

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 1 of 92

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 News Headlines](#)
- [3- Witte Exteriors Ad](#)
- [3- Today's Events](#)
- [4- Groton Transit Fundraiser Ad](#)
- [5- Names Released in Hutchinson County Fatal Crash](#)
- [6- Weekly Round\[s\] Up](#)
- [7- Subway Ad](#)
- [8- Dakota Roofing LLC Ad](#)
- [8- DNC Investing \\$70,000 in South Dakota Democratic Party](#)
- [9- Scholarship and Awards Photos](#)
- [9- Duerr Memorial](#)
- [9- Beck Memorial](#)
- [9- Courtland & Lois Kuehnert](#)
- [10- Emmanuel Lutheran](#)
- [10- Paepke Scholarship](#)
- [10- Luecke Memorial](#)
- [10- Groton Community Fund](#)
- [10- Hopps Dow Scholarship](#)
- [10- Dr. TJ Johnson Memorial](#)
- [11- James Valley Telecommunications](#)
- [11- Weismantel Scholarships](#)
- [11- Ruden Family](#)
- [11- Walter Memorial](#)
- [11- Eastern Star](#)
- [11- Peterson Memorial](#)
- [11- Masonic Lodge](#)
- [12- FCCLA Service](#)
- [12- Doeden Memorial](#)
- [12- Wolter Memorial](#)
- [12- STEM Scholarship](#)
- [12- Broman Scholarship](#)
- [13- Larson Family Scholarship](#)
- [13- Bartz Memorial](#)
- [14- SD Opportunity](#)
- [14- Harms Memorial](#)
- [15- Principal Student Service Award](#)
- [15- Groton Area Teaching Scholarship](#)
- [16- 8th Grade Principal Honor Roll](#)
- [16- 12th Grade Principal Honor Roll](#)
- [17- 6th Grade Principal Honor Roll](#)
- [17- President's Award for Educational Excellence](#)
- [18- SD Regent Scholar Diploma](#)
- [18- Groton FFA Alumni](#)
- [19- Class of 1969](#)
- [19- Strom Memorial](#)
- [19- Marlin Johnson Memorial](#)
- [20- Raap Memorial](#)
- [20- Schuring Memorial](#)
- [20- Bugner Scholarship](#)
- [20- Sammuli - Rix Scholarship](#)
- [21- Military](#)
- [21- Fliehs Family Scholarship](#)
- [21- McKiver Memorial Scholarship](#)
- [22- Groton Chamber](#)
- [22- Dacotah Bank](#)
- [22- Groton Lions Club](#)
- [23- Columbia Legion Auxiliary](#)
- [23- Groton SoDak Enrich](#)
- [24- Voss Memorial](#)
- [24- Groton Legion Post 39](#)
- [25- Heinz Memorial](#)
- [25- Donovan Memorial](#)
- [25- PEO Scholarship](#)
- [26- SD SearchLight: Drug cartels: A link in every illegal fentanyl pill in South Dakota, not just on reservations](#)
- [29- SD SearchLight: South Dakota to receive \\$3.6 million in nationwide baby powder settlement with roots in the state](#)
- [30- SD SearchLight: Becoming a lawyer shouldn't depend on multiple-choice answers](#)
- [31- SD SearchLight: Biden touts gun safety record to advocates as son found guilty on felony charges](#)
- [32- SD SearchLight: U.S. Senate Republicans outline their farm bill framework](#)
- [34- SD SearchLight: 3 more states could see marijuana legalization on November ballots](#)
- [36- Weather Pages](#)
- [40- Daily Devotional](#)
- [41- Subscription Form](#)
- [42- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [43- News from the Associated Press](#)

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

**OPEN:** **Recycling Trailer in Groton**  
The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.  
© 2024 Groton Daily Independent

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 2 of 92

# 1440

In partnership with [smartasset™](#)

## Hunter Biden Verdict

A federal jury yesterday found Hunter Biden guilty of three gun-related felony charges, the first conviction of a child of a sitting US president. The 54-year-old son of President Joe Biden faces up to 25 years in prison, though he is likely to receive a lesser punishment as a first-time offender. Sentencing is expected in four months.

The conviction comes after a plea deal to avoid indictment fell through last summer. The jury took three hours to reach the verdict, finding Hunter Biden had lied to a federally licensed gun dealer and falsely claimed he was not addicted to illicit drugs on a 2018 gun application. At the time, he was embroiled in a yearslong drug addiction detailed in a 2023 memoir. The case involved intimate testimony about Hunter Biden's struggles from his ex-wife, adult daughter, and sister-in-law.

President Biden later indicated he would not use his executive power to pardon his son. The younger Biden faces a separate trial in September over federal tax fraud charges.

## Stabbing in China

Four American college instructors were stabbed in northeastern China yesterday. The victims, instructors from Iowa's Cornell College who are part of an exchange program with Beihua University, were visiting a public park in Jilin when the attack occurred. A 55-year-old suspect surnamed Cui was arrested the same day, and no motive has been released.

The instructors and a Chinese citizen who attempted to intervene were hospitalized and are expected to make full recoveries. Among the wounded is David Zabner, the brother of Iowa State Rep. Adam Zabner (D). Despite the country's low crime rate, China has seen an uptick in public mass stabbings, including a knife attack at a hospital last month.

The attack comes as Washington and Beijing are hoping to restart academic exchanges post-pandemic. There are about 700 US exchange students currently in China, compared to almost 300,000 Chinese students in the US.

## Space Travel Study

Civilians traveling briefly in space experience some of the same physical and psychological shifts as astronauts who spend months in orbit but return to normal within a few months, according to new research. The findings, released yesterday, represent the most comprehensive analysis of the effects of spaceflight on the human body and come amid growing investments in commercial space travel.

The studies particularly rely on a historic all-civilian mission launched by SpaceX in 2021. Two women and two men, each representing a different decade of life, spent three days orbiting roughly 360 miles above Earth's surface. The crew was exposed to similar hazards as highly trained astronauts, including altered gravity and radiation. They collected samples of their blood, saliva, and more; tracked other internal data; and completed routine surveys.

While the crew showed signs of aging, 95% of the measurements studied eventually returned to normal. The findings also revealed space travelers have a higher risk of kidney stones.

## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

The 2024 James Beard Awards announced; Michael Rafidi from Albi in Washington, DC, named outstanding chef and Portland's Langbaan won outstanding restaurant.

Ben Potter, YouTube content creator known as Comicstorian who had amassed over 3 million subscribers, dies at 40 of "unfortunate accident;" details of accident have not been made public.

Dallas Mavericks take on the Boston Celtics tonight (8:30 pm ET, ABC) in Game 3 of the NBA Finals; Celtics lead the series 2-0. WNBA pulling in 1.3 million TV viewers per game, a record for the league and triple last year's average.

Why 1440? The printing press was invented around the year 1440, spreading knowledge to the masses and changing the course of history. More facts: In every day, there are 1,440 minutes. We're here to make each one count.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 3 of 92

## Science & Technology

Expert panel recommends experimental Alzheimer's drug donanemab, finding its slowing of cognitive decline outweighed safety concerns.

Cancer-spreading gene identified by researchers; silencing the gene prevented metastatic cancer cells—responsible for 90% of cancer deaths—from growing and spreading in mice tests.

Evidence discovered of skull elongation of women in medieval Viking culture; finding provides new insight into body modification practices of the region during the period.

## Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 +0.3%, Dow -0.3%, Nasdaq +0.9%) with Apple shares closing up 7%; Federal Reserve to share interest rate policy decision today.

Raspberry Pi—creator of tiny computers used for robotics and dashboards, among other purposes—goes public on the London Stock Exchange, valued at \$690M; retail investors able to buy shares beginning Friday.

Shari Redstone, controlling shareholder of Paramount Global through National Amusements, reportedly rejects Skydance's offer to purchase the company; instead will pursue a sale of National Amusements.

## Politics & World Affairs

Malawi's vice president and nine others confirmed dead after the small military plane they were traveling in crashed due to bad weather conditions in the mountainous northern region near the city of Mzuzu.

Ukraine strikes missile launch sites in Russia. Israel and Hamas signal openness to UN-backed cease-fire proposal as negotiations continue.

Boat carrying migrants from Ethiopia and Somalia capsizes off the coast of Yemen, with 49 people dead as of this writing and more than 140 missing.

**WITTE**   
**EXTERIORS LLC**

**Specializing in Asphalt and Wood Shingles**

Call for an estimate

**Zack Witte ~ 605-695-7874**

Webster, SD

No Contracts!

## Wednesday, June 12

Senior Menu: Meatloaf, baked potato with sour cream, creamed peas, frosted brownie, fruit, whole wheat bread.

Junior Legion hosts Mobridge 5:30 p.m. (2)

Junior Teeners at Watertown, 5 p.m. (2)

U12 W/R hosts Aberdeen 11, 5:30 p.m. (2)

U10 B/R hosts Aberdeen, 5:30 p.m. (2)

SB at Ipswich (U8 at 5:30 p.m. (1), U10 Blk at 6:30 p.m. (1), U12 at 7:30 p.m. (1))

Olive Grove Men's League

Groton CM&A: Family Fun Night, 7 p.m.

## Groton Transit Fundraiser

Thursday, June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2024

5:00 pm - 7:00pm at

Groton Community Center

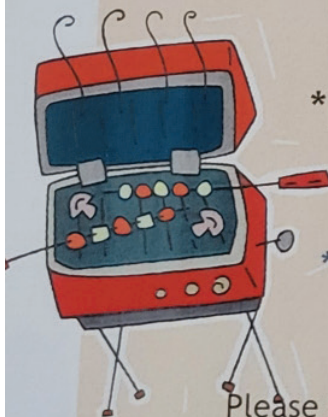
\*\*\*109 N 3<sup>rd</sup> Street-One block East of Groton  
Transit\*\*\*

Let us do the cooking for you!!

Burgers, Brats, Beans,  
Watermelon, Chips and the  
Famous Mini Donuts!!

\*Food\*Fun\*Door Prizes\*

\*\*\*FREE WILL DONATION\*\*\*



Please join us & Help support Groton Transit!!



## Names Released in Hutchinson County Fatal Crash

What: Three vehicle crash

Where: SD Highway 37, mile marker 59, one mile north of Dimock, SD

When: 9:45 a.m. Wednesday, June 5, 2024

Driver 1: Annabelle Grace Boyle, 18-year-old female from Parkston, SD, minor injuries

Vehicle 1: 2009 Ford F250 van

Seatbelt Use: Yes

Passenger 1: Minor female

Seatbelt Use: Yes

Passenger 2: Minor female

Seatbelt Use: Yes

Passenger 3: Minor female

Seatbelt Use: Yes

Passenger 4: Minor male

Seatbelt Use: Yes

Driver 2: Tessa Carilyn Pederson, 22-year-old female from Garretson, SD, minor injuries

Vehicle 2: 2013 Ford Escape

Seatbelt Use: Yes

Passenger 1: Shelby Jo Hohn, 20-year-old female from Dimock, SD, fatal injuries

Seatbelt Use: Yes

Driver 3: Daniel James Baanwarth, 52-year-old male from Mitchell, SD, minor injuries

Vehicle 3: 2019 Peterbilt straight truck-Fuel truck

Seatbelt Use: Yes

Hutchinson County, S.D.- A 20-year-old woman passed away yesterday from injuries sustained in a three vehicle crash on June 5 near Dimock, SD.

Preliminary crash information indicates Tessa C. Pederson, the driver of a 2013 Ford Escape was stopped in the northbound lane of SD Highway 37 near mile marker 59 waiting for oncoming traffic to clear to turn into a private driveway. A 2009 Ford van driven by Annabelle G. Boyle was also traveling northbound on SD Highway 37 and collided with the Escape, sending it into the southbound lane of traffic.

A 2019 Peterbilt fuel truck driven by Daniel J. Baanwarth was traveling southbound at this location and collided with the Ford Escape in the southbound lane. The Ford van came to rest in the middle of the highway. The Ford Escape came to rest in the northbound lane and the fuel truck came to rest on the west shoulder of the roadway.

Boyle and four minor-age passengers of the Ford van were transported to a nearby hospital with minor injuries. Pederson, the driver of the Ford Escape was transported to a nearby health center with non-life-threatening injuries, while her passenger, Shelby Jo Hohn, was taken to a nearby hospital and then flown to a Sioux Falls hospital with serious life-threatening injuries. Hohn passed away from those injuries on Monday, June 10. The driver of the fuel truck sustained minor 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.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 6 of 92



June 3-9, 2024

Welcome back to another edition of the Weekly Round[s] Up! We had another busy week in the United States Senate, getting back to business after our Memorial Day in-state work period. While I was back in South Dakota, I attended the 'Let Freedom Fly International Airshow'

in Pierre which was the product of many hours of work by local and national organizations. Events like these are important as we look to recruit the next generation of young men and women who will serve our country in the military. I went to Brookings and Watertown for Memorial Day activities to recognize and honor our veterans. I also went to Sioux Falls and hosted a health care roundtable with NIH Director Bertagnolli and South Dakota health care stakeholders on how AI could be the key to curing cancers and other deadly diseases. I am grateful Dr. Bertagnolli accepted my invitation to visit South Dakota and see firsthand all the work being done in the state. This past week in Washington, we welcomed several South Dakota groups to our nation's capital, including nearly 250 students and parents from South Dakota schools. I also introduced two new pieces of legislation which will impact folks living in the rural parts of our country. More on that in my Weekly Round[s] Up:

South Dakotans I met with: Students from Madison, Dakota Valley, Harrisburg and Sioux Falls; South Dakota members of the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition; members of the South Dakota Health Care Association; South Dakota members of the National Grain and Feed Association; Dr. Steve Smith, professor at the South Dakota School of Mines; Mike Mimick of South Dakota's UBS branch; and Colby Olson with the South Dakota Cattlemen's Association. I also stopped by a gathering hosted by the South Dakota State Society on Wednesday to celebrate 605 Day.

Met with South Dakotans from: Aberdeen, Black Hawk, Dakota Dunes, Harrisburg, Madison, Marion, Mitchell, Rapid City and Sioux Falls.

Other meetings: General Ahmad Husni, Director of Jordan's General Intelligence Department; Harry Coker Jr., National Cyber Director; Peng Zhao, CEO of Citadel Securities; Ken Kartsen, Senior VP at Trellix; Seleshi Bekele, Ethiopia's Ambassador to the United States; Directors from national labs affiliated with the Department of Energy; and the Defense Strategy Institute's SmallSat & Space Access Summit. I spoke with members of the Healthcare Leadership Council about our work on artificial intelligence in the Senate.

I also attended our Senate Prayer Breakfast, where our speaker was Mary Landrieu, a former United States Senator from Louisiana. While our prayer breakfast consists mostly of current members of the Senate, we always enjoy welcoming our former colleagues back to participate.

Votes taken: 8 – most of these were on nominations to a judge position in the District of Columbia, as well as executive positions in the Department of State and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

We also voted on the Right to Contraception Act. I voted no on this bill. Senate Democrats brought this legislation to the floor as an election year scare tactic. There is no threat to contraceptive access in the United States. There are no restrictions on contraceptives. They are required by law to be offered at no cost by health insurers. In addition, if you read the fine print, this bill could open the door for public elementary schools to offer contraceptives to little kids. It could even allow the federal government to force religious institutions and schools to offer contraceptives. It's massive government overreach.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 7 of 92

Legislation introduced: This week, I introduced the Postal Processing Protection Act, legislation that would require the US Postal Service to consider consequences for rural areas during their closure or downsizing review process. Rural mail services are a lifeline for residents of many communities across South Dakota. USPS should be required to consider the impact of closing processing facilities on rural residents, just as they consider it when closing retail locations. I'm pleased to be introducing this legislation to make certain rural residents receive their mail in a timely and efficient manner.

I also introduced legislation that would reauthorize the Reclamation Rural Water Supply Act which lapsed in 2016. This bill would allow the Bureau of Reclamation to carry out the required feasibility studies for rural water supply projects instead of Congress. This would streamline the process of getting approval for rural water improvement systems including three rural water projects in South Dakota: the Water Investment in Northern South Dakota (WINS), the Western Dakota Regional Water System and the Dakota Mainstem which are all looking to spread water from the Missouri River throughout the state.

Student Loan Letter: I joined my colleagues Senator Bill Cassidy (R-La.) and Representative Virginia Foxx (R-N.C.) in sending a letter to the Department of Education urging them to withdraw their latest student loan forgiveness plan. This proposed rule will cost hard-working Americans an additional \$147 billion and bring the total student loan debt transferred to taxpayers to as much as \$1 trillion.

Hearings: I had one hearing in the Select Committee on Intelligence.

Classified briefings: I attended one classified briefing this week: our bi-weekly cyber education seminar on U.S. Cyber Command and International Partnerships.

My staff in South Dakota visited: Aberdeen, Brookings, Deadwood, Mitchell, Salem, Sturgis and Vermillion.

Steps taken this past week: 44,890 steps or 22.57 miles.



**GROTON**  
**SUBWAY**

**Opening  
June 12th  
Hours Daily  
10 a.m. to 8 p.m.**

**Under new ownership,  
Beau and Chelsea Larson**



## DAKOTA ROOFING, LLC

Have you suffered  
hail damage?

We Offer FREE Roof Inspections And FREE Quotes.  
Give Us A Call At (605) 848-3163!

Whether you are a business owner, property manager,  
or homeowner, count on expert roofing services,  
provided with LIFETIME Warranties on each project!

Call (605) 848-3163 to learn how we can provide your  
structure with a long-lasting roofing solution.

We Offer Silicone Spray Roofing

Dakota Roofing Office and Showroom  
1205 6th Avenue SW ~ Suite #2  
Aberdeen, SD 57401  
(605) 848-3163

SERVING THE DAKOTAS FOR OVER 20 YEARS

### DNC Investing \$70,000 in South Dakota Democratic Party

The Democratic National Committee recently announced nearly \$2 million in new grants to 11 non-battleground state parties, including \$70,000 for the South Dakota Democratic Party. This first of its kind investment will support voter registration efforts and down ballot candidates. A significant portion of this funding will support voter registration, engagement and rides to the polls on South Dakota's Native reservations.

"This investment in the Tribal Nations across South Dakota will mean Native American voices are heard when it comes to the future of this state and the reservations," said SDDP Chair Shane Merrill. "In a year where relations between the state government and tribal governments are declining, it's extremely important to make sure tribal members can cast their ballot and vote for people who will best represent their interests."



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 9 of 92



**Richard Duerr Memorial Scholarship  
Holden Sippel**



**Beck Memorial Scholarship  
Holden Sippel & Diann Morehouse**



**Cortland & Lois Kuehnert Scholarship  
Bradin Althoff (Athletic), Lydia Meier (Honor Student), Claire Heinrich (Valedictorian), Lexi Osterman (Trade/ Tech School), Hannah Monson (Financial Need)**



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 10 of 92



**Emmanuel Lutheran Church  
Faith Forever Scholarship  
Emily Clark, Faith Flihs, Lexi Osterman, Cadence Feist; Not Pictured: Kate Profeta.**



**Tom & Barbra Paepke Scholarships  
Ava Wienk and Emma Schinkel**



**Rob Luecke Memorial  
Becky Hunter and Holden Sippel**



**Groton Community Fund Scholarship  
Sydney Leicht and Dillon Abeln**



**Hopps Dow  
Scholarship**

**Anna Bisbee**



**Dr. T. J. Johnson  
Memorial  
Scholarship**

**Holden Sippel**



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 11 of 92



**James Valley Telecommunications  
Bob Peterson memorial Scholarship**

**Bradin Althoff**



**PAC Community Service  
Scholarship & Eastern Star  
Scholarship**

**Emily Clark**



**Susan Deanne  
Weismantel & Shawn Weismantel  
Kramer Scholarships**

**Emily Clark and Claire Heinrich**



**Ruden Family Ag Scholarship**

**Cadence Feist and Ashlyn Sperry**



**Jack & Helen  
Walter Memorial  
Scholarship &  
Eastern Star  
Scholarship**

**Lexi Osterman**



**Masonic Lodge  
Scholarship**

**Emma Schinkel**

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 12 of 92



## FCCLA Service Award

Back Left: Anna Fjeldheim, Sydney Leicht, Claire Heinrich, Hannah Monson, Emma Schinkel; Front Left: Karsyn Jangula, Abby Jensen, Cadence Feist, Camryn Kurtz, Ashlyn Sperry; Not pictured: Carly Guthmiller.



**Doug Doeden  
Memorial  
Scholarship**

**Anna Fjeldheim**



**Dale D. Wolter  
Memorial  
Scholarship**

**Cadence Feist**



**Groton STEM  
Scholarship &  
Gwendolyn O'  
Connor Broman  
Scholarship**

**Claire Heinrich**



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 13 of 92



**Dennis K. & Shirley R. Larson Family Scholarship**  
Lane Tietz, Karsyn Jangula, Colby Dunker



**Don Bartz Memorial Scholarship**  
Anna Bisbee, Jackson Garstecki, Abby Jensen

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 14 of 92



**South Dakota Opportunity Scholarship**  
Back Left: Holden Sippel, Bradin Althoff, Bryson Wambach;  
Front Left: Anna Fjeldheim, Kyleigh Englund, Anna Bisbee,  
Ashlyn Sperry



**Brenda Harms Memorial Scholarship**  
Sarah Harms, Emma Schinkel, Anna Fjeldheim, Mike Harms.



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 15 of 92



**Principal Student Service Award**  
Emily Clark, Anna Bisbee, Ashlyn Sperry, & Anna Fjeldheim



**Groton Area Teaching Scholarship**  
Anna Bisbee, Anna Fjeldheim, Byson Wambach

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 16 of 92



## 8th Grade Principal Honor Roll

These students have been on Honor Roll every quarter for their 7th grade & 8th Grade year. Back Left: Easton Weber, Jace Johnson, Ryder Schelle, Layne Johnson, Ethan Kroll, Karson Zak, Wyatt Wambach, TC Schuster; Middle Left: John Bisbee, Libby Coke, Rylie Rose, Addison Hoeft, Mya Feser, Chesney Weber, Kyleigh Kroll; Front Left: Sydney Locke, Rylen Ekern, Ruelle Gilbert, Makenna Krause, Brysen Sandness; Not pictured: Taryn Thompson.



## 12th Grade Principal Honor Roll

These students have been on the Honor Roll every quarter of their High School career. Back Left: Kyleigh Englund, Lexi Osterman, Colby Dunker, Bradin Althoff, Dillon Abeln, Holden Sippel, Lane Tietz; Middle Left: Emily Clark, Lydia Meier, Anna Fjeldheim, Claire Heinrich, Hannah Monson, Emma Schinkel, Sydney Leicht; Front Left: Faith Fleihs, Cadence Feist, Abby Jensen, Camryn Kurtz, Ashlyn Sperry.



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 17 of 92



## 6th Grade Principal Honor Roll

These students have been on the Honor Roll every quarter of their 6th grade year. Back Left: Sophia Flihs, Axel Abeln, Illyanna Dallarie, Ryder Schwan, Trayce Schelle, Liam Lord; Middle Left: Liam Johnson, Andi Gauer, Keegan Kucker, Asher Zimmerman, Haden Harder, Trey Tietz, Gavin Hanten; Front Left: Amelia Ewalt, Rown Patterson, Jameson Penning, Hudson Eichler.



## President's Award for Educational Excellence

Back Left: Kyleigh Englund, Lexi Osterman, Holden Sippel, Bradin Althoff, Dillon Abeln; Middle Left: Anna Bisbee, Emily Clark, Lydia Meier, Claire Heinrich, Ashlyn Sperry, Hannah Monson, Sydney Leicht; Front Left: Anna Fjeldheim, Faith Flihs, Cadence Feist, Abby Jensen, Camryn Kurtz.



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 18 of 92



## South Dakota Regent Scholar Diploma

**Back Left: Kyleigh Englund, Anna Fjeldheim, Holden Sippel, Bryson Wambach, Emily Clark, Hannah Monson; Front Left: Cadence Feist, Lydia Meier, Abby Jensen, Claire Heinrich, Ashlyn Sperry, Emma Schinkel.**



## Groton FFA Alumni Scholarship

**Back Left: Layne Hanson, Lexi Osterman, Kyleigh Englund, Ava Wienk, Logan Ringgenberg; Front Left: Faith Flihs, Cadence Feist, Hannah Monson, Ashlyn Sperry.**



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 19 of 92



## Groton Area Class of 1969 Scholarship

**Students Pictured: Camryn Kurtz, Kyleigh Englund, Anna Fjeldheim**  
**Students not pictured: Holden Sippel & Faith Flihs**

**Along with members of the class of 1969.**



**Vicki Strom Memorial Scholarship**  
**Patti Daly & Emily Clark**



**Marlin L. Johnson**  
**Memorial Scholarship**  
**Joan Johnson & Cadence Feist**



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 20 of 92



**Darlene Raap Memorial Scholarship  
Shaela McGannon & Carly Guthmiller**



**Robert Schuring &  
Barry Schuring Memorial Scholarships  
Colby Dunker & Ashlyn Sperry**



**Edna Bugner Scholarship  
Emily Clark & Anna Fjeldheim**



**Sammuli - Rix Scholarship  
Cadence Feist & Claire Heinrich**



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 21 of 92



These students wearing their Red, White, & Blue graduation cords representing their commitment into the Military.

Logan Riggerberg (South Dakota National Guard) , Cadence Feist (South Dakota ROTC National Guard) , Shae Jandel (United States Air Force) , Layne Hanson (South Dakota National Guard).



Irvin & Janice  
Fleih's Family  
Scholarship

Emma Schinkel



Renee McKiver Memorial Scholarship  
Patti Daly, Karsyn Jangula, Katie Kampa

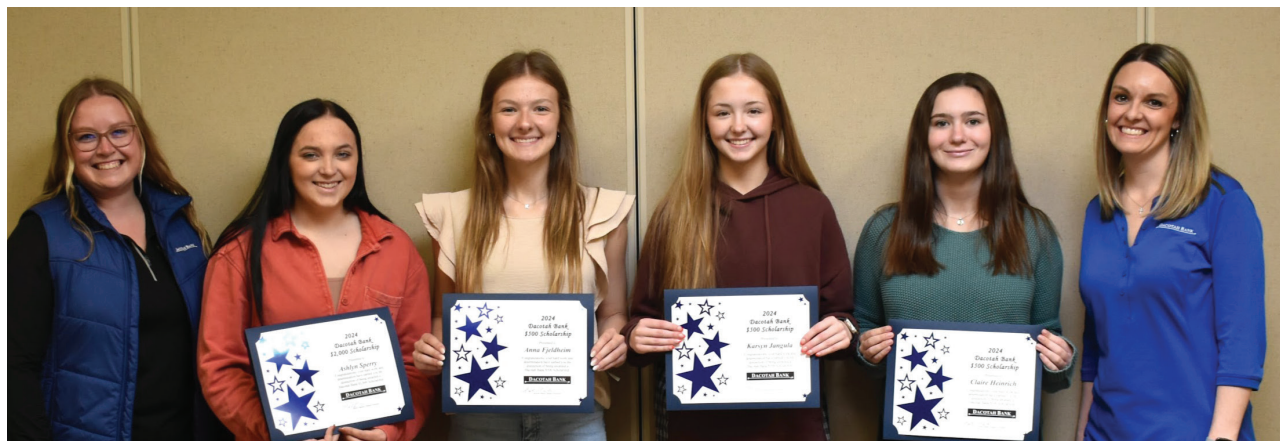


# Groton Daily Independent

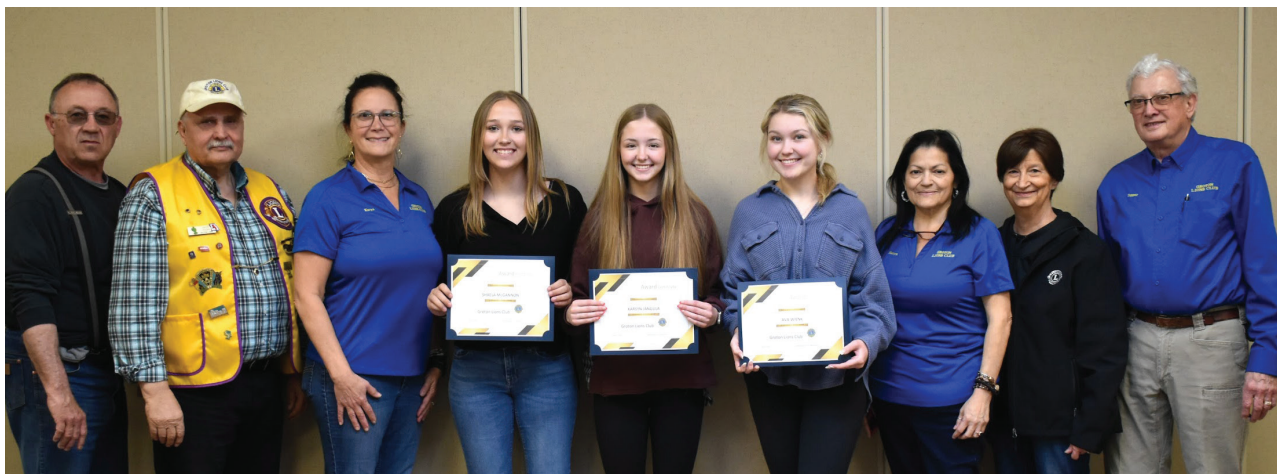
Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 22 of 92



**Groton Chamber of Commerce Scholarship**  
**Ashley Bentz, Katelyn Nehlich, Emily Clark, Ashlyn Sperry, Claire Heinrich, Doug Heinrich**



**Dacotah Bank Scholarship**  
**Katelyn Nehlich, Ashlyn Sperry, Anna Fjeldheim, Karsyn Jangula, Claire Heinrich, Heidi Locke**



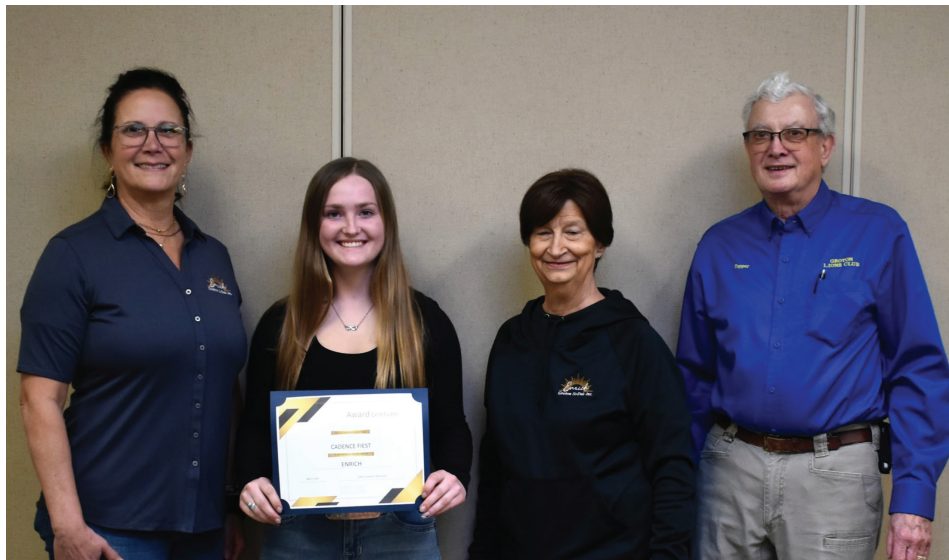
**Groton Lion's Scholarship**  
**Students: Shaela McGannon, Karsyn Jangula, Ava Weink**  
**Along with members of the Groton's Lion's Club.**

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 23 of 92



**Columbia American Legion Auxiliary Scholarship  
Logan Ringgenberg, Cadence Feist, Cara Dennert, Anna  
Bisbee, Dillon Abeln.**



**Groton SoDak Enrich Inc Scholarship  
Karen Babcock, Cadence Feist, Nancy Larsen, Topper Tas-**



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 24 of 92



**Richard 'Dick' Voss Memorial Scholarship  
Ashlyn Sperry, Logan Ringgenberg, Jesse & Julie More-**



**Groton American Legion Post 39 Scholarship  
Back Left: Bruce Babcock, Brent Wienk, Aaron Grant, Bill  
(Eileen) Schuelke; Front left: Logan Ringgenberg, Cadence  
Feist, Layne Hanson.**



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 25 of 92



**Wilfred N. & Lucille A. Heinz Memorial  
Scholarship**

**Emily Clark & Tom Heinz**



**Kay & David Donovan  
Memorial Scholarship  
Dick Donovan & Cadence Feist**



**PEO Scholarship  
Ashlyn Sperry & Emily Sternhagen**



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### **Drug cartels: A link in every illegal fentanyl pill in South Dakota, not just on reservations**

**Ties between transnational trafficking organizations stretch across the state**

**BY: JOHN HULT - JUNE 11, 2024 5:05 PM**

Years ago, domestic methamphetamine users would make their own drugs, sometimes shaking up cold medicine and camp fuel cocktails in plastic pop bottles.

