

# Chicago Tribune



\$5.75 | SUNDAY, APRIL 5, 2026 | CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

## Mayor's agenda facing a fight

Bills to undercut city proposals 'stunning' turn for Springfield

By **Jeremy Gorner and A.D. Quig**  
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

SPRINGFIELD — Illinois lawmakers head into the busy back half of the spring legislative session seeking to quash signature parts of Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson's agenda, from his attempts to tax businesses based on their number of employees to his policy eliminating tipped wages.

For decades, Chicago mayors have fought uphill battles in the statehouse, but the efforts by some Democratic lawmakers to forestall Johnson are unusual.

Kent Redfield, a retired political science professor at the University of Illinois Springfield, described the push-back from the Illinois General Assembly and other local Democrats to a Chicago mayor as "stunning."

While Johnson has had trouble navigating the statehouse — where wheeling and dealing is essential for outsiders like the first-term mayor to achieve their legislative goals — there's no guarantee that any of the measures undercutting him will become law.

One lawmaker called the bills opposing Johnson's agenda "petty," though another, who is one of the mayor's most outspoken critics, believes they are being put forth for good reason.

"What you find from lawmakers in Illinois is not being anti-Mayor Brandon Johnson's agenda as much as we want to incentivize businesses to do business in Illinois," said that critic, state Rep. Curtis Tarver, an assistant majority leader in the

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## ROOM TO BREATHE

As Trump administration rolls back LGBTQ+ protections, some flock to Peoria for a reprieve

By **Tess Kenny** | CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Parker Ross and Ellis Deputy met between a painting and a blanket.

It was last November, soon after they'd both moved to Peoria from out of state, at a local art show for Transgender Day of Remembrance. They each had works on display and that night, there was a reception for the artists.

Ross' piece, a painting of a transmasculine figure called "What Do You See?," and Deputy's, a multicolored quilt that signified healing, were on exhibit right next to each other.

The chance encounter is something Deputy likens to a Hallmark movie ("It was really cute," he said of meeting his boyfriend). But it was also a moment made possible by the couple seeking solace in the same city just a few months prior.

Amid an increasingly hostile environment for the LGBTQ+ community under the second Trump administration, people are flocking to Peoria for a reprieve. While the diaspora of LGBTQ+ residents from less welcoming areas of the country is something blue states, Illinois included, are no stranger to — especially as the political divide in the United States deepens — it's an exodus that local advocates and community members say has been acutely felt in this midsize Midwestern city.

With the city's notorious middle-of-the-road reputation ("Will it play in Peoria?" as the phrase goes) and locale in what's typically thought of as a more rural and red part of the state, it may seem an unlikely safe haven.

The draw is something that's difficult to define with precision. But interviews with

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Ellis Deputy, left, holds hands with his boyfriend, Parker Ross, while walking through Donovan Park in Peoria on March 25. Ross and Deputy, who met in Peoria, both recently moved to Illinois from Republican-led states that have put increasing pressure on the LGBTQ+ community. **ARMANDO L. SANCHEZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

**NCAA TOURNAMENT FINAL FOUR**  
**UConn 71, ILLINOIS 62**



**ARMANDO L. SANCHEZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

## Gone to the dogs

Illinois' most magical NCAA Tournament run in more than two decades ended Saturday night, two victories shy of a national title that remains elusive. The Fighting Illini, playing in the Final Four for the first time in 21 years, failed to complete a furious comeback against UConn in a national semifinal.

Illinois played in front of legions of fans who flocked to Lucas Oil Stadium and turned Indianapolis orange. Supporters had waited a long time for this moment. So had Brad Underwood, the Illinois coach who rose from humble beginnings in his profession to reach the brightest stage in his sport. Their defeat, though, followed a run that won't be forgotten. **More Final Four coverage in Sports**

## Iranian Christians spend holiday praying for peace

By **Angie Leventis Lourgos**  
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

At a small Persian church in the western suburbs, the pastor bowed his head on Palm Sunday and offered a special prayer for regime change and freedom of worship in his native Iran, as the more than monthlong U.S.-Israeli-led war there rages on.

