

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 1 of 92

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 News Headlines](#)
- [3- Weber Landscaping Greenhouse Ad](#)
- [4- City Council Story](#)
- [5- Manhart Ad](#)
- [6- GHS Commencement is Sunday](#)
- [6- Poet is planting trees at the ballfield](#)
- [7- Your Words Matter](#)
- [8- Names Released in Charles Mix County Fatal Crash](#)
- [9- South Dakota Cannabis Legalization Campaign Submits 29,030 Signatures to South Dakota Secretary of State](#)
- [10- Gypsy Day Parade Scheduled for Saturday, Oct. 5](#)
- [11- We the People: "Sword Dancing," Opinion Assignment and Writing](#)
- [12- Dairy Queen Help Wanted](#)
- [13- South Dakota State Fair Admission Passes Available for Read & Win Program](#)
- [14- SD SearchLight: Lawmakers again deny more licenses for out-of-state waterfowl hunters](#)
- [15- SD SearchLight: South Dakota joins Arkansas federal lawsuit over Title IX transgender protections](#)
- [16- SD SearchLight: Montana could be a model as more GOP states weigh Medicaid work requirements](#)
- [19- SD SearchLight: Porn star Stormy Daniels in NYC hush money trial alleges sexual encounter with Trump](#)
- [21- SD SearchLight: TikTok sues to block new U.S. law banning app if it is not sold](#)
- [22- SD SearchLight: Religious views on abortion more diverse than they may appear in U.S. political debate](#)
- [25- Weather Pages](#)
- [29- Daily Devotional](#)
- [30- Subscription Form](#)
- [31- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [32- News from the Associated Press](#)

Wednesday, May 8

Scalloped potato with ham, mixed vegetables, sunset salad, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Egg bake.
School Lunch: Taco burgers tater tots.
High School Baseball in Groton hosting Redfield, 5:30 p.m.

Groton Daily Independent
PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445
Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460

"When you forgive, you in no way change the past--but you sure do change the future."

-Bernard Meltzer



Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm

Emmanuel Lutheran Vacation Bible School, 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.; League at church, go to Alleviate, 5:30 p.m.

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour 9:30 a.m.

Thursday, May 9

Salisbury steak, mashed potatoes with gravy, creamed peas, frosted brownies, fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Pop tarts.

School Lunch: Pizza, peas.

Northeast Conference Track at Sisseton, 11 a.m.

Images of the World at Groton Elementary, 1 p.m.

Groton Lions Club Meeting, 104 N Main, 6 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran Vacation Bible School, 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.; Ascension Worship, 7 p.m.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

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Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 2 of 92

1440

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Adult film star Stephanie Clifford, also known as Stormy Daniels, testified yesterday in a criminal trial against former President Donald Trump, detailing for jurors a supposed 2006 extramarital affair between the two and a subsequent hush money payment.

Sperm whales employ a system of communication much more sophisticated than previously believed, researchers revealed yesterday, using the equivalent of a phonetic alphabet that varies depending on context. The new study analyzed nearly 9,000 codas—short bursts of clicks—using AI to uncover vocal patterns and potential meanings

in how the animals signaled to each other in their deep-sea environment.

Boy Scouts of America announced yesterday it would change its name to Scouting America in February of next year, the first rebrand in its 114-year history. Membership in the youth organization known for outdoor activities and patriotic values has halved in the last decade to 1 million, below its 1972 peak of 5 million.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Disney shares drop nearly 10% despite news that streaming platform Disney+ brought in its first-ever quarterly profit.

Ian Gelder, "Game of Thrones" actor, dies of cancer at age 74. Susan Buckner, actress known for role in "Grease," dies at age 72.

Borussia Dortmund tops Paris Saint-Germain to advance to UEFA Champions League final. Real Madrid takes on Bayern Munich today (3 pm ET, Paramount+) in other semifinal matchup.

Science & Technology

OpenAI debuts tool to detect images generated by its text-to-image DALL-E 3 platform; detection worked with 98% accuracy, but accuracy rate dropped if images were modified after being generated.

Engineers develop millimeter-thick fabric capable of suppressing sounds in large rooms or spaces; the electrically active material acts as a "sound mirror," can reduce ambient noise by up to 75%.

NASA's Roman mission to search for primordial black holes; theorized but never observed, the low-mass objects formed shortly after the Big Bang and may be as small as Earth.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 +0.1%, Dow +0.1%, Nasdaq -0.1%) as investors wait on news of Federal Reserve interest rate cut timing. Reddit shares jump over 14% in after-hours trading on news first-quarter revenue rose 48% from 2023; marks first quarterly earnings report since March initial public offering.

TikTok sues US government over law forcing Chinese parent company ByteDance to divest or face a US ban; argues video platform should be allowed to operate under First Amendment free speech protections.

London-based self-driving car company Wayve raises \$1.1B in Series C funding led by SoftBank. Federal investigators question Tesla over uptick in crashes despite rollout of autopilot software updates.

Politics & World Affairs

Israel takes control of Gaza's side of Rafah crossing with Egypt as the UN warns of potential for collapse of aid flow to the territory; Israel-Hamas cease-fire discussions continue.

Ukrainian officials say they have foiled an assassination plot against Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, arrest two colonels accused of acting as Russian spies.

At least one person died and more than 30,000 people left without power following tornadoes in Oklahoma; parts of central and eastern US under tornado and thunderstorm watches.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 3 of 92



Multimillion dollar waste water improvement project will mean high sewer rates are coming

Sewer utility rates could nearly double in the next year, according to a tentative proposal aimed at funding a multi-million dollar sewer system improvement project.

The council is set to review an initial increase at its next meeting later this month. That rate increase could take effect in June or July.

"Basically, we're doing this because we have to raise the rates," said Councilmember Brian Bahr.

The city can't currently keep up with sewer system demand, said Wastewater Supervisor Dwight Zerr. During Tuesday's meeting, the city was doing an emergency discharge, the second one that has taken place this year.

"We can't keep up right now," he said. "We're trying to find the best way to go about this, but it's not going to be cheap.

"It's been like this for years," he said. "We've been running on it. We definitely have to do something on this. And with talk of the town growing, you're going to need this."

Last week, city staff met with an engineer about what the city needs to improve and grow its waste water system. Though a firm price tag isn't yet available, it could be close to \$5 million, said City Finance Officer Douglas Heinrich.

"That was the number thrown out," Zerr said. "We're not completely sure, but ... you're looking at big numbers."

Heinrich reviewed sewer rates from other similar cities for comparison. Cities like Miller, Crooks and Lawrence charge \$65.20, \$58.55 and \$64.65 respectively per month for their average total bill with surcharges included. That's compared to a minimum total of \$20 that Groton charges.

In order for the South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources to assist in funding a project like that, the city would have to charge about \$65 monthly for wastewater services, he said.

The first rate increase proposed would include a \$20 base rate with an additional \$5 per 1,000 gallons on top of the base rate. For a residence using 4,000 gallons, the rate would increase from \$26.50 to \$40.

Though not finalized, other phased-increases would bring the rate to \$50 per month for a residence using 4,000 gallons by June or July 2025.

"This would at least get us to \$50 and at least make that last jump more palatable to the community," Heinrich said.

"You're going to need to get there," he said. "Going there in a slow step is a better step than going there at a sprint.

"...We just know it's going to be big," Heinrich added.

Money made from the increase would be put into a capital outlay account to fund the future improvement project.

There isn't a concrete plan for improvements to the wastewater system, and the city won't have an idea about it until October, said Mayor Scott Hanlon. However, every possibility thus far has included a large price tag.

"We're looking at some substantial money being spent so we can flush our toilets," he said.

An ordinance spelling out the first phase of sewer rate increase is set to go back to the council for the first reading later this month.

Rubble site discussion

Issues were brought up about the city's rubble site.

Public Works Coordinator Terry Herron told the council that a resident from outside the city bought a residential rubble site permit and hauled in truckloads of items including wooden poles and tree trunks, covering the whole south side of the tree pile.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 5 of 92

"It makes us get cramped for space with people hauling stuff out there," he said. "And he only pays for a \$30 permit, and he gets to bring that stuff in."

Groton residents or businesses can purchase permits for the rubble site, located south of town. Yearly residential permits are \$10 per load or \$35 per year, while commercial permits are \$20 per load or \$175 per year.

Only certain items are accepted, including trees and branches, wood that is not treated or painted, metal, grass, garden refuse and leaves, and also concrete for an additional charge. Other items may be taken to the Brown County Landfill.

Multiple large loads cause the city to run out of space, and there have been issues cropping up, Herron said.

"I've just seen more and more of it over the last few years," he said.

Council members discussed what could be done to curb the issue in the future.

"Unfortunately, I think the dump is just for the citizens of Groton," said Councilmember Brian Bahr. "It's kind of how it has to be."

The city may have to start limiting permits or start having people pay per load, said Mayor Scott Hanlon.

- Another person has joined the city of Groton staff list. The council approved hiring Jesse Anderson as a full-time public works laborer at \$30 per hour. Councilmember Shirley Wells abstained from the vote.

- The council approved hiring another summer employee. Kyleigh Kroll was hired as gatekeeper at \$11.20 per hour. It is Kroll's first year as gatekeeper.

- The City Council adjourned the 136th council session and convened the 137th session. At the start of the 137th session, councilmembers Brian Bahr (Ward 2), Jon Cutler (Ward 1) and Jason Wambach (Ward 3) recited their oaths of office. The three retained their seats after uncontested races. Kevin Nehls (Ward 1) also recited his oath of office after being appointed for a one-year term. Bahr was elected as president of the council, while Wambach was elected as vice president. The council also approved retaining the 2023 committee assignments, with the exception of one. Bahr will become the new planning and zoning representative.

- Elizabeth Varin

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Primary Election - June 4

Absentee Voting Begins April 19

General Election - Nov 5

Absentee Voting Begins September 20

GHS Commencement is Sunday

Groton Area will be having its graduation ceremony on Sunday, May 12, 2 p.m. Next year's commencement ceremony will be held on a Saturday, May 17. D.A.R.E. graduation is set for Tuesday, May 14, 2 p.m.

Seniors graduating this year are: Dillon Abeln, Austin Aberle, Bradin Althoff, Anna Bisbee, Emily Clark, Colby Dunker, Kyleigh Englund, Cadence Feist, Anna Fjeldheim, Faith Fliehs, Jackson Garstecki, Carly Guthmiller, Layne Hanson, Claire Heinrich, Braxton Imrie, Shea Jandel, Karsyn Jangula, Abigail Jensen, Jayla Jones, Tristan Kampa, Camryn Kurtz, Sydney Leicht, Elijah Lich, Shaela McGannon, Lydia Meier, Hannah Monson, Lexi Osterman, Michael Powers-Dinger, Kate Profeta, Logan Ringgenberg, Emma Schinkel, Holden Sippel, Ashlyn Sperry, Tyton Stange, Lane Tietz, Bryson Wambach, Ava Wienk, Jacob Zak

Poet is planting trees at the ballfield

Two elm trees provided by Poet-Groton were planted at the Groton Baseball Park for Earth Day. Kelly Schneider, Mary Carrico and Jess Freeland helped get tree # 1 in the ground. Many thanks to Weber Landscaping crew for "actually" digging the holes and planting!! (Courtesy Photo)

(Courtesy Photo)



Your Words Matter

By Bryan Golden

You are usually conscious of what you say to others. The things you say are based on what you want to achieve. You know from experience that the words you chose have a big impact. When you use the wrong words, the reaction of others is not what you intended.

What you say to yourself is just as important as what you say to others. Yet, too many people are not fully aware of the impact their self-talk has on their own wellbeing. Your words to yourself program your mind.

Your mind follows whatever commands you provide. It doesn't question the directives it receives. It dutifully obeys whatever it is told to do. Your attitude, your actions, the way you feel, your perception, and your outlook, are all impacted by your words.

You talk to yourself constantly. Too often you say negative things. You find fault with yourself. You put yourself down. You diminish your accomplishments. You focus on what you feel you can't do. You tell yourself how many things are impossible. You justify failures with a never-ending string of excuses.

If there are areas of your life you want to improve, you must begin by changing what you tell yourself. Your self-talk changes your thoughts. Nothing in your life changes until your thoughts change.

There are various flawed strategies which people employ instead of striving to say the right words to themselves. For example, waiting for conditions to improve leaves you waiting a long time. Rather than passively waiting for things to change, you have to make things change.

Hoping for circumstances to change is also ineffective. Although there is nothing wrong with hope, it must be combined with action in order to have a positive impact.

Blaming others for your situation puts your fate in someone else's hands. You are responsible for your life. Although you can't control the actions of others, you do control your thoughts, emotions, and responses.

Doing the same things over and over, while expecting a different result, is one definition of insanity. In order to alter your results, you must change what you are doing. Remember, there is always a cause-and-effect relationship between what you do, and the results you obtain.

Don't justify negative self-talk as being realistic. This is another excuse. While you are figuring out reasons for not succeeding, others are doing exactly what you claim is unrealistic.

You can make self-talk a powerful, positive tool which propels you towards your goals. Here are some steps to guide you through this process. Begin with a constant awareness of the words you use when speaking to yourself. Each negative word must be replaced with a positive one.

You want a zero-tolerance policy for negative self-talk. There is no room for any discouraging words. Each negative word, or phrase, has a corresponding positive one. You must fill your mind with positive instructions.

Use the same approach which works when taking a vacation. Start by selecting a destination. Next, figure out how to get there. The way you accomplish any goal is to start with positive self-talk. You tell yourself all of the reasons you can, should, and will succeed. You tell yourself all of the benefits of reaching your goal. You tell yourself how you will feel once you have arrived at your destination.

Clearly, the words used when speaking to yourself matter. They are the difference between success and failure. They lead to happiness or produce frustration. Since you have total control over which words you use, choose only words which lead to positive outcomes.

Bryan is the author of "Dare to Live Without Limits." Contact Bryan at Bryan@columnist.com or visit www.DareToLiveWithoutLimits.com Copyright 2024 Bryan Golden

Names Released in Charles Mix County Fatal Crash

What: Two vehicle fatal crash

Where: SD Highway 46, mile marker 292, two miles east of Wagner, SD

When: 5:27 p.m., Friday, May 3, 2024

Driver 1: Emily Boeke, 24-year-old female from Hubbard, IA, minor injuries

Vehicle 1: 2012 Dodge Ram 3500

Driver 2: Elaine Schroeder, 89-year-old female from Wagner SD, fatal injuries

Vehicle 2: 2013 Ford Edge

Charles Mix County, S.D.- A Wagner, S.D. woman has been identified as the person who died as a result of injuries sustained in a two-vehicle crash on the evening of Friday May 3, two miles east of Wagner SD.

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a 2012 Dodge Ram was traveling eastbound on SD Highway 46 near mile marker 292. At the same time, the driver of a 2013 Ford Edge was also traveling eastbound on SD 46 near mile marker 292. The driver of the Ford Edge slowed down preparing to turn into a driveway. The driver of the Dodge did not see the Ford and rear ended the Ford.

The driver of the Dodge, Emily Boeke, age 24 sustained minor injuries.

The driver of the Ford, Elaine Schroeder, age 89, sustained fatal injuries.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol is investigating the crash. All information released so far is only preliminary.

The Highway Patrol is an agency of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.

South Dakota Cannabis Legalization Campaign Submits 29,030 Signatures to South Dakota Secretary of State

The group is seeking to place an initiated measure on the November 2024 ballot that would legalize cannabis for adults 21 and older

Pierre, SD – Yesterday, South Dakotans for Better Marijuana Laws, the political group that led the 2020 and 2022 campaigns to legalize cannabis in South Dakota, submitted petitions containing 29,030 signatures in support of its proposed ballot initiative to legalize cannabis for adults 21 and older.

“Today is the culmination of seven months of hard work by advocates and volunteers across South Dakota,” said Matthew Schweich, executive director of South Dakotans for Better Marijuana Laws. “We are very confident that we have collected enough signatures from registered voters to qualify for this November's ballot.”

In South Dakota, an initiated measure requires 17,508 signatures from registered voters in order to qualify for the ballot. Today is the deadline for submitting petitions to South Dakota Secretary of State Monae Johnson.

“Things all seem to be moving in the right direction for South Dakota to finally win the freedom they voted for a few years ago,” said Deb Peters, President of the Cannabis Industry Association of South Dakota. “At the federal level, things are moving towards a responsible rescheduling and dozens of states are seeing the tax benefits of recreational cannabis legalization. It's inspiring to see this industry come together and work so hard. We're looking forward to Election Day. ”

In 2020, South Dakota became the first state in the country to legalize medical cannabis and adult-use cannabis in the same election. Following the 2020 election, Governor Noem orchestrated a lawsuit that ultimately repealed the legalization law approved by 54% of voters in a highly controversial ruling. At the same time, advocates were able to defeat Governor Noem’s legislative attempt to delay implementation of the medical cannabis policy.

“The effects of Governor Noem’s actions, including leading the lawsuit against Amendment A, have left a lot of South Dakotans feeling as though their votes do not matter,” said Quincy Hanzen, deputy director of South Dakotans for Better Marijuana Laws. “If this initiative qualifies for the ballot, we hope South Dakota voters will show up on November 5th and make their voice heard.”

Having received the petitions, South Dakota Secretary of State Monae Johnson will now oversee a review of the signatures and determine whether the proposed initiated measure has qualified for the ballot. A decision is expected in the next several weeks.

To read the full text of the initiative, visit: <https://sdbml.org/text>

Gypsy Day Parade Scheduled for Saturday, Oct. 5

ABERDEEN, S.D. — The Gypsy Day Parade, a central feature of Northern State University Homecoming festivities, is scheduled for Saturday, Oct. 5, 2024. The parade and homecoming football game mark the end of a week-long celebration on campus starting Monday, Sep. 30, 2024. As a cornerstone of the celebration, the parade embodies community spirit and engagement, offering an unforgettable experience for all attendees.

Registration for the parade opens on Monday, July 15, allowing ample time for participants to prepare their entries. The Gypsy Days Homecoming Committee extends a warm invitation to local businesses, organizations and community members to participate in this time-honored tradition.

In conjunction with the parade announcement, the Northern State University Student Homecoming Committee has revealed the 2024 homecoming theme: "Wolves in Candy Land." The whimsical theme is expected to inspire creative float designs and colorful costumes throughout the festivities.

Additionally, the committee has announced the homecoming royal court candidates. The homecoming king candidates include Simon Bickford from the Newman Center, Jacob Ebeling from SAAC, Braden Freeman from the Honors Program, Michael Grebner from Residence Hall Association, and Colton Wicks from TRIO Scholar Association.

The homecoming queen candidates are Ashlyn Haselhorst from the Lumin Ministry, Nevaeh Meyer from the School of Education Clubs, Madison Park from Campus Activities Board, Ava Pickard from the Music Department, and Randi Schuster from the Honors Program.

The Gypsy Day Parade and the accompanying homecoming festivities serve as a testament to the strong sense of community and Wolves pride at Northern State University. As the week of Sep. 30 through Oct. 5 approaches, excitement is building for what promises to be a sweet celebration.

For more information about the Gypsy Day Parade, including registration details and event schedules, please visit the Northern State University Gypsy Days Homecoming website at <https://northern.edu/about/gypsy-days/>. Interested parties can also contact the Gypsy Days Homecoming Committee at homecoming@northern.edu.

We the People

The South Dakota Humanities Council is making available a weekly column -- "We the People" -- that focuses on the U.S. Constitution. It is written by David Adler, who is president of The Alturas Institute, a non-profit organization created to promote the Constitution, gender equality, and civic education.



By David Adler

The Supreme Court at Work:

"Sword Dancing," Opinion Assignment and Writing

The U.S. Supreme Court writes opinions to explain and justify to the American people the decisions it reaches in cases it hears and resolves in conference. The explanation of the Court's interpretations of statutes, constitutional provisions, precedents and, ultimately, its results, is critical to the partnership between the judiciary and the citizenry, one that hinges on the public's trust in the Court's rationales and exercise of awesome power over the life of the nation. In a constitutional democracy grounded in reason and persuasion, the High Bench has an obligation to satisfactorily explain its decisions to avoid charges of arbitrariness.

Chief Justice Hughes observed that "there is no better precaution against judicial mistakes than the setting out accurately and adequately of the material facts as well as the points to be decided." He added that all who have written judicial opinions know, writing sharpens thinking and occasionally exposes weaknesses and flaws in an argument that was ill conceived. "As judges say, some opinions just won't write."

As usual, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes put a fine point on the pressure of writing the Court's opinion, a process made difficult by the fact that it represents a collective decision. It requires that a "judge can dance the sword dance; that he can justify an obvious result without stepping on either blade of opposing fallacies." Justice Harry Blackmun expressed the motivations for reaching compromise with colleagues in writing opinions. Opinions often require revision, he said, "because other justices say, if you put in this kind of paragraph or say this, I'll join your opinion. So you put it in. And many times, the final result is a compromise. I think the public doesn't always appreciate this but many times the result is not what the author would originally have liked to have. But five votes are the answer and that's what the coached judgment is. So you swallow your pride and go along with it if you can."

The workload of the Court is pretty evenly divided, by virtue of the long tradition, dating back to the days of Chief Justice John Marshall, of assigning opinions. When Marshall was appointed Chief Justice in 1801, he instituted the practice of assigning a justice to write the Court's institutional opinion, a practice that broke with the Court's early approach, that of each justice writing an opinion. Under Marshall, if the Chief voted with the majority, he wrote the opinion or assigned the opinion to a colleague. If the Chief did not side with the majority, then the justice with the most seniority who was with the majority, either wrote the opinion or assigns it to someone else. As it happened, Marshall, at least in his first four years (1801-1805), wrote all but two of the Court's opinions, likely because his colleagues were lethargic or, some might say, browbeaten. To the end of his career, Marshall wrote the great majority of the opinions. Chief Justice Hughes kept the "plums" for himself. He wrote on average, 21 opinions each year, while his colleagues wrote 16 each. By contrast, Chief Justice Earl Warren, assigned 80 percent of all the Court's opinions during his 16-year career.

Various factors are at play in the assignment of opinions. The Chief Justice, for example, may contemplate a "public relations" strategy, particularly in cases that undoubtedly are going to be unpopular to a significant part of the nation. In this regard, the Chief is mindful of the need to coat a bitter pill that must

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 12 of 92

be swallowed. Chief Justice Hughes took this into consideration when assigning to Justice Felix Frankfurter, the task of writing the opinion in the first flag-salute case, *Minersville v. Gobitis* (1940), which featured a state law requiring school children to salute the flag, because he was a Jewish immigrant. The Court, with only a single dissent, upheld the statute against the Jehovah's Witnesses' claim that it violated the First Amendment. Frankfurter wrote an opinion that drew upon his own minority status and asserted sympathy with another minority, but the effort did not allay public outrage. Three years later, the Court reversed its position and struck down a similar state statute, citing guarantees of freedom of religion and speech.

Chief Justice Hughes liked to assign "liberal" opinions to "conservative" justices to diffuse opposition to the decision. In *Smith v. Allwright* (1944), better known as the Texas White Primary Case, in which the Court held that Blacks may not be excluded from voting in state primary elections, Hughes initially assigned the opinion to Frankfurter. Justice Robert H. Jackson intervened and suggested that Frankfurter was not the best justice to write the opinion. Although he found the reasons contemptible, Jackson noted that Frankfurter was Jewish and born in Vienna, he was raised in New England and was a former law professor at Harvard, an elite institution. Jackson persuaded Hughes that the bitter pill might be more easily swallowed if the opinion were written by Justice Stanley Reed, who hailed from Kentucky and was long associated with Southern politics.



**Now
HIRING!**

Dairy Queen in Groton is hiring! If you're looking for a fun job with lots of variety, look no further! We're looking for energetic, smiling people – we provide free meals, uniforms, competitive wages, fun atmosphere and flexible scheduling. Part-time – day, evening, week-end shifts available. We will work with your schedule. Stop in today and pick up an application.

South Dakota State Fair Admission Passes Available for Read & Win Program

HURON, S.D. – Free 2024 State Fair admission passes are now available for the Read & Win program.

The State Fair is partnering with schools and public libraries to promote youth reading and honor outstanding academic achievement. The Read & Win program encourages summer reading as an incentive to children of all ages across the state to earn free admission to the State Fair. This unique opportunity can complement current reading programs or serve as the foundation for new reading activities.

Registration information can be found online at www.sdstatefair.com or by contacting the State Fair office in Huron at 605-353-7340. To be eligible for free youth passes, please register no later than Monday, August 19.

The Read & Win program is sponsored by Ag Performance.

The 2024 South Dakota State Fair kicks off on Channel Seeds Opening Day Wednesday, August 28, through Monday, September 2. For more information on State Fair events, contact the Fair office at 800-529-0900, visit www.sdstatefair.com or find them on Facebook, Instagram, and X.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Lawmakers again deny more licenses for out-of-state waterfowl hunters

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MAY 7, 2024 4:34 PM

For the second time, a committee of state lawmakers denied an attempt by the Department of Game, Fish and Parks to increase the number of waterfowl licenses for out-of-state hunters, leaving the controversial rule change's future in doubt.

Game, Fish and Parks Secretary Kevin Robling told the committee Tuesday that the proposal is intended to boost hunter numbers.

"The issue is not less ducks, it is less people are picking up the shotgun to hunt ducks across the nation and across South Dakota," Robling said.

The original plan to add 315 nonresident licenses sparked hundreds of opposing public comments after its introduction in March. The Game, Fish and Parks Commission reduced the proposal to 105 licenses and adopted it in April.

The proposal then went to the Legislature's Rules Review Committee, a group of six lawmakers. The committee rejected the proposal for the first time on April 15 and sent it back to GF&P.

State law says if the Interim Rules Review Committee sends a rule back "to consider amendments," the agency may make the amendments and resubmit the rule at the next committee meeting.

During a May 2 GF&P Commission meeting, department lawyer Nick Michels said GF&P would resubmit the proposal without changes "because there were no proposed amendments."

"It wasn't exactly clear what the grounds were for the reversion," Michels said at the May 2 meeting. "I think they just wanted more clarification, honestly."

On Tuesday, Robling defended the proposal. He said the department supports the change to address a decline in waterfowl hunting participation.

"We need to stop saying 'no, you can't hunt here' to waterfowl hunters before the department has nobody to say no to any longer," he said.

Robling said the 105 new nonresident licensees would likely harvest 536 of the 32 million ducks that migrate through the region annually.

"For these reasons, the department is very confident this issue of 105 licenses will have no biological impact on duck populations in South Dakota and across the flyway," he said.

The proposed licenses would only be used on private land in some parts of eastern South Dakota, but not in the northeastern corner of the state, where resident hunters have complained of too much competition for a suitable hunting spot. The change would increase the nonresident license allocation from 6,300 to 6,405, generating about \$9,000 for the department. Resident licenses are unlimited.

Residents call for denial

Opponents of the move said they agree the biological impact would be minimal. But they said the change would put greater pressure on a declining number of available hunting spots.

One factor in declining hunter numbers is vanishing waterfowl habitat, according to a 2017 Game, Fish and Parks survey. Over 70% of responding hunters reported being "very concerned" about the loss of hunting opportunities due to a loss of wetlands. One of the culprits for that is "drain tile" — perforated pipes in the soil to drain unwanted water from farm fields.

Another factor is hunting guides, who sometimes pay farmers for exclusive hunting rights on a piece of land. That means more nonresident licenses could create more revenue for guides — resident and nonresident — who lease more exclusive access for hunting.

"That's the kind of pressure that starts to eliminate resident hunters like myself," said John Simpson of Pierre, one of several people who testified against the rule change Tuesday.

"Our biggest fear is commercialization," testified Chuck Dieter, professor emeritus of natural resource management at South Dakota State University. He said there are 25 resident commercial outfitters in the state, and "what's disturbing to me is there are 28 nonresident guides that come over from other states and guide other nonresidents in South Dakota."

The state does not require guides to carry a specific guiding license, nor does it track how many acres are leased for exclusive waterfowl hunting access.

Dana Rogers with the South Dakota Wildlife Federation said the commercial guide industry would be the primary beneficiary of the rule change. Rogers said he appreciates the commission rolling back the proposed number of additional licenses to 105, "but that's not why all of the people were there testifying, submitting public comments."

"They wanted this to be killed," he said. "Not amended."

Rep. Roger DeGroot, R-Brookings, said the testimony about limited access changed his view.

"I was taken aback today when I heard comments that outfitters can lease private land, then allow non-residents to come and hunt that land," he said. "It actually changed my whole view of the whole thing."

The committee then voted 4-0, with two members excused, to send the proposal back to the department again.

"The vote today effectively kills this proposal," said Committee Vice-Chair and Rep. Jon Hansen, R-Dell Rapids, in comments to South Dakota Searchlight.

Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.

South Dakota joins Arkansas federal lawsuit over Title IX transgender protections

BY: MARY HENNIGAN - MAY 7, 2024 3:50 PM

Arkansas Attorney General Tim Griffin on Tuesday filed a lawsuit with five other states — including South Dakota — against the U.S. Department of Education's change to Title IX that codifies protections for LGBTQ+ students.

The federal rule, announced in April, protects students and employees from sex-based discrimination, requires schools to offer support for people who make complaints, sets guidelines for schools and codifies protections for transgender students. It is expected to go into effect on Aug. 1.

The 60-page lawsuit, filed in U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Arkansas, alleges the education department exceeded its authority by rewriting the law. It also claims the rule is unconstitutional through a violation of the First Amendment, goes against decades of understanding of Title IX making it arbitrary and capricious, and presents "an actual controversy" by redefining "sex" to include gender identity.

The suit seeks to ultimately stop the federal rule's effective date.

Though Title IX applies broadly, Griffin's press conference Tuesday largely focused on transgender students joining girls' sports teams.

Missouri Attorney General Andrew Bailey and Arkansas Solicitor General Nicholas Bronni joined Griffin at the press conference, as did Amelia Ford, a 15-year-old sophomore at Brookland High School near Jonesboro. Amelia and her mother Sara are plaintiffs in the suit, along with Missouri, Nebraska, Iowa, North Dakota and South Dakota.

Amelia, a basketball player, said she's worked hard to earn her spot on the team and doesn't want that opportunity taken away from her. She also expressed concerns about the possibility of having "a boy who identifies as a girl" in her bathroom, locker room or hotel room during overnight sports trips.

"You don't just become a girl by what you feel or by what you think," Amelia said. "The government should not force us to disregard common sense and reality."

The lawsuit mentions Ford's faith several times and states it would be a violation of her Christian beliefs to refer to someone using pronouns that don't align with the person's biological sex.

Bailey referred to the Title IX rule as being "in favor of a radical transgender ideology," and Griffin seemed baffled by the idea of such a proposed change.

"For a legal suit, it can't just be ridiculous, nonsensical, hard to believe, outrageous — there has to be a legal basis," said Griffin, who also added that he thinks "nationally, a vast majority of people think this whole thing is nonsensical."

Asked whether he saw the lawsuit as harmful to transgender students, Griffin said, "No, I see it as following the law."

Griffin's lawsuit comes days after Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders signed an executive order instructing public schools to follow state law instead of the federal Title IX rule when it goes into effect in August.

"My message to Joe Biden and the federal government is that we will not comply," Sanders said during a press conference.

A number of other states have also filed suit against the Title IX rule in their own federal circuit courts, and more are expected.

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem and Attorney General Marty Jackley criticized the rule last month.

"Mediocre men do not have the right to steal opportunities from exceptional women," Noem said in a news release. "South Dakota has the toughest law in the nation to protect girls' and women's sports. We will defend our laws. We will preserve the rights of women. And we will see President Biden in court."

In the same release, Jackley said, "The Biden Administration is undermining State authority and one of Title IX's major achievements, giving young people an equal opportunity to participate in sports."

On Tuesday, Samantha Chapman, ACLU of South Dakota advocacy manager, condemned South Dakota's participation in the lawsuit.

"This lawsuit is just the latest attempt to erase transgender people from society," Chapman said in a news release. "This intolerance against a marginalized group of people is a distraction from our state's real needs and hurts us all."

The staff of South Dakota Searchlight contributed to this report.

Mary is a tenacious, award-winning journalist whose coverage spans city government to housing policy. She holds a bachelor's and master's degree in journalism from the University of Arkansas. Arkansas Advocate is part of States Newsroom, the nation's largest state-focused nonprofit news organization.

Montana could be a model as more GOP states weigh Medicaid work requirements

BY: SHALINA CHATLANI - MAY 7, 2024 7:06 AM

Two decades ago, Jeff Beisecker and his family returned to Great Falls, Montana, from a religious mission to the Philippines. Beisecker had no health insurance and no steady source of income, and neither did his wife. Fearful of being without coverage, Beisecker enrolled himself, his wife and their four children in Medicaid for nearly a decade while he worked his way to a steady, full-time job.

Having the extra help made a difference for his family, recalled Beisecker, 53. "And people might have looked down on us. I don't really care, because it was there to help us along the journey."

For Beisecker, Medicaid coverage was a launching pad to stable work; now he helps others make that leap. As an employment and training coordinator for Opportunities Inc., a Great Falls-based nonprofit, Beisecker connects Montana Medicaid recipients to job training, career counseling, transportation and child

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 17 of 92

care. Opportunities Inc. is one of several nonprofits that run a state-created voluntary program called the Health and Economic Livelihood Partnership Link, known as HELP-Link.

"When folks come in, we can meet with them and say, 'Hey, maybe you can take this training that we can help pay for, and you can come out and start making 28 or 29 dollars an hour,'" Beisecker said.

