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# Operation Epic Fury: How the Iran War Hit the 312

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*One week into the US–Iran conflict, Chicago is feeling the blast radius in its gas prices, its communities, its streets, and its social media feeds.*

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“Nobody asked Chicago how we felt about this. We found out at the gas pump like everybody else.”

--- Portage Park resident, March 4, 2026

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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On February 28, 2026, the United States and Israel launched coordinated strikes against Iran under Operation Epic Fury, killing Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and striking over 2,000 targets. One week later, Chicago—a city 6,000 miles from Tehran—is feeling the blast radius in its gas prices, its communities, its streets, and its social media feeds.

- Chicago gas prices jumped **34 cents/gallon** in one week (\$3.17 → \$3.51)
- Oil surpassed **\$90/barrel**, up 36% in one week
- The Strait of Hormuz is effectively **closed**—20% of world oil supply trapped
- Chicago's Iranian-American community is **deeply divided**: Daley Plaza celebrations vs. Federal Plaza protests
- **Multiple large protests** have swept Downtown, with more planned
- The White House is running the first official **"meme war"**, drawing backlash
- 6 US service members killed; 1,300+ Iranian civilians reported dead

### CHICAGOANS CHECKING GAS PRICES BEFORE AND AFTER FEB 28

**Feb 27: \$2.92/gal**      **Mar 7: \$3.51/gal**

*"This is fine" --- nobody at Shell on Diversey Pkwy*

## TIMELINE: FROM RHETORIC TO REALITY

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Date	Event
Dec 2025	Massive anti-regime protests erupt in Iran; regime kills ~4,000
Jan 13	Saudi intelligence: diplomatic track "exhausted"
Feb 24	Trump State of the Union: accuses Iran of nuclear weapons revival
Feb 28	<b>Operation Epic Fury begins.</b> 1,000+ targets hit in 24 hours
Mar 1	Khamenei confirmed dead. Chicago Daley Plaza celebration + Federal Plaza protest
Mar 2	Iranian counterstrikes hit Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Doha, Kuwait. Hezbollah strikes Israel
Mar 3	Israel invades Lebanon. National Day of Action protests in 70 US cities, incl. Chicago
Mar 4	War powers vote fails in Senate. Gas jumps 11 cents overnight nationally
Mar 7	Oil hits \$90.90/barrel. Trump: "Iran will be hit very hard."

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## YOUR WALLET

### Gas Prices: The Most Immediate Pain

The average Chicago driver felt the war before they read about it. Gas prices tell the story:

Date	Chicago Avg	National Avg	Catalyst
Feb 24 (SOTU)	\$3.05	\$2.92	Trump declares inflation tamed
Mar 1	\$3.17	\$2.98	Strikes begin
Mar 4	\$3.35	\$3.11	Biggest single-day spike since 2022
Mar 7	\$3.51	\$3.41	Oil at \$90.90/barrel
Projected	\$4.00+	\$3.75+	If Hormuz stays closed

**TRUMP AT STATE OF THE UNION:  
 "I HAVE TAMED INFLATION"**

**GAS PRICES ONE WEEK LATER: ↑ 14%**

*Narrator: He had not tamed inflation.*

### Who Gets Hurt Most

Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody’s, warns this is ”particularly hard on lower-income households” who spend a higher share of their budget on gas—a group ”already under a lot of financial pressure.”

- Every **1-cent increase** in gas = \$1.4 billion more in annual consumer spending
- Chicago commuters driving 20+ miles/day for work are seeing weekly fuel costs jump \$15–25
- Trucking, delivery, and rideshare workers hit hardest—costs passed to consumers
- Plastics, shipping, and anything petroleum-derived will follow

## Beyond Gas: The Cascade

- **Natural gas & utilities:** LNG disruption from Qatar (20% of global exports halted) could raise heating and electricity bills
- **Food prices:** Transportation cost increases flow into grocery prices within 2–4 weeks
- **Inflation resurgence:** Economists warn of **stagflation**—higher prices combined with slower growth
- **Housing:** Higher energy costs squeeze already-stretched Chicago renters

## CHICAGO'S IRANIAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY

Chicago's Iranian-American community—estimated at 20,000–30,000 in the metro area, concentrated in the North Shore suburbs—is living through an identity crisis in real time.

### The Split Screen: Celebration and Grief

~100 Iranian-Americans gathered under the Picasso sculpture to celebrate the death of Khamenei. Music playing, sweets distributed. One attendee called it “the beginning of freedom for Iran.”

Many in this group had fled the 1979 revolution or the regime's subsequent persecution. For them, the strikes represented the end of a 47-year nightmare.

Mehrdad, a Skokie resident (last name withheld for safety), hasn't heard from his father since an explosion shattered the windows of his family home in Iran and injured him. Communication lines are cut. Internet is blacked out.

