

# [***AP News in Brief at 6:04 p.m. EDT***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BYN-H5D1-DYMD-607F-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

Hamas accepts Gaza cease-fire; Israel says it will continue talks but launches strikes in Rafah

JERUSALEM — Hamas announced its acceptance Monday of an Egyptian-Qatari cease-fire proposal, but Israel said the deal did not meet its “core demands” and that it was pushing ahead with an assault on the southern Gaza town of Rafah. Still, Israel said it would continue negotiations.

The high-stakes diplomatic moves and military brinkmanship left a glimmer of hope alive — but only barely — for an accord that could bring at least a pause in the 7-month-old war that has devastated the Gaza Strip. Hanging over the wrangling was the threat of an all-out Israeli assault on Rafah, a move the United States strongly opposes and that aid groups warn will be disastrous for some 1.4 million Palestinians taking refuge there.

Hamas's abrupt acceptance of the cease-fire deal came hours after Israel ordered an evacuation of some 100,000 Palestinians from eastern neighborhoods of Rafah, signaling an invasion was imminent.

Israel's War Cabinet decided to continue the Rafah operation, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said. At the same time, it said that while the proposal Hamas agreed to “is far from meeting Israel’s core demands,” it would send negotiators to Egypt to work on a deal.

The Israeli military said it was conducting “targeted strikes” against Hamas in eastern Rafah. The nature of the strikes was not immediately known, but the move appeared aimed at keeping the pressure on as talks continue.

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Trump fined $1,000 for gag order violation in hush money case as ex-employee recounts reimbursements

NEW YORK (AP) — The judge presiding over Donald Trump's hush money trial fined him $1,000 on Monday and warned that future gag order violations could send him to jail, while jurors heard detailed testimony for the first time about the financial reimbursements at the center of the case.

The testimony from Jeffrey McConney, the former Trump Organization controller, provided a mechanical but vital recitation of how the company reimbursed payments that were allegedly meant to suppress embarrassing stories from surfacing during the 2016 presidential campaign and then logged them as legal expenses in a manner that Manhattan prosecutors say broke the law.

McConney's appearance on the witness stand came as the first criminal trial involving a former American president entered its third week of testimony. His account lacked the human drama offered Friday by longtime Trump aide Hope Hicks, but it nonetheless yielded an important building block for prosecutors trying to pull back the curtain on what they say was a corporate records cover-up of transactions designed to protect Trump's presidential bid during a pivotal stretch of the race.

At the center of the testimony, and the case itself, is a $130,000 payment from Trump attorney and personal fixer Michael Cohen to porn actor Stormy Daniels to stifle her claims of an extramarital sexual encounter with Trump a decade earlier.

The 34 felony counts of falsifying business records accuse Trump of labeling the money paid to Cohen in his company’s records as legal fees. Prosecutors contend that by paying him income and giving him extra to account for taxes, the Trump executives were able to conceal the reimbursement.

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Columbia University cancels main commencement after weeks of pro-Palestinian protests

NEW YORK (AP) — Columbia University canceled its large university-wide commencement ceremony Monday following weeks of pro-Palestinian protests that have roiled its campus and others across the U.S., but said students will still be able to celebrate at a series of smaller, school-based ceremonies this week and next.

The decision comes as universities around the country wrangle with how to handle commencements for students whose high school graduations were derailed by COVID-19 in 2020. Another campus shaken by protests, Emory University, announced Monday that it would move its commencement from its Atlanta campus to a suburban arena. Others, including the University of Michigan, Indiana University and Northeastern, have pulled off ceremonies with few disruptions.

Columbia’s decision to cancel its main ceremonies scheduled for May 15 saves its president, Minouche Shafik, from having to deliver a commencement address in the same part of campus where police dismantled a protest encampment last week. The Ivy League school in upper Manhattan said it made the decision after discussions with students.

“Our students emphasized that these smaller-scale, school-based celebrations are most meaningful to them and their families,” officials said.

Most of the ceremonies that had been scheduled for the south lawn of the main campus, where encampments were taken down last week, will take place about 5 miles (8 kilometers) north at Columbia’s sports complex, officials said.

