

# [***AP News in Brief at 6:04 p.m. EDT***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C15-9B21-DYMD-63FC-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

Star witness Michael Cohen directly implicates Trump in testimony at hush money trial

NEW YORK — Donald Trump was intimately involved with all aspects of a scheme to stifle stories about sex that threatened to torpedo his 2016 campaign, his former lawyer said Monday in matter-of-fact testimony that went to the heart of the former president’s hush money trial.

“Everything required Mr. Trump’s sign-off,” said Michael Cohen, Trump's fixer-turned-foe and the prosecution's star witness in a case now entering its final, pivotal stretch.

In hours of highly anticipated testimony, Cohen placed Trump at the center of the hush money plot, saying the then-candidate had promised to reimburse the lawyer for the money he fronted and was constantly updated about behind-the-scenes efforts to bury stories feared to be harmful to the campaign.

“Stop this from getting out,” Cohen, the prosecution's star witness, quoted Trump as telling him in reference to porn actor Stormy Daniels' account of a sexual encounter with Trump a decade earlier.

A similar episode occurred when Cohen alerted Trump that a Playboy model was alleging that she and Trump had an extramarital affair. “Make sure it doesn’t get released,” Cohen said Trump told him. The woman, Karen McDougal, was paid $150,000 in an arrangement that was made after Trump received a “complete and total update on everything that transpired.”

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The Latest | Nearly half a million people flee fighting in Rafah and northern Gaza, UN says

Nearly half a million Palestinians have been displaced in recent days by escalating Israeli military operations in southern and northern Gaza, the United Nations says.

Around 360,000 Palestinians were driven out of Rafah in Gaza's south over the past week, the United Nations’ agency for Palestinian refugees said. There were roughly 1.3 million people sheltering in Rafah before Israel began pushing into the city, which Israel says is the last Hamas stronghold.

Israeli forces are also battling Hamas militants in northern Gaza, where the army had launched major operations earlier in the war. The army's evacuation orders issued Saturday have displaced around 100,000 people so far, U.N. deputy spokesman Farhan Haq told reporters Monday.

No food has entered the two main border crossings in southern Gaza for the past week. Some 1.1 million Palestinians in Gaza face catastrophic levels of hunger, on the brink of starvation, and a “full-blown famine” is taking place in the north, according to the U.N.

Seven months of Israeli bombardment and ground operations in Gaza have killed more than 35,000 people, most of them women and children, according to local health officials.

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Blinken delivers some of the strongest US public criticism of Israel's conduct of the war in Gaza

REHOBOTH BEACH, Del. (AP) — Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Sunday delivered some of the Biden administration’s strongest public criticism yet of Israel’s conduct of the war in Gaza, saying Israeli tactics have meant “a horrible loss of life of innocent civilians” but failed to neutralize Hamas leaders and fighters and could drive a lasting insurgency.

In a pair of TV interviews, Blinken underscored that the United States believes Israeli forces should “get out of Gaza,” but also is waiting to see credible plans from Israel for security and governance in the territory after the war.

Hamas has reemerged in parts of Gaza, Blinken said, and “heavy action” by Israeli forces in the southern city of Rafah risks leaving America's closest Mideast ally “holding the bag on an enduring insurgency."

He said the United States has worked with Arab countries and others for weeks on developing “credible plans for security, for governance, for rebuilding'' in Gaza, but ”we haven’t seen that come from Israel. ... We need to see that, too."

Blinken also said that as Israel pushes deeper in Rafah in the south, a military operation may “have some initial success" but risks “terrible harm” to the population without solving a problem “that both of us want to solve, which is making sure Hamas cannot again govern Gaza.” More than a million Palestinians have crowded into Rafah in hopes of refuge as Israel's offensive pushed across Gaza. Israel has said the city also hosts four battalions of Hamas fighters.

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Russian assault opens new front, diverting Ukraine forces as Western aid trickles in

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian troops were locked in intense battles with Ukrainian soldiers around the embattled town of Vovchansk in northeast Ukraine on Monday, pushing ahead with a ground offensive that opened a new front and put more pressure on overstretched Ukrainian forces.

Moscow's renewed northeast offensive, launched late last week, was the most significant border incursion since the full-scale invasion began.

In just two days, Moscow has captured from 100 to 125 square kilometers (38 to 47 square miles) that include at least seven villages, most of them already depopulated, according to two open source monitoring analysts.

Vovchansk, among the largest towns in the area whose pre-war population of 17,000 had dwindled to just 2,500 before Russia renewed its ground assault last week, has emerged as a key focus of the pitched battles engulfing the Kharkiv region. By Monday, only 200 to 300 residents remained, said Kharkiv Gov. Oleh Syniehubov, as Russian forces closed in from three sides.

Poorly built fortifications and long-term ammunition shortages enabled Russia’s sweeping advance in the area since Friday, local officials and soldiers said. The Kremlin’s forces were seeking to divert and distract Ukrainian troops across the 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line until a big batch of new military aid for Kyiv from the U.S. and European partners arrives on the battlefield in the coming weeks and months, Ukrainian commanders and analysts said.

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Crews conduct controlled demolition on Baltimore bridge span as cleanup continues at collapse site

BALTIMORE (AP) — Crews set off a network of linked explosives Monday to break down the largest remaining span of the collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, and with a boom, the steel section crumpled into the water in seconds.

The explosives flashed orange and let off plumes of black smoke upon detonation. The longest trusses toppled away from the grounded Dali container ship and slid off its bow, sending a wall of water splashing back toward the ship.