"We pray to God to tear down the darkness power from Iran and bring His kingdom and give people peace," said the Rev. James Shahabi in Farsi at Kheimeh Molaghat church in Addison. "And let His name be glorified in Iran freely."

"Amen," the predominantly Iranian American congregation responded in unison.

As the church prepares to celebrate Christ's resurrection on Easter, its members hope for renewal and liberation of their homeland as the fate of its governance hangs in the balance.

They staunchly champion the war, longing for the fall of the

authoritarian Islamic Republic where religious minorities — including Christians — are heavily persecuted.

They yearn for a day when Iranians of all religions will be allowed to worship there freely.

And they have faith in Donald Trump's pledge to "Make Iran Great Again," as the president has called for the Islamic Republic's unconditional surrender while insisting the conflict will be over "pretty quickly."

On Wednesday, during Trump's first national address since the war's Feb. 28 inception, he vowed that U.S. forces will "finish the job" soon following weeks of often contradictory messages on the military operation.

"If Iran gets great, I think the world will get great," said Narjes Delacai, 66, who left the city of Mashhad in northern Iran decades ago.

Aria Bahraman, 44, who fled

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**CHICAGOLAND**

**CPD defends response to immigration blitz**

Chicago's police superintendent sought to clarify his department's reaction to the blitz during a contentious public meeting near where a woman was killed by federal agents. **Chicagoland, Page A3**

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# Memory of holiday spent in Italy treasured



**Rick Steves**

Years ago, while exploring European Easter rituals for one of my public television specials, I headed to the rugged, mountainous Marche region in central Italy — where the small towns of Gubbio and Cantiano are renowned for their Good Friday processions.

In Gubbio, we joined the townspeople for a centuries-old annual procession featuring marching groups dressed in costumes shockingly reminiscent of an American KKK rally. But here, folks wear cone-shaped white hoods not to be racist, but to promote equality; they help make it clear that everyone — old and young, rich and poor (and black and white) — is the same in the eyes of God.

Nearby, the picturesque town of Cantiano stages a Passion Play — a home-grown theatrical production of Jesus' final week on Earth. Under the moon in the crisp air on Good Friday, the entire village packs Cantiano's main square to witness this timeless reenactment, just as they have for centuries. When I attended, a costumed accountant played a centurion, the baker's wife became Pilate's wife, and the young IT whiz was Jesus. Some have held the same role for decades, while others play a succession of roles as they age — graduating from little-boy-in-the-crowd to Jesus to Jewish elder.

Cantiano uses the town as its stage. Jesus' trial takes place in the main square. For the climactic crucifixion scene, the entire cast trudges up a torch-lit path to the top of a nearby hill. Jesus is in the lead, carrying the cross.

Meanwhile, the spec-



The dramatic finale of Cantiano's Passion Play leaves the center cross atop the town empty, save for a floodlit shroud blowing in the wind. **RICK STEVES**

tators in the square below watch as the parade moves slowly to the stark ridgeline above town, where three crosses stand silhouetted against the sky.

The dramatic finale, celebrating the Resurrection, leaves the center cross empty but for a shroud blowing in the wind, floodlit on the hill's summit.

The townspeople consider it a great honor and act of devotion to play a part. After personally experiencing the emotional marathon of the Passion events, they are drained — but not too tired to forgo the festivities in Cantiano's church, which hosts the Easter after-party.

Another Marche tradition is for itinerant troubadours in colorful folk costumes to go from farm to farm singing songs of the Passion.

They rouse the village with their music, welcoming the new spring. And then, as is the custom, they're invited to enjoy the fruits of last year's harvest — some bread, farm-made cheese, salami and wine.

All over Italy, special Easter foods are embedded in cultural heritage. Italian mamas specialize in schiacciata di Pasqua, an anise-flavored Easter cake that they make only once a year. Baked goodies come loaded with sugar, spice and symbolism. Colomba, an Italian fruitcake similar to panettone, is shaped in a mold so it comes out looking like a dove, representing the Holy Spirit.