The days of domestic drug production by way of local meth labs are long gone, according to the Drug Enforcement Administration's 2024 National Threat Assessment, as well as interviews with numerous law enforcement sources in South Dakota.

According to the DEA assessment, nearly all the nation's meth, fentanyl, heroin and cocaine comes from across the southern U.S. border, and the Sinaloa and Jalisco cartels in Mexico.

Those drugs – and the influence of the cartels that control the business, by extension – are everywhere, the DEA says.

The word "cartels" carries considerable weight in the current showdown between Gov. Kristi Noem and the state's nine tribal nations. Noem has painted reservations as safe havens for cartel members and hubs of drug and human trafficking. She's accused tribal leadership of personally benefiting from a cartel presence. Tribal nations have responded by banning Noem from their lands.

Brendan Johnson, a former U.S. attorney for South Dakota, said it's unfortunate that the comments have some South Dakotans believing cartels are based on reservations, when in reality they're targeting communities across the state.

"Suggesting that there's some sort of pipeline between Mexico and the reservations is silly," Johnson said. "It would be tantamount to saying, 'Yeah, the cartels are really focused on Ipswich.' That's stupid, and people wouldn't believe it. Unfortunately, people are more inclined to believe it (about reservations), because they have less knowledge on the reservations."

Tribal leaders have rejected claims that reservations are the primary source or target for drug trafficking, and have called Noem's remarks racist, divisive, unsubstantiated and discriminatory.

"Her remarks were made from ignorance and with the intention to fuel a racially based and discriminatory narrative towards the Native people of South Dakota," Rosebud Sioux Tribal Chairman Scott Herman said in a March 15 statement.

### **South Dakota: Not a hub, but not immune**

Steven Bell, based in Omaha, is the special agent in charge for a U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration region that includes North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa and Minnesota.

In the Upper Midwest, it's "lower population, fewer cases, fewer ties" to the cartels, he said.

"But it's important to note that in all of the states, we have been able to tie back our investigative activity back to the cartel presence," Bell said. "In our rural areas, we've developed information where we have actual individuals and undercover agents and officers in direct contact with known members of the cartel."

There are a few other risk factors to consider in rural areas, Bell said, inclusive of tribal areas. First, drugs generally fetch higher prices in smaller communities, as they tend to be further from the source and users have fewer options for purchasing them. Second, there could be fewer law enforcement officers on patrol to notice trafficking.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 27 of 92

Even so, Bell said, drugs generally flow from larger communities to smaller ones, not the other way around. At least one truth applies to rural and urban areas: anyone captured with several pounds of a drug like meth is rarely more than a few steps removed from the cartel sources that mix it in clandestine labs for shipment to the U.S. – whether they know it or not.

“You might see a retail distributor just selling meth who may or may not have any knowledge of, truly, what organization they work for,” Bell said. “That’s where we come in and put the pieces of the puzzle together, because the cartels do that on purpose to minimize their exposure.”

Putting that puzzle together involves working with state, local and tribal law enforcement through joint powers agreements and groups like the Northern Hills Drug Task Force, according to Bell and others in federal law enforcement.

“We’re not targeting the end users,” Bell said of federal-level drug investigations.

Gary Gaikowski, police chief for the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate, does see his officers interacting with a lot of users. But Gaikowski said his officers know that convincing people to talk about their suppliers – not a drug possession charge – is the endgame.

That’s where coordination with other agencies comes into play, he said. Users are more likely to believe they’ll be protected when they speak to the FBI or Division of Criminal Investigation, he said, because “it seems like they have more authority.”

Those agencies also have higher-level charges and penalties to use as bargaining chips for cooperation.

“It does help us when we coordinate with state authorities and work with the task force,” Gaikowski said.

## **Federal prosecutors: Hot spots are ‘fluid,’ drugs are in the mail**

Large enough cases, on or off South Dakota’s reservations, land in the U.S. Attorney’s Office, where traffickers face mandatory minimum sentences more severe than they’d see in the state system. And that office also prosecutes all felonies that occur on reservations in the state, including drug and human trafficking cases.

The Major Crimes Act of 1885 gives jurisdiction for felonies to the federal government. Tribal courts handle misdemeanor offenses.

U.S. Attorney Alison Ramsdell and the assistant U.S. attorneys who specialize in drug prosecutions each offered assessments of the drug trade similar to Bell’s. So did Johnson and his predecessor, South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley, in separate interviews.

Aside from Johnson, none addressed Noem’s recent comments on drug cartels on tribal lands directly. But none suggested that reservations are hubs for narcotics.

Jackley declined to identify any drug hot spots that might have emerged in recent years. Such locations are fluid, he said. He also said the local, state, tribal and federal law enforcement players who cooperate to investigate the drug trade – and meet quarterly at Ramsdell’s behest – would rather not show their cards.

“If I were to pinpoint an area where the drug task force is working, then I would affect an operation,” Jackley said.

The biggest changes over the past decade have been the sheer volume of cheaply produced narcotics from Mexico and the disappearance of state-level meth cooks, according to Mark Hodges, a federal prosecutor who worked for former U.S. Attorney Ron Parsons, and now Ramsdell.

“So far, inflation hasn’t impacted the price of drugs,” Hodges said. “They’ve gone the opposite direction, because of the supply. There’s more of it, so it’s cheaper.”

There’s also been a spike in the purity of seized narcotics. In the past, couriers would cut Mexican dope with other chemicals during stops in cities like Phoenix, Kansas City or Omaha as their product made its way to more rural states.

Today, “when it gets to Sioux Falls or Rapids City, or Chamberlain, it’s 99% pure,” said John Haak, who leads federal drug prosecutions.

“To me, that indicates control from the central business, the main business,” Haak said. “They’re not letting it be cut.”



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 28 of 92

Haak echoed Jackley on the mobile nature of the drug business. Rural areas with few police officers and the potential for higher prices can be just as attractive as tribal land, while population centers mean access to larger markets.

"There's not a fixed model that they use all the time," Haak said. "They look for the cracks. If Trent works in one case, or Mitchell works in the next case, that's what they do. The whole goal is to stay below the radar."

Parsons would like to see more postal inspectors in South Dakota.

Traffickers send drugs through the U.S. mail, he said, because FedEx and UPS have more sophisticated screening processes. He testified to Congress about tribal law enforcement issues during his tenure as U.S. attorney and urged officials to hire more inspectors.

That hasn't happened.

"There are only two postal inspectors in the entire state of South Dakota, and sometimes one of those positions isn't filled," Parsons said. "You could intercept a lot of drugs by putting a lot more scrutiny on the postal service."

## Dealer: System needs reform

One drug dealer recently sentenced to federal prison told South Dakota Searchlight she's always tried to avoid reservations and to stay a few steps removed from cartels. The dealer spoke on condition of anonymity to protect her safety in prison, where revealing her methods could endanger her. Searchlight confirmed her identity and the details of her criminal record.

Mandatory minimum drug sentences for federal crimes – which applied to her after federal officials intercepted a mailed package of methamphetamine – are the reason she avoided reservations and their federal jurisdiction. Fear of violence is the reason she avoided cartel connections.

She worked with cartel sources in another state, she said, but found other ways to get drugs in South Dakota.

"The cartels don't care," she said. "They'll kill your whole family. Women, babies, they'll do it without batting an eye."

A vulnerability for South Dakota is its geographic size and low population density, and the role those factors play in the price drugs can fetch. She described being able to buy an ounce of methamphetamine in California for \$150 and then make 10 times that amount by breaking it up and selling it in smaller quantities in South Dakota.

Addiction is the heart of the market, she said, for buyers and sellers alike. She's moved pounds of methamphetamine over the years but said she only got into dealing to support her own habit.

She tried to get into treatment or into one of the state's drug courts several times but said she'd always been rejected, in part because of a violent crime on her juvenile record. Her stint in the South Dakota Women's Prison in Pierre on a drug ingestion charge was supposed to include drug treatment, but she didn't get it, she said.

What she did get was a chance to network.

"I didn't know half the people I know here until I went to prison," she said. "They connected me with the rest of the state."

By the time she was arrested on a federal distribution charge in 2022, she was using an 8-ball of meth every day and sharing with friends, she said. An 8-ball is 3.5 grams, or \$350 worth of product at South Dakota prices, she said.

She believes state-level dealers a few steps removed from higher-up players are almost always heavy users.

"They're not moving weight because that's what they want," she said. "They're moving weight because their habit is so f\*\*\*ing deep and they can't afford it otherwise."

That's how cartels and those linked to them get a foothold, she said. People desperate for drugs will let distributors use their home as a hub for sales – at least until the home catches the attention of police.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 29 of 92

The shuffle of stash houses happens in tribal communities, she said, but "I know of 10 houses where it's happened in Mitchell."

## **DEA: Rural areas not prime trafficking spots, still face dangers**

For the drugs that fuel the cartel trade, rural America has specific draws, even though its large-scale busts are smaller than they would be in metro areas.

Bell, the Omaha-based DEA agent, spent much of his career in Phoenix, where he said a 20-pound seizure of meth would be barely notable. In Atlanta in April, federal law enforcement seized more than 600 pounds of methamphetamine.

But 20 pounds of methamphetamine is significant for South Dakota. In a small state, 20 pounds can get a lot of people high and bring in bigger profit margins.

"When you take that off the street in small town USA, you are truly making a difference in the community," Bell said. "In Phoenix where you have four and a half million people, it's whack-a-mole. You get 1,000 pounds one day, and you get 800 the next. It's never-ending."

Bell knows all about meth-by-mail. But he doesn't see more postal inspectors as a panacea, either. There are myriad methods for getting drugs into the U.S. that have been used by cartels. People have built ramps to jump border walls with vehicles filled with narcotics. Drugs are packed into shipping containers to cross borders with consumer goods, carried in boats or moved through underground tunnels. The DEA has intercepted drones and gliders carrying drugs.

"It goes to show how resilient these cartels are," Bell said. "They have nothing but time and money to figure out the best way to get product into the United States and out to the rural communities, where they're going to make the biggest bang for their buck."

*John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.*

## **South Dakota to receive \$3.6 million in nationwide baby powder settlement with roots in the state**

**BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JUNE 11, 2024 4:55 PM**

South Dakota will collect \$3.6 million from Johnson & Johnson to settle allegations that the company marketed unsafe talc-based baby powder products to consumers.

The settlement is part of a \$700 million agreement with 43 attorneys general over claims that Johnson & Johnson's talc-based products increase the risk of ovarian cancer and mesothelioma.

South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley, one of the 43, announced the news in a press release Tuesday.

"This lawsuit is about safety and protecting babies and children," Jackley said in a statement.

South Dakota's share of the money, set to be paid in four installments, will go to help fund the operations of the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division. That division, which handles consumer complaints for state residents, has five and a half investigators, according to Jackley spokesman Tony Mangan. The division has launched 15 formal investigations since last July, he said, and fielded about 1,700 complaints in 2023.

The settlement, as well as the yearslong move away from talc as a baby powder ingredient, has its roots in South Dakota.

In 2013, a federal jury in Sioux Falls found that resident Deane Berg's multi-decade use of Johnson & Johnson products that contained talcum contributed to her ovarian cancer in 2006. She sued in 2009. Berg's case was the first in the U.S. to establish a link between talc and cancer in a jury trial, but the jury did not award her damages.



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 30 of 92

Berg said she learned of the possible link from a Sanford USD Medical Center brochure.

A scan of Berg's cancer tissue, conducted years later as part of the evidence gathering for the lawsuit, showed talcum powder in her left ovary. The company contended that Berg never proved a link, arguing the tissue sample was probably contaminated at the hospital.

Studies dating as far back as 1971 have found an association between talc and cancer risk.

In 2016, a Missouri jury sided with the family of a woman who died from ovarian cancer alleging that Johnson & Johnson's talc-based body powders caused the illness. The jury awarded the family \$72 million, the first monetary award in a case involving the already long-suspected link between talc and ovarian cancer.

As part of the settlement announced Tuesday, Johnson & Johnson will cease manufacturing and selling its talc-based products in the U.S. In addition to the cancer risk allegations, the lawsuit claimed the company targeted African American and Hispanic women in its marketing to counter declining sales.

The company admitted no wrongdoing but stopped selling the products as investigations began.

*States Newsroom's Oregon Capital Chronicle contributed to this reporting.*

*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.*

## **COMMENTARY**

### **Becoming a lawyer shouldn't depend on multiple-choice answers**

**ROGER BARON**

Licensure for new attorneys in South Dakota depends on exam results from essays and timed multiple-choice questions. But the current exams place more emphasis on the wrong portion of the tests.

An applicant's ability to quickly select answers preferred by the author of the multiple-choice questions often determines licensure — even where the test-taker provided acceptable legal analyses in response to essay questions. Under this scheme, the skills needed to practice law carry less weight than skills needed to perform well on timed multiple-choice examinations.

In December, a South Dakota Bar Licensure Assessment overseen by a South Dakota Supreme Court Steering Committee acknowledged this defect: "Nearly all of those who did not pass the bar exam passed the essay portion of the bar, but were unable to pass the multiple-choice portion of the bar exam."

Worse, in South Dakota as throughout the nation, the timed multiple-choice portions of the bar examinations block licensure of students whose law school records, other experiences (such as legal internships) and responses to essay questions adequately demonstrate competence to practice law. Moreover, timed multiple-choice questions often ensnare capable individuals from low-income backgrounds, minority students or students with disabilities.

No one is served when competent students — whose varied life experiences enhance the legal profession by bringing firsthand insight into the challenges confronted by so many clients — are prevented from practicing law.

The committee should have assessed the wisdom of continued use of timed multiple-choice questions. Instead, the committee sidestepped the issue, purporting to provide a remedy through public service apprenticeships, which would offer law students seeking to practice public interest law or serve underserved rural areas of the state a fast track to admission without examination. Such apprenticeships, if approved, are laudable but likely difficult to implement and only bypass the real issue.

The committee work indicates progress, but the primary flaw of the current system remains. There is a growing recognition in the United States that an applicant's ability to successfully navigate timed multiple-choice questions has no relevance to their ability to competently practice law — and, further, the continued use of such questions negatively impacts qualified minority candidates.

In the absence of specific corrective measures designed to counteract the perils of timed multiple-choice questions, there will continue to be numerous qualified candidates who are denied licensure in South Dakota. This systemic denial will continue to have an especially discriminatory effect on Native American, other minority and low-income applicants, as well as individuals with reading limitations and disabilities.

The author wishes to acknowledge the valuable assistance of James Shekleton (counsel for the South Dakota Board of Regents, 1989-2016) in the final preparation of this commentary. The views presented are the author's only and are not intended to represent the views of the University of South Dakota nor the Board of Regents.

*Roger Baron is a professor emeritus at the University of South Dakota School of Law. He writes frequently about the opinions of the South Dakota Supreme Court and the 8th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals. He also maintains and operates USDLAW, an email discussion group for the legal community in South Dakota.*

## **Biden touts gun safety record to advocates as son found guilty on felony charges**

**BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - JUNE 12, 2024 3:39 AM**

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden on Tuesday touted his administration's efforts to reduce gun violence as the second anniversary of bipartisan gun safety legislation he signed into law approaches.

"Never give up on hope," Biden said during an annual conference hosted by the advocacy group Everytown for Gun Safety.

The speech came hours after the president's son Hunter Biden was found guilty in a federal court in Delaware of lying on paperwork related to purchasing a gun and unlawfully possessing that gun, according to media reports.

The federal jury found Hunter Biden, who has struggled with drug addiction, guilty on three related felony charges: lying to a licensed gun dealer, falsely stating on an application for a gun that he was not using drugs and for unlawfully having the gun for 11 days.

He could face up to 25 years in prison, though as a first-time offender his sentence is expected to be much less severe.

The president has avoided publicly commenting on his son's case and he did not mention the verdict in his speech.

### **Gaza protest**

Shortly after Biden began his speech, he was interrupted by a protester who accused the president of being "complicit" in the high death toll of the Israel-Hamas war that has killed 35,000 Palestinians since Oct. 7, according to the Health Ministry in the Gaza Strip run by the Hamas-controlled government. An agreement over a U.S. backed cease-fire deal remains elusive.

The crowd immediately drowned out the protester. A group of protesters was removed, according to a White House pool report.

Biden tried to calm the crowd.

"That's alright," he said. "Folks, it's OK, look they care, innocent children have been lost, they make a point."

### **Law nears second anniversary**

Biden went back to his speech and thanked the gun safety advocates and survivors "who have turned their pain" into advocacy.

"You've helped power a movement," Biden said.

The gun safety law Biden signed in 2022 was the most comprehensive federal gun safety legislation in nearly 30 years. It stemmed from two deadly mass shootings less than two weeks apart in 2022.



One was at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, where 19 children and two teachers were murdered, making it the second-deadliest mass shooting since the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre in 2012.

The other was in Buffalo, New York, where a white supremacist targeted a Black neighborhood and killed 10 Black people in a grocery store.

The 2022 law provided \$750 million for states to enact "red flag laws," which allow the courts to temporarily remove a firearm from an individual who is a threat to themselves or others as well as \$11 billion in mental health services for schools and families. The law cracked down on straw purchases, illegal transactions in which a buyer acquires a gun for someone else.

The bill also requires those who are under 21 and want to purchase a firearm to undergo a background check that takes into account a review of juvenile and mental health records. It also led to the creation of the White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention.

The Justice Department also announced Tuesday it has charged more than 500 people under provisions of the gun safety law to "target the unlawful trafficking and straw-purchasing of firearms."

The statutes "directly prohibit straw purchasing and firearms trafficking and significantly enhance the penalties for those crimes, providing for up to 15 years in prison," according to the Justice Department.

"Criminals rely on illegal gun traffickers and straw purchasers to obtain the weapons they use to harm our communities," Attorney General Merrick Garland said in a statement.

### More work to do

Biden acknowledged that more needs to be done on gun safety legislation and he called on Congress to ban assault weapons and require universal background checks and safe storage of firearms. In a divided Congress, any gun-related legislation is unlikely to pass.

The last time Congress passed major gun legislation was 1994, when then-President Bill Clinton signed a ban on assault weapons that spanned 10 years. When it expired, Congress did not renew the ban.

Biden also took a jab at his rival, former President Donald J. Trump, and said that he won't tell people to "get over" a mass shooting.

After a school shooting in Perry, Iowa, the presumptive GOP presidential nominee said during a campaign speech in Sioux City, Iowa, that while the school shooting that left two dead – an 11-year-old student and the principal – was a "terrible thing that happened," his advice was to "get over it. We have to move forward."

*Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her areas of coverage include politics and policy, lobbying, elections and campaign finance.*

## U.S. Senate Republicans outline their farm bill framework

**BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - JUNE 11, 2024 5:21 PM**

WASHINGTON — Republicans on the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry on Tuesday released their framework for a new five-year farm bill that will set the policy and funding levels for key food, agriculture and conservation programs.

The top Republican on the committee, Arkansas Sen. John Boozman, laid out GOP priorities with reporters during a Tuesday morning briefing prior to publication of the framework.

Those priorities include an increase in reference prices for all covered commodities; increased spending for conservation programs by pulling funds from climate legislation passed in 2022; "cost-neutral" updates to the formula that calculates benefits for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, known as SNAP; increased crop insurance levels; and reporting requirements for foreign purchase and ownership of farmland.

"Hopefully, we can take all of these together and build on that so we can actually get a farm bill passed," Boozman said.

The GOP measure also doubles funding for land grant universities for research on topics such as fertilizer application, pesticides and labor, Boozman said.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 33 of 92

Boozman said the investment in research will help with “getting agriculture into this century.” Boozman said the framework will also boost crop insurance by increasing support for the Supplemental Coverage Option to 80% and the coverage level to 90% for more than 55 specialty and row crops. He added that the Senate’s framework is similar to the one House Republicans put forth. “Following on the House Committee on Agriculture’s bipartisan passage of (a) farmer-focused farm bill, we are putting forth a framework that exhibits a shared common ground with our Democrat counterparts on several key priorities and offers a path forward in the places where we differ,” Boozman said.

## House action

The House Committee on Agriculture passed its version of the farm bill out of committee in late May, and while four Democrats joined Republicans in approving the bill, nearly two dozen Democrats were against it.

The House version of the farm bill is expected to cost \$1.5 trillion over the next 10 years, but there is currently no cost estimate for the Senate GOP version. There is also no bill text for the Senate version.

The current farm bill expires on Sept. 30, and if Congress doesn’t pass a new one, an extension would be needed of policies enacted under the 2018 farm bill.

Boozman said he hopes Congress doesn’t have to pass an extension, but if so, he expects to get the farm bill done during the lame-duck session after the November elections.

Like the House GOP version, the Senate legislation would divert funds from climate-related legislation passed in 2022 for conservation projects that would remove some climate-smart guardrails, which has drawn objections from Democrats.

Boozman said taking off the guardrails would “make it more useful.”

## Nutrition programs

The Senate Republican farm bill framework would not make any changes to benefits and eligibility for SNAP, but it curtails an update tool used by the Thrifty Food Plan.

“The Republican framework restores Congress’ constitutional spending authority by returning to a cost-neutral and transparent process for future five-year reevaluations of the (Thrifty Food Plan) based on the most up-to-date consumption data and dietary guidance, all while ensuring an annual inflationary adjustment,” according to the framework.

In 2018, the farm bill allowed the U.S. Department of Agriculture to reevaluate the Thrifty Food plan and in 2021 the agency updated it to reflect the cost of living, which led to a 21% increase in SNAP benefits. About 12.8% of U.S. households were food-insecure in 2022, according to USDA. More than 41 million people use SNAP benefits.

The Senate’s version reverts to a “cost-neutral” model, Boozman said, which is similar to the House Republican version. Democrats have already opposed those changes.

The Democratic chair of the Senate committee, Sen. Debbie Stabenow of Michigan, released a section-by-section version of the Democrats’ farm bill in early May. That version would boost eligibility for SNAP benefits, but there is no legislative text for that bill either.

In a statement, Stabenow said the framework “follows the same flawed approach” as the House version from Republicans.

“It makes significant cuts to the family safety net that millions of Americans rely on and walks away from the progress we have made to address the climate crisis,” she said.

## Foreign ownership of farmland

Limiting foreign ownership of U.S. farmland has garnered bipartisan support in Congress, as states have passed their own laws on the issue.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack has said the biggest foreign land ownership comes from Canada, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, but there is concern in Congress about ownership by Russia, China, Iran and North Korea — which own less than 400,000 acres of land.



Lawmakers are pushing for federal reporting requirements in the Senate GOP farm bill under Title XII, the miscellaneous section.

"This modernization will help ensure compliance with reporting requirements and provides a clearer picture of the scope and scale of the issues foreign ownership of U.S. farmland poses to our country," according to the framework.

*Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her areas of coverage include politics and policy, lobbying, elections and campaign finance.*

## 3 more states could see marijuana legalization on November ballots

**In some states, lawmakers don't want legalization, so advocates turn to ballot measures.**

**BY: ROBBIE SEQUEIRA - JUNE 11, 2024 10:35 AM**

Nebraskan Crista Eggers is running up against a July 3 deadline. If she can get at least 87,000 names onto each of two petitions before then, she can put an initiative on the state's November ballot that would legalize pot for medicinal purposes.

The petition effort is personal. Her 9-year-old son, Colton, has epilepsy and severe seizures, and medicinal cannabis can be prescribed to treat such conditions.

"I'm a caregiver to a child that needs medical cannabis access. Ninety-five percent of our people collecting [signatures] are Nebraskans who know someone who needs access and needs this issue on the ballot," said Eggers, an Omaha resident and the campaign manager for Nebraskans for Medical Marijuana.

If the group is successful, Nebraska will join Florida and South Dakota in asking voters this fall whether to legalize some marijuana use. In Florida and South Dakota, where medical marijuana is already allowed, voters will be asked to legalize adult recreational use.

South Dakota voters approved a constitutional amendment legalizing cannabis for recreational and medicinal use in 2020, alongside a separate initiative legalizing medical marijuana. The constitutional amendment was later overturned by the state supreme court; the medical marijuana initiative went forward without a challenge. The 2022 election saw South Dakota voters reject another attempt to legalize recreational cannabis. This fall will mark the third straight election in South Dakota with a recreational marijuana measure on the ballot.

Thirty-eight states and the District of Columbia allow the medical use of cannabis products, and 24 plus the District of Columbia allow adults to use it recreationally, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. Cannabis is still illegal under federal law, but 74% of Americans now live in a state where marijuana is legal for either recreational or medical use according to the Pew Research Center, and 54% live in a place where it is legal for recreational use.

Many states, especially left-leaning ones, have legalized marijuana through legislation, but "there are some states where the state legislators still don't want to touch this issue of cannabis legislation, particularly in more conservative parts of the country," said Beau Kilmer, co-director of the RAND Drug Policy Research Center.

"That's why it's not a surprise when cannabis issues go through the ballot initiative process," Kilmer said.

In Kansas, where legislative efforts to legalize marijuana have repeatedly foundered since 2021, conservative legislators again this session blocked a measure to legalize medicinal use, with one Republican lawmaker, state Sen. Mike Thompson, saying the substance could "cause more suicides and human misery," according to the Kansas City Star.

Kansas is one of the 24 states that don't allow citizen-initiated ballot measures.

But the destigmatizing of marijuana use has advanced so far that even some conservative states have legalized it through legislative action: Since 2020, four of the five states to legalize cannabis for medicinal purposes — Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi and Virginia — have done so through the legislature.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 35 of 92

## Making it to the ballot

Nebraska is one of only three states — Idaho and Kansas are the others — where marijuana and all cannabis products, including CBD products, are illegal.

Nebraska legislators have shown little interest in changing course, Eggers said.

To circumvent that legislative opposition, she needs signatures from 7% of the state's 1.2 million voters to put the question on the ballot. She also needs signatures from 5% of registered voters from at least 38 of Nebraska's 93 counties. Along with Eggers, some 25 paid staff and 200 volunteers are helping with the effort.

Eggers and her group came close to getting a cannabis measure on the ballot in 2020, after collecting 200,000 signatures. However, the state's Supreme Court invalidated the measure, saying that the petition violated the state's single-subject rule for ballot initiatives.

The Supreme Court ruled that the petition would have required changes in several state laws, including those regarding possession, public use and insurance coverage.

A second attempt in 2022 was gathering steam when a major donor died in a plane crash that year.

"A lot of money goes into collecting signatures, from filling up people's gas so they can go county to county, printing petitions and the amount of manpower that goes into gathering signatures," Eggers said. "The issue isn't support. We have the support. It has truly come down to not having funding to hire people to help towards signature collection."

## Recreational cannabis

Last year, three states legalized pot recreationally. Voters in Ohio, a red state, approved a ballot measure, while lawmakers in the blue states of Delaware and Minnesota passed legislation.

In all, 13 states plus the District of Columbia have legalized marijuana legislatively.

