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TRUMP AGAIN CHANGES IRAN PLAN

President pauses day-old effort for military to escort ships through Strait of Hormuz

By Eric Schmitt, Greg Jaffe, Leo Sands and Erica L. Green
NEW YORK TIMES

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump, in a sudden reversal, announced Tuesday evening that the change was “based on the request of Pakistan and other countries,” as well as the “tremendous military success” and “great prog-

ress” toward an agreement. Pakistan has hosted ceasefire talks between U.S. and Iranian negotiators.

Trump said, however, that a recently announced U.S. blockade would “remain in full force and effect” in the narrow waterway and that the pause was “to see whether or not the agreement can be finalized and signed.”

Earlier Tuesday, Trump and top U.S. officials had said that a shaky ceasefire with Iran was holding despite new attacks by both sides

after the U.S. military launched an effort to reopen the strait. After the United States and Israel began strikes in Iran on Feb. 28, Iran claimed control of the vital oil shipping route off Iran’s southern coast, through which about 20% of the world’s oil and liquid natural gas had passed. In April, the United States announced its own blockade of the strait. Trump threatened to wipe out a “whole civilization” if Iran did not open the strait. Then the United States said it would

“guide” trapped vessels through the strait.

Only two ships were known to have passed through the waterway on Monday. None appear to have made the trip on Tuesday.

Earlier Tuesday, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth described the U.S. operation to open the strait, which began Monday, as defensive and temporary.

“We’re not looking for a fight,” he

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HOOVES ON GROUND HELP CUT FIRE RISK



Sheep graze in the Westridge Open Space area off Black Oak Drive in Petaluma on April 28. With peak fire season ahead, land managers are increasingly turning to grazing operators to reduce fire risk. **PHOTOS BY BETH SCHLANKER — THE PRESS DEMOCRAT**

Livestock in demand to scarf up fuel in yards, parks, fields

By Natalie Hanson
NATALIE.HANSON@PRESSDEMOCRAT.COM

The North Bay’s seasonal transition from hillsides cloaked in emerald green grass to the telltale tawny of the dry season has been extended by welcome spring rains. But not for long.

And that means peak fire season is on its way. To reduce fire risk on much of that vast open acreage, property owners and land managers in the region are increasingly turning to contracted grazing operators, whose herds of sheep and goats munch down

the grass and underbrush that can feed wildland blazes. The hungry herbivores help reduce invasive weeds and crop native grasses, and are a lower-carbon alternative to human-powered mowing.

The business, while not new, has boomed in the years following Northern California’s bout of catastrophic wildfires, including in Sonoma County, where the 2017 firestorm, 2019 Kincaid Fire and 2020 Walbridge and Glass fires combined to burn several



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SONOMA COUNTY

Head of watchdog agency leaving

John Alden taking new role in law enforcement oversight in Marin

By Marisa Endicott and Emma Murphy
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

John Alden, director of the civilian watchdog agency overseeing the Sonoma County Sheriff’s Office, is leaving his post to take on a new law enforcement oversight role in Marin County.

Alden, a former prosecutor and longtime police oversight practitioner, was hired to lead Sonoma County’s Independent Office of Law Enforcement Review and Outreach, or IOLERO, in 2022.

He shepherded the agency, established in 2015, through a critical period of growth in the wake of Measure P, a 2020 ballot initiative that expanded IOLERO’s funding and investigative abilities, bestowing subpoena power.

“He’s done a lot to advance the efforts of law enforcement oversight in our organization,” said Supervisor Chris Coursey, the board’s vice chair. “He’s an expert in his field and he’s seen as a leader in law enforcement oversight on a national level and with that Sonoma County has become seen as a national leader of oversight. It’s a setback for oversight in Sonoma County to see him walk out the door.”

With his departure, the Board of Supervisors will be responsible for steering the agency through a crucial moment as questions surrounding Measure P’s full implementation continue to hang in the balance.

Including Alden, the agency operates with a full-time staff of 75 employees, the most it has had to



John Alden

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GOP adds \$1B to immigration bill for Trump ballroom

By Carl Hulse
NEW YORK TIMES

WASHINGTON — Senate Republicans have inserted \$1 billion for White House East Wing security enhancements in the immigration enforcement funding bill they hope to rush through Congress this month, setting up a political fight over a ballroom that President Donald Trump has said would be financed with private money.

The leaders of the Judiciary and Homeland

Security committees on Monday released plans for the roughly \$70 billion package, which would significantly bolster spending on Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Border Patrol through the end of Trump’s term using a party-line legislative process that can skirt a filibuster.

