

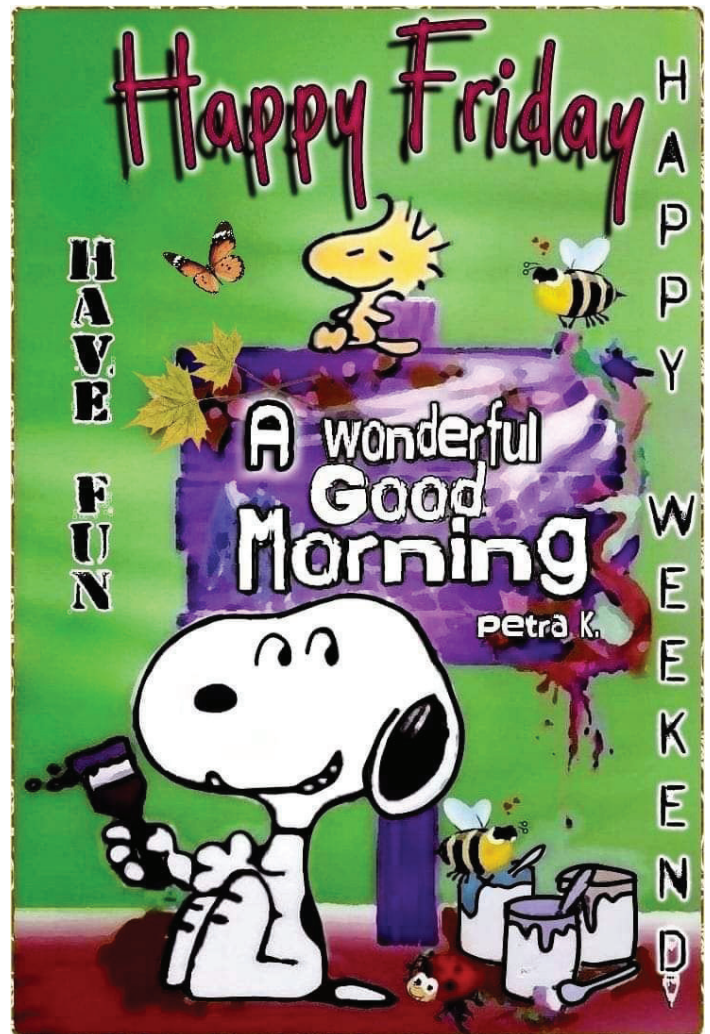
# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 1 of 72

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 News Headlines](#)
- [3- Today on GDILIVE.COM](#)
- [4- NSU Women's Basketball](#)
- [4- Death Notice: Jean Walter](#)
- [5- NSU Men's Basketball](#)
- [5- Nelson Thank You](#)
- [6- Groton Tigers Rally Past Webster Bearcats for 55-43 Victory](#)
- [7- SD SearchLight: South Dakota school choice fight is 'not over,' Republican leader says](#)
- [7- SD SearchLight: SD Senate votes to let 17-year-olds drop out with parental consent](#)
- [8- SD SearchLight: Venhuizen sworn in as South Dakota lieutenant governor after legislative confirmation](#)
- [9- SD SearchLight: We don't need a surveillance state to protect kids online](#)
- [10- SD SearchLight: Former North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum confirmed as Interior secretary](#)
- [11- SD SearchLight: Investigations launch into horrific DC plane crash as Trump without evidence blames DEI](#)
- [14- SD SearchLight: GOP members of U.S. Senate probe RFK Jr. on his history of vaccine denial](#)
- [17- SD SearchLight: With stenographers in short supply, SD lawmakers advance bill letting judges opt for recordings](#)
- [18- Weather Pages](#)
- [22- Daily Devotional](#)
- [23- Subscription Form](#)
- [24- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [25- Upcoming Groton Events](#)
- [26- News from the Associated Press](#)

## Friday, Jan. 31

Senior Menu: Meatloaf, mashed potatoes, creamed peas, fruit, whole wheat bread.  
School Breakfast: Egg bake.  
School Lunch: Pizza crunchers, green beans.  
Groton Quad Wrestling, boys and girls, 6 p.m.



## Saturday, Feb. 1

Groton Invitational Wrestling Tournament, 10 a.m., boys and girls  
Boys Basketball at DAK XII/NEC Clash at Madison: Groton Area vs. Dell Rapids, 5 p.m., auxiliary gym  
Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., 209 N Main

## Sunday, Feb. 2

GROUNDHOG DAY

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

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 2 of 72

# 1440

**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.**

## **Flight 5342 Crash**

All 64 people aboard an American Airlines regional commuter jet and three people aboard an Army helicopter are presumed dead, according to officials yesterday, after the two aircraft collided midair near Washington, DC's Reagan National Airport late Wednesday. The incident is the first major US commercial air disaster since 2009, when a Colgan Air propeller plane crashed into a house in Buffalo, New York.

Early reports suggest air traffic control was aware of both aircraft, asking the helicopter pilots if they were aware of the incoming jet and instructing them to pass behind it.

The wreckage of the plane fell into the Potomac River, which was just above 35 degrees Wednesday evening—near-freezing temperatures in which any survivors would lose consciousness after about 15 to 30 minutes. As of this writing, 28 bodies have been recovered from the water; among the victims were 14 members of the figure skating community returning from a training event.

A preliminary report from federal safety officials is due within 30 days.

## **Uganda Ebola Outbreak**

A 32-year-old man died Wednesday from the Sudan strain of the Ebola virus in Uganda's capital of Kampala. More than 40 close contacts of the victim were placed under observation as officials sounded the alarm in the densely populated capital and regional travel hub of more than 4 million.

The strain is one of four Ebola viruses that give rise to Ebola virus disease, a hemorrhagic fever transmitted through direct contact with bodily fluids with an average 50% fatality rate. Symptoms begin with fever and sore throat and can culminate in internal bleeding and organ failure. There is currently no vaccine for the Sudan strain, though some are in development.

The East African country has seen at least eight Ebola outbreaks over the last three decades, the deadliest of which came in 2000, when 224 people died. The strain's cousin, the Zaire ebolavirus, claimed more than 11,000 lives in an outbreak in West Africa between 2013 and 2016.

## **'The Great Race of Mercy'**

This weekend marks the 100th anniversary of the Nome Serum Run, a historic dog sled relay that saved the remote town of Nome, Alaska, from a diphtheria outbreak in 1925. Twenty mushers and more than 150 sled dogs transported an antitoxin 674 miles across harsh terrain in just 127.5 hours, battling temperatures as low as minus 85 degrees.

In January, Nome's only doctor diagnosed diphtheria, a highly contagious and often fatal disease, in several children. With the town inaccessible by boat and air travel deemed too dangerous, sled dogs were the only viable option for transporting the serum across the Alaskan wilderness to prevent a potential epidemic.

While lead dog Balto gained international fame—and a Disney animated film—for completing the final 55-mile leg, another dog named Togo and his team actually covered the most treacherous 264-mile stretch. The serum run utilized parts of what is now known as the Iditarod Trail, although it wasn't the direct inspiration for the modern race.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 3 of 72

## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

The 67th Grammy Awards to be presented Sunday (8 pm ET, CBS); see nominations and predictions for all categories.

Marianne Faithfull, Grammy-nominated singer and actress, dies at age 78.

NFL Pro Bowl Games kick off, will continue Sunday (3 pm ET, ESPN).

Miami Heat's Terry Rozier under federal investigation for alleged involvement in illegal sports betting scheme.

Denver selected as National Women's Soccer League's 16th team.

2025 Leagues Cup format, teams, and matchups announced.

## Science & Technology

Pair of astronauts stuck aboard the International Space Station take first spacewalk together since their arrival in June following a malfunction on their Boeing Starliner; return expected as soon as late March.

Archaeologists discover 76-million-year-old fossil of a juvenile pterosaur with a puncture wound on its neck; researchers suggest the animal was killed by a prehistoric crocodile.

Humans have herded sheep for at least 11,000 years, genetic analysis suggests; samples taken from locations ranging from Ireland to Mongolia shed light on role the domestication played in ancient human societies.

## Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +0.5%, Dow +0.4%, Nasdaq +0.2%) as slew of companies report earnings.

US economy grew at 2.8% annualized pace in 2024, lower than 2.9% in 2023, per new data.

UPS shares tumble 14% after the shipping giant issues weak full-year revenue guidance and plans to slash Amazon deliveries by more than half.

Apple reports Q4 revenue growth but misses iPhone sales estimates partly due to 11% drop in China sales.

Intel tops Q4 revenue and earnings forecasts.

Justice Department files antitrust challenge to block Hewlett Packard Enterprise's proposed \$14B acquisition of Juniper Networks.

## Politics & World Affairs

Senate confirmation hearings for Trump Cabinet continue, with FBI director pick Kash Patel and national intelligence director pick Tulsi Gabbard; health secretary nominee Robert F. Kennedy Jr. begins second hearing.

Hamas releases eight hostages from Gaza and Israel releases 110 imprisoned Palestinians under cease-fire deal.

Authorities in St. Kitts and Nevis launch investigation after 19 people found dead in vessel drifting at sea in the eastern Caribbean.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 4 of 72

## **NSU Women's Basketball**

### **Wolves Down Dragons in Thursday Night Action**

Aberdeen, S.D. – An explosive second quarter led the Northern State University women's basketball team to take down MSU Moorhead, 69-60. A team effort on the night, with four Wolves scoring in double figures, led by Madelyn Bragg who recorded 20 points.

#### THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 69, MSUM 60

Records: NSU 14-7 (NSIC 10-4), WSU 8-12 (NSIC 4-10)

Attendance: 1255

#### HOW IT HAPPENED

Northern State scored 18 points in the first quarter, 23 in the second, 16 in the third, and 12 in the fourth. The Wolves registered 34 points in the paint, 12 points off turnovers, 11 points from the free-throw line, and 10 points off the bench.

They shot an impressive 42.9% from the field and 91.7% from the free-throw line.

Madelyn Bragg led the team with 20 points, making 9 of 12 shots from the floor.

Alayna Benike contributed 15 points, 8 rebounds, and 5 assists.

With 11 points and 12 rebounds on the day, Michaela Jewett recorded her sixth double-double of the season.

Izzy Moore added 10 points and 5 rebounds, shooting 62.5% from the field.

#### NORTHERN STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Madelyn Bragg: 20 points, 3 rebounds, 75.0% FG

Alayna Benike: 15 points, 8 rebounds, 5 assists, 45.5% FG

Michaela Jewett: 11 points, 12 rebounds, 45.5% FG

Izzy Moore: 10 points, 5 rebounds, 62.5% FG

Rianna Fillipi: 9 points, 7 rebounds, 5 assists, 2 steals

#### UP NEXT

Northern State hits the road to take on Minot State in NSIC weekend action. Tip-off is scheduled for 5:30 p.m. from Minot, N.D. against the Beavers.



### **Death Notice: Jean Walter**

Jean Walter, 94, of Groton passed away January 30, 2025 at Avantara Groton. Services are pending with Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton.

## NSU Men's Basketball

### **Burks Drops a Career High 28 in Loss to Dragons**

Aberdeen, S.D. – The Northern State University men's basketball team opened their split week of NSIC action, falling to MSU Moorhead at home. The Wolves shot 47.3% from the floor and limited their turnovers to just seven in the contest.

#### THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score: NSU 62, MSUM 77

Records: NSU 1-20 (0-15 NSIC), MSUM 13-8 (8-7 NSIC)

Attendance: 1012

#### HOW IT HAPPENED

The Wolves scored 26 points in the first and 36 in the second, while the Dragons tallied 34 in the first and 43 in the second

NSU shot 47.3% from the floor, 20.0% from the 3-point line, and 63.6% from the foul line

They recorded 23 rebounds, seven assists, four steals, and two blocks; scoring 40 points in the paint and 13 points off turnovers

Northern led the contest in points off turnovers, forcing 11 total turnovers in the game

Marcus Burks led the team with a career high 23 points, shooting 52.2% from the floor, with five rebounds and three assists

James Glenn and Kaleb Mitchell added 12 and 11 points respectively, with Mitchell adding a team best five rebounds

#### NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Marcus Burks: 28 points, 52.2 field goal%, 5 rebounds, 3 assists, 1 block

James Glenn: 12 points, 50.0 field goal%, 3 rebounds, 1 assist, 1 steal

Kaleb Mitchell: 11 points, 71.4 field goal%, 5 rebounds, 1 assist, 1 steal

#### UP NEXT

Northern returns to action on Saturday at No. 20 Minot State. Tip-off is set for 3:30 p.m. against the Beavers to open the month of February.



**I am so blessed to have received many 80th birthday greetings from my family, friends, and former students. Nothing like a birthday to remind me of just how many wonderful people I get to spend my life with. THANK YOU!!**

*Dorene Nelson*

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 6 of 72

## Groton Tigers Rally Past Webster Bearcats for 55-43 Victory

GROTON - After a slow start, the Groton Area Tigers stormed back to defeat the Webster Area Bearcats 55-43 in Friday night's girls' basketball matchup.

The Bearcats came out strong, taking control early in the first quarter. After trailing 6-2, Webster found its rhythm and surged ahead to a 15-11 lead at the end of the first frame. However, Groton's resilience showed in the second quarter as they clawed their way back, grabbing a 19-18 lead before heading into halftime up 25-18.

The Tigers turned up the defensive pressure in the third quarter, capitalizing on Webster's mistakes. By the end of the period, Groton had built a commanding 39-26 advantage, fueled by their ability to convert turnovers into points. Webster committed 22 turnovers, and Groton took full advantage, turning 11 of those into 26 points.

Jayden Penning led the charge for Groton with 17 points, while Kennedy Hanson added 10. The Tigers' defensive efforts were anchored by Layla Roberts, who tallied five steals, and Jerica Locke, who pulled down seven of the team's 22 rebounds. Locke also contributed four assists, while Hanson and Taryn Traphaget each recorded a block.

Groton's shooting efficiency helped them maintain control down the stretch. The Tigers hit 8 of 23 shots from beyond the arc (35%) and went 12 of 36 (33%) from two-point range. They also converted 7 of 13 free throws (54%).

For Webster, Erin Sannes put on an impressive performance, leading all scorers with 21 points, including 10 in the fourth quarter. However, despite her efforts, the Bearcats struggled to overcome their turnovers and Groton's relentless defense.

With the win, Groton improved to 10-4 on the season, while Webster fell to 6-7.

- Story compiled by ChatGPT

Jaedyn Penning: 17 points, 2 rebounds, 2 assists, 1 steal, 1 foul.

Kennedy Hansen: 10 points, 2 rebounds, 3 assists, 2 steals, 1 foul, 1 block.

Jerica Locke: 9 points, 7 rebounds, 4 assists, 1 steal, 1 foul.

Taryn Traphagen: 5 points, 3 rebounds, 2 steals, 4 fouls, 1 block.

Laila Roberts: 4 points, 1 rebound, 2 assists, 5 steals, 2 fouls.

Chesney Weber: 4 points, 4 rebounds, 5 assists, 1 steal, 1 foul.

Brooklyn Hansen: 3 points, 1 assist, 1 steal.

Faith Traphagen: 3 points, 3 rebounds, 2 assists, 2 steals, 2 fouls.

Totals: 2-Pointers: 12-36 33%, 3-Pointers: 8-23 35%, Free Throws: 7-13 54%, 22 rebounds, 7 turnovers, 19 assists, 15 steals, 12 fouls, 2 blocks.

Webster Area: Erin Sannes 21, Harley Johnson 8, Carrington Hanson 6, Mallory Steiner 4, Bailee Ninke 3. Field Goals: 15-29 52%, Free Throws: 10-13 77%, Fouls: 12, Turnovers: 22.

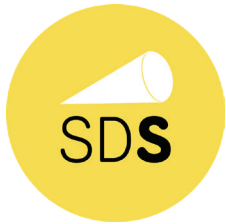
Groton Area won the junior varsity game, 41-21. Kella Tracy 16, McKenna Tietz 10, Talli Wright 5, Sydney Locke 2, Makenna Krause 2, Ashlynn Warrington 2, Teagan Hanten 2, Chesney Weber 2:

Webster: Karli Sannes 7, Cartney Hanson 6, Barelynn Breske 4, Mallory Steiner 1.

Groton Area won the C game, 30-10. Teagan Hanten 11, Makenna Krause 5, Kella Tracy 4, Ashlynn Warrington 4, Emerlee Jones 4, Kinsley Rowen 2.

All games were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM. The varsity game was sponsored by Agtegra, Avantara Groton, Bierman Farm Service, BK Custom T's & More, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Groton Ag Partners, Groton Chamber, Groton Ford, John Sieh Agency, Jungle Lanes & Lounge, Locke Electric, Krueger Brothers, R&M Farms/Rix Farms, The Meathouse in Andover.

The junior varsity game was sponsored by Weber Landscaping. The C game was sponsored by Larry and Val Fliehs. Shane Clark, Jeslyn Kosel and Paul Kosel were on hand for the broadcast.



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### South Dakota school choice fight is 'not over,' Republican leader says

**BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JANUARY 30, 2025 1:28 PM**

PIERRE — South Dakota Republican legislative leaders are still planning to push forward with school choice legislation after two bills failed in a committee earlier this week.

"The fight's not over," said House Majority Leader Scott Odenbach, R-Spearfish.

Democratic leaders said the effort is a waste of time and an attack on public education. Each leadership group had its weekly legislative press conference Thursday at the Capitol.

Republicans said they're working on an alternative solution, which they hope will gain broader support following the rejection of a \$4 million education savings account bill backed by Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden and another proposal from Rep. Dylan Jordan, R-Clear Lake, that would cost an estimated \$142 million. Each of the bills sought to provide public funds to help families pay for private school tuition, homeschool or other alternative instruction costs.

Odenbach hoped to pass the governor's bill, but concerns about its impact on public school funding and a lack of oversight and transparency in private education led to a 9-6 defeat in the House Education Committee. The competing bill was rejected in an 8-7 vote. Conflicting opinions among school choice supporters also contributed to the defeats, with some arguing the governor's bill was too limited.

Several options exist to keep the effort alive, including procedural maneuvers to force the bills to the House floor, the filing of new bills, or the wholesale amendment of an unrelated bill.

Democratic leaders said the school choice bills should be left for dead.

"I think both bills had a fair hearing," said House Minority Leader Erin Healy, D-Sioux Falls. "The room was completely packed yesterday. Everyone was there."

The push for school choice in South Dakota received a potential boost from Washington, D.C., this week. President Donald Trump signed an executive order directing the federal Department of Education to explore federal funding opportunities for states with school choice programs.

"Hopefully we can get something in place to capitalize on that," said Senate Majority Leader Jim Mehlhaff, R-Pierre.

*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.*

### SD Senate votes to let 17-year-olds drop out with parental consent

**BY: JOHN HULT - JANUARY 30, 2025 5:20 PM**

South Dakota teenagers with parental consent could test out of high school at age 16 or opt to withdraw without testing at 17 under the terms of a bill advanced by the state Senate on Thursday in Pierre.

Senate Bill 71 was born of entreaties from administrators who struggle to manage certain students in the face of South Dakota's requirement that all kids stay in school until age 18, according to its sponsor, Sen. Mike Rohl, R-Aberdeen.

Lawmakers endorsed compulsory attendance for those younger than 18 in 2009.

That stricture causes problems for students who are ready to test out of high school but are too young to do so without administrative permission, Rohl said, as well as for the teachers who may find themselves wrangling students who don't want to be there and intend to exit the school system as soon as they're able.

"They're making it so these other kids can't learn, and they're honestly wasting both our time, their time, and the teacher's time," Rohl said.

The choice to allow a student to leave school before adulthood, Rohl told the Senate on Thursday, belongs with parents.