The ballot initiative in Florida, which requires a supermajority of 60% to pass, is being backed by John Morgan, a lawyer and Democratic fundraiser who supported the successful 2016 effort to legalize medical marijuana with more than \$8 million of his own money.

Florida Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis opposes the measure. So do some in the state's medical marijuana industry. Nick Garulay, CEO of My Florida Green, said he worries that legalizing recreational marijuana could bring more competition, and could make it "hard to separate those who want to use it recreationally from those who are sick and rely on cannabis for medication."

Rob Mikos, a professor at Vanderbilt University Law School and an expert on drug law, agreed that in some cases, the passage of recreational cannabis can lead to a decline in medical cannabis patients.

But there isn't enough data to definitively say how adult-use recreational cannabis has affected the medical market in the places that have legalized both medical and recreational cannabis, he said.

For Eggers, the month of June is crucial. As of June 10, she had about 65,000 signatures on each petition, about 30,000 short of the total she expects to need for each.

"We know this can get done, but there's definitely an urgency over the next few weeks," she said.

"I call our campaign horrifically beautiful," Eggers said. "It's horrific we've been at this for such a long time for suffering Nebraskans. But beautiful because we've found support in almost all corners of the state."

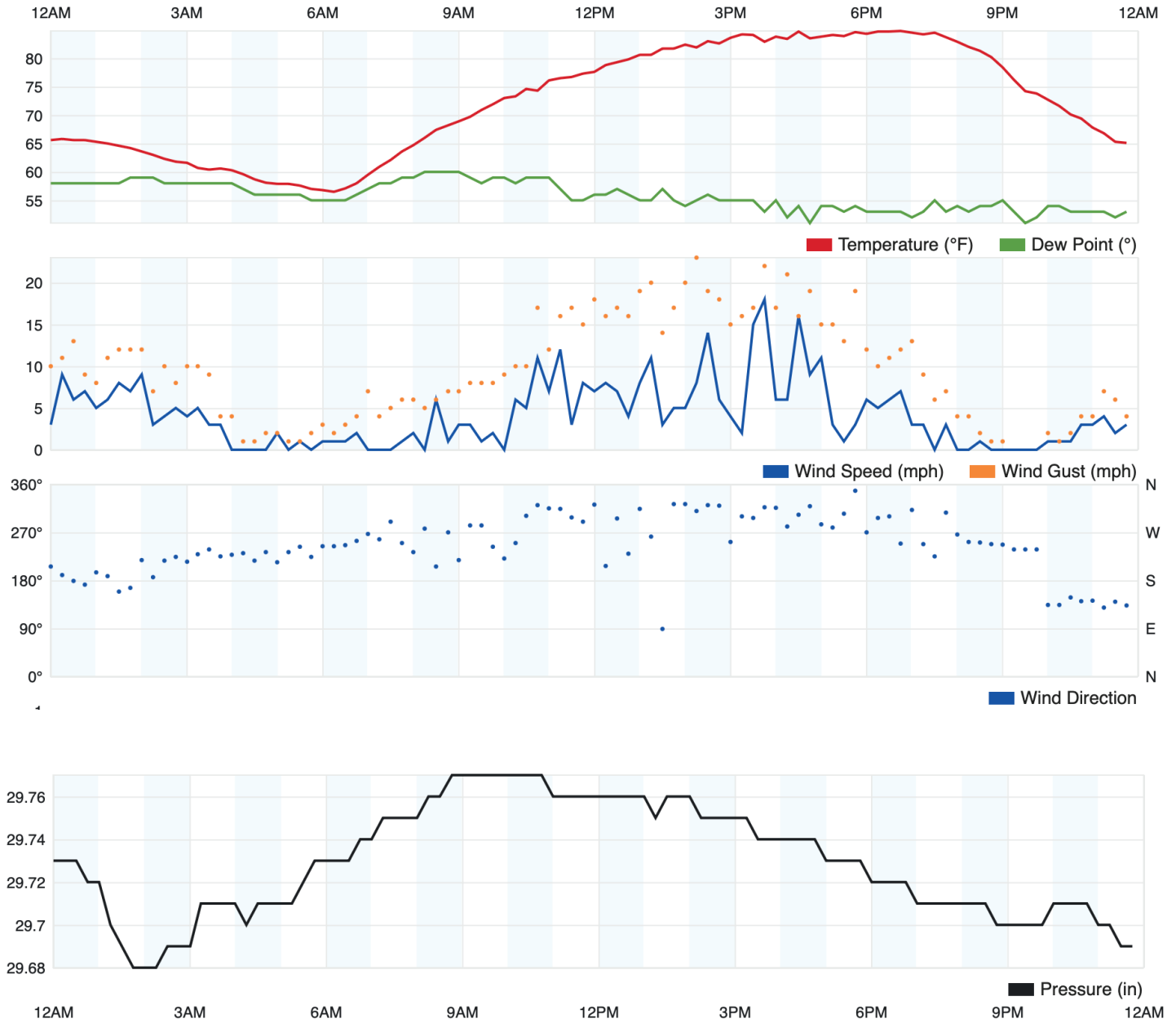
*Robbie Sequeira is a staff writer covering housing and social services for Stateline.*



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 36 of 92

## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 37 of 92

Wednesday

Wednesday  
Night

Thursday

Thursday  
Night

Friday



High: 92 °F

Slight Chance  
T-storms then  
Sunny



Low: 56 °F

Mostly Clear  
then Slight  
Chance  
T-storms



High: 82 °F

Slight Chance  
T-storms then  
Sunny



Low: 51 °F

Clear



High: 84 °F

Mostly Sunny



## Severe Weather Threat Overview

June 12, 2024  
3:11 AM

Today - Tonight

### Timing/Location

- Ongoing storms through the morning, some sub-severe, could organize and strengthen during the afternoon and evening.
- The main threats for the area in **Yellow**

### Tornado Potential

Very Low **Low** Medium High

### Max Hail Size

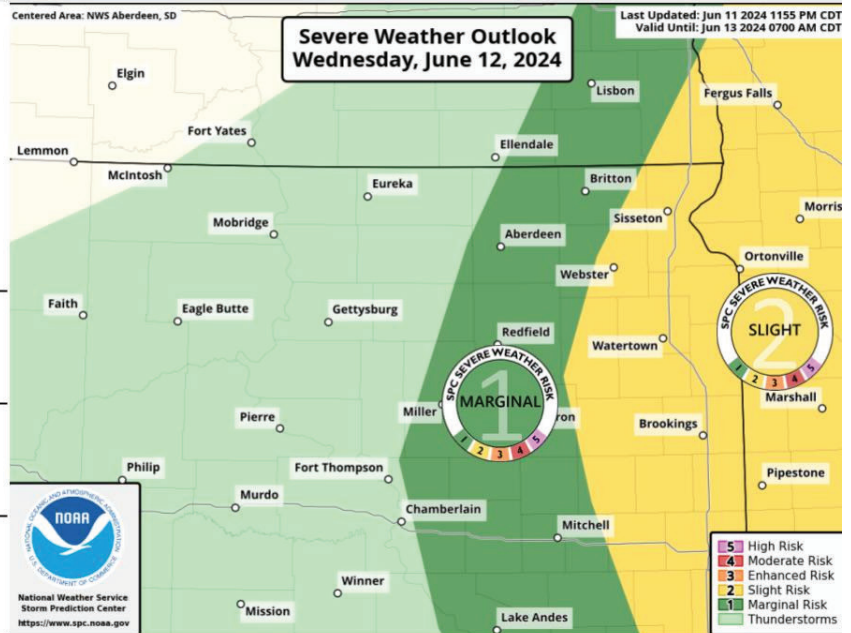
Dimes **Quarters** **Golfball** Baseball

### Max Wind Speed

< 60 mph **60-70 mph** 70-80 mph > 80mph

### Heavy Rain/Flooding Potential

Very Low **Low** Medium High



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

A cold front will move across the area today bringing a chance of showers and thunderstorms. Areas east of the James River are in a SLIGHT (2 out of 5) risk for severe storms. The main threats will be golfball sized hail and 60-70 mph winds. A tornado or two cannot be ruled out. However, considerable forecast uncertainty remains for the second half of the afternoon and evening hours.



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 38 of 92

## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 85 °F at 6:25 PM

Low Temp: 56 °F at 6:07 AM

Wind: 24 mph at 1:47 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 15 hours, 41 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 103 in 1956

Record Low: 37 in 2012

Average High: 80

Average Low: 54

Average Precip in June.: 1.40

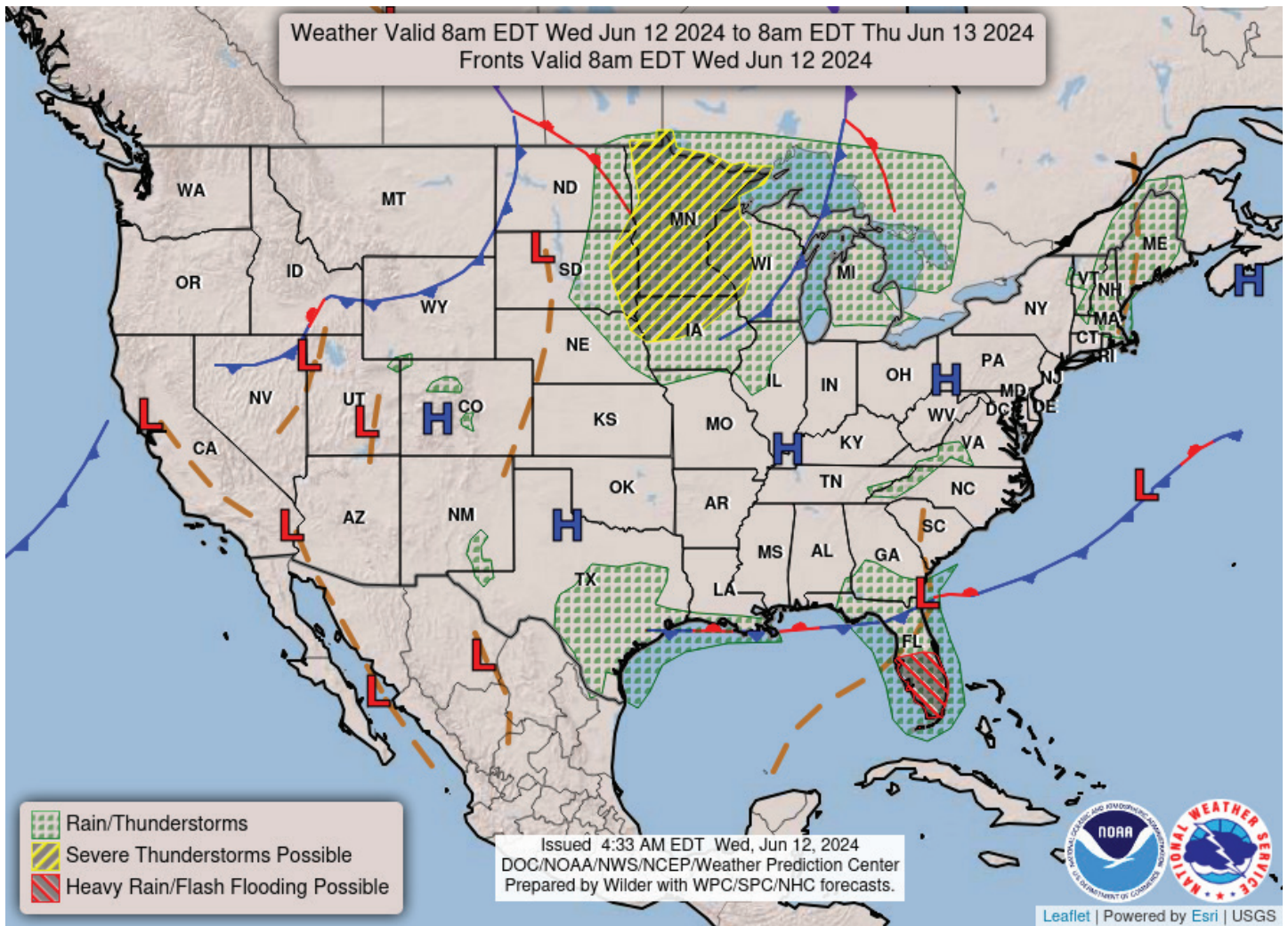
Precip to date in June: 0.12

Average Precip to date: 8.65

Precip Year to Date: 7.19

Sunset Tonight: 9:23:20 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:41:27 am



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 39 of 92

## Today in Weather History

June 12, 1924: A tornado moved southeast from the southwestern edge of Lake Kampeska, passing southwest of Watertown. Two barns were destroyed, and 20 smaller farm buildings were heavily damaged. This tornado was estimated to have F2 strength.

June 12, 1983: Lightning struck and killed two cows near Miller in Hand County. Lightning also hit a home six miles north of Aberdeen, breaking a ceramic statue, and blow out light bulbs. Another home in Aberdeen was struck by lightning, rupturing a gas line and starting the house on fire. Also, heavy rains up to seven inches fall around the area. Some storm total rainfall amounts include; 2.00 inches at 2NW of Stephan; 2.40 inches in Miller; 3.03 at 4 miles west of Mellette; and 6.30 inches in Orient.

June 12, 1994: In Hand County, a thunderstorm caused an estimated 3 million dollars in crop damage. Hail, the largest being baseball size, was reported in drifts of three to four feet high. About 70 thousand acres of cropland and pastures were destroyed. Pheasants, ducks were killed by the hail and many cattle injured. Many windows were broken in homes, holes were punched in mobile homes, damaged occurred to contents of dwellings from hail which entered through windows, and many vehicles were extensively damaged.

June 12, 2013: A line of thunderstorms moving northeast across the region brought damaging wind gusts from 60 to 80 mph to parts of central and northeastern South Dakota. Many branches along with several trees were downed. Some buildings were also damaged with a couple of buildings destroyed. An estimated eighty mph wind destroyed a cabin on the east shore of the Missouri River and north-northwest of Pierre. A hundred foot by seventy-five-foot storage building was flattened south of Doland in Spink County. Tractors and planters and other equipment in the building were damaged.

1881 - Severe thunderstorms spawned more than half a dozen tornadoes in the Lower Missouri Valley. Five of the tornadoes touched down near Saint Joseph MO. In south central Kansas a tornado nearly wiped out the town of Floral. Hail and high winds struck Iowa and southern Minnesota. In Minnesota, Blue Earth City reported five inches of rain in one hour. (David Ludlum)

1915: An estimated F4 tornado moved northeast from northwest of Waterville, Iowa crossing the Mississippi River two miles south of Ferryville, Wisconsin. A man and his daughter were killed in one of three homes that were obliterated southwest of "Heytman," a small railroad station on the Mississippi River. 60 buildings and eight homes were destroyed in Wisconsin. This tornado caused approximately \$200,000 in damage. In addition to this tornado, another estimated F4 tornado moved northeast across Fayette and Clayton Counties in northeast Iowa. One farm was devastated, the house and barn leveled. Heavy machinery was thrown 300 yards. Clothing was carried two miles.

1947 - A heavy wet snow blanketed much of southern and central Wyoming, and gave many places their heaviest and latest snow of record. Totals included 18.4 inches at Lander, 8.7 inches at Cheyenne, and 4.5 inches at Casper. (11th-12th) (The Weather Channel)

1948: The Columbia River Basin flood peaked on this date in the Northwest. The flood produced the highest water level in the basin since the flood there in 1894. The damage estimate for the 1948 flood was \$101 million, and 75 lives were lost.

1969 - Record late season snows covered parts of Montana. Five inches was reported at Great Falls and east of Broadus. Billings, MT, tied their June record with lows of 32 degrees on the 12th and the 13th. (The Weather Channel)

1983 - The state of Utah was besieged by floods and mudslides. Streets in downtown Salt Lake City were sandbagged and turned into rivers of relief. The town of Thistle was completely inundated as a mudslide made a natural dam. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thunderstorms in Nebraska produced softball size hail around Fremont and Ames, and 3.5 inches of rain in less than one hour. Four and a half inches in less than an hour caused flooding around Ithica, NE. A tornado destroyed a mobile home near Broken Bow, NE, injuring both occupants. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Fifteen cities in the southeastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date, including Asheville with a reading of 40 degrees. Drought conditions continued to intensify across the eastern half of the nation. Rainfall at Nashville, TN, was running 12.5 inches below normal. (The National Weather Summary)



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 40 of 92

Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### GRATITUDE OR GREED?

Aesop was a Greek slave who became famous for writing a number of famous fables. One of his stories involved a dog and a bone.

He once told the story of a dog that was crossing a bridge carrying a bone in its mouth. Seeing his reflection in the water beneath him, he thought that the bone in the mouth of the other dog was larger.

In his greed he opened his mouth to try to snatch the bigger bone from the other dog. However, when he opened his mouth, he dropped his bone into the water. Then he had nothing for the water in the stream carried the bone to the river and then into the sea.

Paul compares people who are greedy with those who are immoral and impure and assures his readers that they will not inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God. In fact, he says, "greedy people are actually idolaters" - and indeed they are. An idolater is one who worships and wants things more than they do God and puts the worship of things above and beyond the worship of God.

It is not wrong to want nice things. But if we want things more than we want God, it takes our minds away from Him and changes our priorities to the things of this world. As Christians we must be careful to focus our mind and place our treasures in Heaven with Jesus.

Prayer: Give us discerning minds and faithful hearts, Father, to desire those things that are best for us. May we be careful and cautious at all times to honor You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: You can be sure that no immoral, impure, or greedy person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God. For a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world. Ephesians 5:5



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, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 41 of 92

## The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

### Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

- Black & White ..... \$48.99/year
- Colored ..... \$79.88/year
- Colored ..... \$42.60/6 months
- E-Weekly\* ..... \$31.95/year

\* The E-Weekly is a PDF file emailed to you each week. It does not grant you access to the GDI/Video Archives.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State, Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Mail Completed Form to:

Groton Independent

P.O. Box 34

Groton, SD 57445-0034

or scan and email to [paperpaul@grotonsd.net](mailto:paperpaul@grotonsd.net)

## Groton Daily Independent

[www.397news.com](http://www.397news.com)

### Subscription Form

This option will grant you access to the GDI/Video Archives.

- 1 Month ..... \$15.98
- 3 Months ..... \$26.63
- 6 Months ..... \$31.95
- 9 Months ..... \$42.60
- 12 Months ..... \$53.25

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State, Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

The following will be used for your log-in information.

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Password \_\_\_\_\_

Pay with Paypal. Type the following into your browser window:

[paypal.me/paperpaul](https://paypal.me/paperpaul)







## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.11.24

1 5 7 22 24 8

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$47,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 18 Mins 50 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.10.24

5 11 14 25 26 9

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$3,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 33 Mins 50 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.11.24

12 23 31 44 48 8

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 48 Mins 50 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
06.08.24

11 16 17 19 26

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$20,000**

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 48 Mins 50 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.10.24

9 15 27 32 65 10

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 17 Mins 50 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 06.10.24

3 10 33 58 59 9

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$20,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 17 Mins 49 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

## News from the Associated Press

### French President Macron urges moderate politicians to regroup to defeat far right in elections

SYLVIE CORBET undefined

PARIS (AP) — French President Emmanuel Macron called Wednesday for moderate politicians from the left and the right to regroup to defeat the far right in general elections.

Macron, a pro-business centrist, said he wants “men and women of goodwill who were able to say ‘no’ to extremes to join together to be able to build a joint project” for the country.

A somber-looking Macron is addressing French voters for the first time since he called for a snap national election following a crushing defeat of his party by the far right in the European parliamentary vote.

Unlike in his recent national addresses in which Macron focused on Russia’s war in Ukraine and ways Europe should forge a common defense policy, independent of the United States and shore up trade protections against China, Macron stuck to France’s internal issues favored by the surging right, including curbing immigration, fighting crime and Islamic separatism in France.

He said he decided to dissolve the National Assembly, France’s lower house of parliament, because he could not ignore the new political reality after his pro-European party was handed a chastening defeat and garnered less than half the support of the National Rally with its star leader, Jordan Bardella.

His move Sunday triggered an early legislative election that will take place three weeks after the far-right National Rally party of Marine Le Pen triumphed at the election for the European Union Parliament.

Macron, who has three years left of his second presidential term, hopes voters will band together to contain the far right in national elections in a way they didn’t in European ones.

“Things are simple today: we have unnatural alliances at both extremes, who quite agree on nothing except the jobs to be shared, and who will not be able to implement any program,” Macron said during an opening address at a press conference in Paris.

As for his own centrist alliance, Macron said: “We’re not perfect, we haven’t done everything right, but we have results... and above all, we know how to act.”

Sunday’s decision to dissolve parliament and send to the polls voters who just expressed their discontent with Macron’s politics was a risky move that could result in the French far-right leading a government for the first time since World War II.

Potential alliances and France’s two-round voting system in national elections make the outcome of the vote highly uncertain.

Macron on Wednesday rebuffed accusations that his move to call snap legislative elections would help the far-right take power in France.

“It’s about allowing political forces chosen by the French to be able to govern,” he said during a press conference in Paris. He added that it’s “awkward to think it has to be the extreme right or political extremes. Or maybe you’ve got the spirit of defeat spread everywhere.”

“If that’s what people are afraid of, it’s time now to take action,” he said.

Opposition parties on the left and right have been scrambling to form alliances and field candidates in the early legislative balloting that will take place on June 30 and July 7.

While sharp differences between parties remain on either side of the political spectrum, prominent figures calling for a united front appear to have one thing in common: They don’t want to cooperate with Macron.

Despite their divisions, left-wing parties agreed late Monday to form an alliance that includes the Greens, the Socialists, the Communists and the far-left France Unbowed of Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

National Rally leader Marine Le Pen is working to consolidate power on the right in efforts to translate the European triumph into a national win and come closer to claiming power. The far-right party, with a history of racism and xenophobia, is expected to win the most French seats in the European Parliament, potentially as many as 30 of France’s 81.



## Thefts of charging cables pose yet another obstacle to appeal of electric vehicles

By TOM KRISHER AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — Just before 2 a.m. on a chilly April night in Seattle, a Chevrolet Silverado pickup stopped at an electric vehicle charging station on the edge of a shopping center parking lot.

Two men, one with a light strapped to his head, got out. A security camera recorded them pulling out bolt cutters. One man snipped several charging cables; the other loaded them into the truck. In under 2½ minutes, they were gone.

The scene that night has become part of a troubling pattern across the country: Thieves have been targeting EV charging stations, intent on stealing the cables, which contain copper wiring. The price of copper is near a record high on global markets, which means criminals stand to collect rising sums of cash from selling the material.

The stolen cables often disable entire stations, forcing EV owners on the road to search desperately for a working charger. For the owners, the predicament can be exasperating and stressful.

Broken-down chargers have emerged as the latest obstacle for U.S. automakers in their strenuous effort to convert more Americans to EVs despite widespread public anxiety about a scarcity of charging stations. About 4 in 10 U.S. adults say they believe EVs take too long to charge or don't know of any charging stations nearby.

If even finding a charging station doesn't necessarily mean finding functioning cables, it becomes one more reason for skeptical buyers to stick with traditional gasoline-fueled or hybrid vehicles, at least for now.

America's major automakers have made heavy financial bets that buyers will shift away from combustion engines and embrace EVs as the world faces the worsening consequences of climate change. Accordingly, the companies have poured billions into EVs.

Stellantis envisions 50% of its passenger cars being EVs by the end of 2030. Ford set a target of producing 2 million EVs per year by 2026 — about 45% of its global sales — though it has since suspended that goal. General Motors, the most ambitious of the three, has pledged to sell only EV passenger cars by the end of 2035.

Any such timetables, of course, hinge on whether the companies can convince more would-be EV buyers that a charge will always be available when they travel. The rise in cable thefts isn't likely to strengthen the automakers' case.

Two years ago, according to Electrify America, which runs the nation's second-largest network of direct-current fast chargers, a cable might be cut perhaps every six months at one of its 968 charging stations, with 4,400 plugs nationwide. Through May this year, the figure reached 129 — four more than in all of 2023. At one Seattle station, cables were cut six times in the past year, said Anthony Lambkin, Electrify America's vice president of operations.

"We're enabling people to get to work, to take their kids to school, get to medical appointments," Lambkin said. "So to have an entire station that's offline is pretty impactful to our customers."

Two other leading EV charging companies — Flo and EVgo — also have reported a rise in thefts. Charging stations in the Seattle area have been a frequent target. Sites in Nevada, California, Arizona, Colorado, Illinois, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas and Pennsylvania have been hit, too.

Stations run by Tesla, which operates the nation's largest fast-charging network, have been struck in Seattle, Oakland and Houston. So far this year, Seattle police have reported seven cases of cable thefts from charging stations, matching the number for all of 2023. Thieves hit Tesla stations four times this year compared with just once last year, the Seattle police said.

"Vandalism of public charging infrastructure in the Seattle metro area has unfortunately been increasing in frequency," EVgo said.

The company said law enforcement officials are investigating the thefts while it tries to repair inoperable stations and considers a longer-term solution.

The problem isn't confined to urban areas. In rural Sumner, Washington, about 30 miles south of Seattle,

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 45 of 92

thieves cut cables twice at a Puget Sound Energy charging station. The company is working with police and the property owner to protect the station, which cost more than \$500,000 to install.

Until a month ago, police in Houston knew of no cable thefts. Then one was stolen from a charger at a gas station. The city has now recorded eight or nine such thefts, said Sgt. Robert Carson, who leads a police metal-theft unit.

In one case, thieves swiped 18 of 19 cords at a Tesla station. That day, Carson visited the station to inspect the damage. In the first five minutes that he was there, Carson said, about 10 EVs that needed charging had to be turned away.

In very large cities like Houston, charging stations typically contain an especially large number of plugs and cables, so thefts can be particularly damaging.

"They're not just taking one," Carson said. "When they're hit, they're hit pretty hard."

Roy Manuel, an Uber driver who normally recharges his Tesla at the Houston station hit by thieves, said he fears being unable to do so because of stolen cables.

"If my battery was really low, I'd have quite an issue with operating my vehicle," he said. "If it was so low that I couldn't get to another charger, I might be in trouble. Might even need a tow truck."

The charging companies say it's become clear that the thieves are after the copper that the cables contain. In late May, copper hit a record high of nearly \$5.20 a pound, a result, in part, of rising demand resulting from efforts to cut carbon emissions with EVs that use more copper wiring. The price is up about 25% from a year ago, and may analysts envision further increases.

Charging companies say there isn't actually very much copper in the cables, and what copper is there is difficult to extract. Carson estimates that criminals can get \$15 to \$20 per cable at a scrap yard.

"They're not making a significant amount of money," he said. "They're not going to be sailing on a yacht anywhere."

Still, the more cables the thieves can steal, the more they can cash in. At \$20 a cable, 20 stolen cables could fetch them \$400.

The problem for the charging companies is that it's much costlier to replace cables. In Minneapolis, where cables have been clipped at city-owned charging stations, sometimes multiple times, it costs about \$1,000 to replace just one cable, said Joe Laurin, project manager in the Department of Public Works.

The charging companies are working on strategies to fight back. Electrify America is installing more security cameras. In Houston, police are visiting recycling centers to look for stolen metal.

But it's often hard for the scrap yards to determine conclusively whether metal came from a charging cable. Thieves often burn off the insulation and just sell strands of metal.

The Recycled Materials Association, which represents 1,700 members, is issuing scrap-theft alerts from law enforcement officials so that members can be on the lookout for suspects and stolen goods.

Carson urged EV owners to watch for suspicious people near chargers and to call police.

"If people are driving down the road and you see a gas-powered vehicle, a truck, at a charging station, that probably doesn't belong there," he said.

Because charging stations are often situated in remote corners of parking lots, Carson suggested that many more security cameras are needed.

In the meantime, Electrify America said Seattle police are trying to track down the thieves in the video. And Carson said the Houston police are pursuing leads in the Tesla theft.

"We'd like to get them stopped," he said, "and then let the court system do what they're supposed to do."

## **Faking an honest woman: Why Russia, China and Big Tech all use faux females to get clicks**

By DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When disinformation researcher Wen-Ping Liu looked into China's efforts to influence Taiwan's recent election using fake social media accounts, something unusual stood out about the most successful profiles.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 46 of 92

They were female, or at least that's what they appeared to be. Fake profiles that claimed to be women got more engagement, more eyeballs and more influence than supposedly male accounts.

"Pretending to be a female is the easiest way to get credibility," said Liu, an investigator with Taiwan's Ministry of Justice.

Whether it's Chinese or Russian propaganda agencies, online scammers or AI chatbots, it pays to be female — proving that while technology may grow more and more sophisticated, the human brain remains surprisingly easy to hack thanks in part to age-old gender stereotypes that have migrated from the real world to the virtual.

People have long assigned human characteristics like gender to inanimate objects — ships are one example — so it makes sense that human-like traits would make fake social media profiles or chatbots more appealing. However, questions about how these technologies can reflect and reinforce gender stereotypes are getting attention as more voice assistants and AI-enabled chatbots enter the market, further blurring the lines between man (and woman) and machine.

"You want to inject some emotion and warmth and a very easy way to do that is to pick a woman's face and voice," said Sylvie Borau, a marketing professor and online researcher in Toulouse, France, whose work has found that internet users prefer "female" bots and see them as more human than "male" versions.

People tend to see women as warmer, less threatening and more agreeable than men, Borau told The Associated Press. Men, meanwhile, are often perceived to be more competent, though also more likely to be threatening or hostile. Because of this many people may be, consciously or unconsciously, more willing to engage with a fake account that poses as female.

When OpenAI CEO Sam Altman was searching for a new voice for the ChatGPT AI program, he approached Scarlett Johansson, who said Altman told her that users would find her voice — which served as the eponymous voice assistant in the movie "Her" — "comforting." Johansson declined Altman's request and threatened to sue when the company went with what she called an "eerily similar" voice. OpenAI put the new voice on hold.

Feminine profile pictures, particularly ones showing women with flawless skin, lush lips and wide eyes in revealing outfits, can be another online lure for many men.

