



## Hype over Dodgers builds as team finally takes the field

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# The Newport Daily News

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## March offers more than St. Patrick's Day parade



Steve Marino leads a tour of the Barney Street Cemetery on Sept. 11, 2022. The annual Trolley Tour of Irish Newport on March 9 includes a stop at the cemetery. TIM MAY/MUSEUM OF NEWPORT IRISH HISTORY

### 5 events to celebrate Newport Irish Heritage Month

Will Richmond Newport Daily News | USA TODAY NETWORK

It's March and that means we're all a little bit Irish. • With spring officially right around the corner and St. Patrick's Day offering a chance to celebrate it's the time of year to hopefully put away the winter jacket and start to enjoy warming weather with the sun on our face – if we're lucky. • While the parade garners most of the attention this month, March also serves as the 47th annual Newport Irish Heritage Month with plenty of events to mark the occasion. • Here's a look at five events planned as part of the month, so take a look and start making your plans.

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Bring yourself a little luck with a leprechaun craft at the Newport Public Library on March 11. PROVIDED BY NEWPORT PUBLIC LIBRARY

## Congress again faces shutdown deadline

### Deal on overall spending didn't cover allocation

Riley Beggin USA TODAY

WASHINGTON – Stop us if you've heard this one before: Congress has until Friday to reach a spending agreement, or the nation will face a partial government shutdown.

It's the fourth such deadline lawmakers have approached in recent months. The last three times, they opted for short-term compromises, pushing off more permanent solutions after failing to craft a compromise on funding levels.

This time, lawmakers have reached a deal over how much they will spend overall. In the weeks since, they've worked on allocating those funds to agencies, but policy disagreements and spending requests appear to have gummed up the works. With the clock ticking loudly, leaders have still not released bills to fund agriculture, food and drug, energy and water, military construction, veterans affairs, transportation and housing programs.

And another shutdown deadline looms close behind: Funding for the departments of Health and Human Services, Commerce, Labor, State and Defense expires March 8.

A government shutdown means all federal officials and agencies that aren't deemed "essential" have to stop work. Thousands of federal employees would be furloughed.

"Essential" federal workers, who range from air traffic controllers to emergency personnel in national parks, would work without pay, then receive back pay once a shutdown ends. Some subcontractors could be out of work and would not receive back pay.

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## LEAP DAY CHARM

### People born on Feb. 29 share humor and a unique outlook on the future

Paul Edward Parker Providence Journal USA TODAY NETWORK

Kayleigh Mason will be celebrating her fourth birthday at the end of the month, and, like everyone her age, she's looking forward to getting her learner's permit and getting behind the wheel.

"My friends can't wait for it, too," Kayleigh told The Providence Journal, adding that her friends tell her, "When you can drive, you're bringing us all in your car. You're taking us to Starbucks and Chipotle."

Raya Rische, born one minute after Kayleigh at Women & Infants Hospital, also is looking forward to her fourth so she can get a job.

"On my birthday," Raya said, "I'm going to apply to Burlington."

**"You begin to think about time in a different way, instead of just this incremental passage of time every year."**

Cindy Elder, Barrington resident

Meanwhile, it seems like decades that Cindy Elder has been waiting for her Sweet 16 to roll around. "All kinds of good discounts are going to be coming my way before too long," she told The Journal.

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From left, Kayleigh Mason, Cindy Elder, Pieter Vanderbeck and Raya Rische all were born on Feb. 29, leap day. KRIS CRAIG/PROVIDENCE JOURNAL

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# 3 congressional fights may affect your finances

Medora Lee  
USA TODAY

It's easy to tune out Congress' ongoing squabbles, but Americans may want to pay attention to three major issues that could affect their wallets.

The current budget face-off includes extra funding for two programs that help low-income people pay for food and energy: the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). Both need budget approval to keep operating at full steam.

Separately, a multiyear enhanced child tax credit that passed the House in January is stuck in the Senate. If it passed, as many as 400,000 children would be lifted out of poverty in the first year, said the left-leaning Center on Budget and Policy Priorities think tank.

"The three programs together will make a significant difference in strengthening low-income families," said Mark Wolfe, director of the National Energy Assistance Directors Association.

WIC provides nutrition assistance to 6.7 million women and children, and participation is rising as more Americans struggle financially. To serve them, WIC needs another \$1 billion, the United States Department of Agriculture said in December. In the last two stopgap measures to keep the government running, Congress didn't provide additional money.