Legislative efforts to undo the school attendance rule have bubbled up and fizzled out multiple times since 2009. Most recently, former Watertown Republican Sen. Lee Schoenbeck tried to convince his colleagues to lower South Dakota's compulsory attendance age to 16. That 2023 iteration of the bill failed to clear a Senate committee.

Unlike the 2023 version, SB 71 requires parental consent, and opens the door for an exit at age 17, not 16. It also clears a path for parents to let their children leave school to pursue a general equivalency degree (GED) once they reach age 16 without seeking a waiver from the state Department of Education, provided they pass the test.

SB 71 passed the Senate 34-1 and now heads to the House. The lone no vote came from Sen. Curt Voight, R-Rapid City, a former school administrator who made no remarks about the bill on the Senate floor.

*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.*

## Venhuizen sworn in as South Dakota lieutenant governor after legislative confirmation

**BY: JOHN HULT - JANUARY 30, 2025 4:08 PM**

The South Dakota Legislature voted unanimously on Thursday at the Capitol in Pierre to confirm Tony Venhuizen as the state's lieutenant governor.

Venhuizen, 42, was sworn in shortly afterward.

The Sioux Falls Republican's voice shook momentarily with emotion as he took to the lectern to address the Senate in his first remarks as the body's presiding officer, which is a duty of the lieutenant governor.

"Wow, this is a little overwhelming," Venhuizen said.

He spoke of his grandfather, former state Sen. Henry Poppen, pointing to the seat where he sat during the now-lieutenant governor's childhood visits to the Capitol. He also noted the long public service career of his father-in-law, former Gov. Dennis Daugaard, for whom Venhuizen served as chief of staff.

Venhuizen vacated his state representative seat this week upon his selection by Gov. Larry Rhoden, who ascended to the governorship earlier this month when Gov. Kristi Noem resigned to serve as secretary of the Department of Homeland Security in the Trump administration. Rhoden announced his pick for lieutenant governor on Wednesday, subject to legislative confirmation.

Thursday on the floor of the Senate, Majority Leader Jim Mehlhaff, R-Pierre, lauded Venhuizen as an insightful, balanced voice at the Capitol.

"I have all the confidence in the world that he's very well-prepared and up for the job," Mehlhaff said.

Minority Leader Liz Larson, a Sioux Falls Democrat, also spoke in favor of Venhuizen's confirmation.

"He's an even-handed, level-headed policymaker," she said.

State representatives offered similar sentiments prior to their unanimous adoption of the resolution confirming Venhuizen to the state's second-highest executive post.

Rep. Liz May, a Kyle Republican, has in the past found herself on opposing sides with Venhuizen in the chamber they shared until earlier this week. May also sparred with Venhuizen during his earlier stints in



the executive branch.

On Tuesday, May said she was glad to cast a ballot to confirm him as lieutenant governor.

"I can honestly say I like Tony now," May said. "I like him a lot. I couldn't have said that a lot of years ago. I did not like him. I always felt like Tony was picking on us. If I can build a relationship with anybody, I encourage you all to do the same. We are not going to agree on everything. That's just the way it works. But what you want to do in this position is make friends."

*South Dakota Searchlight's Makenzie Huber contributed to this report.*

*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.*

## **COMMENTARY**

### **We don't need a surveillance state to protect kids online Proposed SD age verification law invades privacy and ignores the tools parents already have by Samantha Chapman**

Adults have a First Amendment right to look for and access information online, including sexual content. But House Bill 1053, a bill aimed at limiting minors' access to online content, would require people to undergo an invasive age verification process before accessing adult content online.

As a parent myself, there are certainly online materials that I don't want my children to view, but I don't need a surveillance state rife with unintended consequences to accomplish this goal. Laws that seek to impose age verification systems on sites with adult content might sound reasonable at first, but the devil is in the details.

Under House Bill 1053, adults would be required to upload personal data, such as a photo ID, with companies that claim to verify their age.

Efforts to childproof the internet like this not only hurt everyone's ability to access information, but also pose numerous threats to our online privacy and safety. If this bill passes, every single website with any amount of "material harmful to minors" would require all users to upload their government-issued ID, bank account information, or credit card number to prove their age, and make otherwise suitable content completely off-limits for minors. This is akin to barring minors from an entire library because one shelf contains adult materials.

Unlike in-person ID checks, online age verification exposes every website visitor to privacy and security risks. That means it seriously burdens the rights of adults to read, get information, speak and browse online anonymously. Records of our personal information tied to details of the adult content we watch, sexual questions we have, or interests or identities we're exploring could make millions of people vulnerable to harassment, blackmail and exploitation.

Because of that, House Bill 1053 would undoubtedly have a chilling effect on free expression online. The legitimate fear of having personal information exposed may deter adults from accessing legal and consensual adult content, thereby limiting their freedom to explore and express themselves in a private digital space.

The Supreme Court has ruled that states can restrict a minor's access to adult material, but legislators must navigate a delicate balance mandated by the U.S. Constitution. The law cannot inhibit a minor's access while simultaneously burdening an adult's right to access the same material. In a precedent-setting case, *Reno v. ACLU*, the courts deemed age verification requirements were unconstitutional when a less restrictive alternative exists. For example, the voluntary installation of parental control filters.

In January, the United States Supreme Court heard arguments in *Free Speech Coalition v. Paxton*, a challenge to a Texas law that, like House Bill 1053, requires people to undergo an age verification process

before accessing adult content online. A decision in the case is expected by early summer 2025.

Young people deserve our protection and support, but age-gating the internet is not the answer — especially considering that for the more tech-savvy users, all of these attempts at censorship would fall short anyway.

The only way that a website can determine whether a user is located in a particular state is to use the geolocation data provided by the user's device. But all you need to get around these censors is a virtual public network, or VPN. Kids can easily circumvent the proposed age verification requirements.

Is there harmful content on the internet for young viewers? Undoubtedly. But not every societal ill requires a solution from the government.

In this case, parents already have the tools they need to keep explicit and harmful content away from kids. Built-in parental controls allow us to set screen time limits, review app permissions (such as our kids' camera, location and contacts), block apps and approve downloads, block sites and filter content. Despite the numerous tools parents have to keep their kids safe online, fewer than 15% of parents activate these tools.

Rather than infringing on constitutional rights, we should focus on educating parents about these existing solutions. Allowing loosely regulated surveillance of our online activity is dangerous and opens the door for government censorship.

*As advocacy manager for the American Civil Liberties Union of South Dakota, Samantha Chapman builds the ACLU's public education and advocacy programs through coalition-building, leadership development, communication and lobbying. She ensures that supporters of the ACLU of South Dakota have the tools, information, and opportunities to be effective advocates on issues like abortion rights, Indigenous justice, criminal justice reform, and LGBTQ+ and Two Spirit rights. Samantha joined the ACLU of South Dakota in December 2022 with six years of professional advocacy and health care communications experience.*

## Former North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum confirmed as Interior secretary

**BY: AMY DALRYMPLE - JANUARY 30, 2025 6:36 PM**

The U.S. Senate voted Thursday to confirm former North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum to lead the Department of Interior.

During his confirmation hearing, Burgum emphasized a commitment to advancing U.S. energy production in President Donald Trump's administration.

The Senate confirmed Burgum on a bipartisan vote of 79-18, with support from North Dakota Sens. John Hoeven and Kevin Cramer, who championed his appointment.

"Doug Burgum clearly understands the potential of our abundant, taxpayer-owned energy resources and will treat them as the strategic asset they are, including our oil, gas and coal reserves," Hoeven said in a statement.

Cramer said Burgum is "tailor-made" for the position, highlighting his "consensus-driven leadership style."

Republican Senate Majority Leader John Thune of South Dakota said Thursday he's pleased Burgum is committed to restoring a multiple-use approach to managing public lands.

"People in places like my state and Gov. Burgum's, where the land is part of our way of life, know that the farmer, the rancher, the forester, and other landowners are some of the best conservationists," Thune said.

The Department of the Interior manages federal natural and cultural resources with about 70,000 employees and an \$18 billion budget.

The department includes 11 agencies: the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, Office of Surface Mining Reclamation & Enforcement, and the bureaus of Indian Affairs, Indian Education, Land Management, Ocean Energy Management, Reclamation, Safety & Environmental Enforcement, and Trust Funds Administration.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 11 of 72

"Serving as Interior Secretary is an opportunity to redefine and improve upon the federal government's relationship with tribal nations, landowners, mineral developers, outdoor enthusiasts and others, with a focus on maximizing the responsible use of our natural resources with environmental stewardship for the benefit of the American people," Burgum said in a November statement after Trump announced his nomination.

Burgum, a wealthy businessman, was elected North Dakota governor in 2016 and served through mid-December. He was succeeded by former U.S. Rep. Kelly Armstrong, a Republican who dropped a reelection campaign for Congress after Burgum announced he didn't plan to seek a third term.

Burgum, a Republican, was a frequent critic of Biden administration policies that threatened domestic oil and gas production and the coal industry. During his two terms as governor, North Dakota sued the Department of Interior and other federal agencies over regulations that affect energy and agriculture.

Trump also tapped Burgum to lead the newly formed National Energy Council, which Burgum has said "will foster an unprecedented level of coordination among federal agencies to advance American energy." He also will have a seat on the National Security Council.

Burgum served as chair of the North Dakota Industrial Commission, which regulates oil and gas production in the state.

Burgum's family has a financial interest in some oil and gas leases in North Dakota, as well as ownership of energy stocks, according to federal financial disclosures. A North Dakota Monitor and ProPublica investigation last year found that Burgum voted about 20 times on issues related to companies with which he has a financial relationship, according to a review of meeting minutes.

Burgum has committed in an agreement with the U.S. Office of Government Ethics to divest from oil and gas leases and energy stocks. The agreement also outlines other steps to prevent potential conflicts of interest, including resigning from other business positions.

Burgum succeeds Deb Haaland, who was the first Native American to serve as a Cabinet secretary. Leaders of the five tribes that share geography with North Dakota have lauded Burgum as an ally, and other tribes submitted letters of support.

Burgum grew up in small-town Arthur, North Dakota, and became a billionaire by investing in Great Plains Software, which he later sold to Microsoft. He founded a real estate development firm before running for governor in 2016. Burgum launched a presidential campaign in 2023 but dropped out and became the first Republican primary candidate to endorse Trump. He also was a finalist to be Trump's vice president.

Burgum will be the second former North Dakota governor to serve as a U.S. Cabinet secretary. Former Gov. Ed Schafer led the U.S. Department of Agriculture from 2008 to 2009 under President George W. Bush.

*Amy Dalrymple is editor-in-chief of North Dakota's States Newsroom outlet, North Dakota Monitor. She previously was editor of The Bismarck Tribune and a newspaper journalist in Williston and Fargo.*

## Investigations launch into horrific DC plane crash as Trump without evidence blames DEI

**BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA AND ASHLEY MURRAY - JANUARY 30, 2025 6:02 PM**

WASHINGTON — U.S. senators said Thursday they are investigating the deadly midair collision between a commercial jet carrying 64 people and a U.S. Army Black Hawk helicopter on approach to Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport in Virginia, just outside the District of Columbia.

Meanwhile, with no conclusive evidence on the cause of the worst U.S. air disaster in years yet disclosed, President Donald Trump in a White House press event tied the tragedy to diversity, equity and inclusion efforts at the Department of Transportation.

The president blamed air traffic controller standards and the Biden administration's "big push to put diversity into the FAA program," pointing to former DOT Secretary Pete Buttigieg in particular. Buttigieg released a statement on social media shortly after the press conference criticizing Trump's comments as "despicable."

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 12 of 72

When reporters asked how he knew that diversity among air traffic controllers was a factor in the crash, Trump responded: "Because I have common sense."

Officials believe there are no survivors from the regional jet or the Black Hawk, which were sent plunging into the frigid Potomac River late Wednesday. The death toll stands at 67, including the three members of the helicopter crew. Officials said 28 bodies had been recovered as a massive operation in the river continued.

Senators expressed their condolences to the families of crash victims and vowed to get answers. J. Todd Inman, a board member of the National Transportation Safety Board, said that the independent investigative agency will have a preliminary report within 30 days and then a final report.

"It's a horrifying accident," said West Virginia GOP Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, who sits on the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation. "Looks like human error."

The chair of that panel, Sen. Ted Cruz, said that he was briefed by senior leadership from the Federal Aviation Administration and NTSB in his office along with members of the committee.

"Obviously, something happened that should not have happened, but I think it is a mistake to speculate until we see what the evidence demonstrates," the Texas Republican said.

Maj. Gen. Trevor J. Bredenkamp said in a written statement Thursday that the Army's "top priority is to assist in the recovery efforts, while fully cooperating with the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), and other investigative agencies to determine the cause of this tragic incident."

"While the investigation is ongoing, we are committed to transparency and will share accurate updates as soon as they become available," said Bredenkamp, commander of the Joint Task Force for the National Capital Region.

## Air Florida crash

Wednesday's collision was the deadliest plane crash in the D.C. area since 1982, when an Air Florida flight crashed into the Potomac River and killed 78 people, and it's the first major disaster of the Trump administration's second term.

The crash of the PSA Airlines Bombardier CRJ700, which occurred around 9 p.m. Eastern Wednesday, came two days after the Senate confirmed former Wisconsin Rep. Sean Duffy as Trump's nominee to be Transportation secretary.

In a Thursday morning briefing, Duffy said that he thought the crash was preventable — in line with early social media posts from the president — but deferred further conclusions to the NTSB, which will lead the investigation.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune said on the Senate floor that his prayers were with those who lost their lives in the crash and that Congress, in its oversight role, will investigate the incident.

"It's too early to know why last night's crash occurred, but we're going to find out," the South Dakota Republican said. "And Congress and federal agencies will be closely examining this tragedy to ensure that America's skies are safe."

## Trump names acting FAA chief

As of Thursday morning there was no acting head of the Federal Aviation Administration.

Trump said during the White House briefing, at approximately 11:20 a.m. Eastern, that he was immediately naming the agency's deputy administrator, Christopher Rocheleau, to the role of acting FAA administrator.

During the roughly 35-minute press conference, Trump told reporters, "We do not know what led to this crash, but we have some very strong opinions and ideas."

As he stood before the press less than 24 hours after the American Airlines Flight 5342 crash, Trump said former President Joe Biden had allowed the FAA to hire persons with disabilities. Trump then specifically said those with "hearing, vision, missing extremities, partial paralysis, complete paralysis, epilepsy, severe intellectual disability, psychiatric disability and dwarfism — all qualify for the position of a controller of

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 13 of 72

airplanes pouring into our country, pouring into a little spot, a little dot on the map, little runway.”

The American Association of People with Disabilities pushed back on Trump’s comments, writing on social media that “FAA employees with disabilities did not cause last night’s tragic plane crash.”

“The investigation into the crash is still ongoing,” AAPD said in a statement. “It is extremely inappropriate for the President to use this tragedy to push an anti-diversity hiring agenda. Doing so makes all Americans less safe.”

Vice President J.D. Vance, along with Duffy and Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, echoed Trump’s comments about DEI at the press briefing.

During Trump’s first administration, in April 2019, the FAA announced an initiative to enroll up to 20 persons with disabilities into an Aviation Development Program.

Trump signed an executive order last week directing the FAA “to immediately stop Biden DEI hiring programs and return to non-discriminatory, merit-based hiring.”

Trump also told reporters he listened to the air traffic controller audio in the seconds leading up to the crash, and “you had a pilot problem from the standpoint of the helicopter.”

Traffic controllers can be heard on the audio telling the Sikorsky H-60 helicopter “I need you to land immediately.”

Buttigieg said in his statement that Trump was not telling the truth about the FAA under Biden.

“As families grieve, Trump should be leading, not lying. We put safety first, drove down close calls, grew Air Traffic Control, and had zero commercial airline crash fatalities out of millions of flights on our watch,” Buttigieg said.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, Democrat of New York, also criticized the president’s news conference.

“Listen, it’s one thing for internet pundits to spew off conspiracies, it’s another for the president of the United States to throw out idle speculation as bodies are still being recovered and families are still being notified,” Schumer said on the Senate floor. “It just turns your stomach.”

## **Local lawmakers have long worried about DCA**

Democratic Maryland Sen. Chris Van Hollen and Democratic Virginia Sens. Tim Kaine and Mark Warner have long criticized the large number of flight slots at DCA and have pushed back on adding new slots to the airport, which is a favorite for lawmakers as it’s close to the U.S. Capitol.

In April, there was a near-miss, when two planes cleared to take off came within 400 feet of crashing.

Last year, Congress in May approved an FAA bill that finalized a five-year, \$105 billion plan that added flight slots to an already busy DCA.

Cruz defended the long haul flights he pushed for in the FAA bill, some that included Texas.

“I believe we should wait for the investigation to demonstrate what actually caused the accident, rather than speculating,” he said. “We know it was tragic, and there are families of 67 men and women grieving right now.”

Nick Daniels, president of the National Air Traffic Controllers Association, the union that represents aviation professionals, said in a statement that “it would be premature to speculate on the root cause of this accident.”

“We will wait for the National Transportation Safety Board to complete its work and use that information to help guide decisions and changes to enhance and improve aviation safety,” he said.

Joseph McCartin, a Georgetown University professor who has studied the nation’s air traffic controllers, said Trump’s comments attributing the crash to DEI programs are “absurd.”

“The problem is that, if there is a problem at the FAA, it certainly doesn’t stem from DEI. Rather, it stems from consistent and chronic understaffing of air traffic control facilities, which has been happening over years,” said McCartin who published the 2011 book “Collision Course: Ronald Reagan, the Air Traffic Controllers, and the Strike that Changed America.”

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 14 of 72

## Who was aboard the jet

Among the 60 passengers and four crew members on the plane were U.S. Figure Skating coaches and athletes, along with their families, returning from a national development camp held in concert with the association's championships in Wichita, the association confirmed Wednesday night.

Six members, including two teen athletes, two parents and two coaches, of the Skating Club of Boston were on board, according to reporting by WBUR and the Rhode Island Current.

Club officials identified the skaters as Jinna Han, 13, and Spencer Lane, 16, along with their mothers, Jin Han and Christine Lane. The club's coaches, among the victims, were Evgenia Shishkova and Vadim Naumov, according to the organization.

Russian state media confirmed Thursday morning that two Russian figure skaters and other Russian citizens were on the plane.

A U.S. Department of State spokesperson told States Newsroom that officials had reached out to the foreign diplomat community and will provide an update once the department receives confirmation from the NTSB of foreign national casualties.

Wichita Mayor Lily Wu said at a press conference Thursday morning that the city had not yet reviewed the passenger manifest, but said one family showed up at the Wichita airport Wednesday night seeking information about the crash.

The direct flight from Wichita to Washington, D.C., had only just begun in January 2024.

Virginia's Loudoun County School District Superintendent Aaron Spence issued a letter Thursday confirming that one of its students had been on the flight, according to FOX5 Washington, D.C. The letter did not identify the student.

The United Association wrote on social media Thursday that four of its union members from Steamfitters Local 602 were among the plane's passengers. The union local is based in Landover, Maryland.

The flight crew was based out of Charlotte, North Carolina, the Charlotte Observer reported.

FOX5 Atlanta reported that one of the plane's pilots was a 28-year-old named Sam Lilley. The local affiliate cited the pilot's father Timothy Lilley, who has ties to Georgia.

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

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

## **GOP members of U.S. Senate probe RFK Jr. on his history of vaccine denial**

**BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - JANUARY 30, 2025 3:00 PM**

WASHINGTON — Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s opinions about vaccine safety, both past and present, appeared likely to lead at least a few Senate Republicans to vote against his nomination following a second confirmation hearing Thursday.