“You have this dual identity,” said Nari-mon Safavi. The sympathies extended to Ukrainians are not offered to Iranians.

## IRANIAN-AMERICANS RIGHT NOW:

LEFT HAND: Celebrating the fall of a dictator

RIGHT HAND: Can't reach family because the internet is gone

*The "dual identity" is not a metaphor, it's a Tuesday.*

## The Communication Blackout

The Iranian government blacked out internet service nationwide. Chicago's Iranian community reports:

- Last contact with family in Iran: **Thursday, Feb 27** for most
- No reliable communication channels remain
- Chicago Persian School spokesperson: community facing "intense and uncertain times" with emotions ranging from "high hopes to anxiety and concern for loved ones"
- Rising Islamophobia concerns—CAIR has documented increased incidents

## THE STREETS

Chicago has seen at least **four major anti-war demonstrations** in the first week of the conflict, with more scheduled.

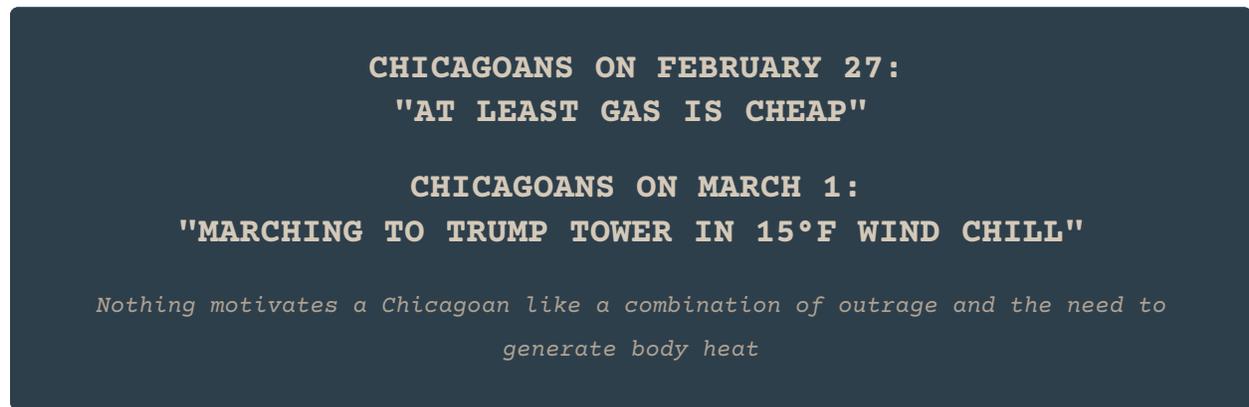
## Protest Timeline

Date	Location	Size	Notes
Feb 28	Federal Plaza	Hundreds	PSL-organized. Marched to Trump Tower via Michigan Ave. Freezing temps.
Mar 1	Federal Plaza	100+	Second rally. Deep concern over escalation.
Mar 2–3	Ida B. Wells & Michigan	100+	National Day of Action. 70 cities. Veterans spoke.
Mar 7	Water Tower Park	TBD	Planned. ANSWER, DSA, AMP, CODEPINK co-sponsoring.

## Who's Protesting

The coalition is broad: Party for Socialism and Liberation, About Face (Veterans Against the War), Palestinian Youth Movement, National Iranian-American Council, DSA, Black Alliance for Peace, American Muslims for Palestine, CODEPINK, Sunrise Movement.

Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) has raised concerns that the Trump administration "may lack a long-term plan for stabilizing Iran."



## THE MEME WAR

This is, by multiple accounts, the first conflict where the **US government itself** is producing war memes as official communications strategy.

### The White House Content Machine

The Trump White House social media operation has released a series of videos that blur the line between military briefing and TikTok content:

Content	Views	Description
Call of Duty edit	58M+	Fighter jets + missile strikes set to Childish Gambino's "Bonfire" with CoD kill scores
SpongeBob	9M+	Explosions interspersed with SpongeBob saying "Wanna see me do it again?"
GTA: San Andreas	—	Real war footage mixed with GTA cutscenes
Tropic Thunder	—	Ben Stiller demanded removal

## The Backlash

- **Amnesty International:** Called it "deliberate glamorisation" and "desensitisation to violence"
- **Kesha:** Called Trump a "criminal predator" after her song was used; said posts showed "blatant disregard for human life"
- **Ben Stiller:** Demanded Tropic Thunder footage be removed
- **Harvard's Matthew Baum:** Notes Trump's base "is not exactly entirely on board with the war in Iran"

THE PENTAGON'S FIRST OFFICIAL BRIEFING  
ON THE WAR WAS DESCRIBED AS:

"Light on strategic objectives,  
heavy on memeable content"

Defense Secretary Hegseth also tweeted "Lethalitymaxxing"  
before the war started. That is a real thing that happened.