Users also treat bots differently based on their perceived sex: Borau's research has found that "female" chatbots are far more likely to receive sexual harassment and threats than "male" bots.

Female social media profiles receive on average more than three times the views compared to those of males, according to an analysis of more than 40,000 profiles conducted for the AP by Cyabra, an Israeli tech firm that specializes in bot detection. Female profiles that claim to be younger get the most views, Cyabra found.

"Creating a fake account and presenting it as a woman will help the account gain more reach compared to presenting it as a male," according to Cyabra's report.

The online influence campaigns mounted by nations like China and Russia have long used faux females to spread propaganda and disinformation. These campaigns often exploit people's views of women. Some appear as wise, nurturing grandmothers dispensing homespun wisdom, while others mimic young, conventionally attractive women eager to talk politics with older men.

Last month, researchers at the firm NewsGuard found hundreds of fake accounts — some boasting AI-generated profile pictures — were used to criticize President Joe Biden. It happened after some Trump supporters began posting a personal photo with the announcement that they "will not be voting for Joe Biden."

While many of the posts were authentic, more than 700 came from fake accounts. Most of the profiles claimed to be young women living in states like Illinois or Florida; one was named PatriotGal480. But many of the accounts used nearly identical language, and had profile photos that were AI-generated or stolen from other users. And while they couldn't say for sure who was operating the fake accounts, they found dozens with links to nations including Russia and China.

X removed the accounts after NewsGuard contacted the platform.



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 47 of 92

A report from the U.N. suggested there's an even more obvious reason why so many fake accounts and chatbots are female: they were created by men. The report, entitled "Are Robots Sexist?" looked at gender disparities in tech industries and concluded that greater diversity in programming and AI development could lead to fewer sexist stereotypes embedded in their products.

For programmers eager to make their chatbots as human as possible, this creates a dilemma, Borau said: if they select a female persona, are they encouraging sexist views about real-life women?

"It's a vicious cycle," Borau said. "Humanizing AI might dehumanize women."

## Americans celebrate their flag every year, and the holiday was born in Wisconsin

By TERESA CRAWFORD and JOHN O'CONNOR Associated Press

WAUBEKA, Wis. (AP) — Each June, the people of Waubeka venerate perhaps the nation's most enduring symbol, celebrating Flag Day, a holiday that escapes the notice of many Americans.

But this unincorporated Wisconsin town about 35 miles (56 kilometers) north of Milwaukee takes the day seriously. After all, it lays claim to being the birthplace of Flag Day, thanks to a tenacious teacher in a one-room schoolhouse.

Here are some things to know about the obscure flag-waving holiday.

What is Flag Day? Flag Day commemorates June 14, 1777, when the Continental Congress determined the composition of the nation's banner: "Resolved, That the flag of the thirteen United States be thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new constellation."

President Woodrow Wilson issued a 1916 proclamation of June 14 as Flag Day and in 1949, President Harry S. Truman signed the formal observance into law. And it falls during Flag Week, after another congressional dictum in 1966.

What about July 4? Yes, Independence Day makes prominent use of the flag. But the emblem is important enough to have its own day, according to David Janik, a Waubeka native and second-generation president of the National Flag Day Foundation.

"July 4th, we're celebrating our independence," Janik said. "But on Flag Day, we're celebrating the birth of our flag, which is the symbol of our country, the symbol that is seen all around the world as the helper, the people who won't leave you out in the cold."

Why Waubeka? On June 14, 1885, Bernard J. Cigrand, an 18-year-old Waubeka native teaching at Stony Hill School, put a flag in his inkwell and assigned his students an essay about what the flag means to them. Cigrand left the next year for dental school in Chicago, but he never gave up his advocacy for a national day dedicated to the flag.

Cigrand realized his dream in 1916 when Wilson issued his proclamation.

Although he died in 1932, Waubeka never forgot Cigrand and in 1946, community leaders established the town's Flag Day celebration, which has run continuously since then.

Any other 'first' Flag Days? Yes. The earliest mention of Flag Day involves a man named George Morris who organized such a commemoration on June 14, 1861, in Hartford, Connecticut, marked by a patriotic program and prayers for Union Army success in a young Civil War. But apparently, the festivities were never repeated.

Pennsylvanians will challenge Cigrand's coronation as "Father of Flag Day." Pittsburgh native William T. Kerr began his advocacy in 1888 and a year later became national chairman of the American Flag Day Foundation, holding that position for a half a century. Kerr was among those standing beside Truman when he signed the Flag Day law.

As for the expected friendly rivalry, Janik said his father, the late Jack Janik, "took care of that." The elder Janik traveled to Washington and lobbied Congress, which in 2004 adopted a resolution naming Waubeka "the birthplace of Flag Day."

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 48 of 92

What about the essays? Along with the parade, the bands, the patriotism awards, the military honor guards and a dog named Harlow who turns 8 on Flag Day and sported a red, white and blue boater on her head, there are the essays.

In the spirit of Cigrand and his students of 139 years ago, the Waubeka Flag Day celebration includes an annual essay contest and draws entries from across the nation — this year from New York to Nevada and Wisconsin to Texas.

The Stars and Stripes “represent a nation where immigrants like my grandparents are welcomed, where diversity is celebrated and where justice is present for all,” wrote Neel Sood, a 4th grader from Bridgewater, New Jersey.

Adell, Wisconsin 7th grader Ryan Spang wrote that “the American flag represents unity. We are one nation, united by our similarities and differences. We support people in our communities in times of need and we cheer them on in times of achievement.”

Why isn't it a day off? Flag Day isn't like Thanksgiving, Memorial Day and a smattering of other federal holidays that generally mean Americans can spend the day off work.

Instead, it's officially recognized nationwide, and government services are still open and the mail still gets delivered. Only Pennsylvania marks it as a state holiday, allowing residents to stay home from work and school.

But another backyard barbecue isn't required to feel the love in Waubeka.

“Our passion for the flag here is very deep,” Janik said. “The flag is the symbol of our country — it symbolizes individualism, success, loss, daring, chivalry. People need a compass to guide them, and the flag is a great compass.”

## Hezbollah fires scores of rockets at northern Israel as Gaza cease-fire talks hang in the balance

By BASSEM MROUE and JACK JEFFERY Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Lebanon's Hezbollah fired a massive barrage of rockets into northern Israel on Wednesday to avenge the killing of a top commander, further escalating regional tensions as the fate of an internationally-backed plan for a cease-fire in Gaza hung in the balance.

The retaliatory attack came as U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken was in the region to push a cease-fire proposal with global support that has not been fully embraced by Israel or Hamas. The militant group submitted its first official response late Tuesday, requesting “amendments” to the deal.

Hezbollah, an Iran-backed ally of Hamas, has traded fire with Israel nearly every day since the 8-month-long Israel-Hamas war began and says it will only stop if there is a truce in Gaza. That has raised fears of an even more devastating regional conflagration.

Air raid sirens sounded across northern Israel, and the military said that about 160 projectiles were fired from southern Lebanon, making it one of the largest attacks since the fighting began. There were no immediate reports of casualties as some were intercepted while others ignited brush fires.

REVENGE FOR SLAIN COMMANDER Hezbollah said it fired missiles and rockets at two military bases in retaliation for the killing of Taleb Sami Abdullah, 55. Known within Hezbollah as Hajj Abu Taleb, he is the most senior commander killed since the fighting began eight months ago. The Israeli strike destroyed a house where Abdullah and three other officials were meeting, about 10 kilometers (6 miles) from the border, late Tuesday.

A Hezbollah official told The Associated Press that Abdullah was in charge of a large part of the Lebanon-Israel front, including the area facing the Israeli town of Kiryat Shmona, which Hezbollah has repeatedly attacked in recent days, causing fires in the area.

The official, who was not authorized to speak to media and spoke on condition of anonymity, said Abdullah had joined Hezbollah decades ago and took part in attacks against Israeli forces during their 18-year occupation of southern Lebanon that ended in May 2000.

Israeli airstrikes on Lebanon have killed over 400 people, most of them Hezbollah members, but the dead

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 49 of 92

also include more than 70 civilians and non-combatants. On the Israeli side, 15 soldiers and 10 civilians have been killed since the war in Gaza began.

Other groups allied with Iran, including powerful militias in Iraq and Syria, and the Houthi rebels in Yemen, have also attacked Israeli, U.S. and other targets since the start of the war, often drawing Western retaliation. In April, Israel and Iran traded fire directly for the first time.

U.S. President Joe Biden's administration has said the best way to calm regional tensions is for Hamas to accept a proposal for a phased cease-fire that it says would end of the war in Gaza and bring about the release of the remaining hostages abducted in Hamas' Oct. 7 attack that ignited the war. The U.N. Security Council voted overwhelmingly in favor of the plan on Monday.

Biden says it is an Israeli proposal, but Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has sent conflicting signals, saying Israel remains committed to destroying Hamas. It's unclear how it would do that if the U.S.-backed proposal, which includes an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, is fully implemented.

**HAMAS ASKS FOR 'AMENDMENTS'** Hamas has expressed support for the broad outline of the deal but wariness over whether Israel would implement its terms.

Hamas spokesman Jihad Taha told the Lebanese news outlet Elnashra that the "amendments" requested by the group include guarantees of a permanent cease-fire and the complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza.

Hamas's official reply to the proposal, which it conveyed to mediators on Tuesday, appeared to be short of outright acceptance but kept negotiations alive. Qatar and Egypt, which have been key mediators alongside the United States, said they were studying it.

Blinken, who is on his eighth visit to the region since the start of the war, headed to Qatar on Wednesday to follow up on the negotiations.

The proposal has raised hopes of ending a conflict in which Israel's bombardment and ground offensives in Gaza have killed over 37,000 Palestinians, according to Palestinian health officials, and driven some 80% of the population of 2.3 million from their homes. Israeli restrictions and ongoing fighting have hindered efforts to bring humanitarian aid to the isolated coastal enclave, fueling widespread hunger.

Israel launched its campaign after Hamas and other militants stormed into Israel on Oct. 7, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking around 250 hostage. Over 100 hostages were released during a weeklong cease-fire last year in exchange for Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. Hamas is still holding around 120 hostages, a third of whom are believed to be dead.

The proposal announced by Biden calls for a three-phase plan that would begin with a six-week cease-fire and the release of some hostages in exchange for Palestinian prisoners. Israeli forces would withdraw from populated areas and Palestinian civilians would be allowed to return to their homes.

Phase one also requires the safe distribution of humanitarian assistance "at scale throughout the Gaza Strip," which Biden said would lead to 600 trucks of aid entering Gaza every day.

At the same time, negotiations would be launched over the second phase, which is to bring "a permanent end to hostilities, in exchange for the release of all other hostages still in Gaza, and a full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza."

Phase three would launch "a major multi-year reconstruction plan for Gaza and the return of the remains of any deceased hostages still in Gaza to their families."

The militant group accepted a similar proposal last month that was rejected by Israel.

Netanyahu's far-right coalition allies have rejected the latest proposal and have threatened to bring down his government if he ends the war leaving Hamas intact. But Netanyahu is also under mounting pressure to accept a deal to bring the hostages back. Thousands of Israelis, including families of the hostages, have demonstrated in favor of the U.S.-backed plan.

## At least 41 die in a fire at a building housing workers in Kuwait

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — At least 41 people died when a fire swept through a building that housed workers in Kuwait early Wednesday, and officials said the blaze appeared to be linked to code



violations.

Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousuf Al-Sabah confirmed the toll and ordered the arrest of the building's owner during a visit to the site, local media reported.

The reports said scores of workers were living in the building in the southern Mangaf district, without giving their nationality.

Kuwait, like other Persian Gulf countries, has a large community of migrant workers who far outnumber the local population. The nation of some 4.2 million people is slightly smaller than the U.S. state of New Jersey but has the world's sixth-largest known oil reserves.

A fire at an oil refinery in 2022 killed four people.

## The Latest | Rockets fired from Lebanon after Israel kills Hezbollah commander

By The Associated Press undefined

Scores of rockets were fired from Lebanon toward northern Israel on Wednesday morning, hours after Israeli airstrikes killed four officials from the militant Hezbollah group including a senior military commander.

The Israeli military said that about 90 projectiles were detected, of which some were intercepted, and that several fires were caused by the strikes.

Taleb Sami Abdullah, 55, who was known within Hezbollah as Hajj Abu Taleb, was the most senior commander killed since fighting began eight months ago. His death came amid rising escalation along the Lebanon-Israel border that has seen Hezbollah intensify its attacks on northern Israel while Israeli airstrikes have struck deep inside Lebanon.

On Tuesday, Hamas responded to the U.S.-backed proposal for a cease-fire in Gaza, saying it wants some "amendments" on the deal. The militant group's reply apparently fell short of an outright acceptance that the United States has been pushing for but kept negotiations alive over an elusive halt to the eight-month war.

While supporting the broad outlines of the deal, Hamas officials have expressed wariness over whether Israel would implement its terms, particularly provisions for an eventual permanent end to fighting and full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in return for the release of all hostages held by the militants.

Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza has killed more than 37,100 people, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between combatants and civilians in its count. Palestinians are facing widespread hunger because the war has largely cut off the flow of food, medicine and other supplies. U.N. agencies say over 1 million in Gaza could experience the highest level of starvation by mid-July.

Israel launched the war after Hamas' Oct. 7 attack, in which militants stormed into southern Israel, killed some 1,200 people — mostly civilians — and abducted about 250.

Currently:

- Hamas responds to Gaza cease-fire plan seeking some changes. The US says it's 'evaluating' the reply
- Netanyahu's top rival left Israel's war Cabinet. How does that affect the prime minister and Gaza?
- UN says violence against children in conflict reached extreme levels in 2023, including in Gaza
- Dozens arrested in new pro-Palestinian protests at University of California, Los Angeles.
- UN says Israeli forces and Palestinian armed groups may have committed war crimes in a deadly raid
- What does Israel's rescue of 4 captives, and the killing of 274 Palestinians, mean for truce talks?

Follow AP's coverage of the war in Gaza at <https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war>

Here's the latest:

Rockets fired from Lebanon after Israel kills Hezbollah commander **BEIRUT** — Scores of rockets were fired from Lebanon toward northern Israel on Wednesday morning, hours after Israeli airstrikes killed four officials from the militant Hezbollah group including a senior military commander.

The Israeli military said that about 90 projectiles were detected. It said that some were intercepted, and that several fires were caused by the strikes.

Taleb Sami Abdullah, 55, who was known within Hezbollah as Hajj Abu Taleb, was the most senior commander killed since fighting began eight months ago. His death came amid rising escalation along the

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 51 of 92

Lebanon-Israel border that has seen Hezbollah intensify its attacks on northern Israel while Israeli airstrikes have struck deep inside Lebanon.

Hezbollah's Al-Manar TV reported that rockets were being fired from south Lebanon into northern Israel. Sirens were sounded in northern Israel, according to Israeli media.

A Hezbollah official said Abdullah was the most senior commander to be killed in Lebanon since the latest round of violence along the Lebanon-Israel border began in October adding that he was the commander of the group's Nasr Unit that is charge of parts of south Lebanon close to the Israeli border.

The Israeli strike destroyed a house in Jwaya where Abdullah and three other officials were holding a meeting, about 10 kilometers (6 miles) from the border, late on Tuesday.

The Hezbollah official, who spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations, said Abdullah was more senior than a commander who was killed in January, Wissam al-Tawil.

Israeli airstrikes on Lebanon have killed over 400 people, most of them Hezbollah members, but the dead also include more than 70 civilians and non-combatants. On the Israeli side, 15 soldiers and 10 civilians have been killed since the war in Gaza began.

— AP writer Bassem Mroue contributed.

Lebanese militant group Hezbollah says a senior commander has been killed **BEIRUT** — Lebanese militant group Hezbollah announced early Wednesday the death of one of its commanders, identified as Taleb Sami Abdullah or "Hajj Abu Taleb."

The group did not give details on the location and circumstances of his death, but identified him as a "martyr on the road to Jerusalem," the term it uses for those killed in the current conflict with Israel. Hezbollah published a photo of Abdullah alongside Wissam al-Tawil, another senior commander killed in an Israeli strike in January.

The Israeli military did not immediately comment on Abdullah's death.

Cross-border fighting between Israel and Hezbollah has intensified in the past month, as Israel launched its offensive into the key southern Gaza city of Rafah. Hezbollah has also stepped up its attacks, striking deeper inside Israel and introduced new and more advanced weaponry.

Israeli drone strikes have killed hundreds of Hezbollah members since exchanges of fire began on Oct. 8, a day after the Israel-Hamas war began in Gaza.

Since then, more than 400 people have been killed in Lebanon, most of them Hezbollah members. The dead also include more than 70 civilians and non-combatants. On the Israeli side, at least 15 soldiers and 10 civilians have been killed.

## More than 1.5 million foreign Muslims arrive in Mecca for annual Hajj pilgrimage

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

**MECCA, Saudi Arabia (AP)** — Muslim pilgrims have been streaming into Saudi Arabia's holy city of Mecca ahead of the start of the Hajj later this week, as the annual pilgrimage returns to its monumental scale.

Saudi officials say more than 1.5 million foreign pilgrims have arrived in the country by Tuesday, the vast majority by air, from across the world. More are expected, and hundreds of thousands of Saudis and others living in Saudi Arabia will also join them when the pilgrimage officially begins on Friday.

Saudi officials have said they expect the number of pilgrims this year to exceed 2023, when more than 1.8 million people performed Hajj, approaching pre-pandemic levels. In 2019, more than 2.4 million Muslims made the pilgrimage. Saudi authorities control the flow of pilgrims through quotas, allowing each country one pilgrim for every thousand Muslim citizens.

The pilgrims included 4,200 Palestinians from the occupied West Bank who arrived in Mecca earlier this month, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs. Palestinians in the Gaza Strip were not able to travel to Saudi Arabia for Hajj this year, because of the 8-month war between Israel and Hamas.

"We are praying for Palestine to be free and (for Palestinians) to liberate their land and to be like other nations, to live in peace and not always to have war," said Ibrahim al-Hadhari, an Algerian pilgrim, as he was standing in the Grand Mosque court waiting for evening prayers.

On Tuesday, pilgrims thronged the Grand Mosque in Mecca, performing a ritual circuit walking seven times around the Kaaba, the cube-shaped structure inside the mosque that is considered Islam's holiest site. They wore ihrams, two unstitched sheets of white cloth that resemble a shroud.

Many were seen carrying umbrellas against the sun, in temperatures reaching 42 degrees Celsius (107 Fahrenheit) during the day on Tuesday.

"I was relieved when I arrived at the Al-Masjid Al-Haram and saw the Kaaba," said Rabeia al-Raghi, a Moroccan woman who came to Mecca for Hajj along with her husband and their daughter. "I am very happy."

Mohammad Abdel-Baset, an Iraqi pilgrim, said he was overjoyed to perform Hajj.

"We congratulate the great crowd and thank God for gathering us from all regions, globally and not from the Arab world only, from all the global Muslim regions (who) came to the Grand Mosque," said Abdel-Baset, a lawyer from Baghdad.

At night, the vast marble court around the Kaaba was packed with the faithful, walking nearly shoulder to shoulder and often jostling with barricades set up by security forces to direct the giant flows of people in and around the Grand Mosque.

Pilgrims do the circumambulation, known as "Tawaf" in Arabic, upon arriving in Mecca. The large crowds circling the Kaaba will last into the Hajj's first day.

On Friday, pilgrims will move to the Mountain of Arafat for a daylong vigil, then to Muzdalifah, a rocky plain area a few miles away. In Muzdalifa, pilgrims collect pebbles to be used in the symbolic stoning of pillars representing the devil back in Mina.

One of the world's largest religious gatherings, the Hajj is one of the Five Pillars of Islam. All Muslims are required to undertake it at least once in their lives if they are physically and financially able to do so.

Those in the Hajj view the pilgrimage as an opportunity to strengthen their faith, wipe out old sins and start new.

## **Report by UN-backed experts cites crimes by Israeli forces, Palestinian militants starting Oct. 7**

GENEVA (AP) — U.N.-backed human rights experts say in a report issued Wednesday that Israeli forces and Palestinian militants engaged in sexual and gender-based violence during the first months of the Israel-Hamas war.

The independent experts, in a detailed chronicling of events that have mostly been reported in the media, said Israeli forces and Palestinian militants committed war crimes, while Israel was also said to have committed crimes against humanity.

Israel, which has refused to cooperate with the body and accused it of bias, rejected the allegations.

The report, which covered the time between the Oct. 7 rampage and the end of last year, laid out a wide array of alleged rights violations and crimes by both sides during the conflict. It said Israeli forces had committed acts including forced starvation, murder or willful killing, collective punishment and intentional attacks on civilians, and that the military wings of Hamas and other armed Palestinian groups had performed deliberate killings and mistreatment of civilians and hostage-takings.

The findings come as the conflict has entered its ninth month with few signs of letting up.

The report said that frequency, prevalence and severity of sexual and gender-based crimes against Palestinians by Israeli security forces during the period late last year amounted to signs that some forms of such violence "are part of ISF operating procedures."

Despite noting denials by Hamas' military wing of sexual violence against Israeli women, the report said the experts had documented "cases indicative of sexual violence" against women and men near the site of a large music festival, a military outpost and several kibbutzim that the raiders attacked.

The expert panel was commissioned in 2021 by the U.N.-backed Human Rights Council to look into rights



violations and abuses in Israel and the Palestinian areas it controls. Led by Navi Pillay, a former U.N. human rights chief, they are independent experts and do not speak for the world body itself. Israel has refused to cooperate with the team of experts.

Israel's diplomatic mission in Geneva responded that the report "outrageously and repugnantly attempts to draw a false equivalence between IDF soldiers and Hamas terrorists with regards to acts of sexual violence" and reiterating longstanding claims of anti-Israel discrimination by the experts.

The report and Israel's response marked the latest sign of the growing gulf between the U.N. and its affiliate institutions and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government over its response to the deadly Oct. 7 rampage and hostage-takings in Israel by armed Palestinian militants.

On Tuesday, the U.N. human rights office — which is separate from the panel of independent experts — cited possible war crimes by Israeli forces and Palestinian armed groups in connection with a deadly raid by Israeli forces that freed four hostages over the weekend and killed hundreds of Palestinians.

## North Korea's Kim hails Russia ties as Putin reportedly plans a visit

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un hailed the country's expanding relationship with Russia on Wednesday, as reports suggest that Russian President Vladimir Putin will soon visit the country for his third meeting with Kim.

Military, economic and other cooperation between North Korea and Russia have sharply increased since Kim visited Russia last September for a meeting with Putin. The U.S., South Korea and their partners believe North Korea has supplied artillery, missiles and other conventional weapons to Russia to support its war in Ukraine in return for advanced military technologies and economic aid.

Kim has been pushing to boost partnerships with Russia and China in a bid to strength his regional footing and launch a united front against the United States.

During their September meeting at Russia's main space launch site, Kim invited the Russian president to visit North Korea at "a convenient time," and Putin accepted.

On Wednesday, Kim sent Putin a message congratulating Russia on its National Day, according to the North's official Korean Central News Agency.

"Thanks to the significant meeting between us at the Vostochny Spaceport in September last year, (North Korea)-Russia friendly and cooperative relations developed into an unbreakable relationship of comrades-in-arms," Kim said in the message.

Kim's comments came as media reports said Putin is expected to visit North Korea as early as next week. If realized, it would their third summit meeting. Their first summit happened in Vladivostok in April 2019.

Japanese public broadcaster NHK, citing unidentified diplomatic sources including high-ranking Russian officials, reported Wednesday that Putin is preparing to visit North Korea and Vietnam next week.

NHK said Putin is expected to seek stronger military ties with North Korea as Russia faces a shortage of weapons in its war with Ukraine, while North Korea is believed to want help with space technology in the wake of its recent failure to put a second spy satellite in orbit in late May.

Russian business daily Vedomosti, citing an unidentified diplomatic source, said Monday that Putin will visit North Korea and Vietnam "in the coming weeks." The report quoted Russia's ambassador in North Korea, Alexander Matsegora, as saying that preparations for Putin's visit to North Korea were underway.

Neither Russia nor North Korea have confirmed reports of a planned trip. Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov told a briefing in late May that "the visit is in the pipeline, and we will make an announcement in due time," according to Russian news agency Tass.

Russia and North Korea are locked in separate confrontations with the United States — Russia over its invasion of Ukraine and North Korea over its advancing nuclear program. Both North Korea and Russia have denied allegations of arms transfers, which would be a violation of multiple U.N. Security Council resolutions.

In March, South Korean Defense Minister Shin Wonsik said North Korea had already shipped about 7,000

containers filled with munitions and other military equipment to Russia. In return, Shin said that North Korea had received more than 9,000 Russian containers likely filled with aid.

Recently, tensions on the Korean Peninsula have risen again as North Korea launched trash-carrying balloons toward South Korea, prompting the South to resume propaganda broadcasts at border areas.

## Federal Reserve is likely to scale back plans for rate cuts because of persistent inflation

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal Reserve officials on Wednesday will likely make official what's been clear for many weeks: With inflation sticking at a level above their 2% target, they are downgrading their outlook for interest rate cuts.

In a set of quarterly economic forecasts they will issue after their latest meeting ends, the policymakers are expected to project that they will cut their benchmark rate just once or twice by year's end, rather than the three times they had envisioned in March.

The Fed's rate policies typically have a significant impact on the costs of mortgages, auto loans, credit card rates and other forms of consumer and business borrowing. The downgrade in their outlook for rate cuts would mean that such borrowing costs would likely stay higher for longer, a disappointment for potential homebuyers and others.

Still, the Fed's quarterly projections of future interest rate cuts are by no means fixed in time. The policymakers frequently revise their plans for rate cuts — or hikes — depending on how economic growth and inflation measures evolve over time.

But if borrowing costs remain high in the coming months, they could also have consequences for the presidential race. Though the unemployment rate is a low 4%, hiring is robust and consumers continue to spend, voters have taken a generally sour view of the economy under President Joe Biden. In large part, that's because prices remain much higher than they were before the pandemic struck. High borrowing rates impose a further financial burden.

The Fed's updated economic forecasts, which it will issue Wednesday afternoon, will likely be influenced by the government's May inflation data being released in the morning. The inflation report is expected to show that consumer prices excluding volatile food and energy costs — so-called core inflation — rose 0.3% from April to May. That would be the same as in the previous month and higher than Fed officials would prefer to see.

Overall inflation, held down by falling gas prices, is thought to have edged up just 0.1%. Measured from a year earlier, consumer prices are projected to have risen 3.4% in May, the same as in April.

Inflation had fallen steadily in the second half of last year, raising hopes that the Fed could achieve a "soft landing," whereby it would manage to conquer inflation through rate hikes without causing a recession. Such an outcome is difficult and rare.

But inflation came in unexpectedly high in the first three months of this year, delaying hoped-for Fed rate cuts and potentially imperiling a soft landing.

In early May, Chair Jerome Powell said the central bank needed more confidence that inflation was returning to its target before it would reduce its benchmark rate. Powell noted that it would likely take more time to gain that confidence than Fed officials had previously thought.

Last month, Christopher Waller, an influential member of the Fed's Board of Governors, said he needed to see "several more months of good inflation data" before he would consider supporting rate cuts. Though Waller didn't spell out what would constitute good data, economists think it would have to be core inflation of 0.2% or less each month.

Powell and other Fed policymakers have also said that as long as the economy stays healthy, they see no need to cut rates soon.

"Fed officials have clearly signaled that they are in a wait-and-see mode with respect to the timing and magnitude of rate cuts," Matthew Luzzetti, chief U.S. economist at Deutsche Bank, said in a note to clients.

The Fed's approach to its rate policies relies heavily on the latest turn in economic data. In the past, the central bank would have put more weight on where it envisioned inflation and economic growth in the coming months.

Yet now, "they don't have any confidence in their ability to forecast inflation," said Nathan Sheets, chief global economist at Citi and a former top economist at the Fed.

"No one," Sheets said, "has been successful at forecasting inflation" for the past three to four years.

## **Some Syrian refugees risk returning to opposition-held areas as hostility in host Lebanon grows**

By OMAR ALBAM and ABBY SEWELL Associated Press

IDLIB, Syria (AP) — For more than a decade, a steady flow of Syrians have crossed the border from their war-torn country into Lebanon. But anti-refugee sentiment is rising there, and in the past two months, hundreds of Syrian refugees have gone the other way.

They're taking a smugglers' route home across remote mountainous terrain, on motorcycle or on foot, then traveling by car on a risky drive through government-held territory into opposition-held northwestern Syria, avoiding checkpoints or bribing their way through.

Until this year, the numbers returning from Lebanon were so low that the local government in Idlib run by the insurgent group Hayat Tahrir al Sham had not formally tracked them. Now it has recorded 1,041 people arriving from Lebanon in May, up from 446 the month before. A Turkish-backed local administration overseeing other parts of northwest Syria said arrivals from Lebanon have increased there, too.

Tiny, crisis-wracked Lebanon is the host of the highest per capita population of refugees in the world and has long felt the strain. About 780,000 Syrian refugees are registered with the U.N. refugee agency there and hundreds of thousands more are unregistered.

For years, and particularly since the country sank into an unprecedented economic crisis in 2019, Lebanese officials have called for the refugees to be returned to Syria or resettled elsewhere. Tensions flared in April when an official with the Christian nationalist Lebanese Forces party, Pascal Suleiman, was killed in what military officials said was a botched carjacking by a Syrian gang.

That prompted outbreaks of anti-Syrian violence by vigilante groups. Lebanese security agencies cracked down on refugees, raiding and closing down businesses employing undocumented Syrian workers.

In hundreds of cases, authorities have deported refugees. The Lebanese government has also organized "voluntary return" trips for those willing to return to government-held areas, but few have signed up, fearing retaliation from Syria's government and security forces.