An increasing number of Republican-led states — including South Dakota — want to require Medicaid recipients to work, arguing that doing so will help them rise out of poverty. Democrats and health advocates note that most people on Medicaid already work either full time or part time. They argue that states shouldn't deny health care coverage to people who don't have jobs, especially since many face serious barriers to employment.

With HELP-Link, Montana might have found middle ground.

When Montanans enroll in Medicaid, nonprofit organizations such as Opportunities Inc., which receives state funding, can offer career guidance and job training from professionals like Beisecker. A key part of that process is identifying barriers to work — such as a lack of training, child care or transportation — and finding ways to overcome them.

"There are ways to support work without taking away people's health coverage," said Joan Alker, executive director of Georgetown University's Center for Children and Families, which researches health care issues.

"Montana is the most concrete example of a work-support connection," she said. "That's one place to look to make sure people are connected to work supports and job training."

Montana Republican state Rep. Edward Buttrey, who crafted the HELP-Link program with Democratic state Rep. Mary Caffero in 2015, said it adheres to GOP principles.

"Republican administrations typically want to ensure that if somebody's getting a benefit from the taxpayers, that they're earning it and in return providing a benefit back to the state and themselves," Buttrey told Stateline. "I think that's what this is about."

Caffero said that in reaching a compromise, legislators "put the people of Montana above party politics."

"We created our own majority," she said, "and extremists were kind of out on a plank."

Increasing interest

Medicaid is a program that provides health insurance for low-income people and is jointly run by states and the U.S. government. Any state that wants to add a work requirement to Medicaid must ask the federal government for permission.

The Biden administration has repeatedly turned down states' requests to impose work requirements. It also has rescinded the approvals granted by its predecessor, which signed off on 13 of them. (Only one state, Arkansas, implemented its rule before courts blocked states from imposing them.) But with the election fast approaching, the prospect of a second Trump administration has prompted more GOP states to reconsider the idea.

That includes states such as Arkansas, Idaho and Louisiana that opted to expand Medicaid to more people under the Affordable Care Act, commonly known as Obamacare. It also includes states that are still debating whether to expand Medicaid under Obamacare, among them Kansas and Mississippi.

Georgia and South Carolina, neither of which has expanded Medicaid under the ACA, both have sought federal permission to include work requirements in partial expansions of Medicaid that are more limited than what is envisioned under Obamacare. Only Georgia, which is fighting the Biden administration in court, currently has a strict work rule for any of its Medicaid enrollees.

How it works

Montana, which expanded Medicaid during the Obama administration, in 2019 sought federal permission to apply work requirements to the roughly 100,000 adults who were newly eligible for the program. Under the proposal, beneficiaries would have had to work at least 80 hours each month, be looking for a job, or be doing volunteer work. There would have been exemptions for pregnancy, disabilities and mental illness.

In 2021, however, the Biden administration rejected Montana's request. Buttrey told Stateline that if

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 18 of 92

former President Donald Trump wins in November, it is likely that Montana will try again. But whatever the outcome of the election, the voluntary workforce training in HELP-Link has emerged as a possible compromise.

Beisecker said that Opportunities Inc. has been working with the Help-Link program for about a year and a half. The nonprofit has been able to help people do things such as get a commercial driver's license, start a welding certificate program, take classes on medical coding, and join construction training programs.

The nonprofit also has a community resource center that can help Medicaid recipients get access to vouchers for food, laundry facilities and other needs.

"We get referrals from other nonprofits we work with," Beisecker said. "We have flyers that we send out so people know about the program. We go to job fairs."

According to data from the Montana Department of Labor and Industry, more than 2,200 people have participated in the HELP-Link program since its inception. Many have gone on to get jobs as registered nurses, dental hygienists, real estate agents and computer programmers, among many other professions.

HELP-Link has built relationships with large local employers such as manufacturers and health care providers, said Heather O'Loughlin, executive director of the Montana Budget & Policy Center, a nonprofit group that examines budget and tax issues. O'Loughlin said a dip in participation since 2021 is evidence that the program has moved many participants into stable jobs.

Caffero, the Democratic lawmaker, agreed.

"The program was doing exactly what we intended. People get jobs and jobs with benefits, jobs where they make a living wage, because they have education and training through HELP-Link," she said. "That's the goal. We don't want the [Medicaid] rolls to go up."

Buttrey noted that prior to the pandemic, Montanans stayed on Medicaid for an average of less than two years. "We've given people some job skills," he said. "We've gotten them preventative care and help with addiction."

Robin Rudowitz, who oversees Medicaid research at KFF, a nonpartisan health research organization, praised Montana's program for encouraging people to find a job — and get off government assistance — without denying them health care while they do it.

She contrasted HELP-Link with the strict work requirements Arkansas briefly had in place for Medicaid recipients during the Trump administration, before a federal court struck them down. Those rules knocked roughly 18,000 people off the rolls. "Arkansas was really the only state that actually implemented to the point of where individuals were disenrolled for failing to comply," she said.

Rudowitz and other health experts also have been critical of Georgia's Pathways to Coverage program, launched last summer, which extended Medicaid coverage to some low-income Georgians on the condition that they work or participate in another qualifying activity 80 hours each month. Under that program, which is not considered full expansion under Obamacare, 4,000 people have gained coverage, out of the roughly 350,000 who would qualify based on their income.

Georgia Republican Gov. Brian Kemp has defended the program and blamed the Biden administration for its slow start. The program is set to expire next fall, but several months ago, Georgia sued the federal government in a bid to extend it.

"It's fiscally foolish, and anti-family," Georgetown's Alker said of the Georgia program. She noted that the state is leaving federal dollars on the table by eschewing a full-fledged expansion under Obamacare.

"It's not been a pathway to coverage for anybody," she said.

Shalina Chatlani covers health care and environmental justice for Stateline.

Porn star Stormy Daniels in NYC hush money trial alleges sexual encounter with Trump

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - MAY 7, 2024 4:59 PM

WASHINGTON — Adult film star Stormy Daniels told a Manhattan jury Tuesday about meeting Donald Trump in a penthouse suite in 2006, where he told the actress not to worry about his wife and that she reminded him of his daughter shortly before they had sex.

The testimony, reported by journalists in the courtroom, described in granular detail the intimate physical encounter with a former president, who is now facing charges in New York for falsifying records of hush-money payments to the actress and director. Trump is the first former president to face criminal charges.

Trump, the presumed 2024 Republican presidential nominee, denies the encounter.

Daniels was called to the stand in the trial's fourth week as prosecutors aim to prove that Trump covered up a \$130,000 payment to silence the star during his 2016 presidential campaign.

The former president faces 34 felony charges for allegedly disguising the payments, reimbursed to his former lawyer Michael Cohen, as "legal expenses." The Trump organization eventually paid Cohen \$420,000 to account for taxes and a bonus.

Book editor testifies

The trial opened Tuesday with a brief appearance from witness Sally Franklin. Franklin is an executive and editor with Penguin Random House, the publisher of some of Trump's books, including "Trump: How to Get Rich" and "Trump: Think Like a Billionaire."

Prosecutors led jurors through excerpts of Trump's books, including portions where Trump claims to always sign checks personally and that he fastidiously kept track of funds going in and out of the Trump Organization.

On Monday, the jury heard from both a former and current finance employee of the Trump Organization about the payments to Cohen. The prosecutors used the testimony to show the jurors financial documentation, including the 11 checks personally signed by Trump.

The New York case is the first of four criminal indictments against Trump to reach the trial stage. The likelihood of the other cases reaching trial before the November election dwindled further Tuesday when a federal district judge in Florida indefinitely postponed the trial date in Trump's classified documents case that had been scheduled for May 20.

'My motivation wasn't money'

Daniels, whose real name is Stephanie Clifford, testified for several hours, telling the jury about a reluctant sexual encounter with Trump and multiple public meetings with him in the following months as he dangled a possible appearance for her on NBC's "The Apprentice," according to reporters at the courthouse.

New York does not allow video or audio recording in the courtroom but provides public transcripts of the proceedings.

Journalists reported Judge Juan Merchan growing irritated with Daniels' long and detailed testimony, at times chastising her and telling her to stick to the questions. Merchan sustained objections from Trump's team, and at times objected on his own.

The actress described meeting Trump in 2006 at a Lake Tahoe golf tournament where she was promoting Wicked Pictures, an adult film company.

Initially refusing an invitation for dinner, Daniels then agreed to meet Trump for the meal in his luxury hotel suite. Daniels testified that Trump answered the door in silky pajamas, and she asked him to get changed.

After dinner, Daniels testified, she was shocked that Trump had stripped down to his underclothes and then positioned himself between her and the door when she attempted to leave, according to reporters at the courthouse.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 20 of 92

She testified that she didn't say no "because I didn't say anything at all."

Daniels said she stopped taking Trump's calls in 2007 after he couldn't guarantee her an appearance on the NBC show.

In the ensuing years, her story appeared on an obscure website, and Daniels talked about being approached in 2011 by a man who threatened her and told her to keep quiet about the encounter.

Daniels testified that after Trump announced his presidential run in 2015 her publicist unsuccessfully tried to sell her story. Interest only heated up, however, in October 2016 after the surfacing of an "Access Hollywood" tape in which Trump brags that his fame allows him to grab women's genitals.

"My motivation wasn't money. It was to get the story out," she said, according to reporters at the courthouse.

Trump and Cohen reached out to Daniels' publicist Gina Rodriguez to buy her story, after which Daniels said she decided keeping quiet would be the safest option for her and her family.

Daniels eventually received \$96,000 of the \$130,000 payment, after her manager and lawyer took fees, she testified.

A mistrial attempt

Trump's defense lawyer Todd Blanche moved for a mistrial Tuesday afternoon, arguing Daniels' testimony went beyond what was necessary for the case.

Blanche especially took issue with Daniels describing from the witness stand her feelings about the alleged affair and her claim that Trump didn't wear a condom.

While Merchan told the defense that some things would have been "better left unsaid," he denied the motion for a mistrial.

Daniels returned to the stand in the afternoon as Trump attorney Susan Necheles aimed to discredit her, accusing her of making "a lot of money" from her story, according to reporters at the courthouse.

Necheles also questioned Daniels about the 2011 encounter with the man she said threatened her. At the time Daniels was in a parking lot on the way into a "mommy and me" class with her baby.

Necheles cast doubt on the veracity of the story, saying "Your daughter's life was in jeopardy and you did not tell her father," according to reporters at the courthouse. Daniels said she kept the story and the parking lot encounter secret from her husband.

In a further attempt to poke holes in Daniels' testimony, Necheles asked why the porn star decided she wanted to sell her story in 2016 after having been so afraid of threats.

Necheles said Daniels saw an "opportunity to make money," to which Daniels responded, "I saw the opportunity to get the story out. I didn't put a price tag on it," according to reporters at the courthouse.

Merchan dismissed the jury at 4:30 p.m. Eastern. Trump's team is expected to continue cross-examination Wednesday.

In response to Daniels' testimony, Trump posted in all caps on his platform Truth Social Tuesday afternoon: "THE PROSECUTION, WHICH HAS NO CASE, HAS GONE TOO FAR. MISTRIAL!"

The post followed an earlier one that had since been deleted, according to media reports. The earlier post expressed anger that Daniels was unexpectedly being called to the witness stand.

Trump was fined \$1,000 Monday for again violating his gag order, which prevents him from posting about witnesses. The former president was fined for nine other gag order violations on April 30.

Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.

TikTok sues to block new U.S. law banning app if it is not sold

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - MAY 7, 2024 4:00 PM

TikTok and its Chinese parent company on Tuesday challenged a recently enacted federal law banning the short-form video platform from the United States if it is not sold to a non-Chinese owner.

TikTok Inc., the U.S. company that operates the popular social media service, and ByteDance, its parent company founded by Chinese entrepreneurs, filed suit in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit over a law requiring ByteDance to sell its subsidiary or face a ban from U.S. app stores.

The law violates the First Amendment right to free speech, the companies wrote. The service is a free-speech platform, used by 170 million Americans monthly. While the government can dictate broadcast licenses that operate over public airwaves, it has no such authority over other platforms including newspapers and websites, they said.

"Congress has made a law curtailing massive amounts of protected speech," the companies wrote. "The government cannot, consistent with the First Amendment, dictate the ownership of newspapers, websites, online platforms, and other privately created speech forums."

Congress passed, and President Joe Biden signed, the law last month. Many lawmakers argued that TikTok was a tool of the Chinese Communist Party.

Sale not viable, TikTok says

The law's alternative for TikTok to avoid a U.S. ban, for ByteDance to sell the platform, is unworkable, the companies said.

The algorithm at the core of TikTok's product, as well as the platform itself, is powered by millions of lines of code developed by thousands of engineers over years, the companies said. Transferring that design to new owners who lack the years of expertise that TikTok's current workforce has would be impossible within the nine-month deadline stipulated in the law.

The Chinese government would also likely not allow divestiture of the algorithm. China, like the United States, can regulate what technology can be exported, they said, and would likely reject a deal to allow foreign ownership of TikTok.

TikTok as a platform is globally integrated, so even if it were possible to find a new owner and transfer ownership of the product, it would lose much of the appeal — and the related market value — of connecting with users around the world, the companies wrote.

"Divesting TikTok Inc.'s U.S. business and completely severing it from the globally integrated platform of which it is a part is not commercially, technologically, or legally feasible," they said. "The Act will therefore have the effect of shutting down TikTok in the United States."

The companies asked the court to declare that the law is unconstitutional, bar Attorney General Merrick Garland from enforcing it and "grant any further relief that may be appropriate."

National security concerns

Congress included the TikTok bill in a package of high-profile spending items, including military and humanitarian aid to Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan. President Joe Biden signed the package into law April 24.

Several China hawks in Congress have expressed concerns that the Chinese government and its ruling Communist Party can compel ByteDance to provide data from TikTok users' devices.

They have also raised concerns that the Chinese Communist Party can manipulate content on the platform.

Sen. Mitt Romney, a Utah Republican, said last week the "overwhelming" share of pro-Palestinian content on TikTok compared to other platforms was a reason driving support for a ban among lawmakers.

In their suit, TikTok and ByteDance said the government has not presented evidence to back up concerns over data privacy or content manipulation and instead relied on hypothetical risks.

"Those speculative concerns fall far short of what is required when First Amendment rights are at stake," they said.

Rep. John Moolenaar, a Michigan Republican who chairs the U.S. House Select Committee on the Chi-

nese Communist Party, said in a written statement posted by the committee's X account Tuesday he was "confident that our legislation will be upheld."

"Congress and the Executive Branch have concluded, based on both publicly available and classified information, that TikTok poses a grave risk to national security and the American people," Moolenaar said. "It is telling that TikTok would rather spend its time, money, and effort fighting in court than solving the problem by breaking up with the Chinese Communist Party."

Jacob covers federal policy as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Based in Oregon, he focuses on Western issues. His coverage areas include climate, energy development, public lands and infrastructure.

Religious views on abortion more diverse than they may appear in U.S. political debate

BY: ELISHA BROWN - MAY 7, 2024 10:57 AM

Lawmakers who oppose abortion often invoke their faith — many identify as Christian — while debating policy.

The anti-abortion movement's use of Christianity in arguments might create the impression that broad swaths of religious Americans don't support abortion rights. But a recent report shows that Americans of various faiths and denominations believe abortion should be legal in all or most cases.

According to a Public Religion Research Institute survey of some 22,000 U.S. adults released last week, 93% of Unitarian Universalists, 81% of Jews, 79% of Buddhists and 60% of Muslims also hold that view.

Researchers also found that most people who adhere to the two major branches of Christianity — Catholicism and Protestantism — also believe abortion should be mostly legal, save for three groups: white evangelical Protestants, Latter-day Saints and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Historically, the Catholic Church has opposed abortion. But the poll found that 73% of Catholics of color — PRRI defines this group as Black, Asian, Native American and multiracial Americans — support the right to have an abortion, followed by 62% of white Catholics and 57% of Hispanic Catholics.

The findings show that interfaith views on abortion may not be as simple as they appear during political debate, where the voices of white evangelical legislators and advocates can be the loudest.

States Newsroom spoke with Abrahamic religious scholars — specifically, experts in Catholicism, Islam and Judaism — and reproductive rights advocates about varying perspectives on abortion and their history.

Abortion views in America before Roe v. Wade

The Moral Majority — a voting bloc of white, conservative evangelicals who rose to prominence after the U.S. Supreme Court Roe v. Wade ruling in 1973 — is often associated with spearheading legislation to restrict abortion.

Gillian Frank is a historian specializing in religion, gender and sexuality who teaches at the Stevens Institute of Technology in New Jersey. Frank said evangelical views on abortion were actually more ambivalent before the early '70s Roe decision established the federal right to terminate a pregnancy. (The Supreme Court upended that precedent about two years ago.)

"What we have to understand is that evangelicals, alongside mainline Protestants and Jews of various denominations, supported what was called therapeutic abortion, which is to say abortion for certain exceptional causes," Frank said, including saving the life or health of the mother, fetal abnormalities, rape, incest and the pregnancy of a minor. Religious bodies like the Southern Baptist Convention and the National Association of Evangelicals said abortion was OK in certain circumstances, he added.

Evangelical Protestants before Roe did not endorse "elective abortions," Frank said, or what they called "abortion on demand," a phrase invoked by abortion-rights opponents today that he said entered the American lexicon around 1962.

The 1973 ruling was seismic and led organizations opposing abortion, such as the National Right to Life

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 23 of 92

Committee — formed by the Conference of Catholic Bishops — to sprout across the country, according to an article published four years later in Southern Exposure. Catholic leaders often lobbied other religious groups — evangelicals, Mormons, orthodox Jews — to join their movement and likened abortion to murder in their newspapers.

After Roe, “abortion is increasingly associated with women’s liberation in popular rhetoric in popular culture, because of the activism of the women’s movement but also because of the ways in which the anti-abortion movement is associating abortion with familial decline,” Frank said. Those sentiments, he said, were spread by conservative figures like Phyllis Schlafly, a Catholic opposed to feminism and abortion, who campaigned against and managed to block the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1970s.

Polls suggest the views of Catholic clergy and laypeople diverge

Catholicism is generally synonymous with opposition to abortion. According to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the church has stood against abortion since the first century. The conference points to Jeremiah 1:5 in the Bible to back up arguments that pregnancy termination is “contrary to the moral law.”

But nearly 6 in 10 American Catholics believe abortion should be mostly legal, according to a Pew Research Center report released last month.

Catholics for Choice spokesperson Ashley Wilson said that there’s a disconnect between the church as an institution and its laity. “We recognize that part of the problem is that the Catholic clergy, and the people who write the official teaching of the church, are all or mostly white male — my boss likes to say ostensibly celibate men — who don’t have wives,” Wilson said. “They don’t have daughters. They have no inroads into the lives of laypeople.”

Her group plans on going to Vatican City in Rome this fall to lift up stories of Catholics who’ve had abortions. The organization is also actively involved in efforts to restore abortion access — 14 states have near-total bans — through direct ballot measures in Colorado, Florida and Missouri this year.

Catholic dioceses and fraternities are often behind counter-efforts to proposed ballot questions. They poured millions into campaigns in Kansas and Kentucky in 2022 to push anti-abortion amendments, and also in Ohio last year to defeat a reproductive rights ballot measure but they failed in each state.

Ensoulement and mercy in Islam

Tenets of Islam — the second largest faith in the world — often make references to how far along a person’s pregnancy is and whether there are complications. University of Colorado Law professor Rabea Benhalim, an expert of Islamic and Judaic law, said there’s a common belief that at 40 days’ gestation, the embryo is akin to a drop of fluid. After 120 days, the fetus gains a soul, she said.

While the Quran doesn’t specifically speak to abortion, Benhalim said Chapter 23: 12-14 is considered a description of a fetus in a womb. The verses are deeply “important in the development of abortion jurisprudence within Islamic law, because there’s an understanding that life is something that is emerging over a period of stages.”

In some restrictive interpretations of Islam, there’s a limit on abortion after 40 days, or seven weeks after implantation, Benhalim said. In other interpretations, because ensoulement doesn’t occur until 120 days of gestation, abortion is generally permitted in some Muslim communities for various reasons, she said. After ensoulement, abortion is allowed if the mother’s life is in danger, according to religious doctrine.

Sahar Pirzada, the director of movement building at HEART, a reproductive justice organization focused on sexual health and education in Muslim American communities, confirmed that some Muslims believe in the 40-day mark, while others adhere to the 120-day mark when weighing abortion.

“How can you make a black-and-white ruling on something that is going to be applied across the board when everyone’s situation is different?” she asked. “There’s a lot of compassion and mercy with how we’re supposed to approach matters of the womb.”

The issue is personal for Pirzada, who had an abortion in 2018 after her fetus received a fatal diagnosis

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 24 of 92

of trisomy 18 when she was 12 weeks pregnant. "I wanted to terminate within the 120-day mark, which gave me a few more weeks," she said.

She consulted scholars and Islamic teachings before making the decision to end her pregnancy, she said, and mentioned the importance of rahma — mercy — in Islam. "I tried to embody that spirit of compassion for myself," she said.

Pirzada, who is now a mother of two, had the procedure at exactly 14 weeks on a day six years ago that was both Ash Wednesday and Valentine's Day. She said she felt loved and surrounded by people of faith at the hospital, where some health care workers had crosses marked in ash on their foreheads. "I felt very appreciative that they were offering me care on a day that was spiritual for them," she said.

Seeing the stories of people with pregnancy complications in the period since the Supreme Court overturned the federal right to an abortion has left her grief stricken. For instance, Kate Cox, a Texas woman whose fetus had the same diagnosis as Pirzada's, was denied an abortion by the state Supreme Court in December. Cox had to travel elsewhere for care, Texas Tribune reported.

Benhalim, the University of Colorado expert, said teachings in Islam and Judaism offer solace to followers who are considering abortion, as they can provide guidance during difficult decisions.

No fetal personhood in Judaism

In Jewish texts, the embryo is referred to as water before 40 days of gestation, according to the National Council of Jewish Women. Exodus: 21:22-23 in the Torah mentions a hypothetical situation where two men are fighting and injure a pregnant woman. If she has a miscarriage, the men are only fined. But if she is seriously injured and dies, "the penalty shall be a life for a life."

This part of the Torah is interpreted to mean that a fetus does not have personhood, and the men didn't commit murder, according to the council. But this may not be a catchall belief — Benhalim noted that denominations of Judaism have different opinions on abortion.

Today, Jewish Americans have been at the forefront of legal challenges to abortion bans based on religious freedom in Florida, Indiana and Kentucky. Many of the lawsuits have interfaith groups of plaintiffs and argue that restrictions on termination infringe on their religion.

The legal challenge in Indiana has been the most successful. Hoosier Jews for Choice and five anonymous plaintiffs sued members of the state medical licensing board in summer 2022, when Indiana's near-total abortion ban initially took effect.

Plaintiffs argued that the ban violated the state's Religious Freedom Restoration Act, and the court later let the claim receive class-action status. Several Jewish Hoosiers said they believe life begins after a baby's first breath, and that abortion is required to protect the mother's health and life, according to court documents.

Last month, the Indiana Court of Appeals ruled that the plaintiffs have the right to sue the state but sent the request for a temporary halt on the ban back to a lower court.

While the decision was unanimous, Judge Mark Bailey issued a separate concurring opinion explaining his reasoning and criticizing lawmakers — "an overwhelming majority of whom have not experienced childbirth" — who assert they are protectors of life from the point of conception.

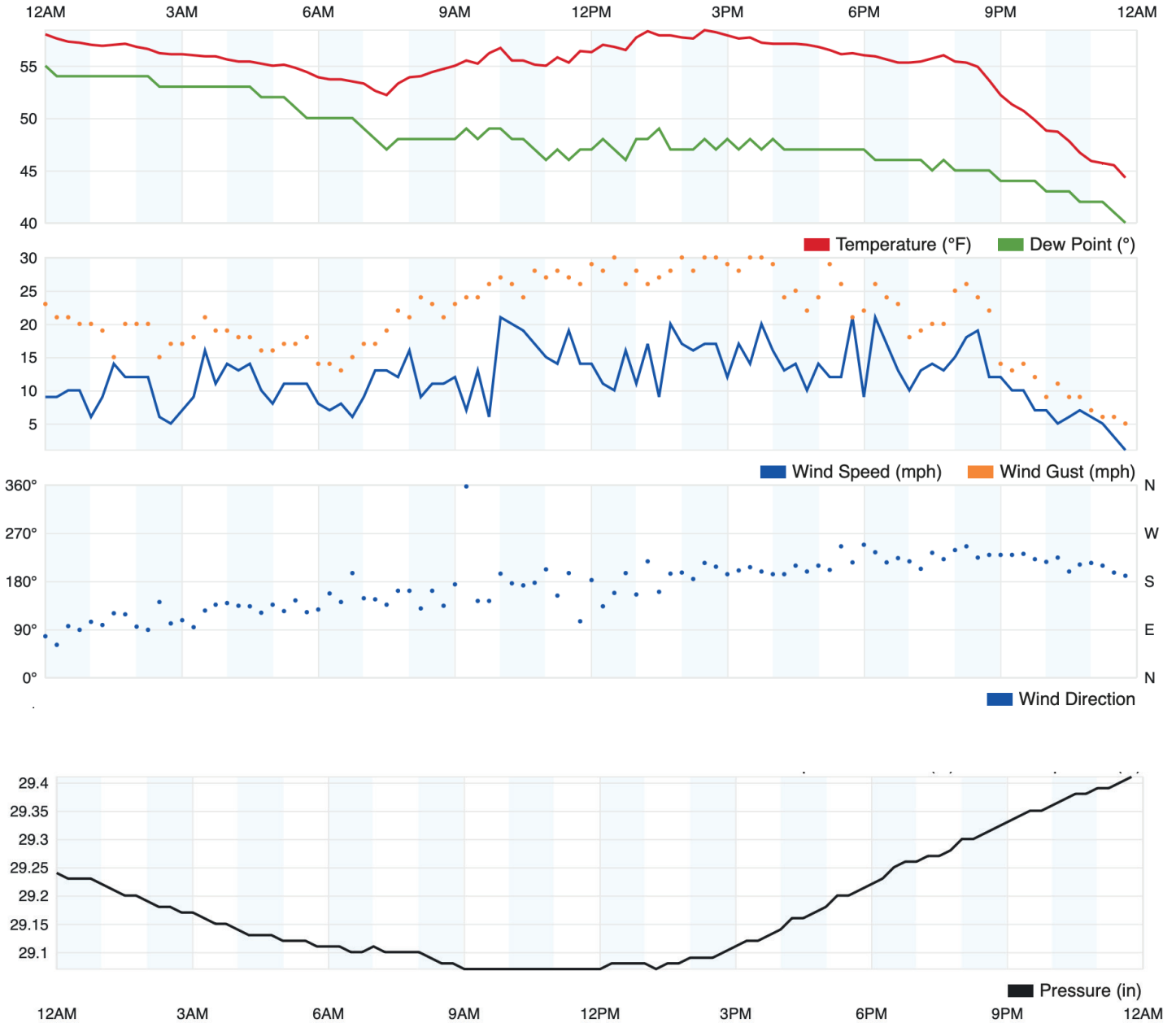
"In my view, this is an adoption of a religious viewpoint held by some, but certainly not all, Hoosiers," he wrote. "The least that can be expected is that remaining Hoosiers of child bearing ability will be given the opportunity to act in accordance with their own consciences and religious creeds."

Elisha Brown is the Reproductive Rights Today newsletter author at States Newsroom. She is based in Durham, North Carolina, where she previously worked as a reporter covering reproductive rights, policy, and inequality for Facing South. Her work has appeared in The New York Times, The Daily Beast, The Atlantic, and Vox. She attended American University in Washington, D.C. and was raised in South Carolina.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 25 of 92

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 26 of 92

Today



High: 67 °F

Sunny then
Slight Chance
Showers

Tonight



Low: 46 °F

Chance
Showers

Thursday



High: 68 °F

Sunny then
Chance
Showers

Thursday
Night



Low: 48 °F

Partly Cloudy

Friday



High: 71 °F

Sunny and
Breezy



ISOLATED SEVERE STORMS WEDNESDAY

Your Local Forecast: www.weather.gov

Issued Wed May 08, 2024 2:27 AM

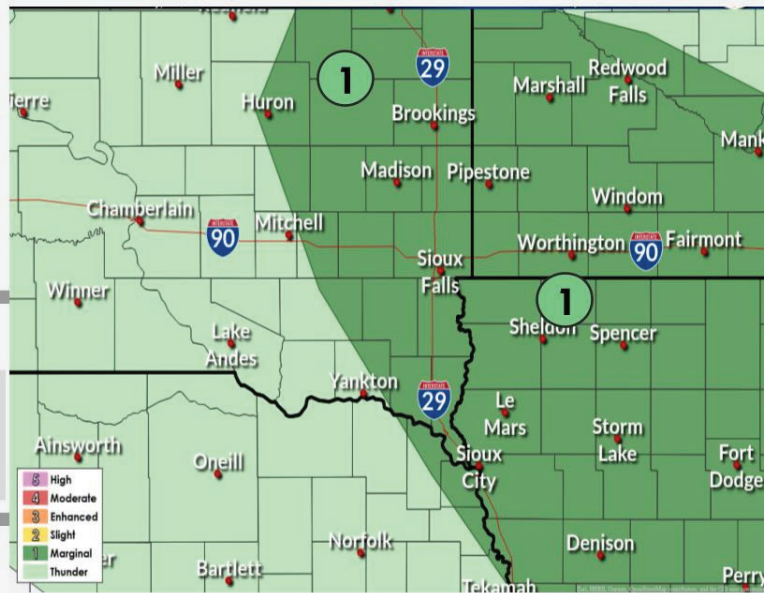
Scattered thunderstorms develop by early afternoon.

A **STORM OR TWO** may become strong to severe through the afternoon hours.

Storms may also produce heavy rainfall which may lead to ponding of water.

Beginning
Around 1pm

Ending
Around 8pm



Storm Risks

DAMAGING WIND UP TO 60 MPH



HAIL Up to Quarter Size



Brief
Funnel/Tornado
Possible

Actions to Take



KNOW YOUR
SHELTER LOCATION



HAVE A
SAFETY PLAN



OUTDOOR PLANS?
STAY WEATHER AWARE



A few strong to perhaps severe storms may be possible Wednesday afternoon. The greatest risks will be from quarter size hail, 50 to 60 mph wind gusts. While a very low chance, a few funnel clouds or even a tornado may be possible. The risk will diminish by the evening.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 27 of 92

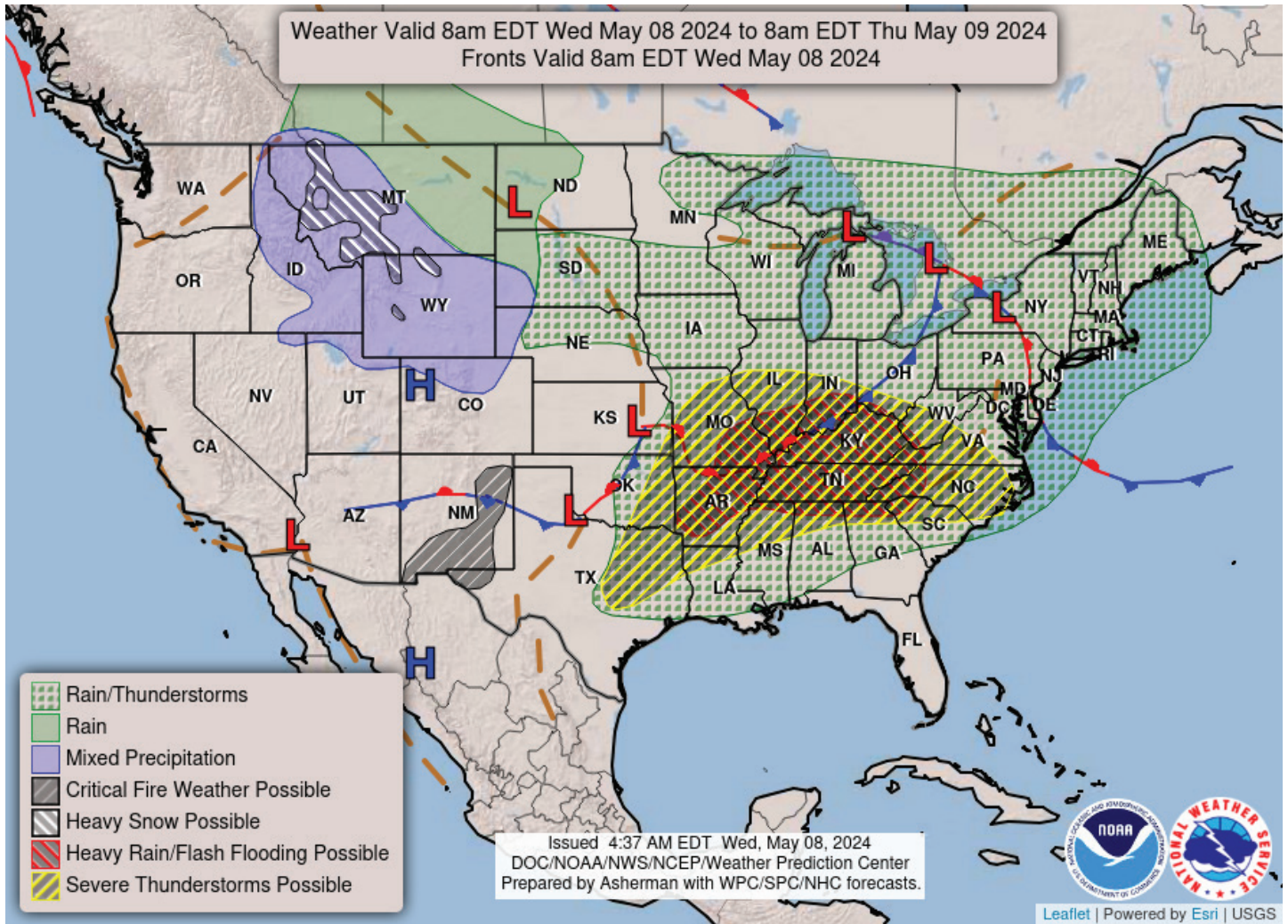
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 69 °F at 4:19 PM
Low Temp: 52 °F at 2:58 AM
Wind: 44 mph at 2:10 PM
Precip: : 0.43

Day length: 14 hours, 39 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 105 in 1934
Record Low: 22 in 1945
Average High: 67
Average Low: 41
Average Precip in May.: 0.87
Precip to date in May: 0.61
Average Precip to date: 4.84
Precip Year to Date: 5.14
Sunset Tonight: 8:48:41 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:07:47 am



Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 28 of 92

Today in Weather History

May 8, 1934: Pierre recorded its' earliest 100 degrees when the high temperature reached 103 degrees. Mobridge also reached 103 degrees, which is the earliest yearly date for the city Mobridge.

