

# [***AP News in Brief at 11:04 p.m. EDT***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BP0-2K21-JC5B-G0N6-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

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

BALTIMORE — Teams of engineers worked Saturday on the intricate process of cutting and lifting the first section of twisted steel from the collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge, which crumpled into the Patapsco River this week after a massive cargo ship crashed into one of its supports.

Sparks could be seen flying from a section of bent and crumpled steel in the afternoon, and video released by officials in the evening showed demolition crews using a cutting torch to slice through the thick beams. The joint incident command said in a statement that the work was being done on the top of the north side of the collapsed structure.

Crews were 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.

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 were on site in the water southeast of Baltimore.

Each movement affects what happens next and ultimately how long it will take to remove all the debris and reopen the ship channel and the blocked Port of Baltimore, Maryland Gov. Wes Moore said.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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The Trump camp assails Biden for declaring March 31, Easter Sunday, as Transgender Day of Visibility

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is facing criticism from Donald Trump's campaign and religious conservatives for proclaiming March 31 — which corresponds with Easter Sunday this year — as “Transgender Day of Visibility.”

The Democratic president issued the proclamation on Friday, calling on “all Americans to join us in lifting up the lives and voices of transgender people throughout our Nation and to work toward eliminating violence and discrimination based on gender identity.”

But in 2024, the March 31 designation overlaps with Easter, one of Christianity's holiest celebrations. Trump's campaign accused Biden, a Roman Catholic, of being insensitive to religion, and fellow Republicans piled on.

"We call on Joe Biden’s failing campaign and White House to issue an apology to the millions of Catholics and Christians across America who believe tomorrow is for one celebration only — the resurrection of Jesus Christ," said Karoline Leavitt, the Trump campaign's press secretary. She assailed what she called the Biden administration's "years-long assault on the Christian faith.”

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., said on social media that the “Biden White House has betrayed the central tenet of Easter” and called the decision “outrageous and abhorrent.”

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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.

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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.

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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.

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Donovan Clingan, UConn power back into Final Four behind 30-0 run in 77-52 rout of Illinois

BOSTON (AP) — Thirty points in a row — that's quite a run.

The NCAA Tournament streak UConn is putting together is pretty, pretty impressive, too.

The defending national champions scored 30 straight points to power their way back to the Final Four on Saturday night, steamrolling Illinois 77-52 — a March Madness record 10th straight double-digit victory for the top-seeded Huskies.

Donovan Clingan had 22 points, 10 rebounds and five blocked shots, and UConn scored the first 25 points of the second half to turn a five-point lead into a blowout. The Huskies, who cruised to their fifth national title last year, seem inexorably headed for a sixth: Their NCAA Tournament wins this year have come by 39, 17, 30 and 25 points.

“We’re going to be tough to beat,” UConn coach Dan Hurley said. “It was a special level of basketball that we were playing.”

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