian Prime Minister Yuliia Svyrydenko said, with Kyiv enduring the heaviest losses.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's High Anti-Corruption Court on Thursday ordered former presidential office head Andriy Yermak held in pretrial detention, with bail set at 140 million hryvnias (\$3.2 million), according to the local news agency Interfax-Ukraine, in a corruption investigation that also implicates other officials in Zelenskyy's inner circle.

Damage was recorded across six districts of the capital, according to head of Kyiv's Military Administration Tymur Tkachenko. He warned Russia was attacking the city with ballistic missiles and drones.

The cities of Kremenchuk, Bila Tserkva, Kharkiv, Sumy and Odesa also were targeted in the attack, which involved both ballistic and cruise missiles, she said.

In the Darnytsia district of Kyiv, a multistory residential building partially collapsed, burying people under the rubble. At least 27 people were rescued from the rubble, according to Ukraine's Emergency Service.

Kyiv's Mayor Vitali Klitschko said 18 apartments were destroyed. He added that there were problems with water supply on the left bank of Kyiv as a result of the attack.

At the scene, emergency workers searched for survivors as smoke from the attack continued to smolder beneath the pile of rubble.

Resident Lyudmila Hlushko, 78, said she heard a lot of explosions and the sound of rockets flying around 3 a.m. "Then the house shook violently and there was a loud bang, breaking the glass in my house," she said.

Emergency operations also were ongoing in the Obolonskyi and Holosiivskyi districts of Kyiv, the service said.

In the Dnieper district, a drone hit the roof of a five-story residential building, Tkachenko said. Another building in the Dniprovskyi district was also damaged.

The attack came hours after a rare daytime attack on Kyiv that killed at least six people, according to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. The assault, which involved 800 drones, struck about 20 regions of Ukraine and was among the longest such attacks during the war.

Zelenskyy said the attack that lasted hours Wednesday aimed to cause as much "pain and grief" as possible.

The attack came after U.S. President Donald Trump said Tuesday he believes Moscow and Kyiv will soon reach a deal to end fighting. Putin said in a speech last weekend that his invasion of Ukraine is possibly "coming to an end."

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha tied the overnight attack to Trump's meeting with Xi, saying Russia's assault proved it posed a threat to international security.

"At the very time when leaders of the most powerful countries are meeting in Beijing, and the world hopes for peace, predictability and cooperation, Putin launched hundreds of drones, ballistic and cruise missiles at the capital of Ukraine," Sybiha said on Telegram.

He said there should be "no illusions" about ending the war. "Only pressure on Moscow can make him stop," Sybiha said of Putin, adding that U.S. and Chinese leaders had sufficient leverage to compel Russia to end the war.

Neither Putin or Trump have provided details about what has changed to make a peace deal in the

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Russia-Ukraine conflict possible.

Moscow and Kyiv maintain mutually exclusive demands. U.S.-led diplomatic efforts over the past year to end the war have fizzled after making no progress on key issues, such as whether Russia gets to keep Ukrainian land it has seized and what can be done to deter Moscow from invading again.

## UAE denies Netanyahu secretly visited the country during the Iran war

By NATALIE MELZER and ADAM SCHRECK Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu quietly visited the United Arab Emirates during the Israeli-U.S. war with Iran, his office said Wednesday. The UAE later denied any secret visit had occurred.

Netanyahu met with UAE President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan in a gathering that “resulted in a historic breakthrough in relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates,” according to the Israeli statement. The Gulf nation normalized relations with Israel in 2020.

The UAE’s official WAM news agency later posted an article denying “reports circulating” about a Netanyahu visit. According to WAM, the country’s relations with Israel “are public and conducted within the framework of the well-known and officially declared Abraham Accords, and are not based on non-transparent or unofficial arrangements.”

The Emirati report also denied any Israeli military delegation was received in the UAE.

Israel’s announcement came a day after U.S. Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee revealed that Israel had sent Iron Dome air-defense weapons and personnel to operate them to the UAE.

The UAE has faced Iranian missile and drone fire even after the ceasefire was reached last month. It has been trying to signal to nervous investors that it remains open for business and safe.

Last week, WAM reported that Netanyahu was among the leaders who called the Emirati president to condemn Iranian attacks and express their solidarity with the Gulf federation.

It was rare public acknowledgment of direct talks between the countries that normalized relations in the 2020 Abraham Accords and have strengthened their ties during the Iran war.

Iran has criticized that agreement and has repeatedly suggested over the years that Israel maintained a military and intelligence presence in the Emirates.

Israeli leaders have made occasional visits to the UAE in recent years after normalizing relations.

Iran demands Kuwait release detainees

Iran’s foreign minister accused Kuwait of attempting to “sow discord” by detaining four Iranians that the Gulf Arab country accuses of being Revolutionary Guard operatives.

In a post Wednesday on X, Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi demanded the Iranians’ immediate release and said Iran reserved the right to respond.

“This illegal act took place near an island used by the U.S. to attack Iran,” Araghchi wrote.

A day earlier, Kuwait said four men were detained and two escaped while trying to infiltrate Bubiyan Island in the northwest corner of the Persian Gulf on May 1.

Bubiyan Island is home to Mubarak Al Kabeer Port, which is under construction as part of a Chinese plan to build infrastructure across the world. It also came under Iranian attack during the war.

Iranian human rights lawyer released

Prominent Iranian human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh has been released from prison more than a month after being detained, a rights group and her daughter said Wednesday.

Sotoudeh, who is known for defending activists, opposition politicians and women prosecuted for removing their headscarves, was detained by Iranian intelligence agents at her house in Tehran in April.

Her release comes as U.S. President Donald Trump arrived in China for a long-anticipated visit that is expected to touch on the war in Iran.

The U.S.-based Human Rights Activists News Agency, which closely tracks developments in Iran, said that Sotoudeh was released on bail from Tehran’s Evin Prison.

Her daughter, Mehraveh Khandan, posted on social media that Sotoudeh was released on temporary custody. Iran's semiofficial ISNA news agency also reported Sotoudeh release.

Sotoudeh has been imprisoned multiple times. Her activist husband, Reza Khandan, has been imprisoned in the same prison as his wife.

Nobel Peace laureate needs long-term care

Doctors who examined Nobel Peace laureate and activist Narges Mohammadi more than a week after she collapsed at a prison in Iran said she needs months of treatment, according to her foundation.

Mohammadi, 53, was urgently transferred from prison to a hospital in northwestern Iran on May 1 after she fell unconscious. She was released on bail nearly 10 days later and transferred to a hospital in Tehran where her specialists examined her.

The doctors said her vascular disease has worsened since she was last checked in 2024 and recommended eight months of treatment.

She was awarded the Nobel in 2023 while in prison and has been jailed repeatedly throughout her career. Her latest imprisonment began in December when she was arrested in the northeastern Iranian city of Mashhad.

## **Kouri Richins, author of a children's book on grief, gets life sentence for killing her husband**

By HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

PARK CITY, Utah (AP) — A Utah mother who published a children's book about grief after the death of her husband will serve a life sentence for his murder without the possibility of parole, a judge ruled Wednesday.

Kouri Richins was convicted in March of aggravated murder for lacing her husband Eric Richins' cocktail with five times the lethal dose of fentanyl at their home near Park City in 2022. A jury also found her guilty of four other felonies, including insurance fraud, forgery and attempted murder for trying to poison her husband weeks earlier on Valentine's Day with a fentanyl-laced sandwich.

Judge Richard Mrazik said Richins is "simply too dangerous to ever be free" when handing down the sentence on the day that her husband would have turned 44.

Her attorneys said they will appeal the conviction and sentence. Richins has been adamant in maintaining she is innocent, saying Wednesday that the verdict was "an absolute lie."

Richins stood at the podium in a lime-green jail uniform as she asked her sons, who were not present in court, "Please just don't give up on me." She encouraged them to always "be like your dad."

Prosecutors said Richins, a 36-year-old real estate agent with a house-flipping business, was millions in debt and planning a future with another man. She had opened numerous life insurance policies on her husband without his knowledge and falsely believed she would inherit his estate worth more than \$4 million after he died.

Eric Richins' father, Eugene Richins, had urged the judge to impose a life sentence without parole to protect his grandsons, who were ages 9, 7 and 5 when their father died.

"This sentence is important so Eric's three sons never have to live with the fear that the person responsible for taking their father could ever harm them again," he said.

The case captivated true-crime enthusiasts when Richins was arrested in 2023 while promoting her children's book about a boy coping with the death of his father.

Sons say they're afraid of their mother

Richins' sons "are not props for some twisted children's book about grief and loss, and yet that is what they've been reduced to by Kouri," said her sister-in-law Katie Richins-Benson, who now has the boys in her care.

Social workers read letters from the sons, who all said they would feel unsafe if their mother was ever released from prison. The children said Richins threatened to kill their animals and showed them videos

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of famished children in war zones when they refused to eat undercooked food.

"You took away my dad for no reason other than greed, and you only cared about yourself and your stupid boyfriends," said the middle son, now 11. He described having to "be a parent" to his younger brother because his mother did not watch over them. Richins made the boy paranoid about sitting on his dad's side of the bed, saying he might die, too, he alleged.

The oldest son, now 13, said he also felt like he had to take care of his siblings and noted that his mother often would lock him inside his room while she drank.

"I will and have always prioritized your safety," Richins said in court after hearing her sons' statements.

Greg Hall, a friend and business associate of Richins, told reporters he was disappointed by the sentence and urged people to "have an open mind" about her.

Trial cut short by defense

The trial was scheduled for five weeks but ended early when Richins waived her right to testify, and her legal team rested its case without calling any witnesses. Her attorneys said they were confident that prosecutors had not produced enough evidence to convict her of murder.

The jury deliberated for just under three hours before finding her guilty of all counts.

During the trial, prosecutors showed the jury text messages between Richins and her lover in which she fantasized about leaving her husband and gaining millions in a divorce. Prosecutors also displayed the internet search history from Richins' phone, which included queries about the lethal dose of fentanyl, luxury prisons and how poisoning is marked on a death certificate.

The defense argued that Eric Richins was addicted to painkillers. Prosecutors countered by showing police body camera footage from the night of his death in which Kouri Richins tells an officer that her husband had no history of illicit drug use.

Prosecutors did not seek the death penalty.

Richins also faces more than two dozen money-related criminal charges in a separate case that has not yet gone to trial.

## **Somalia is in a deadly drought again. Most humanitarian aid isn't there this time**

By JACK DENTON and OMAR FARUK Associated Press

PUNTLAND, Somalia (AP) — Most of Abdi Ahmed Farah's hundreds of goats have died. It has not rained steadily in this part of Somalia for three years, something the 70-year-old never thought possible.

He is in debt from buying water. The reservoir outside his tent is nearly empty. His family is down to one meal a day: rice with sugar and oil. The youngest of his 22 children was born three weeks ago and his wife produces only occasional drops of breast milk.

"I have considered abandoning my family because I cannot provide for them," said Farah, sitting in front of dwindling food supplies, as if on guard.

Yet another drought is affecting millions of people across Somalia, one of the world's most vulnerable countries to climate shocks. Some rivers are dry. Crops have withered. Experts say the drought could be among the worst in Somali history.

The crisis is compounded by aid cuts, most dramatically by the Trump administration, and rising prices from the Iran war. Somalia buys most of its fuel from the Middle East, and 70% of its food is imported.

Production of staple crops of maize and sorghum in the October-December rainy season was the lowest on record in Somalia, according to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization.

Food security experts warn that nearly a half-million children might face severe acute malnutrition, the harshest kind. That would be higher than the number of children requiring treatment for it during droughts in 2011 and 2022, according to UNICEF.

'It's a repeated climate shock'

"2026 is the worst year on record for Somalia in terms of drought," said Hameed Nuru, the U.N. World Food Program director for Somalia. "Children have started dying."



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The Somali government and United Nations estimate that 6.5 million people face crisis levels of hunger, representing a third of the country's population and a 25% increase since January.

Aid agencies are trying to maximize resources and the Somali diaspora is sending money to help, but humanitarian workers warn it is not enough.

"This drought is not just another cycle of dry season. It's a repeated climate shock with shrinking humanitarian support," said Mohamed Assair, a manager with Save the Children in Puntland, a semi-autonomous region.

People drank dirty rainwater and got sick

Farah once had 680 goats, but a lack of food and water as well as diseases exacerbated by drought have claimed all but 110 of them, barely clinging to life.

"There is no market for my goats because they are so thin. Previously we would trade them for rice, but now we can't," he said. Farah's family has been at a site outside Usgure village for 10 days. Almost a dozen goat carcasses lie nearby.

In Usgure, home to 700 families, community leader Abshir Hirsi Ali said the local economy has collapsed because they rely on pastoralists like Farah. Shops have closed and food rations have run low.

A recent, brief shower brought puddles of dirty rainwater. "Some families were so desperate they drank it ... now there is a high number of people with fever," Ali said.

Save the Children occasionally brings free water to Usgure, but private water trucks have quadrupled their prices and the cost of a 50-kilogram (110-pound) bag of flour has increased by a third, to \$40.

"I'm not only afraid for my family but the future of the whole village," said Muhubo Tahir Omar, a 47-year-old mother of 11 children.

Omar, like other parents, had sold her goats to pay for school fees, "but when we didn't pay, the teachers left." Her last goat is now sick.

'Conflict made our situation even worse'

Decades of conflict in Somalia have displaced millions of people. The drought has displaced another 200,000 this year, the U.N. estimates.

Some families flee across harsh landscapes with limited supplies.

"People are on the move ... and when people move, people die," said Kevin Mackey, the Somalia director for humanitarian group World Vision. He recently met people who had walked for nine days to get aid in Dollow in the south.

Around 80 families live in a displacement camp outside Shahda village in Puntland.

Shukri, a 20-year-old mother of four, usually can eke out one meal a day from handouts. Now there is nothing to eat and limited access to clean water.

"The children got diarrhea (from dirty water) and malnourishment worsened," said Shukri, who gave only her first name. "I know a few people who have died."

Many people head to Mogadishu, the capital, where food also remains scarce.

Fadumo, a 45-year-old mother of seven, moved there from Lower Shabelle, where livelihoods were already threatened by al-Qaida-linked al-Shabab militants.

"The water sources we depended on for farming, including the river, dried up," Fadumo said. "Conflict made our situation even worse, forcing us to flee."

'The outlook is deeply concerning'

Drought ravaged Somalia in 2022 and an estimated 36,000 people died, according to the U.N. Now the kind of aid that was rushed to respond to such crises is shrinking.

"Unless there is a sudden and substantial response from donors, the outlook is deeply concerning. A drought of similar severity in 2022 received a response five times greater than what we are seeing," said Antoine Grand, head of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Somalia.

Aid funding to Somalia dropped to \$531 million in 2025 in large part because of aid cuts by the United States, which had been Somalia's top donor. In 2022, aid funding was nearly five times as much at \$2.38 billion.

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WFP said it intended to help 2 million people with food aid this year but has reached only 300,000 because of funding gaps.