May 8, 1965: The strongest tornado recorded in South Dakota tracked across eastern Tripp County. It was part of a larger tornado outbreak in Nebraska and South Dakota during the afternoon through late evening hours.

May 8, 1986: Thunderstorms produced torrential rainfall of two to four inches over much of central and eastern South Dakota. The very heavy rains caused extensive flooding with Walworth and Potter Counties reporting the most damage. In those counties, most roads were under water. Several bridges and roads were also washed out in that area. The heavy rain washed out the dam at Lake Byre in Lyman County, which produced water waist deep in Kennebec. The city of Kennebec lost their sole source of water when the dam broke. Cow Creek in Lyman County also flooded and broke a part of a dam, causing minor property damage. Rain continued to fall into the morning hours on the 9th. Some two-day rainfall totals include; 4.33 inches in Kennebec; 4.21 in Shelby; 3.91 at 4 miles west of Mellette; 3.30 in Gettysburg; 3.06 in Blunt; 2.99 in Eureka; 2.75 at 2 NNW of Mobridge; 2.70 inches 2 miles south of Ashton and in Britton.

May 8, 1995: Flooding caused by snowmelt from two significant snowstorms in April continued throughout May. The flooding was aggravated by widespread torrential rains, especially from the early morning of the 8th through the early morning of the 9th. Rainfall amounts ranged from one to four inches. Some higher rainfall amounts include; 5.50 inches at Wakpala, 4.50 at Chelsea and Leola, 4.20 at Ipswich, 4.10 inches 12 north of McLaughlin, and 3.91 inches at Aberdeen. A worker was injured near Claremont when the train derailed due to the weakening of the rail-bed caused by high water. The extensive flooding continued to cause road damage and many road closures.

1784: Deadly hailstorm in South Carolina hits the town of Winnsborough. The hailstones, measuring as much as nine inches in circumference, killed several persons, and a great number of sheep, lambs, and birds.

1902: On May 7th, Martinique's Mount Pelee began the deadliest volcanic eruption in the 20th century. On this day, the city of Saint Pierre, which some called the Paris of the Caribbean, was virtually wiped off the map. The volcano killed an estimated 30,000 people.

1979: Widespread damage occurred in the Tampa Bay area. The 19 tornadoes reported are the most in one day in Florida history. Three people drowned in Pinellas County where flooding was most severe. Rainfall amounts of 18 inches in 24 hours were reported with 12.73 inches falling at Tampa, FL; with 7.84 inches of that in just six hours. Worst hit was the Polk County community of Auburndale where a tornado made a direct hit on the Auburndale School. Flying debris hurt only eight students. An 83-year-old woman was killed as she hid in an unreinforced concrete block storage shed. 98 trailers were damaged or destroyed, and 40 people were injured.

2003: This was the second of three consecutive days with strong to violent tornadoes around Oklahoma City. A violent F4 tornado that affected Moore, Oklahoma City, Midwest City and Choctaw took on a path very similar to the 5/3/1999 devastating tornado. This particular storm back in 2003 affected areas from Newcastle and Moore to Del City and Choctaw. Although over 130 people were injured, there were no fatalities.

2009: A deadly derecho squall line crosses far southern Illinois at midday devastating the Carbondale area on its way across a 1,200-mile swath of terrain covering sections of nine states. Hundreds of homes and businesses are damaged or destroyed in Kansas, Kentucky, Illinois, Kentucky, and Missouri. The wind gusts to 106 mph in the Carbondale area with sustained winds measured at up to 90 mph. In southern Illinois, the storm system peels siding and roofs off homes and other buildings, blowing out car windows and tearing up trailer parks.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 29 of 92

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

FACING FEAR

General Jimmy Doolittle was the first pilot to fly an airplane relying only on the aircraft's instruments. He is also the one who led the impossible, yet successful, raid on Tokyo in World War II. On one occasion he said to his crew, "I can honestly say that I have never felt fear."

Fear grips us when we sense an impending danger, a situation that might harm or destroy our well-being. Fear comes to us when we feel or sense that a situation is beyond our control. Fear can be either helpful or harmful.

On one occasion David said, "I trust in God, so why should I be afraid? What can mere mortals do to me?"

In other words, David was saying, "How much damage or harm can people do to me if my trust is in the Lord?" People can try to destroy our reputation. They can make statements that hurt us. They can inflict pain and suffering and even death. But they cannot destroy our relationship with God or remove our name from the Book of Life.

God has given each of us complete responsibility to accept or reject His salvation. We have the power of choice within the grace of God to trust Him for our salvation and the privilege of being with Him in eternity. Jesus said, "Do not be afraid of those...who can kill your body. They cannot touch your soul." Our only fear should be of God who controls this life and the one to come.

Prayer: We thank You, Lord, for being a God whom we can trust and whose Word endures forever. We are grateful that we trust in You and never be afraid. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: I trust in God, so why should I be afraid? What can mere mortals do to me? Psalm 56:4



We all need the encouragement, comfort, and peace that comes through God's grace. Our daily devotionals, known as Seeds of Hope, have been a means through which thousands of people have experienced this grace. Each devotional comes from God's Word and we pray this good "seed" finds good soil in your heart. Our aim is that the Seeds of Hope will be a great source of daily encouragement to you and that God will use them to draw you near to Him

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 30 of 92

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Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 31 of 92



WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.07.24

26 28 36 63 66 15

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$331,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 10
DRAW: Mins 58 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.06.24

3 6 11 17 30 10

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$2,250,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 25 Mins 58
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.07.24

9 21 22 33 48 18

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 16 Hrs 40 Mins 59
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.04.24

11 12 20 34 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$85,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 40 Mins 59
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.06.24

10 56 58 59 67 20

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 17 Hrs 9 Mins 59
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.06.24

7 23 24 56 60 25

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000,000

NEXT 17 Hrs 9 Mins 59
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Recreational marijuana backers try to overcome rocky history in South Dakota

By JACK DURA Associated Press

Advocates of legalizing recreational marijuana in South Dakota, a mission with a rocky history, submitted thousands of signatures to election officials on Tuesday in the hopes of once again getting the issue on the conservative state's November ballot.

Supporters of the initiative turned in about 29,000 signatures to Secretary of State Monae Johnson's office. They need 17,508 valid signatures to make the November ballot. Johnson's office has until Aug. 13 to validate the signatures.

Twenty-four states have legalized recreational marijuana, including as recently as November 2023 in Ohio, but "no state has as interesting or rocky or turbulent a story than South Dakota," said South Dakotans for Better Marijuana Laws Campaign Director Matthew Schweich.

Florida voters will decide whether to legalize recreational marijuana this fall. Similar measure efforts are underway in other states, including North Dakota.

In 2020, South Dakota voters approved a medical marijuana initiative and also passed a measure that would have legalized recreational marijuana. But the latter was ultimately struck down when the South Dakota Supreme Court upheld a judge's ruling that it violated a single-subject rule for constitutional amendments — a challenge begun by Gov. Kristi Noem. Measure backers tried again in 2022, but voters defeated the proposal. In 2021, Noem sought to delay legalization of medical marijuana by a year, a proposal that died in the Republican-led Legislature.

Schweich cites several reasons to support the measure, including that it would allow law enforcement resources to be directed elsewhere, increase access for people who have difficulty getting medical marijuana patient cards, and generate new tax revenue and jobs.

"I think for me, the strongest reason at its core is that if we're going to allow alcohol to be legal in our society, then it makes absolutely no sense to punish people for using cannabis because alcohol is more harmful to the individual and to society than cannabis," Schweich said.

Protecting South Dakota Kids, a nonprofit group that opposes legalizing marijuana in the state, fought against the 2022 effort. The Associated Press left a phone message seeking comment on the 2024 initiative with the organization's chairman, Jim Kinyon. In a pamphlet issued in opposition to the 2022 measure, he wrote that legalization "would swing the door wide open for higher crime rates, increased suicide rates, traffic fatalities, workplace injuries, and mental health problems."

The ballot initiative would legalize recreational marijuana for people 21 and older. The proposal has possession limits of 2 ounces of marijuana in a form other than concentrated cannabis or cannabis products, as well as 16 grams of the former and 1,600 mg of THC contained in the latter. The measure also allows cultivation of plants, with restrictions.

The measure doesn't include business licensing, taxation or other regulations. Schweich said the single-subject rule at the heart of the 2021 court ruling tied his hands "in terms of writing the type of comprehensive policy I would have liked to write."

"We're taking a conservative approach in response to this ruling and not taking any chances," he said.

Measure backers, if successful, plan to work with the Legislature next year to pass implementation legislation "that will spell out those missing pieces," he said.

South Dakota outlaws marijuana possession, distribution and possession with intent to distribute, with varying misdemeanor and felony penalties according to factors such as amount and second or subsequent convictions.

The federal government has proposed reclassifying marijuana as a less dangerous drug, a move Schweich said might help to normalize the issue for certain voters.

Schweich said the unique circumstances of the issue in South Dakota justify the third attempt. He thinks the initiative has a better chance this year, when voters are likely to turn out in bigger numbers to vote for president, and possibly to weigh in on an abortion rights initiative that others hope to get on the ballot.

More GOP states challenge federal rules protecting transgender students

By ANDREW DeMILLO Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) — Seven more Republican-led states sued Tuesday to challenge a new federal regulation that seeks to protect the rights of transgender students in the nation's schools. Republican plaintiffs call the effort to fold protection for transgender students under the 1972 Title IX law unconstitutional.

The lawsuits filed in federal courts in Missouri and Oklahoma are the latest GOP attempts to halt the new regulation seeking to clarify Title IX, a landmark 1972 sex discrimination law originally passed to address women's rights and applied to schools and colleges receiving federal money. The rules spell out that Title IX bars discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, too.

Arkansas, Iowa, Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota joined as plaintiffs in the Missouri lawsuit.

The cases come as many Republicans seek to limit the rights of transgender youth, including restricting which bathrooms or pronouns they can use in school. Such prohibitions that could be invalidated by the new federal regulation. The GOP states suing argue that the new federal rules goes beyond the intent of Title IX and that the Biden administration doesn't have the authority to implement them.

"The interpretation of the Biden administration is completely inconsistent with the statute and the way it's been interpreted for decades," Arkansas Attorney General Tim Griffin said at a news conference with Missouri Attorney General Andrew Bailey.

The federal regulation applies to all schools that receive federal funding. The latest filings bring to at least 21 the number of GOP states challenging the new rules. Officials in several states, including Arkansas, have said they don't plan to comply with the regulation.

The U.S. Department of Education said it does not comment on pending litigation.

An Arkansas high school athlete, Amelia Ford, also joined the Missouri case, saying she doesn't believe transgender women should be allowed to compete on women's sports teams.

The Biden administration's new rules broadly protect against discrimination based on sex, but they don't offer guidance around transgender athletes. Most of the states challenging the regulation have laws restricting what teams transgender athletes can play on.

Lawsuits also have been filed in federal courts in Texas, Alabama, Louisiana and Kentucky. The multiple challenges give the states suing a better chance that one of the cases will put the rule on hold nationally.

Which states could have abortion on the ballot in 2024?

By GEOFF MULVIHILL and KIMBERLEE KRUESI Associated Press

A New York judge on Tuesday removed an equal protection measure from the state's November ballot, knocking back to two the number of states where abortion-related amendments will definitely go before voters this year.

The ruling found that lawmakers failed to follow procedural rules when they added the equal protection amendment barring discrimination based on "pregnancy outcomes" and "reproductive healthcare," among other categories.

Still, the push is on across the U.S. to pose abortion rights questions to voters since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* and removed the nationwide right to abortion.

Since that 2022 decision, most Republican-controlled states have new abortion restrictions in effect, including 14 that ban it at every stage of pregnancy. Most Democratic-led states have laws or executive orders to protect access.

Additionally, voters in seven states — California, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Montana, Ohio and Vermont

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 34 of 92

— have sided with abortion rights supporters on ballot measures.

It's not clear yet how many states will vote on measures to enshrine abortion access in November. In some, the question is whether amendment supporters can get enough valid signatures. In others, it's up to the legislature. And there's legal wrangling in some states.

Some efforts that sought to restrict or ban abortion have also failed to reach ballots. In Wisconsin, the House approved a measure asking voters to ban abortion after 14 weeks, but the legislative session ended without a vote from the state Senate. Likewise, Iowa lawmakers ended their session without approving a measure asking voters to find that there's no constitutional right to abortion. Pennsylvania lawmakers previously pursued a similar amendment, but it's not expected to be added to the ballot this year. A Louisiana measure to enshrine abortion rights in the state constitution died in committee, and one in Maine effectively died when it fell short of receiving the approval of two-thirds of the House.

WHAT'S SECURELY ON 2024 BALLOTS?

FLORIDA

The state Supreme Court ruled on April 1 that a ballot measure to legalize abortion until viability could go on the ballot despite a legal challenge from state Attorney General Ashley Moody, who argued that there are differing views on the meaning of "viability" and that some key terms in the proposed measure are not properly defined.

Advocates collected nearly a million signatures to put a state constitutional amendment to legalize abortion until viability on the ballot, surpassing the nearly 892,000 required.

Sixty percent of voters would have to agree for it to take effect.

Abortion is currently illegal in Florida after the first six weeks of pregnancy under a law that took effect on May 1.

MARYLAND

Maryland voters also will be asked this year to enshrine the right to abortion in the state's constitution. The state already protects the right to abortion under state law and Democrats outnumber Republicans 2-1. Abortion is allowed in Maryland until viability.

WHERE ELSE COULD ABORTION BE ON THE BALLOT IN 2024?

ARIZONA

A signature drive is underway to add a constitutional right to abortion in Arizona. Under the measure, the state would not be able to ban abortion until the fetus is viable, with later abortions allowed to protect a woman's physical or mental health. Supporters must gather nearly 384,000 valid signatures by July 4.

Abortion is currently legal for the first 15 weeks of pregnancy in Arizona. An Arizona Supreme Court ruling in April, said enforcement could begin soon for a near-total ban that was already on the books. The governor has since signed a bill repealing that law. It is still expected to be in effect for a time, however.

ARKANSAS

Proponents of an amendment to allow abortion in many cases must gather nearly 91,000 signatures by July 5 for it to get on the Nov. 5 ballot. The measure would bar laws banning abortion in the first 20 weeks of gestation and allow abortion later in pregnancy in cases of rape, incest, threats to the woman's health or life, or if the fetus would be unlikely to survive birth. Because it allows abortion to be banned 20 weeks into pregnancy, the proposal does not have the support of Planned Parenthood Great Plains, which includes Arkansas. The state currently bans abortion at all stages of pregnancy, with narrow exceptions.

COLORADO

Advocates for a ballot measure to add constitutional protections for abortion, including requiring Medicaid and private health insurers to cover it, have turned in signatures to have it placed on the ballot. The secretary of state's office has until May 17 to determine whether there are enough valid signatures. More than 124,000 are required.

Amending the state constitution requires the support of 55% of voters.

Those backing a dueling measure — a law to ban abortion — did not turn in signatures, and the measure will not go before voters.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 35 of 92

Abortion is legal at all stages of pregnancy in Colorado.

MISSOURI

Missouri abortion rights advocates turned in more than 380,000 signatures — more than twice the required 171,000 — for a measure asking voters to approve a constitutional amendment to guarantee abortion until viability.

A group of moderate Republicans have for this year abandoned efforts for an alternate amendment that would have allowed abortion up to 12 weeks, with limited exceptions after that.

Abortion is currently banned in Missouri at all stages of pregnancy, with limited exceptions.

MONTANA

Abortion rights proponents in Montana have proposed a constitutional amendment that would bar the government from denying the right to abortion before viability or when it's necessary to protect the life or health of the pregnant person. After a legal battle over the ballot language, the Montana Supreme Court on April 1 wrote its version of the language that would appear on the ballot if supporters gather more than 60,000 signatures by June 21. Abortion is legal until viability in Montana, under a 1999 Montana Supreme Court opinion.

NEBRASKA

Advocates are trying to collect about 125,000 signatures needed by July 5 to put a constitutional amendment before voters to protect abortion rights until fetal viability. A competing petition effort would add a constitutional amendment mirroring a law adopted last year that bans abortion after 12 weeks, with some exceptions.

NEVADA

Signatures are being gathered to place an abortion access amendment on Nevada's ballot in November. Under the amendment, abortion access for the first 24 weeks of pregnancy — or later to protect the health of the pregnant person — would be enshrined in the state constitution. Such access is already assured under a law passed in 1990. More than 102,000 valid signatures are required by June 26 to place the measure on the ballot. To change the constitution, voters would need to approve it in both 2024 and 2026.

The measure is one of several attempts by Nevada abortion rights groups to get a ballot question before voters in 2024 or 2026.

NEW YORK

A judge on Tuesday removed an equal protection amendment involving reproductive health care from the November ballot, finding lawmakers missed a procedural step when they put it there.

Attorney General Letitia James said she would appeal the ruling.

The measure would bar discrimination based on "pregnancy outcomes" and "reproductive healthcare," along with sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin and disability. The language does not explicitly preserve a right to abortion in New York, where it's currently allowed until viability.

SOUTH DAKOTA

South Dakota advocates said they submitted more than 55,000 signatures — 20,000 more than required — to get a measure on the ballot that would loosen restrictions but does not go as far as many abortion rights advocates would like. It would ban any restrictions on abortion in the first trimester of pregnancy. It would allow the state in the second trimester to "regulate the pregnant woman's abortion decision and its effectuation only in ways that are reasonably related to the physical health of the pregnant woman." An abortion ban would be allowed in the third trimester, as long as it included exceptions for the life and health of the woman. Planned Parenthood is not supporting the measure.

Abortion in the state is now banned at all stages of pregnancy, with narrow exceptions.

Fans are following Taylor Swift to Europe after finding Eras Tour tickets less costly there

By LISA LEFF Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Thousands of ride-or-die Taylor Swift fans who missed out on her U.S. concert tour last year or didn't want to buy exorbitantly priced tickets to see her again found an out-of-the-way solution: Fly to Europe.

The pop star is scheduled to kick off the 18-city Europe leg of her record-setting Eras Tour in Paris on Thursday, and planeloads of Swifties plan to follow Miss Americana across the pond in the coming weeks. The arena where Swift is appearing said Americans bought 20% of the tickets for her four sold-out shows. Stockholm, the tour's next stop, expects about 10,000 concertgoers from the U.S.

A concert might sound like an odd *raison d'être* for visiting a foreign country, especially when fans can watch the Eras Tour from home via the documentary now streaming on Disney+. Yet online travel company Expedia says continent-hopping by Swift's devotees is part of a larger trend it dubbed "tour tourism" while observing a pattern that emerged during Beyoncé's Renaissance world tour.

Some North American fans who plan to fly overseas for the Eras Tour said they justified the expense after noticing that tighter restrictions on ticket fees and resales in Europe made seeing Swift perform abroad no more costly — and potentially cheaper — than catching her closer to home.

"They said, 'Wait a minute, I can either spend \$1,500 to go see my favorite artist in Miami, or I can take that \$1,500 and buy a concert ticket, a round-trip plane ticket, and three nights in a hotel room,'" Melanie Fish, an Expedia spokesperson and travel expert, said.

That was the experience of Jennifer Warren, 43, who lives in St. Catharines, a city in the Niagara region of Ontario. She and her 11-year-old son love Swift but had no luck scoring what she considered as decently priced tickets in the U.S. Undeterred, Warren and her husband decided to plan a European vacation around wherever she managed to get seats. It turned out to be Hamburg, Germany.

"You get out, you get to see the world, and you get to see your favorite artist or performer at the same time, so there are a lot of wins to it," said Warren, who works as the director of research and innovation for a mutual insurance company.

The three VIP tickets she secured close to the stage — "I would call it brute-force dumb luck" — cost 600 euros (\$646) each. Swift subsequently announced six November tour dates in Toronto, within driving distance of Warren's home. "Absolute nose-bleed seats" already are going for 3,000 Canadian dollars (\$2,194) on secondary resale sites like Viagogo, Warren said.

TOUR TOURISM: IS IT REALLY A THING?

Hard-core fans trailing their favorite singer or band on tour is not a new phenomenon. "Groupie" emerged in the late 1960s as a somewhat derogatory word for the ardent followers of rock bands. Deadheads took to the road in the 1970s to pursue the Grateful Dead from city to city.

More recently, music festivals like California's Coachella and England's Glastonbury, and concert residencies in Las Vegas by the likes of Elton John, Lady Gaga and Adele, have attracted travelers to places they wouldn't otherwise visit, Fish noted.

Travel and entertainment analysts have also spoken of a pent-up consumer demand for "experiences" over material objects since the coronavirus pandemic. Some think the willingness of music lovers to broaden their fandom horizons is part of the same mass cultural correction.

"It does seem like it's more than a structural shift, maybe a personality transformation we all went through," said Natalia Lechmanova, the chief Europe economist for the Mastercard Economics Institute.

As Swift hopscotches across Europe, Lechmanova expects restaurants and hotels to see the same boost that Mastercard observed within a 2.5-mile (4-kilometer) radius of concert venues in the U.S. cities she visited in 2023. The U.S. dollar's strong value against the euro may also increase retail spending on apparel, memorabilia, beauty products and supplies for the friendship bracelets fans exchange as part of the Eras Tour experience, the economist said.

Former college roommates Lizzy Hale, 34, who lives in Los Angeles, and Mitch Goulding, 33, who lives

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 37 of 92

in Austin, Texas, already had tickets to see the Eras Tour in L.A. last summer when they decided to try to get ones for Paris, London or Edinburgh, Scotland, too. They saw a Europe concert trip as a makeup for travel plans they had in May 2020 to celebrate Goulding's birthday but had to cancel due to the pandemic.

Goulding managed to secure VIP tickets for one of Swift's three Stockholm shows. He, Hale and two other friends scheduled a 10-day trip that also includes time in Amsterdam and Copenhagen.

"As people who enjoy traveling and enjoy music, if you can find an opportunity to combine the two, it's really special," said Hale, who is pregnant with her first child.

FOR STOCKHOLM, 120,000 SWIFTIES CAN'T BE WRONG

The local economic impact of what the zeitgeist has termed "Swiftonomics" and the "Swift lift" can be considerable. Airbnb reported Tuesday that searches on its platform for the U.K. cities where Swift is performing in June and August — Edinburgh, Liverpool, Cardiff and London — increased an average of 337% when tickets went on sale last summer.

Not to be outdone when it comes to trend-spotting, the property rentals company cited the demand as an example of "passion tourism," or travel "driven by concerts, sports and other cultural events."

In Stockholm, 120,000 out-of-towners from 130 countries -- among them 10,000 from the U.S. — are expected to swarm Sweden's capital this month, Stockholm Chamber of Commerce Chief Economist Carl Bergqvist said. Stockholm is the only Scandinavian city on Swift's tour, and airlines added extra flights from nearby Denmark, Finland and Norway to bring people to the May 17-19 shows, he said.

The city's 40,000 hotel rooms are sold out even though prices skyrocketed for the tour dates, Bergqvist said. Concert visitors are expected to pump around 500 million Swedish kroner, or over \$46 million, into the local economy over the course of their stays, an estimate that does not include what they paid for Swift tickets or to get to Sweden, he said.

"So this is going to be huge for the tourism sector in Sweden and Stockholm in particular," Bergqvist said.

Nightclubs, restaurants and bars are seizing the opportunity to cater to fans with Taylor Swift-themed events, such as karaoke, quizzes and after-concert dance parties.

Houston resident Caroline Matlock, 29, saw Swift more than a year ago when the Eras Tour came to the Texas city. Now she's making more friendship bracelets and trying to learn a few words of Swedish as she prepares to see the 3 1/2-hour show in Stockholm. The idea of seeing Swift in Europe was her friend's, and Matlock needed some persuading at first.

"I was like, 'I only want to go if it's a country I haven't been to. I've seen Taylor Swift,'" she said.

Visiting the Scandinavian cities of Oslo and Gothenburg is on their itinerary. The concert is the last night of the trip and Matlock looks forward to interacting with Swifties from other countries: "Americans tend to have a very obsessive culture, especially Taylor Swift-related, so I'm curious if the crowd will be more toned-down."

WILL TOUR TOURISM ENDURE AFTER ERAS?

It remains to be seen if the music tourism trend has legs as long and strong as Swift's and Beyoncé's, and if it will carry over to Billie Eilish, Usher and other artists with world tours scheduled next year. Expedia's Fish thinks other big-name artists in Europe this summer will prove that booking a foreign trip around a concert is catching on.

Kat Morga, a travel consultant based in Nashville, isn't so sure. Morga saw Swift perform in Nashville last year and helped two clients with school-aged children book European family vacations this summer that include seeing Swift in concert. But she thinks the difficulty of navigating ticket purchases through language barriers, currency conversions, international banking regulations and the risk of cancellations will limit the appeal of regular gig getaways.

"I think this is an anomaly," Morga said. "People aren't typically going to build their \$20,000 huge family vacation only because Taylor Swift is there. She's the one-off. She's special."

Booking Holdings CEO Glenn Fogel, whose company operates Booking.com, priceline.com, agoda.com, Kayak and OpenTable, is even less enthusiastic about concert tours as a tourism instigator. The Swift Effect causes a "little blip" when the superstar goes to smaller destinations, but for the worldwide travel industry, "one star touring around does not make a difference," he said.

"It may just shift it a little bit. A person was going to go to the Caribbean for a week vacation. Instead that person (says), 'Let's travel to the Taylor Swift thing,'" Fogel said. "It doesn't increase it. It just moves it from here to there."

Israel says it reopened a key Gaza crossing after a rocket attack but the UN says no aid has entered

By JOSEPH KRAUSS, SAMY MAGDY and MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The Israeli military said Wednesday that it has reopened the Kerem Shalom crossing into Gaza, a key terminal for the entry of humanitarian aid that was closed over the weekend after a Hamas rocket attack killed four Israeli soldiers nearby.

But the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees said no aid has yet entered and there is no one to receive it on the Palestinian side. Workers fled during an incursion by an Israeli tank brigade on Tuesday that captured the nearby Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt, which remains closed.

That limited incursion did not appear to be the start of the full-scale invasion of Rafah that Israel has repeatedly promised. But the prolonged closure of the two main crossings could exacerbate the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, where the U.N. says a "full-blown famine" is already underway in the north.

The United States paused a shipment of bombs to Israel last week over concerns that Israel was approaching a decision on launching a full-scale assault on Rafah, in a further widening of divisions between the two close allies.

The U.S. says it is concerned over the fate of around 1.3 million Palestinians crammed into Rafah, most of whom fled fighting elsewhere. Israel says Rafah is Hamas' last stronghold and that a wider offensive there is needed to dismantle the group's military and governing capabilities.

The U.S., Egypt and Qatar are meanwhile ramping up efforts to close the gaps in a possible agreement for at least a temporary cease-fire and the release of some of the scores of Israeli hostages still held by Hamas. Israel has linked the threatened Rafah operation to the fate of those negotiations.

The Rafah crossing has been a vital conduit for humanitarian aid since the start of the war and is the only place where people can enter and exit. Kerem Shalom is Gaza's main cargo terminal. Israel now controls all of Gaza's crossings for the first time since it withdrew troops and settlers from the territory nearly two decades ago, though it has maintained a blockade with Egypt's cooperation for most of that time.

Associated Press journalists heard sporadic explosions and gunfire in the area of the Rafah crossing overnight, including two large blasts early Wednesday. The Israeli military reported six launches from Rafah toward the Kerem Shalom crossing on Tuesday.

COGAT, the Israeli military body in charge of Palestinian civilian affairs, said the Kerem Shalom crossing reopened early Wednesday. But Juliette Touma, the director of communications for UNRWA, said no aid had entered as of midday Wednesday and that the U.N. agency had been forced to ration fuel, which is imported through Rafah.

Gaza's Health Ministry meanwhile said at least 46 patients and wounded people who had been scheduled to leave Tuesday for medical treatment have been left stranded.

U.N. agencies and aid groups have ramped up humanitarian assistance in recent weeks as Israel has lifted some restrictions and opened an additional crossing in the north under pressure from the United States, its closest ally.

But aid workers say the closure of Rafah, which is the only gateway for the entry of fuel for trucks and generators, could have severe repercussions, and the U.N. says northern Gaza is already in a state of "full-blown famine."

COGAT said 60 aid trucks entered through the northern crossing on Tuesday. Some 500 trucks entered Gaza every day before the war.

The war began when Hamas militants breached Israel's defenses on Oct. 7 and swept through nearby army bases and farming communities, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting another 250. Hamas is still believed to be holding around 100 hostages and the remains of more than 30 others

after most of the rest were released during a November cease-fire.

The war has killed over 34,700 Palestinians, according to Gaza health officials, and has driven some 80% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million Palestinians from their homes. Israel's military campaign has been one of the deadliest and most destructive in recent history, reducing large parts of Gaza to rubble.

Biden has repeatedly warned Netanyahu against launching an invasion of Rafah. But Netanyahu's far-right coalition partners have threatened to bring down his government if he calls off an offensive or makes too many concessions in the cease-fire talks.

The U.S. has historically provided Israel enormous amounts of military aid, which has only accelerated since the start of the war.

The paused shipment was supposed to consist of 1,800 2,000-pound (900-kilogram) bombs and 1,700 smaller ones, with the U.S. concern focused on how the larger bombs could be used in a dense urban setting, a U.S. official said Tuesday on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive matter. The official said no final decision had been made yet on proceeding with the shipment.

Russia launches a 'massive' missile and drone attack on Ukraine's energy facilities

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian forces unleashed a nighttime barrage of more than 50 cruise missiles and explosive drones at Ukraine's power grid Wednesday, targeting a wide area in what President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called a "massive" attack.

The bombardment blasted targets in seven Ukrainian regions, including the Kyiv area and parts of the south and west, damaging homes and the country's rail network, authorities said. Three people, including an 8-year-old girl, were injured, according to officials.

Russia has repeatedly pounded Ukraine's energy infrastructure during the war that is stretching into its third year and has claimed thousands of lives. By taking out the power, the Kremlin's forces aim to rob Ukrainian manufacturing of its energy supply, especially military plants, and crush public morale.

The mass barrages also drain Ukrainian air defenses of ammunition as Kyiv's depleted forces await delivery of the latest batch of promised Western military support. Ukrainian officials have been pleading for more NATO-standard air defense systems, such as Patriots.

Russia pummeled Ukraine's energy infrastructure during the "blackout winter" of 2022-23. In March, it launched a new wave of attacks, one of which completely destroyed the Trypilska power plant near Kyiv, one of the country's biggest.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has framed the attacks as retaliation for Ukrainian long-range strikes on Russian oil refineries. On Wednesday, a Ukrainian attack hit an oil terminal, injuring five workers and starting a fire, Russia-appointed authorities in the partially occupied Luhansk region said.

Russian bombardments, though frequent, have become less regular in recent weeks, and Ukrainian officials suspect Moscow is stockpiling resources ahead of a major battlefield offensive that could come within weeks.

The 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line has changed little since the early months of the war, but Russia has recently made small but steady gains in some areas as Ukraine battles with a lack of manpower and a shortage of weapons.

In a social media post, Zelenskyy noted that Wednesday's attacks occurred on the day that Ukraine observes the end of European fighting in World War II and equated Ukraine's current struggle with that conflict.

National electrical grid operator Ukrenergo said facilities were hit in the Vinnytsia, Zaporizhzhia, Kirovohrad, Poltava and Ivano-Frankivsk regions.

Two energy facilities were hit in the Lviv region, which is in the country's far west and distant from the fighting's front lines, according to regional Governor Maksym Kozytskyi.

DTEK, Ukraine's biggest private energy supplier, said the attack "seriously damaged" equipment at three

of its thermal power plants.

The attack was the fifth in the last six weeks targeting the company's facilities, DTEK said. Overall, since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, the company's assets have come under attack nearly 180 times, injuring 51 workers and killing three, it said.

Russia launched 55 missiles and 21 Shahed drones overnight, the Ukrainian air force said. Air defenses downed 39 of the missiles and 20 of the drones, Ukrainian air force commander Mykola Oleshchuk said.

Russian forces also damaged the railway station building and train tracks in Kherson, national railway operator Ukrzaliznytsia said.

US and Philippine forces sink a ship during largescale drills in the disputed South China Sea

By JIM GOMEZ and AARON FAVILA Associated Press

LAOAG, Philippines (AP) — U.S. and Philippine forces, backed by an Australian air force surveillance aircraft, unleashed a barrage of high-precision rockets, artillery fire and airstrikes Wednesday and sank a mock enemy ship as part of largescale war drills in and near the disputed South China Sea that have antagonized Beijing.

