

# [***AP News in Brief at 6:04 p.m. EDT***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BNS-K5X1-JC5B-G0ND-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Associated Press

March 30, 2024 Saturday 10:04 PM GMT

Copyright 2024 Associated Press All Rights Reserved

**Section:** DOMESTIC NEWS

**Length:** 2219 words

**Body**

Crews carefully start removing first piece of twisted steel from collapsed Baltimore bridge

BALTIMORE — Teams of engineers are working Saturday on the intricate process of cutting and lifting the first section of twisted steel from the collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge in Maryland,

The bridge crumpled into the Patapsco River on Tuesday after a massive cargo ship crashed into one of its main supports.

Sparks could be seen flying from a section of bent and crumpled steel Saturday afternoon. The U.S. Coast Guard confirmed that work has started to remove a section of the toppled structure.

Crews are carefully measuring and cutting the steel from the broken bridge before attaching straps so it can be lifted onto a barge and floated away, Coast Guard Rear Adm. Shannon Gilreath said Saturday.

Seven floating cranes — including a massive one capable of lifting 1,000 tons — 10 tugboats, nine barges, eight salvage vessels and five Coast Guard boats are on site in the water southeast of Baltimore.

\_\_\_

The Baltimore collapse focused attention on vital bridges. Thousands are in poor shape across the US

After a yearlong closure, a bridge over the Puyallup River reopened in 2019 with a sturdy new span and a brand new name. It even won a national award.

But today, the Fishing Wars Memorial Bridge is closed again after federal officials raised concerns about a vintage section of the nearly century-old bridge that carried about 15,000 vehicles a day. It has no timetable to reopen because the city of Tacoma, Washington, first must raise millions of dollars to clean and inspect it.

“It’s frustrating — and hard to comprehend how we got here,” said Ed Wallace, whose Harley-Davidson motorcycle store has lost customers since the nearby bridge was shuttered.

Bridges fulfill a vital function that often goes overlooked until lives are lost or disrupted by a closure or collapse, like that of the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore early Tuesday. That bridge crumpled when struck by a cargo ship, not because of poor maintenance. But thousands of others stand in worse shape.

About 42,400 U.S. bridges are in poor condition, yet they carry about 167 million vehicles each day, according to the federal government. Four-fifths of them have problems with the legs holding them up or the arms supporting their load. And more than 15,800 of those bridges also were in poor shape a decade ago, according to an Associated Press analysis.

\_\_\_

Some state lawmakers want school chaplains as part of a 'rescue mission' for public education

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Lawmakers in more than a dozen states have proposed legislation to allow spiritual chaplains in public schools, a move that proponents say will ease a youth mental health crisis, bolster staff retention and offer spiritual care to students who can’t afford or access religious schools.

Conservatives also argue religious foundations will act as a “rescue mission” for what they say are public schools' declining values, a topic that has galvanized Republican-controlled Legislatures to fight for issues such as parental oversight of curriculum, restrictions on books and instruction on gender identity and state-funded tuition assistance for private and religious schools.

But many chaplains and interfaith organizations oppose the chaplaincy campaign, calling the motivation offensive and describing the dangers of introducing a position of authority to children without clear standards or boundaries.

“They are going to be engaging students, sometimes when they’re at their most vulnerable, and there’s not going to be any checks on whether they’re able to proselytize, what they’re able to say to kids grappling with really difficult issues,” said Maureen O’Leary, organizing director at Interfaith Alliance.

The organization has shared concerns with lawmakers and school boards, saying schools should be “neutral spaces where students can come as their full selves,” O'Leary said.

\_\_\_

Pope presides over Easter Vigil, delivers 10-minute homily after skipping Good Friday at last minute

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis presided over the Vatican's somber Easter Vigil service on Saturday night, delivering a 10-minute homily and baptizing eight people, a day after suddenly skipping the Good Friday procession at the Colosseum as a health precaution.

Francis entered the darkened, silent St. Peter's Basilica in his wheelchair, took his place in a chair and offered an opening prayer. Sounding somewhat congested and out of breath, he blessed an elaborately decorated Easter candle, the flame of which was then shared with other candles until the whole basilica twinkled.

Over an hour later, Francis delivered a 10-minute homily in a strong voice, clearing his throat occasionally.

The evening service, one of the most solemn and important moments in the Catholic liturgical calendar, commemorates the resurrection of Jesus. The Vatican had said Francis skipped the Good Friday procession to ensure his participation in both the vigil service Saturday night, which usually lasts about two hours, and Easter Sunday Mass a few hours later.

The 87-year-old Francis, who had part of one lung removed as a young man, has been battling respiratory problems all winter that have made it difficult for him to speak at length. He and the Vatican have said he has had bronchitis, a cold or the flu.

\_\_\_

Ships with a second round of aid for Gaza have departed Cyprus as concerns about hunger soar

JERUSALEM (AP) — A three-ship convoy left a port in Cyprus on Saturday with 400 tons of food and other supplies for Gaza as concerns about hunger in the territory soar.

The World Central Kitchen charity said the vessels and a barge carried enough to prepare more than 1 million meals from items like rice, pasta, flour, legumes, canned vegetables and proteins. Also on board were dates, traditionally eaten to break the daily fast during the holy month of Ramadan.

It was not clear when the ships would reach Gaza. The first ship earlier this month delivered 200 tons of food, water and other aid.

The United Nations and partners have warned that famine could occur in devastated, largely isolated northern Gaza as early as this month. Humanitarian officials say deliveries by sea and air are not enough and that Israel must allow far more aid by road. The top U.N. court has ordered Israel to open more land crossings and take other measures to address the crisis.

