

# [***AP News in Brief at 11:04 p.m. EDT***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C1B-SSK1-DYMD-6546-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Associated Press

May 14, 2024 Tuesday 3:04 AM GMT

Copyright 2024 Associated Press All Rights Reserved

**Section:** DOMESTIC NEWS

**Length:** 2274 words

**Body**

Blinken visits Ukraine to tout US support for Kyiv's fight against Russia's advances

KYIV, Ukraine — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrived in Kyiv on Tuesday in an unannounced diplomatic mission to reassure Ukraine that it has American support as it struggles to defend against increasingly intense Russian attacks.

The visit comes less than a month after Congress approved a long-delayed foreign assistance package that sets aside $60 billion in aid for Ukraine, much of which will go toward replenishing badly depleted artillery and air defense systems.

On his fourth trip to Kyiv since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, Blinken will underscore the Biden administration’s commitment to Ukraine’s defense and long-term security, U.S. officials said. They noted that since President Joe Biden signed the aid package late last month, the administration has already announced $1.4 billion in short-term military assistance and $6 billion in longer-term support.

It is “trying to really accelerate the tempo” of U.S. weapon shipments to Ukraine, national security adviser Jake Sullivan said.

“What I am going to suggest is that the level of intensity being exhibited right now in terms of moving stuff is at a 10 out of 10,” Sullivan told reporters at a White House briefing Monday.

\_\_\_

What to know about Trump fixer-turned-foe Michael Cohen's pivotal testimony in the hush money trial

NEW YORK (AP) — Once Donald Trump's loyal attorney and fixer, Michael Cohen pointed the finger at his former boss Monday in pivotal testimony about hush money payments at the center of the first criminal trial of a former American president.

Cohen provided jurors with an insider's account of payments to silence women's claims of sexual encounters with Trump, saying the payments were directed by Trump to fend off damage to his 2016 White House bid.

Cohen is expected to be on the witness stand for several days, and face intense grilling by Trump's attorneys, who have painted him as a liar who's trying to take down the presumptive Republican presidential nominee.

While prosecutors' most important witness, he's also their most vulnerable to attack — having served time in federal prison and built his persona in recent years around being a thorn in Trump's side.

Trump has denied any wrongdoing in the case.

\_\_\_

Misery deepens in Gaza's Rafah as Israeli troops press operation

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Aid workers struggled Monday to distribute dwindling food and other supplies to hundreds of thousands of Palestinians displaced by what Israel says is a limited military operation in Rafah, as the two main crossings near the southern Gaza city remained closed.

The United Nations' agency for Palestinian refugees said 360,000 Palestinians have fled Rafah over the past week, out of 1.3 million who were sheltering there before the operation began. Most had already fled fighting elsewhere during the seven-month war between Israel and Hamas.

Israel has portrayed Rafah as the last stronghold of the militant group, brushing off warnings from the United States and other allies that any major operation there would be catastrophic for civilians. Hamas has meanwhile regrouped and is battling Israeli forces in parts of Gaza that Israel bombarded and invaded earlier in the war.

U.N. deputy spokesman Farhan Haq said Monday that another 100,000 Palestinians have been displaced in northern Gaza following recent Israeli evacuation orders there. That would mean that around a fifth of Gaza's population of 2.3 million people have been displaced over the past week.

Thirty-eight trucks of flour arrived through the western Erez Crossing, a second access point to northern Gaza, said Abeer Etefa, a spokeswoman for the U.N.’s World Food Program. Israel announced the crossing's opening Sunday.

\_\_\_

Collapsed Baltimore bridge span comes down with a boom after crews set off chain of explosives

BALTIMORE (AP) — Crews set off a chain of carefully placed explosives Monday to break down the largest remaining span of the collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, and with a boom and a splash, the mangled steel trusses came crashing down into the river below.

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 Dali, which has been stuck among the wreckage since it lost power and crashed into one of the bridge’s support columns shortly after leaving Baltimore on March 26.

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, which will provide relief for thousands of longshoremen, truckers and small business owners who have seen their jobs impacted by the closure.

Officials said the detonation went as planned. They said the next step in the dynamic cleanup process is to assess the few remaining trusses on the Dali’s bow and make sure none of the underwater wreckage is preventing the ship from being refloated and moved.

\_\_\_

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.

\_\_\_

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.

\_\_\_

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.

\_\_\_

Ron DeSantis is planning to raise money for Donald Trump in Florida and Texas, AP sources say

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis is planning to raise money for former President Donald Trump in the coming weeks, putting into action the commitment he made at a meeting with Trump last month to help his former rival for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, according to two people familiar with the matter.

The people spoke on the condition of anonymity because the details have not been finalized and plans could still shift in the weeks ahead. Still, DeSantis is making calls to donors while his finance team works quickly to put together a schedule that would include stops in Florida and Texas, the people said.

DeSantis is taking concrete steps toward a political reconciliation with Trump, who for months taunted his GOP opponent as “DeSanctimonious" as the Florida governor argued Trump's time had come and gone. The developments also show DeSantis' effort to offer among his most prized assets — his prolific fundraising network — in a gesture that could pay dividends if he runs for president again in 2028, when Trump would be ineligible to run if he wins this November due to constitutional term limits.

“He’s shown his commitment to the president and that’s why I say we’ll follow his lead, and why I think donors will follow his lead,” said Roy Bailey, a Dallas investor who was a co-chairman of DeSantis’ national finance committee during his presidential campaign, but was not among those to confirm the planning. “We will be focused on past DeSantis donors who have yet to donate to President Trump. We’re going to try to mine those donors for him. That will create a lot of value.”

DeSantis, viewed after his dominant reelection in 2022 as a potentially viable Trump rival, raised more than $183 million toward his ultimately unsuccessful Republican presidential primary campaign. The vast majority, more than $145 million, was raised for the super PAC Never Back Down, which could take unlimited sums. DeSantis also raised more than $200 million toward his 2022 Florida campaign.

\_\_\_

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.

\_\_\_

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.

**Load-Date:** May 13, 2024

**End of Document**