A surprise addition to the measure was the \$1 billion proposed by the Judiciary Committee for security work related to Trump’s East Wing renovation. The measure does not mention the president’s proposed new ball-

room, which is being challenged in court, but Trump has insisted that a main reason for the project is to enhance security.

While the president has previously insisted that the renovation would be funded through private donations, a spokesperson on Tuesday said the White House applauded the proposed security funding for a “long overdue” project.

He and congressional Republicans have escalated their efforts to defend the project after the attempted assault late last month at

a journalism gala in Washington attended by the president.

The bill says the public money would be directed to “security adjustments and upgrades, including within the perimeter fence of the White House compound to support enhancements by the Secret Service relating to the East Wing Modernization Project, including above-ground and below-ground security features.” It also bars any of

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GRAZERS

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hundred thousand acres, overlapping in places.

Overship of that sprawling landscape is highly fragmented, complicating management for wildfire purposes. But contract grazers and their supporters say putting hooves on the ground in timely and strategic ways can help curb risk in an era of destructive wildfires stoked by climate change.

"The importance of grazing in the North Bay cannot be overstated," Petaluma's public works director Drew Halter and senior management analyst Delana Bradford told The Press Democrat. "Managed properly, animals reduce fire and ladder fuels in a way that is repeatable, low-emission, and aligned with land stewardship goals. As wildfire risk continues to intensify across the region, grazing is proving to be a critical tool — not just for vegetation management, but for building more resilient ecosystems and more informed, prepared communities."

In Sonoma County about 300,000 acres are suitable for grazing, according to the 2024 Sonoma County Crop Report.

Demand is rising for animals to graze those acres and more — from parkland to private yards — as gauged by such platforms as match, graze, said Stephanie Larson, the local livestock and range management farm advisor with the UC Cooperative Extension.

That platform, which pairs landowners with livestock operators, has nearly doubled its customers statewide between 2023 and 2025, Larson said, with 332 new users added in 2025.



Sheep are herded west on East D Street in Petaluma as part of the Transhumance Festival experience on April 11. **KENT PORTER — THE PRESS DEMOCRAT**

"It's clear that landowners are increasingly concerned about excess fuel buildup, and many more grazing businesses have emerged as a result," Larson said. "Because there's a great demand, there's an increase in supply and so we've seen an increase in people interested in the grazing business."

Still, she sees much more room to expand those efforts across public and privately owned land in the region.

About a handful of local contract grazers were in the business years ago, according to Sarah Keiser, a grazing consultant. She is aware of about a dozen outfits now actively working in Sonoma County.

The services can cost \$1,200 to \$2,000 per grazed acre, Keiser said. That's partly why she founded a cooperative grazing program to help people work together to share animals, or the cost of a contract grazer, on multiple properties.

Petaluma-area resident Bo Laurent is taking advantage of that option, sharing 12 sheep with three neighbors to manage their acreage.

"The main purpose is to keep our grass trimmed to reduce fire risk," Laurent said. Keiser helped the households and others in the area get started, she said. Keiser noted the cost savings: "That's why neighbors come together, because if you try to pay someone to try to graze five acres, you pay a lot. This way, everybody pays less."

Keiser works with two resource conservation districts, Sonoma and Gold Ridge, that together coordinate the county's LandSmart Grazing program, a network that supports property owners, contract grazers, land agencies and community groups who can use livestock to reduce fuel loads.

Petaluma is taking advantage of the effort, employing sheep and goats to graze its parks and other open spaces since 2023 in a program designed by Two Rock Land Management.

Nonprofit groups, including the Sonoma Land Trust, also are turning to livestock to manage the range and wildland they own or control.

Gina Fabiano, Sonoma Land Trust's marketing director, said the group can tailor grazing operations

based on the needs of each site. "What works in one place is not guaranteed to work in another," she said. Santa Rosa has increasingly employed targeted grazing on a range of properties it owns. In 2025, the city used more than 1,000 goats and sheep to tend about 130 acres of dry grass and weeds across eight city sites. Contractors use electric fencing and other methods to keep the animals safe while targeting areas that are fire prone but otherwise difficult to clear with equipment due to terrain or other obstacles.

Paul Lowenthal, Santa Rosa Fire Department's division chief fire marshal, noted the city's fire abatement tools also extend to control and pile burns.

Santa Rosa earlier this year put out a call to livestock tenders seeking to find any interested in grazing on select Santa Rosa Water-managed properties to tamp down weeds.

No compensation was offered, but Laurent and Keiser wasn't hot on that play, noting the costs and logistics involved in any such service. Insurance coverage was a prerequisite.