During my trip, I had the great privilege of sharing an Easter meal with a family in rural Tuscany — where "Nonna" (grandma)

ran the kitchen, preparing the ciambelle. With a gentle touch, she kneaded the dough then shaped it into rings, representing the crown of thorns.

The 8-year-old took them out to grandfather, who was busy stoking the oven with wood from his olive trees. When the coals were just right, he spread them carefully and, drawing from the practice of a lifetime of Easters, he cooked the ciambelle to perfection. In his cellar, he then cut a cured pork salami, hung from the rafters there to dry specially for this Easter meal.

As all generations gathered, the feast began. Grandfather blessed the occasion with a toast, then sliced his prized salami ceremonially like a Thanksgiving turkey. Eggs that

were blessed by the village priest were passed around to be eaten, along with a wide variety of homemade breads. The main course was roast lamb served with an egg-based Easter soup (brodetto pasquale). The tagliatelle pasta was made from scratch by grandma, mom, and the girls. For dessert, the ciambelle was served along with a small glass of a special dessert wine called Vin Santo — "Holy Wine" — recalling the blood of Jesus. Our bellies stuffed, we took a late-afternoon walk through the village.

It's impressive to me that, even in the 21st century, sacred traditions — rich with symbolism — still thrive in Europe's more remote corners. I know that my experience in Italy was one that is still shared by

people all across Europe. Everywhere, extended — yet close-knit — families pull out all the holiday stops. The table is set with precious family heirlooms. The dishes are lovingly prepared and familiar to all.

On Easter Sunday, it seems that everyone has a place to be. And on that particular Easter, I was fortunate to be with friends in this Italian farmhouse. To be so far from my own home and loved ones — yet feel so welcome with this family — is a memory I'll treasure for the rest of my Easters.

*Rick Steves (www.ricksteves.com) writes European travel guidebooks and hosts travel shows on public television and public radio. Email him at rick@ricksteves.com and follow his blog on Facebook.*

## CELEBRITY TRAVEL

### Chupin's best trips always to Asian sites

By **Jae-Ha Kim**  
TRIBUNE CONTENT AGENCY

For Croatian American filmmaker and actor Neb Chupin, shooting "Storm Rider: Legend of Hammerhead," now in theaters, was a labor of love that took him back to his roots.

"The original script featured a story between grandfather and grandson on one island in Croatia where figs were harvested," said Chupin, who was born in Zagreb. "Through years of development, the script transformed into the sci-fi fantasy ... that is centered on resilience and transformation. I wanted to create something visually epic, but still keep the original elements of strong family values, tradition and integrity."

Chupin is also an entrepreneur, having co-founded Dalmatia Fig Spread with his business partner, Maia Magee. After living in the U.S. for more than 30 years, Chupin moved back to Croatia, though he returns to Los Angeles monthly.

This interview with Chupin has been edited for clarity and length.

**Q: What can you share about your Croatian upbringing?**

**A:** I grew up on the Croatian coast helping my grandfather harvest crops such as figs, almonds, grapes and sour cherries.

**Q: Where did you film in Croatia?**

**A:** We covered almost all of the Croatian coast, including Brac, Pag, Hvar and Kornati Islands ... Split, Dubrovnik and Vodice. Even during the summertime, storms on our coast are known to be brutal. So



Filmmaker Neb Chupin visits Bali almost every year and enjoys going back to Miami Beach. **NEB CHUPIN**

the second day of filming the boat race, the winds were going at 100 miles per hour. So only our sci-fi boats could go out. All other boat traffic was forbidden.

**Q: Have you visited places for work that were so nice that you went back there for a vacation?**

**A:** I went to Bali to see where my fig spread was selling. I was fascinated. Ever since then, I visit Bali almost every year.