A center at the hospital in Qardho, Puntland, treats children with severe acute malnutrition. But therapeutic milk is now rarely in stock, and nurses resort to homemade alternatives such as cow's milk, said director Shamis Abdirahman.

The center receives around 15 children a month, but they expect more as displaced people arrive.

One 4-year-old, Farhia, weighs a scant 7.5 kilograms (16.5 pounds). Her eyes are sunken and her bones are prominent under her skin.

Her family fled to Qardho when all of their goats died, said her mother, Najma.

"I don't know what to hope for, or see how we can get back to what we had," she said.

## After bombs, blackouts and bank restrictions, Gaza's digital workers are still coding

By SAM METZ and WAFAA SHURAFU Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — As Israeli drones buzz overhead and ambulance sirens wail in the distance, Tarik Zaeem stays hunched over his laptop, working through lines of code for a Saudi valet parking app, debugging its barcode reader.

On weekdays he walks through the bombed-out streets of Gaza City to a coworking space where freelancers charge devices and access stable internet. Remote work provides desperately needed income and a form of escape from the impoverished and largely destroyed Gaza Strip.

"When I work, I forget everything and focus on the coding. I stop thinking about my family's basic needs," the 44-year-old programmer said of his wife and three children, who fled to Egypt early in the war. "I stop thinking about airstrikes or searching for drinking water. When I'm on my laptop, I shut everything else out."

Zaeem is part of a community of freelancers coding, designing and programming for clients abroad. Platforms connecting them to clients — including Freelancer.com, Upwork and Mostaq — each have thousands of Palestinians from Gaza registered.

Like others in Gaza, they have at times struggled to find food, water and shelter, lost friends and relatives, and seen their homes and neighborhoods leveled by Israeli airstrikes. Many stopped working, but others kept going, designing logos for pizza parlors in Canada, building booking apps for Palestinian barber shops and creating websites for businesses in Kuwait and Turkey.

After struggling through two years of full-scale war, their work is growing steadier, even as broader recovery and reconstruction efforts remain at a standstill seven months since a shaky ceasefire took hold in October.

The digital sector grew up under Israel's blockade

Digital freelancing became popular more than a decade ago in Gaza. Traditional sectors shrank after Hamas seized control of the strip in 2007, as Israel's intensified blockade devastated agriculture, manufacturing and other industries.

High unemployment and a rise in connectivity — more than nine out of 10 households in Gaza had internet before the war — pushed thousands of digitally skilled college graduates to seek income abroad.

Foreign donors and NGOs took notice, investing in hackathons, incubators and coding academies. The United Nations Development Program said in 2018 that "freelancing and online jobs are considered to be among the best temporary solutions to the unemployment problem."

Before the war, U.S.-based Mercy Corps' Gaza Sky Geeks ran bustling coworking spaces with glass walls and a graffiti mural bearing the word "entrepreneur" in Arabic. Rand Safi, its senior program manager, said interest skyrocketed once it became clear that remote workers from Gaza could compete in the global marketplace.

Most of that vanished during the war sparked by Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack, in which Hamas-led militants killed some 1,200 people and abducted 251. Israel's retaliatory offensive killed over 72,700 people, according to local officials, and displaced most of Gaza's population of 2 million — often multiple times.

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Hundreds of thousands sought shelter in squalid tent camps, and electricity and internet outages were widespread.

Gaza Sky Geeks said two of its three locations were destroyed in airstrikes. Entrepreneurs, participants and instructors have been killed or lost contact. Today, it is one of the groups working to rekindle the sector, supporting operations at five independent coworking spaces where digital freelancers can return.

"They want the vibes, and I think they want a piece of their past," Safi said. "There is a sense among people of not wanting to be dependent on humanitarian aid. They want an income."

Deadlines hinge on stable power and connectivity

More than 75% of Gaza's telecommunications infrastructure was damaged during the war, and power outages often made it difficult to fulfill contracts.

"When we first started, the main problem was electricity and internet access. Now that's less of an issue because workspaces have opened across Gaza," software engineer Sharif Naim said.

During the war, Naim founded Taqat Gaza, a coworking space powered by solar generators, giving remote workers an opportunity to work in three-hour shifts. Today, it caters to more than 500 freelancers, offering a full day of internet access and networking opportunities that Naim said were seen as equally useful.

"The focus (today) is creating a proper work environment, training and helping freelancers rebuild skills lost during the war so they can compete in the global market again," he said.

Part of that has been aimed toward women, many of whom became breadwinners or needed to seek additional income amid the war.

Reem Alkhateeb, a mother and graphic designer, said she tries to find time to work online while managing the daily burdens of survival, including waiting in line for food and water. Prices have soared and her husband lost his job, turning her freelancing from supplemental income into the family's financial lifeline.

"Our dreams are no longer about luxury or big ambitions. We dream about the simplest things that should already be basic human rights: having electricity, having internet access, being able to live and work normally," she said.

Payment poses challenges

With banks often inaccessible in Gaza and platforms like PayPal unavailable to people with Palestinian addresses, freelancers have had to find alternative ways to get paid. Some route payments through relatives abroad who can receive transfers on their behalf, while others rely on cash brokers who accept electronic transfers for steep fees.

Some initiatives have stepped in to help freelancers navigate the maze of payment challenges. After her husband and daughter were killed in 2024, Salsabil Bardawi founded "Gaza Talents" as a platform to connect Gaza freelancers to international clients and help them build careers. It has since facilitated more than \$600,000 in income for workers, partnering with the Bank of Palestine and the digital wallet "PalPay."

"A lot of people can work, all they need is a laptop, internet, electricity and clients," she said.

## **A Vienna cafe offers a welcome for Israel supporters as tensions brew at the Eurovision Song Contest**

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

VIENNA (AP) — Vienna's famed coffeehouses have embraced the Eurovision Song Contest. They have also been touched by tensions over Israel's inclusion in the sequin-drenched pop music competition.

When officials announced a list of "Eurofan Cafes" — Vienna coffee shops offering food and music from competing countries — Israel was initially left out.

MQ Kantine, a modern café in the city's arty museums quarter, offered to step in. Now it has falafel, bagels with lox and kosher wine on the menu, a string of small Israeli flags hanging from the ceiling — and a police officer outside the door.

Security is tight across Vienna during the international music contest, whose "United by Music" slogan rings slightly hollow this year. Five countries are boycotting because Israel is taking part. Pro-Palestinian

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activists are planning a protest concert — one of several Eurovision alternatives across Europe — and an anti-Israel march before Saturday's grand final.

At MQ Kantine, volunteers take turns to monitor for potential trouble. But so far the mood has been supportive, said Daniel Kapp, a PR consultant and pro-Israel campaigner.

"It's beautiful," he said, as people drank coffee and beer on the café terrace in the spring sunshine, though he noted that the police officer on duty showed that all is "not entirely normal."

"My feeling is that Austria to a certain degree has learned from its history," Kapp said, referring to the deadly antisemitism under the Nazis before and during World War II. "Which is why the support for Israel is a lot more normal than it is in other countries."

Israel has competed in Eurovision for more than 50 years, and won four times. But its participation has been contested since it launched a war in Gaza after 1,200 people were killed in a Hamas-led cross-border attack on Oct. 7, 2023. More than 73,000 Palestinians have been killed since the war began, according to the territory's Health Ministry, which operates under the Hamas-run government and whose detailed records are viewed as generally reliable by the international community.

Israel's government has repeatedly defended its campaign as a response to the Oct. 7 attack. But a number of experts, including those commissioned by a United Nations body, have said that Israel's offensive in Gaza amounts to genocide. Israel, home to many Holocaust survivors and their relatives, has vigorously denied the claim.

The latest Israel-Hezbollah war in Lebanon and the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran have driven tensions still higher.

The 2024 Eurovision contest in Malmö, Sweden, and last year's event in Basel, Switzerland, saw pro-Palestinian protests that called for Israel to be expelled. Five countries — Iceland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Spain — pulled out of the 2026 contest after organizers allowed Israel to compete.

## Partying amid tight security

The tensions have produced a Eurovision of two halves. An upbeat party atmosphere prevails inside the Wiener Stadthalle arena and in the separate Eurovision Village fan zone. But getting in means passing through a ring of steel, with searches, scanners and a ban on all bags inside the arena. Armed police are a very visible presence on the streets.

Awareness of risk from terror plots is high in the city after a 21-year-old Austrian man accused of pledging allegiance to the Islamic State group pleaded guilty to plotting to attack a Taylor Swift concert in Vienna in 2024.

Israeli singer Noam Bettan told Israeli media that, like last year's Israeli competitor Yuval Raphael, he practiced performing while being booed. There were scattered shouts amid the cheers when he performed in the first Eurovision semifinal on Tuesday. He secured a spot in Saturday's final by being one of the top 10 finishers in voting by viewers and national juries.

Organizers said four people were removed from the 10,000-strong audience for disruptive behavior.

Austrian Eurovision fan Ivo Herzl, who attended the semifinal, said "the vibe was incredibly positive." He is showing support for Israel by making and selling Mazel Lov T-shirts — a play on "mazel tov," a Hebrew and Yiddish phrase of congratulations.

"Vienna has always been a city of tolerance," Herzl said. "It's the city of music and we'll always do everything possible for everyone to enjoy a musical event."

Some Israeli fans said they were reassured by the tight security. Oz Yona, attending his first Eurovision, said he had experienced "no hate" and felt Austria took antisemitism seriously.

He came with friends to cheer for Israel, though he was not optimistic about Bettan's chances — for musical rather than political reasons.

"I don't think he will win," Yona said. "Finland is better this year. Greece is better this year. We have a good song, but not a winning song."

Birgitta Peterson and Kristina Nilsson, who wear matching pink bomber jackets and call themselves The Swedish Ladies, love to explore new cities and meet up each year with their "Eurovision family" of fellow



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fans. They plan to wave Israeli flags at Saturday's final, after Swedish contestant Felicia said earlier this year that she didn't think Israel should be in the contest.

They say tensions over Israel have divided a fan community long known for its friendliness and embrace of diversity.

"The wounds are very deep at the moment," Nilsson said.

"This event should really be about 'united by music' and happiness," she added. "That's what Eurovision is all about."

## Some parents don't want their kids to use tech at school. But districts are pushing back

By SHARON LURYE Associated Press

ARDMORE, Pa. (AP) — For high school senior Aliyah Pack, getting distracted during school is the norm. Kids in her Pennsylvania school district use iPads starting in kindergarten, switch to Chromebooks in second grade and get their own MacBooks in eighth grade.

Aliyah has ADHD, and finds it difficult to concentrate when she's learning from a screen. She'll watch Netflix in class on her school laptop, hiding her earbuds behind her long, curly hair.

"It's very hard to get into the mindset of being in school," Aliyah said.

Aliyah's mother saw her grades were falling and asked the school to take away her laptop. But she was told that wasn't possible.

Across the country, parents are voicing concerns about excessive screen time in schools and lobbying educators to go back to pencil and paper. In places like Lower Merion Township, where Aliyah goes to high school, some are taking it even further. Over 600 people in the affluent Philadelphia suburb have signed a petition asking to preserve parents' ability to opt their children out of using digital devices during the school day. The public school district has pushed back, saying it's not feasible to let hundreds of students opt out of technology that is essential to the curriculum.

Disagreement over how tech is used in the classroom

At a meeting Monday night, school board members said they were considering many ways to respond to parental concerns about technology, but allowing opt-outs was not one of them.

"There is not an option for us to not have technology in schools," said Lower Merion School Board member Anna Shurak.

The board was meeting to discuss updates to the district's technology policies, including repealing a policy that allows opt outs. Over 100 people showed up to protest, many wearing buttons that said "Screens Down, Pencils Up."

Many emphasized they're not anti-tech — in fact, most parents agree that learning how to responsibly use computers is an essential life skill. They just don't want tech to dominate the classroom.

"Teaching how to use technology is not the same thing as using technology to teach everything else," said Sara Sullivan, a parent.

Technology has become inescapable at schools

The debate in Lower Merion raises the question of whether technology has become so intertwined with learning that it's impossible to opt out. Kids use devices to play educational games, submit their homework, access online resources and write essays — but parents are questioning the value of gamified edtech software.

Subashini Subramanian said the software her second-grade daughter uses for math, DreamBox, incentivizes rushing through levels to gain points. When she encouraged her daughter to think through the problems methodically, the 8-year-old said, "If I go through all the steps, it's slowing me down. I have to click, click, click."

At the school board meeting, many parents said they were exhausted from battling their kids over screen time. Adam Washington says his son struggles with screen addiction, so sometimes he takes away his phone or TV — only to find him watching YouTube on the school laptop instead.

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"The screen is killing him. It is killing me, and him, together with our relationship," Washington said. Another parent at the meeting questioned what students would do instead of using their computers.

"Opting out is not a solution. It's avoiding the hard work of finding a solution," Seth Ruderman said.

Parental pushback on edtech has led to change

The pushback on technology in the classroom has gained steam around the country. At least 14 states have proposed laws to limit screen time in schools, according to Ballotpedia, with four states — Alabama, Tennessee, Utah and Iowa — passing such legislation.

In Los Angeles, the nation's second-largest school district said it will ban screens until second grade, require daily caps for screen time per grade, ban YouTube and require an audit of all education technology contracts.

In Vermont, proposed legislation would allow not just parents but also teachers to decline to use classroom tech. Democratic State Rep. Angela Arsenault, a bill co-sponsor, said she's responding to parents' worries about edtech.

"Parents in many districts and states just aren't being listened to or not being heard when they ask that their students not be forced to use these products," Arsenault said.

The Lower Merion school district said it's listening to community concerns and has already made changes, including blocking some problematic websites flagged by parents.

"We have wonderful teachers who have continuously prioritized human interaction and relationships," Superintendent Frank Ranelli wrote in a letter to parents. He declined to comment to the AP for this story.

The district said it is looking into possible changes, including stronger cellphone restrictions, not allowing the youngest students to take devices home and installing software to monitor students in class.

However, surveillance software can bring its own problems and poses risks to student privacy. In 2010, the Lower Merion School District paid \$610,000 to settle lawsuits by two students who alleged the district had spied on them via the webcam on their school-issued laptops.

Kids want ways to hold themselves accountable

High school student Mia Tatar, 16, raised concerns at the board meeting that there's been an unintended consequence to the anti-tech backlash. The internet filters on school computers are now so strict, she said she's been blocked while doing research on appropriate topics for school, like breast cancer.

Mia said students need to learn how to responsibly use technology, and adding filters or getting rid of laptops won't do that.

"It doesn't teach kids how to hold themselves accountable and how to be responsible for regulating their own screen time once they're in the world," Mia said in an interview.

Her friend Elliot Campbell, 15, said there should be strict limits on screen use in the youngest grades, but students should get more freedom as they get older.

"If we lose our laptops or if we lose the partial freedom we have on them, it's not going to prepare us for college," Elliot told board members at the hearing.

Fellow high schooler Joaquin Imaizumi takes a different view. He said it's "completely unfair" to expect children to regulate their usage of devices that even adults find addictive.