*Sir, this is a Wendy's. And also a war.*

## The European Response Meme

One of the most viral organic memes: European Commission President von der Leyen announced an emergency meeting on February 28—*scheduled for Monday*.

WORLD WAR III MIGHT BE STARTING

EUROPEANS:

"We'll discuss it Monday.  
It's the weekend."

1.5 million views. Peak European energy.

*"Nothing is quite as European as demanding that your emergency WW3 meeting  
must only occur during normal office hours."*

## MILITARY FAMILIES

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While no Illinois National Guard deployment has been publicly confirmed as of March 7, the conflict is drawing heavily on reserve and Guard forces:

- **400+ Wisconsin Guard** members are in theater (Kuwait/Iraq)—Wisconsin borders Illinois
- **Virginia Guard** units operating in Kuwait
- **82nd Airborne** movements reported, inviting speculation about ground operations
- **6 US service members killed** in the first week, including Army Reserve soldiers
- Secretary Hegseth has **not ruled out ground troops** in Iran

For Chicago-area military families, this is deeply personal. The Great Lakes Naval Station in North Chicago and Scott Air Force Base downstate mean Illinois has significant military community ties to any Middle East operation.

## THE WORLDVIEW LENS: WHY THIS HITS CHICAGO DIFFERENT

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Drawing from worldview analysis, several structural factors make Chicago particularly vulnerable to this conflict's fallout.

### Institutional Fragility Meets External Shock

Chicago's existing challenges—budget pressures, infrastructure needs, rising cost of living—mean residents have **less buffer** to absorb energy price shocks. When systems are already optimized for efficiency over robustness, small shocks cascade. A 34-cent gas price increase is not a small shock for a family already spending 30% of income on housing.

### Risk Externalization in Action

The war's costs are being externalized from decision-makers to consumers. The people who chose to strike Iran are not the people paying \$3.51/gallon at the Shell on Diversey. Powerful actors maximize upside (regime change, geopolitical positioning) while everyday people absorb the downside (higher prices, community disruption, family separation).

## The Social Infrastructure Gap

If gas hits \$4+/gallon and stays there, Chicago’s lack of robust social safety nets means:

- No meaningful gas price relief programs for low-income commuters
- Food pantry demand will spike as grocery prices follow fuel costs
- Gig economy workers (Uber, DoorDash, delivery) absorb costs with no employer buffer
- CTA ridership may increase, straining an already-stretched transit system

## SCENARIOS: WHAT HAPPENS NEXT FOR CHICAGO

Based on the thinktank’s existing scenario framework:

Scenario		Prob.	Chicago Impact
<b>Quick Resolution</b> (Hormuz reopens, conflict winds down in weeks)	20%	Gas returns to ~\$3.10 by April. Community anxiety fades. Protests taper off.	
<b>Grinding Stalemate</b> (Weeks to months of air campaign, Hormuz contested)	40%	Gas hits \$4+. Food prices rise 5–10%. Protests intensify. Political pressure builds on IL delegation.	
<b>Wider Escalation</b> (Ground troops, Israel–Lebanon war expands, full Hormuz closure)	25%	Gas hits \$5+. Recession risk. Guard deployments. Significant protest movement. Iranian community in crisis.	
<b>Diplomatic Off-Ramp</b> (Ceasefire, negotiations, partial regime transition)	15%	Markets stabilize. Gas normalizes in 4–6 weeks. Community relief. UChicago political scientists get tenure.	

## CHICAGO WEATHER FORECAST: MARCH 2026

Monday: 28°F, partly cloudy

Tuesday: 31°F, chance of snow

Wednesday: 25°F, wind chill advisory

**Thursday: GEOPOLITICAL INSTABILITY**

Friday: 33°F, gas prices still rising

*At least we're used to things being terrible in March.*

## WHAT CHICAGO RESIDENTS CAN DO

1. **Fuel:** Top off now if you can. AAA Illinois recommends filling up before prices climb further. Consider carpooling, CTA, or Divvy for short trips.
2. **Budget:** Build a 2–4 week buffer for higher gas and grocery costs. If gas hits \$4/gal, a 20-mile daily commute costs ~\$25/week more than pre-war prices.
3. **Community:** If you have Iranian-American neighbors, check in. The communication blackout means many are cut off from family.
4. **Stay informed:** Follow local coverage (WBEZ, Sun-Times, Block Club) for Chicago-specific impacts. National coverage doesn't capture neighborhood-level effects.
5. **Civic engagement:** Contact IL Congressional delegation. Senator Duckworth and Chicago-area reps are engaged on war powers questions.

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