**Q: What is your favorite vacation destination?**

**A:** Even though I lived in Miami Beach for over 10 years back in the 1990s, I am always so excited to go back there and feel that sticky hot and humid air.

**Q: What was a trip you took as a child that stands out?**

**A:** My first trip was when I was still living in Croatia and my parents sent me to England to learn English for one month. I was only 12 years old. I remember waiting two hours and more every day to come back home to my host family. I would come (back) late at night hours. That was torture. I must have not known the bus schedule well, I guess. That one-month trip was not a good experience. I was robbed by my classmates as well. At the end, I am ashamed that I didn't make a good impression on my host family. I did not behave as

well as I could. So if they ever read this and recognize me, I am sending my apologies.

**Q: Where are your favorite weekend getaways?**

**A:** During some weekends I drive from Zagreb to my grandfather's house. The town is called Vodice, and I converted his original house into an Airbnb called Dida Boza House, (which) has a cafe and a gift shop.

**Q: What are your five favorite cities?**

**A:** Boston, Miami, LA, Hong Kong, Jakarta.

**Q: Where would you like to go that you have never been to before?**

**A:** Iceland and Faroe Islands.

**Q: What is your best and/or worst vacation memory?**

**A:** My worst trip was when I had a layover in Istanbul and we stayed in one hotel as part of the layover package. Even though the receptionist told us not to talk to strangers, I engaged in conversation with some guy who later robbed me with his buddies. It was awful. For a long time, I hated Turkey, but now I am over it. My best trips were always trips to Asia — Hong Kong, Jakarta and Bali. There was never a single trip to Asian countries that was less than excellent.

For more from the reporter, visit [www.jaehakim.com](http://www.jaehakim.com).

## TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

### Customer books on Expedia, but Beirut flight never existed

By **Christopher Elliott** | KING FEATURES SYNDICATE

I booked a flight for my father on Expedia, but when he went to the airport, there was no such flight.

The reservation was from Beirut to Frankfurt, Germany, on Lufthansa with a connecting United flight to Austin. Lufthansa wasn't even operating flights from Beirut at the time, but Expedia sold me the ticket anyway.

I've been trying to get my money back for more than three months. Expedia keeps telling me that the refund is "subject to airline approval," while United insists that the ticket is nonrefundable. I paid \$1,459 for a flight that never existed.

Can you help me get my money back?

— *Mansour Abado, Dubai, United Arab Emirates*

**A:** You should never have been allowed to buy this ticket. Expedia sold you a phantom flight — a route that Lufthansa had already suspended.

When your father showed up at the airport and discovered that there was no flight, the online travel agency should have immediately refunded your fare. Instead, it hid behind airline approval requirements and passed the buck to United.

Your paper trail tells the story — months of emails, phone calls and chats without resolution. Expedia kept resubmitting requests, until United sent you a form denial, citing its "nonrefundable" policy. This policy doesn't apply when the airline isn't flying

the route at all.

Your father could have avoided some trouble by checking in for his flight early. If he'd done so, he might have been able to find a suitable replacement through Expedia and received a fast refund on his original ticket.

This case is a good reminder to keep an eye on flight schedules, particularly when geopolitical events might cause a flight cancellation. If you're flying out of an area that's prone to cancellations, assume nothing. And if you ever find yourself with a ticket to nowhere, remember that you're entitled to a full refund, no matter what the airline or online agency says.

When your online

agency refuses to help, you can always escalate your problem. I publish the names, numbers and email addresses of the Expedia executives on my consumer advocacy site, [Elliott.org](http://Elliott.org). A brief, polite email to one of them might have resulted in a quick refund.

I reached out to Expedia on your behalf. A representative admitted there had been a "system error" that prevented your refund from being processed. Expedia then issued a full refund.

*Christopher Elliott is the chief advocacy officer of Elliott Advocacy, a nonprofit organization that helps consumers resolve their problems. Contact him at [elliott.org/help](mailto:elliott.org/help) or [chris@elliott.org](mailto:chris@elliott.org).*