"This isn't about learning to constrain yourself," he said in an interview. "We don't give someone drugs and say, 'OK, now learn how to deal with this.'"

His biggest concern is that devices make it far too tempting to access AI tools like ChatGPT, which he sees eroding his classmates' ability to think for themselves.

"I've seen the atrophy of my peers' thinking, which is existentially concerning," Joaquin said.

The influence of AI starts early. A second-grader named Lillian Keshet, who got up to speak at the board meeting, said Google Docs will give her "suggestions" about what to write in class.

"I'm a pretty good writer by myself," Lillian said. "I don't need your suggestions, Google!"

## Man known for racially derogatory livestreams charged with attempted murder after Tennessee shooting

By KRISTIN M. HALL, TRAVIS LOLLER and AUDREY McAVOY Associated Press

CLARKSVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — A man who goes by “Chud the Builder” and livestreams himself saying racially derogatory statements to Black people in public settings was arrested and charged with attempted murder after a shooting outside a Tennessee courthouse on Wednesday, authorities said.

Dalton Eatherly, 28, and an unidentified man were involved in a confrontation that resulted in gunfire, District Attorney Robert J. Nash said in a statement. But Nash wouldn’t say why Eatherly was at that courthouse in Clarksville, what he was doing or what prompted the confrontation.

Police didn’t provide the race of the other man. However, a witness who said she saw him loaded into an ambulance described him as Black.

Both men were transported to hospitals for medical treatment and were stable, the Montgomery County Sheriff’s Office said.

Eatherly was being held at the Montgomery County jail until bond can be set at an arraignment hearing, the county sheriff’s office said. Eatherly was also charged with employing a firearm during dangerous felony, aggravated assault and reckless endangerment with a deadly weapon, the sheriff’s office said.

Jacob Fendley, an attorney listed in court records as representing Eatherly in a separate harassment case from November, did not immediately return a phone message.

Claire Martin, who works in an attorney’s office across the street from the courthouse, said Eatherly is “well known in Clarksville for antagonizing people to see what he can get them to do.” She said he “yells racial slurs” at people while filming them. “He’s not a contributing member of society,” she said.

Martin did not see the altercation but saw the aftermath. The other man “waved at us as he got in the ambulance,” she said.

‘Did I shoot myself ... ?’

In a video posted on the website Pump.fun on Wednesday, Eatherly said he shot a man in self-defense after the person started hitting him. Eatherly speaks with paramedics in the clip, one of whom takes note of a wound’s entry and exit point.

“Did I shoot myself or did it graze it?” Eatherly asked.

Eatherly had been scheduled to appear in court Wednesday morning in Clarksville, located about 50 miles (80 kilometers) northwest of Nashville, over a \$3,300 debt allegedly owed to a credit company, according to Montgomery County court records. The civil case was filed in February on behalf of Midland Credit Management.

Court records didn’t indicate whether Eatherly showed up for the status hearing. Online records list the case as open.

Eatherly, a white man, livestreams confrontations to social media where he can be seen and heard making racially derogatory statements to Black people in public.

In one video taken in a market, he says to a passing Black man, “You chimpin’ out,” a reference to chimpanzees. He then uses the N-word a number of times.

The Black man is seen using a cellphone to record the confrontation, telling Eatherly, “Don’t touch me.”

A clerk tells Eatherly he’s not allowed to say that word. He responds “America is free speech. Tell me I can’t say something again. This is (expletive) America.”

Racists in the United States and other countries historically have compared Black people to monkeys or apes. In February, President Donald Trump posted a racist social media post featuring former President Barack Obama and his wife, Michelle Obama, as primates in a jungle. It was deleted after both Republicans and Democrats criticized the video as offensive.

Steakhouse theft and disorderly conduct charges

In addition to the credit debt case, Eatherly faces a separate criminal case in which he is accused of becoming unruly at a Nashville steakhouse on Saturday and refusing to pay the nearly \$400 bill.

According to an affidavit in the case, the restaurant had asked him not to stream inside the business,

but he did anyway. When they asked him to stop, he began yelling and screaming and “started making racial statements.”

He was arrested and charged on Sunday with theft of services, disorderly conduct and resisting arrest and released on \$5,000 bond. His next appearance in this case was scheduled for July 17 in Davidson County criminal court.

Clarksville resident Larry Quillen said he’s seen videos in which Eatherly carries a gun and mace “and goes around and starts things.”

“I was just kind of like it’s a matter of time. I mean, because what he’s doing is hate. It’s not even freedom of speech and that’s what he claims to do,” Quillen said.

The Montgomery County Sheriff’s Office said one of the two men involved in Wednesday’s shooting was taken to Vanderbilt of Clarksville Hospital for treatment. A message left with the hospital wasn’t immediately returned.

The other was transported by Lifeflight to Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville, the sheriff’s office said. A spokesperson for the hospital, Craig Boerner, said medical privacy laws prohibited the disclosure of information about victims of violence.

## Prosecutors to retry Alex Murdaugh in deaths of wife and son after high court overturned convictions

By JEFFREY COLLINS Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — Alex Murdaugh’s murder convictions and life sentence for the deaths of his wife and son were overturned Wednesday by the South Carolina Supreme Court because the court clerk at his trial suggested he was guilty.

But the disgraced lawyer won’t be leaving prison anytime soon.

Prosecutors say they plan to retry Murdaugh, which likely means there will be another lengthy trial for the case that because of the combination of money, power, Southern accents and treachery has become a true crime sensation with several streaming miniseries, best selling books and dozens of true crime podcasts.

Murdaugh, 57, will remain in prison. He pleaded guilty to stealing around \$12 million from his clients and currently is serving a 40-year federal sentence at the same time as a 27-year state sentence for his financial crimes.

Prosecutors promise a retrial that the court says will look different

Prosecutors haven’t closed the door on appealing the ruling, but said Wednesday they are concentrating on aggressively seek to try Murdaugh again on the murder charges preferably sometime in 2026. State Attorney General Alan Wilson saying he respected the court’s decision but no one is above the law.

Murdaugh’s lawyers pointed out that trial will look a lot different, as the justices also ruled days of evidence at the murder trial about how Murdaugh stole from clients, many of them in dire straits, shouldn’t be allowed next time.

Still, the ruling is a win for Murdaugh, who admits to being a thief, liar, insurance cheat and bad lawyer, but has adamantly denied killing his wife Maggie and younger son Paul since he found their bodies outside their home in 2021.

“Alex has said from day one that he did not kill his wife and son. We look forward to a new trial,” Murdaugh’s lawyers Dick Harpootlian and Jim Griffin said in a joint statement.

The defense has detailed the lack of physical evidence — no DNA or blood was found splattered on Murdaugh or any of his clothes, even though the killings were at close range with powerful weapons that were never found.

Prosecutors argued that the clerk’s comments were fleeting and the evidence against Murdaugh was overwhelming.

Murdaugh told investigators for months he hadn’t seen his wife and son for about an hour before they were killed. But investigators eventually cracked the passcode on Paul Murdaugh’s phone and found a video with a barking dog and Alex Murdaugh’s voice admonishing it five minutes before the young man



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stopped using his phone.

Investigators said Murdaugh was addicted to opioids and his complex schemes to steal money from clients and his family's law firm were starting to unravel so he killed his wife and son to divert attention and buy time to find a way out of his problems.

Court said clerk attacked Murdaugh's credibility with jurors

In their unanimous ruling Wednesday, the South Carolina Supreme Court said the conduct by Colleton County Clerk of Court Becky Hill "egregiously attacked Murdaugh's credibility" by suggesting to jurors his testimony could not be trusted.

A few jurors said Hill, assigned to oversee the evidence and the jury during the trial, told them to watch Murdaugh's body language when he testified in his own defense and to not be fooled, confused or thrown off by what he might say.

"By urging the jurors not to be fooled or convinced by Murdaugh's defense, Hill essentially implored the jurors to find him guilty, the ultimate issue in the case," the justices wrote, adding that the comments insinuated there was something unusual and suspicious about his decision to testify.

Hill "placed her fingers on the scales of justice, thereby denying Murdaugh his right to a fair trial by an impartial jury," the justices wrote. "Our justice system provides — indeed demands — that every person is entitled to a fair trial."

Justices say Hill was looking for celebrity

The court said Hill's motivation was the "siren call of celebrity" and her goal was to increase sales of her book on the trial called "Behind the Doors of Justice: The Murdaugh Murders." It was pulled from publication after plagiarism allegations were made.

"As her book's title suggests, it turns out Hill was quite busy behind the doors of justice, thwarting the integrity of the justice system she was sworn to protect and uphold," the justices wrote in an unsigned 27-page ruling.

Hill's attorney in her criminal case didn't return a phone call or email seeking comment.

Hill has pleaded guilty to lying about what she said and did during the Murdaugh trial, including showing graphic crime scene photos to several media members. The journalists were not named and the photos were not described at her December hearing.

"The court rightly described her conduct as 'breathtaking,' 'disgraceful,' and 'unprecedented in South Carolina,'" Murdaugh's lawyers said.

Justices say financial crime evidence also improperly used

The justices also had a warning for the next judge to try the murder case — be cautious on how much evidence of Murdaugh's thefts from his law firm and clients to allow those jurors to hear.

Some brief evidence of how Murdaugh stole is fine and how it might connect to him killing his wife and son. But the court said details like how some of the people Murdaugh stole from were disabled or vulnerable could unfairly turn against him jurors who should be focused just on whether he killed his family.

The chief prosecutor in the case said he doesn't regret piling on all the financial crime evidence he could in the initial trial because if the jury finds Murdaugh not guilty, they can't try him again,

"You don't hit a home run if you're afraid to strike out," prosecutor Creighton Waters said at a Wednesday news conference.

Wilson is a Republican running for South Carolina's open governor's seat this year. He said politics won't play into any of his decisions on this case and it is the employees of the office, not its elected leader who will be the backbone of the prosecution.

"The decision on whether to nor to pursue this case is not going to be built on who the next occupant of my office" is, Wilson said. "It's going to be built on should we seek justice or not."

## Russia fires 800 drones at Ukraine despite recent talk by Putin and Trump of possible peace

By HANNA ARHIROVA and BARRY HATTON Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia fired at least 800 drones in a massive daytime barrage on about 20 regions of Ukraine on Wednesday, killing at least six people and wounding dozens, including children, in one of the longest attacks by Moscow in the 4-year-old war, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said.

The attack began in midmorning and lasted for hours in the capital of Kyiv, the western city of Lviv near Poland, and the port of Odesa on the Black Sea, among other population centers, Zelenskyy said on the Telegram messaging app.

"Our soldiers are defending Ukraine, but Russia's obvious goal is to overload air defenses," Zelenskyy said, as the bombardment stretched into the late afternoon. He cautioned that a cruise and ballistic missile attack could follow the drone barrage.

It was "one of the longest, massive Russian attacks against Ukraine," he said on social media.

It also rattled neighbors. Hungarian Prime Minister Péter Magyar said his new government has summoned the Russian ambassador over a drone attack near Hungary's border, in a significant shift from his predecessor Viktor Orbán's friendly relations with Moscow.

"The Hungarian government strongly condemns the Russian attack on Transcarpathia," Magyar told journalists, adding that Foreign Minister Anita Orbán will speak with the ambassador Thursday morning.

The foreign minister will ask "when Russia and Vladimir Putin plan to finally end this bloody war," Magyar added.

"Thank you for your compassion and strong position!" Zelenskyy said on X after Magyar's comments.

Three people are killed in a region near Kyiv

Drone debris fell in an open area in Kyiv's Obolonskyi district with no casualties, city officials said, as air defense systems engaged Russian drones over the capital. Mayor Vitali Klitschko said emergency services responded to the scene. Explosions were heard across the city earlier Wednesday.

Three people were killed in a drone attack in the Rivne region west of Kyiv, according to Oleksandr Koval, head of the regional military administration.

Moscow's attacks are unrelenting, even as Ukraine is emboldened by its recent military accomplishments and as U.S. President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin said — without providing evidence — that the war could be approaching an end.

On Tuesday, Zelenskyy said, 14 Ukrainian regions came under attack, followed by overnight strikes on Ukraine's residential, energy and railway infrastructure.

"It is important to support Ukraine and not remain silent about Russia's war. Every time the war disappears from the top of the news, it encourages Russia to become even more savage," Zelenskyy said, apparently referring to the world's attention being focused on the Iran war.

Trump and Putin talk of a possible end to the war

Trump said Tuesday said he believes Moscow and Kyiv will soon reach a deal to end fighting.

"The end of the war in Ukraine I really think is getting very close," Trump said as he left the White House for a summit in Beijing. "Believe it or not, it's getting closer."

Putin said in a speech last weekend that his invasion of Ukraine is possibly "coming to an end."

Neither leader elaborated on what persuaded them about the possibility of peace in Europe's longest conflict since World War II. U.S.-led diplomatic efforts over the past year to end the war have fizzled after making no progress on key issues, such as whether Russia gets to keep Ukrainian land it has seized and what can be done to deter Moscow from invading again.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov indicated Wednesday that Moscow's fundamental terms are unchanged, with Putin insisting that Ukraine pull its troops from the four regions — Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia — that Russia illegally annexed in September 2022 but hasn't fully captured.

"At that point, a ceasefire will be established, and the parties can calmly engage in negotiations, which, incidentally, will inevitably be very complex and involve a lot of important details," Peskov said.

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Zelenskyy vowed to keep pressure on Moscow to make concessions in talks.

"We're not giving up on diplomatic efforts, and we hope that pressure on Russia, together with negotiations in different formats, will help bring peace," he said in a speech Wednesday in Bucharest, Romania, to representatives of countries on NATO's eastern flank.

"Sanctions are working, our long-range (drone and missile) capabilities are working, and every form of pressure is working," he said.

Meanwhile, European governments are assessing the merits of opening talks with Putin. Europe has for years tried to isolate the Russian leader and punished his country with international sanctions.

Fighting appears to shift in Ukraine's favor

The correlation of forces in the war has shifted in recent months. Ukraine has gone from pleading for international help with its defense to offering foreign countries its expertise on how to counter attacks, thanks to its domestically developed drone technology.

Ukraine's long-range drone and missile attacks have disrupted energy facilities and manufacturing deep inside Russia, with three regions reporting strikes Wednesday. The Russian Defense Ministry said that its forces intercepted and destroyed 286 Ukrainian drones over Russian regions, the illegally annexed Crimean Peninsula, the Azov Sea and the Black Sea.

On the 1,250-kilometer (780-mile) front line, the advance of Russia's bigger and better-equipped army has been slowing every month since October, according to the Institute for the Study of War.

Russia's spring offensive has floundered, with Russian forces recording a net loss of territory last month for the first time since 2024, the Washington-based think tank said.

"Not only are Ukrainian defensive lines holding, but Ukrainian forces have managed to contest the tactical initiative in several areas of the front line even as Russia continues to lose disproportionate amounts of manpower to achieve minimal gains," the ISW said Tuesday.