As precarious as the situation is in Lebanon, most refugees still prefer it to northwest Syria, which is controlled by a patchwork of armed groups under regular bombing by Syrian government forces. It also suffers from aid cuts by international organizations that say resources are going to newer crises elsewhere in the world.

For Walid Mohammed Abdel Bakki, who went back to Idlib in April, the problems of staying in Lebanon finally outweighed the dangers of return.

"Life in Lebanon was hell, and in the end we lost my son," he said.

Abdel Bakki's adult son, Ali, 30, who he said has struggled with schizophrenia, disappeared for several days in early April after heading from the Bekaa valley to Beirut to visit his sister and look for work.

His family eventually found him at a police station in the town of Baabda. He was alive but "his body was all black and blue," Abdel Bakki said. Some reports by activist groups said he was beaten by a racist gang, but Abdel Bakki asserted that his son had been arrested by Lebanese army intelligence for reasons that are unclear. Ali described being beaten and tortured with electric shocks, he said. He died several days later.

A spokesman for army intelligence did not respond to a request for comment. Faysal Dalloul, the forensic doctor who examined Ali, said he had multiple "superficial" wounds but scans of his head and chest had not found anything abnormal, and concluded that his death was natural.



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 56 of 92

Abdel Bakki was distraught enough that he borrowed \$1,200 to pay smugglers to take him and his 11-year-old son to northwestern Syria, a journey that included an arduous trek through the mountains on foot. "We spent a week on the road and we were afraid all the time," he said.

They now stay with relatives in Idlib. Their own house had been damaged in an airstrike and then gutted by thieves.

Mohammad Hassan, director of the Access Center for Human Rights, a nongovernmental organization tracking the conditions of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, said an "orchestrated wave of hate speech and violence against refugees, justified by political leaders" is pushing some to leave out of fear that otherwise they will be forcibly deported.

While Lebanese officials have warned against vigilante attacks on refugees, they also regularly blame Syrians for rising crime rates and called for more restrictions on them.

Hassan said the route from Lebanon to Idlib is "controlled by Lebanese and Syrian smuggling gangs linked with local and cross-border militias" and is not safe.

The route is particularly risky for those who are wanted for arrest in Syria's government-controlled areas for dodging army service or for real or suspected affiliation with the opposition.

Ramzi Youssef, from southern Idlib province, moved to Lebanon before Syria's civil war for work. He remained as a refugee after the conflict began.

He returned to Idlib last year with his wife and children, paying \$2,000 to smugglers, driven by "racism, pressure from the state, the economic collapse in Lebanon and the lack of security."

In Aleppo, the family was stopped at a checkpoint and detained after the soldiers realized they had come from Lebanon. Youssef said he was transferred among several military branches and interrogated.

"I was tortured a lot, even though I was outside the country since 2009 and had nothing to do with anything (in the war)," he said. "They held me responsible for other people, for my relatives."

Syria's government has denied reports of torture and extrajudicial killings in detention centers and accuses Western governments of launching smear campaigns against it and supporting "terrorists."

In the end, Youssef was released and sent to compulsory military service. He escaped weeks later and made his way to Idlib with his family.

He said he has not looked back.

"Despite the poverty and living in a tent and everything else, believe me, I'm happy and until now I haven't regretted that I came back from Lebanon," he said.

## After years of delays, scaled-back plans underway for memorial to Florida nightclub massacre

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — Survivors and the families of victims of the Pulse nightclub massacre had hoped by now to have a permanent memorial in place for Wednesday's eighth anniversary of the attack by a lone gunman who killed 49 people at the gay-friendly club in Orlando, Florida.

Instead, new, scaled-back plans are only now getting off the ground following a botched effort to build a multimillion-dollar memorial and museum by a private foundation that disbanded last year.

The city of Orlando purchased the nightclub property last year for \$2 million, and it has since outlined more modest plans for a memorial. The original idea for a museum has been jettisoned and, last week, city leaders formed an advisory board to help determine what the memorial will look like.

"We're very much hoping to find a number of family members to be a part of this committee, as well as survivors," said Larry Schooler, a facilitator tasked with guiding the memorial effort. City officials said the goal is to have the memorial completed by 2028 at the site near downtown Orlando.

Until last year, efforts to build a memorial had been moving ahead in fits and starts ever since the massacre.

On June 12, 2016, Omar Mateen opened fire during a Latin night celebration, leaving 49 dead and 53 wounded. At the time, it was the worst mass shooting in modern U.S. history. But it was surpassed the

following year when 58 people were killed and more than 850 were injured among a crowd of 22,000 at a country music festival in Las Vegas. Mateen, who had pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group, was killed after a three-hour standoff with police.

Barbara and Rosario Poma and businessman Michael Panaggio had previously owned the property, and Barbara Poma was the executive director of the onePulse Foundation — the nonprofit that had been leading efforts to build a memorial and museum. Barbara Poma stepped down as executive director in 2022 and then left the organization entirely last year amid conflict-of-interest criticism over her stated desire to sell instead of donate the Pulse property.

The original project unveiled in 2019 by the onePulse Foundation originally called for a museum and permanent memorial costing \$45 million. However, that estimated price tag eventually soared to \$100 million.

The scope of the project ended up stretching far beyond the fundraising abilities of the nonprofit, according to an investigation by the Orlando Sentinel.

Deborah Bowie, who took the helm of the foundation in 2022, told the Sentinel that what she found when she arrived was a “house of cards waiting to crash down.”

“There’s a big disconnect between what the board thought was going on and what I saw boots on the ground when I got here,” Bowie said. “The budgets that I saw, I couldn’t find the financial justification for.”

Meanwhile, Pulse survivors and others have been waiting eight years for a permanent memorial.

“All of us are entitled to closure, and that’s never going to happen until this memorial is built,” Brett Rigas told the Sentinel.

## Heavy snows and drought of deadly ‘dzud’ kill more than 7 million head of livestock in Mongolia

By ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL Associated Press

HANOI, Vietnam (AP) — An extreme weather phenomenon known as the dzud has killed more than 7.1 million animals in Mongolia this year, more than a tenth of the country’s entire livestock holdings, endangering herders’ livelihoods and way of life.

Dzuds are a combination of perennial droughts and severe, snowy winters and they are becoming harsher and more frequent because of climate change. They are most associated with Mongolia but also occur in other parts of Central Asia.

Many deaths, especially among malnourished female animals and their young, occur during the spring, which is the birthing season.

Herding is central to Mongolia’s economy and culture — contributing to 80% of its agricultural production and 11% of GDP.

In Mongolian, the word dzud means disaster. Dzuds occur when extremely heavy snows cause impenetrable layers of snow and ice to cover Mongolia’s vast grasslands, so the animals cannot graze and they starve to death. Drought at other times of the year means there’s not enough forage for the animals to fatten up for the winter.

Dzuds used to occur once in a decade or so but are becoming harsher and more frequent because of climate change. This year’s dzud is the sixth in the past decade and the worst yet. It followed a dzud last year and a dry summer. Snowfall was the heaviest since 1975.

The toll on Mongolia’s herds has soared, with 2.1 million head of cattle, sheep and goats dead in February, rising to 7.1 million in May, according to state media.

Thousands of families have lost over 70% of their entire herds. And the total death toll may increase to 14.9 million animals, or nearly 24% of Mongolia’s total herd, said Deputy Prime Minister S. Amarsaikhan, according to state media.

Nomadic herding is so vital for resource-rich Mongolia’s 3.3 million people that its constitution refers to the country’s 65 million camels, yaks, cattle, sheep, goats and horses as its “national wealth.”

Livestock and their products are Mongolia’s second-largest export after mining, according to the Asian Development Bank.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 58 of 92

"The loss of the livestock has dealt an irreversible blow to economic stability and intensified the people's already dire circumstances," Olga Dzhumaeva, the head of the East Asia delegation at International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent or IFRC, said in an interview with The Associated Press.

High costs for fuel, food and fodder made the situation much worse for herders like Gantomor, a 38-year-old herder in mountainous Arkhangai province. Like many Mongolians, he goes by one name.

Warnings of a dzud prompted Gantomor to sell his entire flock of about 400 sheep. He only kept his sturdier yaks and horses, hoping that that he'd be able to take them to pastures that wouldn't be as badly affected, said his sister-in-law, Gantuya Batdelger, 33, a graduate school student.

Even after spending more than \$2,000 to transport the remaining 200-odd animals 200 kilometers (124 miles) to a place he thought would be safer, he didn't escape the dzud. Seventy yaks died and 40 horses left the herd, leaving him with less than 100. "By selling the sheep, (the family) had wanted to save some money. But they spent all of it," said Batdelger.

Batdelger's brother-in-law was better off than others. A friend had all but 15 of her 250 yaks die.

The Mongolian countryside was filled with hundreds of carcasses, piling up in the melting snow, she said.

Disposing of the carcasses quickly to ensure they don't spread diseases is another big challenge. By early May, 5.6 million, or nearly 80%, of the dead animals had been buried.

Warmer temperatures can bring forest fires or dust storms. Heavy runoff from melting snow increases the risk of flash floods, especially in urban areas. Many pregnant stock, weakened from the winter, lose their offspring, sometimes because they cannot adequately feed them, said Matilda Dimovska, the UNDP's resident representative in Mongolia.

"It's really devastating to see, how (the baby animals) cry for food," she said.

The dzud is a perfect example of how interlinked climate change is with poverty and the economy, she said. Herders who lose their herds often migrate to cities like the capital, Ulaanbaatar, but find few opportunities for work.

"They enter into the cycle of poverty," she said.

The increasingly routine nature of the dzuds has raised the need for Mongolia to develop better early warning systems for natural disasters, said Mungunkhishig Batbaatar, the country director of the nonprofit People in Need.

Combining technology with community-level approaches works best: "It is estimated that countries with limited early warning coverage have disaster mortality that is eight times higher than countries with substantial to comprehensive coverage," he said.

Meanwhile, international aid has been "very insufficient," said Dzhumaeva. An IFRC appeal launched in mid-March has not reached even 20% of its target of 5.5 million Swiss Francs (\$6 million). Budgets strained by urgent responses to crises like Ukraine or Gaza are a factor, she said, "But this leaves little room for addressing the devastating effects of dzud in Mongolia."

Mongolia needs help but it also needs to adapt to dzuds with strategies such as better weather forecasting and measures to stop overgrazing. Herders need to diversify their incomes to help cushion the impact of livestock losses.

Khandaa Byamba, 37, a camel herder who lives in Dundgobi province in Mongolia's Gobi Desert said in an online interview that she has learned from her elders and also the hard experience of repeated dzuds.

Seeing early signs of yet another dzud, she let her camels wander, relying on their own instincts to find pastures. The family earlier decided to just herd camels to cope with climate change, drought and deteriorating pastures that have been turning into deserts. Khandaa Byamba's husband followed the animals for the first 100 kilometers (62 miles) while she stayed behind with some younger animals.

As the snow piled up, other families reported losing scores of animals. But after the winter, most of her camels returned. They only lost three adult camels and 10 younger ones in their herd of more than 200.

"This year has been the hardest," she said.



## Supreme Court has a lot of work to do and little time to do it with a sizeable case backlog

By MARK SHERMAN and LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court is headed into its final few weeks with nearly half of the cases heard this year still undecided, including ones that could reshape the law on everything from guns to abortion to social media. The justices are also still weighing whether former President Donald Trump is immune from criminal prosecution in the election interference case against him, more than a month after hearing arguments.

The court heard 61 cases this term and 29 remain unresolved, with some decisions expected Thursday and Friday.

Here's a look at some of the major undecided cases:

**Presidential immunity** Donald Trump is arguing that former presidents are immune from prosecution for official acts they took in office and that the indictment he faces on charges of election interference must be dismissed.

The Supreme Court has previously ruled that former presidents can't be sued in civil cases for what they did in office, but it has never weighed in on criminal immunity.

The timing of the decision may be as important as the outcome. Trump's trial in Washington, D.C., may not take place before the November election, even if the court rules he is not immune.

**Jan. 6, 2021** A former Pennsylvania police officer is challenging the validity of obstruction charges brought against hundreds of people who took part in the violent assault on the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021. Trump faces the same charge of obstructing an official proceeding.

The issue is whether a law meant to discourage tampering with documents sought in investigations can be used against the Capitol rioters.

**Abortion pill** Abortion opponents are trying to make it harder for pregnant women to obtain medication abortions. They want the Supreme Court to roll back changes made by the FDA that have made it easier to obtain mifepristone, one of the two drugs used in nearly two-thirds of abortions in the United States last year. Those include eliminating the need for in-person visits and allowing the drug to be mailed.

Most Republican-led states have severely restricted or banned abortion since the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in 2022. The high court's decision in this case will affect abortion even in states where it remains legal.

**Guns** The justices are weighing whether to uphold a federal law that seeks to protect domestic violence victims by keeping guns away from the people alleged to have abused them. An appeals court struck down a law that prohibits people under domestic violence restraining orders from possessing firearms. That court found that the law violated the 2nd Amendment right to "keep and bear arms" following the Supreme Court's 2022 ruling that expanded gun rights and changed how courts are supposed to evaluate gun restrictions.

**Homelessness** The most significant Supreme Court case in decades on homelessness centers on whether people can be banned from sleeping outdoors when shelter space is lacking.

A San Francisco-based appeals court decision said that amounts to cruel and unusual punishment.

Leaders from California and across the West say that the ruling makes it harder for them to regulate homeless encampments encroaching on sidewalks and other public places.

Advocates say it would criminalize homelessness just as rising costs have pushed the number of people without a permanent place to live to record levels.

**Emergency Abortion** There's a second abortion case on the docket this year: whether doctors can provide that medical procedure in emergencies in states that banned abortion after the court overturned *Roe v. Wade*.

In a case out of Idaho, the Biden administration says abortions must be allowed in emergencies where a woman's health is at serious risk.

The state argues that its strict abortion ban does allow abortions to save a woman's life, and doesn't

need to expand exceptions for health risks.

**Bump stocks**The Trump administration banned bump stocks, a gun accessory that allows rapid fire like a machine gun, after they were used in the deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history.

The ban is being challenged by a Texas gun shop owner who says the Justice Department was wrong to reverse course and declare them illegal machine guns after the 2017 Las Vegas massacre.

The Biden administration argues banning them after the shooting that left 60 people dead was the right call.

**Chevron**The justices could overturn a 40-year-old decision that has been cited thousands of times in federal court cases and used to uphold regulations on the environment, public health, workplace safety and consumer protections. The decision colloquially known as Chevron calls on judges to defer to federal regulators when the words of a statute are not crystal clear. The decision has long been targeted by conservative and business interests who say Chevron robs judges of their authority and gives too much power to regulators.

**Social media**Three cases remain unresolved at the intersection of social media and government.

Two cases involve social media laws in Texas and Florida that would limit how Facebook, TikTok, X, YouTube and other social media platforms regulate content posted by their users. While the details vary, both laws aimed to address conservative complaints that the social media companies were liberal-leaning and censored users based on their viewpoints, especially on the political right.

In the third case, Republican-led states are suing the Biden administration over how far the federal government can go to combat controversial social media posts on topics including COVID-19 and election security. A federal appeals court sided with the states in finding that administration officials unconstitutionally coerced the platforms to limit conservative points of view.

**Purdue Pharma**The Supreme Court controls the fate of a nationwide settlement with OxyContin maker Purdue Pharma that would allocate billions of dollars to combat the opioid epidemic, but also provide a legal shield for members of the Sackler family who own the company. The settlement has been on hold since last summer after the Supreme Court agreed to weigh in.

**Wealth tax**A business-backed challenge to a tax on foreign income is being watched closely for what it might say about the fate of a wealth tax, an often discussed but never implemented tax on the wealthiest Americans.

**Air pollution**Republican-led, energy-producing states and the steel industry want the court to put the Environmental Protection Agency's air pollution-fighting "good neighbor" plan on hold while legal challenges continue. The plan aims to protect downwind states that receive unwanted air pollution from other states.

**SEC**Another important regulatory case could strip the SEC of a major tool in fighting securities fraud and have far-reaching effects on other regulatory agencies. The court is being asked to rule that people facing civil fraud complaints have the right to a jury trial in federal court.

## **AP sources: 8 people with possible Islamic State ties arrested in US on immigration violations**

By ERIC TUCKER and REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Eight people from Tajikistan with suspected ties to the Islamic State group have been arrested in the United States in recent days, according to multiple people familiar with the matter.

The arrests took place in New York, Philadelphia and Los Angeles and the individuals, who entered the U.S. through the southern border, are being held on immigration violations, said the people, who were not authorized to discuss the ongoing investigation by name and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

The nature of their suspected connections to the IS was not immediately clear, but the individuals were being tracked by the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force, or JTTF. They were in the custody of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, which made the arrests while working with the JTTF, pending proceedings to remove them from the country.

The individuals from Tajikistan entered the country last spring and passed through the U.S. government's screening process without turning up information that would have identified them as potential terrorism-related concerns, said one of the people familiar with the matter.

The FBI and Department of Homeland Security issued a statement confirming the immigration-related arrests of "several non-citizens" but did not detail specifics. The agencies noted that the U.S. has been in a "heightened threat environment."

FBI Director Christopher Wray has said the U.S. is facing accelerating threats from homegrown violent extremists as well as foreign terrorist organizations, particularly in the aftermath of the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas on Israel.

He said at one recent congressional hearing that officials were "concerned about the terrorism implications from potential targeting of vulnerabilities at the border." The Biden administration in August said that it had detected and stopped a network attempting to smuggle people from Uzbekistan into the U.S. and that at least one member of the network had links to a foreign terrorist group.

"The FBI and DHS will continue working around the clock with our partners to identify, investigate, and disrupt potential threats to national security," the agencies said.

## **1 fatally shot on Atlanta area transit bus that led officers on wild rush hour chase, police say**

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — One person died after being shot on a commuter bus Tuesday afternoon that led officers on a wild chase for miles from Atlanta into an outlying suburb, striking several vehicles as it barreled through rush hour traffic with frightened passengers aboard, authorities said.

TV news helicopters followed the dramatic pursuit of the Gwinnett County Transit bus, which police said took off after officers responded to a report of gunfire on a bus and a possible hostage situation just after 4:30 p.m. near downtown Atlanta.

The helicopter footage showed the bus striking multiple vehicles during the chase and crossing onto the wrong side of a road with police in pursuit. At one point an officer could be seen waiting on a highway and then throwing a device under the bus trying to stop it. The bus continued on, weaving in and around other vehicles.

Atlanta police said the bus was eventually stopped miles (kilometers) away in neighboring DeKalb County and that Joseph Grier, 39, was taken into custody as police vehicles swarmed all around. As officers cleared the bus of passengers, they found an adult victim with a gunshot wound. Authorities said that person, whose name was not immediately released, was taken to a hospital and died from their injuries.

There were 17 people on the bus, including the driver, but no further injuries were reported on the bus, police said. News photos showed an armored police SWAT vehicle squarely blocking the front of the bus, which was also flanked by a firetruck. Afterward, a lighted digital sign above the bus windshield still read: "EMERGENCY" and "CALL POLICE 911."

Atlanta Police Chief Darin Schierbaum told reporters that an officer arrived on the initial scene in the downtown area about a minute after the initial 911 call came in. When the officer confronted the suspect, the man forced the bus driver to drive off, he said.

Officers were following the bus when another 911 call came in from a family member of a bus passenger who said he was getting text messages that there had been a hijacking and people were being held hostage, Schierbaum said.

Then police received another 911 call from the bus, and that line remained open during the entire chase until the bus came to a stop, the chief said. Information from that call was fed to officers from multiple agencies involved in the pursuit and allowed them to "craft an end of this hostage situation," he said.

Grier, whose last known address was in suburban Stone Mountain, had previously been arrested 19 times and had felony convictions, meaning he shouldn't have had a gun, Schierbaum said.

It was not known Tuesday night if Grier had an attorney who could comment on his behalf. And there



was no immediate announcement by authorities of possible charges in the case.

The initial 911 call came just as Schierbaum and Mayor Andre Dickens had finished briefing reporters on a shooting at a food court in a downtown Atlanta in which they said a man shot three people before he was shot by an off-duty police officer. The suspect and the three victims were all taken to hospitals but were expected to survive.

Schierbaum said investigators do not believe there is a link between the food court shooting and the bus hijacking.

"Today has been a very active day, but let me be clear, we're talking about gun violence that is a result of too many people having guns in their hands," Dickens said. He added that it's possible that mental health issues may have played a role, but added that "you're talking about too many guns in the hands of individuals that should not have guns, too many guns on our streets, too many guns in our homes, too many guns in our schools and buses, etc."

John Gilbert of suburban Dacula said his wife, Paulette, takes the bus to and from downtown Atlanta for work three days a week. He said she called him from the bus and said one man had shot another man. Gilbert told his wife to get off the phone because he didn't want the man to think she was calling police and shoot her.

Then he waited for 40 or 45 minutes without knowing what was going on before his wife finally called him once she was off the bus.

"I felt like I had a hole in me," Gilbert said through tears. "I'm just glad she's alright."

## **Southern Baptists expel Virginia church for believing women can serve as pastors**

By PETER SMITH Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Even as they prepare to vote on a formal ban on churches with women pastors, delegates to the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting voted overwhelmingly Tuesday to boot one such church from its ranks.

Messengers, as voting representatives are known, voted 6,759 to 563 to oust First Baptist Church of Alexandria, a historic Virginia congregation that affirms women can serve in any pastoral role, including as senior pastor. A similar scenario played out at last year's meeting. Two congregations, including a well-known California megachurch, were ejected from the convention. Ninety-two percent of messengers approved this year's ouster.

The Virginia congregation has been involved in the nation's largest Protestant denomination since its 19th century founding and has contributed millions toward denominational causes. But it came under scrutiny after the pastor of a neighboring church reported it to denominational authorities over its having a woman as pastor for children and women.

The vote came after the denomination's credentials committee recommended earlier Tuesday that the denomination deem the church to be not in "friendly cooperation," the formulation for expulsion, on the grounds that it conflicts with the Baptist Faith and Message. That statement of Southern Baptist doctrine declares only men are qualified for the role of pastor. Some interpret that only to apply to associate pastors as long as the senior pastor is male.

"We find no joy in making this recommendation, but have formed the opinion that the church's egalitarian beliefs regarding the office of pastor do not closely identify with the convention's adopted statement of faith," said Jonathan Sams, chair of the credentials committee.

The Alexandria church is currently led by a man, Robert Stephens, but the church has made clear it believes women can serve as senior pastors, too. Stephens said his church has had women in ministry for more than 44 years and wants to continue cooperating with Southern Baptists who disagreed on this issue.

"First Alexandria stands before you today as a testament that we can maintain a fruitful partnership with churches that take a different stance on women in ministry," he said. "We at First Baptist are advancing

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 63 of 92

the gospel, and we hope that we will continue to work alongside you all.”

Afterward, representatives from the Alexandria church said they wished the SBC well. But they said they would focus on First Baptist’s own work, ranging from sending a mission team to Nicaragua to partnering on a Bible translation project to taking part in a church youth camp and other ministries.

“This is a sad moment for us, but we also recognize that God has a future for First Baptist Church,” Stephens said.

“We have good news to share with the world, and we will keep doing that,” added Kim Eskridge, the pastor for children and women.

On Wednesday, delegates are slated to consider enshrining a ban on churches with any women pastors in the SBC’s constitution. The proposed amendment received preliminary approval last year, and it requires a final vote this year to be enacted. As of Tuesday evening, 10,895 messengers were registered to take part.

Early Tuesday, a small group of women stood outside the Indiana Convention Center in a low-key demonstration in support of women in ministry.

“I hope that people know women have equal value and can be pastors,” said the Rev. Meredith Stone, executive director of Baptist Women in Ministry. The organization originated among Southern Baptists in the 1980s, but it now works with women in a variety of Baptist denominations.

Joining them was Christa Brown, who has long advocated for fellow survivors of sexual abuse in Southern Baptist churches and criticized the denomination’s resistance to reforms, an effort she has chronicled in a new memoir, “Baptistland.” The Southern Baptists ongoing struggles with sexual abuse reforms is also on this year’s calendar.

She said there’s a direct connection between issues of abuse and the equality of women in ministry.

“When you squash some people, it sets up a lot more people to be squashed,” she said.

An SBC Abuse Reform Implementation Task Force recently concluded its work. While it has provided a curriculum for training churches on preventing and responding to abuse, it has not achieved the mandate of previous annual meetings to establish a “Ministry Check” database of offenders, which could help churches avoid hiring them.

“We’re probably beyond frustrated that there are not names on the database right now or the database is not live right now,” said Josh Wester, chairman of the task force, which officially concluded its work Tuesday. Messengers adopted its recommendations and assigned the denomination’s Executive Committee to complete goals such as activating Ministry Check and creating a “permanent home” for abuse response.

After denominational officials said they couldn’t get insurance for producing a Ministry Watch list, Wester said he and some others set up a separate non-profit organization to maintain it. But he said the Executive Committee’s new leadership is looking for ways to oversee it in-house.

The list would include those convicted or found liable for abuse in civil court — short of an earlier annual meeting’s call for a list including those who confessed or were credibly accused outside of court.

Wester said the ultimate goal is for a broader list.

“We’re just trying to get a database online because it can always be improved,” Wester said.

Though some have advocated for reforms for the past two decades, the SBC has particularly struggled to respond to sexual abuse in its churches since a 2019 report by the Houston Chronicle and San Antonio Express-News. It said that roughly 380 Southern Baptist church leaders and volunteers faced allegations of sexual misconduct in the previous two decades.

The denomination subsequently commissioned a report from a consulting firm, Guidepost Solutions. It concluded that leaders of the convention’s Executive Committee intimidated and mistreated survivors who sought help. The committee handles day-to-day business of the convention.

Some outspoken voices have contended that there is no crisis of abuse in the convention and that such claims are overstated.

But survivor Tiffany Thigpen, one of several advocates for abuse survivors attending the meeting, noted that SBC messengers have repeatedly supported reforms.

“Our hope has been that the messengers finally get as frustrated as we’ve been and say, ‘OK, wait, we’re

not allowing this anymore," she said.

In events held on the sidelines of the meeting, politics has been featured. On Monday, former President Donald Trump appealed for votes in a videotaped message to attendees of a staunchly anti-abortion conservative group that met next door to the convention center.

On Tuesday, former Vice President Mike Pence told an audience of about 500 that he would "never" vote for President Joe Biden, criticizing him on border, abortion and other policies. But Pence stopped short of endorsing Trump, his estranged onetime running mate.

Later, messengers approved a resolution against any effort to establish a state religion, including "Christianity as the state religion of the United States" — a notable move given the rise of Christian nationalism in some conservative circles. The resolution calls for robust religious freedoms and for Christians to get involved in public office.

## **Sandy Hook shooting survivors to graduate with mixed emotions without 20 of their classmates**

By DAVE COLLINS Associated Press

NEWTOWN, Conn. (AP) — Like graduating seniors everywhere, members of Newtown High School's class of 2024 expect bittersweet feelings at their commencement ceremony — excitement about heading off to college or careers and sadness about leaving their friends and community.

But about 60 of the 330 kids graduating Wednesday will also be carrying the emotional burden that comes from having survived one of the deadliest school shootings in U.S. history and knowing many former classmates won't get to walk across the stage with them. Twenty of their fellow first graders and six educators were killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School on Dec. 14, 2012.

The victims will be honored during the ceremony, but details have been kept under wraps.

Soon, these Sandy Hook survivors will be leaving the community that many call a "bubble" because of the comfort and protection it's provided from the outside world. Five of them sat down with The Associated Press to discuss their graduation, future plans and how the tragedy continues to shape their lives.

"They'll be there with us" "I think we're all super excited for the day," said Lilly Wasilnak, 17, who was in a classroom down the hall from where her peers were killed. "But I think we can't forget ... that there is a whole chunk of our class missing. And so going into graduation, we all have very mixed emotions — trying to be excited for ourselves and this accomplishment that we've worked so hard for, but also those who aren't able to share it with us, who should have been able to."

Emma Ehrens was one of 11 children from Classroom 10 to survive the attack. She and other students managed to flee when the gunman paused to reload and another student, Jesse Lewis, yelled for everyone to run. Jesse didn't make it. Five kids and both teachers in the room were killed.

"I am definitely going to be feeling a lot of mixed emotions," said Ehrens, 17. "I'm super excited to be, like, done with high school and moving on to the next chapter of my life. But I'm also so ... mournful, I guess, to have to be walking across that stage alone. ... I like to think that they'll be there with us and walking across that stage with us."

Grace Fischer, 18, was in a classroom down the hall from the killings with Ella Seaver and Wasilnak. With only 11 days to go before Christmas, the school was in the holiday spirit and the children were looking forward to making gingerbread houses that day.

"As much as we've tried to have that normal, like, childhood and normal high school experience, it wasn't totally normal," Fischer said. "But even though we are missing ... such a big chunk of our class, like Lilly said, we are still graduating. ... We want to be those regular teenagers who walk across the stage that day and feel that, like, celebratory feeling in ourselves, knowing that we've come this far."

Leaving home and the 'bubble' Many of the survivors said they continue to live with the trauma of that day: Loud noises still cause them to jump out of their seats, and some always keep an eye on a room's exits. Many have spent years in therapy for post-traumatic stress, depression and anxiety.

The town provided an array of services to the families. Officials shielded them as much as they could



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 65 of 92

from the media and outsiders, and the students said leaving such a protective community will be both difficult and somewhat freeing.

"In Sandy Hook, what happened is always kind of looming over us," said Matt Holden, 17, who was in a classroom down the hall from the shooting. "I think leaving and being able to make new memories and meet new people, even if we'll be more isolated away from people who have stories like us, we'll be more free to kind of write our own story. ... And kind of, you know, not let this one event that happened because we were very young define our lifetimes."

Ehrens said she feels some anxiety over leaving Newtown, but that it's a necessary step to begin the next chapter of her life.

"It definitely feels for me that we're kind of stuck in the same system that we've been stuck in for past 12 years," she said.

