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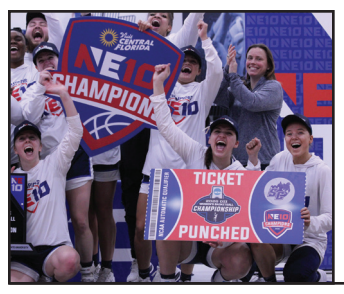

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SOUTHERN NEWS

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PEP Talk kicks off Women's History Month

By Victoria Cruz
News Writer

On March 2, the School of Business hosted another installment of the PEP Talk series with Assata Michelle. Michelle focused the lecture on lessons she wrote about in her book, "Forward Only: Speak Power. Live Change."

Michelle is a leader with over two decades of experience in reentry and restorative justice, whose career focuses on helping inmates successfully transition back into society after incarceration.

"When people advocate for themselves to me, I'm not going to think it through for you. Figure out what you want so we can talk about it together. And don't be afraid to speak truth to power," Michelle said.

Michelle emphasized the importance of being mindful of how people show up when they return home by highlighting tools such as cognitive behavioral therapy, intervention strategies and workforce development programs.

During a Q&A session, students asked Michelle how they could advocate for themselves in spaces where they may not hold power or formal leadership titles.

"However you advocate for yourself, it should be in a respectful way," Michelle said.



PHOTO | WILLIAM GAGNÉ

Author Assata Michelle speaking at her PEP Talk in the School of Business Case Study Room on March 2.

She noted the importance of respecting other perspectives while standing firm in one's beliefs.

"Be respectful first and respect the opinions of others. Never disregard other people. Learn about what you are advocating for and why you are advocating for it. Know what you are fighting for and why you are doing it," Michelle said.

Michelle also encouraged students to come prepared when speaking up.

Another topic that resonated with students was maintaining boundaries as leaders. Michelle stressed that taking care of oneself is essential for longevity and preventing burnout.

"Take care of yourself; you can't offer out what you haven't taken in," Michelle said.

Michelle also distinguished between rules and boundaries, encouraging students to reflect on what they need to protect their well-being.

"No is a complete sentence. You can and should say no. Practice using it and then take a step back to reflect. Sometimes, people say yes but don't really mean it," Michelle said.

Michelle also addressed students who hope to enter industries and institutions they want to change by urging them to stay committed to reform while avoiding being absorbed by the very systems they seek to transform.

"My purpose is to change the system, so practice intentionality. Don't let yourself get burnt out, especially by heavy work. Make sure to have outside things to do and always maintain boundaries," Michelle said.

Michelle added that as students move into leadership roles, others will start to look to them for guidance.

"All you will know isn't all there is to know. Leadership is about agility. Good leaders hire people who know more about other areas so that they can have all the answers collectively," Michelle said.

She highlighted that leaders must have courage so that they can activate their purpose.

In order for individuals to fufill this goal, Michelle said that individuals need to find out what they are passionate about.

Students in attendance said the talk left a lasting impression.

"It is easy to think that to be respected, you have to shrink yourself. Courage, respect and leadership do not have to come from a performative place. Instead, it can come from authenticity and understanding," business major Kimberly Contreras, a sophomore, said.

Other students echoed similar sentiments, noting that Michelle's honesty about her experiences made her message more impactful.

"The speaker is very open about her past, and I think that added a lot to what she was saying. I also really liked the learn it until you earn it mindset about becoming a powerful leader who inspires others to do great," business major Zach McCarthy, a sophomore, said.

Michelle closed by inviting students to choose one small action to take in the next seven days that aligns with a personal career declaration.

PEP Talks take place every Monday and Wednesday from 1–2 p.m. in the School of Business Case Study Room.

US strikes on Iran escalate Middle East conflict

By Victoria Cruz
News Writer

On Feb. 28, the United States and Israel launched a coordinated military operation against the Iranian regime. U.S. attacks are ramping up, NATO allies are being pulled into the conflict.

President Donald Trump said that the military action was necessary, in order to prevent Iran from escalating its nuclear power and threatening other nations at a bilateral meeting with German Chancellor Friedrich Merz on March 3.

"They've been decimated, but if we didn't do what we're doing right now, you would have had a nuclear war. And they would have taken out many countries," Trump said.

This comes after more than 1,320 people have been killed, including six U.S. service members, while 18 others have been injured after strikes were ordered on Iran.

Trump is now calling for Iran's unconditional surrender and says he will not accept any possible deals. He has not ruled out the possibility of deploying U.S. ground troops if necessary.

In the initial attack, the supreme leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and 48 other military and religious leaders were killed.