## **Doctor on ship who helped care for passengers with hantavirus leaves medical isolation unit**

By The Associated Press undefined

An oncologist traveling on the cruise ship at the center of a hantavirus outbreak has been cleared to leave a special biocontainment unit in Nebraska, where he was the lone American placed in isolation after he helped care for fellow passengers who became sick on board.

Dr. Stephen Kornfeld of Bend, Oregon, was among more than 120 passengers and crew evacuated from the ship and flown to different countries to enter quarantine. Kornfeld was brought to the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha with 15 other Americans, but he was the only one taken to an isolated biocontainment unit after a nasal swab he took on the ship produced inconclusive results about whether he had the virus.

On Wednesday, the hospital announced that Kornfeld will now join the 15 other Americans who were taken for monitoring at the National Quarantine Unit, instead of the biocontainment unit, according to hospital spokesperson Kayla Thomas.

Kornfeld appeared on CNN's "Erin Burnett OutFront" on a video call from his hospital room Tuesday, saying, "I feel wonderful, 100%."

He said there was a period on the ship when he came down with flu-like symptoms including night sweats, chills and fatigue but he said he has no symptoms now.

The World Health Organization said Wednesday that a total of 11 hantavirus cases linked to the cruise have been reported worldwide, including three deaths. Eight cases have been confirmed by laboratory tests.

Kornfeld said a nasal swab he took on the ship was later tested twice in the Netherlands. One result came back negative, the other positive. Earlier this week, he was awaiting results from a new test taken when he returned to the U.S.

"The initial test that we received was from abroad and it was inconclusive in its results," Dr. David Fitter of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention told reporters Wednesday.

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In addition to the passengers taken to Nebraska, two other Americans are being monitored at the serious communicable disease unit at Emory University Hospital in Atlanta.

Health authorities say it is the first hantavirus outbreak on a cruise ship. While there is no cure or vaccine for hantavirus, the WHO says early detection and treatment improves survival rates.

Public health officials say the risk to the general public from the cruise ship outbreak is low. Hantavirus usually spreads from rodent droppings and is not easily transmitted between people, though the Andes virus detected on the Hondius may be able to spread between people in rare cases.

The WHO is recommending that passengers and crew from the cruise ship stay in quarantine, either at home or other facilities, for 42 days.

Kornfeld described his quarters at the biocontainment unit in Nebraska as a hospital room with a comfortable bed.

"It's a little weird being in here by myself," he said before he was cleared to leave. "But the nurses come in, the doctors come in. I'm on WhatsApp all the time. It's really amazing how quickly time flies."

## Foreign ticket holders from World Cup qualifying countries won't have to pay bonds to enter US

By SEUNG MIN KIM and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration is suspending a requirement that foreign visitors from countries that have qualified for the World Cup and have bought tickets for the soccer tournament pay as much as \$15,000 in bonds to enter the United States, the State Department said Wednesday.

The department imposed the bond requirement last year for countries that it said had high rates of people overstaying their visas and other security issues as part of the Republican administration's broader crackdown on immigration.

Travelers to the United States from 50 countries are required to pay the new bond, and five of those countries have qualified for the World Cup — Algeria, Cape Verde, Ivory Coast, Senegal and Tunisia.

Citizens from those five countries who have purchased tickets from FIFA are now exempt from the visa bond requirement. World Cup team players, coaches and some staff already had been exempt from the bond requirement as part of the administration's orders to prioritize the processing of visas for the tournament.

"The United States is excited to organize the biggest and best FIFA World Cup in history," Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs Mora Namdar said. "We are waiving visa bonds for qualified fans who bought World Cup tickets" and opted in to the FIFA Pass system that allows expedited visa appointments as of April 15.

In its own statement, FIFA said the announcement shows "our ongoing collaboration with the U.S. government and the White House task force for the FIFA World Cup to deliver a successful, record-breaking and unforgettable global event" and thanked the administration for the partnership.

The waiver is a rare loosening of immigration requirements under the administration and will ease travel burdens for at least some visitors to the U.S. for the World Cup, which begins June 11 and is co-hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico.

The administration has taken dramatic steps to restrict immigration in ways critics say are incongruous with the unifying message a global sporting event such as the World Cup is supposed to project.

For instance, the administration has barred travelers from Iran and Haiti, though World Cup players, coaches and other support personnel are exempt. Travelers from the Ivory Coast and Senegal face partial restrictions under an expanded version of that travel ban, even without the visa bond exemption.

Foreign travelers also had faced potential new requirements to submit their social media histories, although that policy from U.S. Customs and Border Protection had not gone into effect. Also, the administration had deployed U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents at airports recently when Transportation Security Administration personnel were not being paid during a partial federal shutdown.

Those measures prompted Amnesty International and dozens of U.S. civil and human rights groups to issue a "World Cup travel advisory" that warns travelers about the climate in the U.S.



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In a report this month, the main advocacy group for U.S. hotels blamed visa barriers and other geopolitical issues for "significantly suppressing international demand," leading to hotel bookings for the soccer tournament that are far below what had initially been anticipated.

The American Hotel & Lodging Association said travelers are concerned about potentially lengthy visa wait times and increased fees, along with uncertainty about how they're being processed to enter the U.S.

The bond requirements are part of the administration's larger effort to clamp down on migrants who travel to the U.S. on temporary visas but then overstay them. Visa applicants from the affected countries are required to pay \$5,000, \$10,000 or \$15,000 in bonds, which will be refunded if the traveler complies with the terms of the visa or if the visa application is denied.

As of early April, the number of World Cup fans affected by the bond requirement was believed to be relatively small, perhaps only about 250 people, according to U.S. officials who were not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity. But they said that number was changing rapidly as more people buy tickets and some with tickets opt against traveling.

FIFA had requested the waiver, which had to be approved by the State Department and Department of Homeland Security, and was the topic of discussion at multiple meetings at the White House and elsewhere in Washington for several months, the officials said.

## **Survivors of plane crash off Florida were on a life raft for hours with no idea if help was coming**

By GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

For five hours, the 11 survivors of a plane crash off the coast of Florida floated on a life raft, with no means of calling for help and no idea if anyone was coming to save them. As a thunderstorm approached, they gathered under a tarp for whatever protection it might offer.

Then, search and rescue crews from the U.S. military appeared overhead, members of those crews recounted during a news conference Wednesday.

"You could tell just by looking at them that they were in distress — physically, mentally and emotionally," said Air Force Capt. Rory Whipple, a combat rescue specialist who jumped into the water and swam to the survivors. "You have to imagine the emotional injuries that they sustained out there, not knowing if someone was going to rescue them."

The plane, a Beechcraft 300 King Air turboprop, was on its way from Marsh Harbour, on the Bahamian island of Great Abaco, to Grand Bahama International Airport in Freeport when it suffered engine failure Tuesday, authorities said. The pilot ditched the plane in the water about 50 miles (80 km) off Vero Beach, Florida, and managed to get its 10 passengers, three with minor injuries, onto a yellow life raft.

Air Force Reserve Maj. Elizabeth Piowaty credited those efforts, saying the pilot would have been concerned about ocean swells and slowing the plane as much as safely possible before impact.

"I've not known anyone to survive a ditching in the ocean," said Piowaty, who commanded a HC-130J Combat King II plane that assisted with the rescue. "From what I've seen, for all those people to survive is pretty miraculous."

The downed plane's emergency beacon alerted the U.S. Coast Guard to its location. At the time, the Air Force Reserve's 920th Rescue Wing had a crew already airborne conducting a training mission in a HH-60W Jolly Green II helicopter. The crew was redirected to help with the search.

Piowaty said that after locating the survivors, her aircraft passed overhead and dropped a survival kit that included two additional rafts, food and water. The survivors were then able to spread out, and the crew of the HH-60W, including Whipple, was able to hoist them to safety amid 3- to 5-foot (1- to 1.5-m) swells, raising the last survivor just a few minutes before the helicopter would have been forced to refuel.

There was no sign of the downed aircraft, Piowaty said.

All 11 survivors were flown to awaiting emergency medical services at Melbourne Orlando International Airport, authorities said. All were reported to be in stable condition.

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration said it would investigate the crash.

## Lutnick backs away from his Epstein 'blackmail' claim in interview with House committee

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, in an interview with House lawmakers, backed away from a previous claim that convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein had blackmailed people.

Lutnick agreed to sit for an interview with the House Oversight Committee last week after the release of case files on Epstein contradicted his claim on a podcast last year that he had been determined to "never be in a room again" with Epstein after a 2005 tour of Epstein's home that disturbed Lutnick and his wife.

The House Oversight Committee released the transcript of the interview Wednesday, as well as a transcript of an interview with Tedd Waitt, a former boyfriend of Epstein confidant Ghislaine Maxwell.

Lutnick, who for years was neighbors with Epstein in New York City, had claimed in that podcast interview that Epstein engaged in blackmail. But under scrutiny from lawmakers, Lutnick said he was only "speculating."

"I had no personal information. I was just speculating for a podcast," Lutnick told lawmakers, adding that his two other personal interactions with Epstein years later were "meaningless and inconsequential."

Lutnick is the highest-ranked current 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.

How Lutnick described interactions with Epstein

Lutnick repeatedly downplayed his previous interactions with Epstein. He said that after Epstein, who died in a New York jail cell in 2019 while awaiting trial on sex trafficking charges, showed a massage table and made a sexual innuendo during a tour of his townhouse in 2005, Lutnick and his wife decided he would "just avoid him."

Yet Lutnick, who was previously the head of brokerage and investment bank Cantor Fitzgerald, had a pair of interactions and exchanged several emails with Epstein over the years.

They also both invested in the same business venture in 2013, according to the Epstein case files. Lutnick told lawmakers that he was unaware that Epstein was also an investor until the case files were released months ago.

The commerce secretary also described his two other meetings with Epstein. During a family vacation in the Caribbean, Epstein's staff invited them to have lunch on his private island. Describing the 2012 visit, he told the committee: "We sat outside, had lunch. It was boring. We left."

Lutnick also said he made a brief visit to Epstein's home in 2011 to discuss scaffolding that would be installed at Epstein's townhouse. Lutnick called that meeting "meaningless and inconsequential."

Democrats pressed Lutnick to answer for his decision to meet up with Epstein after initially determining that he would avoid him. Lutnick responded that he couldn't remember why his family made the visit to Epstein's island.

As they emerged from the interview last week, Democrats criticized Lutnick as evasive and dishonest. Several called on him to resign.

"If a Cabinet Secretary lies to the American public, they should no longer serve in that position. Mr. Lutnick should resign or be fired," Rep. Robert Garcia, the top Democrat on the House Oversight Committee, said on social media shortly after Lutnick's interview.

The White House has stood behind Lutnick, who for years has been a part of Trump's circle.

Maxwell's former boyfriend also interviewed

Lawmakers also last month interviewed Waitt, the cofounder of Gateway computers who dated Maxwell in the early 2000s. Maxwell, who is serving a lengthy prison sentence for helping Epstein traffic girls, had also dated Epstein and was his longtime confidant.

Waitt told lawmakers that he was unaware at the time that either Epstein or Maxwell was committing sexual abuse. He also described meeting Epstein only a handful of times.

"Each of those were very brief and unintentional," he said, adding that he had never visited Epstein's home, flown on his planes or visited his private island.

Waitt said he found Epstein "somewhat arrogant" and added that he was "off-putting."

## **Drug counselor who delivered 'Friends' star Matthew Perry ketamine that killed him gets 2 years**

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A licensed drug addiction counselor who delivered Matthew Perry the doses of ketamine that killed him, and later became a key informant in the investigation, was sentenced Wednesday to two years in prison.

At a federal court in Los Angeles, Judge Sherilyn Peace Garnett handed down the sentence to 56-year-old Erik Fleming for his role in the death of the "Friends" star.

"It's truly a nightmare I can't wake up from," Fleming said in a deep, somber voice from the podium before his sentencing. "I'm haunted by the mistakes I made."

The judge ordered Fleming, who has been free on bond, to turn himself in to serve his term in 45 days. He was also sentenced to three years of probation.

Fleming was the fourth defendant sentenced of the five who have pleaded guilty in prosecutions over the actor's 2023 death in the Jacuzzi at his Los Angeles home. Fleming connected Perry to Jasveen Sangha, the convicted drug who prosecutors called "The Ketamine Queen." He delivered drugs from her house to Perry's, and marked them up to make a profit.

Fleming gave up Sangha to investigators the same day they first found him at his sister's house, where he was sleeping on the couch several months after Perry's death. Sangha was sentenced last month to 15 years in prison.

Fleming's attorney Robert Dugdale told the judge he "handed over the Ketamine Queen on a silver platter."

"They didn't have a clue who she was before that day," Dugdale said.

He would likely have gotten about four years in prison if it weren't for his cooperation.

The prosecution said he deserved credit for doing the right thing, but argued that he did so only when confronted and cornered by authorities.

"Mr. Fleming didn't cooperate because he had a benevolent motive, or because he wanted justice for Mr. Perry," Assistant U.S. Attorney Ian Yanniello said. "He wanted to save himself."

The judge also pointed out that Fleming didn't come forward in the months after Perry's death, that he didn't create new evidence by making phone calls to co-conspirators or anything similar, and that investigators might have gotten the same information he gave them simply through the seizure of his phone.

But all agreed that his cooperation sped up and smoothed the investigation.

Prosecutors also said Fleming's job as a drug counselor made him especially morally culpable for selling street drugs to a victim who had a public, well-documented battle with addiction, even if he wasn't acting as counselor to Perry.

Fleming became the first defendant to plead guilty in August 2024, admitting to distribution of ketamine resulting in death. That was before arrests in the case were even announced, and Wednesday was his first court appearance since his role became public knowledge.

Defense lawyers emphasized that he had no criminal record and said he spent only 11 days as a drug dealer, with a single customer. Fleming told the judge it was an act of desperation "in the midst of the worst time of my life."

Fleming told the judge his great remorse "can't compare to the agony I've caused."

Outside the courthouse, he said "my chest and heart hurt every day for the pain I caused not only his family but the millions of people who adore him."

He and his lawyers also highlighted what they called his extraordinary moves toward rehabilitation, spending 20 months sober and helping to establish a sober living home.

Perry had been receiving ketamine treatments for depression — an increasingly common off-label use.

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Perry was seeking more of the drug than he could get through doctors and asked a friend to help him get more. She introduced him to Fleming, a former film and television producer whose career had been ravaged by addiction but had since become a drug counselor.

Fleming said he was in the midst of a major relapse brought on by life struggles. He got ketamine from Sangha and took it to Perry's house where he sold it to the actor's live-in personal assistant Kenneth Iwamasa.

His deliveries included 25 vials for \$6,000 four days before Perry's death.

Iwamasa would inject Perry from that batch on Oct. 28, 2023, and hours later, he found the actor dead. A medical examiner's report found that Perry died from the acute effects of ketamine, a surgical anesthetic, and drowning was a secondary cause.

The 2 1/2-year investigation and prosecution that resulted should come to a close in two weeks with the sentencing of Iwamasa.