Louisiana Sen. Bill Cassidy, a physician and chairman of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, said at the end of the three-hour hearing that he agrees with Kennedy that vaccines should be safe and effective, but that the two are far apart in how they went about their research.

"As someone who has discussed immunizations with thousands of people, I understand that mothers want reassurance that the vaccine their child is receiving is necessary, safe and effective. We agree on that point, the two of us," Cassidy said. "But we've approached it differently. And I think I can say that I've approached it using the preponderance of evidence to reassure and you've approached using selected evidence to cast doubt."

Throughout the hearing, Cassidy and numerous other senators from both political parties asked Kennedy about previous statements he's made, including a repeatedly debunked claim that certain vaccines

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 15 of 72

lead to autism.

Kennedy, who has been nominated by President Donald Trump to the hugely influential post of secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, said that he would apologize and reassure Americans about the measles and Hepatitis B vaccines, if Cassidy could show him data establishing their safety.

Cassidy discussed the decades of safety data during the hearing and cited peer-reviewed studies, but Kennedy never backed away from his claims.

Kennedy repeated statements he made during his Senate Finance Committee confirmation hearing on Wednesday, during his Thursday hearing, including that he just wanted to follow the science, though he added caveats.

"I am not going to go into HHS and impose my pre-ordained opinions on anybody at HHS," Kennedy said. "I'm going to empower the scientists at HHS to do their job and make sure that we have good science that's evidence based, that's replicable, where the raw data is published."

The Autism Science Foundation writes on its website that Autism Spectrum Disorder is "a brain-based disorder that is characterized by social-communication challenges and restricted and repetitive behaviors, activities and interests." The nonprofit, which funds research into the causes of autism, notes that "there are many genetic and environmental factors involved with autism."

"These include both rare and common variants. About 15% of cases of autism can be linked to a specific gene mutation," the organization says. "Some of the environmental factors that have been studied include medical conditions in parents, age, toxic chemicals, medications taken during pregnancy and before pregnancy, and diet and nutrition."

## **Sanders: 'Take on the insurance companies'**

Vermont independent Sen. Bernie Sanders, ranking member on the HELP Committee, said there were areas where he hoped Kennedy succeeded, including reducing obesity and reducing ultra processed foods. But he said that actually improving Americans' overall health would require much more than that.

"I'm not quite sure how we can move to making America healthy again, unless we have the guts to take on the insurance companies and the drug companies that guarantee healthcare to all people," Sanders said.

Other policy changes, like paid family and medical leave, are essential to ensuring that people can live healthy lives, he said.

"There are women today who are having babies, then they're going to go back to work in a week or two because they have no guaranteed paid family and medical leave," Sanders said. "How do you have a healthy country when women are forced to go back to work? When women and men get fired because they stay home taking care of their sick kids? That's not making America healthy again."

Sanders said it's extremely difficult for people to find time to live healthy lives when they must work extremely long hours, making \$13 or \$14 an hour, only to still live in poverty.

## **Murkowski focuses on Native Americans' health**

Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski, another centrist Republican who hasn't publicly announced whether she'll support Kennedy's confirmation, questioned him about how he'd help improve health outcomes in Native American communities.

"When you look at our health statistics, whether it's Alaska Natives or whether it is American Indians, our health statistics in this country ... are not where they need to be," Murkowski said. "And it's in all categories. It's infectious disease, it's tuberculosis, it's Hep C, it's mental health, it's depression, it's substance use, it's sexually transmitted diseases, it's hypertension, stroke. It is so deep, and it is so challenging and it is so hard."

Murkowski cited Kennedy's prior comments where he said he'd triple the amount of federal spending to tribal communities.

Kennedy didn't commit during the hearing to boosting funding for the Indian Health Service or other programs designed to support Indigenous communities, but said he did hope to hire someone from one

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 16 of 72

of those communities at the assistant secretary level at HHS.

"I'd like to get him actually designated as an assistant secretary ... to ensure that all of the decisions that we make in our agency are conscious of their impacts on the First Nations," Kennedy said.

Murkowski also expressed concern about Kennedy's statements on vaccine safety, saying that while some things need to be shaken up, there also has to be a "level of confidence" in public health programs.

"We have made some considerable gains in my state of Alaska with vaccinating the many people in very rural areas where one disease outbreak can wipe out an entire village," Murkowski said. "We saw this in 1918 with the Spanish flu. And that's why everyone was rattled to the core; villages were shut down entirely, entirely, during COVID because of the fear of transmission."

Murkowski told Kennedy he was clearly an influencer with a platform he could use to greatly benefit people, if he chooses to.

"I'm asking you to focus on how you can use your position to provide for greater levels of confidence to the public when it comes to these life-saving areas," Murkowski said.

## Collins probes on vaccines

Maine Sen. Susan Collins, a centrist who faces a challenging reelection bid next year, told Kennedy she agreed with him that the federal government needs to focus more time, energy and money addressing chronic diseases, like diabetes and Alzheimer's.

"But it concerns me when I read a quote from you that says, 'I'm going to say to NIH scientists, God bless you all. Thank you for your public service. We're going to give infectious diseases a break for about eight years,'" Collins said. "Don't we need to do both?"

Kennedy said he "absolutely" agreed that researchers should focus their attention on finding solutions to both forms of illness and disease, but argued enough money hasn't gone to studying both.

Collins, chairwoman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, sought to remind Kennedy that the Constitution gives Congress the ability to spend federal money and direct where that money goes.

Collins mentioned a pediatric nurse in Maine who shared worries about the impact a decrease in childhood vaccinations could have on other children in their communities, especially those who cannot get vaccines because of illnesses or allergies.

"She raised the concern that if people are discouraged from getting their children vaccinated, we will lose the herd immunity in a classroom," Collins said. "And that means that a child who may be immunosuppressed and cannot get a vaccine are at risk of being in a classroom with an unvaccinated child. And thus at risk of getting the infectious disease because we've lost the herd immunity."

Kennedy said he believed that people have stopped trusting in the safety of vaccines, but pledged to bring in "good science" if confirmed by the Senate.

"I'm going to restore trust and that will restore vaccine uptake," Kennedy said.

## Hassan challenges Kennedy on autism

New Hampshire Democratic Sen. Maggie Hassan had one of the most pointed exchanges with Kennedy during the hearing, challenging the statements from some GOP senators who criticized Democrats for asking Kennedy certain questions regarding his past statements on vaccines.

"Now, some of you are new to this committee and new to the Senate, so you may not know that I am the proud mother of a 36-year-old young man with severe cerebral palsy," Hassan said. "And a day does not go by when I don't think about, 'What did I do when I was pregnant with him that might have caused the hydrocephalus that has so impacted his life?'"

"So please do not suggest that anybody in this body of either political party doesn't want to know what the cause of autism is," she said, adding that many of her friends have children with autism.

"Mr. Kennedy, that first autism study rocked my world. And like every mother, I worried about whether, in fact, the vaccine had done something to my son," Hassan said. "And you know what? It was a tiny study of about 12 kids. And over time, the scientific community studied and studied and studied and found



that it was wrong. And the journal retracted the study because sometimes science is wrong. We make progress. We build on the work and we become more successful. And when you continue to sow doubt about settled science, it makes it impossible for us to move forward. So that's what the problem is here."

*Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.*

## **With stenographers in short supply, SD lawmakers advance bill letting judges opt for recordings**

**BY: JOHN HULT - JANUARY 30, 2025 9:58 AM**

A shortage of stenographers in South Dakota helped spur unanimous support in a legislative committee for a bill that would allow judges to decide if a stenographer is necessary in lower-level court hearings.

Stenographers, also called court reporters, are people who transcribe everything said in a court proceeding, using stenographic machines with specialized keyboards.

Current law allows the parties involved in misdemeanor criminal or civil cases to demand a stenographer to cover hearings in person.

That's not usually necessary, though, State Court Administrator Greg Sattizahn told the Senate Judiciary Committee on Thursday at the Capitol in Pierre. An audio recording can be used after the hearing to create an official written transcript if necessary, Sattizahn said, and that's become the most common method for creating official records in South Dakota.

The technology has been a boon for the state in the face of a steady loss of trained court reporters in recent years, Sattizahn said.

The Unified Judicial System has eight open stenography positions at the moment.

"As those positions come open, we've in many cases converted them to court recorders," Sattizahn said, referring to the audio recording systems used to create transcribable audio records of hearings.

There are 41 court reporters on staff for the state courts at the moment. There are 11 court recorder systems available.

The slim stenography labor pool can create a scheduling burden for felony cases, Sattizahn said — one that can be exacerbated when parties to lower-level cases opt to exercise their right to demand a stenographer.

House Bill 1011 would put the decision on whether a human court reporter is needed in the hands of a case's presiding judge. No one testified against the bill, which was presented on behalf of the state court systems at the request of South Dakota Supreme Court Justice Steven Jensen.

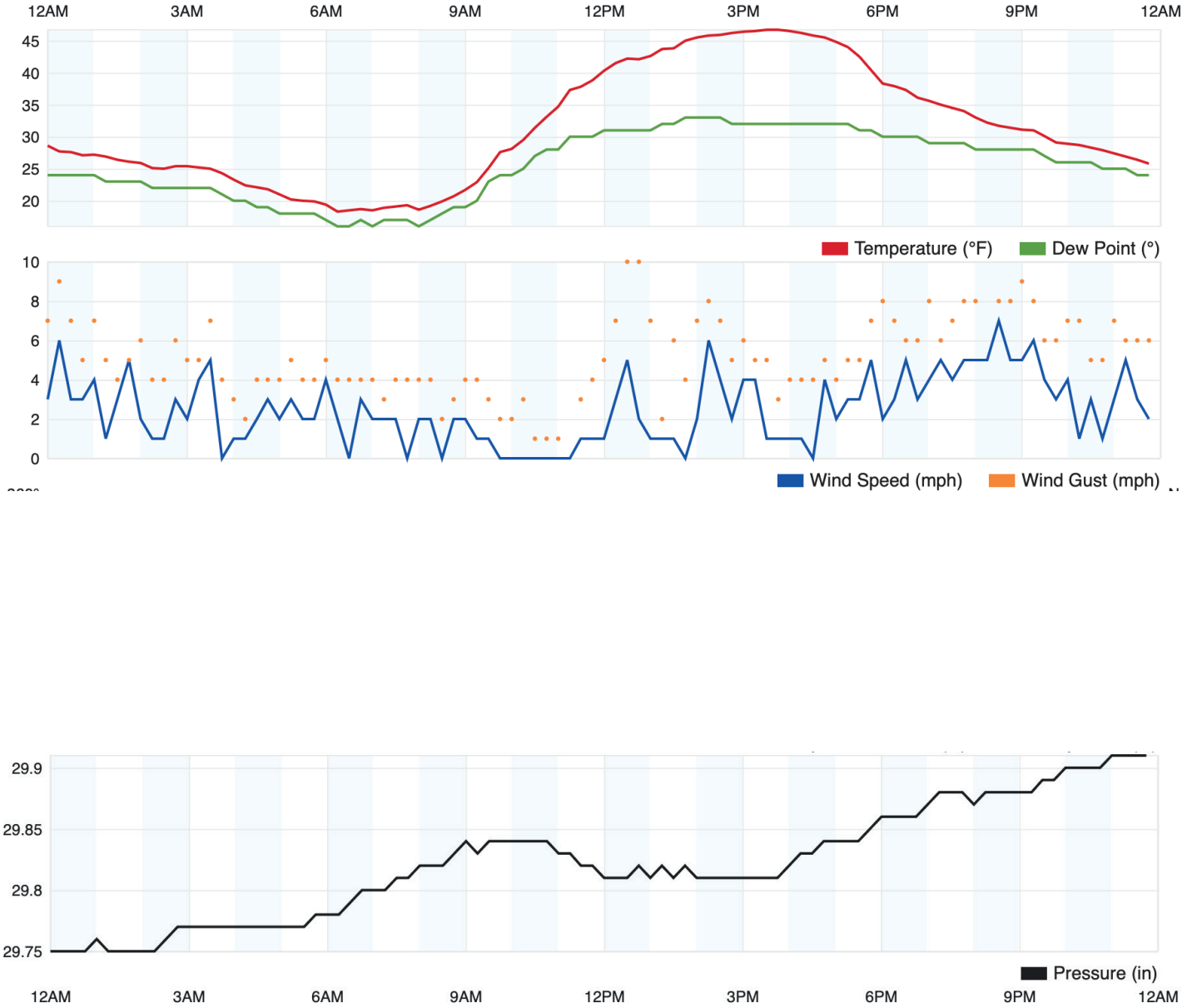
The committee backed the bill 7-0, sending it to the Senate, where final passage would send the bill to the governor's desk.

*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.*

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 18 of 72

## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 19 of 72

Today



High: 29 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Tonight



Low: 19 °F↑↑

Cloudy

Saturday



High: 44 °F

Partly Sunny

Saturday Night



Low: 25 °F

Partly Cloudy

Sunday



High: 35 °F

Breezy.  
Slight Chance  
Snow then  
Partly Sunny



## Snowfall Timing Heading Into Monday And Temperatures

January 31, 2025  
4:09 AM

Light Snow May Develop Sunday Night And Move Mainly Into Central South Dakota

### Key Messages

- **What's The Concern?**

Light snow may develop move into central South Dakota Sunday night into Monday morning

Arctic cold air surges into central and northeast South Dakota and west central Minnesota Sunday night through Tuesday

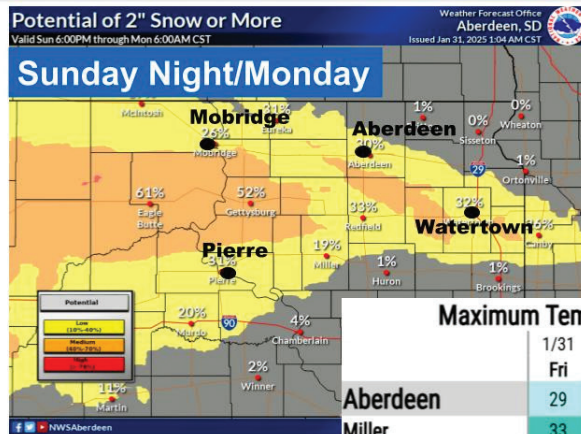
- **What's Uncertain?**

Shifts north or south in where the snow develops/moves to, as well as how much

- **What you can do?**



Continue to monitor later forecasts if you have outdoor or travel plans on Thursday



### Maximum Temperature Forecast (°F)

	1/31	2/1	2/2	2/3	2/4	2/5	2/6
	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu
Aberdeen	29	45	32	12	13	18	16
Miller	33	48	37	21	15	18	16
Mobridge	35	47	35	16	13	17	18
Murdo	40	52	37	25	17	18	18
Ortonville	32	43	36	17	13	19	16
Pierre	39	51	38	24	18	19	20
Sisseton	27	43	35	15	11	17	15
Watertown	32	44	33	17	13	18	15



National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

Continued warm (above normal) temperatures through Sunday. However, a cold front passing through on Sunday will stir up northwest winds and usher arctic cold air back into the region for the first week of February. Snow chances increase to 40 to 60 percent Sunday night into Monday morning, with a couple inches of snow possible.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 20 of 72

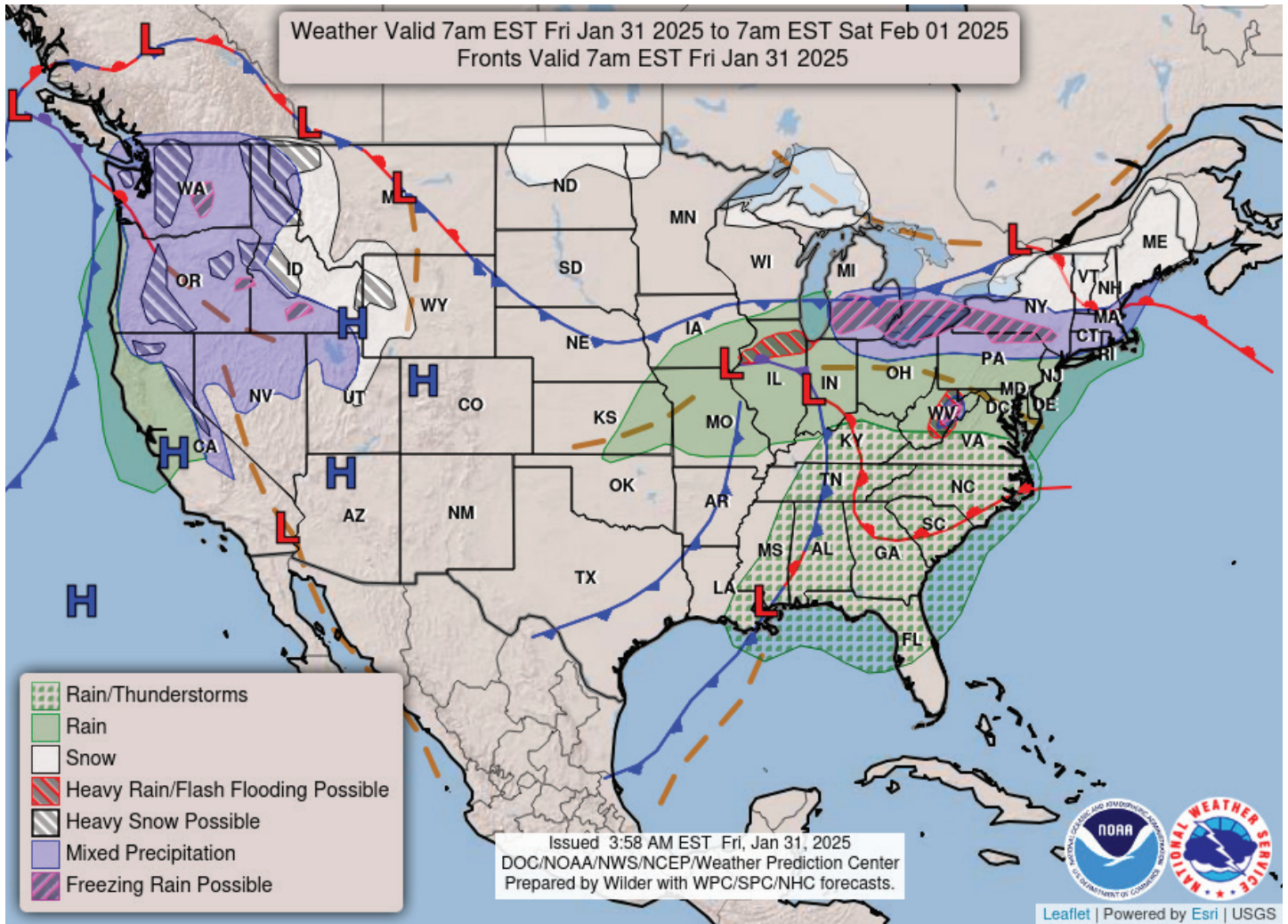
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 47 °F at 3:24 PM**  
**Low Temp: 18 °F at 6:13 AM**  
**Wind: 10 mph at 12:28 PM**  
**Precip: : 0.00**

Day length: 9 hours, 47 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 51 in 1924  
Record Low: -32 in 1996  
Average High: 25  
Average Low: 2  
Average Precip in Jan.: 0.55  
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00  
Average Precip to date: 0.55  
Precip Year to Date: 21.71  
Sunset Tonight: 5:39:42 pm  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:50:52 am



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 21 of 72

## Today in Weather History

January 31, 1969: Minnesota experienced many winter storms throughout the month of 1969, where several people had died from heart attacks and auto accidents. Many roads were blocked or iced over several times during the month. Considerable snow during January and frequent periods of strong winds resulted in many days of blowing and drifting snow across northeast South Dakota. There were also many days with freezing rain. The most significant icing occurred on the 22nd and the 27th. There were numerous days where the traffic was at a standstill due to blocked roads and closed airports. Many school closings occurred throughout the month, with many activities canceled. Many rural roads went long periods without being opened, resulting in hardships for farmers. Days of blowing snow were the 8th, 19th, 22nd, 23th, 24th, 26th, 27th, and 31st. Days of freezing rain were the 5th, 14th, 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th, and the 22nd.