It marked a major step in freeing the ship, which has been stuck amid the wreckage since it lost power and crashed into one of the bridge’s support columns shortly after leaving Baltimore on March 26. The demolished span came crashing down on the ship’s bow and remained resting on its deck for the past six weeks.

The collapse killed six construction workers and halted most maritime traffic through Baltimore’s busy port. The controlled demolition will allow the Dali to be refloated and restore traffic through the port as the cleanup enters its final stages.

Once the ship is removed, maritime traffic can begin returning to normal, which will provide relief for thousands of longshoremen, truckers and small business owners who have seen their jobs impacted by the closure.

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A town in western Canada prepares for a possible 'last stand' as wildfires rage in British Columbia

FORT NELSON, British Columbia (AP) — An intense wildfire could reach a town in western Canada this week, fire experts and officials warned, based on forecasts of winds that have fueled the out-of-control blaze, which has forced the evacuation of thousands of people.

The British Columbia Wildfire Service said the wildfire was burning 2½ kilometers (around 1½ miles) northwest of Fort Nelson. More than 4,700 people have evacuated after an order was issued on Friday.

Bowinn Ma, the province’s minister of emergency management, said that drought conditions have persisted since last year and no rain is in the forecast.

“We are extremely concerned,” she said. "It is extremely uncommon for us to have so many on a evacuation order."

Cliff Chapman, the service’s director of operations, said they were fortunate that stronger winds didn't materialize overnight, but said that winds were expected to continue to blow west over the next day or two.

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Questions and grief linger at the apartment door where a deputy killed a US airman

WASHINGTON (AP) — At the apartment door where a Florida deputy shot and killed Senior Airman Roger Fortson, a small shrine is growing with the tributes from the Air Force unit grappling with his loss.

There is a long wooden plank, anchored by two sets of aviator wings, and a black marker for mourners to leave prayers and remembrances for the 23-year-old.

One visitor left an open Stella Artois beer. Others left combat boots, bouquets and an American flag. Shells from 105mm and 30mm rounds like those that Fortson handled as a gunner on the unit's AC-130J special operations aircraft stand on each side of the door — the empty 105mm shell is filled with flowers.

Then there's the quarter.

In military tradition, quarters are left quietly and often anonymously if a fellow service member was there at the time of death.

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UNC board slashes diversity program funding to divert money to public safety resources

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — As North Carolina's public university system considers a vote on changing its diversity policy, the system's flagship university board voted Monday to cut funding for diversity programs in next year's budget.

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Board of Trustees approved a change that would divert $2.3 million of diversity spending from state funds to go toward public safety and policing at a special meeting to address the university's budget. The board's vote would only impact UNC-Chapel Hill's diversity funding, which could result in the loss of its diversity office.

UNC will join the ranks of other notable public universities that have stripped diversity spending, such as the University of Florida in Gainesville, which announced in a March memo it was reallocating funds to faculty recruitment. But unlike UF, which implemented its funding rollback after the state Legislature passed a bill banning diversity program spending at state universities, UNC “set the tone” on funding cuts before the North Carolina Legislature stepped in, budget chair Dave Boliek said.

“We’re going ahead and, you know, sort of taking a leadership role in this. That’s the way I view it,” Boliek said on Monday after the vote.

The change would go into effect at the start of the 2024-2025 fiscal year on July 1, Boliek said. Any jobs that could be impacted would occur after that date, although Boliek said he wasn't sure how many positions may be affected.

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Illness took away her voice. AI created a replica she carries in her phone

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — The voice Alexis “Lexi” Bogan had before last summer was exuberant.

She loved to belt out Taylor Swift and Zach Bryan ballads in the car. She laughed all the time — even while corralling misbehaving preschoolers or debating ***politics*** with friends over a backyard fire pit. In high school, she was a soprano in the chorus.

Then that voice was gone.

Doctors in August removed a life-threatening tumor lodged near the back of her brain. When the breathing tube came out a month later, Bogan had trouble swallowing and strained to say “hi” to her parents. Months of rehabilitation aided her recovery, but her speech is still impaired. Friends, strangers and her own family members struggle to understand what she is trying to tell them.

In April, the 21-year-old got her old voice back. Not the real one, but a voice clone generated by artificial intelligence that she can summon from a phone app. Trained on a 15-second time capsule of her teenage voice — sourced from a cooking demonstration video she recorded for a high school project — her synthetic but remarkably real-sounding AI voice can now say almost anything she wants.

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Are US interest rates high enough to beat inflation? The Fed will take its time to find out

WASHINGTON (AP) — The sharp interest rate hikes of the past two years will likely take longer than previously expected to bring down inflation, several Federal Reserve officials have said in recent comments, suggesting there may be few, if any, rate cuts this year.

A major concern expressed by both Fed policymakers and some economists is that higher borrowing costs aren't having as much of an impact as economics textbooks would suggest. Americans as a whole, for example, aren't spending much more of their incomes on interest payments than they were a few years ago, according to government data, despite the Fed's sharp rate increases. That means higher rates may not be doing much to limit many Americans' spending, or cool inflation.

“What you have right now is a situation where these high rates aren’t generating more braking power on the economy,” said Joseph Lupton, global economist at J.P. Morgan. “That would suggest that they either need to stay high for longer or maybe even higher for longer, meaning rate hikes might come into the conversation.”

Fed Chair Jerome Powell said at a press conference earlier this month that an interest rate increase was “unlikely,” but he did not fully rule it out. Powell emphasized, however, that the Fed needed to take more time to gain “greater confidence” that inflation is actually returning to the Fed's 2% target.

“I think the Fed’s telling you hikes are not quite as on the table as the market was expecting,” said Gennadiy Goldberg, an economist at TD Securities.

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