Perry, who died at 54, became one of the biggest stars of his generation as Chandler Bing on "Friends," NBC's culture-changing sitcom that ran from 1994 to 2004.

## Tech carries Wall Street to records, even as most stocks fall after discouraging inflation data

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — A rebound for technology stocks led Wall Street to records Wednesday, even though the majority of U.S. stocks fell following another discouraging update on inflation.

The S&P 500 rose 0.6% and topped its prior all-time high set at the start of the week. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dipped 67 points, or 0.1%, while the Nasdaq composite set its own record after climbing 1.2%.

Gains for tech stocks led the way, like Micron Technology's 4.8% and On Semiconductor's 11.1%. They had stumbled the day before after momentum suddenly halted for stocks riding excitement around artificial-intelligence technology.

Nvidia, the chip company that was among the first faces of the AI boom, rose 2.3% and was the strongest force pushing upward on the S&P 500 because of its immense size. Its CEO, Jensen Huang, got an invitation to join President Donald Trump on his trip to China, where they could discuss allowing shipments of Nvidia AI chips to the world's second-largest economy.

Earlier in the day, Japan's SoftBank Group Corp. said that its profit for the 12 months through March zoomed by nearly five-fold from the previous year as its AI investments paid off. China's Alibaba Group said its AI and cloud growth accelerated in the latest quarter, and its stock that trades in the United States rose 8.2% even though its overall results fell short of analysts' expectations.

But the majority of stocks outside of the technology industry fell, as pressure builds on Wall Street.

"Corporate earnings and AI momentum are acting as the market's primary shock absorbers, but the road is getting significantly rougher," said Tim Waterer, chief market analyst at KCM Trade.

A report on Wednesday showed that inflation at the U.S. wholesale level was considerably worse last month than economists expected. That followed a report on Tuesday showing accelerating inflation at the U.S. consumer level.

Prices are rising for fuel, transportation and all kinds of other things because of tariffs, bad weather affecting food prices and other reasons. But atop them all is the jump in oil prices created by the war with Iran, which has slowed the global flow of crude to customers worldwide.

On Wednesday, oil prices moved more modestly following big gains early in the week, and the price for a barrel of Brent crude oil fell 2% to settle at \$105.63.

But it remains well above its price of roughly \$70 from before the war, and the International Energy Agency said Wednesday that oil inventories worldwide are depleting at a record pace. The resulting jump in oil prices has forced traders to give up most hopes for a cut to interest rates this year by the Federal Reserve. If anything, a hike to rates seems like the next-best bet after no move in rates this year.



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Wall Street generally loves lower rates because they would give the economy a boost by making mortgages and other loans cheaper. They can also push upward on prices for stocks and all kinds of other investments, but the downside is they can worsen inflation.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury edged up to 4.47% from 4.46% late Tuesday and is well above its 3.97% level from before the war.

The rise in yields helped send stocks of utilities and real-estate owners to some of the sharper losses in the S&P 500. Such companies tend to pay relatively big dividends, which become less attractive to investors looking for income when bonds are paying more in interest.

American Electric Power fell 3% after announcing a \$2.6 billion offering of its stock.

Elsewhere on Wall Street, Birkenstock Holding dropped 12.9% after the British company said its results for the latest quarter were hurt by U.S. tariffs and other factors.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 43.29 points to 7,444.25. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dipped 67.36 to 49,693.20, and the Nasdaq composite climbed 314.14 to 26,402.34.

In stock markets abroad, indexes rose across much of Europe and Asia.

South Korea's Kospi led the way with a jump of 2.6%. It had sunk 2.3% the day before, after a senior figure in the administration suggested the government may redistribute windfall AI profits from companies to citizens. That sapped momentum from AI stocks worldwide on Tuesday.

## **Officials say \$1.3 billion in Medicaid money to California will be deferred over suspicions of fraud**

By ALI SWENSON and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President JD Vance on Wednesday announced new steps in the Trump administration's initiative to root out fraud in federal health programs, including a \$1.3 billion deferral in Medicaid funding to California.

"How long are people going to pay into programs if they know that that money doesn't go to a low-income kid who needs healthcare, but that money goes into a fraudster getting rich?" Vance said during an event at the White House, adding that taxpayers and program beneficiaries are victimized by such fraud.

The Republican administration also is imposing a six-month freeze on some new Medicare enrollments and warning states to investigate Medicaid fraud or risk losing funding, officials said.

The moves are part of Vance's anti-fraud task force, which has been taking more aggressive steps to investigate states before the November elections. The panel set up by President Donald Trump seeks to crack down on potential misuse of public money.

Vance, a potential 2028 White House hopeful, has used the high-profile assignment from Trump to remind Americans struggling with high costs that he is trying to claw back taxpayer dollars. Vance has promoted the task force's work during campaign stops for Republican candidates and is expected to focus on the effort Thursday in Maine, which has closely watched primary races scheduled for June 9.

The steps come as people across the United States have raised concerns about rising health costs and barriers to access, sometimes from the federal government's own actions. New work requirements in Medicaid, for example, are expected to strain hospitals around the country and result in millions of enrollees losing their health coverage.

The administration contends its vigorous fraud-busting efforts will help prevent wrongdoing in Medicaid and Medicare while preserving funding and resources for those most in need.

Deferring \$1.3 billion in California payments

Dr. Mehmet Oz, who leads the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, said the administration was making the "largest deferral we've ever made" in Medicaid funds and that it was justified.

He claimed the administration had identified questionable expenditures and anomalies, such as a higher rate of growth in California's home care program compared with other states. He did not provide concrete examples of documented fraud.

"We'd like the state to at least come to the table and explain to us how these outlier payments have

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been generated," he said.

The press office of Gov. Gavin Newsom, D-Calif., disputed Oz's claims and said the state's home care program grew because the state is "keeping more people OUT of far more expensive nursing homes."

"We hate fraud," the office wrote on X. "But that's NOT what this is."

The total cost of California's Medicaid program, including state and federal funding, is expected to be about \$222 billion for the budget year that starts July 1.

Nationwide freeze on some new Medicare provider enrollments

Oz's agency also announced a nationwide six-month moratorium on all new Medicare enrollments by providers of hospice and home care.

"Today we're shutting the door on fraud — preventing new bad actors from entering Medicare while we aggressively identify, investigate, and remove those already exploiting them," he said in a statement.

Existing hospice and home healthcare providers will continue to operate as usual. But CMS said it will "intensify targeted investigations, deploy advanced data analytics, and accelerate the removal" of providers in the category that are suspected of fraudulent activity.

Such a freeze is not unprecedented, said Tricia Neumann, a senior vice president and executive director for the program on Medicare policy at the healthcare research nonprofit KFF. She said President Bill Clinton's Democratic administration also imposed a temporary moratorium on home health agencies.

"A brief moratorium gives the administration time to crack down on true fraud and prevent new fraudulent entities from popping up," she said.

Several alleged fraud schemes have been prosecuted in the hospice and home healthcare categories, and states have acknowledged that it is a legitimate concern. But some have pushed back on the administration's aggressive tactics and raised concerns that the catchall efforts could needlessly punish law-abiding providers that are trying to serve patients.

The country's largest organization advocating for home healthcare providers, the National Alliance for Care at Home, said in a statement that it supports efforts to root out fraud. But it said it prefers targeted strategies to a sweeping moratorium, which it said raises concerns about access to care as well as reduces competition and slows innovation.

Also Wednesday, the Department of Health and Human Services' internal watchdog sent letters to state attorneys general warning them to vigorously investigate possible fraud or risk losing federal money.

Moves are part of monthslong federal push

In recent months, CMS has suspended payments to hundreds of hospice and home care agencies in Los Angeles over alleged fraud and issued another six-month moratorium on suppliers of durable medical equipment, prosthetics, orthotics and certain other supplies in Medicare.

The administration also has approached at least five states with investigations into potential healthcare fraud and halted some \$243 million in Medicaid payments to Minnesota over fraud concerns. Last month, Oz announced CMS would add to that oversight by requiring all 50 states to share how they planned to revalidate some of their Medicaid providers.

In at least one case, the administration has erred in its accusations against states. In April, CMS acknowledged to The Associated Press that it made a significant error in figures it used to help justify a fraud probe in New York. The acknowledgment deepened doubts about the administration's methods and raised a common criticism of the second Trump administration — that it tends to attack first and confirm the facts later.

## Louisiana advances plan for new US House districts as Georgia joins redistricting effort for 2028

By JACK BROOK, JEFF AMY, SOPHIE BATES and DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press  
BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — Republican senators in Louisiana advanced a plan Wednesday to eliminate one of two majority-Black congressional seats before the November midterm elections while Georgia's governor announced that he will call lawmakers back to work to redraw legislative voting districts for the

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2028 elections.

The developments showed the far-reaching ripples of a recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling that struck down Louisiana's congressional map as an illegal racial gerrymander, weakening the protections of the federal Voting Rights Act. The decision has prompted various Republican-led states to try to dismantle districts with large minority populations that have elected Democrats.

Since the court's ruling, Tennessee and Alabama already have acted to implement different House maps that could help Republicans win an additional seat in the November elections, where control of the closely divided chamber is at stake. A similar effort fizzled Tuesday in the South Carolina Senate but may not be over.

The redistricting efforts to undo minority districts are the latest in a 10-month-long national redistricting battle that already has involved about one-third of the states. It gained steam when President Donald Trump urged Texas Republicans last year to redraw House districts in an attempt to win more seats in the midterm elections. Democrats in California responded with their own new districts. Numerous Republican states have redistricted since then.

Republicans think they could gain as many as 15 seats so far from new House maps in Texas, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Florida, Tennessee and Alabama. Democrats, meanwhile, think they could gain six seats from new maps in California and Utah. The Virginia Supreme Court last week struck down a redistricting effort that could have yielded four more winnable seats for Democrats.

Georgia is the first to target the 2028 elections

Republican Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp called a special legislative session on redistricting to begin June 17, the day after runoffs will settle party nominees for the November elections. Kemp has said he doesn't want to change Georgia's voting districts for this year's elections, because some ballots already have been cast for Tuesday's first round of primaries.

The governor's proclamation is the first to focus on the 2028 elections since the Supreme Court's ruling in the Louisiana case. Other states could follow, including Democratic states such as New York that were already looking at ways to enact new legislative districts by the next presidential election.

By acting now, Georgia Republicans could guard against the possibility that a Democrat could win the governor's race in November and veto new voting districts if the legislature had waited to act until its regular session next year.

Five of Georgia's 14 U.S. House members are Black Democrats. The easiest target for Republicans could be U.S. Rep. Sanford Bishop's district in southwest Georgia. Republicans could also try to pick off one or more of the four Democrats who represent parts of the Atlanta area, but spreading out too many Democrats could make more Republican districts competitive.

Kemp's proclamation allows new boundaries not only for U.S. House districts but also for the state Senate and state House. A court previously ordered some state House and Senate districts be redrawn to help Black voters elect more candidates, voiding a map the GOP-controlled legislature drew after the 2020 Census. Republicans could choose to revert to that map or take a more aggressive path, especially in the 180-member House, where the GOP's majority has shrunk over time to 99 seats.

Democratic U.S. Sen. Raphael Warnock said Wednesday he would "fight this with everything I have."

"There is an extreme movement in this country that will stop at nothing to hold on to power, even if it means stripping representation away from millions," Warnock wrote in an online post.

Louisiana map resembles 2022 districts

The Louisiana Senate could vote Thursday on the new House map advanced by a redistricting committee.

The plan keeps a New Orleans-based, majority-Black district represented by Democratic U.S. Rep. Troy Carter while also including a portion of Baton Rouge. It significantly reshapes the 6th District, represented by Democratic U.S. Rep. Cleo Fields, which currently snakes northwest from Baton Rouge to Shreveport to create a second majority-Black district. That district would instead be clustered around predominantly white communities in southern Louisiana around Baton Rouge.

Fields, a Baton Rouge resident, said he won't decide whether to seek reelection until the maps are final-

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ized. But he said won't challenge Carter in a primary.

"I've said from day one, I have no interest in running against Troy Carter. Period," Fields told The Associated Press. "The real issue is not whether I serve another second in Congress. The real issue is whether or not a person like me will have the opportunity to serve in Congress."

State Sen. Jay Morris, a Republican who sponsored the revised map, said the new districts are very similar to those used in 2022 that resulted in five Republicans and one Democrat winning election.

A federal judge struck down the 2022 map for violating the Voting Rights Act. Then in 2023, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Alabama had to create its own second largely Black congressional district.

In light of the Alabama ruling, the Louisiana Legislature passed a revised map, creating a second majority-Black district that was used in the 2024 elections. That map also was challenged, leading to last month's U.S. Supreme Court ruling that Louisiana's districts relied too heavily on race. The Supreme Court followed with a decision also overturning a judicial order mandating that Alabama use a House map with two largely Black congressional districts.

Republican Gov. Jeff Landry postponed Louisiana's U.S. House primaries, scheduled for Saturday, until either July 15 or a date to be determined by the Legislature to allow time for new districts to be put in place.

Mississippi calls off special session

Republican Gov. Tate Reeves on Wednesday called off next week's special legislative session that had been planned to redraw Mississippi Supreme Court districts. But he said he expects lawmakers to redraw the state's congressional, legislative and Supreme Court districts before the 2027 elections.

In a social media post, Reeves said there is no longer an immediate need to redraw Supreme Court districts.

A federal judge had previously ordered the districts be redrawn, ruling that the current map violated the Voting Rights Act by diluting the power of Black voters. The 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals overturned that ruling this week, following the Supreme Court decision on Louisiana's districts. The case will now return to a lower court for further argument.

Mississippi already held primaries for its 2026 congressional elections. Any redistricting by Republicans ahead of the 2028 elections likely would target U.S. Rep. Bennie Thompson, the only Democrat among four House members.

## Republicans have gained an edge in a US House redistricting battle. What states are taking action?

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

Republicans have opened up an advantage in a national redistricting battle among states after court rulings that weakened federal Voting Rights Act protections for minorities and invalidated a key Democratic redistricting effort.

A recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling that struck down a Black-majority congressional district in Louisiana as an illegal racial gerrymander has provided grounds for Republicans in several Southern states to try to eliminate House districts with large minority populations that have elected Democrats.

Meanwhile, a Virginia Supreme Court ruling invalidated a voter-approved congressional map that Democrats had been counting on to deliver as many as four additional U.S. House seats. The court said Democratic lawmakers had violated the state constitution when placing the proposal on the ballot.

Legislative voting districts typically are redrawn based on census data after the start of each decade. But an unusual spate of mid-decade redistricting broke out after President Donald Trump urged Texas Republicans last year to reshape U.S. House districts to give the party an edge in the midterm elections. Democrats in California countered with their own political gerrymandering. More states followed.

So far, Republicans believe they could win up to 15 additional seats from new districts in Texas, Alabama, Florida, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio and Tennessee. Democrats, meanwhile, think they could gain up to six seats from new districts in California and Utah. But those tallies presume past voting patterns hold in November. Historically, the president's party tends to lose seats in the midterms.