1911: Tamarack, California, was without snow the first eight days of the month, but by the end of January, they had been buried under 390 inches of snow, a record monthly total for the United States. By March 11, 1911, Tamarack had a record snow depth of 451 inches.

1949 - The temperature at San Antonio, TX, plunged to a record low of one degree below zero. Helena MT reached 42 degrees below zero. (David Ludlum)

1950: Seattle, Washington experienced their coldest temperature on record with a reading of zero degrees.

1966 - A blizzard struck the northeastern U.S. When the storm came to an end, twenty inches of snow covered the ground at Washington D.C. (David Ludlum)

1979: A winter storm that started on the previous day and ended on this day spread 2 to 4 inches of rainfall in 24 hours over much of coastal Southern California and two inches of snow in Palm Springs. Snow fell heavily in Palm Springs, and 8 inches fell at Lancaster. All major interstates into Los Angeles were closed. Snow drifts shut down Interstate 10 on both sides of Palm Springs, isolating the city.

1982 - A snowstorm struck Missouri, Illinois and Indiana. Twenty-five inches of snow at Greenville IL, located east of Saint Louis, paralyzed the community. The storm left 4000 motorists stranded for two days. (David Ludlum)

1987 - A storm in the Pacific Northwest produced wind gusts to 85 mph in Oregon, and nearly two inches of rain in twelve hours in the Puget Sound area of Washington State. Ten inches of snow at Stampede Pass WA brought their total snow cover to 84 inches. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thirty-one cities in the central and northeastern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date, with many occurring during the early morning hours. Temperatures in western New York State reached the 60s early in the day. Strong northerly winds in the north central U.S. produced wind chill readings as cold as 60 degrees below zero in North Dakota. (National Weather Summary)

1989 - The barometric pressure at Norway, AK, reached 31.85 inches (1078.4 mb) establishing an all-time record for the North American Continent. The temperature at the time of the record was about 46 degrees below zero (The Weather Channel). Severe arctic cold began to invade the north central U.S. The temperature at Great Falls MT plunged 85 degrees in 36 hours. Valentine NE plummeted from a record high of 70 degrees to zero in just nine hours. Northwest winds gusted to 86 mph at Lander WY, and wind chill readings of 80 degrees below zero were reported in Montana. Sixty-four cities in the central U.S. reported record highs for the date as readings reached the 60s in Michigan and the 80s in Kansas. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - High winds in Montana on the 28th, gusting to 77 mph at Judith Gap, were followed by three days of snow. Heavy snow fell over northwest Montana, with up to 24 inches reported in the mountains. An avalanche covered the road near Essex with six feet of snow. Snow and high winds also plagued parts of the southwestern U.S. Winds gusted to 54 mph at Show Low AZ, and Flagstaff AZ was blanketed with eight inches of snow. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 22 of 72



## WINNING THE WORLD

Dr. A.B. Simpson was one of God's greatest missionaries and Biblical scholars. His passion for those who were unsaved was legendary and he devoted his life to winning them to Christ.

Early one morning, a guest who had spent the night in his humble home was quietly walking down the hallway. As he passed the study of Dr. Simpson, he noticed a light coming from the partially opened door. Out of curiosity he peeked into the room and there he saw him praying and heard him sobbing loudly. The arms of Dr. Simpson were wrapped around a globe and the visitor heard him pleading with God to bless every missionary on every continent. He listened as he asked the Lord to provide for the needs of those who were serving Him around the world. He wanted God to bless them and care for them and to work through them to win many for His Kingdom.

The Psalmist encourages us to "plant in tears." He assures us that when we plant in tears and ask the Lord of the harvest to bring the lost into His Kingdom, He will and there will be a great "harvest with shouts of joy."

We must also remember what Jesus said: "The harvest is so great, but the workers are so few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask Him to send out more workers for His fields."

Let's pray for the harvest and the harvesters.

Prayer: We pray, Heavenly Father, that You will bless those who are doing Your work in Your fields today. We also pray for more who are willing to work with You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: The harvest is so great, but the workers are so few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask Him to send out more workers for His fields. Matthew 9:37-38

*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

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 23 of 72

## 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)

Pay with Venmo: [@paperpaul](https://venmo.com/paperpaul) Phone Number to Confirm: 7460

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 24 of 72



## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.28.25

10 19 31 47 56 6

MegaPlier: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$59,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 22 Mins 58 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.29.25

9 20 23 42 45 2

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$23,190,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 37 Mins 58 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.30.25

9 13 18 23 40 4

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 52 Mins 58 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.29.25

5 10 27 30 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$23,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 52 Mins 58 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.29.25

18 28 41 63 68 4

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 21 Mins 58 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 01.29.25

8 12 31 33 38 18

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$89,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 21 Mins 58 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 25 of 72

## Upcoming Groton Events

- 01/05/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 01/26/2025 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed at the Community Center 10am-1pm
- 01/26/2025 87th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm
- 02/02/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 02/05/2025 FB Live Electronic Hwy 12 Sign Drawing City Hall 12pm
- 03/02/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 03/22/2025 Spring Vendor Fair at the GHS Gym 10am-2pm
- 04/05/2025 Dueling Duo Baseball/Softball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39, 6-11:30pm
- 04/06/2025 Pancake Sunday, Historical Society Fundraiser, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 04/12/2025 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt at the City Park 10am Sharp
- 05/03/2025 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
- 05/26/2025 Memorial Day Services Groton Union Cemetery with lunch at Legion Post #39, 12pm
- 06/07/2025 Day of Play
- 07/04/2025 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 07/13/2025 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm
- 07/09/2025 Legion Auxiliary #39 Salad Buffet & Dessert Bar at the Groton Legion 11am-1pm
- 08/09/2025 2nd Annual Celebration in the Park/Rib Cook-Off 1-9:30pm
- 09/06/2025 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
- 10/31/2025 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm
- 11/27/2025 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1:30pm

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 26 of 72

## News from the **AP** Associated Press

### Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press

#### **BOYS PREP BASKETBALL**

Aberdeen Roncalli 76, Britton-Hecla 35  
Andes Central/Dakota Christian 63, Bon Homme 34  
Belle Fourche 51, Hot Springs 28  
Boyd County, Neb. 57, Burke 37  
Canton 64, Sioux Falls Lutheran 49  
Castlewood 64, Iroquois-Lake Preston 35  
Deuel 51, Milbank 38  
Douglas 66, Lead-Deadwood 59  
Elk Point-Jefferson 55, Tri-Valley 36  
Elkton-Lake Benton 60, Oldham-Ramona-Rutland 39  
Estelline-Hendricks 80, Arlington 16  
Ethan 54, Mitchell Christian 29  
Florence-Henry 58, Great Plains Lutheran 36  
Gregory 67, Avon 32  
Hamlin 77, Sisseton 22  
Hankinson, N.D. 75, Wilmot 57  
Hill City 66, Wall 61  
Huron 55, Yankton 45  
Ipswich 48, Herreid-Selby 29  
Irene-Wakonda 70, Freeman Academy-Marion 39  
Lennox 63, Parker 28  
Leola-Frederick High School 74, Faulkton 55  
Little Wound 57, Lakota Tech 37  
Lyman 70, New Underwood 52  
Miller 69, James Valley Christian School 66  
Pipestone, Minn. 59, Madison 56  
Potter County 63, Faith 37  
Sioux Falls Christian 88, Dakota Valley 66  
Sioux Falls Washington 54, Aberdeen Central 40  
Sioux Valley 63, Beresford 40  
Spearfish 61, Rapid City Central 57  
Stanley County 66, Crow Creek Tribal School 49  
Sully Buttes 68, Hitchcock-Tulare 47  
Vermillion 57, Dell Rapids 53  
Viborg-Hurley 61, Centerville 52  
Wagner 64, Scotland/Menno 48  
Dakota Oyate Challenge=  
Crazy Horse 50, Wakpala 41  
Lower Brule 76, Flandreau Indian 31  
Marty 71, Tiospaye Topa 40  
Omaha Nation, Neb. 80, Tiospa Zina 38  
POSTPONEMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS=  
Philip vs. Newell, ccd.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 27 of 72

## **GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL**

Andes Central/Dakota Christian 44, Bon Homme 27  
Brookings 53, Harrisburg 50  
Burke 52, Boyd County, Neb. 17  
Canton 67, McCook Central-Montrose 39  
Castlewood 54, Iroquois-Lake Preston 18  
Centerville 65, Viborg-Hurley 35  
Chester 60, Bridgewater-Emery 47  
Clark-Willow Lake 56, Redfield 17  
Crow Creek Tribal School 61, Stanley County 31  
Deubrook 56, Flandreau 35  
Douglas 59, Lead-Deadwood 41  
Elk Point-Jefferson 47, Tri-Valley 36  
Faulkton 52, Leola-Frederick High School 32  
Freeman 60, Canistota 28  
Great Plains Lutheran 39, Florence-Henry 34  
Groton 55, Webster 43  
Hamlin 71, Sisseton 58  
Highmore-Harrold 53, Wolsey-Wessington 32  
Hill City 44, Wall 25  
Irene-Wakonda 46, Freeman Academy-Marion 24  
Kadoka 57, Kimball-White Lake 15  
Lennox 54, Parker 22  
Lyman 50, New Underwood 16  
McLaughlin 72, Lemmon High School 48  
Milbank 60, Deuel 40  
Miller 65, James Valley Christian School 15  
Northwestern 49, Potter County 37  
Philip 61, Newell 30  
Rapid City Christian 57, Hot Springs 28  
Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 78, Wessington Springs 62  
Sioux Falls Christian 60, Dakota Valley 48  
Sioux Falls Washington 50, Aberdeen Central 41  
Sioux Valley 66, Beresford 39  
Spearfish 59, Rapid City Central 57  
St Thomas More 41, Sturgis Brown High School 29  
Sully Buttes 42, Hitchcock-Tulare 33  
Timber Lake 45, McIntosh High School 23  
Vermillion 60, Dell Rapids 50  
Wagner 62, Scotland/Menno 15  
Wilmot 70, Aberdeen Christian 10  
Dakota Oyate Challenge=  
Marty 50, Lower Brule 45  
Omaha Nation, Neb. 82, Crazy Horse 12  
Tiospa Zina 55, Wakpala 32  
Tiospaye Topa 78, Flandreau Indian 38

Some high school basketball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

## South Dakota State defeats North Dakota State 72-62

By The Associated Press undefined

FARGO, N.D. (AP) — Oscar Cluff's 23 points helped South Dakota State defeat North Dakota State 72-62 on Thursday night.

Cluff added 15 rebounds and three blocks for the Jackrabbits (15-8, 6-2 Summit League). Joe Saylor shot 7 for 13, including 4 for 6 from beyond the arc to add 19 points. Kalen Garry went 5 of 14 from the field (2 for 9 from 3-point range) to finish with 12 points.

Jackson Moni led the Bison (16-7, 5-3) in scoring, finishing with 19 points and eight rebounds. Tajavis Miller added 14 points and seven rebounds for North Dakota State. Masen Miller finished with 10 points and six rebounds. The Bison broke a five-game winning streak.

South Dakota State's next game is Saturday against North Dakota on the road. North Dakota State visits St. Thomas on Sunday.

## FDA approves painkiller designed to eliminate the risk of addiction associated with opioids

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal officials on Thursday approved a new type of pain pill designed to eliminate the risks of addiction and overdose associated with opioid medications like Vicodin and OxyContin.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration said it approved Vertex Pharmaceuticals' Journavx for short-term pain that often follows surgery or injuries.

It's the first new pharmaceutical approach to treating pain in more than 20 years, offering an alternative to both opioids and over-the-counter medications like ibuprofen and acetaminophen. But the medication's modest effectiveness and lengthy development process underscore the challenges of finding new ways to manage pain.

Studies in more than 870 patients with acute pain due to foot and abdominal surgeries showed Vertex's drug provided more relief than a dummy pill but didn't outperform a common opioid-acetaminophen combination pill.

"It's not a slam dunk on effectiveness," said Michael Schuh of the Mayo Clinic, a pharmacist and pain medicine expert who was not involved in the research. "But it is a slam dunk in that it's a very different pathway and mechanism of action. So, I think that shows a lot promise."

The new drug will carry a list price of \$15.50 per pill, making it many times more expensive than comparable opioids, which are often available as generics for \$1 or less.

Vertex began researching the drug in the 2000s, when overdoses were rocketing upward, principally driven by mass prescribing of opioid painkillers for common ailments like arthritis and back pain. Prescriptions have fallen sharply in the last decade and the current wave of the opioid epidemic is mainly due to illicit fentanyl, not pharmaceutical medicines.

Opioids reduce pain by binding to receptors in the brain that receive nerve signals from different parts of the body. Those chemical interactions also give rise to opioids' addictive effects.

Vertex's drug works differently, blocking proteins that trigger pain signals that are later sent to the brain.

"In trying to develop medicines that don't have the addictive risks of opioid medicines, a key factor is working to block pain signaling before it gets to the brain," Vertex's Dr. David Altshuler, told The Associated Press last year.

Commonly reported side effects with the drug were nausea, constipation, itching, rash and headache.

"The new medication has side effect profiles that are inherently, not only different, but don't involve the risk of substance abuse and other key side effects associated with opioids," said Dr. Charles Argoff of the Albany Medical Center, who consulted for Vertex on the drug's development.

The initial concept to focus on pain-signaling proteins came out of research involving people with a rare hereditary condition that causes insensitivity to pain.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 29 of 72

Vertex has attracted interest from Wall Street for its ambitious drug pipeline that involves winning FDA approval for multiple drugs across several forms of chronic pain, which generally represents a bigger financial opportunity than acute pain.

But the Boston drugmaker's share price plummeted in December when Vertex reported disappointing mid-stage results in a study of patients with chronic nerve pain affecting the lower back and legs. The drug didn't perform significantly better than placebo, the research found.

"We believe the data reflect a near worst-case scenario for this key pipeline program," biotechnology analyst Brian Abrahams said in a research note to investors, adding that the results jeopardized estimates that Vertex's pipeline could be worth billions across multiple forms of pain.

Still, Vertex executives said they plan to move forward with a new, late-stage study of the drug, theorizing that a different trial design could yield better results and pave the way for FDA approval in chronic pain.

## 5 years after Britain left the EU, the full impact of Brexit is still emerging

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Five years ago Friday, two crowds of people gathered near Britain's Parliament — some with Union Jacks and cheers, others European Union flags and tears.

On Jan. 31, 2020 at 11 p.m. London time — midnight at EU headquarters in Brussels — the U.K. officially left the bloc after almost five decades of membership that had brought free movement and free trade between Britain and 27 other European countries.

For Brexit supporters, the U.K. was now a sovereign nation in charge of its own destiny. For opponents, it was an isolated and diminished country.

It was, inarguably, a divided nation that had taken a leap into the dark. Five years on, people and businesses are still wrestling with the economic, social and cultural aftershocks.

"The impact has been really quite profound," said political scientist Anand Menon, who heads the think-tank U.K. in a Changing Europe. "It's changed our economy.

"And our politics has been changed quite fundamentally as well," he added. "We've seen a new division around Brexit becoming part of electoral politics."

A decision that split the nation

An island nation with a robust sense of its historical importance, Britain had long been an uneasy member of the EU when it held a referendum in June 2016 on whether to remain or leave. Decades of deindustrialization, followed by years of public spending cuts and high immigration, made fertile ground for the argument that Brexit would let the U.K. "take back control" of its borders, laws and economy.

Yet the result — 52% to 48% in favor of leaving — came as a shock to many. Neither the Conservative government, which campaigned to stay in the EU, nor pro-Brexit campaigners had planned for the messy details of the split.

The referendum was followed by years of wrangling over divorce terms between a wounded EU and a fractious U.K. that caused gridlock in Parliament and ultimately defeated Prime Minister Theresa May. She resigned in 2019 and was replaced by Boris Johnson, who vowed to "get Brexit done."

It wasn't so simple.

A blow to the British economy

The U.K. left without agreement on its future economic relationship with the EU, which accounted for half the country's trade. The political departure was followed by 11 months of testy negotiations on divorce terms, culminating in agreement on Christmas Eve in 2020.

The bare-bones trade deal saw the U.K. leave the bloc's single market and customs union. It meant goods could move without tariffs or quotas, but brought new red tape, costs and delays for trading businesses.

"It has cost us money. We are definitely slower and it's more expensive. But we've survived," said Lars Andersen, whose London-based company, My Nametags, ships brightly colored labels for kids' clothes and school supplies to more than 150 countries.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 30 of 72

To keep trading with the EU, Andersen has had to set up a base in Ireland, through which all orders destined for EU countries must pass before being sent on. He says the hassle has been worth it, but some other small businesses he knows have stopped trading with the EU or moved manufacturing out of the U.K.

Julianne Ponan, founder and CEO of allergen-free food producer Creative Nature, had a growing export business to EU countries that was devastated by Brexit. Since then she has successfully turned to markets in the Middle East and Australia, something she says has been a positive outcome of leaving the EU.

Having mastered the new red tape, she is now gradually building up business with Europe again.

"But we've lost four years of growth there," she said. "And that's the sad part. We would be a lot further ahead in our journey if Brexit hadn't happened."

The government's Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts that U.K. exports and imports will both be around 15% lower in the long run than if the U.K. had remained in the EU, and economic productivity 4% less than it otherwise would have been.

Brexit supporters argue that short-term pain will be offset by Britain's new freedom to strike trade deals around the world. Since Brexit, the U.K. has signed trade agreements with countries including Australia, New Zealand and Canada.

But David Henig, a trade expert at the European Center for International Political Economy, said they have not offset the hit to trade with Britain's nearest neighbors.

"The big players aren't so much affected," Henig said. "We still have Airbus, we still have Scotch whisky. We still do defense, big pharmaceuticals. But the mid-size players are really struggling to keep their exporting position. And nobody new is coming in to set up."

A lesson in unintended consequences

In some ways, Brexit has not played out as either supporters or opponents anticipated. The COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine piled on more economic disruption, and made it harder to discern the impact of Britain's EU exit on the economy.

In one key area, immigration, Brexit's impact has been the opposite of what many predicted. A desire to reduce immigration was a major reason many people voted to leave the EU, yet immigration today is far higher than before Brexit because the number of visas granted for workers from around the world has soared.

Meanwhile, the rise of protectionist political leaders, especially newly returned U.S. President Donald Trump, has raised the stakes for Britain, now caught between its near neighbors in Europe and its trans-Atlantic "special relationship" with the U.S.

"The world is a far less forgiving place now than it was in 2016 when we voted to leave," Menon said.

Can Britain and the EU be friends again?

Polls suggest U.K. public opinion has soured on Brexit, with a majority of people now thinking it was a mistake. But rejoining seems a distant prospect. With memories of arguments and division still raw, few people want to go through all that again.

Labour Party Prime Minister Keir Starmer, elected in July 2024, has promised to "reset" relations with the EU, but has ruled out rejoining the customs union or single market. He's aiming for relatively modest changes such as a making it easier for artists to tour and for professionals to have their qualifications recognized, as well as on closer cooperation on law enforcement and security.

EU leaders have welcomed the change of tone from Britain, but have problems of their own amid growing populism across the continent. The U.K. is no longer a top priority.