Military officials and diplomats from several countries watched the display of firepower from a hilltop along a sandy coast in Laoag City in Ilocos Norte, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s northern home province.

More than 16,000 military personnel from the United States and the Philippines, along with a few hundred Australian troops and military observers from 14 countries, were participating in annual combat-readiness drills called Balikatan, Tagalog for shoulder-to-shoulder. The drills, which started April 22 and end Friday, include a scenario of a foreign invasion of the Philippine archipelago.

It's the latest indication of how the United States and the Philippines have bolstered a defense treaty alliance that started in the 1950s amid their concern in recent years over China's increasingly aggressive actions in disputed territories in Asia.

Marcos has ordered his military to shift its focus to external defense from decades-long domestic anti-insurgency operations as China's actions in the South China Sea become a top concern. That strategic shift dovetails with the efforts of U.S. President Joe Biden and his administration to reinforce an arc of alliances in the Indo-Pacific region to counter China.

China has angered the Philippines by repeatedly harassing its navy and coast guard ships with powerful water cannons, a military-grade laser, blocking movements and other dangerous maneuvers in the high seas near two disputed South China Sea shoals. They have led to minor collision that have injured several Filipino navy personnel and damaged supply boats.

"We're under the gun," Philippine Ambassador to Washington Jose Romualdez told The Associated Press in a telephone interview.

"We don't have the wherewithal to be able to fight all of this bullying coming from China so where else will we go?" Romualdez said. "We went to the right party, which is the United States and those that believe in what the U.S. is doing."

China has accused the Philippines of setting off the hostilities in the disputed waters by encroaching in what it says are its offshore territories, demarcated by 10 dashes on a map. It says the Chinese coast guard and navy have been forced to take action to expel Philippine coast guard and other vessels from those areas. The Philippines has repeatedly cited a 2016 international arbitration ruling based on the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea that invalidated China's claim over virtually the entire South China Sea on historical grounds.

China did not participate in the arbitration complaint filed by the Philippines in 2013, and has rejected the ruling and continues to defy it.

After being hit repeatedly by missile and artillery fire and bombs dropped by U.S. and Philippine war-

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 41 of 92

planes during the combat drills, the mock enemy ship sank as black smoke billowed from its stern. The target ship was made in China but decommissioned by the Philippine navy in 2020 due to mechanical and electrical issues, according to the Philippine military.

Philippine military officials said the drills were not directed at any country. China has opposed military drills involving U.S. forces as well as increasing U.S. military deployments in the region, which it warned would escalate tensions and endanger regional stability.

For the first time in years, the combat exercises were staged in and near the fiercely contested Spratly Islands area, which China has closely guarded with its coast guard, navy and suspected militia flotillas.

On Monday, U.S. and Filipino marines transported by Black Hawk helicopters practiced securing an airfield in the country's northernmost town of Itbayat along the Bashi Channel near southern Taiwan. A small group of journalists, including from the AP, was invited to witness the air and ground combat maneuvers.

"They're not operating in safe areas. They're operating slightly further to the western bounds and they're doing that in order to practice in ways that they might have to work for real," said British Defense Attaché to Manila Bea Walcot, who watched the ship-sinking drill.

Washington and Beijing have been on a collision course over China's increasingly assertive actions to defend its territorial claims in the South China Sea, and Beijing's stated goal of annexing Taiwan, by force if necessary.

In February last year, Marcos approved a wider U.S. military presence in the Philippines by allowing rotating groups of American military forces to stay in four more Philippine military camps. That was a sharp turnaround from his predecessor, Rodrigo Duterte, who feared that a larger American military footprint would antagonize Beijing.

China strongly opposed the move, which allows U.S. forces to establish staging grounds and surveillance posts in the northern Philippines across the channel from Taiwan, and in western Philippine provinces facing the South China Sea.

China has warned that the deepening security alliance between Washington and Manila and their ongoing military drills should not harm its security and territorial interests or interfere in the territorial disputes. The Philippines countered that it has the right to defend its sovereignty and territorial interests.

"An alliance is very important to show China that you may have all the ships that you have, but we have a lot of firepower to sink all of them," Romualdez said.

The Olympic torch is being welcomed in French port city of Marseille with fanfare and high security

By SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

MARSEILLE, France (AP) — Paris Games organizers have promised "fantastic" celebrations as the arrival of a majestic ship carrying the Olympic torch from Greece is expected to draw a huge crowd Wednesday in the southern French city Marseille, where the Old Port has been placed under high security.

Paris 2024 Olympics Organizing Committee President Tony Estanguet expressed his emotion at the torch's arrival in France.

"The return of the Games to our country will be a fantastic celebration," he said.

The torch was lit in Greece last month before it was officially handed to France. It left Athens aboard a three-mast ship named Belem, which was first used in 1896, and spent twelve days at sea.

More than a thousand boats will accompany the Belem's parade around the Bay of Marseille. The ship will then dock on a pontoon that looks like an athletics track in the Old Port.

The welcoming ceremony will include a demonstration by the jets of the Patrouille de France, the acrobatic team of the French air force.

"As a former athlete, I know how important the start of a competition is. That is why we chose Marseille, because it's definitely one of the cities most in love with sports," said Estanguet, a former Olympic canoeing star with gold medals from the 2000, 2004 and 2012 Games.

Olympic swimmer Florent Manaudou has been chosen to be the first carrier of the flame in France.

Manaudou won four Olympic medals and he's the brother of swimmer Laure Manaudou, who won three Olympic medals at Athens in 2004.

"We are extremely proud," Marseille mayor Benoît Payan said. "This is where it all begins."

The show will "dazzle the world," said Payan, adding that up to 150,000 spectators are expected in the Old Port.

Marseille people "have a sense of celebration, a sense of the game, sport and Olympism in their guts," he said, recalling that the city was founded by Greek colonists some 2,600 years ago.

Payan said all efforts have been made to ensure security underwater, at sea, in the air and on the ground.

Heavy police and military presence was seen patrolling Marseille's city center Tuesday, as a military helicopter flew over the Old Port, where a wide range of barriers have been set up.

"There are various security threats that weigh on this event," the biggest being "the terrorist threat," French Interior Ministry spokesperson Camille Chaize said.

"We're employing various measures, notably the elite National Gendarmerie Intervention Group unit, which will be present in the torch relay from beginning to end," she said.

The torch relay will start Thursday in Marseille, before heading to Paris through iconic places across the country, from the world-famous Mont Saint-Michel to D-Day landing beaches in Normandy and the Versailles Palace.

The Olympic cauldron will be lit after the Games' opening ceremony that will take place on the River Seine on July 26.

The cauldron will be lit at a location in Paris that is being kept top-secret until the day itself. Among reported options are such iconic spots as the Eiffel Tower and the Tuileries Gardens outside the Louvre Museum.

Rape, terror and death at sea: How a boat carrying Rohingya children, women and men capsized

By EDNA TARIGAN and KRISTEN GELINEAU Associated Press

MEULABOH, Indonesia (AP) — Huddled on board the boat, the 12-year-old girl quaked with fear.

The captain and crew who she says had tortured her and three other women and girls were not finished. And the punishment for disobedience, the men warned, would be death.

It was the third night that the girl and around 140 other ethnic Rohingya refugees had been trapped on the fishing boat off Indonesia's coast. They had fled Bangladesh and their homeland of Myanmar in a bid to escape violence and terror, only to face the same at sea.

The 12-year-old — identified in this story only by the initial N, because she is a sexual assault survivor — tried to hide. She had already survived a night in the captain's bedroom, where she says he and several crew members had beaten and sexually abused her.

Like most of the passengers, she had survived attacks by Myanmar's military that forced her and her family to flee to neighboring Bangladesh. There, she had survived nearly seven years in violence-plagued refugee camps. And she had thus far survived this journey without her family, who hoped she'd make it to Malaysia, where she was promised as a child bride to a man she had never met.

The captain ordered more girls to join him and his crew in the bedroom.

"If you don't come to us," he shouted, "then we will capsize this boat!"

What happened next would force N and the other Rohingya on board into yet another battle for survival. For many, this would be the battle they finally lost.

In March, Indonesian officials and local fishermen rescued 75 people from the overturned hull of a boat off the coast of Indonesia's province of Aceh. Another 67 passengers, including at least 28 children, were killed when the boat capsized, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Until now, little was known about why the boat capsized. This account, as told to The Associated Press in interviews with eight surviving passengers, provides the first insight into what happened.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 43 of 92

N's journey began in Bangladesh, where a series of boats ferried her and other Rohingya across the Bay of Bengal.

The bedlam began, the passengers say, when they were transferred to a cramped Indonesian vessel that was supposed to take them to Indonesia. From there, they would be smuggled into Malaysia.

The Indonesian captain and crew separated the men from the women and forced the men into the boat's cargo holds. Anyone who protested was beaten, says Muhammed Amin.

The captain and crew — who warned they were armed, though no one saw a gun — forced N and four other women and girls into the captain's bedroom.

One of the women slipped out, but N and the others were trapped. The assaults by the captain and five of his six crew lasted all night, N says.

When morning dawned, N was allowed out to use the toilet. She hid among the other women, but the other three girls were abused for a second night.

On the third night, the three girls emerged from the captain's room, sobbing and speechless.

The captain and crew demanded fresh victims. The women refused.

The captain and crew had been drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana, the passengers say. The furious captain threatened to capsize the boat unless the women complied.

Soon after, Jannat Ullah says, he saw the captain push the steering wheel with his leg.

The vessel tilted violently, sending passengers tumbling. And then it smashed into a wave.

In the blackness of the water, people screamed for salvation, for God, for their children.

N battled her way onto the boat's overturned hull. Once again, she had managed to survive. But the three girls who were abused alongside her had not.

Amin spotted the captain and three crew members swimming away.

In the morning, a small fishing boat arrived, and took six people to shore.

Meanwhile, worsening waves had destabilized the capsized boat, which overturned again, killing more people.

Rain spared passengers death by dehydration. But as another night passed, it was clear not everyone would survive. Rahena Begum's 9-year-old daughter stopped breathing.

The passengers prayed, then slid the child's body into the sea.

Around 30 minutes later, Rahena says, the rescue ship finally arrived.

The bodies of 12 women and three children have since been recovered off Aceh, according to the UNHCR.

Although the fishing boat's crew rescued the initial six people the morning of March 20, search vessels weren't launched until that evening. Officials didn't finish rescuing the passengers until midday on March 21.

Ibnu Harris Al Hussain, chief of Banda Aceh's search and rescue agency, said the rescue operation began shortly after his agency learned about the boat.

"The most important thing is that we have ensured their safety when they were found," Hussain wrote in a message to the AP.

On April 2, police announced they had arrested three crew members, plus a fourth man who was not on the boat. They were charged with people smuggling, which carries a maximum 15-year prison sentence. Police are searching for the remaining crew, including the captain, who fled to Malaysia, West Aceh Police Chief Andi Kirana told the AP.

Police are not considering murder charges, Kirana says, because they believe the capsizing was an accident.

But N and the other passengers believe the disaster was a deliberate act of revenge by a sadistic captain and crew. And for that, N says, the punishment should fit the crime.

"They tortured us. They treated us like animals," she says. "We want the government to treat them like animals."

Kirana also said police are not considering rape charges, because they haven't received reports of sexual assault. But N says police have never questioned her.

N hopes to make it to Malaysia and to the man who wants her as his wife.

Maybe then, she says, she will finally be free — though in reality, Rohingya child brides in Malaysia often become prisoners to abusive husbands.

For now, all she can do is fight to survive another day.
"I don't want to suffer anymore," she says.

Storms battering the Midwest bring tornadoes, hail and strong winds

By ED WHITE, ALEXA ST. JOHN and SEAN MURPHY Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — Severe storms continued to barrel through the Midwest early Wednesday, unleashing a curtain of heavy rain, gusty winds and tornadoes that forecasters warned could spill out of the region.

The tornadoes were first spotted after dark Tuesday in parts of Michigan, Indiana and Ohio, while portions of Illinois, Kentucky and Missouri were also under a tornado watch, according to the National Weather Service.

As the storms raged on in the pre-dawn hours Wednesday, the National Weather Service in Pittsburgh warned that a tornado in northeastern Ohio could cross into Pennsylvania. Parts of West Virginia were also under a tornado warning.

Hours earlier in southwestern Michigan, two tornadoes blitzed the city of Portage near Kalamazoo on Tuesday night, destroying homes and commercial buildings, including a FedEx facility that was ripped apart.

There were no serious injuries immediately reported, but city officials said in a news release that the twisters knocked out power to more than 20,000 people. Most of them would be without power until late Wednesday, city officials said.

At one point, about 50 people were trapped inside the FedEx facility because of downed power lines. But company spokesperson Shannon Davis said late Tuesday that "all team members are safe and accounted for."

Tuesday's storms came a day after parts of the central United States were battered by heavy rain, strong winds, hail and twisters. Both the Plains and Midwest have been hammered by tornadoes this spring.

On Monday night, a deadly twister in Oklahoma tore through the small 1,000-person town of Barnsdall. At least one person was killed and another was missing. Dozens of homes were destroyed.

Aerial videos showed homes reduced to piles of rubble and others with roofs torn off. The twister tossed vehicles, downed power lines and stripped limbs and bark from trees across the town. A 160-acre (65-hectare) wax manufacturing facility in the community also sustained heavy damage.

It was the second tornado to hit Barnsdall in five weeks — a twister on April 1 with maximum wind speeds of 90 to 100 mph (145 to 161 kph) damaged homes and blew down trees and power poles.

Before Monday night's powerful tornado touched down, the National Weather Service had warned that "a large and life-threatening tornado" north of Tulsa was headed toward Barnsdall and the nearby town of Bartlesville.

At the Hampton Inn in Bartlesville, several splintered 2x4s were driven into the south side of the building. Chunks of insulation, twisted metal and other debris were scattered over the hotel's lawn, and vehicles in the parking lot were heavily damaged with blown-out windows.

Hotel guest Matthew Macedo said he was ushered into a laundry room to wait out the storm.

"When the impact occurred, it was incredibly sudden," he said.

Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt, who toured the twister's damage on Tuesday, said it was rated by weather researchers as a violent tornado with winds reaching up to 200 mph (322 kph). Stitt said he and legislative leaders have agreed to set aside \$45 million in this year's budget to help storm-damaged communities.

"Oklahomans are resilient," Stitt said, "and we're going to rebuild."

Areas in Oklahoma, including Sulphur and Holdenville, are still recovering from a tornado that killed four and left thousands without power late last month.

The powerful storms come amid a wild swing in severe weather across the globe that includes some of the worst-ever flooding in Brazil and a brutal Asian heat wave.

Across the U.S., the entire week is looking stormy. The eastern U.S. and the South are expected to get the brunt of the bad weather through the rest of the week, including in Indianapolis, Memphis, Nashville, St. Louis and Cincinnati — cities where more than 21 million people live. It should be clear over the weekend.

Too much water, and not enough:

Brazil's flooded south struggles to access basic goods

By MAURICIO SAVARESE and GABRIELA SÁ PESSOA Associated Press

PORTO ALEGRE, Brazil (AP) — The mayor of a major city in southern Brazil on Tuesday pleaded with residents to comply with his water rationing decree, given that some four-fifths of the population is without running water, a week after major flooding that has left at least 90 people dead and more than 130 others missing.

Efforts were continuing to rescue people stranded by the floods in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul, as more rains were forecast for the region into next week. The capital, Porto Alegre, has been virtually cut off, with the airport and bus station closed and main roads blocked because of the floodwaters.

The floods in Brazil are among extreme weather events being seen around the world.

Yoga teacher Maria Vitória Jorge's apartment building in downtown Porto Alegre is flooded, so she's leaving it behind, having withdrawn about 8,000 reais (\$1,600) from her savings to rent an apartment for herself and her parents elsewhere in the state.

"I can't shower at home, wash the dishes or even have drinkable water," the 35-year-old Jorge said in her car as she prepared to travel. She had just a gallon of water for the 200-kilometer (125-mile) drive to the city of Torres, so far unaffected by the floods.

Five of the Porto Alegre's six water treatment facilities aren't working, and Porto Alegre Mayor Sebastião Melo on Monday decreed that water be used exclusively for "essential consumption."

"We are living an unprecedented natural disaster and everyone needs to help," Melo told journalists. "I am getting water trucks to soccer fields and people will have to go there to get their water in bottles. I cannot get them to go home to home."

The most urgent need is drinking water, but food and personal hygiene products are also in short supply. Other Brazilian states are mobilizing trucks with donations bound for Rio Grande do Sul.

There were long lines and empty shelves at supermarkets in Porto Alegre on Tuesday. Some people have tried to buy bottled water since the weekend, and when they could find it, their purchases were limited to two five-liter (1.3-gallon) bottles.

Public health experts say there is also growing risk of disease as much of the region remains submerged, warning that cases of dengue fever and leptospirosis, a bacterial disease, in particular could rise sharply within days.

Adriano Hueck on Tuesday was attempting to retrieve medicine stocked at a friend's warehouse, which is partially flooded.

"If we can save some of it, there's still a chance it can be useful in hospitals," said 53-year-old Hueck, who then pointed toward another part of the city. "My house is somewhere there. You can't even see its roof now."

Like Jorge, the yoga teacher, residents in Rio Grande do Sul who are able to flee are doing so, amid fears of shortage and disease. However, it's difficult for many to leave Porto Alegre with main access roads blocked by floodwaters. The city's airport and main bus terminal are filled with water and closed for the foreseeable future.

Close to the airport, about 100 people of a nearby slum set up tents on the road, hoping to return to their shacks on small boats to try to save some of their belongings. Some roasted chunks of meat on improvised grills.

The downpour has stopped for now, but a looming cold front will bring more severe rain starting Tuesday night, mainly in the southern part of the state, according to the National Meteorological Institute. Rainfall could exceed 150 millimeters (nearly six inches) by early Wednesday.

Late Monday, Rio Grande do Sul Gov. Eduardo Leite issued an alert for several cities close to the huge Patos Lagoon. The floodwaters in Porto Alegre and other cities pass through the lagoon to the sea.

"The water level will rise and it will affect you," he said in a video broadcast on his social media chan-

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 46 of 92

nels. "Please, believe the alerts and help us save lives. Let's reduce the damage so we can be together to rebuild."

Porto Alegre's metropolitan region is one of Brazil's largest, home to around 4 million people.

Damage from the rains has already forced more than 150,000 people from their homes. An additional 50,000 have taken refuge in schools, gymnasiums and other temporary shelters.

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva visited Rio Grande do Sul for a second time on Sunday, accompanied by Defense Minister José Múcio, Finance Minister Fernando Haddad and Environment Minister Marina Silva, among others.

Authorities said Monday that they are concerned about the risks of hypothermia, as the temperature should drop to 10 C (50 F) on Wednesday. On Tuesday, Melo issued a plea for more donations of blankets.

And it isn't just residents who are at risk.

"Our personnel has been wet for five days, shivering in the cold, staying up all night, in deficient sanitary conditions, because we're sharing the same facilities with the displaced," Gen. Hertz Pires do Nascimento, the army commander of Brazil's southern region, told journalists.

During Mass at the Vatican on Sunday, Pope Francis said he was praying for the state's population.

Security is another concern. Rio Grande do Sul's public security secretariat said in a statement that police will beef up operations to prevent looting and theft. Brazil's national guard is mobilizing to the state to reinforce security.

"Even a boat was stolen this morning from the people working on the rescue. Jet Skis and houses were looted. This is deplorable and must be denounced," Paulo Pimenta, Lula's spokesperson, said Tuesday at a news conference.

The flood disaster is also likely to affect the South American country's food supplies. Rio Grande do Sul produces 70% of an basic Brazilian foodstuff: rice.

"With the rains, I think we've definitely delayed the harvest in Rio Grande do Sul. So, if needed to balance production, we'll have to import rice, import beans," Lula said in a radio interview at Brazil's public broadcaster.

After deadly Oklahoma tornado, storms bring twisters to the Midwest

By ED WHITE, ALEXA ST. JOHN and SEAN MURPHY Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — Severe storms battered the Midwest on Tuesday, unleashing a curtain of heavy rain, gusty winds and tornadoes throughout the region a day after a deadly twister ripped through a small Oklahoma town and killed at least one person.

Tornadoes were spotted after dark Tuesday in parts of Michigan, Indiana and Ohio, while portions of Illinois, Kentucky and Missouri were also under a tornado watch, according to the National Weather Service.

Forecasters warned that the storms could stretch late into the night with the possibility of more twisters and large hail.

In southwestern Michigan, two tornadoes blitzed the city of Portage near Kalamazoo. The city said in a news release that no serious injuries had been reported despite the twisters severely damaging homes and commercial buildings, including a FedEx facility.

An estimated 50 people were trapped inside the facility at one point because of downed power lines, authorities said. But FedEx spokesperson Shannon Davis said late Tuesday that "all team members are safe and accounted for."

Meanwhile, entire homes were destroyed in a nearby mobile home park.

The National Weather Service's Storm Prediction Center has cited more than a dozen reports of tornadoes from Monday evening through early Tuesday in the central part of the United States. Eight of the twisters were in Oklahoma, while Kansas, South Dakota, Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri and Tennessee all saw at least one tornado.

The powerful storms come amid a wild swing in severe weather across the globe that includes some of the worst-ever flooding in Brazil and a brutal Asian heat wave.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 47 of 92

The deadly tornado that touched down Monday night in Oklahoma ripped through the 1,000-person town of Barnsdall, about a 40-minute drive north of Tulsa. The National Weather Service there had warned Monday evening that "a large and life-threatening tornado" was headed toward Barnsdall and the nearby town of Bartlesville.

It was the second tornado to hit Barnsdall in five weeks — a twister on April 1 with maximum wind speeds of 90 to 100 mph (145 to 161 kph) damaged homes and blew down trees and power poles.

Barnsdall Mayor Johnny Kelley said one person was dead while one man was missing after Monday's twister. Authorities launched a secondary search Tuesday morning for the missing man.

"The toughest thing on me as the mayor is this is a small community," Kelley said. "I know 75% to 80% of the people in this town."

At least 30 to 40 homes in the Barnsdall area were damaged Monday night, the Oklahoma Highway Patrol reported.

Aerial videos showed several well-built homes reduced to piles of rubble and others with roofs torn off and damaged walls still standing. The powerful twister tossed vehicles, downed power lines and stripped limbs and bark from trees across the town. A 160-acre (65-hectare) wax manufacturing facility in the community also sustained heavy damage.

First responders rescued about 25 people, including children, from heavily damaged homes where buildings had collapsed on or around them, Kelley said. About a half dozen people suffered injuries, he said.

The Barnsdall Nursing Home said it evacuated residents because a gas leak could not be turned off due to storm damage. It later posted online that all residents were accounted for with no injuries, and they were being taken to other facilities.

Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt, who toured the twister's damage on Tuesday, said it was rated by weather researchers as a violent tornado with wind speeds up to 200 mph (322 kph). Stitt said he and legislative leaders have agreed to set aside \$45 million in this year's budget to help storm-damaged communities.

"Oklahomans are resilient," Stitt said, "and we're going to rebuild."

At the Hampton Inn in Bartlesville, several splintered 2x4s were driven into the south side of the building. Chunks of insulation, twisted metal and other debris were scattered over the hotel's lawn, and vehicles in the parking lot were heavily damaged with smashed-out windows.

Matthew Macedo, who was staying at the hotel, said he was ushered into the hotel laundry room to wait out the storm.

"When the impact occurred, it was incredibly sudden," he said.

The storms tore through Oklahoma as areas, including Sulphur and Holdenville, were still recovering from a tornado that killed four and left thousands without power late last month. Both the Plains and Midwest have been hammered by tornadoes this spring.

Oklahoma and Kansas had been under a high-risk weather warning Monday. The last time such a warning was issued was March 31, 2023, when a massive storm system tore through parts of the South and Midwest including Arkansas, Illinois and rural Indiana.

The entire week is looking stormy across the U.S. The eastern U.S. and the South are expected to get the brunt of the bad weather through the rest of the week, including in Indianapolis, Memphis, Nashville, St. Louis and Cincinnati, cities where more than 21 million people live. It should be clear over the week-end. ___ This story has been corrected to show that the comments from the FedEx spokesperson were made late Tuesday, not Monday.

US paused bomb shipment to Israel to signal concerns over Rafah invasion, official says

By ZEKE MILLER and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. paused a shipment of bombs to Israel last week over concerns that Israel was approaching a decision on launching a full-scale assault on the southern Gaza city of Rafah against the wishes of the U.S., a senior administration official said Tuesday.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 48 of 92

The shipment was supposed to consist of 1,800 2,000-pound (900-kilogram) bombs and 1,700 500-pound (225-kilogram) bombs, according to the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive matter, with the focus of U.S. concern being the larger explosives and how they could be used in a dense urban setting. More than 1 million civilians are sheltering in Rafah after evacuating other parts of Gaza amid Israel's war on Hamas, which came after the militant group's deadly attack on Israel on Oct. 7.

The U.S. has historically provided enormous amounts of military aid for Israel. That has only accelerated in the aftermath of Hamas' Oct. 7 attack that killed some 1,200 in Israel and led to about 250 being taken captive by militants. The pausing of the aid shipment is the most striking manifestation of the growing daylight between Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government and the administration of President Joe Biden, which has called on Israel to do far more to protect the lives of innocent civilians in Gaza.

It also comes as the Biden administration is due to deliver a first-of-its-kind formal verdict this week on whether the airstrikes on Gaza and restrictions on delivery of aid have violated international and U.S. laws designed to spare civilians from the worst horrors of war. A decision against Israel would further add to pressure on Biden to curb the flow of weapons and money to Israel's military.

Biden's administration in April began reviewing future transfers of military assistance as Netanyahu's government appeared to move closer toward an invasion of Rafah, despite months of opposition from the White House. The official said the decision to pause the shipment was made last week and no final decision had been made yet on whether to proceed with the shipment at a later date.

U.S. officials had declined for days to comment on the halted transfer, word of which came as Biden on Tuesday described U.S. support for Israel as "ironclad, even when we disagree."

Press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre declined to square the arms holdup with Biden's rhetoric in support of Israel, saying only, "Two things could be true."

Israeli troops on Tuesday seized control of Gaza's vital Rafah border crossing in what the White House described as a limited operation that stopped short of the full-on Israeli invasion of the city that Biden has repeatedly warned against on humanitarian grounds, most recently in a Monday call with Netanyahu.

Israel has ordered the evacuation of 100,000 Palestinians from the city. Israeli forces have also carried out what it describes as "targeted strikes" on the eastern part of Rafah and captured the Rafah crossing, a critical conduit for the flow of humanitarian aid along the Gaza-Egypt border.

Privately, concern has mounted inside the White House about what's unfolding in Rafah, but publicly administration officials have stressed that they did not think the operations had defied Biden's warnings against a widescale operation in the city.

White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said Israel described the operation along the Gaza-Egypt border in eastern Rafah as "an operation of limited scale and duration" aimed at cutting off Hamas arms smuggling, but also said the U.S. would monitor the fighting.

Just last month, Congress passed a \$95 billion national security bill that included funding for Ukraine, Israel and other allies. The package included more than \$14 billion in military aid for Israel, though the stalled transfer was not related to that measure.

The State Department is separately considering whether to approve the continued transfer of Joint Direct Attack Munition kits, which place precision guidance systems onto bombs, to Israel, but the review didn't pertain to imminent shipments.

The U.S. dropped the 2,000-pound bomb sparingly in its long war against the Islamic State militant group. Israel, by contrast, has used the bomb frequently in the seven-month Gaza war. Experts say the use of the weapon, in part, has helped drive the enormous Palestinian casualty count that the Hamas-run health ministry puts at more than 34,000 dead, though it doesn't distinguish between militants and civilians.

The U.S.-Israel relationship has been close through both Democratic and Republican administrations. But there have been other moments of deep tension since the founding in which U.S. leaders have threatened to hold up aid in attempt to sway Israeli leadership.

President Dwight Eisenhower pressured Israel with the threat of sanctions into withdrawing from the Sinai in 1957 in the midst of the Suez Crisis. Ronald Reagan delayed the delivery of F16 fighter jets to Israel at

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 49 of 92

a time of escalating violence in the Middle East. President George H.W. Bush held up \$10 billion in loan guarantees to force the cessation of Israeli settlement activity in the occupied territories.

Grit, humor, grief and gloom mix as Ukrainians face a dangerous new phase in the war

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Paintbrush in hand, Anastasiya Sereda is working on a painting of a chubby-faced panda in the uniform of a Ukrainian soldier.

Propped on her easel is the reason why — a photo of her boyfriend Bohdan, a burly serviceman with a gentle smile.

“He looks like a panda,” Sereda said in explanation, alternately laughing and choking with tears as she talked about her partner, who was killed almost a year ago on the front line in eastern Ukraine. Taking part in an art class for women bereaved by war, she’s trying to capture her boyfriend’s humor and heroism, and channel her roiling emotions onto canvas.

Many other Ukrainians also are wrestling with a potent mix of emotions — including grief, anger, humor, defiance and fear — as they face a new phase in the war with growing concern about international support for their cause.

Most remain firm in their resolve to drive out the Russian invaders and decide their country’s future course. Many also worry that international attention is distracted by the Israel-Hamas war and other concerns, and that allies aren’t delivering much-needed weapons and ammunition. Foreign visitors are often told to go home with a message: Send air defenses, especially U.S.-made Patriot missiles, to close Ukraine’s skies to the enemy.

There are many grounds for worry. Russia has thrown waves of soldiers and deadly glide bombs at Ukrainian lines, forcing Kyiv’s troops to retreat from several villages along the 600-mile (1,000-kilometer) frontline in the country’s east and south. Military analysts say Russia is pushing to take as much territory as it can before fresh supplies of arms reach Ukraine from a \$61 billion U.S. aid package approved in April.

Away from the front, air-raid sirens are a routine occurrence in much of the country as Russia attacks with missiles, rockets and drones. Sometimes the attacks hit energy plants, railways or other infrastructure. Often the targets feel indiscriminate: apartment buildings, hospitals, playgrounds. All mean more lives ripped apart.

“We really want the world to remember that people are dying right now,” said Valentyna, who works at a power station that has been repeatedly hit by Russian missiles. When air alerts send her to the plant’s basement shelter, she helps make camouflage netting to send to the troops, threading strips of green and gray cloth on a string frame.

“When there’s a siren you feel better if you’re doing something,” Valentyna said. The Associated Press agreed not to publish her full name because she works for critical national infrastructure.

Kyiv, Ukraine’s beautiful capital, is once again a bustling European city with modern conveniences from craft beer bars and hip coffee shops to ride-hailing apps and McDonald’s. Residents have adapted to war, and nowadays, few head for the shelter of the subway when air alarms sound.

But reminders of the dead are all around: in the sea of yellow and blue flags in Independence Square, and the memorial wall outside St. Michael’s Golden-Domed Monastery, where people leave flowers in front of photos of fallen troops.

As some Kyivites brunched on patios one spring Sunday, hundreds of others took to the streets for a demonstration to demand the release of Azov Brigade troops who were taken captive by Russia after defending the southern city of Mariupol two years ago. The weekly protests aim to ensure the POWs are not forgotten, and draw supportive honks from passing cars.

There’s a growing gap between those who serve and those who don’t, highlighted by a recent government decision to suspend passport renewal services for conscription-age men outside the country. Though human rights groups have criticized the move, many Ukrainians agree with the government that the move

is a question of fairness.

And war also has brought solidarity, throwing together people from all walks of life and turning academics, scientists, writers and many others into soldiers.

Scores of people gathered in Kyiv's central Independence Square on a rainy recent afternoon to say goodbye to Nazarii Lavrovskiy, a medical researcher turned army paramedic who was killed in April while helping to evacuate wounded troops.

University friends, fellow scientists from his lab researching antimicrobial drugs and battle-hardened soldiers all fell to one knee on the wet pavement as his coffin was carried from a hearse to the sound of military trumpet and drum.

"He joined us, and it was strange to see such people ending up in the war," said Oleksii Palii, a veteran of Lavrovskiy's unit, the 112th Separate Territorial Defense Brigade. "At first, he couldn't cope at all, but later he became a combat medic. He earned tremendous respect from all the soldiers.

"Rest in peace, that's how it turned out."

With so much to worry about, many Ukrainians have put fears for the future on the back burner, said Anton Grushetskyi, executive director of the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology. There is concern about what a victory for Donald Trump in November's U.S. presidential election could mean, given the Republican contender's past praise of Russian President Vladimir Putin. But it's not at the forefront of most people's minds.

"People cannot (predict) their lives in a couple of months, even, because the situation is changing rapidly," Grushetskyi said.

That sentiment was echoed by Olena Herhel, another member of the "Alive, true love stories" art project, where war widows find support and an outlet for their feelings. She joined the painting group after her husband was killed in the fighting almost two years ago.

"There is no point in making plans, because no one can say what will happen tomorrow," she said. "My family just tries to get on with the tasks that we have for today."

Has Israel followed the law in its war in Gaza? The US is due to render a first-of-its-kind verdict

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Facing heat over its military support for Israel's war, the Biden administration is due to deliver a first-of-its-kind formal verdict this week on whether the airstrikes on Gaza and restrictions on delivery of aid have violated international and U.S. laws designed to spare civilians from the worst horrors of war.

A decision against Israel would add to pressure on President Joe Biden to curb the flow of weapons and money to Israel's military.

The administration agreed in February at the insistence of Democrats in Congress to look at whether Israel has used U.S.-provided weapons and other military assistance in a lawful manner.