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Floodwaters start receding around Houston area as recovery begins following rescues and evacuations

HOUSTON (AP) — Floodwaters in the Houston area began to recede on Monday, allowing residents to begin returning to their homes and assess damages after days of heavy rainfall that pummeled the area and led to hundreds of rescues — including people who were stranded on rooftops.

Officials in Harris County, where Houston is located, reported no deaths or major injuries from the flooding. But in North Texas, a 4-year-old boy died after riding in a car that was swept away in fast waters, authorities said.

After days of heavy rainfall in the Houston area and other parts of Southeast Texas, the forecast on Monday called for mainly sunny skies with a slight chance of showers.

“We can absolutely see the light at the end of the tunnel, and we’ve made it through the worst of this weather event,” Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo, the county’s top elected official, told reporters Monday.

Areas near Lake Livingston, located northeast of Houston, received upwards of 23 inches (58 centimeters) of rain over the past week, National Weather Service meteorologist Jimmy Fowler said. Areas in northeastern Harris County, the nation’s third-largest county, had a range of between 6 inches (15 centimeters) to almost 17 inches (43 centimeters) of rain in that same period.

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Pulitzer Prizes in journalism awarded to The New York Times, The Washington Post, AP and others

NEW YORK (AP) — The New York Times and The Washington Post were awarded three Pulitzer Prizes apiece on Monday for work in 2023 that dealt with everything from the war in Gaza to gun violence, and The Associated Press won in the feature photography category for coverage of global migration to the U.S.

Hamas’ Oct. 7 attack on Israel and its aftermath produced work that resulted in two Pulitzers and a special citation. The Times won for text coverage that the Pulitzer board described as “wide-ranging and revelatory,” while the Reuters news service won for its photography. The citation went to journalists and other writers covering the war in Gaza.

The prestigious public service award went to ProPublica for reporting that “pierced the thick wall of secrecy” around the U.S. Supreme Court to show how billionaires gave expensive gifts to justices and paid for luxury travel. Reporters Joshua Kaplan, Justin Elliott, Brett Murphy, Alex Mierjeski and Kirsten Berg were honored for their work.

The Pulitzers honored the best in journalism from 2023 in 15 categories, as well as eight arts categories focused on books, music and theater. The public service winner receives a gold medal. All other winners receive $15,000.

The 15 photos in AP’s winning entry were taken across Latin America and along the U.S.-Mexico border in Texas and California in a year when immigration was one of the world’s biggest stories. They were shot by AP staffers Greg Bull, Eric Gay, Fernando Llano, Marco Ugarte and Eduardo Verdugo, and longtime AP freelancers Christian Chavez, Felix Marquez and Ivan Valencia.

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Brad Parscale helped Trump win in 2016 using Facebook ads. Now he’s back, and an AI evangelist

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — Donald Trump’s former campaign manager looked squarely into the camera and promised his viewers they were about to witness a bold new era in ***politics***.

“You’re going to see some of the most amazing new technology in artificial intelligence that’s going to replace polling in the future across the country,” said Brad Parscale in a dimly lit promotional video accentuated by hypnotic beats.

Parscale, the digital campaign operative who helped engineer Trump’s 2016 presidential victory, vows that his new, AI-powered platform will dramatically overhaul not just polling but also campaigning. His AI-powered tools, he has boasted, will outperform big tech companies and usher in a wave of conservative victories worldwide.

It’s not the first time Parscale has proclaimed that new technologies will boost right-wing campaigns. He was the digital guru who teamed up with scandal-plagued Cambridge Analytica and helped propel Trump to the White House eight years ago. In 2020, he had a public blowup then a private falling out with his old boss after the Capitol riot. Now he’s back, playing an under-the-radar role to help Trump, the presumptive GOP nominee, in his race against Democratic President Joe Biden.

Parscale says his company, Campaign Nucleus can use AI to help generate customized emails, parse oceans of data to gauge voter sentiment and find persuadable voters, then amplify the social media posts of “anti-woke” influencers, according to an Associated Press review of Parscale’s public statements, his company websites, slide decks, marketing materials and other documents not previously made public.