"I completely understand, it's difficult to get back together after quite a harsh divorce," said Andersen, who nonetheless hopes Britain and the EU will draw closer with time. "I suspect it will happen, but it will happen slowly and subtly without politicians particularly shouting about it."

**What to know about the NTSB and the investigation into the DC plane crash**

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 31 of 72

WASHINGTON (AP) — A collision between an American Airlines passenger jet and an Army helicopter near Washington, D.C., that killed 67 people brought renewed focus on the federal agency charged with investigating aviation disasters.

National Transportation Safety Board Chairwoman Jennifer Hommendy described the investigation into the crash Wednesday night as an “all-hands-on-deck event” for the agency during a news conference Thursday in which she appeared with members of the board and a senior investigator overseeing the probe.

Here are some things to know about the NTSB:

What does the agency do?

The NTSB is an independent federal agency responsible for investigating all civil aviation accidents as well as serious incidents in the U.S. involving other modes of transportation, such as railroad disasters and major accidents involving motor vehicles, marine vessels, pipelines and even commercial space operators.

“We’re here to ensure the American people that we are going to leave no stone unturned in this investigation,” Hommendy said, noting the probe is in the very early stages. “We are going to conduct a thorough investigation of this entire tragedy, looking at the facts.”

The agency has five board members who serve five-year terms and are nominated by the president and confirmed by the U.S. Senate.

How will the investigation work?

For the investigation into Wednesday’s crash, the NTSB will establish several different working groups, each responsible for investigating different areas connected to the accident, board member Todd Inman said.

Inman said those groups include operations, which will examine flight history and crewmember duties; structures, which will document airframe wreckage and the accident scene; power plants, which will focus on aircraft engines and engine accessories; systems, which will study the electrical, hydraulic and pneumatic components of the two aircraft; air traffic control, which will review flight track surveillance information, including radar, and controller-pilot communications; survival factors, which will analyze the injuries to the crew and passengers and crash and rescue efforts; and a helicopter group.

The investigation also will include a human-performance group that will be a part of the operations, air traffic control and helicopter groups and will study the crew performance and any factors that could be involved such as human error, including fatigue, medications, medical histories, training and workload, Inman said.

How long will the investigation take?

NTSB officials did not say Thursday how long the investigation would take, but accident investigations often take between one to two years to complete.

The agency typically releases a preliminary report within a few weeks of the accident that includes a synopsis of information collected at the scene.

What is the NTSB’s history?

The NTSB history dates to 1926, when Congress passed a law charging the U.S. Department of Commerce with investigating aircraft accidents.

It was established as an independent agency within the U.S. Department of Transportation in 1967 and then separated by Congress in 1974 as a stand-alone organization, fully independent from any other federal agencies.

Since its creation in 1967, the agency reports it has investigated more than 153,000 aviation accidents and incidents.

## **After the initial ecstasy of freedom, released hostages face a long road to recovery**

By MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — When Ilana Gritzewsky returned to Israel after being held captive in Gaza for 55 days in November 2023, she had so much adrenaline coursing through her body she couldn’t sleep for

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 32 of 72

two days.

"You don't understand that it's really over," Gritzewsky recalled. "You don't know who you are or even what your name is."

A ceasefire between Israel and Hamas is underway and hostages are being released in stages. But after the initial jubilation of being freed, the released captives — who have been held for more than 15 months — are likely to endure a trying reentry, based on the testimony of those who were held hostage themselves.

Gritzewsky, 31, who is originally from Mexico, was kidnapped with her boyfriend from Kibbutz Nir Oz on Oct. 7, 2023, when Hamas-led militants burst across the border, killing around 1,200 people, and kidnapping around 250 people, in an attack that sparked the war in Gaza.

Gritzewsky was released after 55 days during the only previous ceasefire deal a year ago.

More than a year later, Gritzewsky has lingering health issues. She hasn't regained all of the weight that she lost, she's prediabetic, and has lingering pain issues from the kidnapping, when her pelvis and jaw were broken and her leg was burned from the motorcycle exhaust. She suffered hearing loss in one ear.

"I'm still not able to really take care of myself," she said. "I don't think my brain has really grasped everything I've gone through."

She's acknowledges she has neglected her own recovery as she advocates tirelessly for her boyfriend's release.

Fifteen hostages have been released from Gaza, in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners and detainees, as the current ceasefire for the war that has devastated Gaza moves into its second full week. More than 47,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza and wide swaths of the territory have been destroyed. Hamas is expected to release small groups weekly throughout the ceasefire's initial six-week phase. There are approximately 80 hostages left in Gaza, almost half of whom Israel believes to be dead.

The joy of a warm embrace, and a new reality sets in

When Gritzewsky was freed, she was able to do what she had dreamed of during her captivity: hug her mother and see her family.

She was desperate for a good steak, but due to concerns about health complications spurred by eating too much or too quickly in those with prolonged vitamin and nutritional deficiencies, it took time before she could eat what she wanted.

"You're used to hostage conditions, so whenever you get food you put some to the side. You ask if you can go to the bathroom, if you can sleep," she said.

The leadup to her release was traumatic. Gritzewsky said she was told four times she was being released, only to be brought to a different location. Each time her transfer didn't lead to freedom.

"I thought this was going to be my life forever, that I was going to be a doll for Hamas terrorists, I'd end up having babies with them, I wanted to just smash my head into the wall and die," she said.

Watching the released hostages enter Israel over the past week was a "storm of emotions," said Gritzewsky.

"It's finally starting. Our heroes are starting to come out, and they're leaving on their own two feet," she said. But there's also uncertainty about whether the ceasefire will hold. Gritzewsky's boyfriend, Matan Zangauker, 25, is not on the list of 33 hostages expected to be released in the first stage of the ceasefire.

Hostages must adjust to regaining their autonomy

The hostages stay in the hospital for several days as they undergo a battery of tests to determine next steps. All 15 of the hostages released over the past two weeks returned in stable condition but were suffering from "mild starvation" and vitamin deficiencies, according to Dr. Ami Banov, an Israeli military doctor who has treated the released hostages. He said many of them suffered injuries in the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas attack and that the medical care they received was nonexistent or poor quality. Many of them still have pieces of shrapnel in their body.

Some of the women who have returned recently said they were held in tunnels and deprived of sunlight for at least eight months straight, said Banov, which can lead to major vision or skin issues. Those who



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 33 of 72

were held in captivity with others seem to be faring better mentally than hostages who were kept alone, he said.

Each hostage is accompanied by a dedicated team of doctors, nurses, specialists, psychologists, and social workers, medical officials said.

One of the most important things is allowing the returned hostage to lead the recovery, explained Ofrit Shapira, a psychoanalyst who heads a group of health professionals treating freed hostages, their families, and survivors of the Oct. 7 attack. Everyone treating them must ask their permission for each little thing, from turning off a light to changing bedsheets to carrying out medical tests.

"They took everything away that defines them as humans, especially privacy and autonomy, and it's a challenge to help them regain that," she said.

Doctors refer to this process as "grounding" said Banov, who likened it to a decompression process, gradually helping the hostages understand they have regained control over such decisions as what to eat, what to wear and where and when to meet their families.

"We feel obligated to give them the option to do whatever they feel right," he said. But he said everything is being done in "very small steps."

Adina Moshe was freed after 49 days in captivity. In a first-person account on the Israeli news site N12, she said some hostages will return knowing little about any destruction to their homes or the fates of their loved ones. They will remain suspicious of people and have to contend with aggressive media. Any improvement in their condition can easily reverse, she said.

"In their souls, they will continue to remain in the tunnels for a long time," she wrote.

It will take a long time to 'repair wounds of the soul'

Avichai Brodutch, whose wife and three children were kidnapped on Oct. 7 from Kibbutz Kfar Aza will never forget waiting for them to return in the hospital and the moment he saw them for the first time.

"The elevator doors opened and I got my family, reborn," he said.

Brodutch said the return was both overwhelming and joyful because he feared his family had been killed during Hamas' initial attack. He said they returned thin and lice-ridden.

The physical issues were quickly treated. But Brodutch said captivity left a lasting imprint on his family's mental well-being. Each day, he hears a new story about something that happened in Gaza. They relive Oct. 7 over and over, and the challenges remain largest for his wife, Hagar, who cared for their three children and a neighbor's child, Abigail Edan, then 3, while in captivity.

"It's going to take a long time to repair the wounds of the soul," he said.

## **US aid was long a lifeline for Eastern Europe. Trump cuts are sending shockwaves through the region**

By STEPHEN McGRATH and AUREL OBREJA Associated Press

CHISINAU, Moldova (AP) — President Donald Trump's abrupt freeze of U.S. foreign aid is sending shockwaves through Eastern Europe, leaving pro-democracy groups, independent media, civil society initiatives and local governments scrambling to make ends meet in a region often defined by rivalries between East and West.

The U.S. State Department said that the 90-day freeze aims to root out waste and block so-called woke programs to expose U.S.-funded activities "that run contrary to our national interests" — as Trump aggressively rolls out his "America First" agenda.

Fears of a rise in influence from Russia and China

Eastern Europe has been a longtime geopolitical battleground where Western foreign policy interests often collide with those of Moscow or Beijing.

Many fear the cessation of U.S. funds could expose Washington's allies — and create a vacuum that its foes could gladly seek to fill.

"In Moldova's case, foreign donor support is vital to balancing the media landscape," says Oxana Greadenco, the director of independent media platform Moldova.org. "Many television networks and media

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 34 of 72

institutions are funded by Russia so there needs to be a counterbalance ... This is an unprecedented situation, but we are trying not to panic."

The U.S. Agency for International Development, or USAID, informed her that grants officially ended on Jan. 24 and they aren't allowed to spend any remaining funds in their accounts. This week, Greadcenco promoted their online Patreon campaign, which garnered 135 new backers in two days, which should cover salaries for the platform's 16-strong staff through March, she said.

"We did not expect it to impact Moldova so severely, as we thought there would only be a partial cut in funds," she told The Associated Press. "Being aware of how much Moldova depends on U.S. funds, not just NGOs and the press but also local municipalities, many public institutions ... this is a shock for everyone."

Vital aid for former communist countries

Since the 1990s, USAID has invested several billion dollars in countries like Moldova, Serbia, Albania, Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina — all former communist countries with aspirations of joining the European Union.

In these countries, USAID money has promoted democratic institutions and reforms, aided infrastructure and energy security projects, bolstered businesses and economies, and supported a significant number of nongovernmental organizations and independent media platforms. The agency says it "tailors its approach to each country's unique challenges and opportunities."

"It's no exaggeration to say that we have democracy in Moldova, in part thanks to American financial support," Valeriu Pasa, the chairman of the Chisinau-based think-tank WatchDog, said in a statement on Wednesday. He added that the U.S. benefits "from us being more democratic and developed, ensuring we don't turn into a Russian or Chinese colony."

The wide-ranging effects of the USAID spending freeze spanning different sectors highlight how critical the funds are to the region.

Sytrime Dervisholi, executive director of the Prefabricated Construction Association of Kosovo, says the halted USAID funds will adversely affect her association's ability to provide technical assistance to member companies that require vocational education and training, and access to grants.

"Kosovo, but also our association ... is dependent on foreign aid, mostly on U.S. aid," she said. "So we really do hope that this measure will be ... canceled after 90 days," when the funding reviews by U.S. officials have concluded.

Safet Gerxhaliu, an independent economic analyst in Kosovo, also believes the USAID freeze could have "a very negative impact" on the country's future, affecting everything from the government to the private sector and education.

"I do believe that the impact is very bad, because those measures come at the same time that Kosovo is under sanctions from the European community," he said. Brussels froze some funding to Kosovo in 2023 following a series of clashes with ethnic Serb minorities.

Although Serbia obtained EU candidate status in 2012, the Balkan nation is also a key ally of Russia and China in Europe. Under the government of populist President Aleksandar Vucic, reforms in areas such as strengthening the rule of law and tackling corruption have been slow, and the USAID suspension could further hamper progress.

"We currently have a USAID project about public financing. Training for local NGOs regarding following of public finances," Nemanja Nenadic from Transparency International organization in Serbia, told the AP. "This has been put on hold."

US funds help monitor elections

For the Promo-LEX Association, a longtime pro-democracy and human rights NGO in Moldova, USAID funds are vital since they account for about 75-80% of its projects, which include monitoring elections, political financing and parliamentary oversight.

"All USAID-funded activities have been put on hold. Without immediate alternative support, these crucial activities may not continue at the same scale or effectiveness," said Ion Manole, the association's executive director. "Given previous Russian interference — through illicit campaign funding, political corruption,

and disinformation — our observation mission is essential to ensuring electoral transparency.”

Moldova will hold a pivotal parliamentary election this fall which comes after the pro-Western government accused Russia of meddling in two key votes last year — including backing a vast vote-buying scheme in the country of about 2.5 million people.

“Without resources, we cannot deploy long-term observers, conduct election-day monitoring, or track foreign interference effectively,” Manole said. “A change to an anti-Western government could affect Moldova’s European path and ... significantly destabilize the whole of Eastern Europe and the Black Sea region.”

“We remain hopeful that the U.S. government’s evaluation process will allow programs like ours to resume,” he said, adding that his NGO is already seeking alternative funding, mainly from European donors.

A geopolitical opportunity for Moscow

Cristian Cantir, a Moldovan associate professor of international relations at Oakland University, told the AP that any suspension of aid “gives Russia an unnecessary opportunity to exploit and benefit further from Moldova’s weaknesses, which the lack of USAID funding would exacerbate.”

“Moscow would therefore have greater abilities to derail Chisinau from its European Union integration course,” he said. “Similarly, cutting funding to independent news outlets makes it more difficult for journalists to hold corrupt politicians — many of whom have connections to Russia — accountable and therefore weakens Moldova’s sovereignty and institutional independence.”

The Trump administration has cast the aid freeze as an accountability quest to justify American spending abroad. Beyond support for Ukraine in recent years, the U.S. is spending about \$40 billion in foreign aid annually, according to the U.S. State Department.

Greadcenco of the Moldova.org news platform hopes that other international partners will consider stepping in to stem a potential longer-term shortfall.

“These funds are vital to keeping Moldova afloat,” she said. “I dread to think what the complete cessation of these funds would mean for our country.”

## Israeli doctors say five released Thai hostages in ‘fair’ health after 15 months of captivity

By MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

BEER YAAKOV, Israel (AP) — When the mother of one of the Thai hostages held in the Gaza Strip for over a year caught sight of her son on a Facebook livestream after his release Thursday, he had changed so much that she didn’t recognize him at first.

Surasak Rumnao, 32, who was kidnapped from the southern Israeli town of Yesha on Oct. 7, 2023, looked pale and puffy, said his mother, Khammee Lamnao.

“I was so happy that I could not eat anything. His father brought some food to me but I did not want to eat at all,” Khammee said on a video call with The Associated Press after the release of her son.

Dozens of Israeli doctors, nurses and representatives from Israel and Thailand waved flags, sang and cheered Thursday as the five Thai hostages stepped off a military helicopter and entered a hospital outside Tel Aviv, where they will spend a few days undergoing medical tests and recuperating. Three Israelis were also released on Thursday, and Israel released 110 Palestinian prisoners in the exchange.

Besides Surasak, Watchara Sriaoun, 33, Sathian Suwannakham, 35, Pongsak Thaenna, 36, and Bannawat Saethao, 27, were released in Thursday’s exchange.

Hamas militants kidnapped 31 Thai nationals during the assault on southern Israel, making them the largest group of foreigners held captive. Many of the Thai agricultural workers lived in compounds on the outskirts of southern Israeli kibbutzim and towns, and Hamas militants overran those places first.

During an earlier ceasefire in November 2023, 23 Thai nationals were released in a deal negotiated between Thailand and Hamas, with assistance from Qatar and Iran.

According to Thailand’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 46 Thais have been killed during the conflict, including two Thai citizens who were killed on Oct. 7, 2023 and their bodies taken into Gaza.

Dr. Osnat Levzion-Korach, the director of Shamir Medical Center outside Tel Aviv where the five were

taken, said they were in "fair" health, though most were held underground and were not exposed to sunlight for extended periods of time. She said they did not appear to be malnourished and credited their young age with helping them survive captivity in fairly good physical shape.

Thailand's ambassador to Israel, Pannabha Chandramya, said she facilitated video calls between the hostages and their families after they arrived at the hospital, describing them as incredibly emotional, with shouts of joy and tears. She said it was "one of the happiest days of her life," to see their release just a week before she ends her five-year term.

Pannabha said there was no immediate information available about the last Thai hostage left in Gaza, Nattapong Pingsa, nor the two Thai workers whose bodies were taken into Gaza.

Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra thanked Qatar, Egypt, Iran, Turkey, the United States, Israel, and the Red Cross, for helping to negotiate the Thais' release in a separate deal from the Israel-Hamas ceasefire. She said Thailand's minister of foreign affairs would travel to Israel this weekend.

Ambassador Pannabha said the Thai government may bring some relatives of the released hostages to Israel, though many don't have passports, and that the government would help those released return home as soon as they are medically cleared to travel.

Israel will recognize the released Thai hostages as terror victims, a designation that entitles them to financial benefits and health care, said Alex Gandler, the deputy spokesperson of Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

He said Israel's ambassador in Thailand visited some of the hostages released in the previous ceasefire deal on Thursday and that the Israeli government maintains contact with them. Gandler added that since the released Thais did not have family in Israel to greet them upon their release, some of their former employers came to meet them at the hospital.

Gandler said Israel is committed to releasing all the hostages, regardless of nationality. There are still one Thai, one Nepali and one Tanzanian hostage, as well as the bodies of a Tanzanian and the two Thais being held in Gaza, according to the prime minister's office. Israel hopes all the international hostages will be released, both living and dead, Gandler said, which Israel and Hamas will begin discussing next week.

## **Midair collision kills 67 people in the deadliest US air disaster in almost a quarter century**

By LOLITA C. BALDOR, TARA COPP, ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON and LEA SKENE Associated Press  
ARLINGTON, Va. (AP) — A midair collision between an Army helicopter and a jetliner killed all 67 people aboard the two aircraft, officials said, as they scrutinized the actions of the military pilot in the country's deadliest aviation disaster in almost a quarter century.

At least 28 bodies were pulled from the icy waters of the Potomac River after the helicopter apparently flew into the path of the American Airlines regional jet late Wednesday while it was landing at Ronald Reagan National Airport, just across the river from Washington, officials said Thursday. The plane carried 60 passengers and four crew members, and three soldiers were aboard the helicopter.

President Donald Trump told a White House news conference that no one survived.

"We are now at the point where we are switching from a rescue operation to a recovery operation," said John Donnelly, the fire chief in the nation's capital.

The crash occurred before 9 p.m. in some of the most tightly controlled and monitored airspace in the world, just over 3 miles (about 4.8 kilometers) south of the White House and the Capitol.

Air crash investigations can take months, and federal investigators told reporters they would not speculate on the cause.

National Transportation Safety Board investigators recovered the cockpit voice recorder and the flight data recorder from the Bombardier CRJ700 airplane, agency spokesperson Peter Knudson said. They were at the agency's labs for evaluation.

The plane was found upside-down in three sections in waist-deep water, and first responders were

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 37 of 72

searching miles of the Potomac, Donnelly said. The helicopter wreckage was also found. Images from the river showed boats around the partly submerged wing and the mangled wreckage of the plane's fuselage.

American Airlines CEO Robert Isom said the plane was making a normal approach when "the military aircraft came into the path" of the jet.

One air traffic controller was responsible for coordinating helicopter traffic and arriving and departing planes when the collision happened, according to a report by the Federal Aviation Administration that was obtained by The Associated Press. Those duties are often divided between two people, but the airport typically combines the roles at 9:30 p.m, once traffic begins to slow down. On Wednesday the tower supervisor directed that they be combined earlier.