"There's no infrastructure nor available water, and

farmers are not going to do it for free," Keiser said. "I can't imagine that anybody's going to graze on small urban properties ... when it's incredibly costly and there's also a risk of theft."

The city received five applications for the program and has selected a local grazer, according to a spokesperson.

Given the rising demand, Keiser is working to increase the number of contract grazers in the area. She hopes to create a mentorship program to help grazers grow their business.

She pointed to other efforts to increase awareness about the subject, including the recent Transhumance Festival she helps organize. Last month, as they have in past years, livestock tenders herded their animals through the middle of Petaluma as part of the event, featuring demonstrations on land stewardship practices, soil and watershed health.

"I think we're going to have more and more demand for grazers because it's a viable option, especially when gasoline prices are soaring," Keiser said. "And it's a nature-based solution to vegetation management on a landscape to realize we can't think of landscape management as one and done — you have to come back to do it multiple times a year."

Lowenthal, the Santa Rosa fire marshal, said that is especially true after last month's plentiful rains, with an encore Monday.

"We were obviously pretty concerned this year with how dry our local season looked as we pushed through March with little to no rain and record breaking heat," Lowenthal said. "We saw a lot of prop-

GRAZING AND FIRE PREVENTION

Santa Rosa residents can review current grazing management guidance on the city's Wildfire Ready page. For landowners interested in working with a contract grazer, resource conservation district officials advise being ready for scores of animals, with water availability, space for temporary fencing and an accessible spot to park a trailer for unloading and loading livestock.

- For more information:
- Sonoma Resource Conservation District, sonomarcld.org
 - Gold Ridge Resource Conservation District, goldridgecd.org
 - LandSmart grazing program, sonomarcld.org/get-involved/landsmart-grazing-program
 - Sonoma County Resilient Forests and Watersheds Initiative, sonomacountyresilient.org
 - City of Petaluma grazing program, cityofpetaluma.org/grazing

erty owners cutting their seasonal grazings pretty early this year, thinking they were going to roll into a dry April. Now we're seeing more significant rainfall, which is going to lead to a lot of growth of fire fuels."

That means more responsibility for landowners who haven't already tackled their yard projects.

"Once our season is declared locally and the fire risks increase," Lowenthal said, "property owners will be required to maintain their seasonal grazings."

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BALLROOM

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the funding being spent on "non-security elements."

But Democrats pounced on the proposal, signaling that they intended to make the ballroom a centerpiece of their opposition to the measure and their election-year message that the president and his party were not meeting voters' needs.

"Republicans are on a different planet than American families," Sen. Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., the minority leader, said in a post on social media. "Republicans looked at families drowning in bills and decided what they really needed was more roads and a Trump ballroom."

Top Democrats also noted that consideration of the bill would put all senators on the record on "White House construction project



Construction is underway at the White House in Washington on April 23. **DOUG MILLS — NEW YORK TIMES**

that polls have shown to be unpopular.

"Just flagging that now everyone gets an up or down vote on the ballroom," Sen. Brian Schatz, D-Hawaii, said on social media.

Should the provision survive and be enacted into law, it could clear away legal obstacles to construction of the ballroom, which a federal judge has ruled requires

congressional approval.

Republicans are advancing the legislation outside normal congressional spending channels because Senate Democrats had blocked money for ICE and the border control in a dispute over the tactics and conduct of federal immigration officers. That fight shut down parts of the Department of Homeland Security for almost 80 days.

"The Senate Judiciary Committee is taking action to help provide certainty for federal law enforcement and safe streets for American families," Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, chair of the Judiciary Committee, said in a statement. "We will work to ensure this critical funding gets signed into law without unnecessary delay."

After the attack at the jour-

nalism dinner last month, some congressional Republicans proposed that the ballroom be paid for with \$400 million in federal money, with private donations to be used for extras such as china. Democrats quickly made clear that they would not support that effort, leaving the potential funding uncertain.

On Tuesday, Davis Ingle, the White House spokesperson, cited the recent incident in praising the security funding in the bill.

"As President Trump has repeatedly said, the White House must be a safe and secure complex that generations of future presidents and visitors to the people's house can enjoy," he said.

Republicans had pushed for the bill to be kept free of any proposals not directly tied to the immigration crackdown to make it easier to push through rapidly to meet

the president's June 1 deadline but evidently chose to make an exception in the case of the White House project.

The Judiciary Committee measure would provide about \$39 billion and the homeland security measure another \$52.5 billion for hiring, training and equipping new immigration enforcement officers and purchasing and employing new border control technology, including artificial intelligence. The homeland security secretary would receive \$5 billion in a flexible fund, and the legislation includes \$1.4 billion for the Justice Department. None of the spending would be offset with cuts elsewhere.