According to National Public Radio, the official reason for the attack was to destroy Iran's nuclear capabilities, which the Trump administration has previously claimed were destroyed last year.

The Iranian theocratic authoritarian regime has been extremely repressive toward its citizens. This repression has been particularly severe against women and children.

The U.S. government has also attempted to consolidate power within the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which is tasked with ideological defense.

Ali Khamenei has also maintained influence over several groups across the Middle East outside of Iran.

These include Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthi rebels in Yemen and various militias in Iraq. His assassination has led to chaos within these terrorist groups.

This has already been seen in Lebanon after Hezbollah fired missiles at Israel.

In response, Israel and the Israeli Defense Forces launched an assault and began preparing ground troops for a possible invasion.

The U.S. has been in negotiations with Iran, asking them to phase out their uranium enrichment program.

In his State of the Union address, Trump claimed that Iran was building ballistic missiles that could reach the U.S.

According to Reuters, Trump's claim that Iran will soon have a missile that can hit the United States is not backed by U.S. intelligence reports.

"The U.S. intelligence community has been making a similar assessment that Iran might have an intercontinental ballistic missile in a decade since the mid-1990s," Daryl Kimball, the executive director of the Arms Control Association, told PolitiFact.

Iran denied these claims, but the decision to attack had already been made by the administration.

In response to the initial strikes, Iran began attacking military targets in Israel, Jordan, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates.

In just the first week since the initial attack, war has spread throughout the Middle East.

With no end in sight, students are questioning the necessity of U.S. intervention.

"A lot of people do not want to be involved. I feel like the U.S. is trying to deny the correlation between what is going on here," psychology major Kristian Williamson, a senior, said.

At the time of publication, Iran has communicated no plans to surrender to U.S. or Israeli demands. Conflict is expected to continue and escalate. Congress has rejected measures to stop the conflict but have not officially declared war.

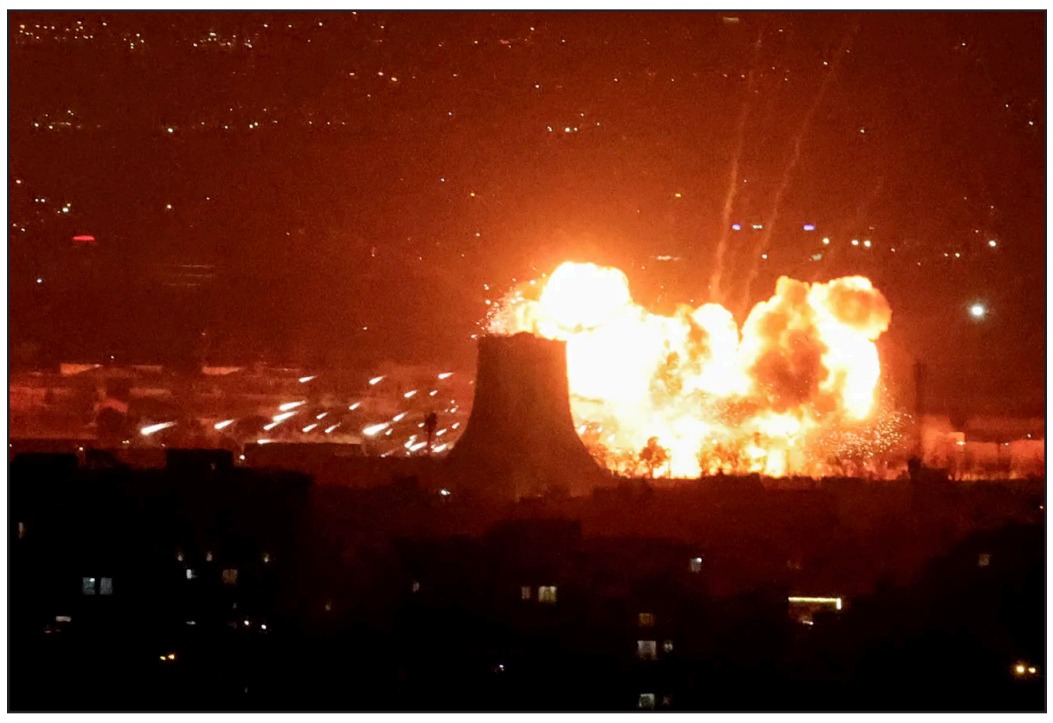

PHOTO | USA TODAY

An explosion erupts following strikes close to Mehrabad International Airport in Tehran, Iran on Saturday, March 7, 2026.



PHOTO | OREGON PUBLIC BROADCASTING

A group of men inspecting the ruins of a police station struck amid the U.S.–Israeli military campaign in Tehran, Iran on March 3.