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Democrats need to gain just a few seats in November to wrest control of the House from Republicans, which would give them greater power to oppose Trump.

Where new House districts are proposed

Lawmakers in at least a couple states still are considering plans for new U.S. House maps ahead of the November elections.

Louisiana

Current map: two Democrats, four Republicans

New map: Republican lawmakers have proposed a new U.S. House map that could help them win an additional seat in response to an April 29 Supreme Court ruling striking down a majority-Black congressional district. Republican Gov. Jeff Landry postponed the May congressional primary to either July 15 or a date to be determined by lawmakers.

Challenges: Lawsuits assert Landry lacked authority to suspend the primary elections.

South Carolina

Current map: one Democrat, six Republicans

New map: Republican state House members have proposed a new U.S. House map that could give the GOP a better chance at winning an additional seat.

Challenges: The House voted to allow redistricting to be considered after their regular work session ends May 14, but the resolution failed to get the needed two-thirds majority in the Senate.

Where new House districts are in place

New U.S. House districts are in place in nine states. Seven took up redistricting voluntarily, one was required to by its state constitution and another did so under court order.

Texas

Current map: 13 Democrats, 25 Republicans

New map: Republican Gov. Greg Abbott signed a revised House map into law last August that could help Republicans win five additional seats.

Challenges: The U.S. Supreme Court in December cleared the way for the new districts to be used in this year's elections. It has since overturned a lower-court ruling that blocked the new map because it was "racially gerrymandered."

California

Current map: 43 Democrats, nine Republicans

New map: Voters in November approved revised House districts drawn by the Democratic-led Legislature that could help Democrats win five additional seats.

Challenges: The U.S. Supreme Court in February allowed the new districts to be used in this year's elections. It denied an appeal from Republicans and the Department of Justice, which claimed the districts impermissibly favor Hispanic voters.

Missouri

Current map: two Democrats, six Republicans

New map: Republican Gov. Mike Kehoe signed a revised House map into law last September that could help Republicans win an additional seat by reshaping a Democratic-held district based in Kansas City.

Challenges: The Missouri Supreme Court ruled May 12 that the new map is in effect as election officials work to determine whether a referendum petition seeking a statewide vote complies with constitutional criteria and contains enough valid petition signatures. The court has rejected claims that the new districts are not compact and that mid-decade redistricting is illegal.

North Carolina

Current map: four Democrats, 10 Republicans

New map: The Republican-led General Assembly gave final approval in October to revised districts that could help Republicans win an additional seat.

Challenges: A federal court panel in November denied a request to block the revised districts from being used in the midterm elections.

Ohio

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Current map: five Democrats, 10 Republicans

New map: A bipartisan panel composed primarily of Republicans voted in October to approve revised House districts that improve Republicans' chances of winning two additional seats.

Challenges: None. The state constitution required new districts before the 2026 election, because Republicans had approved the prior map without sufficient Democratic support after the last census.

Utah

Current map: no Democrats, four Republicans

New map: A judge in November imposed revised House districts that could help Democrats win a seat. The court ruled that lawmakers had circumvented anti-gerrymandering standards passed by voters when adopting the prior map.

Challenges: A federal court panel and the state Supreme Court, in February, each rejected Republican challenges to the judicial map selection.

Florida

Current map: eight Democrats, 20 Republicans

New map: Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis announced on May 4 that he had signed revised U.S. House districts that improve the GOP's chances of winning four additional seats.

Challenges: Court challenges contend the new map violates a state constitution provision prohibiting districts from being drawn with intent to favor or disfavor a political party.

Tennessee

Current map: one Democrat, eight Republicans

New map: Republican Gov. Bill Lee signed new U.S. House districts May 7 that improve the GOP's chances of winning an additional seat by carving up the lone Democratic-held seat, a Black-majority district that includes Memphis.

Challenges: Court challenges contend the new districts were drawn with a racially discriminatory purpose, disenfranchise voters this year and were not proper under Lee's special session proclamation.

Alabama

Current map: two Democrats, five Republicans

New map: The U.S. Supreme Court on May 11 cleared the state to switch to U.S. House districts passed in 2023 by Republican state lawmakers that could improve the GOP's chances of winning an additional seat.

Challenges: Attorneys who originally challenged the 2023 plan have asked a lower court to again block it from being used.

## US grocery prices rose in April, but gas spikes weren't the only reason

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

Americans paid more for their groceries last month, but high gasoline prices resulting from the Iran war were only one of the reasons why.

Prices for food eaten at home rose 2.9% in April compared to the same month a year earlier, according to government figures released Tuesday. That was the highest year-over-year inflation rate for the category since August 2023.

Prices at restaurants, fast-food chains and other places to get prepared meals also increased, putting overall food prices up 3.2% in the last year, the Labor Department's consumer price index showed.

Fuel prices have soared while the Iran war prevents cargo ships from passing through the Strait of Hormuz, a vital corridor for global oil supplies. Diesel fuel powers fishing boats, tractors and the trucks that ship 83% of U.S. agricultural products. As of Tuesday, the average price per gallon was up 61% from a year ago, according to AAA.

The meat, produce and dry goods vendors that supply Sparrow Market, a small independent grocer in Ann Arbor, Michigan, all added fuel surcharges to their deliveries in recent weeks, owner Raymond Campise

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said. Wholesale prices for meat, produce and some other products also have gone up, he said.

"For independent markets operating on narrow margins, even small increases can have a major impact," Campise said.

The full impact of rising energy costs on food likely has not hit retail grocery prices yet in the U.S., according to Purdue University economists Ken Foster and Bernhard Dalheimer. Higher costs to produce, process, store and transport food can take three to six months to show up on supermarket shelves, where prices typically fall slowly once increased, they said.

"Most of what we're seeing now in the food price chain probably predates the conflict," Foster, a professor of agricultural economics, said. "We're cautiously waiting to see what the June numbers and the May numbers might show as they come out in terms of ... the extent to which energy shocks in the Strait of Hormuz and shipping blockades and so forth are going to impact food prices."

The consumer price index measures changes in what people in U.S. cities paid at retail stores for meat, bread, milk, produce and other grocery staples. Over the last 20 years, grocery prices increased an average of 2.6%, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Prices for perishable and refrigerated products tend to increase faster than prices for packaged goods when energy is an issue. Consumers paid 6.5% more for fresh fruit and vegetables in U.S. cities last month than they did in April 2025, and 8.8% more for meat, the Labor Department reported.

But U.S. trade policies and extreme weather also have weighed on U.S. food prices in the last year. In July 2025, the Trump administration imposed a 17% duty on fresh tomatoes imported from Mexico; consumer prices rose 40% in the 12 months before April.

Dry weather in the Western U.S. has been one of many factors pushing up beef prices, which in April were 15% higher year-over-year. Coffee prices were up 18.5%, partly due to drought and other weather conditions that have hurt global coffee production in recent years.

"Today's CPI showed that food prices have been rising 3.2 percent in the past year, but the story behind that number is more complicated than just an energy shock," said Dalheimer, an assistant professor of macroeconomics and trade in Purdue's Department of Agricultural Economics.

Prices for some foods remained more or less flat or declined over 12 months. Milk and chicken dipped slightly. Butter cost 5.8% less in April than it did a year earlier. Egg prices fell 39% as farmers rebuilt flocks that were decimated by an ongoing bird flu outbreak.

Food prices and broader inflation are likely to feature prominently in November's midterm elections. During his 2024 campaign, President Donald Trump often cited the prices of bacon, cereal, crackers and other groceries as reasons why voters should return him to the White House.

Some food producers say they're struggling now because of higher fuel costs. The Southern Shrimp Alliance, which represents shrimpers in eight states, said some boats haven't left the dock this spring because they can't catch enough shrimp to compensate for the cost of diesel.

Fuel typically makes up 30% to 50% of the costs for U.S. shrimpers, but because they supply only 6% of the shrimp that Americans consume, they have limited ability to raise prices or add surcharges for fuel, the organization said.

Higher fuel prices may also be impacting food costs in other ways. Part of April's 5% annual increase in prices for nonalcoholic beverages may be due to the petroleum derivative that goes into making plastic bottles, Foster said.

"It's possible some of that's starting to seep down the supply chain and get into those prices," he said.

Over the next year or more, Americans could also see higher food prices due to spiking fertilizer costs, since around 30% of the world's fertilizer travels through the Strait of Hormuz.

Fertilizer costs are less of an issue for U.S. farmers this year, since many already had fertilizer supplies in place before the war began, according to Foster. But the effects could become more noticeable next year if the war drags on, he said.

"I expect the Iran conflict to impact the coming years' food prices through a couple of channels. One, the energy costs and transportation handling. The other would be through packaging costs," Foster said. "If

the conflict were to last longer, then we might see more coming online as fertilizer prices start to impact longer-term planting decisions and cropping decisions.”

## Who are the 5 people convicted in connection with Matthew Perry’s death

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The wide-ranging prosecution in the death of “Friends” star Matthew Perry is coming to a close. Five people have pleaded guilty for various roles in supplying the actor with ketamine, the drug that killed him at age 54 in 2023. Four of them have been sentenced. The last person will be sentenced in the coming days.

Here’s a look at each person.

**Kenneth Iwamasa**

Perry’s 60-year-old longtime live-in personal assistant Kenneth Iwamasa was intimately involved in the actor’s illegal ketamine use, acting as his drug messenger and personally giving him injections — six to eight per day in the last days of his life — according to his plea agreement.

“Shoot me up with a big one,” Iwamasa told authorities Perry said to him on Oct. 23, 2023. After several injections, the assistant left him at his home in the Pacific Palisades neighborhood of Los Angeles and returned to find Perry dead in his hot tub. An autopsy found the primary cause of death was the acute effects of ketamine, with drowning as a secondary cause.

Iwamasa made nearly all of the illegal drug buys on Perry’s behalf, working in coordination with his co-defendants. One of them, Dr. Salvador Plasencia, taught him how to give Perry the injections.

Iwamasa was quick to participate with police and prosecutors, becoming the first to reach a plea deal as they sought to use him as a key witness against other defendants.

**PLEADED GUILTY TO:** One count of conspiracy to distribute ketamine causing death.

**SENTENCE:** He’s scheduled to become the final defendant sentenced on May 27.

**WHAT THEY SAID:** Iwamasa is the only defendant who has yet to give public comment.

**Jasveen Sangha**

Prosecutors say she was known as “The Ketamine Queen,” because of her jet-setting, drug dealing lifestyle. Her lawyers say authorities made up that nickname to feed a media frenzy.

Jasveen Sangha did admit to running a serious drug operation, selling Perry the dose of ketamine that he took on the day he died, and causing the death of another man, 33-year-old Cody McLauri, in 2019.

Like the other defendants, Sangha had no previous convictions.

But, prosecutors said, and a judge agreed, that unlike the other defendants whose actions were atypical, she had been dealing drugs including ketamine, methamphetamine and cocaine for at least five years from her home.

Sangha is a 42-year-old who was born in Britain, raised in the United States and has dual citizenship. Her social media accounts showed her in posh spaces alongside rich-and-famous faces in Spain, Japan and Dubai, London and Los Angeles.

Sangha went to high school in Calabasas, California — perhaps best known as home to the Kardashians — and went to college at the University of California, Irvine, graduating in 2005 and going to work at Merrill Lynch. She later got an MBA from the Hult International Business School in London.

Her lawyers presented that personal history as evidence that she was an otherwise upstanding citizen, but prosecutors used the same facts to argue she didn’t need to sell drugs but did so for greed and glamour.

**PLEADED GUILTY TO:** Three counts of distribution of ketamine, one count of distribution of ketamine resulting in death or serious bodily injury, and one count of using her home for drug distribution.

**SENTENCE:** She was sentenced to 15 years in prison, the longest so far.

**WHAT THEY SAID:** “These were not mistakes. They were horrible decisions,” Sangha said at sentencing, adding that her choices had “shattered people’s lives and the lives of their family and friends.”

Erik Fleming



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Fleming, 56, was working as a drug addiction counselor when a mutual friend he had with Perry told him that the actor was seeking ketamine, according to filings from prosecutors.

Fleming's lawyers said he was a former television and film producer whose career had been ravaged by substance abuse, and that after gaining hard-won sobriety he became a counselor.

But he had badly relapsed when approached about Perry, and connected the actor with Sangha to buy her product.

In all, prosecutors say, Fleming delivered 50 vials of Sangha's ketamine for Perry's use, marking up the price to make a profit, including 25 vials sold for \$6,000 to the actor four days before his death.

Authorities found him early in the investigation and lawyers on both sides agreed he was immediately and extraordinarily cooperative. He gave up Sangha, and became the first to appear in court and enter a guilty plea.

**PLEADED GUILTY TO:** One count of distribution of ketamine resulting in death.

**SENTENCING:** He was sentenced Wednesday to two years in prison and three years of probation.

**WHAT THEY SAID:** "This grievous failure will haunt me forever," Fleming wrote in a letter to the court. After he was sentenced, he said: "I want to do everything I can to make sure a tragedy like this never happens again. I don't want anyone to die from ketamine."

Dr. Salvador Plasencia

"I wonder how much this moron will pay?"

That was a text message Plasencia sent to a fellow doctor when he learned Perry was looking for illegal, off-the-books ketamine, according to a plea agreement where the doctor admitted to selling 20 vials of the drug to the actor in the weeks before his death.

Plasencia, a 44-year-old Los Angeles-area doctor known to patients as "Dr. P," was one of the main targets of the prosecution and had been headed for a joint trial with Sangha when he reached the plea agreement last year.

Perry was connected to Plasencia through another patient. The actor had been getting ketamine legally from his regular doctor as treatment for depression, an off-label but increasingly common use of the surgical anesthetic. But he wanted more than that doctor would prescribe.

Plasencia admitted to injecting Perry with some of the initial vials he provided, and left more for Iwamasa to inject, despite the fact that Perry froze up and his blood pressure spiked after a dose.

Plasencia graduated from UCLA's medical school in 2010 and had not been subject to any medical disciplinary actions before the Perry case.

**PLEADED GUILTY TO:** Four counts of distribution of ketamine.

**SENTENCE:** 2 1/2 years in prison, two years of probation and a \$5,600 fine.

**WHAT THEY SAID:** Plasencia cried at his sentencing as he imagined the day he would have to tell his 2-year-old son "about the time I didn't protect another mother's son. It hurts me so much."

Dr. Mark Chavez

Chavez, a San Diego doctor who ran a ketamine clinic, was the source of the doses that Plasencia sold to Perry.

Chavez admitted to obtaining the ketamine from a wholesale distributor on false pretenses and passing it along.

Chavez, 55, graduated from UCLA's medical school in 2004. He has surrendered his medical license.

**CHARGE:** One count of conspiracy to distribute ketamine.

**SENTENCING:** Eight months of home confinement and three years of supervised release.

**WHAT THEY SAID:** "I just want to say my heart goes out to the Perry family," Chavez said at sentencing.

## Senate confirms Trump pick Warsh as chairman of the Federal Reserve, following Powell

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER and JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate confirmed President Donald Trump's nominee to lead the Federal Reserve, Kevin Warsh, bringing new leadership to the world's most powerful central bank at a fraught moment for the global economy.