"The position configuration was not normal for the time of day and volume of traffic," the report said. A person familiar with the matter, however, said the tower staffing that night was at a normal level.

The positions are regularly combined when controllers need to step away from the console for breaks, during shift changes or when air traffic is slow, the person said, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal procedures.

The Federal Aviation Administration has long struggled with a shortage of air traffic controllers.

Officials said flight conditions were clear as the jet arrived from Wichita, Kansas, carrying, among others, a group of elite young figure skaters, their parents and coaches, and four union steamfitters from the Washington area.

A top Army aviation official said the crew of the helicopter, a Black Hawk, was "very experienced" and familiar with the congested flying that occurs daily around the city.

"Both pilots had flown this specific route before, at night. This wasn't something new to either one of them," said Jonathan Koziol, chief of staff for Army aviation.

The helicopter's maximum allowed altitude at the time was 200 feet (about 60 meters), Koziol said. It was not immediately clear whether it exceeded that limit, but Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said altitude seemed to be a factor in the collision.

Koziol said investigators need to analyze the flight data before making conclusions about altitude.

Trump opened the news conference with a moment of silence honoring the crash victims, calling it an "hour of anguish" for the country.

But he spent most of his time casting political blame, lashing out at former President Joe Biden's administration and diversity efforts at the Federal Aviation Administration, saying they had led to slipping standards — even as he acknowledged that the cause of the crash was unknown.

Without evidence, Trump blamed air traffic controllers, the helicopter pilots and Democratic policies at federal agencies. He claimed that the FAA was "actively recruiting workers who suffer severe intellectual disabilities, psychiatric problems and other mental and physical conditions under a diversity and inclusion hiring initiative."

Inside Reagan National, the mood was somber Thursday as stranded passengers waited for flights to resume, sidestepping camera crews and staring out the windows at the Potomac, where recovery efforts were barely visible in the distance.

Aster Andemicael had been there since the previous evening with her older adult father, who was flying to Indiana to visit relatives. She spent much of the long night thinking about the victims and their families.

"I've been crying since yesterday," Andemicael said, her voice cracking. "This is devastating."

Flights resumed around midday.

The deadliest plane crash since November 2001

Wednesday's crash was the deadliest in the U.S. since Nov. 12, 2001, when an American Airlines flight slammed into a residential area of Belle Harbor, New York, just after takeoff from Kennedy Airport, killing all 260 people aboard and five people on the ground.

The last major fatal crash involving a U.S. commercial airline occurred in 2009 near Buffalo, New York. Everyone aboard the Bombardier DHC-8 propeller plane was killed, along with one person on the ground, bringing the total death toll to 50.

Experts often highlight that plane travel is overwhelmingly safe, however. The National Safety Council

estimates that Americans have a 1-in-93 chance of dying in a motor vehicle crash, while deaths on airplanes are too rare to calculate the odds. Figures from the Department of Transportation tell a similar story.

But the airspace around Reagan National can challenge even the most experienced pilots no matter how ideal the conditions. They must navigate hundreds of other commercial planes, military aircraft and restricted areas around sensitive sites.

Just over 24 hours before the fatal collision, a different regional jet had to go around for a second chance at landing at Reagan National after it was advised about a military helicopter nearby, according to flight tracking sites and control logs. It landed safely minutes later.

Tragedy stuns Wichita

The crash devastated the Kansas city, which prides itself on being in America's heartland. Wichita hosted the U.S. Figure Skating Championships this year for the first time, along with training camps for top young skaters.

The city has been a major hub for the aircraft industry since the early days of commercial flight, and it is home to the U.S. headquarters for Bombardier, which manufactured the jetliner. So many regional workers have jobs tied to the industry that the area's economy slumps when sales dip.

Several hundred people gathered in the city council chambers for a prayer vigil.

"We will get through this, but the only way we will get through this is together," said the Rev. Pamela Hughes Mason of St. Paul AME Church.

Collision happened in tightly controlled airspace

Flight 5342 was inbound to Reagan National at an altitude of about 400 feet (122 meters) and a speed of about 140 mph (225 kph) when it rapidly lost altitude over the Potomac, according to data from its radio transponder. The Canadian-made Bombardier CRJ-700 twin-engine jet, manufactured in 2004, can be configured to carry up to 70 passengers.

A few minutes before the crash, air traffic controllers directed the jet to a shorter runway, and flight-tracking sites showed that it adjusted its approach.

Less than 30 seconds before the collision, an air traffic controller asked the helicopter if it had the arriving plane in sight.

A crewmember said the aircraft was in sight and requested "visual separation" — allowing it to fly closer than otherwise might be allowed if pilots did not see the plane. Controllers approved the request.

Seconds later, the two aircraft collided.

## US aid agency is in upheaval during foreign assistance freeze and staff departures

By MATTHEW LEE and ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Trump administration changes have upended the U.S. agency charged with providing humanitarian aid to countries overseas, with dozens of senior officials put on leave, thousands of contractors laid off, and a sweeping freeze imposed on billions of dollars in foreign assistance.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio defended the pause on foreign assistance Thursday, saying "the U.S. government is not a charity."

Aid organizations say the funding freeze — and deep confusion over what U.S.-funded programs must stop work as a result — has left them agonizing over whether they could continue operating programs such as those providing round-the-clock nutritional support to extremely malnourished infants and children, knowing that closing the doors means that many of those children would die.

Current and former officials at the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development say staffers were invited to submit requests to exempt certain programs from the foreign aid freeze, which President Donald Trump imposed Jan. 20 and the State Department detailed how to execute on Jan. 24.

Three days later, at least 56 senior career USAID staffers were abruptly placed on administrative leave.

Three officials said many of those put on leave were lawyers involved in determining what programs

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 39 of 72

might qualify for waivers, helping write proposals and submitting those waiver requests as they believed they had been invited to do.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal. A Trump administration directive that aid organizations interpret as a gag order has left them unwilling to speak publicly for fear of permanently losing U.S. funding.

In an internal memo Monday about the staffing changes, new acting USAID administrator Jason Gray said the agency had identified "several actions within USAID that appear to be designed to circumvent the President's Executive Orders and the mandate from the American people."

"As a result, we have placed a number of USAID employees on administrative leave with full pay and benefits until further notice while we complete our analysis of these actions," Gray wrote.

A former senior USAID official said those put on leave had been helping aid organizations navigate the "confusing process" to seek waivers from the aid pause for specific life-saving projects, such as continuing clean water supplies for displaced people in war zones.

Others were identified as having been involved in diversity, equity and inclusion programming, which the administration has banned.

On Thursday, a USAID human resources official who tried to reverse the action, saying there was no justification for it, was himself placed on leave, according to two of the officials who had viewed internal emails and verified them as authentic. Reporters from ProPublica and Vox first reported the emails on X.

The State Department and White House didn't respond to messages seeking comment about the staffing changes.

The new leaders at USAID also abruptly laid off contractors who made up about half the workforce in the agency's humanitarian bureau Tuesday, knocking them out of systems so that some vanished in the middle of videoconferences, the former senior official said. The targeted institutional service contractors do everything from administrative and travel support to grant processing and data analytics.

The staffing changes came three days after the State Department issued guidelines last Friday for implementing Trump's executive order freezing foreign assistance for 90 days. The department says it's reviewing the money the United States is spending to ensure it adheres to administration policy.

The guidelines initially exempted only military aid to Israel and Egypt and emergency food programs but also said program administrators and implementors could apply for waivers for programs that they believe would meet administration standards.

On Tuesday, Rubio issued a broader waiver for programs that provide other "life-saving" assistance, including medicine, medical services, food and shelter, and again pointed to the possibility of waivers. Rubio pointed to the broadened exemptions in an interview Thursday with SiriusXM host Megyn Kelly.

"We don't want to see people die and the like," he said.

Rubio said there would be a program-by-program review of which projects make "America safer, stronger or more prosperous."

The step of shutting down U.S.-funded programs during the 90-day review meant the U.S. was "getting a lot more cooperation" from recipients of humanitarian, development and security assistance, Rubio said. "Because otherwise you don't get your money."

The State Department said that since the aid freeze went into effect, it has approved dozens of waivers, although many were returned because they did not include enough detail. It said waiver requests for programs costing "billions of dollars" have been received and are being reviewed.

The department did not specify how many waiver requests had been denied but said thus far its actions had stopped more than \$1 billion from being spent on programs and projects that are "not aligned with an America First agenda."

Even with the broadening of exemptions for life-saving care, uncertainty surrounds what U.S.-funded programs legally can continue. Hundreds of thousands of people globally are going without access to medicine and humanitarian supplies and clinics are not getting medicine in time because of the funding freeze, aid organizations warn.

## Crews in midair crash included 2nd-generation pilot and flight attendant 'full of life'

By JEFF AMY and RIO YAMAT Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Sam Lilley knew he wanted to fly and began training to be a pilot, like his father, right out of college.

"You don't really expect to meet people that find their purpose so early on in life, and Sam found his in flying," said Kaitlin Sells, who met Lilley while they were students at Georgia Southern University.

Lilley was the first officer aboard the American Airlines jet carrying 60 passengers and four crew members that collided midair Wednesday night with an Army helicopter carrying three soldiers, legislators in Georgia said.

Authorities say there were no survivors after the two aircraft plummeted into the Potomac River in the country's deadliest aviation disaster since 2001. At least 28 bodies have been pulled from the icy waters of the river as recovery operations continue.

Lilley and the rest of the American Airlines crew were traveling on a daily direct route from Wichita, Kansas, to Washington, D.C., at the time of the collision. The soldiers aboard the Black Hawk helicopter were conducting an annual night proficiency training flight, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said, adding they were a "fairly experienced crew."

Here is what we know so far about some members of the two flight crews:

Sam Lilley

Lilley's father, Timothy Lilley, told WAGA-TV in Atlanta that he was in Washington waiting for answers.

"This is undoubtedly the worst day of my life," said Timothy Lilley, who also is a longtime pilot and served as a U.S. Army helicopter pilot for 20 years, noting he flew similar routes in and out of the Pentagon.

"I was so proud when Sam became a pilot," he wrote on Facebook. "Now it hurts so bad I can't even cry myself to sleep. I know I'll see him again but my heart is breaking."

Timothy Lilley said his son was excelling in his career and personal life at the time of his death and was engaged to be married later this year.

Sam Lilley graduated in 2018 with a degree in marketing but decided to become a pilot. He had earlier graduated from Richmond Hill High School, just south of Savannah, Georgia, where he had been an active member of Coastal Community Christian Church.

A local news story from 2011 highlighted his efforts to raise money to build a water well in a Zambian village.

Sells, his friend from college, said there was no one better suited to be a pilot.

"There was no one that cared more. There was no one that was more passionate," Sells said, saying Lilley valued "taking care of people and them putting their trust in him."

Outside the plane, Lilley was devoted to making others happy and the type of person who always was the first onto a dance floor, Sells said.

"I don't think I've ever seen that man in a bad mood, spreading negativity," Sells said. "He was the type of person where if someone was not having a good time or someone was upset, he would do everything in his power to pull them out of it."

Jonathan Campos

The captain of the American Airlines flight was 34-year-old Jonathan Campos, according to multiple media reports. His aunt, Beverly Lane, told the New York Times that Campos had wanted to be a pilot since the age of 3.

"I think he wanted to be free, and be able to fly and soar like a bird," Lane said.

She told the newspaper she talked with Campos on Wednesday, just before the fateful flight. He told her he was looking forward to an upcoming Caribbean cruise with family.

Campos was a 2015 graduate of Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach, Florida, where he studied Aeronautical Science, according to the university.



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 41 of 72

Danasia Elder

Danasia Elder was a flight attendant on the commercial flight, WSOC-TV in Charlotte, North Carolina, reported.

Elder's brother-in-law, Brandon Payne, described her as "full of life," highlighting her love for God, her kids and travel. She was married with two children, Kayden and Dallas.

"She was a great wife, a great parent, a great friend," Payne told the news station. "She was very bright, very smart. She was an entrepreneur. This flight attendant thing was kind of like one of her dreams she wanted to do."

Payne said he is proud of his sister-in-law for pursuing her dream.

"She would want y'all do the same thing she did. Chase your dreams, no matter what. Don't let nothing scare you, push you away. Just believe in yourself, believe in God, and follow the path," Payne said.

Ryan O'Hara

Ryan O'Hara was one of three soldiers aboard the Black Hawk helicopter.

"Ryan was just the most committed, disciplined person I remember working with," said Josh Muehlendorf, a senior instructor pilot in the U.S. Army. "He had such great integrity."

The two flew together numerous times on the same route in D.C. several years prior to the fatal crash and O'Hara took rules and procedures seriously, according to Mehlendorf.

"Ryan was one of those crew chiefs who always had our back," he said. "It's really hard to stomach a guy as professional and excellent as he was."

Andrew Eaves

Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves said on the social platform X that the state was mourning the death of Andrew Eaves, who was also aboard the Army helicopter.

Eaves was from the small town of Brooksville in eastern Mississippi, Reeves said.

His wife Carrie Eaves confirmed he was on the helicopter in a Facebook post Thursday.

"We ask that you pray for our family and friends and for all the other families that are suffering today. We ask for peace while we grieve," the post read.

She also asked that people refrain from posting negative comments on social media.

"These families children do not need to suffer more pain," she wrote.

## Mushers and dogs braved a horrific Alaska winter to deliver lifesaving serum 100 years ago

By MARK THIESSEN Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — The Alaska Gold Rush town of Nome faced a bleak winter. It was hundreds of miles from anywhere, cut off by the frozen sea and unrelenting blizzards, and under siege from a contagious disease known as the "strangling angel" for the way it suffocated children.

Now, 100 years later, Nome is remembering its saviors — the sled dogs and mushers who raced for more than five days through hypothermia, frostbite, gale-force winds and blinding whiteouts to deliver life-saving serum and free the community from the grip of diphtheria.

Among the events celebrating the centennial of the 1925 "Great Race of Mercy" are lectures, a dog-food drive and a reenactment of the final leg of the relay, all organized by the Nome Kennel Club.

Remembering the mushers and dogs for 'heroic effort'

"There's a lot of fluff around celebrations like this, but we wanted to remember the mushers and their dogs who have been at the center of this heroic effort and ... spotlight mushing as a still-viable thing for the state of Alaska," said Diana Haecker, a kennel club board member and co-owner of Alaska's oldest newspaper, the Nome Nugget.

"People just dropped whatever they were doing," she said. "These mushers got their teams ready and went, even though it was really cold and challenging conditions on the trail."

Other communities are also marking the anniversary — including the village of Nenana, where the relay began, and Cleveland, Ohio, where the serum run's most famous participant, a husky mix named Balto,

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 42 of 72

is stuffed and displayed at a museum.

Jonathan Hayes, a Maine resident who has been working to preserve the genetic line of sled dogs driven on the run by famed musher Leonhard Seppala, is recreating the trip. Hayes left Nenana on Monday with 16 Seppala Siberian sled dogs, registered descendants of Seppala's team.

The historic trek to neutralize the diphtheria epidemic in Nome

Diphtheria is an airborne disease that causes a thick, suffocating film to develop at the back of the throat; it was once a leading cause of death for children. The antitoxin used to treat it was developed in 1890, and a vaccine in 1923; it is now exceedingly rare in the U.S.

Nome, western Alaska's largest community, had about 1,400 residents a century ago. Its most recent supply ship had arrived the previous fall, before the Bering Sea froze, without any doses of the antitoxin. Those the local doctor, Curtis Welch, had were outdated, but he wasn't worried. He hadn't seen a case of diphtheria in the 18 years he had practiced in the area.

Within months, that changed. In a telegram, Welch pleaded with the U.S. Public Health Service to send serum: "An epidemic of diphtheria is almost inevitable here."

The first death was a 3-year-old boy on Jan. 20, 1925, followed the next day by a 7-year-old girl. By the end of the month, there were more than 20 confirmed cases. The city was placed under quarantine.

West Coast hospitals had antitoxin doses, but it would take time to get them to Seattle and then onto a ship for Seward, an ice-free port south of Anchorage. In the meantime, enough for 30 people was found at an Anchorage hospital.

It still had to get to Nome. Airplanes with open-air cockpits were ruled out as unsuited for the weather. There were no roads or trains that reached Nome.

Instead, officials shipped the serum by rail to Nenana in interior Alaska, some 675 miles (1,086 kilometers) from Nome via the frozen Yukon River and mail trails.

Thanks to Alaska's new telegraph lines and the spread of radio, the nation followed along, captivated, as 20 mushers — many of them Alaska Natives — with more than 150 dogs relayed the serum to Nome. They battled deep snow, whiteouts so severe they couldn't see the dogs in front of them, and life-threatening temperatures that plunged at times to minus 60 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 51 degrees Celsius).

The antitoxin was transported in glass vials covered with padded quilts. Not a single vial broke.

Seppala, a Norwegian settler, left from Nome to meet the supply near the halfway point and begin the journey back. His team, led by his dog Togo, traveled more than 250 miles (320 kilometers) of the relay, including a treacherous stretch across frozen Norton Sound.

After about 5 1/2 days, the serum reached its destination on Feb. 2, 1925. A banner front-page headline in the San Francisco Chronicle proclaimed: "Dogs victors over blizzard in battle to succor stricken Nome."

The official record listed five deaths and 29 illnesses. It's likely the toll was higher; Alaska Natives were not accurately tracked.

Balto gains fame as unlikely dog to bring serum to Nome

Seppala and Togo missed the limelight that went to his assistant, Gunnar Kaasen, who drove the dog team led by Balto into Nome. Balto was another of Seppala's dogs, but was used to only haul freight after he was deemed too slow to be on a competitive team.

Balto was immortalized in movies and with statues in New York's Central Park and one in Anchorage intended as a tribute to all sled dogs. He received a bone-shaped key to the city of Los Angeles, where legendary movie actress Mary Pickford placed a wreath around his neck.

But he and several team members were eventually sold and kept in squalid conditions at a dime museum in Los Angeles. After learning of their plight, an Ohio businessman spearheaded an effort to raise money to bring them to Cleveland. After dying in 1933, Balto was mounted and placed on display at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History.

Iditarod pays homage to the serum run

Today, the most famous mushing event in the world is the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race, which is not based on the serum run but on the Iditarod Trail, a supply route from Seward to Nome. Iditarod organizers

are nevertheless marking the serum run's centennial, with a series of articles on its website and by selling replicas of the medallions each serum run musher received a century ago, race spokesperson Shannon Noonan said in an email. This year's Iditarod starts March 1.

"The Serum Run demonstrated the critical role sled dogs played in the survival and communication of remote Alaskan communities, while the Iditarod has evolved into a celebration of that tradition and Alaska's pioneering spirit," Noonan said.

## **Conspiracies, espionage, an enemies list: Takeaways from a wild day of confirmation hearings**

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Conspiracy theories about vaccines. Secret meetings with dictators. An enemies list. President Donald Trump's most controversial Cabinet nominees — Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Tulsi Gabbard and Kash Patel — flooded the zone Thursday in back-to-back-to-back confirmation hearings that were like nothing the Senate has seen in modern memory.

The onslaught of claims, promises and testy exchanges did not occur in a political vacuum. The whirlwind day — Day 10 of the new White House — all unfolded as Trump himself was ranting about how diversity hiring caused the tragic airplane-and-helicopter crash outside Washington's Ronald Reagan National Airport.

And it capped a tumultuous week after the White House abruptly halted federal funding for programs Americans rely on nationwide, under guidance from Trump's budget pick Russ Vought, only to reverse course amid a public revolt.

"The American people did not vote for this kind of senseless chaos," said Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., earlier.