If Congress doesn't act now, states "will have to make tough choices," said Craig Moschetti, senior manager of policy for Share Our Strength's No Kid Hungry Campaign.

Eligible families could be wait-listed, be turned away or have their benefits cut for the first time in 30 years. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimates about 2 million children and mothers nationwide would be cut by September, with harm falling disproportionately on Black and Hispanic families.

LIHEAP spent its \$4.1 billion grant plus a supplemental \$2 billion in fiscal year 2023 to help a record 7.1 million households. The program wants to keep funding at that \$6.1 billion total.

"I keep hearing back from the Hill that it will be tough," Wolfe said. "Additional funding looks grim." At least 1 million households would be cut from the program, he said.

A record 16% of households, or 21.2 million, are already behind on their energy bills. During calendar year 2023, this unpaid debt increased from \$17.7 billion to \$20.3 billion, Wolfe said.

"Energy prices are coming down but remain high," he said. "States are reporting that they are cutting back on emergency funds, closing their programs early and scaling back or not planning to offer cooling assistance."

In January, the House passed a bill that would allow a larger portion of the child tax credit to be refundable, retroactive to tax year 2023. Americans are filing those returns now. If the bill passes the Senate, the IRS will recalculate your taxes to see if you're entitled to more refund money.

The refundable portion of the \$2,000 credit would increase from \$1,600 to \$1,800 for tax year 2023. It would increase to \$1,900 for 2024 and to \$2,000 for 2025.

However, the Senate hasn't put the bill up for a vote. Some senators, like ranking member of the Senate Finance Committee Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, and Marco Rubio, R-Fla., say the bill would turn the child tax credit into welfare instead of tax relief for working Americans. Others, like Mitt Romney, R-Utah, say the plan is too costly.

Senate Republicans, too, largely support funding the government without the policy add-ons.

Some hard-right members are arguing they should threaten a shutdown to get what they're asking for — a position that's unpopular with most voters.

"As always, the task at hand will require that everyone rows in the same direction," Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., said Monday.

If they can't get policy wins, hard-right members want an extension until the end of September. But that would institute across-the-board 1% spending cuts that Democrats and moderate Republicans oppose.

Both sides say the other is holding up the process.

At any time, lawmakers could announce an agreement on the first four bills. Adhering to a promise to allow House members to review any legislation for 72 hours, the House could vote as early as Friday morning.

If the bills moved that quickly, the Senate would then vote on the bills Saturday morning, creating a shutdown of only a few early-morning hours with little interruption in services.

If lawmakers can't reach a deal, leaders may need to explore other options. Ultraconservative leaders would push for a full-year extension. Most say another short-term bill is more likely.

Contributing: Ken Tran, USA TODAY

# Consumer confidence dips despite robust economy

Matt Ott  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

American consumers are feeling less confident this month as concerns over a possible recession grew despite most recent data pointing to a healthy U.S. economy.

The Conference Board, a business research group, said Tuesday that its consumer confidence index fell to 106.7 from a revised 110.9 in January. Analysts had been forecasting that the index remained steady from January to February. The decline in the index comes after three straight months of improvement.

The index measures both Americans' assessment of current economic conditions and their outlook for the next six months.

The index measuring Americans short-term expectations for income, business and the job market fell to 79.8 from 81.5 in January. A reading under 80 often signals an upcoming recession. Consumers' view of current conditions also retreated, falling to 147.2 from 154.9.

The decline in consumer confidence this month comes as somewhat of a surprise as the economy continues to show resilience in the face of higher interest rates and inflation. Though price growth has receded considerably in the past year, inflation remains above the Federal Reserve's 2% target.

Consumer spending accounts for

about 70% of U.S. economic activity, so economists pay close attention to consumer behavior as they take measure of the broader economy.

Overall, confidence is barely above the average from last year, which was 105.4, according to Stephen Stanley, an economist at Santander, a bank.

Americans were slightly less worried about food and gas prices last month, the Conference Board said, but expressed more concern about jobs and the ongoing presidential campaign.

Consumers' expectations of future inflation fell to their lowest level since March 2020.

Yet even as inflation concerns wane, the proportion of Americans who said jobs were "easy to get" fell.

