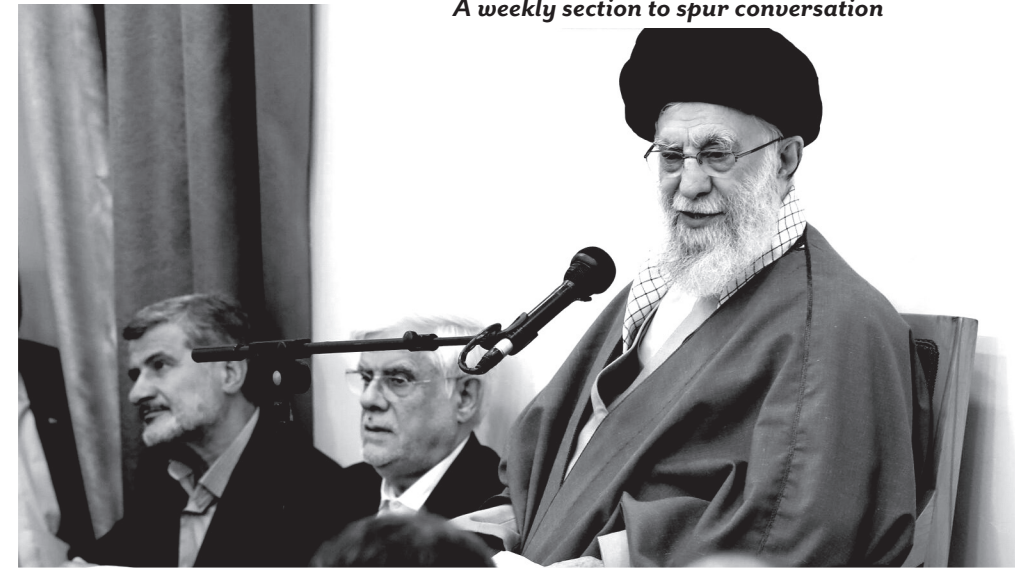


# Talking Points

A weekly section to spur conversation



## ANOTHER US AIRCRAFT CARRIER IN MIDEAST WATERS AHEAD OF SECOND ROUND OF IRAN-US NUCLEAR TALKS

By Jon Gambrell | The Associated Press

A second U.S. aircraft carrier is operating in Mideast waters ahead of the next round of talks between Iran and the United States over Tehran's rapidly advancing nuclear program, satellite photos analyzed Tuesday by The Associated Press showed.

The operation of the USS Carl Vinson and its strike group in the Arabian Sea comes as suspected U.S. airstrikes pounded parts of Yemen controlled by the Iranian-backed Houthi rebels overnight into Tuesday. American officials repeatedly have linked the monthlong U.S. campaign against the Houthis under President Donald Trump as a means to pressure Iran in the negotiations.

Questions remain over where the weekend talks between the countries will be held after officials initially identified Rome as hosting the negotiations, only for Iran to insist early Tuesday they would return to Oman. American officials so far haven't said where the talks will be held, though Trump did call Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tariq on Tuesday while the ruler was on a trip to the Netherlands.

The stakes of the negotiations couldn't be higher for the two nations closing in on half a century of enmity. Trump repeatedly has threatened to unleash airstrikes targeting Iran's nuclear program if a deal isn't reached. Iranian officials increasingly warn that they could pursue a nuclear weapon with their stockpile of uranium enriched to near weapons-grade levels.

But even Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei reportedly described the first round of talks as going "well," while still couching his remarks Tuesday.

U.S. Mideast envoy Steve Witkoff, who represented America in last weekend's talks in Oman, separately signaled that the Trump administration may be looking at terms of the 2015 nuclear deal that the president unilaterally withdrew from in 2018 as a basis for these negotiations. He described the talks last weekend as "positive, constructive, compelling."

"This is going to be much about verification on the enrichment program, and then ultimately verification on weaponization," Witkoff told Fox News on Monday night. "That includes missiles, the type of missiles that they have stockpiled there. And it includes the trigger for a bomb."

He added: "We're here to see if we can solve this situation

diplomatically and with dialogue."