It was all challenging even the most loyal Republicans who are being asked to confirm Trump's Cabinet or face recriminations from an army of online foot-soldiers aggressively promoting the White House agenda. A majority vote in the Senate, which is led by Republicans 53-47, is needed for confirmation, leaving little room for dissent.

Here are some takeaways from the day:

Tulsi Gabbard defends her loyalty — and makes some inroads

Gabbard is seen as the most endangered of Trump's picks, potentially lacking the votes even from Trump's party for confirmation for Director of National Intelligence. But her hearing before the Senate Intelligence Committee offered a roadmap toward confirmation.

It opened with the chairman, Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark., swatting back claims that Gabbard is a foreign "asset," undercover for some other nation, presumably Russia. He said he reviewed some 300 pages of multiple FBI background checks and she's "clean as a whistle."

But Virginia Sen. Mark Warner, the top Democrat on the panel, questioned whether she could build the trust needed, at home and abroad, to do the job.

Gabbard, a lieutenant colonel in the Army Reserve, defended her loyalty to the U.S. She dismissed Sen. Jerry Moran, a Kansas Republican, when he asked whether Russia would "get a pass" from her.

"Senator, I'm offended by the question," Gabbard responded.

Pressed on her secret 2017 trip to meet with then-Syrian President Bashar Assad, who has since been toppled by rebels and fled to Russia, she defended her work as diplomacy.

Gabbard may have made some inroads with one potentially skeptical Republican. Sen. Susan Collins of Maine asked whether Gabbard would recommend a pardon for Edward Snowden. The former government contractor was charged with espionage after leaking a trove of sensitive intelligence material, and fled to residency in Russia.

Gabbard, who has called Snowden a brave whistleblower, said it would not be her responsibility to "advocate for any actions related to Snowden."

Picking up one notable endorsement, Gabbard was introduced by an influential voice on intelligence matters — former Sen. Richard Burr, a Republican who was chairman of the Intelligence Committee.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 44 of 72

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. pressed again on vaccine safety

Kennedy faced a second day of grilling to become Health and Human Services secretary, this time at the Senate Health committee, as senators probed his past views against vaccines and whether he would ban the abortion drug mifepristone.

But what skeptical Democratic senators have been driving at is whether Kennedy is trustworthy — if he holds fast to his past views or has shifted to new ones — echoing concerns raised by his cousin Caroline Kennedy that he is a charismatic “predator” hungry for power.

“You’ve spent your entire career undermining America’s vaccine program,” said Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn. “It just isn’t believable that when you become secretary you are going to become consistent with science.”

Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., took the conversation in a different direction reading Kennedy’s comments about the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks in which he said in a social media post, “It’s hard to tell what is conspiracy and what isn’t.”

“Wow,” Kaine said.

Kennedy responded that his father, the late Robert F. Kennedy, told him that people in positions of power do lie.

But Kennedy’s longtime advocacy in the anti-vaccine community continued to dominate his hearings.

Sen. Maggie Hassan, D-N.H., choked back tears when she told Kennedy that his work caused grave harm by relitigating what is already “settled science” — rather than helping the country advance toward new treatments and answers in healthcare.

But Sen. Tommy Tuberville, R-Ala., immediately shifted the mood saying his own sons are fans of the nominee and he thanked Kennedy for “bringing the light” particularly to a younger generation interested in his alternative views.

Pressed on whether he would ban the abortion drug mifepristone, Kennedy said it’s up to Trump.

“I will implement his policy.”

A combative Kash Patel spars with senators over his past

Kash Patel emerged as perhaps the most combative nominee in a testy hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee as the nominee to lead the FBI.

Confronted with his own past words, writings and public comments, Patel, a former Capitol Hill staffer turned Trump enthusiast, protested repeatedly that his views were being taken out of context as “unfair” smears.

Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., read aloud Patel’s false claims of voter fraud in the 2020 election and another about his published “enemies list” that includes former Trump officials who have been critical of the president.

“We’re going to come after you,” she read him saying.

Patel dismissed her citations as a “partial statement” and “false.”

Klobuchar, exasperated, told senators, “It’s his own words.”

Patel has stood by Trump in the aftermath of the Jan. 6, 2021, attack at the Capitol and produced a version of the national anthem featuring Trump and the so-called J6 choir of defendants as a fundraiser. The president played the song opening his campaign rallies.

During one jarring moment, Sen. Adam Schiff, D-Calif., asked Patel to turn around and look at the U.S. Capitol Police officers protecting the hearing room.

“Tell them you’re proud of what you did. Tell them you’re proud that you raised money off of people that assaulted their colleagues, that pepper sprayed them, that beat them with poles,” Schiff said.

Patel fired back: “That’s an abject lie, you know it. I never, never, ever accepted violence against law enforcement.”

Patel said he did not endorse Trump’s sweeping pardon of supporters, including violent rioters, charged in the Jan. 6 attack.

“I do not agree with the commutation of any sentence of any individual who committed violence against law enforcement,” Patel said.

In another Cabinet development, Republicans on the Senate Budget Committee advanced Trump's budget nominee Russ Vought toward confirmation after Democrats boycotted the meeting in protest.

Vought was an architect of Project 2025 and was influential in the White House memo to freeze federal funding this week, which sparked panic in communities across the country. Advocacy organizations challenged the freeze in court, and the White House quickly rescinded it, for now.

## Midair collision kills 67 people in the deadliest US air disaster in almost a quarter century

By LOLITA C. BALDOR, TARA COPP, ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON and LEA SKENE Associated Press  
ARLINGTON, Va. (AP) — A midair collision between an Army helicopter and a jetliner killed all 67 people aboard the two aircraft, officials said Thursday, as they scrutinized the actions of the military pilot in the country's deadliest aviation disaster in almost a quarter century.

At least 28 bodies were pulled from the icy waters of the Potomac River after the helicopter apparently flew into the path of the American Airlines regional jet late Wednesday while it was landing at Ronald Reagan National Airport, just across the river from Washington, officials said. The plane carried 60 passengers and four crew members, and three soldiers were aboard the helicopter.

President Donald Trump told a White House news conference that no one survived.

"We are now at the point where we are switching from a rescue operation to a recovery operation," said John Donnelly, the fire chief in the nation's capital.

The crash occurred before 9 p.m. in some of the most tightly controlled and monitored airspace in the world, just over 3 miles (about 4.8 kilometers) south of the White House and the Capitol.

Air crash investigations can take months, and federal investigators told reporters they would not speculate on the cause.

National Transportation Safety Board investigators recovered the cockpit voice recorder and the flight data recorder from the Bombardier CRJ700 airplane, agency spokesperson Peter Knudson said. They were at the agency's labs for evaluation.

The plane was found upside-down in three sections in waist-deep water, and first responders were searching miles of the Potomac, Donnelly said. The helicopter wreckage was also found. Images from the river showed boats around the partly submerged wing and the mangled wreckage of the plane's fuselage.

American Airlines CEO Robert Isom said the plane was making a normal approach when "the military aircraft came into the path" of the jet.

One air traffic controller was responsible for coordinating helicopter traffic and arriving and departing planes when the collision happened, according to a report by the Federal Aviation Administration that was obtained by The Associated Press. Those duties are often divided between two people, but the airport typically combines the roles at 9:30 p.m, once traffic begins to slow down. On Wednesday the tower supervisor directed that they be combined earlier.

"The position configuration was not normal for the time of day and volume of traffic," the report said. A person familiar with the matter, however, said the tower staffing that night was at a normal level.

The positions are regularly combined when controllers need to step away from the console for breaks, during shift changes or when air traffic is slow, the person said, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal procedures.

The Federal Aviation Administration has long struggled with a shortage of air traffic controllers.

Officials said flight conditions were clear as the jet arrived from Wichita, Kansas, carrying, among others, a group of elite young figure skaters, their parents and coaches, and four union steamfitters from the Washington area.

A top Army aviation official said the crew of the helicopter, a Black Hawk, was "very experienced" and familiar with the congested flying that occurs daily around the city.

"Both pilots had flown this specific route before, at night. This wasn't something new to either one of

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 46 of 72

them," said Jonathan Koziol, chief of staff for Army aviation.

The helicopter's maximum allowed altitude at the time was 200 feet (about 60 meters), Koziol said. It was not immediately clear whether it exceeded that limit, but Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said altitude seemed to be a factor in the collision.

Koziol said investigators need to analyze the flight data before making conclusions about altitude.

Trump opened the news conference with a moment of silence honoring the crash victims, calling it an "hour of anguish" for the country.

But he spent most of his time casting political blame, lashing out at former President Joe Biden's administration and diversity efforts at the Federal Aviation Administration, saying they had led to slipping standards — even as he acknowledged that the cause of the crash was unknown.

Without evidence, Trump blamed air traffic controllers, the helicopter pilots and Democratic policies at federal agencies. He claimed that the FAA was "actively recruiting workers who suffer severe intellectual disabilities, psychiatric problems and other mental and physical conditions under a diversity and inclusion hiring initiative."

Inside Reagan National, the mood was somber Thursday as stranded passengers waited for flights to resume, sidestepping camera crews and staring out the windows at the Potomac, where recovery efforts were barely visible in the distance.

Aster Andemicael had been there since the previous evening with her older adult father, who was flying to Indiana to visit relatives. She spent much of the long night thinking about the victims and their families.

"I've been crying since yesterday," Andemicael said, her voice cracking. "This is devastating."

Flights resumed around midday.

The deadliest plane crash since November 2001

Wednesday's crash was the deadliest in the U.S. since Nov. 12, 2001, when an American Airlines flight slammed into a residential area of Belle Harbor, New York, just after takeoff from Kennedy Airport, killing all 260 people aboard and five people on the ground.

The last major fatal crash involving a U.S. commercial airline occurred in 2009 near Buffalo, New York. Everyone aboard the Bombardier DHC-8 propeller plane was killed, along with one person on the ground, bringing the total death toll to 50.

Experts often highlight that plane travel is overwhelmingly safe, however. The National Safety Council estimates that Americans have a 1-in-93 chance of dying in a motor vehicle crash, while deaths on airplanes are too rare to calculate the odds. Figures from the Department of Transportation tell a similar story.

But the airspace around Reagan National can challenge even the most experienced pilots no matter how ideal the conditions. They must navigate hundreds of other commercial planes, military aircraft and restricted areas around sensitive sites.

Just over 24 hours before the fatal collision, a different regional jet had to go around for a second chance at landing at Reagan National after it was advised about a military helicopter nearby, according to flight tracking sites and control logs. It landed safely minutes later.

Tragedy stuns Wichita

The crash devastated the Kansas city, which prides itself on being in America's heartland. Wichita hosted the U.S. Figure Skating Championships this year for the first time, along with training camps for top young skaters.

The city has been a major hub for the aircraft industry since the early days of commercial flight, and it is home to the U.S. headquarters for Bombardier, which manufactured the jetliner. So many regional workers have jobs tied to the industry that the area's economy slumps when sales dip.

Several hundred people gathered in the city council chambers for a prayer vigil.

"We will get through this, but the only way we will get through this is together," said the Rev. Pamela Hughes Mason of St. Paul AME Church.

Collision happened in tightly controlled airspace

Flight 5342 was inbound to Reagan National at an altitude of about 400 feet (122 meters) and a speed

of about 140 mph (225 kph) when it rapidly lost altitude over the Potomac, according to data from its radio transponder. The Canadian-made Bombardier CRJ-700 twin-engine jet, manufactured in 2004, can be configured to carry up to 70 passengers.

A few minutes before the crash, air traffic controllers directed the jet to a shorter runway, and flight-tracking sites showed that it adjusted its approach.

Less than 30 seconds before the collision, an air traffic controller asked the helicopter if it had the arriving plane in sight.

A crewmember said the aircraft was in sight and requested "visual separation" — allowing it to fly closer than otherwise might be allowed if pilots did not see the plane. Controllers approved the request.

Seconds later, the two aircraft collided.

## Israelis and Palestinians rejoice after more hostages and prisoners are freed

By MOHAMMAD JAHJOUH, WAFAA SHURAFU and ISABEL DeBRE Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip (AP) — Eight more hostages were freed from the Gaza Strip by Hamas-led militants on Thursday in a sometimes chaotic process that briefly delayed Israel's release of 110 Palestinian prisoners and underscored the fragility of the ceasefire that began earlier this month.

The exchange of hostages for prisoners is a key part of a ceasefire agreement aimed at ending the deadliest and most destructive war ever fought between Israel and Hamas. Fifteen hostages and hundreds of prisoners have been released so far, and militants still hold dozens more hostages abducted in their Oct. 7, 2023, attack that ignited the war.

Also on Thursday, Hamas confirmed the death of Mohammed Deif, head of its military wing and one of the alleged masterminds of the Oct. 7 attack. Israel said six months ago he was killed in an airstrike in Gaza.

Israelis rejoiced as images of the freed hostages reuniting with their families were shown live on TV — and then replayed throughout the day and night. In downtown Tel Aviv, crowds of people gathered outside the hospitals where hostages were taken to cheer — and cry — at the sight of the incoming ambulances.

Earlier, masked and armed militants freed three Israelis — after first parading them through unruly crowds in Gaza — as well as five Thai nationals, who were working on farms in southern Israel when the deadliest attack in the country's history took place.

There was a different joyous homecoming on the other side of the divide. Scores of Palestinians thronged the buses carrying released prisoners into the West Bank city of Ramallah. Some offered wreaths of flowers in the colors of the Palestinian flag and warm jackets to cover the men hoisted on the shoulders of supporters.

Shortly before, Palestinians threw stones outside the prison and Israeli forces fired tear gas in an effort to clear the area.

Scenes of chaos as hostages are released

The release of prisoners came hours after militants in Gaza held off thousands of boisterous Palestinian onlookers as they handed hostages over to the Red Cross.

Hamas released seven of the hostages in front of the destroyed home of its slain leader, Yahya Sinwar, as crowds pressed in. The militant group called it a "message of determination," but it nearly derailed this month's third swap of hostages for prisoners and triggered the latest in a series of disputes that have tested the durability of the truce.

The first hostage — female soldier Agam Berger, 20 — was released after Hamas paraded her in front of a smaller crowd in the heavily destroyed urban Jabaliya refugee camp in northern Gaza.

Hours later, at a handover of the other seven in the southern city of Khan Younis, hundreds of militants from Hamas and the smaller Islamic Jihad group arrived with a convoy.

Footage showed hostage Arbel Yehoud, 29, looked stunned as masked militants hustled her through the shouting crowd, pushing people back. Also released were Gadi Moses, an 80-year-old man, and the five Thai laborers. Both Yehoud and Moses are dual German-Israeli nationals.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 48 of 72

The scenes of the hostages being marched through seemingly hostile crowds in Gaza was unnerving for Israelis who became vicarious participants in the hostages' ordeals. Netanyahu condemned the "shocking scenes" and called on international mediators to ensure the safety of hostages in future releases — a commitment he said he later received.

Israel identified the Thai hostages released as: Watchara Sriaoun, 33; Pongsak Thaenna, 36; Sathian Suwannakham, 35; Surasak Rumnao, 32; and Bannawat Saethao, 27. Thai officials said they appeared to be in good health.

Yehoud had been at the center of a dispute earlier this week over the sequence in which the hostages would be released. Mediators from the United States, Egypt and Qatar resolved it with an agreement that Yehoud would be released with the others on Thursday.

About 20 of her friends gathered in southern Israel watched as the tense scene unfolded on live television. They cried after Yehoud was turned over to the Red Cross.

Moses looked stunned as he was led by Israeli soldiers to reunite with his family. Footage released by the Israeli military showed his relatives bursting into the room to embrace him. His daughter exclaimed repeatedly, "my father, my father!"

Prisoners released in the West Bank to throngs of well-wishers

Among the Palestinian prisoners who were released, 30 were serving life sentences for deadly attacks against Israelis; seven were allowed to return to the occupied West Bank, but the rest were being transferred to Egypt before further deportation.

Palestinians view the prisoners released as heroes who have sacrificed for the cause of ending Israel's decades-long occupation of lands they want for a future state.

As Red Cross buses approached, the families of Palestinian prisoners caught their first glimpses of their loved ones through the windshields, some shattered in the melee of stone-throwing and tear gas-firing.

Zakaria Zubeidi — a prominent former militant leader and theater director who took part in a dramatic jailbreak in 2021 before being rearrested days later — was beaming, wrapped in a Palestinian checkered keffiyeh and surrounded by whistling and cheering crowds. He wept as he pulled his relatives into hugs.

"The treatment in prison was harsh, but these masses of people made us forget the suffering of 22 years," said Ali Farajallah, who was released after 22 years behind bars for his role in attacks against Israelis.

Rights groups have described harsh treatment in Israeli jails since the Israel-Hamas war began.

Hamas confirms the death of a longtime leader

Arab television networks cut into livestreams of the Palestinian prisoner release to carry a press conference held by Hamas to confirm the death of Deif and four other members.

The confirmation dealt, at least symbolically, a powerful blow to the militant group, particularly since the elusive Deif was considered iconic among Hamas fighters for surviving multiple assassination attempts.

Israel had previously announced each of the five deaths confirmed on Thursday.

Hamas' confirmation comes as the group reasserts itself as Gaza's dominant political force despite the Israeli military's stated goal of destroying and dislodging it. Earlier this week, Hamas militants welcomed Palestinians returning home to northern Gaza.

Ceasefire holds for now but next phase will be harder

A total of 33 hostages will be released from Gaza in the first, six-week phase of the ceasefire, including women, children, older adults and sick or wounded men. Nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners will be freed in exchange. Israel says Hamas has confirmed that eight of the hostages to be released in this phase are dead.

Israeli forces have pulled back from most of Gaza, allowing hundreds of thousands of people to return to what remains of their homes and humanitarian groups to surge assistance.

The deal calls for Israel and Hamas to negotiate a second phase in which Hamas would release the remaining hostages and the ceasefire would continue indefinitely. The war could resume in early March if an agreement is not reached.

Israel says it is still committed to destroying Hamas, even after the militant group reasserted its rule over Gaza within hours of the truce. A key far-right partner in Netanyahu's coalition is already calling for



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 49 of 72

the war to resume after the ceasefire's first phase.

Hamas says it won't release the remaining hostages without an end to the war and a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza.

Tens of thousands killed

In the Oct. 7 attack that started the war, Hamas-led militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted around 250.

More than 47,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's ensuing air and ground war, over half of them women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not say how many of the dead were militants.

The Israeli military says it killed over 17,000 fighters, without providing evidence. It blames civilian deaths on Hamas because its fighters operate in dense residential neighborhoods and put military infrastructure near homes, schools and mosques.

## Pilots have long worried about DC's complex airspace contributing to a catastrophe

By RYAN J. FOLEY, JIM MUSTIAN AND MICHAEL BIESECKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The airspace around Washington, D.C., is congested and complex — a combination aviation experts have long worried could lead to catastrophe.

Those fears materialized Wednesday night when an American Airlines plane collided with a military helicopter, taking the lives of 67 people, including three soldiers and more than a dozen figure skaters.

Even in peak flying conditions, experts said, the airspace around Reagan Washington National Airport can challenge the most experienced pilots, who must navigate hundreds of other commercial planes, military aircraft and restricted areas around sensitive sites.

"This was a disaster waiting to happen," said Ross Aimer, a retired United Airlines captain and chief executive officer of Aero Consulting Experts. "Those of us who have been around a long time have been yelling into a vacuum that something like this would happen because our systems are stretched to extremes."

There was no immediate word on the cause of the collision, but officials said flight conditions were clear as the jet arrived from Wichita, Kansas. Investigators have already begun examining every aspect of the crash, including questions about why the Army Black Hawk helicopter was 100 feet above its permitted altitude and whether the air traffic control tower was properly staffed. A Federal Aviation Administration report obtained by The Associated Press described staffing levels as "not normal for the time of day and volume of traffic."