Additionally, under the same agreement, it must tell Congress whether it deems that Israel has acted to "arbitrarily deny, restrict, or otherwise impede, directly or indirectly," delivery of any U.S.-supported humanitarian aid into Gaza for starving civilians there.

State Department spokesman Matthew Miller told reporters Tuesday that the department was trying to meet the Wednesday deadline for completing the review but "it's possible it slips just a little bit."

The administration is compelled to make a decision at a time when tumult in internationally brokered cease-fire negotiations and a threatened Israeli offensive on the crowded southern Gaza city of Rafah — a move adamantly opposed by the U.S. — could change both the course of Israel's war and Americans' support for it.

Israel's campaign to crush the Hamas militant group following its surprise October attack and the disaster that's followed for Gaza's civilians also have fueled debate within the Biden administration and Congress over broader questions.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 51 of 92

Does the U.S. call grave human rights violations by one of its foreign recipients of military support when it sees them? Or only when it deems doing so serves broader U.S. strategic interests?

Democratic and Republican lawmakers openly frame the current decision in those terms.

"While human rights is an important component of the national interest, American priorities are much broader — particularly in an era of strategic competition," Sen. Jim Risch, the ranking GOP member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and Rep. Michael McCaul, Republican chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, wrote last week in urging to Biden to repeal his February directive, formally known as National Security Memorandum 20.

But Sen. Chris Van Hollen, the Democrat who spearheaded congressional negotiations with the White House to mandate the review, told reporters he feared the longstanding desire of American administrations to maintain the strong security partnership with Israel would shape the outcome.

Israel is the largest recipient of U.S. security assistance. Palestinian suffering in the war in Gaza has churned up protests and other challenges for Biden at home and abroad as he seeks reelection against Donald Trump.

The administration's findings must be "seen to be based on facts and law, and not based on what they would wish it would be," Van Hollen told reporters last week.

At the time the White House agreed to the review, it was working to head off moves from the Democratic lawmakers, and independent Sen. Bernie Sanders, to start restricting shipments of weapons to Israel.

Israel launched its offensive after attacks led by Hamas killed about 1,200 people on Oct. 7. Nearly 35,000 Palestinian civilians, two-thirds of them women and children, have been killed since then, according to local health officials. U.S. and U.N. officials say full-fledged famine has set in in northern Gaza, owing to Israeli restrictions on food shipments and to the fighting.

Human rights groups long have accused Israeli security forces of committing abuses against Palestinians, and accused Israeli leaders of failing to hold those responsible to account.

Israel says it is following all U.S. and international law, that it investigates allegations of abuse by its security forces, and that its campaign in Gaza is proportional to the existential threat that it says is posed by Hamas.

As the suffering of Palestinian civilians grew, Biden and his administration edged away from their initial unwavering public support of Israel and began to criticize its conduct of the war.

Biden in December said "indiscriminate bombing" was costing Israel international backing. After Israeli forces targeted and killed seven aid workers from the World Central Kitchen in April, the Biden administration for the first time signaled it might cut military aid to Israel if it didn't change its handling of the war and humanitarian aid.

A senior administration official, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive matter, told The Associated Press on Tuesday that the U.S. paused a shipment of bombs to Israel last week over concerns about Israel's decision on Rafah.

Republican Ronald Reagan was the last president openly to suspend some U.S. support for Israel's military as a way to pressure Israel over its offensives.

But critics say Biden and other recent presidents have looked the other way when Israel's security forces are accused of extrajudicial killings and other abuses against Palestinians. They have accepted Israeli assurances over alleged grave abuses that would trigger suspension of military aid for any other foreign military partner, two former State Department officials who left the government last year said. The administration denies any double standard.

Now, though, Congress is compelling the administration to render its most public assessment in decades over whether Israel has used U.S. military support lawfully.

Under a 1997 congressional act known as the Leahy Laws, when the U.S. finds credible evidence that a unit of foreign security forces has committed gross human rights abuses, any U.S. aid to that unit is supposed to be automatically suspended.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken wrote House Speaker Mike Johnson last week that the U.S. found the

evidence of such abuses by one particular Israeli unit to be credible. Blinken added that Israel had yet to rectify the unit's wrongdoing, something the Leahy laws say must happen for any suspension of military aid to be lifted. Blinken said rather than suspend the aid, the U.S. would work with Israel to "engage on identifying a path to effective remediation for this unit."

Israeli officials have identified it as the Netzah Yehuda, which is accused in the death of a Palestinian American man and other abuses in the Israeli-occupied West Bank before the war in Gaza erupted.

Tim Rieser, a veteran Senate foreign policy staffer who helped now-retired Sen. Patrick Leahy craft the law, said if it had been applied to Israel, "maybe it would have been a deterrent."

Instead, "what we've seen is that abuses against Palestinians are rarely punished," Rieser told the AP.

While a finding against Israel under the national security memo wouldn't obligate the administration to start cutting military support for Israel, it would increase pressure on Biden to do so.

A report to the administration by an unofficial, self-formed panel of military experts and former State Department officials, including Josh Paul and Charles Blaha, points to specific Israeli strikes on aid convoys, journalists, hospitals, schools and refugee centers and other targets broadly protected by law. The report argues the administration must find Israel's conduct in Gaza has violated the law. Amnesty International has argued the same.

The high civilian death tolls in Israel's strikes go far beyond the laws of proportionality, the U.S. critics and rights groups say. They point to an Oct. 31 strike on a six-story apartment building in Gaza that killed at least 106 civilians. Critics say Israel provided no immediate justification for that strike.

"They're taking what we did in Mosul and Raqqa, and going tenfold beyond," exceeding even what was allowed under U.S. rules of engagement at the time in the so-called war on terror, said Wes Bryant, a former Air Force targeting expert who led strike cells against the Islamic State and other extremist groups in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. He is among those urging the U.S. to condition military support to Israel.

"If this is the new bar for 21st-century warfare, we might as well go back to World War II," Bryant said.

Israel and the Biden administration say Hamas' presence in tunnels throughout Gaza, and alleged presence in hospitals and other protected sites, make it harder for Israeli forces to avoid high civilian casualties.

Mother of Australian surfers killed in Mexico gives moving tribute to sons at a beach in San Diego

MEXICO CITY (AP) — The mother of two Australian surfers killed in Mexico delivered a moving tribute to her sons Tuesday at a beach in San Diego.

"Our hearts are broken and the world has become a darker place for us," Debra Robinson said, fighting back tears. "They were young men enjoying their passion of surfing together."

Her sons, Callum and Jake, were allegedly killed by car thieves in Baja California, across the border from San Diego, somewhere around April 28 or 29.

Robinson also mourned the American who was killed with them, Jack Carter Rhoad.

The beachside location where she spoke, across the border from the Baja California city of Tijuana, was no coincidence. She noted that her son Callum "considered the United States his second home."

Robinson noted that her son Jake loved surfing so much that, as a doctor, he liked to work in hospitals near the beach.

"Jake's passion was surfing, and it was no coincidence that many of his hospitals that he worked in were close to surfing beaches," she said.

Choking back tears, Robinson conveyed a final message that coincided with her sons' adventurous lifestyles.

"Live bigger, shine brighter, and love harder in their memory," she said.

Robinson thanked Australian officials and supporters there and in the United States.

While she thanked Mexico's ambassador to Australia, she notably did not thank the local officials in Baja California who eventually found the bodies of her sons and Carter Rhoad.

Their killers dumped the bodies of the men into a well about 4 miles (6 kilometers) away from where they

had been attacked at a beachside campsite. Investigators were surprised when, underneath the bodies of the three foreigners, a fourth body was found that had been there much longer. It was unclear if the body was related to the current case.

The fact that such killers are not caught or stopped in the overwhelming majority of cases in Mexico has led some Mexicans to protest that authorities only investigate such disappearances when they are high-profile cases involving foreigners.

Robinson said that her sons' bodies, or their ashes, will eventually be taken back to Australia.

"Now it's time to bring them home to families and friends," she said. "And the ocean waits in Australia."

Prosecutors have identified three people as potential suspects, two of whom were caught with methamphetamines. One of them, a woman, had one of the victims' cellphones when she was caught. Prosecutors said the two were being held pending drug charges but continue to be suspects in the killings.

A third man was arrested on charges of a crime equivalent to kidnapping, but that was before the bodies were found. It was unclear when or if he might face more charges.

The third man was believed to have directly participated in the killings. In keeping with Mexican law, prosecutors identified him by his first name, Jesús Gerardo, alias "el Kekas," a slang word that means quesadillas, or cheese-filled tortillas.

He had a criminal record that included drug dealing, vehicle theft and domestic violence, and authorities said they were certain that more people were involved.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese told a radio station in the Robinsons' home town of Perth in Western Australia state that every parent felt for the family's loss.

"I think the whole nation's heart goes out to the parents of Callum and Jake Robinson. It is every parent's worst nightmare to lose a son or a daughter. To lose these two brothers is just awful and my deepest sympathies and condolences and I'm sure the whole nation's with the parents and with the other family and friends of these two fine young Australians," Albanese told Perth Radio 6PR.

Albanese said he was reminded of when his only child Nathan Albanese traveled last year at the age of 22 to a musical festival in Spain.

"You do worry, but you think as well that's part of the Australian right of passage, is traveling around with a backpack and meeting people and it's how you grow as a person as well so you want to encourage them," Albanese said.

In 2015, two Australian surfers, Adam Coleman and Dean Lucas, were killed in western Sinaloa state, across the Gulf of California — also known as the Sea of Cortez — from the Baja peninsula. Authorities said they were victims of highway bandits. Three suspects were arrested in that case.

Transgender activists flood Utah tip line with hoax reports to block bathroom law enforcement

By HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Transgender activists have flooded a Utah tip line created to alert state officials to possible violations of a new bathroom law with thousands of hoax reports in an effort to shield trans residents and their allies from any legitimate complaints that could lead to an investigation.

The onslaught has led the state official tasked by law with managing the tip line, Utah Auditor John Dougall, to bemoan getting stuck with the cumbersome task of filtering through fake complaints while also facing backlash for enforcing a law he had no role in passing.

"No auditor goes into auditing so they can be the bathroom monitors," Dougall said Tuesday. "I think there were much better ways for the Legislature to go about addressing their concerns, rather than this ham-handed approach."

In the week since it launched, the online tip line already has received more than 10,000 submissions, none of which seem legitimate, he said. The form asks people to report public school employees who knowingly allow someone to use a facility designated for the opposite sex.

Utah residents and visitors are required by law to use bathrooms and changing rooms in government-

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 54 of 92

owned buildings that correspond with their birth sex. As of last Wednesday, schools and agencies found not enforcing the new restrictions can be fined up to \$10,000 per day for each violation.

Although their advocacy efforts failed to stop Republican lawmakers in many states from passing restrictions for trans people, the community has found success in interfering with the often ill-conceived enforcement plans attached to those laws.

Within hours of its publication Wednesday night, trans activists and community members from across the U.S. already had spread the Utah tip line widely on social media. Many shared the spam they had submitted and encouraged others to follow suit.

Their efforts mark the latest attempt by advocates to shut down or render unusable a government tip line that they argue sows division by encouraging residents to snitch on each other. Similar portals in at least five other states also have been inundated with hoax reports, leading state officials to shut some down.

In Virginia, Indiana, Arizona and Louisiana, activists flooded tip lines created to field complaints about teachers, librarians and school administrators who may have spoken to students about race, LGBTQ+ identities or other topics lawmakers argued were inappropriate for children. The Virginia tip line was taken down within a year, as was a tip line introduced in Missouri to report gender-affirming health care clinics.

Erin Reed, a prominent trans activist and legislative researcher, said there is a collective understanding in the trans community that submitting these hoax reports is an effective way of protesting the laws and protecting trans people who might be targeted.

"There will be people who are trans that go into bathrooms that are potentially reported by these sorts of forms, and so the community is taking on a protective role," Reed said. "If there are 4,000, 5,000, 6,000 form responses that are entered in, it's going to be much harder for the auditor's office to sift through every one of them and find the one legitimate trans person who was caught using a bathroom."

The auditor's office has encountered many reports that Dougall described as "total nonsense," and others that he said appear credible at first glance and take much longer to filter out. His staff has spent the last week sorting through thousands of well-crafted complaints citing fake names or locations.

Despite efforts to clog the enforcement tool they had outlined in the bill, the sponsors, Rep. Kera Birkeland and Sen. Dan McCay, said they remain confident in the tip line and the auditor's ability to filter out fake complaints.

"It's not surprising that activists are taking the time to send false reports," Birkeland said. "But that isn't a distraction from the importance of the legislation and the protection it provides women across Utah."

The Morgan Republican had pitched the policy as a safety measure to protect the privacy of women and girls without citing evidence of threats or assaults by trans people against them.

McCay said he hadn't realized activists were responsible for flooding the tip line. The Riverton Republican said he does not plan to change how the law is being enforced.

LGBTQ+ rights advocates also have warned the law and the accompanying tip line give people license to question anyone's gender in community spaces, which they argue could even affect people who are not trans.

Their warnings were amplified earlier this year when a Utah school board member came under fire — and later lost her reelection bid — for publicly questioning the gender of a high school basketball player she wrongly assumed was transgender.

Israel seizes Gaza's vital Rafah crossing, but the US says it isn't the full invasion many fear

By SAMY MAGDY, MELANIE LIDMAN and LEE KEATH Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Israeli troops seized control of Gaza's vital Rafah border crossing on Tuesday in what the White House described as a limited operation, as fears mount of a full-scale invasion of the southern city and talks with Hamas over a cease-fire and hostage release remain on a knife's edge.

The U.N. warned of a potential collapse of the flow of aid to Palestinians from the closure the Rafah crossing from Egypt and the other main crossing into Gaza, Kerem Shalom, from Israel, at a time when

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 55 of 92

U.N. officials say northern Gaza is experiencing "full-blown famine."

The Israeli foray came after hours of whiplash in the now 7-month-old Israel-Hamas war, with the militant group saying Monday it accepted a cease-fire proposal that Israel insisted fell short of its own core demands.

The high-stakes diplomatic moves and military brinkmanship left a glimmer of hope for a deal to bring at least a pause in the war, which has killed more than 34,700 Palestinians, according to local health officials, and has devastated the Gaza Strip.

The Rafah and Kerem Shalom crossings are critical entry points for food, medicine and other supplies for Gaza's 2.3 million people. They have been closed for at least two days, though the smaller Erez crossing between Israel and northern Gaza remains open.

By capturing the Rafah crossing, Israel gained full control over the entry and exit of people and goods for the first time since it withdrew soldiers and settlers from Gaza in 2005, though it has long maintained a blockade of the coastal enclave in cooperation with Egypt.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the capture of the crossing an "important step" toward dismantling Hamas' military and governing capabilities, and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said Israel would "deepen" the Rafah operation if talks on the hostage deal failed.

Osama Hamdan, a Hamas official based in Beirut, said the militant group would not respond to military pressure or threats and would not accept any "occupying force" at the Rafah crossing.

White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said the operation along the Gaza-Egypt border in eastern Rafah was not a full-on Israeli invasion of the city that President Joe Biden has repeatedly warned against on humanitarian grounds. Kirby said Israel described it as "an operation of limited scale and duration" aimed at cutting off Hamas arms smuggling.

Kirby expressed optimism about the cease-fire negotiations, saying Israel and Hamas "should be able to close the remaining gaps" to complete an agreement. He said CIA chief William Burns will attend further talks in Cairo with representatives from Israel, Egypt and Qatar. Hamas also sent a delegation to Cairo, which will meet separately with the Arab mediators.

"Everybody is coming to the table," Kirby said.

Fighting forced the evacuation of the Abu Youssef al-Najjar Hospital, one of the main medical centers receiving people wounded in airstrikes on Rafah in recent weeks. It was not immediately clear how many patients were moved to other facilities.

The looming operation threatens to widen a rift between Israel and its main backer, the United States, which says it is concerned over the fate of around 1.3 million Palestinians crammed into Rafah, most of whom fled fighting elsewhere.

Biden warned Netanyahu again Monday against launching an invasion of the city after Israel ordered 100,000 Palestinians to evacuate parts of Rafah. But Netanyahu's far-right coalition partners have threatened to bring down his government if he calls off an offensive or makes too many concessions in cease-fire talks.

A senior Biden administration official said late Tuesday that the U.S. had paused a shipment of bombs to Israel last week over concerns that Israel was approaching a decision on launching a full-scale assault on Rafah against U.S. wishes.

The U.S. has historically provided Israel enormous amounts of military aid, which has only accelerated since Hamas' Oct. 7 attack that ignited the war. The paused shipment was supposed to consist of 1,800 2,000-pound (900-kilogram) bombs and 1,700 smaller ones, with the U.S. concern focused on how the larger bombs could be used in a dense urban setting, according to the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive matter. The official said no final decision had been made yet on proceeding with the shipment later.

Palestinians' cheers of joy over Hamas' acceptance of the cease-fire deal turned to fear Tuesday. Families fled Rafah's eastern neighborhoods on foot or in vehicles and donkey carts piled with mattresses and supplies. Children watched as parents disassembled tents in the sprawling camps that have filled Rafah for months to move to their next destination — which for many remained uncertain.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 56 of 92

"Netanyahu only cares about coming out on top. He doesn't care about children. I don't think he'll agree" to a deal, said Najwa al-Saksuk as her family packed up while Israeli strikes rang out amid plumes of black smoke.

Families of the Israeli hostages also saw their hope turn to despair. Rotem Cooper, whose 85-year-old father, Amiram, was among scores abducted during Hamas' Oct. 7 attack, slammed what he said was the government's inaction on a deal.

"We see all sorts of explanations — 'This isn't the deal that we gave them, Hamas changed it without saying something,'" Cooper said at a parliamentary hearing Tuesday. He questioned whether military pressure was an effective bargaining tactic.

Israel's 401st Brigade took "operational control" of the Gaza side of the Rafah crossing early Tuesday, the military said. Military footage showed Israeli flags flying from tanks in the area. It also said troops and airstrikes targeted suspected Hamas positions in Rafah.

The military claimed it had intelligence the crossing was "being used for terrorist purposes," though it did not immediately provide evidence. It said Hamas fighters near the crossing launched a mortar attack that killed four Israeli troops near Kerem Shalom on Sunday and that more mortars and rockets were fired from the area Tuesday.

Israeli authorities denied the U.N. humanitarian affairs office access to the Rafah crossing Tuesday, said its spokesman, Jens Laerke. All fuel for aid trucks and generators comes through Rafah, and Laerke said there was a "very, very short buffer of about one day of fuel."

Israeli strikes and bombardment across Rafah overnight killed at least 23 Palestinians, including at least six women and five children, according to hospital records.

Mohamed Abu Amra said his wife, two brothers, sister and niece were killed when a strike flattened their home as they slept. "We did nothing. ... We don't have Hamas," he said.

Egypt's Foreign Ministry condemned the seizure of the Rafah crossing, calling it "a dangerous escalation."

It has previously warned that any occupation of Rafah — which is supposed to be part of a demilitarized border zone — or an attack that forces Palestinians to flee into Egypt would threaten the 1979 peace treaty with Israel that's been a linchpin for regional security.

Netanyahu has said an offensive to take Rafah — which Israel calls Hamas' last major stronghold in Gaza — is crucial to destroying Hamas after its Oct. 7 attack in Israel when the militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took around 250 hostages.

The United States, Egypt and Qatar have spent months trying to broker a cease-fire agreement and the release of the estimated 100 hostages and remains of 30 others still held by Hamas, which insists it will not release them unless Israel ends the war and withdraws from Gaza.

Netanyahu and other top officials have publicly rejected those demands, saying they plan to launch the offensive after any hostage release and continue until Hamas is destroyed. For now, the hostages serve as Hamas' strongest bargaining chip and potential human shields for its leaders.

An Egyptian official and a Western diplomat said the draft Hamas accepted had only minor changes in wording from a version the U.S. had earlier pushed for with Israeli approval. The changes were made in consultation with the CIA chief, who embraced the draft before sending it to Hamas, they said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the deliberations.

According to a copy released by Hamas, the proposal outlines a phased release of hostages alongside gradual withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza and ending with a "sustainable calm," defined as a "permanent cessation of military and hostile operations."

From flooding in Brazil and Houston to brutal heat in Asia, extreme weather seems nearly everywhere

By SETH BORENSTEIN, SUMAN NAISHADHAM, SIBI ARASU and FABIANO MAISONNAVE Associated Press
In sweltering Brazil, flooding killed dozens of people and paralyzed a city of about 4 million people. Voters and politicians in India, amid national elections, are fainting in heat that hit as high as 115 degrees (46.3 degrees Celsius).

A brutal Asian heat wave has closed schools in the Philippines, killed people in Thailand and set records there and in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Maldives and Myanmar. Record temperatures — especially at night when it just won't cool down — have hit many parts of Africa. Flooding devastated Houston, and the United States as a whole just had its second highest number of tornadoes for the month of April.

In a world growing increasingly accustomed to wild weather swings, the last few days and weeks have seemingly taken those environmental extremes to a new level. Some climate scientists say they are hard pressed to remember when so much of the world has had its weather on overdrive at the same time.

"Given that we've seen an unprecedented jump in global warmth over the last 11 months, it is not surprising to see worsening climate extremes so early in the year," said University of Michigan environment dean Jonathan Overpeck. "If this record pace of warming continues, 2024 will likely be a record year of climate disasters and human suffering."

When the world is warmer, it is likely to have more extreme weather and climate events, including record heat and rainfall, scientists say. And climate change is also changing weather patterns, leading to rainy and hot systems stalling over areas and the jet stream meandering, said Alvaro Silva, a climate scientist at the World Meteorological Organization.

Adding to the stronger effects of human-caused climate change is a now-weakening El Nino — a natural warming of parts of the central Pacific that changes weather worldwide — that came on the heels of a three-year La Nina, its cool counterpart, Silva said.

Scientists also pointed to 13 straight months of record hot oceans as a potential factor in the weather extremes.

This all comes as the world just finished its 11th record-breaking hot month in a row, the European climate service Copernicus reported Wednesday.

The average global temperature of 59 degrees Fahrenheit (15 degrees Celsius) in April beat the old record from 2016 by a quarter of a degree (0.14 degrees Celsius). Copernicus' data set goes back to 1950, while other climate monitoring agencies go back to 1850 but have yet to report April calculations.

Last month was 1.58 degrees Celsius (2.84 degrees Fahrenheit) warmer than the pre-industrial late 19th century. The world in 2015 adopted a goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial times, but it mostly applies to being that warm for a decade or more, not a month.

While several factors play a role in this recent spate of extremes, "climate change is the most important one," Silva said.

The trouble is that the world has adapted to and constructed cities designed for 20th century temperatures and rainfall, but climate change brings more heat and downpours, said Andrew Dessler, a Texas A&M University climate scientist.

"We're departing the climate of the 20th century right now and we just can't handle these events," Dessler said. "So they're getting slightly more extreme, but they're passing our ability to handle them."

Texas Tech climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe, chief scientist for the Nature Conservancy, said more extremes in more places are overlapping.

"Climate change is loading the weather dice against us in every part of the world," Hayhoe said. "What this means is that it is increasing not only the frequency and severity of many weather extremes, but also that the risk of compound events is increasing."

In just the first five days of May, 70 countries or territories broke heat records, said climatologist Maximiliano Herrera, who tracks temperature records across the world.

Nandyala and Kadapa in India's southern state of Andhra Pradesh set an all-time high at 115 degrees

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 58 of 92

(46.3 Celsius), Herrera said.

Nitin Gadkari, a federal minister, fainted during campaigning in the western Indian state of Maharashtra. "Heatwaves in India are by far the deadliest type of extreme weather events. At the same time, they are the type of extremes most strongly increasing in a warming world," said climate scientist Friederike Otto in a statement earlier this week.

This week in Southeast Asia, "it was the hottest May night ever," Herrera posted on X (formerly Twitter). Parts of Thailand didn't drop below 87.6 degrees (30.9 Celsius).

In late April, parts of northern Thailand hit 111 degrees (44 Celsius), while Chauk township in Myanmar's hottest region hit a record 118.8 degrees (48.2 Celsius).

Many African nations are also facing scorching heat. Herrera said it hit 117.5 degrees (47.5 Celsius) in Kayes, Mali. The capital of Niger had its hottest May night and Burkina Faso's capital had its hottest night for any month. In Chad, in north central Africa, temperatures were expected to linger above 114 degrees (45.6 Celsius) all week.

The deadly heat wave felt across West Africa last month was linked to human-caused climate change, according to scientists at the World Weather Attribution group.

In Mexico's Ciudad Altamirano, the temperature neared 115 degrees (46 Celsius) with record heat all over Latin America, Herrera said. Bolivia had its hottest May night on record and Brazil its hottest day in May.

The record-setting Brazil heat that stifled huge cities such as Sao Paulo also kept a rainstorm from moving over the country's south, turning it deadly, according to Francisco Aquino, a climatologist at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul.

There also was a massive influx of humidity from the Amazon's so-called flying rivers, or air currents that carry water vapor, Aquino explained. "These caused clouds to generate extreme rainfall," he said.

The Southern State of Rio Grande do Sul is reeling from the worst flood on record, with at least 90 people dead, nearly 204,000 displaced and 388 municipalities impacted, according to local authorities.

In Porto Alegre, a metropolitan area with over 4.4 million inhabitants, the waters took over downtown, the international airport and several neighborhoods. Authorities said it will take days for the water level to recede.

Houston is still trying to dry out after days of heavy rainfall that required more than 600 people to be rescued from flooding across Texas, including 233 people in Houston. Just northeast of Houston, about 23 inches (58 centimeters) fell.

Meanwhile, April brought the heaviest rains ever recorded to the United Arab Emirates, flooding portions of major highways in the desert kingdom and Dubai International Airport, the world's busiest hub for international travel.

Spartz fends off Republican rivals to win contentious Indiana congressional primary

By ISABELLA VOLMERT Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Two-term U.S. Rep. Victoria Spartz won a contentious Republican primary to defend her seat just months after she decided to run for reelection in a campaign that focused attention on her opposition to sending aid to her native Ukraine.

She defeated eight rival Republicans to secure her place on the ballot this fall in a solidly Republican district.

The first and only Ukrainian-born House member, Spartz previously backed support for the country. But ahead of her primary contest, she reversed her position and voted against sending \$61 billion in aid to Ukraine. She defended the switch, arguing her loyalty is to America first and saying she wanted to see policy on the U.S.-Mexico border included in the aid package, a position largely shared by her Republican challengers.

The election in the northern suburbs of Indianapolis was in part a test of whether Spartz's maneuvers would pay off. Her stance was widely shared among her competitors, including state Rep. Chuck Goodrich, who loaned \$4.6 million to his campaign. Goodrich attacked Spartz over her previous support for Ukraine,

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 59 of 92

saying she puts "Ukraine first." Spartz trailed Goodrich in spending and fundraising by millions of dollars.

"My victory in this election is a testament to the American people and my fellow Hoosiers that money and lies do not buy elections," Spartz said in a statement. "I am honored to represent Indiana and ready to get back to work to get our great Republic back on track."

The primary marked the latest twist in Spartz's political career. She won a tight primary race in 2020 and wasn't challenged for the GOP nomination in 2022. She initially planned to leave Congress last year, opting against reelection to her House seat and forgoing a chance to seek the Senate seat being vacated by Republican Mike Braun.

She later reversed course, deciding to seek another term in the House. But her shifting plans gave an opening to Goodrich to raise a sizable sum of money and raised the potential that Spartz would be the first House Republican to lose a primary this year in a race that wasn't affected by redistricting.

Statewide, Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican presidential nominee, and President Joe Biden piled up more delegates heading to their respective party conventions later this summer.

Trump took Indiana by 16 points in 2020 and is favored there against Biden this year. But in a warning that some in the GOP aren't comfortable with their party's standard bearer, former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley was still attracting support months after dropping out of the race.

Indiana voters do not have the option to vote "uncommitted." The protest-vote movement in some states against Biden's handling of the Israel-Hamas war has cast doubt on the president's Democratic support in November.

The most watched and expensive contest within the state was the GOP's six-way race to replace term-limited Republican Gov. Eric Holcomb. Braun came out on top.

Braun had quickly become the frontrunner in the race, bolstered by several advantages: name recognition, money and Trump's endorsement. He spent more than \$6 million in the first three months of 2024 alone.

During his victory speech in central Indiana, Braun spoke about his ascent to U.S. Senate six years ago. He called this year's race the "feistiest, most competitive primary" in the state's history.

Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch campaigned to slash the state's income tax. Two former commerce secretaries, Brad Chambers — who had contributed \$10 million to his campaign — and Eric Doden also ran but didn't break through with conservative voters who decided the primary.

Chambers and Doden in particular attacked Braun over his record with law enforcement in the course of the campaign. Braun proposed a bill in 2020 to reform qualified immunity, which protects police officers from most lawsuits stemming from work performed in the line of duty. He later backed down on the measure following intense backlash from law enforcement.

Once seen as a probable Hoosier State governor, former Attorney General Curtis Hill struggled to compete. Political novice Jamie Reitenour was also on the ballot.

Braun has pitched himself as a political outsider and social conservative, the same as he did in his 2018 senate campaign. He will face Democratic nominee and former state schools superintendent Jennifer McCormick, who was uncontested, and Libertarian nominee Donald Rainwater in November.

Inside the courtroom where Trump was forced to listen to Stormy Daniels

By JENNIFER PELTZ, MICHAEL R. SISAK and JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump squirmed and scowled, shook his head and muttered as Stormy Daniels described the unexpected sex she says they had nearly two decades ago, saying she remembered "trying to think of anything other than what was happening."

It was a story Daniels has told before. This time, Trump had no choice but to sit and listen.

Years in the making, the in-person showdown between the former president and the porn actor who has become one of his nemeses happened Tuesday in a New York courtroom that has become the plainspoken stage for the historic spectacle of Trump's hush money trial, where the gravitas of the first-ever criminal trial of a former U.S. commander-in-chief butts up against a crass and splashy tale of sex, tabloids and payoffs.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 60 of 92

It's often said that actual trials are not like the TV drama versions, and in that way, this one is no exception — a methodical and sometimes static proceeding of questions, answers and rules. But if Tuesday's testimony wasn't an electric scene of outbursts and tears, it was no less stunning for its sheer improbability.

Daniels' testimony had been speculated about for as long as Trump has been under indictment. But when it would happen was still a mystery until Tuesday morning, when her lawyer Clark Brewster confirmed in an email to an Associated Press reporter that it was "likely today."

But even after the trial resumed, Daniels still had to wait.

The first witness of the day was a publishing executive who read passages from some of Trump's business books.

Then, when the judge asked for the prosecution's next witness, Assistant District Attorney Susan Hoffinger matter-of-factly declared, "The people call Stormy Daniels."

Daniels strode briskly to the stand, not looking at Trump, her shoes clunking on the floor. The former president stared straight ahead until the moment she had passed his spot at the defense table, then tilted his head slightly in her direction.

As is standard in court proceedings, Daniels was asked if she saw Trump in the courtroom and to identify him. Before answering, Daniels, wearing eyeglasses, shuffled in her seat for a beat, looking around the courtroom. She then pointed toward him, describing his navy suit coat and gold tie, and said he was sitting at the defense table. Trump looked straight forward, lips pursed.

Dozens of reporters and a handful of public observers packed the courtroom gallery.

In one row alone: CNN anchor Erin Burnett, MSNBC host Lawrence O'Donnell and Andrew Giuliani, the son of Trump's former lawyer Rudy Giuliani, who wore a media credential from WABC Radio, where he and his dad host shows. Trump's son Eric sat elsewhere in the courtroom.

As she testified, Daniels spoke confidently and at a rapid clip, the sound of reporters typing reaching a frenetic tempo.

She spoke so quickly, at least six times during her testimony she was asked to slow down so a court stenographer could keep pace.

Jurors seemed as attentive as they've been all trial as Daniels recounted her path from aspiring veterinary student to porn actor.

One juror smiled when Daniels mentioned one of the ways into the industry was by winning a contest, like "Ms. Nude North America." Another juror's eyes widened as he read along on the monitor displaying a Truth Social post in which Trump said he "did NOTHING wrong" and used an insulting nickname to disparage Daniels' looks.

Trump denies her claims and has pleaded not guilty in the case, in which he's charged with falsifying business records related to a \$130,000 payment to Daniels to keep quiet.

Many of the jurors jotted notes throughout her testimony, peering up from notepads and alternating their gaze from Daniels in the witness box to the lawyers questioning her from a lectern.

Guided by prosecutors, Daniels drew a detailed scene of her alleged evening with Trump at a hotel suite in Lake Tahoe in 2006, delving frankly into details that Judge Juan M. Merchan would later concede "should probably have been left unsaid."

She recalled entering the sprawling suite to find Trump in a pair of silk pajamas. She sheepishly admitted to snooping through his bathroom toiletries in the bathroom, finding a pair of golden tweezers. Daniels even acted out part of her interaction with Trump, reclining back in the witness box to demonstrate how she said he was positioned on the bed of his hotel suite when she emerged from the restroom.

Her willingness to provide extra details prompted an usual moment: Trump's lawyers consented to allowing a prosecutor to meet with Daniels in a side room, during a break in testimony, to give her some instructions to — as Judge Merchan put it — "make sure the witness stays focused on the question, gives the answer and does not give any unnecessary narrative."

Out of the earshot of the jury, or the reporters in the room, Merchan also asked Trump's lawyers to stop him from cursing as Daniels spoke.

"I understand that your client is upset at this point, but he is cursing audibly, and he is shaking his head visually and that's contemptuous. It has the potential to intimidate the witness and the jury can see that," the judge said. "I am speaking to you here at the bench because I don't want to embarrass him," Merchan added.