"For me, I feel like it's definitely going to get better and be able to break free of that system and just be able to become my own person rather than, again, the Sandy Hook kid," Ehrens said.

Fischer echoed that sentiment, saying that although it will be hard leaving the town and friends she's grown up with, she'll make new friends and build a new community as she explores new challenges at college.

"Sandy Hook will always be with me," she said.

Tragedy spurs activism, shapes their futures All five seniors have been active in the Junior Newtown Action Alliance and its anti-gun violence efforts, saying they want to prevent shootings from happening through gun control and other measures. Last week, several of them met with Vice President Kamala Harris at the White House to discuss their experiences and call for change.

They say their fallen classmates have motivated their advocacy, which they all plan to continue after high school.

Seaver, 18, said working with the alliance makes her feel less helpless. She plans to study psychology in college and to become a therapist, wanting to give back in a way that helped her.

"Putting my voice out there and working with all of these amazing people to try and create change really puts a meaning to the trauma that we all were forced to experience," Seaver said. "It's a way to feel like you're doing something. Because we are. We're fighting for change and we're really not going to stop until we get it."

Ehrens said she plans to study political science and the law, with the aim of becoming a politician or civil rights lawyer.

Fischer said she, too, hopes to become a civil rights lawyer.

Holden plans to major in political science and wants to push for gun policy changes.

Wasilnak, meanwhile, said she hasn't settled on a major, but that she intends to continue to speak out against gun violence.

"For me, I knew I wanted to do something more since I was younger when the tragedy first happened," Wasilnak said. "I wanted to turn such a terrible thing into something more, and that these children and educators didn't die for nothing. Of course it was awful what happened to them, and it should have never happened. But I think that for me, something bigger needed to come out of it, or else it would have been all for nothing."

## Hamas responds to Gaza cease-fire plan seeking some changes. US says it's 'evaluating' the reply

By MATTHEW LEE and ABBY SEWELL Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Hamas said Tuesday that it gave mediators its reply to the U.S.-backed proposal for a cease-fire in Gaza, seeking some "amendments" on the deal. It appeared the reply was short of an outright acceptance that the United States has been pushing for but kept negotiations alive over an elusive halt to the eight-month war.

The foreign ministries of Qatar and Egypt — who have been key mediators alongside the United States

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 66 of 92

— confirmed that they had received Hamas' response and said mediators were studying it.

"We're in receipt of this reply that Hamas delivered to Qatar and to Egypt, and we are evaluating it right now," White House national security spokesman John Kirby told reporters in Washington.

Hamas spokesman Jihad Taha said the response included "amendments that confirm the cease-fire, withdrawal, reconstruction and (prisoner) exchange." Taha did not elaborate.

But while supporting the broad outlines of the deal, Hamas officials have expressed wariness over whether Israel would implement its terms, particularly provisions for an eventual permanent end to fighting and full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in return for the release of all hostages held by the militants.

Even as the U.S. has said Israel accepted the proposal, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has given conflicting signals, saying Israel will not stop until its goal of destroying Hamas is achieved.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has been in the region this week trying to push through the deal — his eighth visit since Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel ignited Israel's campaign in Gaza. On Tuesday, he continued pressure on Hamas to accept the proposal, saying that the U.N. Security Council's vote in its favor made it "as clear as it possibly could be" that the world supports the plan.

"Everyone's vote is in, except for one vote, and that's Hamas," Blinken told reporters in Tel Aviv after meeting with Israeli officials, hours before Hamas announced its reply. He said Netanyahu had reaffirmed his commitment to the proposal when they met late Monday.

In a joint statement announcing that they had submitted their reply to Qatar and Egypt, Hamas and the smaller Islamic Jihad militant group said they were ready to "deal positively to arrive at an agreement" and that their priority is to bring a "complete stop" to the war. A senior Hamas official, Osama Hamdan, told Lebanon's Al-Mayadeen television that the group had "submitted some remarks on the proposal to the mediators," without elaborating.

The proposal has raised hopes of ending an 8-month conflict in which Israel's bombardment and ground offensives in Gaza have killed over 37,000 Palestinians, according to Palestinian health officials, and driven some 80% of the population of 2.3 million from their homes. Israeli restrictions and ongoing fighting have hindered efforts to bring humanitarian aid to the isolated coastal enclave, fueling widespread hunger.

Israel launched its campaign, vowing to eliminate Hamas, after the group and other militants stormed into Israel on Oct. 7, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking around 250 hostages. Over 100 hostages were released during a weeklong cease-fire last year in exchange for Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

Later Tuesday, Blinken attended a Gaza aid conference in Jordan, where he announced over \$400 million in additional aid for Palestinians in Gaza and the wider region, bringing the total U.S. assistance to more than \$674 million over the past eight months.

U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres told the gathering that the amount of aid flowing to the United Nations in Gaza for distribution has plummeted by two-thirds since Israel launched an offensive in the territory's southern city of Rafah in early May.

Guterres called for all border crossings to be opened, saying, "the speed and scale of the carnage and killing in Gaza" is beyond anything he has since he took the helm of the U.N. in 2017.

In a separate development, the U.N. human rights office said Israeli forces and Palestinian militants may have committed war crimes during the deadly Israeli raid that rescued four hostages over the weekend. At least 274 Palestinians were killed in the operation, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

Blinken, who was in Cairo on Monday, was also expected to visit Qatar — where talks would likely focus on the next steps in the push for a deal.

On Monday, the U.N. Security Council voted overwhelmingly to approve the proposal, with 14 of the 15 members voting in favor and Russia abstaining. The resolution calls on Israel and Hamas "to fully implement its terms without delay and without condition."

The proposal, announced by President Joe Biden last month, calls for a three-phased plan that would begin with an initial six-week cease-fire and the release of some hostages in exchange for Palestinian prisoners. Israeli forces would withdraw from populated areas and Palestinian civilians would be allowed to

return to their homes. Hamas is still holding around 120 hostages, a third of whom are believed to be dead.

Phase one also requires the safe distribution of humanitarian assistance "at scale throughout the Gaza Strip," which Biden said would lead to 600 trucks of aid entering Gaza every day.

At the same time, negotiations would be launched over the second phase, which is to bring "a permanent end to hostilities, in exchange for the release of all other hostages still in Gaza, and a full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza."

Phase three would launch "a major multi-year reconstruction plan for Gaza and the return of the remains of any deceased hostages still in Gaza to their families."

The militant group embraced a similar proposal last month that was rejected by Israel.

Biden presented it as an Israeli proposal, but Netanyahu has publicly disputed key aspects of it, saying there were parts left out by Biden. The conflicting signals appear to reflect Netanyahu's political dilemma. His far-right coalition allies have rejected the proposal and have threatened to bring down his government if he ends the war without destroying Hamas.

A lasting cease-fire and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza would likely allow Hamas to retain control of the territory and rebuild its military capabilities.

But Netanyahu is also under mounting pressure to accept a deal to bring the hostages back. Thousands of Israelis, including families of the hostages, have demonstrated in favor of the U.S.-backed plan.

The transition from the first to the second phase appears to be a sticking point. Hamas wants assurances that Israel will not resume the war, and Israel wants to ensure that protracted negotiations over the second phase do not prolong the cease-fire indefinitely while leaving hostages in captivity.

Blinken said the proposal would bring an immediate cease-fire and commit the parties to negotiate an enduring one. "The cease-fire that would take place immediately would remain in place, which is manifestly good for for everyone. And then we'll have to see," Blinken said.

## What's next for Hunter Biden after his conviction on federal gun charges

By CLAUDIA LAUER and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — Hunter Biden's legal woes are not over after his conviction on three felony firearms charges in a trial that put a spotlight on his drug-fueled past.

Now, President Joe Biden's son faces sentencing, and another criminal trial on tax charges in the middle of his father's reelection campaign.

Jurors found Hunter Biden guilty on Tuesday after just three hours of deliberations over two days in the federal court in Wilmington, Delaware. The case stemmed from a gun Hunter Biden bought in 2018 while, as prosecutors say, he was in the throes of a crack cocaine addiction.

Here's a look at what's next for Hunter Biden:

Sentencing He was convicted of lying on a mandatory gun purchase form by saying he was not illegally using or addicted to drugs, and illegally having the gun for 11 days.

The three counts carry up to 25 years in prison. But whether the president's son actually serves any time behind bars will be up to U.S. District Judge Maryellen Noreika. The judge, who was nominated to the bench by former Republican President Donald Trump, didn't immediately set a date for sentencing.

In the federal system, first-time offenders don't get anywhere near the maximum sentence. Federal sentencing guidelines — which judges use as they weigh punishments for defendants — are expected to recommend a far lighter punishment. And judges aren't bound by the guidelines, so she could decide not to send him to prison at all. Other options include probation or home detention.

In pressing the judge not to put him behind bars, defense lawyers will likely note that, unlike many illegal firearm possession cases, Hunter Biden's gun was not used in a crime. Hunter Biden never even fired the gun, which he had for 11 days before it got thrown in the trash, his lawyers have said.

The defense will also likely emphasize that Hunter Biden has since turned his life around. He has said he has been sober since 2019. Also, there have been no reported violations of his conditions of release,



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 68 of 92

including that he continues to abstain from drugs and alcohol and participate in a recovery program.

Appeal likely Defense attorney Abbe Lowell said in a written statement Tuesday that they will "continue to vigorously pursue all the legal challenges available." It's unclear on what grounds Hunter Biden will appeal the verdict, but he mounted multiple unsuccessful challenges to the case ahead of trial.

Among other things, Hunter Biden's lawyers have challenged the constitutionality of the gun law at the center of the case in the wake of a landmark Supreme Court decision that has upended firearm laws across the country.

Hunter Biden's lawyers have also argued the president's son was prosecuted for political purposes. Lowell has claimed prosecutors bowed to political pressure after a plea agreement hit the skids in court and was publicly pilloried by Republicans, including Trump, as a "sweetheart deal."

Under that deal last year, Hunter Biden would have pleaded guilty to misdemeanor tax offenses and avoided prosecution in the gun case if he stayed out of trouble. Prosecutors were planning to recommend two years of probation. But the deal fell apart after the judge raised concerns about it.

On Friday, defense lawyers urged the judge to acquit Hunter Biden of the charges, arguing prosecutors had not met their burden of proof. Noreika did not rule on the motion before the jury reached its verdict.

Other legal problems Hunter Biden's trial on tax charges in California is scheduled to begin September 5. He was initially slated to go to trial in that case later this month, but the judge recently granted a defense request to delay.

He's charged in the California case with nine felony and misdemeanor tax offenses. The charges stem from what federal prosecutors say was a four-year scheme to skip out on paying the \$1.4 million he owed to the IRS. Prosecutors allege he instead used the money to fund an extravagant lifestyle which, by his own admission, included drugs and alcohol. The president's son has since repaid the back taxes.

Hunter Biden's lawyer said at a recent hearing that he was struggling to line up expert witnesses willing to testify in the high-profile case in Los Angeles. Prosecutors said they are planning to call roughly 30 witnesses.

Republicans have also signaled they will keep going after Hunter Biden after their impeachment inquiry into the president stalled.

Last week, House Republicans issued criminal referrals against Hunter Biden and the president's brother, James, accusing them of making false statements to Congress as part of the GOP's yearlong impeachment inquiry. The president has not been accused or charged with any wrongdoing by prosecutors investigating his son.

Hunter Biden's attorney said in a statement last week that the referrals are "nothing more than a desperate attempt by Republicans to twist Hunter's testimony so they can distract from their failed impeachment inquiry" and interfere with his criminal trial.

A presidential pardon? President Biden said Tuesday that he would accept the verdict and "continue to respect the judicial process as Hunter considers an appeal." The president has said in recent interviews he would not pardon his son.

The president's response to the verdict stands in stark contrast to Trump, who blasted the justice system as "rigged" after his conviction on 34 felony counts in New York. The presumptive Republican presidential nominee was convicted of a scheme to illegally influence the 2016 election through a hush money payment to a porn actor who said the two had sex. Trump denied any wrongdoing and has cast himself as the victim of a politically motivated justice system working to deny him another term.

While in the White House, Trump used his pardon power to benefit a broad array of allies, Republican supporters in Congress convicted of crimes and others whose causes were championed by friends.

The beneficiaries included four associates convicted in special counsel Robert Mueller's Russian election interference investigation, but notably excluded two others — former campaign aide Rick Gates and former personal lawyer Michael Cohen — who cooperated with prosecutors as part of that probe.

In a statement Tuesday, Trump's campaign called Hunter Biden's verdict "nothing more than a distraction from the real crimes of the Biden Crime Family." Trump and his allies have long pressed forward unsubstantiated or debunked allegations that Joe Biden — while serving as vice president — acted to advance his family members' foreign business interests.

## Steady decline in youth hockey participation in Canada raises concerns about the future of the sport

By STEPHEN WHYNO AP Hockey Writer

BRAMPTON, Ontario (AP) — All four ice rinks at Susan Fennell Sportsplex are full of action on this winter Saturday morning, the air filled with the sound of hockey skates grinding through ice and pucks clanging off the glass.

The scene is as familiar as the sunrise in countless rinks across Canada. Hockey remains a beloved pastime, a source of pride and joy and something that has knitted the vast nation together for more than 150 years.

Behind the scenes of the goals and celebrations is an alarming trend: Youth hockey participation in the cradle of the sport has decreased by nearly a quarter over the past decade and a half, a decline that began well before the pandemic from a peak of over half a million kids taking part as recently as 2010.

Because of growing costs for everything from equipment and ice time to specialized coaching and travel programs, families are choosing other sports like soccer and basketball over hockey. There are concerns about the future of grassroots hockey in the country that has nourished it into the popular, vibrant sport that is seeing growth elsewhere, including the United States.

"It does sadden me," said Alex Klimsiak, who coaches two teams in Brampton as his way to giving back to the game he still plays recreationally in suburban Toronto at the age of 44. "Enrollment's probably been declining for the last five, six years. Definitely before the pandemic you could see it. A pandemic just put a magnifying glass and escalated it."

In 2022, about two months after Canada celebrated what was then its 18th world junior hockey championship, the CEO of hockey equipment giant Bauer, Ed Kinnaly, declared: "The number of kids getting involved in hockey in Canada is spiraling downward ... but nobody's talking about that."

At the time, Hockey Canada reported 411,818 youths younger than 18 participating in the sport, a 22% drop from 523,785 just 13 years earlier, not counting an introductory program that is has been separated from registration numbers since 2021. That number slightly rebounded in 2023 to 436,895 but is still below pre-pandemic levels even while soccer and tennis numbers in Canada have already recovered.

"I'm concerned but I'm not panicked," Kinnaly told The Associated Press. "I'm concerned obviously at what the numbers say. I'm not panicked because I do believe that the sport is evolving. I do think the right people — the National Hockey League, USA Hockey, Hockey Canada, private corporations — are all starting to have the honest dialogue with each other, which is, A, we've got to stop talking about what's wrong and, B, we've got to start investing in change for the sake of the sport."

Choices beyond hockey Few things are more closely associated with Canada than hockey, a place where kids and adults alike look forward to winter and lakes and ponds freezing over so they can lace up their skates, push a net out and play some shinny. When Canada faced the U.S. in the 2010 Olympic final on home ice in Vancouver, half the country's total population watched Sidney Crosby score the "golden goal," etched into national lore. Millions are watching Edmonton this spring as the Oilers try to end the nation's 31-year Stanley Cup championship drought.

Yet the sport may no longer be the go-to for kids in Canada. According to the Canadian Youth Sports Report released last summer by Solutions Research Group, soccer is the top choice at 16%, followed by swimming, hockey and basketball. Raw participation numbers for the sports are not comparable given differences in registration requirements across various governing bodies.

Parents cited financial issues as their top concern (58%), followed by family care and youth mental health, including bullying. There are some concerns, too, that the time needed for practices and drills even at the lower levels of competitive hockey is part of the problem.

"It definitely is a big commitment," said Priyanka Kwatra, whose 10-year-old son Shawn has developed a love for the sport and plays in suburban Toronto. "It's a very time-consuming sort of sport."

Time-consuming in large part because of the limited availability of ice that pushes practices and games to very early in the morning or late at night. Many youth programs train nine months or more per year, on the ice three to five times a week along with off-ice workouts.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 70 of 92

When her husband, Amit, first looked at equipment for Shawn, the \$1,000 price tag was a shock. Add to that limits on available ice for practices or for fun and games and basketball or soccer suddenly seem easier.

"Getting someone into hockey, it's not as simple as getting someone into soccer where you just need a soccer ball," Amit Kwatra said. "Hockey, the amount of gear that's required in order to kind of get the game started is a lot, and I think that is the biggest barrier for a lot of people that initiate their kids into hockey."

Other sports can also feel like a safer choice than hockey with its speed, hits and sharp skates. Gianfranco Talarico is the founder of Daredevil Hockey, which has been making cut-proof gear for more than a decade. He said his company's feedback and surveys have shown safety and cost are the biggest things hindering a more rapid growth of the sport.

"It's so intertwined in the fabric of Canadians," he said. "If we don't collectively focus on making hockey a safer sport, the potential brand equity of hockey in general will start to diminish."

'Professionalization of hockey' During All-Star Weekend in Toronto, the NHL put on a youth event in nearby York. With daughter Sharon, Priyanka and Amit watched their son on the ice, he and more than 100 other young players all in their first set of gear provided by Bauer as part of NHL/NHLPA First Shift, one of many learn-to-play efforts intended to keep hockey in Canada's bloodlines.

"It's a low-cost entry point, and then it obviously is able to accelerate growth because it provides opportunity," said Matt Herr, a former NHL player who is now the league's senior director of youth hockey and industry growth. "Especially in Canada, we're competing now where it used to be the pastime. ... it was everybody's first choice, and now there's all these different choices and we've got to make sure we're still everybody's first choice."

Herr and others know the equipment costs are potentially becoming a barrier. The quality of sticks, helmets and pads has increased sharply thanks to technological advances, but with that comes higher pricing — and with that comes the risk of leaving out lower-income families eager to try hockey, especially with higher levels of the sport running nearly year-round.

Rachael Bishop for her 2017 honors thesis at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, found a massive gap between the household incomes of families in hockey compared with other sports, an indication of the means necessary to afford it.

"I do think it's more so probably a factor of cost, and we're seeing it become prohibitively expensive now," Bishop told The AP. "You see the professionalization of hockey: It's a full-year sport now: You've got to join summer leagues, you want to get all the best equipment. Then there's always like power-skating lessons, summer camps, so I think a lot of it is cost more so than anything."

Klimsiak, the Brampton coach, estimated that the cost of being on a competitive team — the ones that travel to tournaments and have multiple set practice times as opposed to recreational teams — starts at \$4,000, with some teams charging \$10,000 or more. He said some Toronto hockey organizations are combining resources because there aren't enough players to go around.

"The cost of the game has gone up," said Klimsiak, who has three sons playing, one on his team, which he has trouble finding goaltenders for. "Referee costs have gone up. It's tough. It's proportional. It's like cost of living, so everything's gone up and now unfortunately the parents have to pay more."

Cost is something University of Toronto professor Simon Darnell is all too aware of. The parent of a 9-year-old playing competitive hockey, the expert in sports culture and sociology calls costs one of the "exclusionary practices in hockey that go back a long time," along with the culture of winning and the obsession over climbing up to the next team.

Darnell, acknowledging the willingness to shell out money for ice and other expenses, also understands the early-morning, nearly year-round aspect of hockey is one of factors keeping some out.

"It's like if you don't want to participate in hockey on those terms, then there isn't as much space for you I think as there should be," Darnell said. "It's if you don't want to play by those rules, then there isn't space for you and then you go and play a different sport."

Stopping the slideA further concern: Are there enough ice rinks to accommodate hockey as a source of fun and character-building for children? Canada's population, now nearly 40 million, has doubled in 50



years, and the International Ice Hockey Federation reports there are still just 2,860 indoor ice rinks across the sprawling country. Renting ice can cost hundreds of dollars just for 1-2 hours.

Kinnaly pointed to a 2019 Parks and Recreation Ontario plan to invest \$2 billion over the next two decades on 45 new soccer fields, 30 basketball courts, 18 indoor pools and a single hockey rink as further cause for concern

"The number of rinks that are in disrepair or have closed further compresses the availability of ice time," Kinnaly said. "If there aren't places for people to play, it's going to continue to be a headwind, a real challenge."

Programs like First Shift and Scotiabank's Hockey For All are among the steps being taken to stop the slide. Kinnaly said Bauer's program has been "immensely successful" at not only getting kids into hockey but keeping them, with a retention rate around 60%, and has discussed ways of introducing new Canadians to the game like equipment being part of the welcome package upon signing up for a checking account.

But there are still systemic issues, from crumbling infrastructure and a lack of new rinks to inflationary pressure on pricing.

The woes are not being seen at the NHL level, where revenue continues to rise and fan interest is growing. In the U.S., youth hockey participation has slowly grown to nearly 400,000 registered players.

Instead, the existential crisis for the home of hockey exists at places like the Brampton rink, where the players and fans of tomorrow are developed. There are encouraging signs, such as hockey still being the preferred sports for First Nations youth and nearly 40% of First Shift participants being girls as the women's game gets more attention — but the overall trend has presented a painful question that must be answered.

"I don't think hockey can rest on its position in a way that it used to, and there's part of me that's OK with that," said Darnell, the Toronto professor. "I think it makes sense if we're going to invest in hockey in Canada as somehow representative of Canadian culture that we actually need to think about what does Canadian culture look like and is it reflected in hockey? Because right now it's not."

## **President Joe Biden's son, Hunter Biden, is convicted of all 3 felonies in federal gun trial**

By RANDALL CHASE, CLAUDIA LAUER, MICHAEL KUNZELMAN, COLLEEN LONG and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — Hunter Biden was convicted Tuesday of all three felony charges related to the purchase of a revolver in 2018 when, prosecutors argued, the president's son lied on a mandatory gun-purchase form by saying he was not illegally using or addicted to drugs.

Hunter Biden, 54, stared straight ahead and showed little emotion as the verdict was read after jury deliberations that lasted only three hours over two days in Wilmington, Delaware. He hugged his attorneys, smiled wanly and kissed his wife, Melissa, before leaving the courtroom with her.

President Joe Biden said in a statement issued shortly after the verdict that he would accept the outcome and "continue to respect the judicial process as Hunter considers an appeal."

Now Hunter Biden and presumptive Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump, the president's chief political rival, have both been convicted by American jurors in an election year that has been as much about the courtroom as about campaign events and rallies.

Hunter Biden faces up to 25 years in prison when he is sentenced by U.S. District Judge Maryellen Noreika, though as a first-time offender he would not get anywhere near the maximum, and there's no guarantee the judge would send him to prison. She did not set a sentencing date.

Defense attorney Abbe Lowell said they would "continue to vigorously pursue all the legal challenges available." In a written statement, Hunter Biden said he was disappointed by the outcome but grateful for the support of family and friends.

The jury's decision was read swiftly after the announcement that it reached a verdict. First lady Jill Biden sat through nearly every day of the trial but did not make it into the courtroom in time to hear the verdict.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 72 of 92

Hunter Biden walked out of the courthouse holding hands with the first lady and his wife before they got into waiting SUVs and drove off.

Joe Biden steered clear of the federal courtroom where his son was tried and said little about the case, wary of appearing to interfere in a criminal matter brought by his own Justice Department. But allies of the Democrat have worried about the toll that the trial — and now the conviction — will take on the 81-year-old, who has long been concerned with his only living son's health and sustained sobriety.

Hunter Biden's conviction came just weeks after Trump was found guilty of 34 felony charges related to a hush money payment to a porn actor in the 2016 campaign. The cases are in no way the same, and Hunter Biden is a private citizen who is not running for office. But they have both argued they were victimized by the politics of the moment.

Trump, however, has continued to falsely claim his verdict was "rigged," while Joe Biden has said he would accept the verdict involving his son and would not seek to pardon him.

In his statement Tuesday, the president said he and the first lady are proud of their son, who says he has been sober since 2019, and will always be there for him with "love and support."

Trump's campaign called the verdict "nothing more than a distraction from the real crimes of the Biden Crime Family." Trump and his allies have pressed unsubstantiated or debunked allegations that Joe Biden acted while vice president to advance his family members' foreign business interests.

The verdict came down as the president prepared to give a speech at a conference hosted by the Everytown for Gun Safety Action Fund in Washington. He did not mention his son as he spoke about his administration's efforts to stop gun violence and the need to ban so-called assault weapons.

Hours after the conviction, President Biden hugged his son after landing in Wilmington to spend the night with family before leaving Wednesday for the Group of Seven leaders conference in Italy. Hunter Biden, his wife and their child greeted the president on the tarmac, and the president lingered to visit with them for several minutes.

Jurors found Hunter Biden guilty of lying to a federally licensed gun dealer, making a false claim on the application by saying he was not a drug user and illegally having the gun for 11 days.

The trial played out in the president's home state, where Hunter Biden grew up and where the family is deeply established. Joe Biden spent 36 years as a senator in Delaware, commuting daily to Washington, and his other son, Beau Biden, was the state attorney general before he died of cancer.

The proceedings put a spotlight on a dark time in Hunter Biden's life, including his spiraling descent after Beau's death in 2015. The trial featured deeply personal testimony from former romantic partners and embarrassing evidence such as text messages and photos of Hunter Biden with drug paraphernalia or partially clothed.

In his closing argument on Monday, prosecutor Leo Wise acknowledged the evidence was "ugly." But he told jurors it was also "absolutely necessary" to prove Hunter was in the throes of addiction when he bought the gun and therefore lied when he checked "no" on the form that asked whether he was "an unlawful user of, or addicted to" drugs.

Before the case went to the jury, the prosecutor urged jurors to pay no mind to members of the president's family sitting in the courtroom, telling them: "People sitting in the gallery are not evidence."

David Weiss, the prosecutor who has led the long-running investigation into the president's son, told reporters the case was about Hunter Biden's "illegal choices" and "dangerous" conduct.

"No one in this country is above the law," said Weiss, the Trump-nominated U.S. attorney for Delaware, who was named special counsel by Attorney General Merrick Garland in August. "Everyone must be accountable for their actions."

Hunter Biden's lawyers had argued that he did not consider himself an "addict" when he bought the gun. They sought to show he was trying to turn his life around at the time, having completed a rehabilitation program at the end of August 2018.

Hunter Biden's legal troubles aren't over. He faces a trial in September in California on charges of failing to pay \$1.4 million in taxes, and congressional Republicans have signaled they will keep going after him in their stalled impeachment effort into the president. The president has not been accused or charged with

any wrongdoing by prosecutors investigating his son.

Just last year, it appeared that Hunter Biden would avoid the spectacle of a trial so close to the election. Under a deal with prosecutors, he was supposed to plead guilty to misdemeanor tax offenses and avoid prosecution in the gun case if he stayed out of trouble for two years.

But the deal fell apart after Noreika, who was nominated by Trump, questioned unusual aspects of the proposed agreement, and the lawyers could not resolve the matter.

Hunter Biden has said he was charged because the Justice Department bowed to pressure from Republicans who argued the Democratic president's son was getting special treatment.

## Mexico's tactic to cut immigration to the US: wear out migrants

By MEGAN JANETSKY and FÉLIX MÁRQUEZ Associated Press  
VILLAHERMOSA, Mexico (AP) — "Here, again."

Yeneska García's face crumbled as she said it, and she pressed her head into her hands.

Since fleeing crisis in Venezuela in January, the 23-year-old had trekked through the Darien Gap jungle dividing Colombia and Panama, narrowly survived being kidnapped by a Mexican cartel and waited months for an asylum appointment with the United States that never came. She finally crossed the U.S.-Mexico border in May, only to have American authorities expel her.

Now she was back in southern Mexico, after Mexican immigration bused her to sweltering Villahermosa and dropped her on the street.

"I would rather cross the Darien Gap 10,000 times than cross Mexico," García said, sitting in a migrant shelter.

She clutched a crinkled Ziploc bag that held her Venezuelan ID, an inhaler and an apple — her few remaining possessions.

Driven by mounting pressure from the U.S. to block millions of vulnerable people headed north, but lacking the funds to deport them, Mexican authorities are employing a simple but harsh tactic: wearing migrants out until they give up.

That means migrants are churning in limbo here as authorities round them up across the country and dump them in the southern Mexican cities of Villahermosa and Tapachula. Some have been punted back as many as six times.

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said Monday that the policy protects migrants.

"We care a lot ... about keeping migrants in the southeast because crossing to the north is very risky," López Obrador said in his morning press briefing, responding to a question from The Associated Press about busing migrants to southern Mexico.

But the moves have forced migrants, including pregnant women and children, into even more precarious situations. That's likely to worsen under President Joe Biden's new asylum restrictions, analysts say.

Mexico's actions explain a plunge in arrivals to the U.S.-Mexico border, which dropped 40% from an all-time high in December and persisted through the spring. That coincided with an increase in migrants in Mexico without legal permission, data from the country's immigration agency shows. U.S. officials mostly credit Mexican vigilance around rail yards and highway checkpoints.

"Mexico is the wall," said Josue Martínez, a psychologist at Villahermosa's only migrant shelter, Peace Oasis of the Holy Spirit Amparito, which was bracing for a crush of people under Biden's measure to halt asylum processing when U.S. officials deem that the southern border is overwhelmed.

The small shelter has been scrambling since Mexico's government began pushing people back two years ago. Last month, it housed 528 people, up from 85 in May 2022.

"What will we do when even more people arrive?" Martínez said. "Every time the United States does something to reinforce the northern border, we automatically know tons of people are coming to Villahermosa."

Migrants here walk or take buses north toward Mexico City, where they can request an appointment to seek asylum over U.S. Customs and Border Protection's app, CBP One. But most never make it far enough north for the app's location requirement.



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 74 of 92

Checkpoints dot southern Mexican highways. Armed soldiers pull migrants off buses and round up those walking along roads and in surrounding mountains. Of two dozen migrants interviewed by the AP, all said they were extorted by law enforcement or Mexican migration officials to continue on their journeys. After dishing out hefty sums two or three times, families had nothing. They were then bused back south, where most were left on the streets.