Vinson joins Truman as second US aircraft carrier in Mideast

Satellite photos taken Monday by the European Union's Copernicus program showed the Vinson, which is based out of San Diego, California, operating northeast of Socatra, an island off Yemen that sits near the mouth of the Gulf of Aden. The Vinson is accompanied by the Ticonderoga-class guided missile cruiser USS Princeton and two Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyers, the USS Sterett and the USS William P. Lawrence.

The U.S. ordered the Vinson to the Mideast to back up the USS Harry S. Truman, which has been launching airstrikes against the Houthis since the American campaign started March 15. Footage released by the Navy showed the Vinson preparing ordinance and launching F-35 and F/A-18 fighter jets off its deck in recent days.

The U.S. Navy's Bahrain-based 5th Fleet, which oversees the Mideast, declined to discuss details of the Vinson's operations. However, hours after the AP's report, the U.S. military's Central Command posted videos from the two carriers on the social platform X saying there had been "24/7 strikes" on the Houthis by the two carriers.

Khamenei responds  
The Vinson's arrival came as Khamenei, while speaking to high-ranking government officials in Tehran on Tuesday, endorsed the progress of the talks.

"We shouldn't be overly optimistic about this dialogue, nor overly pessimistic," the 85-year-old Khamenei said. "The first steps have been taken well and executed properly. From here on, the process should be followed carefully. The red lines are clear — both for the other side and for us. We may or may not reach a result, but either way, it's worth pursuing."

He also urged officials "not to tie the country's affairs" to the talks, which are scheduled to have a second round on Saturday. "Of course, we don't fully trust them — we know who we're dealing with," Khamenei added. "But we are optimistic about our own capabilities."

Witkoff suggests 3.67% uranium enrichment for Iran

Meanwhile, Witkoff offered for the first time a specific enrichment level he'd like to see for Iran's nuclear program. Today, Tehran enriches uranium to up to 60% — a short, technical step from weapons-grade levels of 90%.

"They do not need to enrich past 3.67%," Witkoff told Fox News. "In some circumstances, they're at 60%, in other circumstances, 20%. That cannot be."

"And you do not need to run, as they claim, a civil nuclear program where you're enriching past 3.67%. So this is going to be much about verification on the enrichment program, and then ultimately verification on weaponization."

The 2015 nuclear deal Iran agreed to with world powers under President Barack Obama saw Tehran agree to drastically reduce its stockpile of uranium and only enrich up to 3.67% — enough for its nuclear power plant at Bushehr. Iran in exchange received access to frozen funds around the world, and sanctions were lifted on its crucial oil industry and other sectors.

Late Tuesday, Witkoff wrote on X that "a deal with Iran will only be completed if it is a Trump deal."

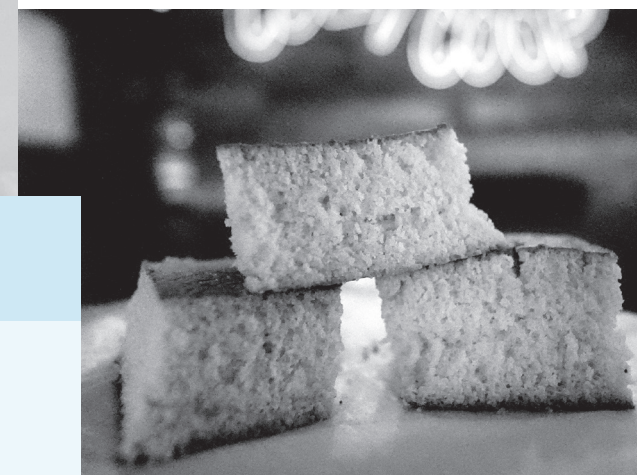
"Iran must stop and eliminate its nuclear enrichment and weaponization program," he wrote. "It is imperative for the world that we create a tough, fair deal that will endure, and that is what President Trump has asked me to do."

Iran's Javan newspaper, which is believed to be close to its paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, suggested in an editorial Tuesday that Tehran would be open to reducing its enrichment. "Something that we have done before, why should we not carry it again and reach a deal?" the editorial asked. "This is not called a withdrawal by Islamic Republic from its ideals anywhere in the world."