"In the case of jobs, the market is still strong; it's just much less strong than a year ago when job swapping for higher pay was easy," said Robert Frick, an economist at the Navy Federal Credit Union. "And now the contentious election season is coming closer into view, and national elections strongly influence perceptions of the economy."

In a bid to combat four-decade-high inflation in the wake of the pandemic, the Federal Reserve raised its benchmark rate 11 times beginning in March 2022. However, the central bank has left rates alone at its last four meetings and is expected to start cutting rates later this year.



Couples dance at Forty Steps along Newport's Cliff Walk in 2022. Sponsored by the Museum of Newport Irish History, an annual dance event returns March 24. PROVIDED BY LEW ABRAMSON

## Shutdown

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A shutdown can also have significant impacts on other Americans. For example, some food assistance benefits could be delayed, including WIC, and certain food safety inspections, federal housing loan support and veterans programs could be paused.

The 12 appropriations bills that keep the government functioning for the next year are due at the end of September. When it became clear lawmakers wouldn't meet the deadline for 2024, then-House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., put his job on the line to pass an extension through November.

Several hard-right House Republicans, livid that the extension didn't include conservative policy priorities, moved to kick McCarthy out of his post.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., has tried to navigate the funding fight ever since he got the job. Under his leadership, lawmakers extended funding again in November and January.

Ultraconservative House lawmakers are putting Johnson under immense pressure to deliver a government funding bill with GOP policy priorities attached, ranging from abortion restrictions to food assistance cuts. Those proposals are a no-go with Democrats.

## WALLACE THE BRAVE WILL HENRY



## Events

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### Trolley Tour of Irish Newport

The annual Trolley Tour of Irish Newport takes place on Saturday, March 9.

Departing from Hibernian Hall, 2 Wellington Ave., guests will explore "Irish Newport" on this narrated tour presented by the Museum of Newport Irish History. With two departures at 10 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. these 2-hour tours will include stops at sites connected with Newport's Irish heritage, including Forty Steps and the Barney Street Cemetery. Tours include an introductory visit to the Museum's Interpretive Center on Lower Thames Street. Sponsored by Viking Tours of Newport in memory of Karen A. Oakley. Free, but gratuities for the driver are gratefully accepted. Reservations are a must as space is limited.

### Historic Irish Cemetery Tour

Take the Historic Irish Cemetery Tour at 12:30 p.m. on Sunday, March 10 or Saturday, March 23.

Take a tour of the historic Saint Joseph Cemetery (known locally as the Barney Street Cemetery). Located at the corner of Barney and Mt. Vernon Streets in Newport, is the oldest Catholic cemetery in Rhode Island, and the site of the state's first Catholic church (1828), which served Newport's growing Irish immigrant community. The outdoor tour of approximately 30 minutes, given by a historian/guide, Steve Marino, and sponsored by Museum of Newport Irish History, is held, weather permitting. Free. Reservations requested.

### Leprechaun craft

Bring the kids to the Newport Public Library, 300 Spring St., on Monday, March 11 for the Leprechaun "Take & Make" Craft at the Newport Public Library, 300 Spring Street, Newport.

Children are invited to visit the library any time during open hours of 9:00 a.m. - 8:30 p.m. on Mon. Mar. 11 to pick up a craft to take home and make. We'll give you a bag filled with all the supplies needed and instructions. No registration is required.

### Dancing at the Forty Steps

Dancing at the Forty Steps returns to the Cliff Walk, east end of Narragansett Avenue on Sunday, March 24 at 3 p.m.

Commemorating the informal dances held there by the Irish who made Newport their home in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Sponsored by the Museum of Newport Irish History, the annual event will feature live traditional Irish music, demonstrations of Irish set dancing led by Donal and Mary Lehane, and the Ancient Order of Hibernian Men Singers. Free, outdoor event. Weather permitting.

### Visit the Museum of Newport Irish History Interpretive Center

Museum of Newport Irish History Interpretive Center at 648 Thames St., Newport, will be open from noon to 5 p.m. on the following nine days: March 8, 9, 19, 15, 16 (Parade Day), 17, 22, 23, 24. Admission by donation. MNIH

Members and children under 16 are free. For more information, visit [newportirishhistory.org](http://newportirishhistory.org).

For more information on these events and others taking place during Newport Irish Heritage Month visit [newportirishhistory.org/newport-irish-heritage-month](http://newportirishhistory.org/newport-irish-heritage-month)

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