Mexican authorities refer to the temporary detentions as "humanitarian rescues."

But Venezuelan Keilly Bolaños says there is nothing human about them. She and her four children have been sent to southern Mexico six times. The 25-year-old single mother wants asylum so her 4-year-old daughter can get treatment for leukemia, unavailable to her in Venezuela.

Days earlier, she was captured in the northern state of Chihuahua, where she said members of the military beat her in front of her crying children, then loaded them onto a bus for the two-day journey to Villahermosa.

"How can you run when you have four children? You can't," Bolaños said.

The family slept on cardboard boxes alongside other migrants outside Villahermosa's bus terminal. Bruises still lined Bolaños' legs. Yet she planned to take a seventh swing at heading north. She has nowhere else to go.

"I know that all this struggling will be worth it some day," she added.

Mexico's tactics appear to be a way to appease the U.S., which has pressured Latin American nations to help slow migration while failing to overhaul its own immigration system that most Americans agree is broken. Panama's incoming president has promised to block passage through the Darien Gap, while Biden eased criticisms of El Salvador's president after he reduced migration.

When Biden announced his new restrictions last week, he said he "drastically" cut migration to the border "due to the arrangement that I've reached with President (López) Obrador." He said he also planned to work with incoming President Claudia Sheinbaum on border issues.

But Michael Shifter, a senior fellow at the Inter-American Dialogue, said such measures are only short-term solutions that don't address root causes of migration.

"They say this is a regional challenge we all have to face together, which is true," Shifter said. "The problem is: if the U.S. can't get its own house in order, that sends a signal to other governments asking: 'Why should we work with them if the U.S. itself is not capable of dealing with the issue?'"

Some asylum seekers said they were ready to give up on their "American dream," but can't leave because they're cut off from their consulate or are out of money.

After being taken off of a bus, one group of migrants begged authorities to help them get back to Venezuela shortly before being sent back south.

"We just want to go to the embassy in Mexico City. To go back to Venezuela," 30-year-old Fabiana Bellizar told officials, after being returned from northern Mexico a day earlier. "We don't want to be here anymore."

They started traveling the same route the next morning.

Others said they would try to find work and a place to sleep in the city before continuing on.

López Obrador on Monday said work is offered to migrants in the south, but the few lucky people face precarious conditions. One migrant was paid \$25 a day for 12 hours of work under the beating sun on a mango farm. Another said employers tried to coerce her into sex work.

Others are forced to take more dangerous routes, and into the arms of mafias looking to kidnap migrants.

At the first sign of flashing lights, 27-year-old Honduran Alexander Amador dove behind a tree, scrambling for cover in the shadows cloaking the road between the Mexican states of Veracruz and Tabasco.

Amador and his two travel companions had been walking for 10 hours, running into the jungle to escape authorities trying to scoop them up along the highway. After being returned twice to southern Mexico while traveling by bus, it was the only thing the Hondurans could think of to continue onward.

But they were frightened, both of Mexican law enforcement and cartels. In the past year, security in southern Mexican states such as Tabasco and Chiapas has spiraled as cartels battle for control over lucrative migrant routes.

"Here, you can't trust anyone. Everything is a danger to you," Amador said, swinging his backpack over his shoulder and walking into the darkness.

## **A Florida law blocking treatment for transgender children is thrown out by a federal judge**

By TERRY SPENCER Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — A federal judge on Tuesday struck down a 2023 Florida law that blocked gender-affirming care for transgender minors and severely restricted such treatment for adults, calling the statute unconstitutional.

Senior Judge Robert Hinkle said the state went too far when it barred transgender minors from being prescribed puberty blockers and hormonal treatments with their parents' permission. He also stopped the state from requiring that transgender adults only receive treatment from a doctor and not from a registered nurse or other qualified medical practitioner. And he barred a ban on online treatment for transgender adults.

Hinkle said transgender people are constitutionally entitled to the legitimate treatment they need and, quoting the late Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., compared those who oppose it to those who were once against equality for minorities and women.

"Some transgender opponents invoke religion to support their position, just as some once invoked religion to support their racism or misogyny," Hinkle wrote in his 105-page decision. "Transgender opponents are of course free to hold their beliefs. But they are not free to discriminate against transgender individuals just for being transgender.

"In time, discrimination against transgender individuals will diminish, just as racism and misogyny have diminished," he continued. "To paraphrase a civil-rights advocate from an earlier time, the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."

Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis' office blasted Hinkle's ruling, issuing a statement calling it "erroneous," and vowing to appeal.

"Through their elected representatives, the people of Florida acted to protect children in this state, and the Court was wrong to override their wishes," the statement said. "As we've seen here in Florida, the United Kingdom, and across Europe, there is no quality evidence to support the chemical and physical mutilation of children. These procedures do permanent, life-altering damage to children, and history will look back on this fad in horror."

But those who sued the state celebrated the decision.

Lucien Hamel, a transgender adult, issued a statement saying, "I'm so relieved the court saw there is no medical basis for this law — it was passed just to target transgender people like me and try to push us out of Florida."

"This is my home. I've lived here my entire life," he said. "This is my son's home. I can't just uproot my family and move across the country. The state has no place interfering in people's private medical decisions, and I'm relieved that I can once again get the healthcare that I need here in Florida."

A mother of one of the children who sued said, "This ruling means I won't have to watch my daughter needlessly suffer because I can't get her the care she needs."

"Seeing Susan's fear about this ban has been one of the hardest experiences we've endured as parents," said the woman. She was identified in court documents only as Jane Doe and her daughter as Susan Doe to protect their privacy. "All we've wanted is to take that fear away and help her continue to be the happy, confident child she is now."

DeSantis had signed the law last year as he was gearing up for a presidential campaign that was highly based on culture wars.

"We never did this through all of human history until like, what, two weeks ago? Now this is something?" he told cheering supporters as he signed the bill. "They're having third graders declare pronouns? We're

not doing the pronoun Olympics in Florida.”

At trial, Florida’s attorneys had conceded that the state cannot stop someone from pursuing a transgender identity, but said it can regulate medical care.

For minors, the only treatments at issue are puberty blocking treatments and cross-sex hormones — giving testosterone to someone assigned female at birth, for example. Those who were undergoing treatment when the law was adopted in May 2023 were allowed to continue. Surgery, which is rare for minors, was still blocked.

For adults, treatment was still allowed but could only be done by a physician instead of an advanced practice registered nurse or other professional. It required the patient to sign a consent form in person while in the same room with the doctor, meaning the treatment couldn’t be done on a video call or otherwise online — something not normally required with other medical procedures. Violators could be charged criminally and medical providers could lose their licenses.

Hinkle wrote that Florida had long allowed treatment for gender dysphoria, the feeling that one’s gender identity does not match one’s sex as registered at birth.

“But then the political winds changed,” Hinkle wrote. He was appointed to the bench by Democratic President Bill Clinton in 1996.

For 99% of people, Hinkle wrote, their biological sex and their gender identity are the same. But for a few, they differ. Hinkle said the state admitted that during the trial, even if some won’t believe it and think transgender people are making a choice like “whether to read Shakespeare or Grisham.”

“Many people with this view tend to disapprove of all things transgender and so oppose medical care that supports (it),” he said.

He said even though the state concedes it cannot constitutionally block people from identifying as transgender and presenting themselves as they wish, several legislators made it clear in their comments that this was their goal.

At least 25 states have adopted laws restricting or banning gender-affirming medical care for transgender minors, and most of those states face lawsuits.

The only other one to be struck down so far as unconstitutional is the ban in Arkansas, which the state has appealed to the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Advocates are asking the U.S. Supreme Court to block Tennessee’s ban on gender-affirming care for minors.

Judges’ orders are in place temporarily blocking enforcement of a ban in Montana and aspects of the ban in Georgia.

## **Biden and gun control advocates want to flip an issue long dominated by the NRA**

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Groups pushing tighter gun laws have been building political muscle through multiple elections, boosted by the outcry following mass shootings at schools and other public places, in addition to the nation’s daily gun violence.

Now, gun control advocates and many Democrats see additional openings created by hard-line positions of the gun lobby and their most influential champion, former President Donald Trump. They also point to controversies surrounding the National Rifle Association, which has undergone leadership shuffles and membership declines after a key former executive was found to have expensed private jet flights and accepted vacations from group vendors.

At a Washington conference hosted by Everytown for Gun Safety Action Fund on Tuesday, President Joe Biden rattled off a list of gun-related accomplishments during his administration, prompting huge cheers from the hundreds in the audience. He also called for a ban on assault-style weapons and universal background checks for firearms purchases.

Biden’s speech came as his son Hunter was convicted Tuesday of three charges for lying on a federal



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 77 of 92

gun-purchase form in 2018 when he said he was not a drug user. The president, who has said he loves his son and also would respect the verdict, was leaving from the event to head to Delaware to be with his son and family. He did not mention his son during his address.

"We need you," Biden told the enthusiastic crowd members, whom he repeatedly praised for their advocacy. "We need you to overcome the unrelenting opposition of the gun lobby."

Biden's campaign says gun control could be a motivating issue for suburban college-educated women who may be decisive in several key battlegrounds this fall. The Democratic campaign and its allies have already circulated clips of Trump, a Republican, saying, "We have to get over it," after an Iowa school shooting in January and then telling NRA members in May that he "did nothing" on guns during his presidency.

There have been 15 mass killings so far in 2024, according to data tracked by The Associated Press. A mass killing is defined as an attack in which four or more people have died, not including the perpetrator, within a 24-hour period.

Asked for comment, the Trump campaign pointed to the former president's previous statements promising no new gun regulations if he returns to the White House.

Trump has spoken twice this year at NRA events and was endorsed by the group in May. He alleged that Biden "has a 40-year record of trying to rip firearms out of the hands of law-abiding citizens." His campaign and the Republican National Committee also announced the creation of a "Gun Owners for Trump" coalition that includes gun-rights activists and those who work in the firearms industry.

About 7 in 10 suburban college-educated women who voted in the 2022 midterm elections supported stricter gun control laws, although less than 1 in 10 named it as the top problem facing the country, according to AP VoteCast, a wide-ranging survey of voters.

An AP-NORC poll conducted in August 2023 found that about 6 in 10 independent voters said they wanted stricter gun laws. Only about one-third of Republicans wanted more expansive gun legislation while about 9 in 10 Democrats were in support.

Biden White House gets high marks from gun-control advocates Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris highlight their action on gun policy, notably the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act of 2022, a compromise brokered after a mass shooting at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas. The law expanded background checks for the youngest gun buyers, tried to make it harder for domestic abusers to obtain weapons and allocated billions of dollars to programs intended to curb gun violence.

It is the most sweeping federal gun legislation since a ban on certain semi-automatic weapons was signed in 1994; that ban expired a decade later.

Tougher gun laws are also a key pillar of Biden's anti-crime message. In his speech Tuesday, the president pointed to the more than 500 defendants who have now been charged under the 2022 law for federal gun trafficking and straw purchasing crimes.

Biden also reenergized the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, and he's the first president to establish a White House office devoted to preventing gun violence.

Angela Ferrell-Zabala, executive director of Moms Demand Action, called the Biden White House "the strongest administration we've ever seen on this issue."

The idea of going beyond the 2022 law to enforce background checks on all potential gun buyers has bipartisan support, according to an August 2023 AP-NORC poll, with about 9 in 10 Democrats and about 7 in 10 Republicans in favor. A majority of U.S. adults wanted a nationwide ban on the sale of AR-15-style rifles, which can rapidly fire many rounds and are often used in mass shootings.

Last Thursday, Vice President Harris helped lead a gathering of health care leaders that West Wing aides highlighted as the first such White House summit to discuss guns as a public health crisis. On Friday, she discussed guns with Students for Biden, continuing a theme of her recent speeches on college campuses around the country.

"It is a false choice to suggest that you have to be in favor of the Second Amendment or you want to take everyone's guns away," Harris said Friday in Maryland, where she spoke as part of a series of White House and campaign events focused on gun violence.

Gun-control advocates cite a potentially wider reach that extends across several parts of the Democrats' coalition in recent elections: parents of schoolchildren, younger voters who grew up in an era of school shootings and safety drills, and Black and Hispanic voters. Biden's approval among some of these groups has fallen during his term in the White House.

"The political calculus has changed so dramatically on this issue in a relatively short period of time," said John Feinblatt, president of Everytown for Gun Safety. Legislating on guns, he said, was "an issue that elected officials once ran away from and now they run toward."

Feinblatt said Everytown's political arm plans advertising and voter outreach in presidential battleground states starting this summer.

The effort is modeled after Everytown's strategy in Virginia's 2023 legislative races, which yielded Democratic majorities. Everytown's ads in suburban and exurban districts painted Republicans as threats to "public health and public safety."

A still-powerful NRAThe NRA did not respond to a request for comment. It remains a force in Republican politics despite a series of headwinds. Wayne LaPierre, once one of the nation's most powerful lobbyists, was found liable in a New York court for spending NRA funds on himself, ultimately stepping down. NRA membership and income dropped.

Ferrell-Zabala of Moms Demand Action labeled the group as "flailing." She said the disarray has pushed some of the most conservative activists to burgeoning groups like Gun Owners of America. Self-described as "the only no-compromise gun lobby in Washington," the group opposes essentially any restriction on gun ownership and possession.

Matthew Lacombe, a Case Western Reserve University professor who studies gun politics, said the NRA's advocacy was a factor in Trump's 2016 victory over Hillary Clinton. Lacombe said the NRA remains a force and "represents an established base" for Trump.

"It's part of a broader cultural identity" that goes beyond guns, he said, though he added that dynamics in the wider electorate have shifted.

"There was a time when the NRA successfully branded gun-control advocates as the extremists in this debate," Lacombe said. "I don't think most Americans see that idea of gun control as extreme anymore. They see the other side that way."

## **Pamela Smart, serving life, accepts responsibility for her husband's 1990 killing for the first time**

By KATHY McCORMACK Associated Press

CONCORD, N.H. (AP) — Pamela Smart, who is serving life in prison for plotting with her teenage student to have her husband killed in 1990, accepted full responsibility for his death for the first time in a videotaped statement released Tuesday as part of her latest sentence reduction request.

Smart, 56, was a 22-year-old high school media coordinator when she began an affair with a 15-year-old boy who later fatally shot her husband, Gregory Smart, in Derry, New Hampshire. The shooter was freed in 2015 after serving a 25-year sentence. Though Pamela Smart denied knowledge of the plot, she was convicted of being an accomplice to first-degree murder and other crimes and sentenced to life without parole.

Smart has been incarcerated for nearly 34 years. In the videotaped statement, she said she began to "dig deeper into my own responsibility" through her experience in a writing group that "encouraged us to go beyond and to spaces that we didn't want to be in."

"For me, that was really hard, because going into those places, in those spaces is where I found myself responsible for something I desperately didn't want to be responsible for, my husband's murder," she said, her voice quavering. "I had to acknowledge for the first time in my own mind and my own heart how responsible I was, because I had deflected blame all the time, I think, almost as if it was a coping mechanism, because the truth of being so responsible was very difficult for me."

She asked to have an "honest conversation" with New Hampshire's five-member Executive Council, which

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 79 of 92

approves state contracts and appointees to the courts and state agencies, and with Gov. Chris Sununu. Smart has exhausted all of her judicial appeal options and has to go through the council for a sentence change. The council rejected her latest request, her third, in 2022 and Smart appealed to the state Supreme Court, which dismissed her petition last year.

Val Fryatt, a cousin of Gregory Smart, told The Associated Press on Tuesday that Smart "danced around it" and accepted full responsibility "without admitting the facts around what made her 'fully responsible.'"

Fryatt noted that Smart didn't mention her cousin's name in the video, "not even once."

Messages seeking comment on the petition and statement were sent to the council members, Sununu, and the attorney general's office.

"New Hampshire's process for commutation or pardon requests is fair and thorough," Sununu's office said in a statement. "Pamela Smart will be given the same opportunity to petition the Council for a hearing as any other individual."

"I will look into it, it's not on my radar screen as of yet," Councilor Joseph Kenney responded in an email.

Smart is serving time at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in Westchester County, New York. She has earned a doctorate in ministry and three master's degrees behind bars. She has also tutored fellow inmates, been ordained as a minister and been part of an inmate liaison committee. She said she is remorseful and has been rehabilitated.

"I made excuses, dismissed my own involvement, and blamed everyone else but myself," Smart wrote in her letter to Sununu. Because she wasn't there the night of the murder and didn't pull the trigger, she thought she wasn't responsible, saying she "became comfortable in my warped logic."

She added, "I am the one to blame for his absence from this world."

Smart's longtime lawyer, Mark Sisti, said the petition was filed last week.

"We're trying to impress upon the governor and council that we believe this is the time for them to actually listen to her," he said. "If they have any questions, she's more than happy to answer any of the questions that they may have."

Nearly 30 letters of support, many from people in the corrections system, were included in her petition.

"She is the true definition of a rehabilitated, improved and refined human being," Edward Gibbs, a member of the York State Assembly, wrote in his letter, dated March 14.

The trial was a media circus and one of America's first high-profile cases about a sexual affair between a school staff member and a student. Joyce Maynard wrote "To Die For" in 1992, drawing from the Smart case. That inspired a 1995 film of the same name, starring Nicole Kidman and Joaquin Phoenix. The killer, William Flynn, and three other teens cooperated with prosecutors. They have all since been released.

Flynn testified that Smart told him she needed her husband killed because she feared she would lose everything if they divorced. He said she threatened to break up with him if he didn't kill Gregory Smart.

## US gas prices are falling. Experts point to mild demand at the pump ahead of summer travel

By WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Gas prices are once again on the decline across the U.S., bringing some relief to drivers now paying a little less to fill up their tanks.

The national average for gas prices on Monday stood around \$3.44, according to AAA. That's down about 9 cents from a week ago — marking the largest one-week drop recorded by the motor club so far in 2024. Monday's average was also more than 19 cents less than it was a month ago and over 14 cents below the level seen this time last year.

Why the recent fall in prices at the pump? Industry analysts point to a blend of lackluster demand and strong supply — as well as relatively mild oil prices worldwide.

Here's a rundown of what you need to know.

Today's falling gas prices, explained. There are a few factors contributing to today's falling gas prices. For starters, fewer people may be hitting the road.



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 80 of 92

"Demand is just kind of shallow," AAA spokesperson Andrew Gross said, pointing to trends seen last year and potential lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. "Traditionally — pre-pandemic — after Memorial Day, demand would start to pick up in the summertime. And we just don't see it anymore."

Last week, data from the Energy Information Administration showed that U.S. gasoline demand slipped to about 8.94 million barrels a day. That might still sound like a lot — but before the pandemic, consumption could reach closer to the 10 million barrel-a-day range at this time of year, Gross noted.

Beyond pandemic-specific impacts, experts note that high gas prices seen following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and persistent inflation may have led many Americans to modify their driving habits. Other contributing factors could be the increased number of fuel-efficient cars, as well as electric vehicles, on the road today, Gross said.

Some of this is still seasonal. Patrick De Haan, head of petroleum analysis at GasBuddy, noted that gas prices typically ease in early summer because of refinery capacity. At this time of year, he said, many factors boosting prices in late winter and early spring — particularly refinery maintenance — are no longer present.

"Once refinery maintenance is done, output or utilization of the nation's refineries goes up — and that contributes to rising supply," De Haan said. And that stronger supply, paired with weaker consumption, has led to a "bit more noticeable" decline in prices this year. He added that U.S. refinery utilization is at some of its highest levels since the pandemic.

Separately, the Biden administration announced last month that it would be releasing 1 million gasoline barrels, or about 42 million gallons, from a Northeast reserve with an aim of lowering prices at the pump this summer. But De Haan noted that such action has little impact nationally — 42 million gallons equals less than three hours of U.S. daily gas consumption.

"Really, what we're seeing right now with (declining) gasoline prices ... has been driven primarily by seasonal and predictable economics," he said.

What about oil prices? Experts also point to cooling oil costs. Prices at the pump are highly dependent on crude oil, which is the main ingredient in gasoline.

West Texas Intermediate crude, the U.S. benchmark, has stayed in the mid \$70s a barrel over recent weeks — closing at under \$78 a barrel Monday. That's "not a bad place for it to be," Gross said, noting that the cost of crude typically needs to go above \$80 to put more pressure on pump prices.

Oil prices can be volatile and hard to predict because they're subject to many global forces. That includes production cuts from OPEC and allied oil producing countries, which have previously contributed to rising energy prices.

OPEC+ recently announced plans to extend three different sets of cuts totaling 5.8 million barrels a day — but the alliance also put a timetable on restoring some production, "which is likely why the price of oil had somewhat of a bearish reaction," De Haan said.

Could prices go back up? The future is never promised. But, if there are no major unexpected interruptions, both Gross and De Haan say that prices could keep working their way down.

At this time of year, experts keep a particular eye out for hurricane risks — which can cause significant damage and lead refineries to power down.

"Prices move on fear," Gross said. In the U.S., he added, concern particularly rises once a hurricane enters the Gulf of Mexico — and even if it doesn't eventually make landfall, refineries may pull back on operations out of caution. Impacts can also range by region.

But barring the unexpected, analysts like De Haan expect the national average to stay in the range of \$3.35 to \$3.70 per gallon this summer. Gas prices typically drop even more in the fall, and it's possible that we could see the national average below \$3 in late October or early November, he said.

What states have the lowest gas prices today? While gas prices nationwide are collectively falling, some states always have cheaper averages than others, due to factors ranging from nearby refinery supply to local fuel requirements.

As of Monday, per AAA data, Mississippi had the lowest average gas price at about \$2.94 per gallon — followed by \$2.95 Oklahoma and just under \$2.97 in Arkansas.

Meanwhile, California, Hawaii and Washington had the highest average prices on Monday — at about \$4.93, \$4.75 and \$4.41 per gallon, respectively.

## **UN says Israeli forces and Palestinian armed groups may have committed war crimes in a deadly raid**

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — The U.N. human rights office is citing possible war crimes by Israeli forces and Palestinian armed groups in connection with a deadly raid by Israeli forces that freed four hostages over the weekend and killed hundreds of Palestinians.

Office spokesman Jeremy Laurence expressed concerns about possible violations of rules of proportionality, distinction and precaution by the Israeli forces in Saturday's raid at the urban Nuseirat refugee camp.

Palestinian health officials say at least 274 Palestinians, including dozens of women and children, were killed in the operation.

Laurence said Palestinian armed groups who are holding hostages in densely populated areas are putting the lives of nearby civilians and the hostages at "added risks" from the hostilities.

"All these actions by both parties may amount to war crimes," he told a regular U.N. briefing in Geneva.

"It was catastrophic, the way that this was carried out in that civilians — again — were caught smack bang in the middle of this," Laurence added.

Alluding to the "ordeal" faced by hostages and their families, he said: "The fact that four hostages are now free is clearly very good news. These hostages should never have been taken in the first place. That's a breach of international humanitarian law. They must be freed. All of them. Promptly."

The Israeli diplomatic mission in Geneva criticized the U.N. human rights chief, Volker Türk, saying the "high commissioner has finally realized that Hamas uses Palestinians as human shields."

"Yet, instead of taking a clear and consistent stance against this abhorrent strategy, he falls into the habit of slandering Israel," the statement said. "This time, for rescuing our hostages.""

The Associated Press could not immediately reach the rights office for a comment.

Israel launched its war against Hamas after the group's stunning Oct. 7 attack, in which the militants stormed into southern Israel, killed about 1,200 people — mostly civilians — and took about 250 hostage.

Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza has killed more than 36,730 people, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between combatants and civilians in its count.

Palestinians are facing widespread hunger because the war has largely cut off the flow of food, medicine and other supplies. U.N. agencies say over 1 million in Gaza could experience the highest level of starvation by mid-July.

## **For shrinking Mississippi River towns, frequent floods worsen fortunes**

By MICHAEL PHILLIS, JIM SALTER and CAMILLE FASSETT Associated Press

WEST ALTON, Mo. (AP) — Devastating flooding, driven in part by climate change, is taking an especially damaging toll on communities that once thrived along the banks of America's most storied river.

Flooding has pushed people out of their homes near the Mississippi River at a roughly 30% higher rate than the U.S. as a whole, according to data provided exclusively to The Associated Press by the risk analysis firm First Street. In regions growing slower than many other parts of the country, where towns are struggling with job loss and fewer resources, flooding is accelerating the exodus.

Consider West Alton, Missouri, on a bend of the Mississippi near its meeting with the Missouri River. It had 3,900 people in 1970, Mayor Willie Richter said. That number nosedived to about 570 after big floods in 1973 and 1993. Now, after the 2019 flood, about 360 people remain. All three churches closed. Many of the remaining homes have been raised to keep safe from floodwaters.

The toll weighs on people. When officials this year arrived at a blaze consuming a small home abandoned

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 82 of 92

after the 2019 flood, the suspect said he “burned the house down because he got tired of looking at it,” according to a police report.

Vacant properties invite arson, said Richter, who said four or five abandoned homes have burned since that last big flood.

“People just walk away from them,” Richter said. “The houses are condemned, they either got to be torn down or elevated. This much time has passed, there’s a lot of damage.”

The data from First Street show that while West Alton is an extreme example of flooding’s effect, it’s emblematic of challenges faced by smaller communities in the Midwest and South. Many struggle to keep young people and jobs from leaving. Industries and economic forces that once spread wealth along the river have consolidated and shifted away.

In a peer-reviewed paper published in December, First Street found that flooding drove millions of people in the U.S. from their homes, using modeling that relied on analysis of block-level Census data, flood risk information and other factors. For this story, First Street provided additional data on communities within roughly 100 miles of the Mississippi River from 2000 to 2020. The AP analyzed the data and mapped it to find and report on hard-hit communities.

First Street’s work showed people tend to move to a safer place nearby. But some people leave communities entirely. Older residents are most likely to stay behind. Even in some growing communities, high flood risk constrained that growth.

Many Mississippi River towns formed in the 19th century. Pulp and paper mills, chemical plants, coal operations and the metals industry grew up along the massive river that provided a cheap and easy way to move heavy things, said Colin Wellenkamp, executive director of the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative.

But technology, automation and consolidation changed those industries. Coal consumption dropped. Fewer pulp and paper sites were needed. The national highway system made it easier to bypass towns.

Flooding worsens the fortunes of places already struggling, and some towns thriving a century ago now “are barely standing,” said Patrick Nunnally, a retired lecturer at the University of Minnesota and a Mississippi River expert.

“It sort of chips away at the river culture as people pick up and leave,” said Dean Klinkenberg, who travels the Mississippi River writing guidebooks and histories of the communities.

Jeremy Porter, head of climate implications at First Street, said two types of flooding events tend to drive people to move: Frequent low-level flooding, and shocking events like the floods of 1993 and 2019 that devastate communities.

Climate change is adding to the problem. A warmer atmosphere means big storms can dump more rain and overwhelm sewer systems. And severe river flooding is becoming more common: six of the 10 highest floods on record at St. Louis have come over roughly the last three decades.

And when big rain events hit the Midwest, they can overwhelm small rivers and creeks.

The creek vexing Twain’s birthplace Bear Creek runs into the Mississippi near downtown Hannibal, Missouri. The city’s historic downtown draws hundreds of thousands of visitors each year, but its population has slowly declined — from 17,757 in 2000 to 17,107 in 2020. Flooding from Bear Creek hasn’t helped.

After years of dealing with floods that crept into downtown and even threatened the small home where young Samuel Clemens, later known to the world as Mark Twain, grew up, the city finally built an \$8 million, 34-foot levee in 1992.

The timing was fortunate. In spring 1993, the Mississippi rose fast, and torrential summer rains sent it higher than even the monumental flood of 1973. But downtown stayed dry and open to tourists.

Homes outside the protected area got swamped, though. Much of the flooding was from Bear Creek as the Mississippi backed up into it.

Over the years, silt from the river has worked its way into the creek, clogging storm drains and worsening flash flooding, Mayor Barry Louderman said.

Louderman estimated at least a half-dozen companies that employed a combined 300 to 400 people “are just gone, were never replaced,” due to persistent flooding. First Street’s models show Hannibal would



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 83 of 92

have likely grown over the last two decades if not for flooding.

Steve Dungan has lived on Ely Street near Bear Creek all of his 54 years. As a child, he fished from the porch when the creek rose.

One summer night in 1993, Dungan was at a hospital in nearby Quincy, Illinois, where his wife was about to give birth to their daughter. He got a call that the water was coming up fast, and relatives and friends were scurrying to salvage what they could from his home by boat.

"We lost the waterbed, stove, refrigerator — stuff they couldn't pack out," he said.

With family anchoring him to the area, he chose to stay.

Ray Allen, another longtime Ely Street resident who also operated an auto repair and welding shop there, did not. He recalled being awakened by a noise during that 1993 flooding.

"Jumped up out of bed and was standing in water knee-deep beside the bed," Allen, now 80, recalled. "That's a rude awakening, I'll tell you that."

The government bought out nearly all of the homes on Ely Street and in many other neighborhoods vulnerable to Bear Creek. People scattered. Some, like Allen and his wife of 63 years, Rachel, left town, though they moved back about 12 years ago and now live high on a hill.

He misses his old friends and neighbors on Ely Street.

"All of the people that were good friends down there kind of got busted apart," he said.

Cultural loss West Alton is a two-hour drive downriver from Hannibal. In 1993, Sugar Vanburen watched as most of her mobile home floated down the river. Only what was bolted down remained — the floor, a toilet and furnace.

Her sister left, but not Sugar. It's where she grew up. She likes the quiet community. Her grandchildren go to a good school. Residents learn how to empty mud from the basement and get neighbors to help clean up.

After the 1993 flood, the Federal Emergency Management Agency offered buyouts to some facing severe flood risk. Recently, letters for a new round of voluntary buyouts went out.