Sen. Rand Paul, R-Kentucky, who leads the Homeland Security Committee, has been resistant to surges in new spending but said he is backing the funding push because of Democratic recalcitrance.

team to not only grow but build on the foundation of community trust in the oversight process," said Kristyne Lange, a member of Community for Law Enforcement Accountability Now, a group originally formed to spearhead Measure P's passage. She also serves as president for the NAACP's Sonoma County branch.

Lange said she hoped decisions about IOLERO's future leadership and especially any proposed changes to Measure P will be a transparent process.

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LEAVING

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date. This fiscal year, IOLERO's budget was \$2.5 million — tied to the mandated 1% of the Sheriff's Office spending. Alden's salary was \$252,000. Jim Duffy, a civilian oversight advocate and practitioner who was part of early efforts to establish IOLERO, lamented the loss of the agency's director. "We were so lucky to have had Jim Alden," he said, adding that he was well-respected in professional oversight circles and praised for his diplomatic approach to the job.

Duffy said he was not surprised by the news, however. "This was totally foreseeable due to a lack of support coming from the Board of Supervisors," he said.

Alden did not respond to an interview request Tuesday.

The county is expected to appoint an interim director to lead the watchdog office until a permanent replacement is hired.

In the past couple of years, IOLERO and the Sheriff's Office and its deputies have increasingly clashed as the watchdog sought to flex its new investigative powers, especially the pursuit of its first independent investigations into in-custody deaths or deputy shootings and whistleblower complaints.

In 2024, IOLERO sued over the Sheriff's Office's refusal to respond to subpoenas related to a whistleblower inquiry. An appellate court decided in IOLERO's favor

in March with a ruling that could have statewide implications. The Sheriff's Office is requesting a review of the decision by the California Supreme Court, according to a department spokesperson.

Oversight advocates have criticized supervisors for what they see as a lack of vocal support for Alden and implementation of Measure P as voters intended. Supervisors have praised work between the two agencies but stopped short of publicly stepping into the escalating dispute.

In recent weeks, Board Chair Rebecca Hermosillo has signaled she is working on potential updates to Measure P, a move that has the ballot initiative's backers on edge.

Hermosillo, reached over text message Tuesday, said she was attending a tour at an out-of-state conference and was unavailable for an interview.

Matt Brown, the county's communication's specialist, confirmed Hermosillo was attending a conference in Maui, hosted by the National Association of Counties. Brown also shared a statement on Hermosillo's behalf.

"John has served Sonoma County well for almost four years," Hermosillo said. "In his time, he has helped strengthen and expand law enforcement oversight in Sonoma County. We wish him the very best in the next chapter of his career."

Alden's extensive experience will make him hard to replace, Duffy said. "There are a limited number of highly qualified practitioners

to run these offices."

After starting his career as a deputy district attorney in Marin County, Alden had spent nearly two decades working in law enforcement oversight in San Francisco and Oakland before coming to Sonoma County.

Sonoma County Sheriff Eddie Ingram said his department's significant collaboration with Alden had been overshadowed by public attention on disputes between the two agencies.

"I've always said despite our differences in the legal interpretations of Measure P, I believe Director Alden is the best IOLERO Director we have had," Ingram said in a statement. "As I've said before, the focus has been on the negative, but no one reports on our positive interactions which far exceed our negative interactions. I believe his efforts and leadership at IOLERO has helped increase the quality of our internal affairs investigations, improve our policies, and made the Sheriff's Office better. I wish Director Alden success in his new position."

Ingram and Alden have both been quoted at length in Press Democrat coverage attesting to the the positive work between their offices.

Nevertheless, the sheriff and the Deputy Sheriff's Association, a labor group for patrol deputies, have accused Alden of overstepping and eroding trust with the department. Last year, the ASA filed a complaint with the State Bar of California against Alden and re-upped request for the county to investigate IOLERO's actions.

Sonoma State Concert Band
Andy Collingsworth, Conductor

Maria Carrillo High School Wind Ensemble
Matthew Bringeloh, Conductor

American Voices

Morton Gould: American Salute
David del Tredici: Acoustic Song
Robert Schumann: A Legend Legend
Duke Ellington: Caravan
Shayling Li: Starry Ocean (West Coast premiere)

Henry Fillmore: Americans We
Alfred Reed: American Dances
Aran Khatibshahi: Two Dances From Spallics
John Philip Sousa: The Golden Star

Friday, May 8, 2026
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 Green Music Center

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\$12 Seniors
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