"I will talk to him," said one of Trump's lawyers, Todd Blanche.

Peppy and loquacious when she was being questioned by prosecutors, Daniels was feistier on cross-examination, digging in when defense lawyer Susan Necheles questioned her credibility and motives.

Daniels forcefully denied Necheles' suggestion that she had tried to extort Trump, answering the lawyer's contention: "False."

Daniels left the witness stand just before 4:30 p.m. She didn't look at Trump as she trod past. He didn't look at her, either, instead leaning over to whisper to Necheles.

Moments later, Merchan adjourned court until Thursday — with Wednesday the trial's usual off day. Trump left the courtroom with his entourage of lawyers and aides.

"This was a very revealing day in court. Any honest reporter would say that," Trump said to journalists in the hallway outside the courtroom. He is limited by court order from saying much more about Daniels to the media.

Inside the courtroom, the witnesses to history reconciled their thoughts, gathered their belongings and waited for Trump to leave the building, so they could, too.

Stormy Daniels describes meeting Trump during occasionally graphic testimony in hush money trial

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, JENNIFER PELTZ, ERIC TUCKER and JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press
NEW YORK (AP) — With Donald Trump sitting just feet away, Stormy Daniels testified Tuesday at the former president's hush money trial about a sexual encounter the porn actor says they had in 2006 that resulted in her being paid to keep silent during the presidential race 10 years later.

Jurors appeared riveted as Daniels offered a detailed and at times graphic account of the encounter Trump has denied. Trump stared straight ahead when Daniels entered the courtroom, later whispering to his lawyers and shaking his head as she testified.

The testimony was by far the most-awaited spectacle in a trial that has toggled between tabloidesque elements and dry record-keeping details. A courtroom appearance by a porn actor who says she had an intimate encounter with a former American president added to the long list of historic firsts in a landmark case laden with claims of sex, payoffs and cover-ups and unfolding as the presumptive Republican nominee makes another bid for the White House.

Daniels veered into salacious details despite the repeated objections of defense lawyers, who demanded a mistrial over what they said were prejudicial and irrelevant comments.

"This is the kind of testimony that makes it impossible to come back from," attorney Todd Blanche said. "How can we come back from this in a way that's fair to President Trump?"

The judge rejected the request and said defense lawyers should have raised more objections during the testimony. The Trump team later in the day used its opportunity to question Daniels to paint her as motivated by personal animus and profiting off her claims against Trump.

"Am I correct that you hate President Trump?" defense lawyer Susan Necheles asked Daniels.

"Yes," she acknowledged.

Daniels' statements are central to the case because in the final weeks of Trump's 2016 Republican presidential campaign, his then-lawyer and personal fixer, Michael Cohen, paid her \$130,000 to keep quiet about what she says was an awkward and unexpected sexual encounter with Trump in July 2006 at a celebrity golf outing in Lake Tahoe. Trump has pleaded not guilty.

Led by a prosecutor's questioning, Daniels described how an initial meeting at a golf tournament, where they discussed the adult film industry, progressed to a "brief" sexual encounter that she said Trump initiated after inviting her to dinner and back to his hotel suite.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 62 of 92

She said she didn't feel physically or verbally threatened, though she knew his bodyguard was outside the suite. There was also what she perceived as an imbalance of power: Trump "was bigger and blocking the way," she said.

At the time, Trump was married to his wife, Melania, who has not been in court for the trial. Daniels said Trump told her they did not sleep in the same room, prompting him to shake his head at the defense table.

After it ended, Daniels said, "It was really hard to get my shoes because my hands were shaking so hard."

"He said: 'Oh, it was great. Let's get together again, honey bunch,'" Daniels said. "I just wanted to leave."

Trump's reaction to her testimony at the defense table prompted Judge Juan Merchan to summon his lawyers to a quiet discussion at the bench.

"I understand that your client is upset at this point, but he is cursing audibly, and he is shaking his head visually and that's contemptuous. It has the potential to intimidate the witness and the jury can see that," Merchan said, adding, "I am speaking to you here at the bench because I don't want to embarrass him."

"I will talk to him," Blanche replied.

In the years since the encounter was disclosed, Daniels has emerged as a vocal Trump antagonist, sharing her story innumerable times and criticizing the former president with mocking and pejorative jabs. But there was no precedent for Tuesday's testimony, when she came face-to-face with Trump and was asked under oath in an austere courtroom to describe her experiences to a jury weighing whether to convict a former American president of felony crimes for the first time in history.

She told jurors how she met Trump because the adult film studio she worked for at the time sponsored one of the holes on the golf course. She said they had a brief conversation when Trump's group passed through, chatting about the adult film industry and her directing abilities. The celebrity real estate developer remarked that she must be "the smart one" if she was making films, Daniels recalled.

Later, in an area known as the "gift room," where celebrity golfers collected gift bags and swag, Trump remembered her as "the smart one" and asked her to dinner, Daniels said.

She said her then-publicist suggested in a phone call that Trump's invitation was a good excuse to skip a work dinner and would "make a great story" and perhaps help her career.

"What could possibly go wrong?" she recalled the publicist saying.

The two saw each other periodically in the ensuing years, when she said she spurned Trump's advances.

In 2011, several years after she and Trump were last in touch, she said she learned from her agent that the story of her encounter with Trump had made its way to a magazine.

She said she agreed to an interview for \$15,000 because "I'd rather make the money than somebody make money off of me, and at least I could control the narrative." The story never ran, but later that year, she was alarmed when an item turned up on a website.

Perhaps seeking to preempt defense claims that she was in urgent need of a massive payout, Daniels testified that she was in the best financial shape of her life when she authorized her manager to shop her story during the 2016 presidential campaign.

She said she had no intent of approaching Cohen or Trump to have them pay her.

"My motivation wasn't money," she said. "It was to get the story out," she testified.

But Necheles zeroed in on that point, pressing Daniels on the fact that she owes Trump hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees stemming from an unsuccessful defamation lawsuit and that she tweeted in 2022 that she "will go to jail before I pay a penny."

"That was me saying, 'I will not pay for telling the truth,'" Daniels testified Tuesday.

She later forcefully denied that she was trying to squeeze Trump for money.

"You were looking to extort money from President Trump," Necheles said.

"False," Daniels responded.

"Well, that's what you did," the lawyer said.

"False," Daniels answered.

Daniels was expected to return to the witness stand Thursday, when the trial resumes.

Testimony so far has made clear that at the time of the payment to Daniels, Trump and his campaign were reeling from the October 2016 publication of the never-before-seen 2005 "Access Hollywood" foot-

age in which he boasted about grabbing women's genitals without their permission.

Before that video was made public, "there was very little if any interest" in Daniels' claims, according to testimony earlier in the trial from her then-lawyer, Keith Davidson. A deal was reached with the National Enquirer for Daniels' story, but the tabloid backed out. Davidson began negotiating with Cohen directly, hiked up the price to \$130,000, and reached a deal.

After the deadline for the \$130,000 payment from Cohen came and went, she authorized Davidson to cancel the deal. He did, by email, according to documents shown in court. But about two weeks later, the deal was revived.

Daniels testified that she ended up with about \$96,000 of the \$130,000 payment, after her lawyer and agent got their cuts.

She also said she was steadfast in abiding by her nondisclosure agreement with Cohen, declining to comment to The Wall Street Journal for a November 2016 story that reported she had been in discussions to tell her story on "Good Morning America" but that nothing had come of it. She also declined to comment for the newspaper before it broke the news of her hush money arrangement in 2018.

After that story was published, her life turned into "chaos," she testified.

"I was front and foremost everywhere," she recalled.

Prosecutors are building toward their star witness, Cohen, who pleaded guilty to federal charges related to the hush money payments.

Trump is charged with 34 felony counts of falsifying business records in connection with the payments. The trial is the first of his four criminal cases to reach a jury.

Here is what Stormy Daniels testified happened between her and Donald Trump

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Porn actor Stormy Daniels took the witness stand Tuesday in the hush money case against Donald Trump, who looked on as she detailed their alleged sexual encounter and the payment she got to keep it quiet.

Prosecutors allege Trump paid Daniels to keep quiet about the claims as he ran for president in 2016. Her testimony aired them very publicly as the presumptive Republican presidential nominee seeks to win the White House again.

Trump denies having sex with Daniels, and his lawyers unsuccessfully pushed for a mistrial midway through her testimony.

It's the biggest spectacle yet in the first criminal trial of a former American president, now in its third week of testimony in Manhattan.

Here are some takeaways from Daniels' testimony:

WHO IS STORMY DANIELS?

The case centers on a \$130,000 payment to Daniels from Trump's then-lawyer, Michael Cohen, in the final weeks of Trump's 2016 campaign. Prosecutors say it was part of a scheme to illegally influence the campaign by burying negative stories about him.

His lawyers have sought to show that Trump was trying to protect his reputation and family — not his campaign — by shielding them from embarrassing stories about his personal life.

Daniels, whose real name is Stephanie Clifford, told jurors that she started exotic dancing in high school and appearing in adult films at age 23, eventually moving on to direct more than 150 films and winning a roster of porn industry awards.

MEETING TRUMP

Daniels testified she first met and chatted with Trump at a 2006 Lake Tahoe celebrity golf outing where her studio was a sponsor.

He referred to her as "the smart one" and asked her if she wanted to go to dinner, she said. Daniels

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 64 of 92

testified that she accepted Trump's invitation because she wanted to avoid dinner with her co-workers and thought it might help her career. Trump had his bodyguard get her number, she said.

When they met up later in his penthouse, she appreciated that he seemed interested in the business aspects of the industry rather than the "sexy stuff." He also suggested putting her on his TV show, "The Apprentice," a possibility she hoped could help establish her as a writer and director.

She left to use the bathroom and was startled to find Trump in his underwear when she returned, she said. She didn't feel physically or verbally threatened but realized that he was "bigger and blocking the way," she testified.

"The next thing I know was: I was on the bed," and they were having sex, Daniels recalled. The encounter was brief but left her "shaking," she said. "I just wanted to leave," she testified.

PAYMENTS FOR SILENCE

Daniels was asked if Trump ever told her to keep things between them confidential and said, "Absolutely not." She said she learned in 2011 that a magazine had learned the story of their encounter and she agreed to do an interview for \$15,000 to make money and "control the narrative." The story never ran.

In 2016, when Trump was running for president, Daniels said she authorized her manager to shop the story around but did not initially receive interest from news outlets. She said that changed in October with the release of the "Access Hollywood" tape in which Trump bragged about grabbing women sexually without asking permission. She said she learned that Cohen wanted to buy her silence.

MISTRIAL PUSH

Midway through her testimony, Trump's lawyers moved for a mistrial.

Defense lawyer Todd Blanche argued that Daniels' testimony about the alleged encounter and other meetings with him had "nothing to do with this case," and would unfairly prejudice the jury.

The judge rejected it, and he faulted defense attorneys for not raising more of their objections while she was testifying.

Before Daniels took the stand, Trump's lawyers had tried to stop her from testifying about the encounter's details, saying it was irrelevant in "a case about books and records."

Prosecutors countered that Daniels' testimony gets at what Trump was trying to hide and they were "very mindful" not to draw too much graphic detail. Before Daniels took the stand, they told the judge the testimony would be "really basic," and would not "involve any details of genitalia."

While the judge didn't side with Trump's lawyers, he acknowledged that some details were excessive. The objections could potentially be used by Trump's lawyers if he is convicted and they file an appeal.

CROSS-EXAMINATION

Trump's lawyers tried to attack Daniels' credibility, suggesting she was motivated by money and that her account has shifted over the years.

"Am I correct that you hate President Trump?" Defense lawyer Susan Necheles asked Daniels at one point. Daniels acknowledged she did.

"And you want him to go to jail?" the lawyer asked.

"I want him to be held accountable," Daniels said. Pressed again whether that meant going to jail, she said, "If he's convicted."

The defense pressed Daniels on the fact that she owes Trump hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees stemming from an unsuccessful defamation lawsuit and on a 2022 tweet in which she said she "will go to jail before I pay a penny." Daniels dug in at times in the face of pointed questions, forcefully denying the idea that she had tried to extort Trump.

TRUMP IN COURT

Trump whispered frequently to his attorney during Daniels' testimony, and his expression seemed to be pained at one point as she recounted details about the dinner she says they shared. He shook his head and appeared to say something under his breath as Daniels testified that Trump told her he didn't sleep in the same room as his wife.

At one point, the judge told defense lawyers during a sidebar conversation — out of earshot of the jury

and the public — that he could hear Trump “cursing audibly” and see him shaking his head, according to a transcript of the proceedings.

“I am speaking to you here at the bench because I don’t want to embarrass him,” Judge Juan Merchan told Blanche, Trump’s lawyer. Blanche assured the judge he would talk to his client.

“You need to speak to him. I won’t tolerate that,” the judge said.

On the way out of the courthouse, Trump called it “a very revealing day.” He didn’t address Daniels’ testimony explicitly but claimed the prosecutors’ case was “totally falling apart.”

A JARRING SPLIT SCREEN

Trump’s appearance in court Tuesday, like all other days he’s stuck in the courtroom, means he can’t be out on the campaign trail as he runs for president a third time. It’s a frequent source of his complaints, but Daniels’ testimony in particular might underscore how much of a distraction the trial is from the business of running for president.

While Trump was stuck in a Manhattan courthouse away from voters and unable to speak for much of the day, his rival, Democratic President Joe Biden, was attending a Holocaust remembrance ceremony and condemning antisemitism.

It’s an issue Trump has sought to use against Biden in the campaign by seizing on the protests at college campuses over the Israel-Hamas war.

Semi-automatic gun ban nixed in Colorado’s Democratic-controlled statehouse after historic progress

By JESSE BEDAYN Associated Press/Report for America

DENVER (AP) — A bill to ban the sale and transfer of semi-automatic firearms was nixed in Colorado’s Democratic-controlled Legislature on Tuesday as lawmakers pressed forward with a slew of other gun control bills on the 25th anniversary year of the Columbine High School massacre.

The western state has a deep history with firearms that is pockmarked by some of the most high-profile mass shootings nationwide. Both factors loom large over gun control debates in the Legislature, complicating attempts at such bans that nine other Democratic-controlled states have in place, including California and New York.

The Colorado House passed the ban in a historic first and what proponents see as a “tremendous achievement” after roughly the same proposal was swiftly nixed last year. But some Senate Democrats are wary of the efficacy and breadth of the ban, which prohibits the sale, transfer and manufacture of semi-automatic firearms.

Colorado’s blue shift is evident in part by a number of successful gun control measures passed last year, including raising the buying age for a gun from 18 to 21. Some half-dozen proposals are nearing passage this year, including a bill to put a measure on the November 2024 ballot to tax sales of guns and ammunition. Another would give the Colorado Bureau of Investigation more power to investigate gun sales that are already illegal.

The state’s purple roots have frustrated attempts at a broader ban.

A decade ago, two lawmakers were ousted in the state’s first recall elections over their support for bills that set limits on ammunition magazines and expanded background checks.

“That history, I think, lingers,” said Democratic state Sen. Julie Gonzales, one of the semi-automatic ban bill’s sponsors. She added that the proposal’s success in the House “signals that there is a new space for us to have different conversations.”

But for now, at a sparsely attended committee hearing Tuesday, Gonzales asked that the legislation be put to rest in the face of opposition from Senate Democrats.

On that committee sits Democratic state Sen. Tom Sullivan, who would have been a “no” vote, along with Republican lawmakers who have decried the bill as an encroachment on Second Amendment rights.

Sullivan’s son, Alex, was one of 12 killed in the 2012 Aurora theater shooting at a midnight screening of “The Dark Knight Rises.” The tragedy catapulted Sullivan into activism around gun control and then public

office, where he has spearheaded many bills on the issue.

Sullivan said the weapons that the bill seeks to curtail are involved in only a small fraction of gun deaths and injuries. Those firearms include a long list of semi-automatic rifles, along with some pistols and shot-guns, with certain characteristics, such as a threaded barrel or detachable stock.

Their prohibition wouldn't make much of a dent in gun violence, Sullivan argued, and the proposal takes up immense political oxygen in the state capitol — energizing the opposition and detracting from more effective and less controversial gun control measures.

"The narrative is all wrong," Sullivan said. "That's what they want you to believe, that it's assault weapons and schools. It's not. ... It's suicides and it's domestic violence."

Democratic state Rep. Tim Hernández, one of the bill's sponsors, said he'd had many discussions with Sullivan in the preceding months.

"We both agree that an assault weapons ban is not a silver bullet to the epidemic of gun violence," Hernández said. "For us to get to a place where we are interrogating all the ways that gun violence shows up, we have to run policies for all the ways it manifests itself."

The proposal is expected to be revived next year.

Meanwhile, other bills nearing the governor's desk include a proposal to require more rigorous safety training for someone seeking a concealed carry permit. And one would require firearm dealers to obtain a state permit, not just a federal one, to give regulators greater power to enforce state gun laws.

TikTok sues US to block law that could ban the social media platform

By HALELUYA HADERO, MICHELLE CHAPMAN and BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Business Writers

TikTok and its Chinese parent company filed a lawsuit Tuesday challenging a new American law that would ban the popular video-sharing app in the U.S. unless it's sold to an approved buyer, saying it unfairly singles out the platform and is an unprecedented attack on free speech.

In its lawsuit, ByteDance says the new law vaguely paints its ownership of TikTok as a national security threat in order to circumvent the First Amendment, despite no evidence that the company poses a threat. It also says the law is so "obviously unconstitutional" that its sponsors are instead portraying it as a way to regulate TikTok's ownership.

"For the first time in history, Congress has enacted a law that subjects a single, named speech platform to a permanent, nationwide ban, and bars every American from participating in a unique online community with more than 1 billion people worldwide," ByteDance asserts in the lawsuit filed in a Washington appeals court.

The law, which President Joe Biden signed as part of a larger foreign aid package, marks the first time the U.S. has singled out a social media company for a potential ban, which free speech advocates say is what would be expected from repressive regimes such as those in Iran and China.

The lawsuit is the latest turn in what's shaping up to be a protracted legal fight over TikTok's future in the United States — and one that could end up before the Supreme Court. If TikTok loses, it says it would be forced to shut down next year.

The law requires ByteDance to sell the platform to a U.S.-approved buyer within nine months. If a sale is already in progress, the company would get another three months to complete the deal. ByteDance has said it doesn't plan to sell TikTok. But even if it wanted to divest, the company would need Beijing's blessing. According to the lawsuit, the Chinese government has "made clear" that it wouldn't allow ByteDance to include the algorithm that populates users' feeds and has been the "key to the success of TikTok in the United States."

TikTok and ByteDance say the new law leaves them with no choice but to shut down by next Jan. 19 because continuing to operate in the U.S. wouldn't be commercially, technologically or legally possible. They also say it would be impossible for ByteDance to divest its U.S. TikTok platform as a separate entity from the rest of TikTok, which has 1 billion users worldwide — most of them outside of the United States. A U.S.-only TikTok would operate as an island that's detached from the rest of the world, the lawsuit argues.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 67 of 92

The suit also paints divestment as a technological impossibility, since the law requires all of TikTok's millions of lines of software code to be wrested from ByteDance so that there would be no "operational relationship" between the Chinese company and the new U.S. app.

The companies argue that they should be protected by the First Amendment's guarantee of freedom of expression and are seeking a declaratory judgment that it is unconstitutional.

The Justice Department declined to comment on the suit Tuesday. And White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre declined to engage on questions about why the president continues to use TikTok for his political activities, deferring to the campaign.

Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi, an Illinois Democrat who is the ranking member of the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, issued a statement Tuesday defending the new law.

"This is the only way to address the national security threat posed by ByteDance's ownership of apps like TikTok. Instead of continuing its deceptive tactics, it's time for ByteDance to start the divestment process," he said.

ByteDance will first likely ask a court to temporarily block the federal law from taking effect, said Gus Hurwitz, a senior fellow at the University of Pennsylvania's Carey Law School who isn't involved in the case. And the decision whether to grant such a preliminary injunction could decide the case, because its absence, ByteDance would need to sell TikTok before the broader case could be decided, he said.

Whether a court will grant such an injunction remains unclear to Hurwitz, largely because it requires balancing important free speech issues against the Biden administration's claims of harm to national security. "I think the courts will be very deferential to Congress on these issues," he said.

The fight over TikTok comes amid a broader U.S.-China rivalry, especially in areas such as advanced technologies and data security that are seen as essential to each country's economic prowess and national security.

U.S. lawmakers from both parties, as well as administration and law enforcement officials, have expressed concerns that Chinese authorities could force ByteDance to hand over U.S. user data or sway public opinion by manipulating the algorithm that populates users' feeds. Some have also pointed to a Rutgers University study that maintains TikTok content was being amplified or underrepresented based on how it aligns with the Chinese government's interests — a claim the company disputes.

Opponents of the law argue that Chinese authorities — or any nefarious parties — could easily get information on Americans in other ways, including through commercial data brokers that rent or sell personal information. They say the U.S. government hasn't provided public evidence that shows TikTok has shared U.S. user information with Chinese authorities or tinkered with its algorithm for China's benefit.

"Data collection by apps has real consequences for all of our privacy," said Patrick Toomey, deputy director of the ACLU's National Security Project. "But banning one social media platform used by millions of people around the world is not the solution. Instead, we need Congress to pass laws that protect our privacy in the first place."

Jameel Jaffer, executive director of the Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University, expects TikTok's lawsuit to succeed.

"The First Amendment means the government can't restrict Americans' access to ideas, information, or media from abroad without a very good reason for it — and no such reason exists here," Jaffer said in a statement.

Although TikTok prevailed in earlier First Amendment challenges, it isn't clear whether the current lawsuit will be as simple.

"The bipartisan nature of this federal law may make judges more likely to defer to a Congressional determination that the company poses a national security risk," said Gautam Hans, a law professor and associate director of the First Amendment Clinic at Cornell University. "Without public discussion of what exactly the risks are, however, it's difficult to determine why the courts should validate such an unprecedented law."

Boy Scouts of America changing name to more inclusive Scouting America after years of woes

By JAMIE STENGLE Associated Press

IRVING, Texas (AP) — The Boy Scouts of America announced after 114 years that it will change its name and will become Scouting America in an effort to emphasize inclusion as it works to move past the turmoil of bankruptcy and a flood of sexual abuse claims.

The rebrand is another seismic shift for an organization steeped in tradition that did not allow gay youths or girls to begin joining its ranks until relatively recently. Seeking to boost flagging membership numbers, the Irving, Texas-based organization announced the name change Tuesday at its annual meeting in Florida.

"In the next 100 years we want any youth in America to feel very, very welcome to come into our programs," Roger Krone, who took over last fall as president and chief executive officer, told The Associated Press in an interview before the announcement.

The change will officially take effect on Feb. 8, 2025, timed to the organization's 115th birthday.

The organization began allowing gay youth in 2013 and ended a blanket ban on gay adult leaders in 2015. In 2017, it made the historic announcement that girls would be accepted as Cub Scouts as of 2018 and into the flagship Boy Scout program — renamed Scouts BSA — in 2019. Over 6,000 girls have now achieved the vaunted Eagle Scout rank.

The Girl Scouts of the USA, a separate organization, has clashed with the Boy Scouts in recent years over its recruitment of girls. The Girl Scouts did not respond to requests seeking comment Tuesday.

A wave of reaction to the change on social media included criticism that the word "boy" will no longer appear in the name, including from Republican Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas.

Like other organizations, the Boy Scouts of America lost members during the pandemic, when participation was difficult. After a high point over the last decade of over 2 million members in 2018, the organization currently serves just over 1 million youths, including more than 176,000 girls and young women. Membership peaked in 1972 at almost 5 million.

Generations of scouts have included eventual presidents (among them Bill Clinton and Gerald Ford), astronauts (Buzz Aldrin) and celebrities (actor Harrison Ford, filmmaker Steven Spielberg). Krone said the organization must continue to attract newcomers.

"Part of my job is to reduce all the barriers I possibly can for people to accept us as an organization and to join," he said.

There were nearly 1,000 young women in the inaugural class of female Eagle Scouts in 2021, including Selby Chipman. The all-girls troop she was a founding member of in her hometown of Oak Ridge, North Carolina, has grown from five girls to nearly 50, and she thinks the name change will encourage even more girls to join.

"Girls were like: 'You can join Boy Scouts of America?'" said Chipman, now a 20-year-old college student and assistant scoutmaster of her troop.

Rebranding can risk alienating supporters who think the change is unnecessary, said David Aaker, vice chairman of the national branding and marketing firm Prophet. But he described the Boy Scouts' rebranding as savvy, saying it kickstarts a new conversation about the organization while not being so drastic that it strays too far from its original scouting mission.

"It's a one-time chance to tell a new story," said Aaker, who also is a professor emeritus at the University of California-Berkeley Haas business school.

The move to accept girls throughout the Boy Scout ranks strained a bond with the Girl Scouts of the USA, which sued, saying it created marketplace confusion and damaged its recruitment efforts. They reached a settlement agreement after a judge rejected those claims, saying both groups are free to use words like "scouts" and "scouting."

Past pressure to allow girls into the Boy Scouts had come from those including the National Organization for Women, which applauded Tuesday's announcement.

Much of the online criticism invoked the word "woke," including Rep. Andrew Clyde, a Georgia Republican,

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 69 of 92

who said on X: "Wokeness destroys everything it touches."

But Lois Alvar, a 20-year-old Eagle Scout and assistant scoutmaster from the Dallas area, said the new name helps all scouts feel accepted. "Having it nationally recognized that girls are being welcomed and included in scouting allows it to be a more safe space, just in general," she said.

The Boy Scouts' \$2.4 billion bankruptcy reorganization plan took effect last year, allowing the organization to keep operating while compensating the more than 80,000 men who say they were sexually abused as children while in scouting.

Although the organization won't officially become Scouting America until next year, Krone said he expects people will start immediately using the name.

"It sends this really strong message to everyone in America that they can come to this program, they can bring their authentic self, they can be who they are and they will be welcomed here," Krone said.

More and faster:

Electricity from clean sources reaches 30% of global total

By ISABELLA O'MALLEY Associated Press

Billions of people are using different kinds of energy each day and 2023 was a record-breaking year for renewable energy sources — ones that don't emit planet-warming pollutants like carbon dioxide and methane — according to a report published Wednesday by Ember, a think tank based in London.

For the first time, 30% of electricity produced worldwide was from clean energy sources as the number of solar and wind farms continued to grow fast.

Of the types of clean energy generated last year, hydroelectric dams produced the most. That's the same as in most years. Yet droughts in India, China, North America and Mexico meant hydropower hit a five-year low. Research shows climate change is causing droughts to develop more quickly and be more severe.

People used more electricity than ever last year, about 2% more, an increase of about as much as Canada uses in a year. Some of this new demand was for heat pumps, which are an efficient way to both heat and cool buildings, and for electric vehicles. It was also for electrolyzers, special machines used to get hydrogen out of water, for energy. These are all technologies that provide solutions to climate change.

Other increased demand was for electricity to feed new data centers and for air conditioning as places around the world become hotter.

Solar made up the biggest share of new clean energy last year. More than twice as much solar power was added as coal power. It was the 19th year in a row that solar was the fastest-growing source of electricity generation. A surge in solar installations happened at the end of the year and the report predicts 2024 will see an even larger jump.

China added more renewable energy than any other country last year — 51% of the new solar power and 60% of the new wind power globally. China, the European Union, the United States and Brazil together accounted for 81% of new solar generation in 2023.

Yet China was also responsible for 55% of coal generation globally and 60% of China's electricity generation came from coal. The International Energy Agency says coal is the most carbon-intensive of the fossil fuels.

Scientists say emissions from burning fuels like coal must ramp steeply down to protect Earth's climate, yet there was an increase in electricity made from burning fossil fuels. China, India, Vietnam and Mexico were responsible for nearly all of the rise.

The report said some countries burned coal to make up for the loss of hydroelectric power they experienced when drought caused their reservoirs to dry up. This is an example of a vicious cycle — when climate change prompts the use of more of the substances that cause climate change in the first place.

Despite all the growth in clean energy, fossil fuels still made up the majority of global electricity generated last year, causing a 1% rise in global power sector emissions. Scientists say even if we slashed all greenhouse gas emissions today, the planet would continue to warm for years because of the amount of pollutants already added to the atmosphere.

Analysts expect the world to use even more electricity in 2024. But renewable energy generation is forecast to grow even faster. That could mean a 2% drop (333 terawatt-hours) in energy generated from fossil fuels.

US service member shot and killed by Florida police identified by the Air Force

By TARA COPP and FREIDA FRISARO Associated Press

FORT WALTON BEACH, Fla. (AP) — The U.S. Air Force said an airman based at the Special Operations Wing at Hurlburt Field, Florida, was shot and killed Friday during an incident involving a sheriff's deputy.

Senior Airman Roger Fortson, 23, died at his off-base residence, the U.S. Air Force said in a statement released Monday.

A deputy responding to the call of a disturbance in progress "reacted in self-defense after he encountered a 23-year-old man armed with a gun," the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office said in a news release Friday.

Fortson was taken to a hospital where he died, officials said. The deputy involved was placed on administrative leave pending an investigation into the incident.

Fortson was assigned to the 4th Special Operations Squadron as a special missions aviator, where one of his roles as a member of the squadron's AC-130J Ghost Rider aircrew was to load the gunship's 30mm and 105mm cannons during missions.

In a statement late Tuesday, Okaloosa County Sheriff Eric Aden said the Florida Department of Law Enforcement will investigate the incident and the State Attorney's Office will conduct an independent review. He said the sheriff's office was "saddened" by the shooting.

The Air Force's 1st Special Operations Wing said its priorities are "providing casualty affairs service to the family, supporting the squadron during this tragic time, and ensuring resources are available for all who are impacted."

Some colleges that had been permissive of pro-Palestinian protests begin taking a tougher stance

By CHARLES REX ARBOGAST, PAT EATON-ROBB and STEVE LeBLANC Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Police cleared a pro-Palestinian tent encampment at the University of Chicago on Tuesday after administrators who had initially adopted a permissive approach said the protest had crossed a line and caused growing concerns about safety.

University President Paul Alivisatos acknowledged the school's role as a protector of freedom of speech after officers in riot gear blocked access to the school's Quad but also took an enough-is-enough stance.

"The university remains a place where dissenting voices have many avenues to express themselves, but we cannot enable an environment where the expression of some dominates and disrupts the healthy functioning of the community for the rest," Alivisatos wrote in a message to the university community.

Tensions have continued to ratchet up in standoffs with protesters on campuses across the U.S. — and increasingly, in Europe — nearly three weeks into a movement launched by a protest at Columbia University. Some colleges cracked down immediately on protests against the Israel-Hamas war. Among those that have tolerated the tent encampments, some have begun to lose patience and call in police over concerns about disruptions to campus life, safety and the involvement of nonstudents.

Since April 18, just over 2,600 people have been arrested on 50 campuses, figures based on AP reporting and statements from universities and law enforcement agencies.

But not all schools are taking that approach, with some letting protesters hold rallies and organize their encampments as they see fit.

The president of Wesleyan University, a liberal arts school in Connecticut, has commended the on-campus demonstration — which includes a pro-Palestinian tent encampment — as an act of political expression. The camp there has grown from about 20 tents a week ago to more than 100.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 71 of 92

"The protesters' cause is important — bringing attention to the killing of innocent people," university President Michael Roth wrote to the campus community Thursday. "And we continue to make space for them to do so, as long as that space is not disruptive to campus operations."

The Rhode Island School of Design, where students started occupying a building Monday, affirms students' rights to freedom of speech and peaceful assembly and supports all members of the community, a spokesperson said. The school said President Crystal Williams spent more than five hours with the protesters that evening discussing their demands.

On Tuesday the school announced it was relocating classes that were scheduled to take place in the building. It was covered with posters reading "Free Palestine" and "Let Gaza Live," and dove was drawn in colored chalk on the sidewalk.

Campuses have tried tactics from appeasement to threats of disciplinary action to resolve the protests and clear the way for commencements.

At the University of Chicago, hundreds of protesters gathered for at least eight days until administrators warned them Friday to leave or face removal. On Tuesday, law enforcement dismantled the encampment.

Officers later picked up a barricade erected to keep protesters out of the Quad and moved it toward the demonstrators, some of whom chanted, "Up, up with liberation. Down, down with occupation!" Police and protesters pushed back and forth along the barricade as the officers moved to reestablish control.

Officials at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, told deans and department chairs Monday that some students have been informed by instructors opposing the suspension of student protesters that they will withhold grades.

The school provost's office said it will support "sanctions for any instructor who is found to have improperly withheld grades."

At the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, protesters were given a deadline to voluntarily leave or face suspension. Many left, according to an MIT spokesperson, who said protesters breached fencing after the arrival of demonstrators from outside the university. On Monday night, dozens remained at the encampment in a calmer atmosphere.

MIT officials said the following day that dozens of interim suspensions and discipline committee referrals were in process, actions taken to ensure the "safety of our community."

Sam Ihns, a graduate student studying mechanical engineering and a member of MIT Jews for a Cease-fire, said the group has been there for two weeks and is calling for an end to the killing in Gaza.

"Specifically, our encampment is protesting MIT's direct research ties to the Israeli Ministry of Defense," he said.

Many protesters want schools to divest from companies that do business with Israel or otherwise contribute to the war effort. Others simply want to call attention to the deaths in Gaza and for the war to end.

Wesleyan senior Uday Narayanan said students there are prepared to protest through the summer if that's what it takes for their demands to be met.