Sugar threw hers away. But Robert Myers, St. Charles County's planning and zoning division director, said the goal is to buy out as many as 100 homes across the county.

Mayor Richter recalls the West Alton of decades ago: three churches, an ice cream shop, four taverns where people hung out.

"Now we don't have any churches. We have one tavern that's open and it just got reopened not too long ago," he said. "A lot of that community stuff is gone."

Tom Silk lives next to a vacant lot that was once home to the church he attended and where he married.

Silk likes the town. It's rural, peaceful. But it takes work to stay. His front door still bears the water stain right at the handle marking the 2019 flood — second-highest on record.

That year, he packed up a U-Haul and left for about two months. It took a year and a half to repair his house — he did the work after finishing shifts loading trucks at a FedEx warehouse — but he wanted to stay.

"It's quiet, it is the country life, but ... you are still by the city if you need to do anything or go anywhere," he said.

Richter said flooding is so frequent that he probably wouldn't live in town if he didn't grow up locally, farm and have strong community connections. The town has organized July 4 celebrations and a flea market family fun day in the fall. People come back. But there's a sense of loss.

Vanburen misses neighbors who moved away.

"Everybody's gone," she said. "This is a ghost town."

Diverging fortunes Cairo, Illinois, is surrounded by a levee at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. It's endured a lot.

First rising as a hub for steamboats in the 19th century, Cairo peaked around 1920 with about 15,000 people, including a sizeable Black population. It had attractive retail shops, several rail lines and a healthy manufacturing sector. It was also strictly segregated, and protests in the 1960s met violence that spiraled for years. The city has hemorrhaged people during a downward economic trend that's never stopped,

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 84 of 92

according to local historian Klinkenberg.

Its population today is about 10% of peak. Retail and manufacturing are gone. For a long time, it didn't have a grocery store. Most of the place is abandoned, with brick buildings cracked by growing trees.

Economic factors and racial discrimination caused Cairo's decline; flooding made things harder. Most of its population loss since 2000 was due to flooding, First Street says.

In 2011, residents were told to evacuate as bad flooding threatened. Andrea "Drea" Vinson swore she wasn't leaving. Then she went up to the river wall for a look at the rising water.

"Ain't no way," she recalled. "I lived downtown back then. No, that's headed straight for my house."

She evacuated.

Long before 2011, plans had been set to avert a flooding catastrophe in Cairo by flooding farmland instead. But officials waited a long time to blow a levee.

Steve Tarver, who runs a community development nonprofit, said the delay reflected how little officials seemed to value the largely Black community. That didn't encourage people to return.

"That kills a lot of the value of our town," he said.

Vinson likes living in Cairo and returned. She raised kids here, it's inexpensive, she knows its people. But some who evacuated in 2011 never came back.

Hope remainsRecent decades have brought new benefits to some riverside towns. The Clean Water Act of 1972 improved rivers and streams around the country that had carried tons of waste. Parks sprouted from cleaned-up industrial areas, attracting tourists and businesses.

One example is Grafton, Illinois, a community of roughly 730 people about an hour north of St. Louis. To cope with bad flooding officials didn't build a floodwall or levee. Instead, many residents simply vacated risky land to move uphill. Parks on low-lying land can absorb flooding. And the city worked to develop tourist attractions — a winery, a zip line and a marina. The population has edged up in recent years.

Then there are the "great river rats" as Klinkenberg calls them — people up and down the river who will never leave.

In Hannibal, the old Dungan family home is long gone, but Steve Dungan still lives nearby. So do his relatives. On a recent day, Dungan biked to his mother's tidy white frame home near the creek.

"Dad passed away in this house," he said. "Mom lives here. I've got an older brother in this room, and he's handicapped. So, no."

## The US lifts a ban on sending weapons to a controversial Ukrainian military unit

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The U.S. has lifted a ban on providing American weapons and training to a controversial Ukrainian military unit that was key to the defense of the major port city of Mariupol, the State Department said on Tuesday.

The Azov Brigade is among Ukraine's most effective and popular fighting units but it has been dogged by its origins as a volunteer battalion that drew fighters from far-right circles and criticism for some of its tactics. The U.S. had banned the regiment from using American weapons, citing the neo-Nazi ideology of some of its founders.

The current members of the Azov Brigade, which has been absorbed into Ukraine's National Guard as the 12th Special Forces Brigade, reject accusations of extremism and any ties with far-right movements. But the Kremlin has seized on the regiment's origins in its efforts to cast Russia's invasion as a battle against Nazi influence in Ukraine.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Moscow took an "extremely negative" view of Washington's decision. He described Azov as an "ultranationalist armed formation" and accused U.S. authorities of being "ready to flirt with neo-Nazis."

U.S. law prohibits providing equipment and training to foreign military units or individuals suspected of committing gross human rights violations. The State Department said in a statement that it found "no evidence" of such violations.

"This is a new page in our unit's history," the Azov Brigade wrote in a statement on Instagram. "Azov is becoming even more powerful, even more professional and even more dangerous for occupiers."

"Obtaining Western weapons and training from the United States will not only increase the combat ability of Azov, but most importantly, contribute to the preservation of the lives and the health of personnel," the statement said.

Up until the State Department's decision, Azov was prohibited from sending fighters to Western military exercises or accessing weapons bought with American funds. Lifting the ban will likely bolster the brigade's fighting capacity at a difficult time during the war against Russia's invasion. Ukraine suffers from persistent ammunition and personnel shortages.

Years before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Human Rights Watch raised concerns about Azov, writing that credible allegations of egregious abuses had been made against its fighters.

Moscow has repeatedly portrayed the Azov as a Nazi group and accused it of atrocities, but has publicly given little evidence of the allegations. In 2022, Russia's top court officially designated Azov a terrorist group.

The brigade grew out of a group called the Azov Battalion, formed in 2014 as one of many volunteer regiments created to fight Russia-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine. It quickly became a separate official unit under the Ministry of Internal Affairs and later a unit of the National Guard.

Since its first commander left in October 2014, the brigade says on its website, it has been "cleansing itself" of undesirable elements. It wasn't possible to ascertain whether the brigade has accomplished that. It has, however, tried to recast its public image away from the controversy surrounding its ultranationalist origins to that of an effective and skillful fighting force, and has shunned connections with controversial figures.

Azov soldiers played a key part in the defense of Mariupol, holding out in a siege and low on ammunition for weeks at the southern port city's steel mill, despite devastating attacks from Russian forces in 2022.

They are hailed as heroes in Ukraine, remembered for defense of the sprawling plant that became a symbol of Ukrainian tenacity in the war against Russia, and people take to the streets for weekly rallies calling for the release of hundreds of Azov POWs who remain in Russian captivity.

## **Malawi's vice president and 9 others are confirmed dead after their plane's wreckage is found**

By GREGORY GONDWE and GERALD IMRAY Associated Press

BLANTYRE, Malawi (AP) — Malawi's Vice President Saulos Chilima and nine other people died when the small military plane they were traveling in crashed in bad weather in a mountainous region in the north of the country, the president said Tuesday. Chilima was 51.

President Lazarus Chakwera announced that the wreckage of the plane that went missing Monday morning had been located after a search of more than 24 hours in thick forests and hilly terrain near the city of Mzuzu. He said the wreckage was found near a hill and the plane had been "completely destroyed," with everyone killed on impact.

It was a "terrible tragedy," Chakwera said. "Words cannot describe how heartbreaking this is, and I can only imagine how much pain and anguish you all must be feeling." He called Chilima "a good man, a devoted father and husband, a patriotic citizen who served his country with distinction and a formidable vice president."

Chakwera said the victims' remains were being brought to the southern African nation's capital, Lilongwe. The seven passengers included members of Chilima's staff and security detail along with former first lady Shanil Dzimbiri, the ex-wife of former President Bakili Muluzi. There were three crew members.

Hundreds of soldiers, police officers and forest rangers had searched for the plane since it went missing Monday at around 10 a.m. while making the 45-minute flight from Lilongwe to Mzuzu, around 370 kilometers (230 miles) to the north.

The group was traveling to attend the funeral of a former government minister. Air traffic controllers told the plane not to attempt a landing at Mzuzu's airport because of bad weather and poor visibility and



asked it to turn back to Lilongwe. Air traffic control then lost contact with the aircraft and it disappeared from radar.

Chakwera said the wreckage was found in the Chikangawa Forest south of Mzuzu. Images from the site showed thick fog over the hills and remnants of the plane in an open area near the tree line. The president described the aircraft as a small, propeller-driven plane operated by the Malawian armed forces.

Officials with Chilima's United Transformation Movement political party — a party different from the president's — criticized the government response as slow and said there was no transponder on the plane, concerning for an aircraft carrying a high-level delegation.

Chilima and Chakwera had led Malawi under unusual circumstances. They both ran for president in 2019 as opposition candidates but teamed up to challenge election results in court over irregularities, and won. They then won the rerun of the election — the first time in Africa that a court-overturned election result resulted in a defeat for the incumbent president.

Chilima had said Chakwera had agreed to step down after his first term and allow him to run for president in next year's election as part of their alliance. However, Chakwera announced he would run for reelection, and there were signs of friction between the two.

Chilima also had recently faced corruption charges over allegations that he received money in return for influencing the awarding of government procurement contracts for the armed forces and the police. Prosecutors dropped the charges last month. He had denied the allegations.

Chilima had just returned from an official visit to South Korea on Sunday. He was in his second term as vice president after serving from 2014-2019 under former President Peter Mutharika.

The search for the plane prompted an international response. Chakwera said the U.S., the U.K., Norway and Israel had offered assistance and provided "specialized technologies." The U.S. Embassy in Malawi said it had assisted and offered the use of a Department of Defense small C-12 plane. Malawi also asked neighbors Zambia and Tanzania if they could help.

Malawi, a country of around 21 million people, was ranked as the fourth poorest nation in the world by the World Bank in 2019.

## **US opts for experience and versatility on Olympic women's basketball roster, passes on Caitlin Clark**

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

USA Basketball said experience was a major reason Caitlin Clark was not on the U.S. women's Olympic roster that was officially revealed Tuesday.

The selection committee didn't believe the talented Clark had enough of high-level reps to be a member of the group headed to the Paris Games. The team includes seven players from the group that won gold in Tokyo — the seventh straight for the Americans.

Selection committee chair Jen Rizzotti said the committee was aware of the outside noise and pressure to select Clark, the No. 1 pick in the WNBA draft who has drawn millions of new fans to the sport from her record-setting career in college at Iowa to now with the Indiana Fever.

"Here's the basketball criteria that we were given as a committee and how do we evaluate our players based on that?" Rizzotti told The Associated Press in an interview. "And when you base your decision on criteria, there were other players that were harder to cut because they checked a lot more boxes. Then sometimes it comes down to position, style of play for Cheryl (Reeve) and then sometimes a vote."

Diana Taurasi is back for a record sixth time. Her Olympic career started when she was a WNBA rookie in the 2004 Athens Game, and now the 42-year old will be on the team again. Other returners from the Tokyo Olympics are Breanna Stewart, A'ja Wilson, Chelsea Gray, Napheesa Collier, Jewell Loyd and Brittney Griner.

Besides the returners, the Americans also added 5-on-5 newcomers Kelsey Plum and Jackie Young, who helped the U.S. win the inaugural 3x3 gold medal at the Tokyo Games in 2021. Several first-time Olympians will join the team with Alyssa Thomas, Sabrina Ionescu and Kahleah Copper. All three played on the

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 87 of 92

American team that won the World Cup in Australia in 2022.

"It's a great mix of talent across the board in terms of individual skill sets," USA Basketball CEO Jim Tooley said. "We have veterans, newcomers and those in the middle. Good perspective and continuity is such an important thing and is why we've been successful in the Olympics."

All 12 of those players had senior national team experience. Clark, to no fault of her own, does not.

"She's certainly going to continue to get better and better," Tooley said. "Really hope that she's a big part of our future going forward."

The selection committee has a set of criteria to pick the team that includes playing ability, position played and adaptability to the international game. Marketing and popularity aren't on that list.

"It would be irresponsible for us to talk about her in a way other than how she would impact the play of the team," Rizzotti said. "Because it wasn't the purview of our committee to decide how many people would watch or how many people would root for the U.S. It was our purview to create the best team we could for Cheryl."

Clark wasn't the only talented player left off the team.

Ariel Atkins was on the Tokyo Olympic team. Shakira Austin, Betnijah Laney-Hamilton and Brionna Jones all played on the World Cup team in 2022. Aliyah Boston and Arike Ogunbowale had gone to nearly every training camp. Ogunbowale has played well to start the WNBA season, averaging 26.4 points a game — second best in the league.

Any of those players, along with Clark, could be taken as an alternate if one of the 12 members of the team is unable to play. There are some questions about Gray's status. The Las Vegas point guard has not played yet this season while recovering from a leg injury suffered in the WNBA Finals last year.

Clark has said she will use not being selected for the Paris Games as incentive to get better and potentially make the 2028 Olympic team.

"I think it just gives you something to work for," Clark told reporters after practice Sunday. "It's a dream. Hopefully one day I can be there. I think it's just a little more motivation. You remember that. Hopefully when four years comes back around, I can be there."

While Clark won't be headed to Paris, Griner will be playing internationally for the first time since she was detained in a Russian prison for 10 months in 2022. She said she'll only play abroad with USA Basketball.

"When you represent your country, you're on the highest stage, it doesn't get any higher than that," Griner said. "Anytime you get to put on the red, white and blue, USA across your chest, we'll get every country's best shot. ... You're playing for so much more. I can't wait to go."

Thomas was excited for her first chance to play in the Olympics.

"It's a huge honor. I stepped away from USA Basketball for awhile, but it was something I grew up watching with my family," the 32-year-old Thomas said. "Just an honor to be part of that group of players. It's a prestigious group."

Thomas gives Reeve the versatility of being able to guard any position as well as facilitate from the forward spot. The Connecticut Sun forward is currently leading the WNBA with 8.5 assists a game.

"This team fits my style of play. The defense aspect, the way Coach Reeve wants to play, I think I'm a perfect fit for that."

Taurasi, who turned 42 on Tuesday, will break the record for most Olympics played in the sport of basketball. Five players, including former teammate Sue Bird, have competed in five.

"The thing that Diana does that I've never seen anyone else do is that she makes everybody around her confident and play their best," Rizzotti said. "Whether she's scoring a point, whether she starts, whether she plays limited minutes, whether she's just a voice in the locker room, she infuses people with a level of self-confidence that has been a factor in us winning,"

The U.S. team will train for about week in Phoenix in July. After that, they'll play an exhibition game against Germany in London before heading to France.

In Paris, the Americans will play Japan, Belgium and Germany in Olympic pool play.

## Takeaways from AP examination of flooding's effect along Mississippi River

By MICHAEL PHILLIS, JIM SALTER and CAMILLE FASSETT Associated Press

WEST ALTON, Mo. (AP) — Commerce along the Mississippi River has evolved over the past century at the expense of many once-thriving river towns. But persistent and sometimes devastating flooding has added to the woes of some of those towns.

An examination of data provided to The Associated Press found that flooding pushed people out of their homes along the river at a roughly 30% higher rate than the U.S. as a whole.

The data came from First Street, a risk analysis firm that used modeling that relied on analysis of block-level Census data, flood risk information and other factors. AP further analyzed and mapped the data to find and report on some hard-hit communities.

Here's what to know from AP's report:

A changing river valley Persistent flooding isn't the only issue that many Mississippi River towns must contend with. Most of them trace their roots to the 19th century, when the mighty river was a convenient way to move heavy goods. Many industries — coal, pulp and paper mills, chemical and metals plants — chose to build alongside the river to take advantage of that.

But technology, automation and consolidation remade all of those. The national highway system gave industries an alternative to river shipping. These things added up to economic headwinds for everyone along the river.

Flooding just makes it all worse. First Street was able to isolate flooding's effects from other factors that can prod people to move, such as economic decline.

Their data showed that people tend to move to a safer place nearby. But some people leave communities entirely. Older residents are most likely to stay behind. Even in some growing communities, high flood risk constrained that growth.

Dean Klinkenberg, who writes guidebooks and histories of the communities, said it chips away at the river culture as people move away.

What it looks like in one town West Alton, Missouri, sits on the Mississippi near its meeting with the Missouri River. It had almost 4,000 people in 1970, but major floods in 1973, 1993 and 2019 have left it with fewer than 400.

All three of its churches are gone, and many of the homes still there had to be elevated to stay above future floods.

Mayor Willie Richter said some people just walk away from their homes. He said he probably would have left if he didn't have such strong community connections.

Sugar Vanburen lost her home in the '93 flood. She refused to leave, citing the quiet community, good school for her grandchildren and help from neighbors.

But she misses many who have left, and calls West Alton a "ghost town."

Adapting — and refusing to quit Recent decades have brought new benefits to some riverside towns, and they've taken advantage. The Clean Water Act of 1972 improved rivers and streams around the country that had carried tons of waste. Parks sprouted from cleaned-up industrial areas, attracting tourists and businesses.

One example is Grafton, Illinois, a community of roughly 730 people about an hour north of St. Louis. To cope with bad flooding officials didn't build a floodwall or levee. Instead, many residents simply vacated risky land to move uphill. Parks on low-lying land can absorb flooding. And the city worked to develop tourist attractions — a winery, a zip line and a marina. The population has edged up in recent years.

And some people love the river so much they won't leave.

Steve Dungan lives in Hannibal, Missouri — best known as Mark Twain's hometown. He and his wife lost most of their stuff when their home was hit by the big flood of 1993. But Dungan came back after that flood, anchored by family and memories.

On a recent day, Dungan biked to his mother's tidy white frame home near the creek.



"Dad passed away in this house," he said. "Mom lives here. I've got an older brother in this room, and he's handicapped. So, no."

## UK's glum Conservatives try to shift the mood with a promise of tax cuts as polling day nears

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Tuesday implored British voters, and his own party, to throw him a lifeline in the U.K.'s election, pledging to cut taxes and reduce immigration if his Conservative Party is reelected on July 4.

With the Conservatives trailing the left-of-center Labour Party in opinion polls, Sunak acknowledged that "people are frustrated with our party and frustrated with me." But he argued that the Conservatives are "the only party with the big ideas to make this country a better place to live."

Opponents said Sunak was making unrealistic and unaffordable promises in a desperate bid to stave off defeat.

Tuesday's launch of the Tories' manifesto, its main package of pledges, came a day after Sunak was forced to deny rumors he could quit even before polling day as the Conservatives are alarmed over his lackluster campaign.

Sunak insisted he had not considered resigning and said he was "not going to stop fighting for people's votes."

On July 4, British voters will elect lawmakers to fill all 650 seats in the House of Commons, and the leader of the party that can command a majority — either alone or in coalition — will become prime minister.

Sunak held the manifesto launch at Silverstone motor racing circuit in central England, home of the British Grand Prix, and it could be one of his last big chances to get his spluttering campaign back on track.

His central pitch was the claim that a government led by Labour's Keir Starmer would raise taxes, while a Conservative one would lower them.

In its manifesto the party pledged 17 billion pounds (\$22 billion) in tax cuts by 2030, to be paid for largely by slashing welfare costs. The main tax cut is a 2 percentage point reduction in National Insurance, a tax employees pay to qualify for a state pension. The Conservative government has already cut it twice, from 12% to the current 8%.

Sunak said the Conservatives would pay for lower taxes by "controlling the unsustainable rise in working-age welfare that has taken off since the pandemic."

The Labour Party argues that the tax burden has risen to its highest level in decades during 14 years of Tory rule. Labour campaign chairman Pat McFadden called the Conservative manifesto "the most expensive panic attack in history."

Paul Johnson, director of independent think tank the Institute for Fiscal Studies, said he had "a degree of skepticism" about the math behind the Conservative promises.

"Those are definite giveaways paid for by uncertain, unspecific and apparently victimless savings," he said.

Sunak's surprise decision to call a summer election, several months earlier than most people expected, was intended partly to catch the opposition unprepared.

But it's the Conservatives who have seemed off-balance from the moment Sunak stood outside 10 Downing St. in the rain on May 22 to announce the start of the campaign.

The Conservatives were already on the defensive after jettisoning two prime ministers without an election in quick succession in 2022: first Boris Johnson, felled by scandals, then Liz Truss, who rocked the economy with drastic tax-slashing plans and lasted just seven weeks in office.

The party's prospects worsened last week when populist firebrand Nigel Farage announced that he would run for Parliament at the helm of the right-wing party Reform U.K., vowing to be a "bloody nuisance" to the established parties.

Farage has been traversing the country seeking to rally support with his anti-establishment and anti-

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 90 of 92

immigration rhetoric. On Tuesday a 28-year-old man was arrested after Farage was pelted with objects from a construction site as he rode in an open-topped bus in Barnsley, northern England.

Last week Farage was doused with a milkshake after a campaign appearance.

Sunak stumbled again last week when he flew home early from commemorations in France of the 80th anniversary of D-Day so he could resume campaigning. The photos of centenarian World War II veterans and an array of world leaders including U.S. President Joe Biden attending the solemn ceremony on Omaha Beach without him were a publicity nightmare.

Sunak quickly realized his error and apologized.

Paul Goodman, a former Conservative lawmaker who is now a member of the House of Lords, said the irony is that apart from the D-Day gaffe, "the Conservatives have run a perfectly decent, conventional campaign," but have little to show for it.

"They've launched lots of policies, they've had some hits on Labour," he said. "Rishi Sunak actually did pretty well in the debate (against Starmer) last week. ... All of this appears to have made no difference at all."

Sunak said the Conservatives would halve net immigration from its current level of about 700,000 people a year and would push on with a controversial plan to send some asylum-seekers who reach Britain by boat across the English Channel on a one-way trip to Rwanda.

Sunak said that if he won the election there would be a "relentless continual process of permanently removing illegal migrants to Rwanda" with the first flights taking off in July.

Rwanda deportation flights have been repeatedly blocked by U.K. courts and could still be grounded by the European Court of Human Rights. Sunak said he would "choose our security" over court orders, but did not make an explicit pledge to leave the jurisdiction of the European court, as Conservative hard-liners have demanded.

Labour, eyeing a return to power, is running a cautious campaign centered on the single word "change." Starmer's core message — which dismays some in his left-of-center party — is that he has transformed Labour from its high-taxing, big-spending days into a party of the stable center.

While opinion polls giving Labour a double-digit lead may change, University of Strathclyde polling expert John Curtice said Sunak was facing a steep mountain to climb even before he called the election.

"Arguably the Tories' days were numbered the moment that Liz Truss fouled up," he said. "Because no government that has presided over a market crisis has survived at the ballot box."

## Attraction starring Disney's first Black princess replaces ride based on film many viewed as racist

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — A new attraction starring the first Black Disney princess is opening at the company's U.S. theme park resorts, and some Disney followers see it as a fitting replacement to a former ride based on a movie that contained racist tropes.

The new theme park attraction updates Tiana's storyline from the 2009 animated film "The Princess and the Frog" and is opening this year in the space previously occupied by Splash Mountain. The water ride had been themed to "Song of the South," a 1946 Disney movie filled with racist clichés about African Americans and plantation life.

Tiana's Bayou Adventure keeps Splash Mountain's DNA as a log-flume ride, but it's infused with music, scenery and animatronic characters inspired by "Princess," set in 1920s New Orleans. It opens to the public later this month at Walt Disney World in Florida and at Disneyland in California later this year.

"For little Black girls, Tiana has meant a lot. When a little child can see somebody who looks like them, that matters," said Neal Lester, an English professor at Arizona State University, who has written about Tiana.

Disney's announcement that it would transform its longstanding Splash Mountain ride into Tiana's Bayou

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 91 of 92

Adventure was made in June 2020 following the social justice protests sparked by the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis police custody. At the time, Disney said the change had already been in the works. But it came as companies across the U.S. were reconsidering or renaming decades-old brands amid world-wide protests.

The "Song of the South" film is a mix of live action, cartoons and music featuring an older Black man who works at a plantation and tells fables about talking animals to a white city boy. The film has been criticized for its racist stereotypes, hasn't been released in theaters in decades and isn't available on the company's streaming service Disney+.

Disney has been criticized for racist tropes in films made in earlier decades. The crow characters from the 1941 film "Dumbo" and the King Louie character from 1967's "The Jungle Book" were viewed as African American caricatures. The depiction of Native Americans in the 1953 movie "Peter Pan" and the Siamese cats — often deemed as Asian stereotypes — from the 1955 film "Lady and the Tramp" also have been derided.

Not everyone is sold on the belief that opening a ride based on Tiana's story solves Disney's past problematic racial depictions.

By refurbishing Splash Mountain into Tiana's Bayou Adventure instead of dismantling the attraction completely, Disney has linked "Song of the South" with "The Princess and the Frog." Both are fantasies that are silent, for the most part, on the racial realities of the segregated eras they depict, said Katie Kapurch, an English professor at Texas State University who has written widely about Disney.

"We might see the impulse to replace rather than dismantle or build anew as a metaphor for structural racism, too," Kapurch said. "Again, this is unintentional on Disney's part, but the observation gets to the heart of how Disney reflects America back to itself."

Imagineers who design the Disney rides are always attempting to look at the attractions with fresh eyes and ways to tell new stories "so that everybody feels included," said Carmen Smith, a senior vice president for creative development at Walt Disney Imagineering.

"We never want to perpetuate stereotypes or misconceptions," Smith said Monday. "Our intention is to tell great stories."

It's also important for the Imagineers to tell a variety of stories for its global audience, said Charita Carter, an executive creative producer at Walt Disney Imagineering who oversaw the development of the attraction.

"Society does change, and we develop different sensibilities," Carter said. "We focus our stories differently depending what our society needs."

The transformation from Splash Mountain to Tiana's Bayou Adventure is one of several recalibrations at the entertainment giant's theme parks for rides whose storylines are considered antiquated or offensive.

In 2021, Disney announced it would remodel Jungle Cruise, one of the original Disney parks' rides, which had been criticized in years past for being racially insensitive because of its depiction of animatronic Indigenous people as savages or headhunters. Three years before that, Disney eliminated a "Bride Auction" scene, deemed offensive since it depicted women lining up for auction, from its "Pirates of the Caribbean" ride.

It's a positive step for Disney to have a ride based on a character from a background not seen in previous versions of Disney princesses replacing an attraction from a film steeped in racist tropes since "representation matters," Lester said.

"Disney is first and foremost about money and getting people into the park, and you can make money, still have representation and be aware of social justice history and make everyone feel like they belong there," Lester said.

## Today in History: June 12, 49 killed in Pulse nightclub shooting

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, June 12, the 164th day of 2024. There are 202 days left in the year.



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, June 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 352 ~ 92 of 92

Today's Highlight in History:

On June 12, 2016, a gunman opened fire at the Pulse nightclub, a gay establishment in Orlando, Florida, leaving 49 people dead and 53 wounded; Omar Mateen pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group during a three-hour standoff before being killed in a shootout with police.

On this date:

In 1630, Englishman John Winthrop, leading a fleet carrying Puritan refugees, arrived at the Massachusetts Bay Colony, where he became its governor.

In 1776, Virginia's colonial legislature adopted a Declaration of Rights.

In 1942, Anne Frank, a German-born Jewish girl living in Amsterdam, received a diary for her 13th birthday, less than a month before she and her family went into hiding from the Nazis.

In 1963, civil rights leader Medgar Evers, 37, was shot and killed outside his home in Jackson, Mississippi. (In 1994, Byron De La Beckwith was convicted of murdering Evers and sentenced to life in prison; he died in 2001.)

In 1964, South African Black nationalist Nelson Mandela was sentenced to life in prison along with seven other people, including Walter Sisulu, for committing sabotage against the apartheid regime (all were eventually released, Mandela in 1990).

In 1967, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Loving v. Virginia*, unanimously struck down state laws prohibiting interracial marriages.

In 1978, David Berkowitz was sentenced to 25 years to life in prison for each of the six "Son of Sam" .44-caliber killings that terrified New Yorkers.

In 1987, President Ronald Reagan, during a visit to the divided German city of Berlin, exhorted Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev to "tear down this wall."

In 1991, Russians went to the polls to elect Boris N. Yeltsin president of their republic.

In 1994, Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman were slashed to death outside her Los Angeles home. (O.J. Simpson was later acquitted of the killings in a criminal trial but was eventually held liable in a civil action.)

In 2004, former President Ronald Reagan's body was sealed inside a tomb at his presidential library in Simi Valley, California, following a week of mourning and remembrance by world leaders and regular Americans.

In 2020, Rayshard Brooks, a 27-year-old Black man, was shot and killed by one of the two white officers who responded after he was found asleep in his car in the drive-thru lane of a Wendy's restaurant in Atlanta; police body camera video showed Brooks struggling with the officers and grabbing a Taser from one of them, firing it as he fled.

Today's Birthdays: Sportscaster Marv Albert is 84. Singer Roy Harper is 84. Actor Roger Aaron Brown is 76. Actor Sonia Manzano is 74. Rock musician Bun E. Carlos (Cheap Trick) is 73. Country singer-musician Junior Brown is 72. Singer-songwriter Rocky Burnette is 71. Actor Timothy Busfield is 67. Singer Meredith Brooks is 66. Actor Jenilee Harrison is 66. Rock musician John Linnell (They Might Be Giants) is 65. Actor John Enos is 62. Rapper Grandmaster Dee (Whodini) is 62. Actor Paul Schulze is 62. Actor Eamonn Walker is 62. Actor Paula Marshall is 60. Actor Frances O'Connor is 57. Actor Rick Hoffman is 54. Actor-comedian Finesse Mitchell is 52. Actor Mel Rodriguez is 51. Actor Jason Mewes is 50. Actor Michael Muhney is 49. Blues musician Kenny Wayne Shepherd is 47. Actor Timothy Simons is 46. Actor Wil Horneff is 45. Singer Robyn is 45. Rock singer-musician John Gourley (Portugal. The Man) is 44. Actor Dave Franco is 39. Country singer Chris Young is 39. Actor Luke Youngblood is 38. Actor Ryan Malgarini is 32.