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Nervous about falling behind the GOP, Democrats are wrestling with how to use AI

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden’s campaign and Democratic candidates are in a fevered race with Republicans over who can best exploit the potential of artificial intelligence, a technology that could transform American elections — and perhaps threaten democracy itself.

Still smarting from being outmaneuvered on social media by Donald Trump and his allies in 2016, Democratic strategists said they are nevertheless treading carefully in embracing tools that trouble experts in disinformation. So far, Democrats said they are primarily using AI to help them find and motivate voters and better identify and overcome deceptive content.

\u2033Candidates and strategists are still trying to figure out how to use AI in their work. People know it can save them time — the most valuable resource a campaign has,” said Betsy Hoover, director of digital organizing for President Barack Obama’s 2012 campaign and co-founder of the progressive venture capital firm Higher Ground Labs. “But they see the risk of misinformation and have been intentional about where and how they use it in their work.”

Campaigns in both parties for years have used AI — powerful computer systems, software or processes that emulate aspects of human work and cognition — to collect and analyze data.

The recent developments in supercharged generative AI, however, have provided candidates and consultants with the ability to generate text and images, clone human voices and create video at unprecedented volume and speed.

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An American soldier was arrested in Russia and accused of stealing, US officials say

WASHINGTON (AP) — An American soldier has been arrested in Russia and accused of stealing, according to two U.S. officials.

U.S. officials said the soldier, Staff Sgt. Gordon Black, 34, was stationed in South Korea and was in the process of returning home to Fort Cavazos in Texas. Instead, officials said he traveled to Russia.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss personnel details.

Cynthia Smith, Army spokeswoman, confirmed that a soldier was detained on Thursday in Vladivostok, a major military and commercial Pacific port, on charges of criminal misconduct. She said Russia notified the U.S. and the Army told the soldier's family.

“The U.S. Department of State is providing appropriate consular support to the soldier in Russia,” Smith said.

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After AP investigation, family of missing students enrolls in school

ATLANTA (AP) — Four months after The Associated Press wrote about an Atlanta family struggling to enroll in school, all of the children — in a complete turnaround — returned to class last month. The project on Monday was named a Pulitzer Prize finalist.

The youngest child, an energetic 8-year-old girl, had never attended school before. On her first day, she was greeted at her home by a half dozen children from around the apartment block, who escorted her to the bus stop, her mother said.

“I was most excited for her,” said Tameka. “My other children, they know what school’s like. I want that experience for her.”

(Tameka is her middle name. The AP has withheld her full name because she runs the risk of jail time or losing custody since her kids haven’t been in school.)

The final child, a student with Down syndrome, started school last Tuesday, Tameka said.

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Lawsuit alleges decades of child sex abuse at Illinois juvenile detention centers statewide

CHICAGO (AP) — Child sexual abuse at Illinois juvenile detention centers was pervasive and systemic for decades, according to disturbing accounts in a lawsuit filed Monday by 95 men and women housed at the youth centers as children.

The lawsuit details alleged incidents of abuse from 1996 to 2017, including gang rape, forced oral sex, beatings and groping of children by corrections officers, sergeants, nurses, therapists, a chaplain and others at nine youth centers. Many plaintiffs said they were threatened or rewarded to keep quiet.

“The State of Illinois has allowed a culture of abuse at Illinois Youth Centers to flourish unabated,” the 186-page complaint said.

The lawsuit, filed in the Illinois Court of Claims, follows similar harrowing allegations of child sex abuse at juvenile detention centers in Maryland, New Jersey, New Hampshire, California and New York City. Some cases have gone to trial or resulted in settlements; arrests have been infrequent.

The Illinois lawsuit contends the state failed to supervise, discipline, remove or investigate alleged abusers, enabling the abuse to continue. The complaint alleges the abuse happened at youth centers in locations all over the state including Chicago, Joliet, Harrisburg, Murphysboro and Warrenville. Several locations have since closed.

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