When Trump withdrew from the deal in 2018, however, he pointed at Iran's ballistic missile stockpile as one reason to leave the deal. Witkoff said any deal with Iran would have to include "missiles, the type of missiles that they have stockpiled there and it includes the trigger for a bomb."

Iran relies on its ballistic missiles as a hedge against regional nations armed with advanced fighter jets and other American weaponry. Getting it to abandon its missile program likely will be difficult in negotiations.

# Talking Points



## GEORGIA'S GOT CORNBREAD, CALIFORNIA MIGHT CLAIM BIGFOOT, TEXAS A CANNON!

By Mike Stobbe & Kasturi Pananjady | The Associated Press

When state legislatures convene, it doesn't always have to be about taxes, tariffs and heart-wrenching testimonies from constituents calling for policy changes. The debates around adopting official state symbols offer levity along with valuable civics lessons for students. They also create a rare space where politicians can find common ground. In New Mexico, lawmakers from all sides of the aisle rallied around a fourth grader's proposal for designating tortillas as the state's official bread. Georgia in recent days passed legislation to recognize cornbread as an official staple there. Oregon lawmakers are deciding if they want T-bone steaks on the state symbols menu, while Bigfoot could join the list of symbols in California.

### Find Your State: State Symbols Under Consideration Or Recently Enshrined

Visit [Congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov) to find links for legislative websites for each U.S. state and territory. From there, you can search specific states for bills or resolutions proposing new official state symbols. Recommended search phrases include "state symbol" and "official symbol."

While official state symbols

are decided through statehouses, some states list them through their state library, secretary of state or state archives so check these sites for your state. For example, here's a list of the state symbols for North Carolina on the secretary of state page and symbols for California on the state library page. The organization State Symbols USA also offers comprehensive lists of official symbols for each U.S. state and territory.

Here's a list of some state symbols under consideration or recently approved by state legislatures:

CALIFORNIA: Lawmakers are considering adding two things to their state list: solar energy and Bigfoot. California has the country's largest solar market, according to industry groups. As for the legendary creature, Bigfoot's proponents say it's part of popular culture and inspires searches that boost tourism in rural parts of the state.

COLORADO: The state's list of symbols now includes Agaricus julius, a mushroom once mistaken as "The Prince mushroom" that supporters say plays a vital role in high-elevation spruce and fir forests.

GEORGIA: Lawmakers have passed legislation that would recognize cornbread as the state's official bread.

IOWA: Lawmakers are considering a resolution designating the regal fritillary as the official state butterfly.

MICHIGAN: There are dueling butterfly proposals in Michigan, with black swallowtails and monarchs duking it out.

MINNESOTA: Lawmakers are mulling adopting an official state fossil — a giant beaver that was about the size of a small bear and roamed the area during the last ice age. It's part of a campaign led by the Science Museum of Minnesota. Minnesota might also adopt a whole constellation, with legislation pending that would add Ursa Minor to that state's list.

NEW MEXICO: Lawmakers approved a measure that would make tortillas the official state bread, which would expand the list of official symbols that honor the state's culinary culture. The governor vetoed the measure before a bill signing deadline. In 2023, New Mexico became the first state to adopt an official aroma — green chiles roasting in the fall.

NORTH CAROLINA: Law-

makers are considering adopting the Moravian star, a multi-pointed decoration that symbolizes the Star of Bethlehem and has become synonymous with the Christmas season.

OREGON: There's already an official state nut, fruit and pie. But adopting the T-bone would recognize the role that cattle has played in Oregon's development and its contribution to the economy, supporters say.

TENNESSEE: It's all about Nashville hot chicken where a proposal calls for making the popular dish an official state food, joining hot slaw and Memphis barbecue.

TEXAS: Texas is considering adding the cannon as an official gun. The Lone Star State already has an official handgun — the Colt Walker pistol. But those who introduced this year's resolution say historic weapons such as the cannon are powerful reminders of the state's struggle for freedom. That includes the first battle of the Texas Revolution, when settlers coined the phrase "Come and Take It" during a skirmish with the Mexican military over a bronze cannon.

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