Warsh, 56, a former top Fed official, was confirmed Wednesday in a largely party-line 54-45 vote and will replace Jerome Powell as chair at an unusually difficult time for the independent agency.

Inflation has topped the Fed's 2% target for five years and is now rising faster because of spiking gas prices. The Fed's interest rate-setting committee is divided and saw the most dissenting votes in more than three decades last month. And Powell, after years of personal attacks from Trump and an unprecedented Justice Department investigation, plans to remain on the Fed's board even after his term as chair ends, potentially creating a competing power center.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., said in a floor speech that it's critical that a Fed chair "understand not only the macro" but also "appreciate the microeconomy: and that's the hardworking Americans, their jobs and their livelihoods."

"Kevin Warsh is just such a person," Thune said.

Trump has demanded change at the Federal Reserve

The Fed has faced threats to its independence from Trump, who has repeatedly attacked Powell for not cutting interest rates. Trump also sought to fire Fed governor Lisa Cook and launched an investigation into Powell's Senate testimony about a building renovation.

The probe of Powell had threatened to derail Warsh's nomination, as Republican Sen. Thom Tillis of North Carolina vowed to withhold support until the investigation was terminated. The probe was ultimately dropped in April. Every Republican voted for Warsh on Wednesday, as did Democratic Sen. John Fetterman of Pennsylvania.

Kevin Hassett, director of the White House's National Economic Council, said in a Fox News interview on Sunday that he believes the markets are relieved that Warsh "is going to help lower interest rates over time."

"Obviously, data driven," said Hassett. "I'm not putting any pressure on Kevin Warsh."

In December, Trump said on his social media platform that he wanted a Fed chair who would cut interest rates when the stock market rose — the opposite of what traditional economics would prescribe — and added, "Anyone that disagrees with me will never be the Fed chairman!"

Trump's comments have fueled concerns over whether Warsh will set rates based on economic conditions or instead seek to appease Trump, even if doing so could worsen inflation. At Warsh's confirmation hearing last month, Sen. Elizabeth Warren, a Democrat from Massachusetts, derided him as a "sock puppet" for Trump.

Still, Warsh denied at the hearing that Trump had pressured him to reduce the Fed's key rate.

"I will be an independent actor if confirmed as chair of the Federal Reserve," he said.

A critic of the Fed's leadership in the past

Warsh has been highly critical of the Fed's recent track record, particularly the inflation spike in 2021-22, the worst in four decades.

He has called for limiting the Fed's communications, which would be a sharp shift after decades of growing transparency. He has argued that some of its communications tools, such as quarterly forecasts of where its key rate may head, have made it harder for officials to switch gears.

Senate Democrats have also condemned Warsh for not fully divulging the details of his wealth, which amounts to at least \$100 million. His investments include stakes in Polymarket and SpaceX, but he hasn't revealed the size of those holdings. He promised to sell all such assets within 90 days of being sworn in.

"He will be the wealthiest Fed chair in history, but he refuses to provide transparency to the American people about who he is entangled with," Warren said.

Warsh faces difficult economic conditions

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The Fed is still grappling with how to respond to the 50% spike in gas prices caused by the war in Iran. The increase has boosted inflation, which reached 3.8% in April.

The Fed is tasked by Congress with keeping prices stable, which it seeks to do by raising its short-term rate to make borrowing and spending more expensive, cooling growth and inflation.

The Fed typically looks past temporary price increases that stem from supply disruptions, such as the war's cutoff of oil through the Strait of Hormuz, because those prices typically level off — or even fall — once supply is restored.

But the Fed also followed that approach after the coronavirus pandemic snarled global supply chains. Inflation turned out to last longer than expected, and Powell and other Fed officials have acknowledged that they waited too long to raise rates. Inflation surged to 9.1% by June 2022.

The Fed's rate-setting committee has kept rates unchanged for three straight meetings as it evaluates the spike in gas prices. At its most recent meeting last month, three members of the committee objected to language that suggested its next move would be a rate cut. They preferred more neutral language that would allow for a hike. Many Fed watchers saw those dissents as a warning shot to Warsh that he won't be able to easily engineer rate reductions.

A fourth member of the 12-member committee, Stephen Miran, dissented in favor of a rate cut, as he has at every meeting since Trump appointed him to the Fed's board last September. Miran is serving until a replacement is named, and Warsh will take his spot.

Powell, meanwhile, said at a news conference on April 29 that he would remain as a Fed governor until the Justice Department closes its investigation into the Fed's building project, the first time a chair may stay on the board for an extended period since 1948. His term as a governor lasts until January 2028.

U.S. Attorney Jeanine Pirro has dropped the government's probe, but she has said it could be reopened if the Fed's inspector general, which has looked into the renovation project since last July, finds evidence of criminal activity. \_\_\_\_

Follow the AP's coverage of the Federal Reserve System at <https://apnews.com/hub/federal-reserve-system>.

## US overdose deaths fell again in 2025, but some worry about policy and drug supply changes

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — About 70,000 Americans died of drug overdoses last year — about 14% fewer than the previous year, according to preliminary government data.

It was the third straight annual drop, making it the longest decline in decades, according to federal data released Wednesday. The 2025 total is about the same as the tally in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Declines were seen across a number of drug types, including fentanyl, cocaine and methamphetamine. Overdose deaths fell in the vast majority of states, although seven saw at least slight increases, including jumps of 10% or more in Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico, the preliminary data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showed.

"I'm cautiously optimistic that this represents really a fundamental change in the arc of the overdose crisis," said Brandon Marshall, a Brown University researcher who studies overdose trends.

But the number of Americans dying from overdoses is still high, and deaths declined at a slower pace last year. A number of things could cause deaths to rise again — including government policy changes or a shift in the drug supply, Marshall and other researchers say.

"If deaths are going down rapidly, that means they can increase just as rapidly if we take our foot off the gas," Marshall said.

Overdoses rose during the height of the pandemic

U.S. overdose deaths were generally rising for decades, but they shot up dramatically during the pandemic, peaking at nearly 110,000 in 2022. The pandemic spike was associated with social isolation and difficulties accessing addiction treatment.

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Deaths declined as the pandemic waned. Researchers have pointed to numerous possible factors: an increase in the availability of the overdose-reversing drug naloxone, expanded addiction treatment, shifts in how people use drugs, and the growing impact of billions of dollars in opioid lawsuit settlement money.

Some research also suggests the number of people likely to overdose has been shrinking, as fewer teens take up drugs and many illicit drug users have died. Another theory suggests regulatory changes in China a few years ago appear to have diminished the availability of precursor chemicals used to make fentanyl.

The nation's decades-long overdose epidemic has played out at different paces in different parts of the country, due at least in part to differences in the illicit drug supply and what people are using. The death increases last year in Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico could stem from more combined use of fentanyl and methamphetamine recently in those places, Marshall guessed.

New substances are showing up in the US drug supply

Health and law enforcement officials in recent months have been sounding alarms about newer drugs that were increasingly detected in 2025.

Alex Krotulski is director of the Center for Forensic Science Research and Education, a federally funded toxicology lab in Horsham, Pennsylvania, that is an important part of a national illicit drug early warning system.

In all of last year, the lab identified 27 new drugs. Less than five months into 2026, the lab already has identified 23, he said.

Among the drugs on the lab's radar is cychlorphine, a potent synthetic opioid described as up to 10 times stronger than fentanyl. Experts say it is being used as a cutting agent, added to other illicit drugs, without the buyer's knowledge.

"The drug supply continues to change and evolve," Krotulski said.

Trump administration cuts some programs

Meanwhile, the Trump administration has been cutting programs designed to reduce overdose deaths and infections tied to drug use. In a letter last month, the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration notified federal grant recipients that the government would no longer pay for test strips and kits that help drug users see if their drugs contain highly-lethal additives.

Officials say they are shifting away from services that facilitate illicit drug use, including clean syringes and hotlines that people can dial into while they use drugs.

Last week, a group of women who lost children to overdoses spoke with reporters to protest government policies that emphasize punishment and incarceration.

Kimberly Douglas founded one group, Black Moms Against Overdose, after her 17-year-old son died.

"We are starting to see overdoses go down in some places and that's because of harm reduction" services like those being targeted by the Trump administration, she said.

## France confines more than 1,700 on British cruise ship in Bordeaux after gastroenteritis outbreak

By THOMAS ADAMSON Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Over 1,700 passengers and crew on a British cruise ship were ordered to remain on board after an outbreak of gastrointestinal illness, French authorities said Wednesday.

They dismissed any link to a deadly hantavirus outbreak on another vessel that has put European health authorities on alert.

The Ambition was midway through a 14-night cruise from Belfast and Liverpool that was due to take in ports in northern Spain and along France's Atlantic coast.

It reached Bordeaux on Tuesday evening, according to the operator, Ambassador Cruise Line.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which tracks outbreaks on voyages that call on U.S. and foreign ports, recorded 23 gastrointestinal outbreaks on cruise ships last year. Most were caused by norovirus, including a new strain.

Last week, a Caribbean Princess cruise ship reported a norovirus outbreak during a voyage with more



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than 3,100 passengers aboard, according to the U.S. health agency. More than 140 passengers and 15 crew members fell ill during the trip, which ended Monday, the CDC said.

The prefect of Nouvelle-Aquitaine region and Gironde department, Etienne Guyot, suspended disembarkation from the Ambition and restricted the vessel's interactions with the port of Bordeaux.

He acted on the recommendation of the regional health agency, the Agence Régionale de Santé Nouvelle-Aquitaine, the joint statement said.

Up to 50 passengers showed symptoms consistent with acute digestive infection after the ship's captain alerted French authorities on Tuesday evening, the statement said.

Those affected were treated by the ship's doctor and isolated in their cabins.

A medical team was dispatched to the vessel, and samples are being analyzed at a Bordeaux hospital.

"There is no reason to establish a link between this outbreak aboard a cruise ship from Belfast and Liverpool and the hantavirus cases detected aboard the MV Hondius," the joint statement said.

The hantavirus outbreak aboard the Hondius last month prompted a multicountry response and the hospitalization of passengers in Britain, France, Spain and the United States. Three passengers died and there have been nine confirmed cases, with another two suspected.

An update is expected later on Wednesday, once analysis results are available.

Ambassador Cruise Line said earlier Wednesday that a 92-year-old male passenger had died on Sunday, although he had not reported symptoms consistent with the illness, and that his cause of death was yet to be established by a coroner.

The company said 48 passengers and one crew member were displaying gastrointestinal symptoms as of late Wednesday morning.

Ambassador said its data showed cases had risen after passengers boarded in Liverpool on May 9. All shore excursions at Bordeaux had been canceled and affected passengers offered full refunds, the company said.

Ambassador Cruise Line, a British operator targeting passengers over 50, was founded in 2021.

## Company says it's not clear when its hantavirus-hit ship will start cruises again

By ELENA BECATOROS and DEVI SHASTRI Associated Press

The operator of the cruise ship at the center of a hantavirus outbreak told The Associated Press on Wednesday it expects to know by the end of the week if the vessel will keep to its schedule for the coming months, as it previously indicated it would.

The Dutch-flagged MV Hondius is listed on Oceanwide Expeditions' website as scheduled to depart on a cruise later in May that would take it to the Arctic. Three of the ship's passengers died in an outbreak that was first confirmed earlier this month while the vessel was in the Atlantic.

In all, there have been nine confirmed and two suspected cases in the outbreak.

More than 120 people — all passengers and some of the crew — were evacuated from the Hondius in Spain's Canary Islands on Sunday and Monday and are in isolation in several countries.

Asked on Monday whether it would amend its cruising schedule due to the outbreak, Oceanwide Expeditions said it did not "foresee changes to our operations" — which included a new cruise beginning May 29 from Keflavik, Iceland.

But on Wednesday, the company told AP it expected "clarity on whether the vessel will sail and the sailing schedule by the end of this week."

Separately, over 1,700 passengers and crew aboard a British cruise ship on Wednesday were ordered to remain on board following an outbreak of gastrointestinal illness, French authorities said.

They ruled out any link to the hantavirus outbreak on the Hondius. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recorded 16 gastrointestinal outbreaks on cruise ships in 2024, with most caused by norovirus, a foodborne illness that can cause vomiting, diarrhea, nausea and stomach pain for about one to three days.

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Much is still unknown about the hantavirus

Despite years of research, many questions have yet to be answered about the hantavirus, including exactly how it spreads, how long it can survive outside a host and why it can be mild for some people and severe for others.

There is no specific treatment or cure, but early medical attention can increase the chance of survival. The Andes virus implicated in the cruise ship outbreak can have an incubation period of up to eight weeks and a mortality rate of up to 50%, according to the World Health Organization.

The virus usually spreads from rodent droppings and is not easily transmitted between people, though the Andes virus may be able to spread between people in rare cases.

The genome of the hantavirus has been completely sequenced, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control said Wednesday.

"There is no data to suggest that this virus is behaving differently in terms of transmissibility or severity from any of the known virus circulating in certain regions of the world," said Andreas Hoefer, who oversees the operational coordination of the European Union's reference laboratories for public health.

"Based on that data, I would say that currently we have no reason to suspect that this is a new virus," Hoefer said.

Cruise ship to be disinfected in Rotterdam

The hantavirus outbreak aboard the Hondius is the first known case on a cruise ship.

The ship is now sailing to the Dutch port of Rotterdam with 25 crew, two health workers and the body of one of the passengers who died on board. None is showing symptoms, and the vessel is expected to arrive on May 17 or 18, Oceanwide Expeditions said in a statement Tuesday.

Once there, the Hondius will "undergo a thorough cleaning and disinfection process," the company said. "The specific protocols are currently being finalized" in cooperation with health authorities.

The Dutch National Institute for Public Health and the Environment told the AP on Tuesday the vessel "will be cleaned and disinfected. We are currently working on the protocol on how to do this," and no further details could be shared.

Responding to a question about whether the disinfection procedure might alter the ship's cruising schedule, Oceanwide Expeditions told the AP it was following official guidelines and "currently awaiting further information on how to proceed."

It added: "We expect clarity on whether the vessel will sail and the sailing schedule by the end of this week. ... A ship cannot sail without official authorization."

Asked whether it had received any cancellation or rebooking requests for cruises on the Hondius, Oceanwide Expeditions said Monday it was "not providing commentary on commercial matters at this time as we are focused on safety, disembarkation procedures and coordination with authorities."

Experts say future passengers are likely safe

How long the hantavirus lives on surfaces is highly variable, experts said, potentially from days to weeks depending on how cold it is or the presence of sunlight. But based on circumstances known about the outbreak, basic sanitation should suffice, they said.

Normal disinfectants and ultraviolet light are enough to kill the virus, said Erik Hill, a virus expert at Seton Hall University. Someone would need to be exposed to a large enough dose of the virus to get sick, he explained, which is why people cleaning rodent droppings in an enclosed space are most at risk. The virus won't survive very well on touch surfaces, he added.