Meanwhile, Egypt’s state-run Al Qahera TV said truce negotiations between Israel and Hamas will resume Sunday, citing an unnamed Egyptian security source. The channel has close ties to the country’s intelligence services.

\_\_\_

Israel's high court says the government must stop funding seminaries. Could that topple Netanyahu?

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel's Supreme Court ruling curtailing subsidies for ultra-Orthodox men has rattled Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's governing coalition and raised questions about its viability as the country presses on with the war in Gaza.

Netanyahu has until Monday to present the court with a plan to dismantle what the justices called a system that privileges the ultra-Orthodox at the expense of the secular Jewish public.

If that plan alienates the ultra-Orthodox lawmakers on whose support he depends, his coalition could disintegrate and the country could be forced to hold new elections.

Here's a breakdown of the decision and what it might spell for the future of Israeli ***politics***.

Most Jewish men are required to serve nearly three years in the military, followed by years of reserve duty. Jewish women serve two mandatory years.

\_\_\_

President Joe Biden is lapping Donald Trump when it comes to campaign cash — and he'll need it

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden’s reelection campaign is raising gobs of cash. And it has an election-year strategy that, in a nutshell, aims to spend more — and spend faster.

Not only has Biden aimed to show himself off as a fundraising juggernaut this month, but his campaign is also making significant early investments both on the ground and on the airwaves — hoping to create a massive organizational advantage that leaves Republican Donald Trump scrambling to catch up.

But while the money pouring in has given Biden and the Democrats a major cash advantage, it’s also becoming clear Biden will need it. Throughout his life in business and ***politics***, Trump’s provocations have earned him near limitless free media attention. Biden, meanwhile, has often struggled to cut through the noise with his own message despite holding the presidency.

That means Biden is going to need oodles of cash to blanket battleground states where a few thousand votes could mean the difference between victory or defeat. Add to that the challenge of reaching millennials, as well as even younger voters, who formed an important part of his 2020 coalition, in a far more fractured media ecosystem that skews toward streaming services over conventional broadcast and cable.

Biden's organizational and outreach effort began in earnest this month, with the campaign using his State of the Union address as a launching pad to open 100 new field offices nationwide and boosting the number of paid staff in battleground states to 350 people. It’s also currently in the middle of a $30 million television and digital advertising campaign targeting specific communities such as Black, Hispanic and Asian voters.

\_\_\_

Some of Trump's allies in Congress already support his 2025 ideas on deportations and Jan. 6 pardons

WASHINGTON (AP) — As Donald Trump campaigns on promises of mass deportations and pardons for those convicted in the Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the Capitol, his ideas are being met with little pushback and some enthusiasm by a new era of Republicans in Congress.

It’s a shift from the first time around when the presumptive Republican presidential nominee encountered early skepticism and, once in a while, the uproar of condemnation.

Rather than being dismissed as campaign bluster or Trump speaking his mind to rouse his most devoted voters, his words are being adopted as party platforms, potentially able to move quickly from rhetoric to reality with a West Wing in waiting and crucial backing from key corners on Capitol Hill.

“We’re going to have to deport some people,” said Republican Sen. JD Vance of Ohio, one of Trump's biggest supporters, days after campaigning alongside Trump in his home state.

While Democratic President Joe Biden and his allies are sounding alarms about Trump’s proposed agenda for a second term — and his promise that he would be a "dictator" but only on Day one — the Republican Party in Congress is undergoing a massive political realignment toward Trump's “Make America Great Again” movement.

\_\_\_

Uranium is being mined near the Grand Canyon as prices soar and the US pushes for more nuclear power

The largest uranium producer in the United States is ramping up work just south of Grand Canyon National Park on a long-contested project that largely has sat dormant since the 1980s.

The work is unfolding as global instability and growing demand drive uranium prices higher.

The Biden administration and dozens of other countries have pledged to triple the capacity of nuclear power worldwide in their battle against climate change, ensuring uranium will remain a key commodity for decades as the government offers incentives for developing the next generation of nuclear reactors and new policies take aim at Russia's influence over the supply chain.

But as the U.S. pursues its nuclear power potential, environmentalists and Native American leaders remain fearful of the consequences for communities near mining and milling sites in the West and are demanding better regulatory oversight.

Producers say uranium production today is different than decades ago when the country was racing to build up its nuclear arsenal. Those efforts during World War II and the Cold War left a legacy of death, disease and contamination on the Navajo Nation and in other communities across the country, making any new development of the ore a hard pill to swallow for many.

\_\_\_

LGBTQ-inclusive church in Cuba welcomes all in a country that once sent gay people to labor camps

MATANZAS, Cuba (AP) — Proudly wearing a rainbow-colored clergy stole and a rainbow flag in her clerical collar, the Rev. Elaine Saralegui welcomed all to her LGBTQ+ inclusive church in the Cuban port city of Matanzas.

“We’re all invited. And no one can exclude us,” Saralegui told same-sex couples who held hands sitting on wooden pews in the Metropolitan Community Church where she had recently married her wife.

These words and this kind of gathering would have been unimaginable before in the largest country in the conservative and mostly Christian Caribbean, where anti-gay hostility is still widespread.

Cuba repressed gay people after its 1959 revolution led by Fidel Castro and sent many to labor camps. But in recent years, the communist-run island barred anti-gay discrimination, and a 2022 government-backed “family law” — approved by popular vote — allowed same-sex couples the right to marry and adopt.

Members of Cuba’s LGBTQ+ community say it marked a milestone that has allowed them to embrace their gender identity and worship more freely in a country that for decades after the revolution was officially atheist. Over the past quarter century, it has gradually become more tolerant of religions.

**Load-Date:** March 30, 2024

**End of Document**