"Our tuition dollars are still going toward the brutalization of Palestinians," the 21-year-old physics major said. "So, ultimately, even though our president has said, 'Oh, I'm not going to call the cops. Oh, I'm not going to beat up students,' that's still not enough, and that's not the bare minimum for us."

And as Wesleyan's May 26 commencement approaches, some protesters fear they will be forcibly removed from the center of campus, adjacent to the field where the ceremony is to take place.

"The longer we are here, the more that their facade of laid back, hands off is falling away," said Batya Kline, a 22-year-old graduate student. "We know that the university does not want us here, and we know that they can change their pace at the drop of a hat without letting us know."

Frank Straub, senior director of violence prevention at nonprofit advocacy organization Safe and Sound Schools, said these and past protests have shown the need for early dialogue among the university, police and protesters to establish ground rules.

Straub said Wesleyan, for example, needs to have conversations about commencement and where protesters can be, and should make sure a plan is in place to respond, should protesters want to get arrested, so that can be done without violence.

"By their nature, protests are adversarial, but I think we can have controlled adversity," he added. "And I think the more campus officials are engaged with the protesters and the more police are included in those conversations, that's critically important."

The protests stem from the conflict that started Oct. 7 when Hamas militants attacked southern Israel, killing about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking roughly 250 hostages.

Vowing to destroy Hamas, Israel launched an offensive in Gaza that has killed more than 34,500 Palestinians, about two-thirds of them women and children, according to the Health Ministry in the Hamas-ruled territory. Israeli strikes have devastated the enclave and displaced most of its inhabitants.

The Latest | Stormy Daniels to return to witness stand on Thursday as court adjourns

NEW YORK (AP) — As the third week of witness testimony in Donald Trump's hush money trial takes place, all eyes are on Stormy Daniels, who took the stand Tuesday morning and recounted for jurors the lead-up to meeting Trump and a 2006 sexual encounter she has said the two engaged in. Trump denies the encounter took place.

The alleged sexual encounter and the \$130,000 she was paid to keep silent about it during the 2016 presidential election are at the heart of the charges against the former president.

Daniels, whose real name is Stephanie Clifford, was called to the witness stand mid-morning, following testimony from a Penguin Random House executive.

Hanging in the background of Tuesday's testimony was the question of whether Trump will be able to abide by the terms of his now twice-broken gag order that bars him from speaking publicly about jurors, witnesses and some others connected to the case.

Judge Juan M. Merchan on Monday found Trump in contempt of court for a second time, fining him \$1,000 for a single violation and sternly warning the loquacious former president that jail time would be considered for future violations "if necessary and appropriate."

New York City Mayor Eric Adams said Tuesday that the city's jail system will be ready to house the former president if necessary.

Tuesday's testimony digs further into the events and people involved in what prosecutors have said was a scheme to influence the 2016 presidential election by buying and burying negative stories about the then-candidate.

The trial is in its 13th day.

Trump is accused of falsifying internal business records to cover up hush money payments — including the payment to Daniels — recording them instead as legal expenses.

Trump has pleaded not guilty to 34 felony counts of falsifying business records.

The case is the first-ever criminal trial of a former U.S. president and the first of four prosecutions of Trump to reach a jury.

Currently:

- Read the judge's ruling on Trump's most recent gag order violation
- Hush money, catch and kill and more: Terms to know in Trump trial
- What Trump's gag order means in his hush money case
- Key players: Who's who at Donald Trump's hush money criminal trial
- The hush money case is just one of Trump's legal cases. See the others here

Here's the latest:

TRUMP AND DANIELS' DEMEANORS WERE DIFFERENT FOR CROSS-EXAMINATION

As the defense cross-examined Stormy Daniels during her testimony Tuesday afternoon, both her demeanor and Trump's stood in contrast to their respective manners when the prosecution conducted its questioning earlier in the day.

Daniels was considerably feistier on cross-examination, a contrast from her peppy, loquacious posture when she was being questioned by the prosecution. Her credibility and motives under attack, Daniels dug

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 73 of 92

in at times in the face of pointed questioning from defense lawyer Susan Necheles.

Necheles worked to paint Daniels as a money-hungry liar, pointing to inconsistencies in her accounts over the years and suggesting she's taken to her role as a Trump foil — akin to Michael Cohen, his former lawyer — because it's brought her riches and relevance.

At other times, Daniels also appeared petulant or to be appealing to the jury's humanity.

Trump, meanwhile, seemed more relaxed after his lawyers started questioning Daniels, sitting back in his seat, a placid expression on his face. It was a stark contrast from Trump's tense demeanor earlier in the morning, when he scowled and shook his head through much of Daniels' description of their alleged sexual encounter, a claim he has denied.

COURT ADJOURNS FOR THE DAY

Court in Donald Trump's hush money case has adjourned for the day. Proceedings will resume with Stormy Daniels returning to the stand on Thursday morning.

DANIELS DENIES TRYING TO 'EXTORT' TRUMP

During cross-examination in Donald Trump's hush money trial on Tuesday, Stormy Daniels forcefully denied the defense's suggestion that she was "looking to extort money" from the former president.

Twice, Daniels told Trump attorney Susan Necheles that the suggestion was "false."

Necheles was questioning why Daniels decided to sell her story when, as she testified, a stranger had threatened her to keep quiet in 2011 after a gossip site reported that she'd had a sexual encounter with Trump.

"I was a very different and much braver person in 2016 than I was in 2011. And Donald Trump was not just a guy on television, he was running for president," Daniels testified.

DEFENSE HONES IN ON INCOMPLETE FINANCIAL DISCLOSURES

In an apparent effort to suggest that Stormy Daniels has a financial motive to testify against Donald Trump, defense attorney Susan Necheles grilled her about not having completely filled out or signed a financial disclosure form related to her legal fee debt to him.

"Isn't it true," Necheles asked, "that you're hoping that if President Trump gets convicted, you won't have to pay him?"

"I hope that I don't have to pay him no matter what happens," Daniels retorted.

DEFENSE BEGINS CROSS-EXAMINATION OF DANIELS

Defense attorney Susan Necheles began cross-examination of Stormy Daniels Tuesday afternoon with a testy exchange about whether Daniels rehearsed her testimony, referring to a previous statement in which she said she had undergone "grueling" mock trial preparations.

Daniels said that did not amount to a rehearsal.

"The memories were hard to bring up, they were painful," she said.

Necheles then asked Daniels' about her feelings toward Donald Trump.

"Am I correct that you hate President Trump?" Necheles asked Daniels.

"Yes," she said.

"And you want him to go to jail?"

"I want him to be held accountable," Daniels said. Asked again by Necheles whether that meant going to jail, she said: "If he's convicted."

Necheles further pressed Daniels on the fact that she owes Trump hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees stemming from her unsuccessful defamation lawsuit — and tweeted in 2022 that she "will go to jail before I pay a penny."

"That was me saying, 'I will not pay for telling the truth,'" Daniels testified.

Necheles also asked about another Daniels tweet about not giving "a dime" to Trump, whom she described using a crude pejorative.

"You despise him, and you call him names," Necheles said.

Daniels said that was because Trump had called her names in his own social media posts.

DANIELS SOUGHT TO GET OUT OF NONDISCLOSURE AGREEMENT IN 2018

Stormy Daniels testified that she sought to get out of her nondisclosure agreement in 2018 "so I could

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 74 of 92

stand up for myself.”

She hired Michael Avenatti, who sued Donald Trump and prevailed in getting the non-disclosure agreement nullified. Trump was ordered to pay Daniels about \$100,000 in legal fees.

Daniels went on to give an interview to Anderson Cooper on “60 Minutes” and wrote a book, “Full Disclosure,” about her life, career and her alleged encounter with Trump.

After a prosecutor asked if she was still represented by Avenatti, Daniels said “no,” and referenced his legal downfalls — including a conviction for defrauding Daniels.

DANIELS SAYS HER LIFE DEVOLVED INTO ‘CHAOS’ AFTER 2018 WSJ ARTICLE

The year 2017 was Stormy Daniels “best year ever,” she testified Tuesday.

She was winning professional accolades for her work writing and directing adult films, living with her daughter in a neighborhood where she was respected as a mother and her horse was competing in high-level equestrian events, she said.

Daniels testified that she was also steadfast in abiding by her nondisclosure agreement with Michael Cohen. She declined to comment to The Wall Street Journal for a story published on Nov. 4, 2016, that reported she had been in discussions to tell her story on “Good Morning America” but that nothing had come of it. She also declined when the newspaper asked her for comment before it broke the news of her hush money arrangement in 2018.

“I was under the NDA. I was respecting that, and I didn’t want to comment,” Daniels testified.

After the Journal published its story about Daniels and the payoff, her life turned into “chaos,” she testified. “I was front and foremost everywhere,” she recalled. Daniels said her family was “ostracized” from her daughter’s playgroup and her riding stable.

DANIELS TESTIFIES ABOUT COHEN PAYMENT

Stormy Daniels testified Tuesday that after the deadline for the \$130,000 payment from Michael Cohen came and went without the funds materializing, she authorized her then-lawyer Keith Davidson, to cancel the deal. He did, by email, according to documents shown in court. But about two weeks later, the deal was revived.

After her lawyer and agent got their cuts, Daniels said she ended up with about \$96,000 of the original payment.

JUDGE REJECTS DEFENSE REQUEST FOR MISTRIAL

Judge Juan M. Merchan on Tuesday rejected a defense request for a mistrial in Donald Trump’s hush money case.

“I don’t believe we’re at the point where a mistrial is warranted,” he said.

The judge said he agreed with defense attorney Todd Blanche that porn actor Stormy Daniels said more at times than she should have, but he blamed the defense for not objecting more vigorously when she was testifying.

“I agree there are some things that would’ve been better left unsaid,” Merchan said, noting the “witness was a little difficult to control.”

Prosecutors had defended Daniels’ testimony following the mistrial request, countering that her testimony went to Trump’s reasons for paying her to stay silent — and went to Daniels’ credibility.

Merchan said there were guardrails in place and that he sustained most of the defense’s objections — but that there should have been more.

TRUMP’S LAWYERS ASK FOR MISTRIAL

Donald Trump’s lawyers asked for a mistrial in his hush money case following testimony before the lunch break from porn actor Stormy Daniels that they say ran afoul of rules established for her taking the witness stand.

Defense lawyer Todd Blanche said Daniels’ testimony about the alleged sexual encounter with Trump and her detailed account of a preceding conversation and other meetings with Trump had “nothing to do with this case and is extremely prejudicial.”

Blanche argued that “the court set guardrails for this testimony” but it was “just thrown to the side.”

“This is the kind of testimony that makes it impossible to come back from,” he said, adding that it is also

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 75 of 92

“unfair” as Trump has to go out on the campaign trail later today.

A post published to Trump’s Truth Social account just before court resumed read: “THE PROSECUTION, WHICH HAS NO CASE, HAS GONE TOO FAR. MISTRIAL!”

It’s the first time Trump’s attorneys have sought a mistrial in the hush money case.

MAYOR SAYS NEW YORK CITY’S JAIL SYSTEM WILL BE READY IF IT HAS TO HOUSE FORMER PRESIDENT

New York City Mayor Eric Adams said Tuesday during his regular briefing at City Hall that correction officers have discussed the possibility of having to house Donald Trump at Rikers Island following the latest sanctions brought against him in his hush money trial.

“We have to adjust to whatever comes our way,” Adams said, declining to elaborate. “We don’t want to deal with hypotheticals, but they’re professionals. They’ll be ready.”

After fining Trump \$1,000 on Monday for again violating his gag order, Judge Juan M. Merchan said he was prepared to send him to jail if the former continues violating a court mandate barring him from speaking publicly about jurors, witnesses and some others connected to the case. Trump was fined \$9,000 last week for nine other violations of the order.

THERE WAS NO INTEREST IN DANIELS’ STORY BEFORE ‘ACCESS HOLLYWOOD’ TAPE LEAK, SHE SAYS

Stormy Daniels said Tuesday that she was in the best financial shape of her life, directing 10 films a year, when she authorized her manager Gina Rodriguez to shop her story during the 2016 presidential election cycle.

Daniels said she had no intent of approaching Michael Cohen or Donald Trump to have them purchase her story about her encounter with Trump. “My motivation wasn’t money, it was to get the story out,” she testified.

Initially, she did not receive any interest from news outlets. But that changed after the release of the infamous “Access Hollywood” tape in October 2016, a month ahead of the election.

Daniels testified that she learned from Rodriguez that Cohen, who was then Trump’s attorney, was interested in purchasing her silence.

“They were interested in paying for the story, which was the best thing that could happen because then my husband wouldn’t find out but there would still be documentation,” Daniels said.

Daniels testified that when she was approached with Cohen’s \$130,000 offer: “I didn’t care about the amount, I just wanted to get it done.”

‘I’D RATHER MAKE THE MONEY THAN SOMEBODY MAKE MONEY OFF OF ME’

Before Donald Trump’s hush money trial recessed for lunch Tuesday, Stormy Daniels testified that in 2011 — a few years after “The Apprentice” possibility died and she had stopped talking with Trump — she learned from her agent that the story had made its way to a magazine.

She said she agreed to an interview for \$15,000 because, “I’d rather make the money than somebody make money off of me, and at least I could control the narrative.”

The story never ran, but later that year, she was alarmed when an item turned up on a website.

In the interim, Daniels said, she’d been threatened to keep silent by a stranger in a Las Vegas parking lot.

Daniels has previously made that claim and produced a composite sketch of the man, which Trump called “a total con job.”

Daniels sued Trump over that comment, calling it defamatory. Her suit was dismissed in 2018, and she was ordered to pay Trump nearly \$293,000 for his attorneys’ fees and another \$1,000 in sanctions.

Daniels said her agent proposed to get the online item taken down, and it was.

DANIELS LAST SAW TRUMP IN JUNE 2007

Stormy Daniels last saw Donald Trump in June 2007 at his bungalow at the Beverly Hills Hotel, she testified on Tuesday.

She recalled spending about two hours there — highlighted by Trump’s fascination with the Discovery Channel’s “Shark Week,” which was on the television, and little news about her chances of appearing on his show, “The Apprentice.”

Daniels testified that she spurned Trump’s advances and that he told her, “I miss you” and wanted to get together again.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 76 of 92

Asked if Trump ever told her to keep things between them confidential, she testified: "Absolutely not." Daniels said she spoke with Trump several more times by phone and that he eventually told her he wouldn't be able to put her on "The Apprentice."

NEXT MEETING WITH TRUMP WAS 'VERY BRIEF,' DANIELS SAYS

In her testimony Tuesday, Stormy Daniels said she next saw Donald Trump for a meeting inside Trump Tower set up by his assistant, Rhona Graff. "It was very brief, he was very busy," she remembered, describing Trump as carrying out multiple meetings at once.

At their meeting, Trump told her that he "wanted to say hi," Daniels testified, and that he was still working on getting her on "The Apprentice." He offered her two tickets to the Miss USA beauty pageant, which she accepted.

Graff testified earlier in the trial that she recalled seeing Daniels once at Trump's office, but didn't remember the date. Graff said she assumed Daniels was there to discuss potentially being a contestant on one of Trump's "Apprentice" shows.

DANIELS SAYS SHE WANTED TO MAINTAIN RELATIONSHIP WITH TRUMP OVER POSSIBLE TV OPPORTUNITIES

In January 2007, Stormy Daniels brought two friends to a vodka release party sponsored by Donald Trump in Los Angeles, she said Tuesday. Inside a VIP booth, Daniels said she was introduced to another of Trump's friends — a woman she later learned was Karen McDougal, a now-former Playboy model who has said she had an affair with Trump. As with Daniels' claims, Trump has denied McDougal's allegation.

Daniels testified that Trump repeatedly propositioned her to go home with him that night, but that she declined his advances. At the same time, she said, she didn't want to close off the possibility of appearing on "The Apprentice," which Trump had suggested was possible.

"I wanted to maintain that sort of relationship," she said. "The chance to be on 'The Apprentice' was still up in the air, and it would've been great for my career."

DANIELS DESCRIBES SUBSEQUENT INTERACTIONS WITH TRUMP

Stormy Daniels said Tuesday that Donald Trump's bodyguard called her the day after the encounter in the hotel suite to tell her that Trump wanted to see her again, and she agreed to meet him in a bar or club in her hotel.

She found him with NFL quarterback Ben Roethlisberger. Daniels said Trump introduced her to the football player but seemed largely preoccupied during her 10-minute visit in the loud space, she told jurors. She added that Trump said he would continue to think about the possibility of her appearing on one of his "Apprentice" shows.

Roethlisberger declined to comment on Daniels' description of the evening in her 2018 book.

After returning home the next day, Daniels told many people she'd met Trump and gone to his room but informed only a few close confidantes about the alleged sexual encounter, she said. In the months after, she said, Trump called her frequently on the "Apprentice" possibilities.

"He always talked about when we could get together again, did I miss him, and he always called me honeybunch," she testified, adding that she always put him on speakerphone and many of her colleagues heard the calls — without telling him.

DANIELS NOTED POWER IMBALANCE BETWEEN HER AND TRUMP

Before they had sex, Stormy Daniels testified Tuesday, Donald Trump was between her and the door out of the hotel suite. She said she didn't feel physically or verbally threatened, though she knew his bodyguard was outside the suite and there was what she perceived as an imbalance of power: Trump "was bigger and blocking the way," she testified.

"The next thing I know was: I was on the bed," Daniels recalled.

DANIELS TESTIFIES THAT SHE HAD SEX WITH TRUMP ON BED IN HIS HOTEL SUITE

Stormy Daniels testified Tuesday that she ended up having sex with Donald Trump on the bed in his hotel suite.

After multiple discussions with the judge in the hush money case and Trump's lawyers out of the earshot

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 77 of 92

of jurors, prosecutor Susan Hoffinger navigated her questioning about the encounter with exceeding caution. She instructed Daniels to keep her answers brief and free of extra details.

Trump's lawyers repeatedly objected as Daniels described certain details, and Judge Juan M. Merchan repeatedly shot down Daniels' attempts to describe the encounter in more vivid detail — striking several of her answers from the official court record.

Asked if Trump used a condom during the encounter, Daniels said, "No."

The encounter was "brief" and when it ended she was shaking, Daniels said.

"He said, 'Oh it was great, let's get together again honey bunch,'" Daniels continued. "I just wanted to leave."

Jurors looked on, riveted, as Daniels discussed the sexual encounter.

Trump has denied having sex with Daniels.

DANIELS FURTHER DESCRIBES ENCOUNTER WITH TRUMP

After talking with Donald Trump in his suite for about two hours, Stormy Daniels testified, she went to use the bathroom. When she was finished, she said, she found Trump sitting on the bed wearing boxer shorts and a T-shirt.

"When I exited, he was up on the bed, like this," Daniels testified, feigning reclining with her knees up in the witness stand.

"At first it was just startled, like jump scare. I wasn't expecting someone to be there, minus a lot of clothing," Daniels testified. She said it suddenly felt like the room was spinning, like blood was draining from her hands and feet.

"I thought, 'Oh my God,' what did I misread to get here?" Daniels testified. "Because the intention was pretty clear. Somebody stripped down in their underwear and posed on the bed, waiting for you."

Daniels said Trump told her: "I thought we were getting somewhere, we're talking. I thought you were serious about what you wanted. If you ever want to get out of that trailer park — I was offended because I never lived in a trailer park."

JUDGE ADMONISHES PROSECUTOR OVER EXCESSIVE DETAILS IN DANIELS TESTIMONY

Before Stormy Daniels returned to the stand after a morning break on Tuesday, the judge in Donald Trump's hush money case admonished prosecutor Susan Hoffinger about the "degree of detail" she's eliciting from Daniels, saying there was no need to get into the design of the floor in the hotel room foyer or the various subjects covered in her conversation with Trump.

"The degree of detail that we're going into here is just unnecessary," Judge Juan M. Merchan said.

DANIELS SAYS TRUMP SUGGESTED PUTTING HER ON 'THE APPRENTICE'

Before a morning break in Donald Trump's criminal trial, Stormy Daniels testified that she and Trump spoke for about two hours in his hotel suite before they were supposed to go to dinner. During the conversation, she said, he dangled the idea of putting her on his TV show "The Apprentice."

Daniels testified that Trump pitched the allure of a porn star competing on the show — which had yet to spawn its celebrity version — and said it would be a chance for her to show the world that, as a writer and director, she's "more than a dumb bimbo."

Daniels said she doubted the show's network, NBC, would ever let it happen, and that she feared her lack of business acumen would make her an easy out. She said she enjoyed her work making adult films and isn't ashamed of it, but she had designs on writing and directing music videos and more mainstream productions.

Daniels testified that her takeaway from Trump was that "people might be able to take me serious, know that I wasn't just an airhead" and that being on the show could position her to "about what I wanted to do, which was to be taken seriously as a writer and director."

"He's like, 'this is your chance for somebody to see you and maybe give you that opportunity,'" Daniels said. "He pitched it as a win-win."

Scientists are learning the basic building blocks of sperm whale language after years of effort

By MARIA CHENG Associated Press

ROSEAU, Dominica (AP) — Scientists studying the sperm whales that live around the Caribbean island of Dominica have described for the first time the basic elements of how they might be talking to each other, in an effort that could one day help better protect them.

Like many whales and dolphins, sperm whales are highly social mammals and communicate by squeezing air through their respiratory systems to make strings of rapid clicks that can sound like an extremely loud zipper underwater. The clicks are also used as a form of echolocation to help them track their prey.

Scientists have been trying for decades to understand what those clicks might mean, with only minimal progress. While they still don't know, they now think there are sets of clicks they believe make up a "phonetic alphabet" that the whales can use to build the very rough equivalent of what people think of as words and phrases.

"We're now starting to find the first building blocks of whale language," said David Gruber, founder and president of the Cetacean Translation Initiative or CETI, an effort devoted to translating the communication of sperm whales.

In a study published Tuesday in the journal Nature Communications, researchers analyzed more than 8,700 snippets of sperm whale clicks, known as codas. They say they have found four basic components they think make up this phonetic alphabet.

Pratyusha Sharma, the paper's lead researcher, said this alphabet could then be used by the whales in an unlimited number of combinations.

"It doesn't appear that they have a fixed set of codas," said Sharma, an artificial intelligence and computer science expert at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. "That gives the whales access to a much larger communication system," she said, explaining it was as if the whales had a very large dictionary.

Sperm whales have the biggest brains of any animal on the planet at up to 20 pounds, as much as six times the size of an average human brain. They live in matriarchal groups of about 10 and sometimes meet up with hundreds or thousands of other whales. Sperm whales can grow up to 60 feet (18 meters) long and dive to nearly 3,280 feet (1,000 meters) to hunt for squid. They sleep vertically, in groups.

Gruber, a biology professor at the City University of New York, said sperm whales seem to have sophisticated social ties and deciphering their communication systems could reveal parallels with human language and society.

To get enough examples of the sperm whale clicks in Dominica, where there is a resident population of about 200 whales, scientists created a giant underwater recording studio with microphones at different depths. Tags on the whales also record what position they are in when clicking — for example diving, sleeping, breathing at the surface — and if there are any other whales nearby they might be communicating with.

Jeremy Goldbogen, an associate professor of oceans at Stanford University, called the new research "extraordinary," saying it had "vast implications for how we understand ocean giants."

Goldbogen, who was not involved in the study, said that if we were one day able to understand what sperm whales were saying, that knowledge should be used for conservation purposes, like minimizing their risk of being hit by ships or reducing ocean noise levels.

Sperm whales are classified as "vulnerable" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. The whales were hunted for centuries for the oil contained in their giant heads and the species is still recovering.

Diana Reiss, a marine mammal behavior and communication expert at the City University of New York, said that scientists understand certain aspects of marine animals' communication reasonably well, including the whistles used by dolphins and the songs sung by humpback whales.

But when it comes to sperm whales, even that basic knowledge is lacking.

"What's new in this study is that they are trying to look at the basis for the whales' communication system ... not just particular calls they're making," she said.

Reiss, who was not involved in the new research, said she hoped we would one day be able to match the whales' clicks to behavior.

"We will never understand what the clicks mean to another whale, but we may be able to understand what the clicks mean enough to predict their behavior," she said. "That alone would be an amazing achievement," she said.

CETI founder Gruber said millions and possibly billions of whale codas would be needed to collect enough data to try to work out what the whales are saying, but he expects AI to help speed the analysis. He said other sperm whale populations — the whales are found in deep oceans from the Arctic to the Antarctic — likely communicate in slightly different ways.

Katy Perry and Rihanna didn't attend the Met Gala. But AI-generated images still fooled fans

By WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — No, Katy Perry and Rihanna didn't attend the Met Gala this year. But that didn't stop AI-generated images from tricking some fans into thinking the stars made appearances on the steps of fashion's biggest night.

Deepfake images depicting a handful of big names at the Metropolitan Museum of Art's annual fundraiser quickly spread online Monday and early Tuesday.

Some eagle-eyed social media users spotted discrepancies — and platforms themselves, such as X's Community Notes, soon noted that the images were likely created using artificial intelligence. One clue that a viral picture of Perry in a flower-covered gown, for example, was bogus is that the carpeting on the stairs matched that from the 2018 event, not this year's green-tinged fabric lined with live foliage.

Still, others were fooled — including Perry's own mother. Hours after at least two AI-generated images of the singer began swirling online, Perry reposted them to her Instagram, accompanied by a screenshot of a text that appeared to be from her mom complimenting her on what she thought was a real Met Gala appearance.

"lol mom the AI got to you too, BEWARE!" Perry responded in the exchange.

Representatives for Perry did not immediately respond to The Associated Press' request for further comment and information on why Perry wasn't at the Monday night event. But in a caption on her Instagram post, Perry wrote, "couldn't make it to the MET, had to work." The post also included a muted video of her singing.

Meanwhile, a fake image of Rihanna in a stunning white gown embroidered with flowers, birds and branches also made its rounds online. The multihyphenate was originally a confirmed guest for this year's Met Gala, but Vogue representatives said that she would not be attending before they shuttered the carpet Monday night.

People magazine reported that Rihanna had the flu, but representatives did not immediately confirm the reason for her absence. Rihanna's reps also did not immediately respond to requests for comment in response to the AI-generated image of the star.

While the source or sources of these images is hard to lock down, the realistic-looking Met Gala backdrop seen in many suggests that whatever AI tool was used to create them was likely trained on some images of past events.

The Met Gala's official photographer, Getty Images, declined comment Tuesday.

Last year, Getty sued a leading AI image generator, London-based Stability AI, alleging that it had copied more than 12 million photographs from Getty's stock photography collection without permission. Getty has since launched its own AI image-generator trained on its works, but blocks attempts to generate what it describes as "problematic content."

This is far from the first time we've seen generative AI, a branch of AI that can create something new, used to create phony content. Image, video and audio deepfakes of prominent figures, from Pope Francis

to Taylor Swift, have gained loads of traction online before.

Experts note that each instance underlines growing concerns around the misuse of this technology — particularly regarding disinformation and the potential to carry out scams, identity theft or propaganda, and even election manipulation.

“It used to be that seeing is believing, and now seeing is not believing,” said Cayce Myers, a professor and director of graduate studies at Virginia Tech’s School of Communication — pointing to the impact of Monday’s AI-generated Perry image. “(If) even a mother can be fooled into thinking that the image is real, that shows you the level of sophistication that this technology now has.”

While using AI to generate images of celebs in make-believe luxury gowns (that are easily proven to be fake in a highly-publicized event like the Met Gala) may seem relatively harmless, Myers and others note that there’s a well-documented history of more serious or detrimental uses of this kind of technology.

Earlier this year, sexually explicit and abusive fake images of Swift, for example, began circulating online — causing X, formerly Twitter, to temporarily block some searches. Victims of nonconsensual deepfakes go well beyond celebrities, of course, and advocates stress particular concern for victims who have little protections. Research shows that explicit AI-generated material overwhelmingly harms women and children — including disturbing cases of AI-generated nudes circulating through high schools.

And in an election year for several countries around the world, experts also continue to point to potential geopolitical consequences that deceptive, AI-generated material could have.

“The implications here go far beyond the safety of the individual — and really does touch on things like the safety of the nation, the safety of whole society,” said David Broniatowski, an associate professor at George Washington University and lead principal investigator of the Institute for Trustworthy AI in Law & Society at the school.

Utilizing what generative AI has to offer while building an infrastructure that protects consumers is a tall order — especially as the technology’s commercialization continues to grow at such a rapid rate. Experts point to needs for corporate accountability, universal industry standards and effective government regulation.

Tech companies are largely calling the shots when it comes to governing AI and its risks, as governments around the world work to catch up. Still, notable progress has been made over the last year. In December, the European Union reached a deal on the world’s first comprehensive AI rules, but the act won’t take effect until two years after final approval.

Scenes from Israel and Gaza reflect dashed hopes as imminent cease-fire seems unlikely

By JULIA FRANKEL and JACK JEFFERY Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — An announcement by Hamas late Monday that it had accepted a cease-fire proposal sent people in the streets of Rafah into temporary jubilation, as Palestinian evacuees in the jam-packed town felt their first glimmer of hope the war could end.

For families of Israeli hostages held in Gaza, the announcement raised the possibility that their long wait was coming to an end — that they might soon see their loved ones.

But the fervor was short-lived.

A few hours after Hamas’ announcement, Israel rejected the proposal — which was different from one the two sides had been discussing for days — and said it was sending a team of negotiators for a new round of talks.

By Tuesday morning, Israeli tanks had rolled into Rafah, cementing the dashed hopes among Israelis and Palestinians of any imminent cease-fire.

In Rafah, disillusioned Palestinians spent Tuesday packing up their belongings and preparing to evacuate. Families of Israeli hostages were incensed, too, and thousands of protesters demonstrated late into the night across the country.

GAZA: PALESTINIANS EVACUATE, CONDEMN COLLAPSE OF DEAL

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 81 of 92

Across Gaza, Palestinians have been demanding a cease-fire for months, hoping that a stop to the fighting will bring an end to the suffering.

Over 34,000 Palestinians in Gaza have been killed by Israeli fire and airstrikes since the war erupted on Oct. 7, according to the Hamas-run Health Ministry. That day, Hamas militants killed about 1,200 in Israel and took around 250 hostages.

An estimated 100 hostages and the remains of 30 others are still held by Hamas, which insists it will not release them unless Israel ends the war and withdraws from Gaza.

Hundreds of thousands in Gaza have been displaced, many sheltering in nylon tents in Gaza's south, as "a full-blown famine" develops in the north of the enclave, according to the United Nations.

So when the news came out that Hamas had accepted a cease-fire proposal put forward by Egypt and Qatar, Palestinians poured onto the streets, carrying children on their shoulders and banging pots and pans in excitement. For a moment, it seemed life would get easier.

But in the early hours of Tuesday, Israeli tanks entered the edge of Rafah and took control of one of the key border crossings between Israel and Gaza. Palestinians in the city loaded their belongings onto large trucks and fled.

"They kept giving us hope and telling us tomorrow, or after tomorrow, a truce will take place," said Najwa al-Siksik as drones buzzed over her tent camp. "As you can hear," she said, "this was happening all night long."

Al-Sisik said she had lost all hope of an eventual deal.

"(Israel) doesn't care about us or our children," she said. "It only cares about its people. And (Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu only cares about being at the top."

Raef Abou Labde, who fled to Rafah from the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis earlier in the war, rode atop a car packed with belongings, headed to what was sure to be yet another temporary refuge. Labde said he had little faith that Netanyahu's far-right government sincerely wanted a cease-fire deal.

"I hope to God that the truce happens," he said. "But what I see is that Netanyahu doesn't want a cease-fire. He wants to displace the Palestinian people to Sinai, destroy Gaza and occupy it."

ISRAEL: PROTESTS GROW, DEMANDING NEW DEAL NOW

In Israel, the Hamas announcement did not provoke the kind of immediate celebrations seen in Gaza. Many relatives of hostages held in Gaza, who have seen what feels like countless rounds of cease-fire negotiations end with no deal, have grown jaded.

"We won't believe there's a deal until we start to see some hostages return home," said Michael Levy, whose 33-year-old brother, Or Levy, remains in captivity.

Still, the back and forth between Israel and Hamas led to boisterous and sustained protests Monday night. Protesters, led by hostage families, blocked the main highway into Tel Aviv, lighting fires on the road.

Demonstrations also broke out in Jerusalem, Haifa, and Beersheba.

Hostage families slammed the government's inaction on a possible deal in a hearing at Israel's parliament Tuesday.

"We see all sorts of explanations — this isn't the deal that we gave them, Hamas changed it," said Rotem Cooper, whose father Amiram Cooper was kidnapped Oct. 7. He questioned whether military pressure was an effective bargaining tactic to force Hamas to release additional hostages.

For some, the news indicated that a deal was closer than ever before.

Sharone Lifshitz, whose father, Oded, is a hostage, said she believed the differences between the proposal Hamas had accepted and Israel's "core demands" were not so wide.

"Hamas are shrewd operators," she said. "Now it's going to be hard for Israel to just say 'no.'"

Others said they hoped Israel's movement into Rafah Tuesday was a tactic to pressure Hamas into a mutually agreeable deal.

"This is a way to show that Israel is serious about its demands," said Levy. "Hamas can't just declare they have agreed to a deal with changed terms."

Iran and the UN nuclear agency are still discussing how to implement a 2023 deal on inspections

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Iran and the United Nations' nuclear watchdog are still negotiating over how to implement a deal struck last year to expand inspections of the Islamic Republic's rapidly advancing atomic program, officials said Tuesday.

The acknowledgment by the International Atomic Energy Agency's leader Rafael Mariano Grossi shows the challenges his inspectors face, years after the collapse of Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers and the wider tensions gripping the Mideast over the ongoing Israel-Hamas war.