Hantavirus "is not the concern on cruise ships," Hill said. He and other experts say more contagious bugs, like measles or the norovirus, are much larger threats on cruises.

Dr. Max Brito, vice president of the Infectious Diseases Society of America, said that "with proper disinfection and sterilization practices, I think it should be OK to go back to operations within a reasonable time."

But the experts could not say definitively what that time frame would be because of the variables involved.

Oceanwide Expeditions says it has no indication of any rodents on board, and it operates under strict hygiene and safety protocols.

Based on the hypothesis that the first patients were exposed on land and reports that ship officials did

not find rodents on board, the risk to those on the next cruise should be low, Brito said.

"I don't want to say that it's a one-off but, as it's shaping up to be, it's a very specific outbreak and it's probably not so easy to reproduce in the same way," he said.

## **Gunfire breaks out in Philippine Senate where authorities tried to arrest a senator**

By JOEAL CALUPITAN, AARON FAVILA and JIM GOMEZ Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — A burst of gunfire rang out late Wednesday in the Philippine Senate, sparking chaos in the building where authorities had tried to arrest a senator wanted by the International Criminal Court in connection with a deadly government crackdown on drugs.

No one was hurt, officials said. President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. asked the public to stay calm in televised remarks.

It was not immediately clear who fired the shots or why. The gunfire erupted as Philippine authorities tried to arrest Sen. Ronald dela Rosa, a former national police chief who enforced former President Rodrigo Duterte's anti-drug efforts in which thousands of mostly petty suspects were killed from 2016 to 2018.

Allied senators took dela Rosa into "protective custody" on Monday, when he reappeared after months of absence.

Several senators were still in the building after holding a session when the gunshots were heard by a throng of journalists, including two from The Associated Press. Armed security personnel, including military members, ran around with guns ready and later asked employees to leave as tensions started to ease.

Senate President Alan Cayetano briefly appeared before journalists in the Senate shortly after the shots were fired but could not provide details.

"The emotions are high here," Cayetano said. "This is the Senate of the Philippines, and we are allegedly under attack."

Interior Secretary Juanito Victor Remulla Jr. later arrived with top police officials and said he was deployed by the president to secure the senators. He said he did not come to arrest dela Rosa, who remained in the building.

### **Investigation launched**

An investigation was underway, and security cameras would be reviewed to find out who was behind the gunfire and their intentions, Remulla said.

On Monday, the ICC unsealed an arrest warrant for dela Rosa.

Originally issued in November, the warrant charges dela Rosa with the crime against humanity of murder of "no less than 32 persons" between July 2016 and the end of April 2018, when he led the national police force under Duterte.

The ICC had no immediate comment on the events in Manila.

Dela Rosa, 64, has vowed to fight the ICC arrest order. He called on his followers Wednesday night to gather in the Senate to prevent what he said was his impending arrest.

National Bureau of Investigation agents tried to arrest dela Rosa on Monday, but he managed to dash to the Senate's plenary hall and sought the help of fellow senators. Cayetano said then that he would cite the government agents involved for contempt.

Duterte was arrested in March last year and flown to the ICC's headquarters in The Hague. He is still in detention in the Netherlands and faces a trial in the killings from his crackdown, in which dela Rosa has also been accused.

"We should not allow another Filipino to be brought to The Hague, the second one after President Duterte," dela Rosa said, addressing his followers in a Facebook message and blaming politics for his predicament.

"This is unacceptable," dela Rosa said.

He said he was ready to face any allegations before Philippine courts, but he denied condoning extrajudicial killings when he led the police force. Duterte has also made the same denials, although he openly threatened suspected drug dealers with death while in office.

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Police deployed outside Senate

Hundreds of police officers have been deployed outside the Senate since Monday to maintain order, sparking complaints from dela Rosa and allied senators.

"If I have something to answer for, I will face those in our local courts and not before foreigners," dela Rosa told reporters in the Senate.

Five senators called on dela Rosa to surrender to authorities in a proposed resolution, but his allies opposed the move in a heated exchange Wednesday in the Senate, where 13 of 24 senators friendly to dela Rosa wrested control of its leadership on Monday.

Duterte and his daughter, the current vice president, and political allies such as dela Rosa have been the harshest critics of Marcos.

Vice President Sara Duterte, once a political ally of Marcos, has blamed the president for allowing what she said was "the kidnapping" of her father and his handover to a foreign court.

Sara Duterte has recently been impeached by the House of Representatives, which is dominated by the allies of Marcos, over accusations that included unexplained wealth and threats to have the president assassinated if she herself were killed amid their political disputes. The Senate was preparing to convene into a tribunal to try the vice president.

Disputes reflect deep division in Philippine politics

The disputes reflect the deep divisions that have long plagued the rambunctious Asian democracy.

After winning the presidency in 2016, Duterte appointed dela Rosa, a loyal ally, as head of the national police force, which enforced the brutal campaign against illegal drugs that alarmed Western governments, including the United States and human rights groups.

Dela Rosa also once headed the police force in the southern city of Davao, where Duterte was a longtime mayor and built a political name for his extra-tough approach to crime.

"My role was to lead the war on drugs, and that war on drugs was not meant to annihilate people," dela Rosa said when he was asked about the huge death toll.

"When the lives of police officers came under threat, of course they needed to defend themselves," dela Rosa said.

Duterte withdrew the Philippines from the ICC in 2019 in a move human rights activists say was aimed at escaping accountability.

The ICC, however, said that it retained jurisdiction over crimes committed when the Philippines was still a member and successfully moved to have him arrested, the first former Asian leader to fall into such disgrace.

## Russian ship that sank near Spain in 2024 may have carried nuclear reactor parts

By JOSEPH WILSON Associated Press

BARCELONA, Spain (AP) — A Russian ship that sank in the Mediterranean over a year ago after its engine room exploded may have been carrying pieces for nuclear reactors used in submarines, a Spanish government document shows.

The Ursa Major sank on Dec. 23, 2024, between Spain and Algeria while allegedly on a journey from St. Petersburg to Russia's eastern port of Vladivostok. Two crew members were lost while 14 other people were saved by Spanish rescue craft.

In a written response to opposition lawmakers, the Spanish government wrote that the ship's captain "confessed" that the ship was carrying "components for two nuclear reactors similar to those used in submarines."

The response was included in a document registered by the Spanish parliament on Feb. 23 and was first reported by CNN on Tuesday. The document has been seen by The Associated Press.

At the time of the sinking, the Russian state-owned ship owner, Oboronlogistika, said that the Ursa Major was sabotaged. It said three powerful explosions damaged the boat just above the water line in what the



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company described as a "terrorist attack."

Oboronlogistika was established under Russia's defense ministry and placed under U.S. and European Union sanctions for its ties to Russia's military.

According to the document, the boat's manifest said the boat was carrying 129 containers, two large cranes and "two well covers."

Officials said that when questioned upon rescue by the Harbor Master in Cartagena, Spain, the boat captain revealed that the well covers were nuclear components. He added that the boat was not carrying nuclear fuel.

Spanish authorities said they were not able to search the ship to confirm the information during the rescue operation which focused on saving the crew and searching for the two missing members. The wreck rests at 2,500 meters (8,200 feet) deep.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told a conference call with reporters on Wednesday that he hasn't seen the reports regarding the ship's cargo while adding: "there is nothing for us to comment on here."

## Inside the furor plaguing Democratic National Committee leader Ken Martin

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Politics Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Democrats keep winning at the ballot box. And yet Ken Martin, the man leading the Democratic National Committee, is facing a crisis of confidence among party officials who are increasingly concerned about the health of their political machine barely a year into his term.

Major donors aren't giving. Liberal influencers are publicly questioning Martin's refusal to release an internal report on the party's failures. And Democratic operatives have begun informal discussions about recruiting a new chair, even as most believe that Martin's job isn't in serious jeopardy ahead of the mid-term elections.

Amanda Litman, who leads the Democratic-allied organization Run For Something, said she's been approached by senior strategists in recent days gauging her interest in replacing Martin. She declined but said many in the party have lost faith in the DNC leader.

"I think it's a really hard job, and also Ken is not doing it very well," Litman told The Associated Press. "I honestly think he's going to have a hard time rebuilding trust."

Part of the challenge for those Democrats frustrated with Martin, she said, "is that there's not really an alternative."

The criticism has gotten to Martin, said two people who insisted on anonymity to describe private conversations. They said he's become increasingly paranoid, even inside party headquarters in Washington, where he did not install his own team after taking over last year.

Martin tries to press forward

The handwringing comes in spite of the Democratic Party's undeniable success in the vast majority of elections under Martin's leadership, which coincides with Republican President Donald Trump's return to the White House. Democrats over the last year have dominated races for governor and special elections for state legislative and congressional seats. They've also won campaigns for state supreme court, county executive and even county sheriff.

Less than six months before the 2026 midterm elections, however, the concern over Martin's leadership is, at best, an unwanted distraction for a party desperate to break the Republican Party's grip on power in Washington. And, at worst, the conflict will make it harder for Democrats to win in November, while undermining faith in the DNC as it coordinates the party's next presidential nomination process.

Martin declined to comment for this article. He has sought to avoid media interviews over the last week, preferring to keep his head down while focusing on improving the DNC's financial health and scouting potential sites for the presidential convention in 2028.

While in Denver, for example, Martin hosted a crowded fundraising event before three private one-on-one donor meetings in between calls to more donors in other cities.

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Former DNC Chair Jaime Harrison, whom Martin replaced, said he's upset and frustrated by those in his party who are publicly challenging Martin's leadership. Harrison was especially angry with Democratic operatives from the podcast "Pod Save America," who pressed Martin during a recent episode about why he reneged on a promise to release a post-2024 election autopsy.

Even Martin's close allies described the interview as a cringeworthy moment for the first-term chair.

"Am I happy with everything that goes on in the party? No. Am I happy with leadership that sometimes you get? No. But do you see me going out at this juncture trying to make that case? This is not the moment for that," Harrison said. "We have to be as strong as we possibly can going into November, because we have to win. Once we win, we can fight like hell."

Asked if he thought Martin's job was at risk, Harrison said, "I don't think so."

Martin's gamble

Martin is leaning into a 50-state spending strategy that his supporters privately acknowledge is risky.

The DNC each month is distributing \$1 million among party organizations in every state and key U.S. territories, besides allocating \$5,000 more per month to nearly two dozen Republican-controlled states, to help build party infrastructure.

The investments are overwhelmingly popular with local leaders even as the DNC struggles financially.

The national party reported \$22.1 million cash on hand with \$18.4 million in debt at the end of March, according to its most recent federal filing. The Republican National Committee, by contrast, reported \$116.8 million in the bank with zero debt.

Despite the criticism, DNC national finance co-chair Chris Lowe said the cash disparity is the result of an intentional strategy Martin outlined when running for chair and has executed since taking over the building.

"We made a conscious decision to spend money," Lowe said. "His view, and I would agree with this view, is the best way to position ourselves for the presidential (election) in '28 is not just to amass a bunch of money, it's to have a history of winning elections all across the country up and down the ballot. And that's what we've done."

Lowe notes that Martin raised more money in his first year as chair than anyone else in an equivalent year when the Democrats did not have the White House. And in 2026 so far, he said, the committee has exceeded its big-dollar fundraising targets every month.

DNC member Michael Kapp, a vocal Martin ally from California, said that he'd "love to have big donors come on board" but that the committee's bank account isn't what matters most.

"Republicans can brag about having more money but they're not spending it, and they're not winning," Kapp said. "At the end of the day the scoreboard matters more than the spreadsheet."

The secret autopsy

Beyond fundraising, the furor around Martin's leadership centers on his refusal to release the DNC's internal study of the 2024 election — known inside the DNC as the "after-action report" — despite his past promises to do so on his first day as chair.

Kapp, as is the case with many of Martin's allies, said "it's certainly something that should be made public," but he's willing to accept Martin's argument that it's too close to the November midterm elections to release the autopsy now.

"I know there are lessons to be learned from that," he said of the report. "I trust Ken. I've known the man for 10 years. But at this point, when we're six, seven months away from the midterms, we need to be focused on the midterms."

Martin has been aggressively courting big-dollar donors, despite their demonstrated reluctance to give to the committee. He acknowledged pressure related to the autopsy in some of the conversations and indicated changes could be coming soon, according to two people with direct knowledge of the discussions but not authorized to share them.

As Martin looks ahead to 2028, when the DNC is tasked with building out the political infrastructure for the party's next presidential nominee, some presidential prospects are approaching the intraparty conflict with caution.

Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear, who is expected to launch a presidential bid, did not answer directly when

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asked whether Martin should continue to lead the DNC.

"Ken and I work well together. And I say that being somebody who wasn't originally on board," Beshear said. "But he made an effort to reach out to me. And, listen, I want to work with whoever's there. We need a healthy DNC. We need it to work."

## Today in History: May 14, Lewis and Clark Expedition begins

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, May 14, the 134th day of 2026. There are 231 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On May 14, 1804, the Lewis and Clark expedition, organized to explore the Louisiana Territory as well as the Pacific Northwest, began its journey near present-day Hartford, Illinois.

Also on this date:

In 1607, Jamestown, the first permanent English settlement in North America, was established by members of the Virginia Company.

In 1796, English physician Edward Jenner successfully inoculated 8-year-old James Phipps against smallpox by using cowpox matter. (Smallpox would be declared the first fully eradicated human disease in 1980.)

In 1948, the independent state of Israel was proclaimed in Tel Aviv by David Ben-Gurion, who became its first prime minister.

In 1955, representatives from eight Communist bloc countries, including the Soviet Union, signed the Warsaw Pact in Poland. (The pact was dissolved in 1991.)

In 1961, Freedom Rider civil rights activists were attacked by violent mobs in Anniston and Birmingham, Alabama.

In 1973, NASA launched Skylab, the first American space station, from Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

In 1988, an inebriated driver of a pickup truck traveled the wrong way on a Kentucky interstate and slammed into a church group bus, killing 24 children and three others returning home from an Ohio amusement park. The fiery collision was one of America's deadliest drunken driving crashes on record.

In 2022, an 18-year-old white supremacist wearing body armor opened fire in a supermarket in a predominantly Black neighborhood in Buffalo, New York, killing 10 people before being taken into custody. (The gunman, Payton Gendron, was sentenced to life in prison without parole in February 2023.)

Today's Birthdays: Baseball Hall of Famer Tony Pérez is 84. Filmmaker George Lucas is 82. Filmmaker Robert Zemeckis is 75. Musician David Byrne is 74. Actor Tim Roth is 65. Actor Cate Blanchett is 57. Filmmaker Sofia Coppola is 55. Former NFL running back Frank Gore is 43. Actor Amber Tamblyn is 43. Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg is 42. Former NFL tight end Rob Gronkowski is 37. Actor Miranda Cosgrove is 33. Soccer player Rúben Dias is 29. Olympic gold medalist hockey player Jack Hughes is 25.