Meanwhile, Lebanon's Hezbollah militia launched attacks on Israel on Tuesday as Yemen's Houthi rebels were suspected of targeting a commercial ship in the Gulf of Aden.

Grossi has already warned that Tehran has enough uranium enriched to near-weapons-grade levels to make "several" nuclear bombs if it chose to do so. He has acknowledged the agency cannot guarantee that none of Iran's centrifuges may have been peeled away for clandestine enrichment.

Grossi spoke to journalists at a news conference in the city of Isfahan, alongside Mohammad Eslami, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran. While both men said there would be no immediate new deal struck during the visit, they pointed to a March 2023 joint statement as a path forward for cooperation between the IAEA and Iran.

That 2023 statement included a pledge by Iran to resolve issues around sites where inspectors have questions about possible undeclared nuclear activity, and to allow the IAEA to "implement further appropriate verification and monitoring activities."

Grossi and Eslami offered few specifics from the ongoing discussions, though Grossi said technical teams from the two sides were talking over specifics.

"What we are looking at is concrete measures that could make this operational," Grossi said.

Eslami said: "The important point is that Mr. Grossi takes the necessary actions to settle the problems that are mainly political."

Speaking to reporters later Tuesday in Vienna, Grossi reiterated that the joint statement between Iran and the IAEA agreed in March 2023 was still very much "alive" and that it contained all the necessary points.

"I want results and I want them soon," Grossi told reporters at Vienna airport. "The present state is completely unsatisfactory," he said.

Grossi explained that there was no timeframe or deadline agreed on the implementation of the various points but added that he was told by Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian that Iran was "ready to engage in very concrete measures."

He also said that no technical team was left behind in Tehran to continue discussions.

Tensions have grown between Iran and the IAEA since 2018, when then-President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew the United States from Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers. Since then, Iran has abandoned all limits the deal put on its program and enriches uranium to up to 60% purity — near weapons-grade levels of 90%.

IAEA surveillance cameras have been disrupted, while Iran has barred some of the agency's most experienced inspectors. Iranian officials also have increasingly threatened they could pursue atomic weapons.

Meanwhile, tensions between Iran and Israel have hit a new high. Tehran launched an unprecedented drone-and-missile attack on Israel last month, after years of a shadow war between the two countries reached a climax with Israel's apparent attack on an Iranian consular building in Syria that killed two Iranian generals and others.

Isfahan itself apparently has come under Israeli fire in recent weeks, despite being surrounded by sensitive nuclear sites.

Eslami in his remarks accused Israel of meddling in the relationship between the IAEA and Iran.

"It is important to be careful that the hostile actions against the Islamic Republic of Iran, which the Zionists are source of ... do not affect the interactions between Iran and the agency," Eslami said. "What

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 83 of 92

is shown in the media is based on the Zionist regime's manipulations."

Grossi insisted that the IAEA's relationship with Tehran is not affected by outside parties.

Elsewhere in the Mideast, Hezbollah claimed multiple explosive drone and rocket attacks on Israel, saying they targeted barracks, Israeli air defenses and other sites. The Israeli military did not immediately comment on those incidents, though it did acknowledge incoming fire targeting Yiftah, some 150 kilometers (90 miles) north of Jerusalem, an attack also claimed by Hezbollah.

The Lebanese Sunni political and militant organization the Islamic Group also claimed targeting an Israeli barracks near Chebaa Farms, a territory captured by Israeli troops from Syria during the 1967 Mideast war. The attacks all came as the Israeli military seized the Rafah border crossing with Egypt in the Gaza Strip as cease-fire negotiations remained on edge.

Also Tuesday, a ship in the Gulf of Aden came under a suspected attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center said. A captain aboard the vessel "reported two explosions in close proximity" to the ship, the UKMTO said, though the boat and its crew were safe.

The rebels did not immediately claim the attack, but it typically takes them hours to acknowledge their assaults. The Houthis have launched over 50 attacks on shipping since November over the Israel-Hamas war.

The U.S. military's Central Command separately said that it shot down a Houthi drone over the Red Sea on Monday.

TikTok has sued the US over a law that could ban its app.

What's the legal outlook?

By WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — A newly minted law forcing TikTok's parent company to sell the video-sharing platform or face a ban in the U.S. could be in for an uphill battle in court.

The app's China-based owner, ByteDance, filed a lawsuit Tuesday, calling the measure unconstitutional. Critics of the sell-or-be-banned ultimatum argue it violates TikTok users' First Amendment rights.

But a court challenge's success is not guaranteed. The law's opponents, which include advocacy organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union, maintain that the government hasn't come close to justifying banning TikTok, while others say national-security claims could still prevail.

For years, lawmakers on both sides of the aisle have expressed concerns that Chinese authorities could force ByteDance to hand over U.S. user data, or influence Americans by suppressing or promoting certain content on TikTok. The U.S. has yet to provide public evidence to support those claims, but political pressures have piled up regardless.

If upheld, legal experts also stress that the law could set a precedent carrying wider ramifications for digital media in the U.S.

Here's what you need to know.

IS A TIKTOK BAN UNCONSTITUTIONAL?

That's the central question. TikTok and opponents of the law have argued that a ban would violate First Amendment rights of the social media platform's 170 million U.S. users.

Patrick Toomey, deputy director of the ACLU's National Security Project, previously told The Associated Press that a TikTok ban would "stifle free expression and restrict public access" to a platform that has become central source for information sharing.

Among key questions will be whether the legislation interferes with the overall content of speech on TikTok, Elettra Bietti, an assistant professor of law and computer science at Northeastern University, noted following the law's passage last month — as content-based restrictions meet a higher level of scrutiny.

"Congress has taken the unprecedented step of expressly singling out and banning TikTok: a vibrant online forum for protected speech and expression used by 170 million Americans to create, share, and view videos over the Internet," ByteDance said in its lawsuit Tuesday. "For the first time in history, Congress has enacted a law that subjects a single, named speech platform to a permanent, nationwide ban, and bars every American from participating in a unique online community with more than 1 billion people worldwide."

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 84 of 92

COULD TIKTOK SUCCESSFULLY PREVENT THE BAN IN COURT?

TikTok has expressed confidence about the prospects of its legal challenge.

"Rest assured, we aren't going anywhere," TikTok CEO Shou Chew said in a video response posted to X shortly after the legislation was signed into law on April 24. "The facts and the Constitution are on our side, and we expect to prevail again."

Toomey also said that he was optimistic about the possibility of TikTok being able to block the measure in court, noting that both users and the company "have extremely strong" First Amendment claims.

"Many of the calls to completely ban TikTok in the U.S. are about scoring political points and rooted in anti-China sentiment," Toomey added. "And to date, these steps to ban TikTok had not been remotely supported by concrete public evidence."

Still, the future of any litigation is hard to predict, especially for this kind of case. And from a legal perspective, it can be difficult to cite political motivations, even if they're well-documented, as grounds to invalidate a law.

The battle could also string along for some time, with the potential for appeals that could go all the way to the Supreme Court, which would likely uphold the law due to its current composition, said Gus Hurwitz, a senior fellow at the University of Pennsylvania's Carey Law School.

HOW MIGHT THE GOVERNMENT RESPOND TO THE CHALLENGE?

TikTok's legal challenge won't go on without a fight. The government will probably respond with national-security claims, which were already cited prominently as the legislation made its way through Congress.

Toomey maintains that the government hasn't met the high bar required to prove imminent national-security risks, but some other legal experts note that it's still a strong card to play.

"One of the unfortunate and really frustrating things about national-security legislation (is that) it tends to be a trump card," Hurwitz said. "Once national-security issues come up, they're going to carry the day either successfully or not."

Hurwitz added that he thinks there are legitimate national-security arguments that could be brought up here. National security can be argued because it's a federal measure, he noted. That sets this scenario apart from previously unsuccessful state-level legislation seeking to ban TikTok, such as in Montana.

But national-security arguments are also vulnerable to questioning as to why TikTok is getting specific scrutiny.

"Personally, I believe that what TikTok does isn't that different from other companies that are U.S.-based," Bietti said, pointing to tech giants ranging from Google to Amazon. "The question is, 'Why ban TikTok and not the activities and the surveillance carried out by other companies in the United States?'"

IF THE LAW IS UPHELD, COULD THERE BE WIDER RAMIFICATIONS?

Still, legal experts note that there could be repercussions beyond TikTok in the future.

The measure was passed as part of a larger \$95 billion package that provides aid to Ukraine and Israel. The package also includes a provision that makes it illegal for data brokers to sell or rent "personally identifiable sensitive data" to North Korea, China, Russia, Iran or entities in those countries.

That has encountered some pushback, including from the ACLU, which says the language is written too broadly and could sweep in journalists and others who publish personal information.

"There's real reason to be concerned that the use of this law will not stop with TikTok," Toomey said. "Looking at that point and the bigger picture, banning TikTok or forcing its sale would be a devastating blow to the U.S. government's decades of work promoting an open and secure global internet."

A look at some of the turmoil surrounding the Boy Scouts, from a gay ban to bankruptcy

By JAMIE STENGLE Associated Press

IRVING, Texas (AP) — Founded in 1910, the Boy Scouts of America achieved a vaunted status in the U.S. over the decades, with pinewood derbies, the Scout Oath and Eagle Scouts becoming part of the lexicon.

Lore has it that American businessman William Boyce was inspired to start the organization after he

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 85 of 92

became lost in the fog in London and was guided to his destination by a youth who turned down a tip, telling Boyce that because he was as a scout (they were formed in Britain in 1907) he couldn't accept money for a good deed.

The U.S. organization, which now welcomes girls throughout the ranks and allows them to work toward the coveted Eagle Scout status, announced Tuesday that it will change its name to Scouting America as it focuses on inclusion.

Here's a look at some of the turmoil the American icon has endured over the last several decades:

BATTLES OVER GAYS IN THE SCOUTS

In 1990, the Boy Scouts of America expelled James Dale, an Eagle Scout who had become an assistant scoutmaster, after discovering he was co-president of Rutgers University's gay and lesbian organization. He sued in 1992 accusing the Boy Scouts of discrimination, and lost at the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled that the organization could maintain membership and leadership criteria that excluded homosexuals.

Conservative groups rallied around the Boy Scouts, but scores of institutions curtailed support as the ban continued.

It wasn't until 2013 that the organization began allowing gay Scouts. In 2015, the organization ended its blanket ban on gay adult leaders while allowing church-sponsored Scout units to maintain the exclusion for religious reasons.

TRANSGENDER BOYS ALLOWED

In 2017, the Boy Scouts announced that they would allow transgender children who identify as boys to enroll in their boys-only programs.

That came after an 8-year-old transgender child was asked to leave his Scout troop in New Jersey after parents and leaders found out he is transgender.

GIRLS ARE WELCOMED INTO THE RANKS

In what was arguably the biggest change, the Boy Scouts of America said in 2017 that girls would be welcomed into the program. With that announcement, girls were accepted as Cub Scouts as of 2018 and into the flagship Boy Scout program — renamed Scouts BSA — in 2019.

There were nearly 1,000 women in the inaugural class of female Eagle Scouts in 2021. Today, more than 6,000 girls have earned the coveted Eagle Scout rank.

The Girl Scouts of the USA sued, but a settlement was reached after a judge rejected its claims and said both groups can use words like "scouts" and "scouting."

BANKRUPTCY AND SEX ABUSE CLAIMS

When it sought bankruptcy protection in February 2020, the Boy Scouts of America had been named in about 275 lawsuits, and told insurers it was aware of another 1,400 claims.

Last year a federal judge upheld the \$2.4 billion bankruptcy plan allowing the organization to keep operating while compensating more than 80,000 men who filed claims saying they were sexually abused while in scouting.

India votes in third phase of national elections as Modi escalates his rhetoric against Muslims

By KRUTIKA PATHI and SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Millions of Indian voters across 93 constituencies were casting ballots on Tuesday as Prime Minister Narendra Modi mounted an increasingly shrill election campaign, ramping up polarizing rhetoric in incendiary speeches that have targeted the Muslim minority.

In recent campaign rallies, Modi has called Muslims "infiltrators" and said they "have too many children," referring to a Hindu nationalist trope that Muslims produce more children with the aim of outnumbering Hindus in India. He has also accused the rival Indian National Congress party of scheming to "loot" wealth from the country's Hindus and redistribute it among Muslims, who comprise 14% of India's more than 1.4 billion people.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 86 of 92

Tuesday's polling in the third round of multi-phase national elections has crucial seats up for grabs in states including Karnataka, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh. Most polls predict a win for Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party, which is up against a broad opposition alliance led by the Congress and powerful regional parties. The staggered election will run until June 1 and votes will be counted on June 4.

Modi, who voted in western Ahmedabad city on Tuesday, had kicked off his campaign with a focus on economic progress, promising he would make India a developed nation by 2047. But in recent weeks, he and the ruling BJP have doubled down heavily on their Hindu nationalism platform, with Modi employing some of his most divisive rhetoric in his decade in power.

Analysts say the change in tone comes as the BJP aims to clinch a supermajority or two-thirds of the 543 seats up for grabs in India's lower Parliament by consolidating votes among the majority Hindu population, who make up 80%. They say Modi's party is also ratcheting up polarizing speeches to distract voters from larger issues, like unemployment and economic distress, that the opposition has focused on.

While India's economy is among the world's fastest growing, many people face growing economic stress. The opposition alliance hopes to tap into this discontent, seeking to galvanize voters on issues like high unemployment, inflation, corruption and low agricultural prices, which have driven two years of farmers' protests.

"The mask has dropped, and I think it is political compulsions that have made them do this," said Ali Khan Mahmudabad, a political science professor at New Delhi's Ashoka University.

Changes in the BJP's campaign may also be a sign of anxiety around low voter turnout it had not anticipated, Mahmudabad said. Voter turnout in the first two phases have been slightly lower than the same rounds in the last election in 2019, according to official data.

"In recent elections, the BJP's wins have been associated with getting the voters out (to vote)," Mahmudabad said. "There may be some fatigue, anti-incumbency or even disenchantment," which has led the BJP to escalate their rhetoric.

Modi, in numerous speeches in recent weeks, has said women's wealth could be at risk if Congress comes to power, claiming the party would snatch away their "mangalsutra" — a sacred gold chain that indicates a Hindu woman's marital status — and give it to its voters, a veiled reference to Muslims. The opposition won't stop there, he has repeatedly claimed, saying the party was conspiring to take away "your property" and "distribute it among selected people."

Others in Modi's party have echoed his remarks. A recent video posted by the BJP on Instagram was more direct. The animated campaign video, which has since been taken down from the social media platform, said if the Congress party comes to power, it will take money and wealth from non-Muslims and redistribute it to Muslims.

The Congress party and other political opponents have characterized Modi's remarks as "hate speech" that could fan religious tensions. They have also filed complaints with India's election commission, which is overseeing the polls, for breaching rules that ban candidates from appealing to "caste or communal feelings" to secure votes.

The commission can issue warnings and suspend candidates for a period of time over violations of the code of conduct, but it has issued no warnings to Modi so far.

Modi's critics say India's tradition of diversity and secularism has come under attack since the prime minister and his party rose to power a decade ago. While there have long been tensions between India's majority Hindu community and Muslims, rights groups say that attacks against minorities have become more brazen under Modi.

The party denies the accusation and says its policies benefit all Indians.

Mahmudabad, the political scientist, said Modi's party had counted on getting votes from the fervor over a Hindu temple that was built atop a razed mosque that Modi opened in January. Many saw the glitzy spectacle as the unofficial start of his election campaign.

"Instead, people are talking about inflation, unemployment and economic distress," Mahmudabad said. "And so in order to galvanize and consolidate their vote, the BJP has raised the specter of Muslims."

Putin begins his fifth term as president, more in control of Russia than ever

By EMMA BURROWS Associated Press

President Vladimir Putin began his fifth term at a glittering Kremlin inauguration Tuesday, embarking on another six years as leader of Russia after destroying his political opponents, launching a devastating war in Ukraine and concentrating all power in his hands.

At the ceremony in the gilded Grand Kremlin Palace, Putin placed his hand on the Russian Constitution and vowed to defend it as a crowd of hand-picked dignitaries looked on.

"We are a united and great people and together we will overcome all obstacles, realize all our plans, together we will win," Putin said after being sworn in.

Since succeeding President Boris Yeltsin in the waning hours of 1999, Putin has transformed Russia from a country emerging from economic collapse to a pariah state that threatens global security. Following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine that has become Europe's biggest conflict since World War II, Russia has been heavily sanctioned by the West and is turning to other regimes like China, Iran and North Korea for support.

Already in office for nearly a quarter-century and the longest-serving Kremlin leader since Josef Stalin, Putin's new term doesn't expire until 2030, when he will be constitutionally eligible to run again.

In a heavily choreographed performance, Putin was pictured in his office looking at his papers before walking along the Kremlin's long corridors, pausing at one point to look at a painting, on the way to his inauguration.

His guard of honor waited in the sleet and rain for hours, in temperatures hovering just above freezing, while Putin made the brief journey to the Grand Kremlin Palace in his Aurus limousine.

Putin used the the first moments of his fifth term to thank the "heroes" of his war in Ukraine and to rail against the West.

Russia "does not refuse dialogue with Western states," he said. Rather, he said, "the choice is theirs: do they intend to continue trying to contain Russia, continue the policy of aggression, continuous pressure on our country for years, or look for a path to cooperation and peace."

He was greeted with applause when he entered the hall with more than 2,500 invited guests. They included senior members of the Russian government as well as celebrities including American actor Steven Seagal.

Neither the U.S., U.K. nor German ambassadors attended. The U.S. Embassy said Ambassador Lynne Tracy was out of the country on "prescheduled, personal travel."

A handful of European Union envoys attended even though top EU diplomat Josep Borrell said he told them "the right thing to do is not to attend this inauguration," because Putin is the subject of an arrest warrant by the International Criminal Court for war crimes, accusing him of personal responsibility for the abductions of children from Ukraine.

Among those present was the French ambassador, according to a French diplomat who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly.

A 30-gun salute followed Putin's remarks. He reviewed the presidential regiment in the Kremlin's Cathedral Square in a light drizzle and then walked into nearby Annunciation Cathedral for a blessing from Patriarch Kirill, head of the Russian Orthodox Church.

During the brief service, Kirill compared Putin to Prince Alexander Nevsky, the medieval ruler who "courageously defended their people on the battlefield."

He reminded Putin that the head of state sometimes "has to take fateful and formidable decisions" that can lead to victims, an apparent reference to the many casualties in Ukraine — a conflict the church has endorsed.

The question now is what the 71-year-old Putin will do over the course of another six years in the Kremlin, both at home and abroad.

Russian forces are gaining ground in Ukraine, deploying scorched-earth tactics as Kyiv grapples with shortages of men and ammunition.

Ukraine has brought the battle to Russian soil through drone and missile attacks, especially in border

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 88 of 92

regions. In a speech in February, Putin vowed to fulfill Moscow's goals in Ukraine, and do what is needed to "defend our sovereignty and security of our citizens."

Shortly after his orchestrated reelection in March, Putin suggested that a confrontation between NATO and Russia is possible, and he declared he wanted to carve out a buffer zone in Ukraine to protect his country from cross-border attacks.

The Russian government has now been dissolved so that Putin can name a new prime minister and Cabinet.

One key area to watch is the Defense Ministry.

Last month, Deputy Defense Minister Timur Ivanov — a protege of Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu — was detained on charges of bribery amid reports of rampant corruption. Some analysts have suggested Shoigu could become a victim of the government reshuffle but that would be a bold move, with the war still raging.

At home, Putin's popularity is closely tied to improving living standards for ordinary Russians.

Putin on Tuesday once again promised Russians a prosperous future, but since the invasion of Ukraine, many have seen the cost of living rise.

Putin began his term in 2018 by promising to get Russia into the top five global economies, vowing it should be "modern and dynamic." Instead, Russia's economy has pivoted to a war footing, and authorities are spending record amounts on defense.

Analysts say now that Putin has secured another six years in power, the government could take the unpopular steps of raising taxes to fund the war and pressure more men to join the military.

In the years following the invasion, authorities have cracked down on any form of dissent with a ferocity not seen since Soviet times.

Putin indicated Tuesday that he would continue to silence critics.

He told his audience in the Grand Kremlin Palace to remember the "tragic cost of internal turmoil and upheaval," and said that Russia "must be strong and absolutely resistant to any challenges and threats."

Putin enters his fifth term with practically no opposition inside the country.

Laws have been enacted that threaten long prison terms for anyone who discredits the military. The Kremlin also targets independent media, rights groups, LGBTQ+ activists and others who don't hew to what Putin has emphasized as Russia's "traditional family values."

His greatest political foe, opposition leader Alexei Navalny, died in an Arctic penal colony in February. Other prominent critics have either been imprisoned or have fled the country, and even some of his opponents abroad fear for their security.

Navalny's widow, Yulia Navalnaya, released a video ahead of the inauguration in which she said Putin's promises "are not only empty, they are false."

Russia, she said, is "ruled by a liar, a thief and a murderer."

Bernie Sanders says Gaza may be Joe Biden's Vietnam. But he's ready to battle for Biden over Trump

By SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In April, Bernie Sanders repeatedly stood shoulder to shoulder with President Joe Biden, promoting their joint accomplishments on health care and climate at formal White House events while eviscerating Donald Trump in a widely viewed campaign TikTok video.

Then just last week, Sanders was bluntly warning that the crisis in Gaza could be Biden's "Vietnam" and invoking President Lyndon B. Johnson's decision not to run for reelection as the nation was in an uproar over his support of that war.

Such is the political dichotomy of Bernie Sanders when it comes to Joe Biden. They are two octogenarians who share a bond that was forged through a hard-fought primary in 2020 and fortified through policy achievements over the last three years.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 89 of 92

Now, in this election year, Sanders will be Biden's most powerful emissary to progressives and younger voters — a task that will test the senator's pull with the sectors of the Democratic Party most disillusioned with the president and his policies, especially on Gaza.

Privately, Sanders has felt less enthusiastic in recent days about making the political case on Biden's behalf as the Gaza crisis worsened, according to a person familiar with Sanders' sentiments. Still, Sanders remains adamant that the specter of Trump's return to the Oval Office is too grave a threat and stresses that "this election is not between Joe Biden and God. It is between Joe Biden and Donald Trump."

"I understand that a lot of people in this country are less than enthusiastic about Biden for a number of reasons and I get that. And I strongly disagree with him, especially on what's going on in Gaza," Sanders said in a recent interview with The Associated Press.

But Sanders continued: "You have to have a certain maturity when you deal with politics and that is yes, you can disagree with somebody. That doesn't mean you can vote for somebody else who could be the most dangerous person in American history, or not vote and allow that other guy to win."

That will be the thrust of the message that Sanders will carry through November, even as progressive furor over Biden's handling of the war in Gaza continues to escalate, protests continue to fester and Sanders' own critiques of the administration's policy become more pointed.

Few can doubt Sanders' influence throughout the Biden presidency. Once rivals for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2020, the two men later joined forces to assemble half a dozen policy task forces that underpinned the party's policy platform later that year.

That laid the groundwork for a burst of ambitious policymaking in the first two years of the Biden administration, from a sweeping \$1.9 trillion pandemic relief package in early 2021 to legislation in the summer of 2022 that was a mishmash of longstanding Democratic priorities, including cheaper prescription drugs for Medicare beneficiaries.

More than three years into Biden's term, Sanders' connections throughout the West Wing are deep. He chats regularly not only with the president, but his top aides, including White House chief of staff Jeff Zients, senior adviser Anita Dunn and national security adviser Jake Sullivan.

"He doesn't mince words," Dunn said. "He's very direct with us, pretty blunt, and that's a good thing."

Yet some Democrats are worried that anger among progressives over Gaza is so deep that not even Sanders can persuade them to support Biden. A persistent bloc of voters in multiple primaries continues to choose "uncommitted" or a variant to protest Biden's handling of the Israel-Hamas war, sometimes far surpassing Biden's margin of victory in those same states in the 2020 general election.

"This campaign is in trouble. And Sen. Sanders will do everything — again, everything — that he can to try to pull this man over the finish line," said Nina Turner, who was a national co-chair of Sanders' 2020 campaign. "I'm not so sure it's going to work this time."

Mitch Landrieu, a national co-chair for the Biden campaign, told CNN that Sanders' comparisons to the Vietnam War were an "over-exaggeration." A March poll conducted by the Harvard Institute of Politics found that 18- to 29-year-olds were less likely to say the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was the national issue that concerned them most, compared to issues like the economy, immigration and abortion.

But it isn't just on Gaza that Sanders has been pushing Biden and his aides. He's urging them to shift campaign strategy to not just contrast Biden with Trump but to lay out ambitious goals on health care, education, child care and workers' rights.

Biden's State of the Union address, which his advisers point to as a roadmap for his second term, was a "general start," Sanders said, but he added that Biden has to do more to inspire voters.

Yet top advisers to the president, long a stalwart of the Democratic center-left, and Sanders, the undisputed leader of the party's progressive wing, say the two men share more traits than their ideological stances would indicate.

For one, they both hold a core belief that government should be a force for good. Their political careers are anchored in small, sparsely populated states that exposed them to the most hyperlocal and grassroots of politics. They have a sense of pragmatism about working within the political system's realities, even if Sanders works to push those boundaries and Biden governs inside of them.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 90 of 92

Biden, as vice president, was the rare establishment Democrat who was warm to Sanders during the senator's first presidential bid.

"I know he felt that while there was a lot of hostility within the Democratic Party and in the top ranks ... he felt warmth and positivity from Joe Biden," said Faiz Shakir, who served as campaign manager for Sanders' 2020 campaign and remains a close political adviser.

Now, Sanders is determined to ensure Trump doesn't win again.

"I see this as an enormously important election that I for one will not sit out," Sanders said. "I'll be active."

From Marseille to Mont-Blanc:

What to know about the journey of the Olympic torch to Paris

By JEROME PUGMIRE AP Sports Writer

The Olympic torch will finally enter France when it reaches the southern seaport of Marseille on Wednesday. And it's already been quite a journey.

After being lit on April 16 in Ancient Olympia, the torch was carried around Greece before leaving Athens aboard a three-mast ship named Belem, headed for Marseille.

The Belem was first used in 1896, the same year the modern Olympics came back. It will be accompanied by more than 1,000 boats as it parades around the Bay of Marseille, before arriving at the Vieux-Port, or Old Port, and docking on a pontoon resembling an athletics tracks.

Torch bearers will carry the flame across Marseille the next day, the last stretch running on the roof of the famed Stade Vélodrome, home to Marseille's passionate soccer fans.

After leaving Marseille, a vast relay route will be undertaken before the torch's odyssey ends with the opening ceremony of the Games on July 26 in Paris.

Here's a look at where the torch goes before reaching Paris:

MONT-SAINT-MICHEL

The torch is due to reach the famed and visually stunning site of Mont Saint-Michel in Normandy on May 31.

Located in an area of raised land surrounded by water, the island fortress looks like it was created for a Game of Thrones film set. But it's real, and very old.

So old that it already existed during the Hundred Years' War between England and France, from 1337 to 1453. An English attack was even fended off. Later it became a prison, and in 1979 it was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Every year swarms of tourists are in awe of its raw and haunting beauty.

ACROSS THE OCEANS

The torch travel route is even more unique considering it takes a detour through France's overseas territories called the Relais des Océans, or Ocean Relay. Riding the waves of the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Ocean, it will be in French Guiana on June 9 before hitting New Caledonia on June 11.

Next is the island of Réunion at Saint-Denis — coincidentally the same name as the Paris suburb with the Olympic village — before reaching Papeete in the surfing realm of Tahiti, then Baie-Mahault in Gaudeloupe and finally Fort-de-France in Martinique.

The torch comes back to France on June 18 in the southern city of Nice.

FROM SEA BREEZE TO HEAVY CHEESE

Just five days after landing on French shores, the torch heads up the Alpine mountain pass of Chamonix-Mont-Blanc for Olympic Day on June 23.

The Haute-Savoie region is known for its outstanding Chamonix ski resort, which hosts World Cup races, for sweeping views across glacier fields to nearby Italy, and — some would say more importantly — as a producer of fine cheese.

A Cheese Olympics, should it be invented, would feature a sturdy crew of eight competitors from Savoie: Abondance, Beaufort, Chevrotin, Emmental, Reblochon, Tome, Tomme and the heavy-duty Raclette.

HEADING FOR PARIS

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 91 of 92

After leaving fromage-friendly Savoie, torch bearers will digest in the Doubs region of eastern France, and then visit the Alsace city of Strasbourg in the northeast.

Three days later the torch will reach Verdun, the site of one of the most horrific battles of World War I. From February to December 1916, more than 700,000 French and German soldiers were killed or wounded at the Battle of Verdun.

BASTILLE DAY ARRIVAL

The torch is to arrive on the streets of Paris on July 14 — hardly surprising, considering it's Bastille Day, France's national day.

The torch will stay the following day in Paris, then exit again before snaking back to the French capital via Versailles — home to the resplendent Royal Palace — and the suburbs of Nanterre on July 24 and Seine Saint-Denis on July 25.

From there, it's to travel a very short distance back to Paris on July 26 for the grandiose opening ceremony where athletes will parade on more than 80 boats at sunset on the Seine River.

FINAL DESTINATION?

After the nearly four-hour ceremony ends shortly after 11 p.m., the cauldron will be lit at a location that is being kept top-secret until the day itself. Among reported options are such iconic spots as the Eiffel Tower and the Tuileries Gardens outside the Louvre Museum.

FLAME PROTECTION

A total of 10,000 people will carry the torch along its route. Local police forces on each section of the relay will help to ensure security is high, providing a security bubble around the torch and its carrier.

ECO-FRIENDLY

The torches have a lower environmental impact than those used at previous Games. They burn biogas instead of propane and are recharged when fuel runs out.

Around 2,000 torches will be used compared to more than 10,000 before, according to Georgina Grenon, the director of environmental excellence at Paris 2024. The torches are made with recycled steel and not new aluminum.

Today in History: May 8

South Africa adopts constitution guaranteeing equal rights

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, May 8, the 129th day of 2024. There are 237 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 8, 1996, South Africa took another step from apartheid to democracy by adopting a constitution that guaranteed equal rights for Blacks and whites.

On this date:

In 1541, Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto reached the Mississippi River.

In 1846, the first major battle of the Mexican-American War was fought at Palo Alto, Texas; U.S. forces led by Gen. Zachary Taylor were able to beat back Mexican forces.

In 1915, Regret became the first filly to win the Kentucky Derby.

In 1945, President Harry S. Truman announced on radio that Nazi Germany's forces had surrendered, and that "the flags of freedom fly all over Europe."

In 1972, President Richard Nixon announced that he had ordered the mining of Haiphong Harbor during the Vietnam War.

In 1973, militant American Indians who had held the South Dakota hamlet of Wounded Knee for 10 weeks surrendered.

In 1978, David R. Berkowitz pleaded guilty in a Brooklyn courtroom to murder, attempted murder and assault in connection with the "Son of Sam" shootings that claimed six lives and terrified New Yorkers. (Berkowitz was sentenced to six consecutive life prison terms.)

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 317 ~ 92 of 92

In 1984, the Soviet Union announced it would boycott the upcoming Summer Olympic Games in Los Angeles.

In 1993, the Muslim-led government of Bosnia-Herzegovina and rebel Bosnian Serbs signed an agreement for a nationwide cease-fire.

In 2003, the Senate unanimously endorsed adding to NATO seven former communist nations: Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

In 2012, Maurice Sendak, author of "Where the Wild Things Are" and other beloved children's books, died in Danbury, Connecticut at age 83.

In 2013, a jury in Phoenix convicted Jodi Arias of first-degree murder in the 2008 death of her one-time boyfriend, Travis Alexander (Arias was later sentenced to life in prison).

In 2018, President Donald Trump withdrew the U.S. from the nuclear accord with Iran and restored harsh sanctions; Trump had been a severe critic of the deal negotiated by the Obama administration in which Iran agreed to restrictions on its nuclear program.

In 2020, the unemployment level surged to 14.7%, a level last seen when the country was in the throes of the Great Depression; the government reported that 20 million Americans had lost their jobs in April amid the economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic.

In 2022, the summer movie season got off to a blockbuster start thanks to "Doctor Strange and the Multiverse of Madness." The superhero extravaganza grossed an estimated \$185 million in ticket sales in its first weekend in U.S. and Canadian theaters.

In 2023, The Associated Press won two Pulitzer Prizes in journalism for its coverage of the Russian invasion in Ukraine, in the categories of public service and breaking news photography.

Today's Birthdays: Naturalist Sir David Attenborough is 98. Singer Toni Tennille is 84. Actor James Mitchum is 83. Country singer Jack Blanchard is 82. Jazz musician Keith Jarrett is 79. Actor Mark Blankfield is 76. Singer Philip Bailey (Earth, Wind and Fire) is 73. Rock musician Chris Frantz (Talking Heads) is 73. Rockabilly singer Billy Burnette is 71. Rock musician Alex Van Halen is 71. Actor David Keith is 70. Actor Raoul Max Trujillo is 69. Sports commentator/former NFL coach Bill Cowher is 67. Former New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio is 63. Actor Melissa Gilbert is 60. Rock musician Dave Rowntree (Blur) is 60. Rock singer Darren Hayes is 52. Singer Enrique Iglesias is 49. Blues singer-musician Joe Bonamassa is 47. Actor Matt Davis is 46. Actor Elyes Gabel is 41. Actor Domhnall Gleeson is 41. Actor Julia Whelan (WAY-lan) is 40. Actor Nora Anezeder is 35.