As authorities piece together the nation's deadliest U.S. airline crash since 2001, the tragedy has raised new concerns about the specific dangers at Reagan National, which has seen a series of near-misses in recent years. Experts and some lawmakers said they are concerned that the airspace is about to get more congested in the wake of Congress' decision last year to ease restrictions that had limited the airport to nonstop flights within 1,250 miles (2,012 kilometers) of Washington, with few exceptions.

Lawmakers enabled airlines to launch new routes to destinations like Seattle and San Francisco. The plan fueled intense debate about congestion versus convenience, with some legislators heralding new flights to their home states while others warned of potential tragedy. The flight that crashed Wednesday was not part of the expansion. It was added by American Airlines in January of last year amid a push by Kansas lawmakers for more service between Reagan National and Wichita.

Airliners and helicopters in close proximity

Commercial aircraft flying in and out of Reagan National have long had to contend with military helicopters traversing the same airspace within at-times startling proximity.

"Even if everybody is doing what they're supposed to be doing, you've only got a few hundred feet separation between aircraft coming in to land and the many helicopters along that route," said Jim Brauchle, a former U.S. Air Force navigator and aviation attorney. "It doesn't leave a whole lot margin of error."

Pilots have long warned of a "nightmare scenario" near the airport with commercial jetliners and military

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 50 of 72

helicopters crossing paths, especially at night when the bright lights of the city can make seeing oncoming aircraft more difficult.

Just over 24 hours before Wednesday's fatal collision, a different regional jet had to go around for a second chance at landing at Reagan National after it was advised about a military helicopter nearby, according to flight tracking sites and control logs. It landed safely minutes later.

Retired U.S. Army National Guard pilot Darrell Feller said the crash this week reminded him of an incident he experienced a decade ago when he was flying a military helicopter south along the Potomac River near Reagan National.

An air traffic controller advised him to be on the lookout for a jetliner landing on Runway 3-3, an approach that requires planes to fly directly over the route used by military and law enforcement helicopters transiting the nation's capital.

Not always easy to spot airliners

Feller was unable to pick out the oncoming jetliner against the lights of the city and cars on a nearby bridge. He immediately descended, skimming just 50 feet over the water to ensure the descending jetliner would pass over him.

"I could not see him. I lost him in the city lights," Feller, who retired from the Army in 2014, recounted Thursday. "It did scare me."

Feller's experience was eerily similar to what experts said may have happened with the crew of the Army helicopter Wednesday shortly before 9 p.m. as they flew south along the Potomac and collided with an American Airlines Flight 5342 landing at Runway 3-3.

As the American Airlines jet approached the airport, air traffic controllers asked its pilots if they could land on Runway 3-3 rather than the longer — and busier — north-south runway. The jet's pilots altered their approach, heading over the east bank of the Potomac before heading back over the river to land on 3-3.

Less than 30 seconds before the crash, an air traffic controller asked the Army helicopter if it had the American Airlines plane in sight, and the military pilot responded that he did. The controller then instructed the Black Hawk to pass behind the jet. Seconds after that last transmission, the two aircraft collided in a fireball.

Feller, who served as an instructor pilot for the D.C. National Guard, said he had several rules for new pilots to avoid such collisions. He warned them to stay below the mandated 200-foot ceiling for helicopters. And he urged them to be on guard for planes landing on 3-3 because they could be difficult to spot.

Those planes' "landing lights are not pointed directly at you," Feller said, adding that those lights also get "mixed up with ground lights, with cars."

Not the first such deadly crash

Wednesday's crash was reminiscent of a deadly collision in 1949, when Washington's airspace was considerably less crowded. A passenger plane on final approach to what is now Reagan Airport collided with a military plane, plunging both aircraft to the Potomac River and killing 55 people. At the time, it was the deadliest air crash in the U.S.

Jack Schonely, a retired Los Angeles Police Department helicopter pilot, said he's been a passenger on helicopter rides through D.C. and was always struck by how complicated it seems for the pilots.

"You've got two large airports. You've got multiple restricted areas. You've got altitude restrictions. Routine restrictions, and a lot of air traffic," he said. "There's a lot going on in a tight area."

Robert Clifford, an aviation attorney, said the U.S. government should temporarily halt military helicopter flights in the airspace used by commercial airlines near Reagan National.

"I can't get over how stunningly clear it is that this was a preventable crash and this should never, ever have occurred," Clifford said. "There have been discussions for some time about the congestion associated with that and the potential for disaster. And we saw it come home last night."

## Dick Button, Olympic great and voice of skating, dies at 95

By BARRY WILNER and DAVE SKRETTA AP Sports Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — Dick Button was more than the most accomplished men's figure skater in history. He was one of his sport's great innovators and promoters, the man responsible not only for inventing the flying camel spin but describing it to generations of fans.

He was an athlete and actor, a broadcaster and entrepreneur.

"Dick was one of the most important figures in our sport," said Scott Hamilton, the 1984 Olympic champion. "There wasn't a skater after Dick who wasn't helped by him in some way."

The winner of two Olympic gold medals and five consecutive world championships, Button died Thursday in North Salem, New York, at age 95. His death was confirmed by his son, Edward, who did not provide a cause, though Button had been in declining health.

"The two-time Olympic champion's pioneering style and award-winning television commentary revolutionized figure skating," U.S. Figure Skating said. "His legacy will live on forever. We extend our deepest condolences to his family and loved ones."

His death further shook a tight-knit figure skating community already reeling from Wednesday night's crash of an American Airlines flight and an Army helicopter outside Washington, D.C., that killed everyone on board. Two teenage skaters, their mothers and two former world champions who were coaching at the Skating Club of Boston — where Button also skated and which he remained close to the rest of his life — were among the 14 people killed from the skating community.

The trophy room at the Skating Club of Boston is named in Button's honor, and the club has hosted the Dick Button Artistic Figure Skating Showcase, which is designed to promote the beauty and innovation of skating as an art form.

Button's impact on figure skating began after World War II. He was the first U.S. men's champion — and his country's youngest at the time at age 16 — when the competition returned in 1946. Two years later, he took gold at the St. Moritz Olympics, back when the competitions were staged outdoors. He performed the first double axel in any competition and became the first American to win the men's event, paving the way for future champions such as Hamilton, Brian Boitano and Nathan Chen.

"By the way, that jump had a cheat on it," Button once said. "But listen, I did it and that was what counted."

That first Olympic title began his dominance of international skating, and U.S. amateur sports in general. He was the first figure skater to win the prestigious Sullivan Award in 1949 — no other figure skater won it until Michelle Kwan in 2001.

In 1952, while still a student at Harvard, Button won a second gold at the Oslo Games, making more history with the first triple jump (a loop) in competition. Soon after, he won a fifth world title, then gave up his eligibility as an amateur to perform in shows; all Olympic sports were subject to an amateur-professional division at the time.

"I had achieved everything I could have dreamed of doing as a skater," said Button, who had earned a law degree from Harvard in 1956. "I was able to enjoy the Ice Capades and keep my hand in skating, and that was very important to me."

With a frank and often brutally honest style, Button became an Emmy Award-winning TV analyst, helping viewers learn not only the basics but also the nuances of a sport unfamiliar to most casual fans. He became as much a fixture on ABC's "Wide World of Sports" as Jim McKay and the hapless ski jumper that went tumbling down the slope.

"Dick Button is the custodian of the history of figure skating and its quintessential voice," Boitano, the 1988 Olympic champion, said in Button's autobiography. "He made the words 'lutz' and 'salchow' part of our everyday vocabulary."

After the 1961 plane crash that killed the entire U.S. figure skating team on the way to the world championships, which then were canceled, Button persuaded ABC Sports executive Roone Arledge to televise the 1962 event on "Wide World." That's when he joined the network as a commentator, and took figure skating to a mainstream television audience.

Button later ran professional events that provided skaters an avenue to profit from their ability once

their competitive careers were over. The World Professional Figure Skating Championships, the Challenge of Champions and others provided Hamilton, the dance team of Jayne Torvill and Christopher Dean, Kurt Browning, Katarina Witt and others a new platform to perform.

Button even tried his hand at acting, performing in such shows and films as "The Young Doctors" and "The Bad New Bears Go to Japan." His studio, Candid Productions, helped to produce made-for-TV programs such as "Battle of the Network Stars."

"Dick Button created an open and honest space in figure skating broadcasting where no topic or moment was off-limits," said Johnny Weir, the three-time U.S. champion and current NBC Sports figure skating analyst. "He told it like it was, even when his opinion wasn't a popular one. His zingers were always in my mind when I would perform for him, and I wanted to make him as happy and proud as I would my coaches.

"That is something very special about commentating figure skating," Weir said. "As an athlete, we rarely have an opportunity to speak, and we rely on the TV voices to tell our story for us. Nobody could do it like Mr. Button."

Button is survived by his longtime partner, Dennis Grimaldi, and his two children, Edward and Emily.

## **The Latest: Collision between passenger jet and Army helicopter near DC leaves no survivors**

By The Associated Press undefined

A collision between an American Airlines passenger jet and an Army helicopter at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport near Washington, D.C., killed 67 people, including more than a dozen figure skaters. The plane was carrying 60 passengers and four crew members at the time of the crash late Wednesday. Three soldiers were on board the helicopter.

President Donald Trump said at a briefing Thursday that there were no survivors.

The body of the plane was found upside down in three sections in waist-deep water. The wreckage of the helicopter was also found. At least 28 bodies were pulled from the icy waters of the Potomac River. There was no immediate word on the cause of the collision, but officials said flight conditions were clear as the jet arrived from Wichita, Kansas.

U.S. Figure Skating previously confirmed that several skaters, coaches and family members were on the commercial flight after attending a development camp that followed the national championships that ended Sunday in Wichita.

Here's the latest:

Cockpit voice and flight data recorders have been recovered from the plane

"NTSB investigators recovered the cockpit voice recorder and flight data recorder from the Bombardier CRJ700 airplane involved in yesterday's midair collision at DCA," National Transportation Safety Board spokesperson Peter Knudson said. "The recorders are at the NTSB labs for evaluation."

2 Chinese nationals were among the victims

The Chinese embassy in the U.S. said two Chinese nationals were among the victims of the crash and would provide consular protection and assistance. It has asked the U.S. side to verify the information, officially inform the Chinese side and provide assistance to the families of the victims.

"The Chinese Embassy extends deepest condolences to all the victims and sympathies to the bereaved families," an embassy statement said. It did not offer further details on the victims.

Aviation experts have long worried DC's congested airspace could lead to catastrophe

Even in peak flying conditions, experts said, the airspace around Reagan Airport can challenge the most experienced pilots, who must navigate hundreds of other commercial planes, military aircraft and restricted areas around sensitive sites.

"This was a disaster waiting to happen," said Ross Aimer, a retired United Airlines captain and chief executive officer of Aero Consulting Experts. "Those of us who have been around a long time have been yelling into a vacuum that something like this would happen because our systems are stretched to extremes."

A different regional jet had to maneuver around a military helicopter at Reagan Airport just over 24 hours

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 53 of 72

prior to collision

Just over 24 hours before Wednesday's fatal midair collision, a different regional jet executed a go-around maneuver when descending to land at Reagan Airport due to a military helicopter in the same area.

Flight tracking sites and air traffic control logs show the Embraer E-175 was cleared to land at the airport's Runway 19 and advised about a helicopter in its vicinity. It executed a go-around after its automated collision avoidance system ordered what is known as a 'resolution advisory' to avoid nearby traffic, which put the aircraft out of proper alignment for landing. It landed safely minutes later.

The military helicopter, callsign PAT1, was advised of the descending airplane. Flight tracking sites show the plane flew roughly 1,000 feet (300 meters) above the helicopter, a normally acceptable separation.

Airline pilots are trained to respond immediately to resolution advisories, which are designed to avoid a potential mishap, but occasionally sound alarms for traffic that does not pose an immediate threat to safety.

Other deadly commercial airline crashes in the US

Fatal crashes of commercial aircraft in the U.S. have become a rarity. The deadliest recent crash was in 2009 near Buffalo, New York. All 45 passengers and the four crew members were killed when the Bombardier DHC-8 propeller plane crashed into a house. One person on the ground also was killed.

The collision Wednesday of the Bombardier CRJ-701 twin-engine plane and UH-60 Blackhawk occurred over the Potomac River and the aircraft fell into the water. In 1982 an Air Florida flight crashed into the Potomac and killed 78.

Pilots union says its accident investigation team is working with the NTSB

Jason Ambrosi, president of the Air Line Pilots Association said the union's accident investigation team was on the scene working with the National Transportation Safety Board, and its Critical Incident Response Program was working to support union members and the families involved in the collision.

"We mourn the loss of our friends, colleagues, and members of our ALPA and Association of Flight Attendants union family," he said.

Ambrosi reiterated in a statement what the NTSB has said — the investigation must have the time to do its work.

"A lot of details and speculation will come out in response to this tragedy, but we must remember to let the investigation run its course," he said.

Air traffic control staffing was normal, AP source says

One air traffic controller was responsible for coordinating helicopter traffic and arriving and departing planes when the collision happened, according to a report by the Federal Aviation Administration obtained by The Associated Press.

The configuration was "not normal," the report said, but a person familiar with the matter said the staffing at the air traffic control tower on Wednesday night was at a normal level. The positions are regularly combined when controllers need to step away from the console for breaks, are in the process of a shift change, or air traffic is slow, the person said, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal procedures.

Asian Pacific American Caucus criticizes Trump's comments blaming DEI

The leadership of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus has also criticized President Trump for his attempts to blame DEI policies for the collision, calling it "despicable."

"President Trump has made baseless claims that seek to blame people of color for this horrific tragedy. It is despicable," read the statement from the congressional caucus. "We don't need racist lies, we need answers, and a leader who will put aside partisan politics to unite our country. President Trump has failed to meet this moment. The American people deserve better."

FAA has long struggled with air traffic controller shortages

The Federal Aviation Administration has long struggled with a shortage of air traffic controllers and identified fatigue as a factor that might lead to mistakes.

After a number of highly publicized close calls between planes that were following orders from control towers, the FAA said last summer that it would increase the minimum time controllers get between shifts starting this year.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 54 of 72

An agreement between the agency and the National Air Traffic Controllers Association called for 10 hours off between shifts, 12 hours off before and after a midnight shift, and a limit on consecutive overtime assignments.

Although then-FAA Administrator Mike Whitaker said in September that the agency had met its 2024 goal of hiring 1,800 controllers, airline executives said they expected the problem to persist.

The cause of Wednesday night's crash is under investigation. A preliminary FAA report obtained by The Associated Press said one air traffic controller was working two positions at the time.

Experts stress that midair collisions are incredibly rare

"Your drive to the airport is riskier than your flight from the airport," said Michael McCormick, an assistant professor and program coordinator for air traffic management at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach, Florida. "Aviation remains, in spite of what happened yesterday night, the safest mode of transportation in the United States."

Hassan Shahidi, president and CEO of Flight Safety Foundation, also stressed how rare this kind of deadly accident is.

"This should have never happened. It is absolutely preventable," Shahidi said, adding that he and others will continue to follow the NTSB's investigation into the exact cause of the collision to help ensure that it never happens again.

Part of that might come down to modernization and additional resources, he said.

"We have highly trained air traffic controllers all over the country. We have highly trained pilots all over the country. They're doing their jobs well," he said. "But we also need to understand what else is needed — in terms of technology, in terms of modernization of the air traffic control system, in terms of additional personnel and training support."

Black lawmakers blast Trump's comments blaming DEI for the collision

A group of Black lawmakers issued a statement mourning the lives of those killed in the D.C. plane collision and blasting Trump's comments that diversity, equity and inclusion efforts were at fault.

"It is our hope that the outpour of condolences and support from people across our nation will bring solace during this season of bereavement," said Rep. Yvette Clark, chair of the Congressional Black Caucus. "However, the opportunity to fully focus our sympathies on those who are in mourning and who may not have even retrieved their dearly departed was marred by a truly disgusting and disgraceful display of racist political prognostication."

The group added that diversity efforts "are American values" that "work to benefit all Americans who have been traditionally kept out of opportunities.

The Army has seen an increase in major aviation accidents in recent years

The Army saw 15 flight and two ground Class A incidents in fiscal year 2024, according to safety data obtained by The Associated Press through the Freedom of Information Act and a January 2025 Army aviation safety report.

Class A incidents are any aviation accident that results in the destruction of the aircraft, deaths of service members or more than \$2.5 million in damage to the airframe.

In a briefing with Pentagon reporters Thursday, Army aviation Chief of Staff Jonathan Koziol said the spike in incidents last year had prompted the Army to do a safety stand-down, in which units pause flight operations to evaluate safety procedures "to not allow these types of incidents to happen," Koziol said.

Trump signs an aviation order rolling back federal diversity initiatives

He says the presidential memorandum on aviation safety will undo "damage" done to related federal agencies by the Biden administration.

The president singled out policies meant to promote diversity and inclusion by the Biden White House and of the administrations of other Democrats, saying, "What they've done is disgraceful."

Signing the memorandum in the Oval Office, Trump repeated — without evidence — his past assertions that federal diversity programs contributed to a helicopter and a regional jet colliding near Washington, D.C.

He said the memorandum can help ensure that "we have very strong people running" key aviation

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 55 of 72

agencies.

President of air traffic controllers union says they 'cannot comment on the specifics' of the crash  
Nick Daniels, president of the National Air Traffic Controllers Association, wrote in a statement that "it would be premature to speculate on the root cause of this accident."

"We will wait for the National Transportation Safety Board to complete its work and use that information to help guide decisions and changes to enhance and improve aviation safety," he continued.

Daniels also offered condolences for those affected by "the tragic loss of life."

NTSB chair says investigators will look at 'facts'

National Transportation Safety Board Chair Jennifer Homendy said Thursday at a press conference that "we look at facts on our investigation and that will take some time."

She was responding to a question on speculation about the cause of the crash.

At a press conference earlier Thursday, Trump suggested that the Federal Aviation Administration's diversity efforts had made air travel less safe.

The president asserted his opinion even though the crash has yet to be fully investigated and there has been no determination as to whether the FAA did anything wrong.

Homendy also said the black boxes from the aircraft have not been recovered yet.

Attorney says airport's crowded space is well-known fact

The crowded airspace around the airport was well known before the crash, said Robert Clifford, an aviation attorney from Chicago involved in numerous airline disaster cases.

"I can't get over how stunningly clear it is that this was a preventable crash and this should never, ever have occurred," Clifford told The Associated Press.

"There have been discussions for some time about the congestion associated with that and the potential for disaster. And we saw it come home last night," Clifford said.

He said the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport was "very unique" as it is not only located near the nation's capital but also is a highly restricted space.

"However, because of the massive military presence in our capital, the Pentagon and a number of bases, there's understandably a lot of military aircraft in the area."

Army: Crew of Blackhawk that crashed was 'very experienced'

The crew that was flying the Army Blackhawk helicopter was "very experienced" and were not new to the unit or the congested flying that occurs daily around Washington, D.C., said Jonathan Koziol, chief of staff for Army aviation.

"Both pilots had flown this specific route before, at night. This wasn't something new to either one of them," Koziol said. "Even the crew chief in the back has been in the unit for a very long time, very familiar with the area, very familiar with the routing structure."

The crew included an instructor pilot and pilot in command were experienced to the point where either crew member "could manage that helicopter by themselves."

Bodies of 3 Army soldiers recovered

The bodies of all three soldiers who were on board the Army helicopter have been recovered, U.S. officials say.

Officials said the remains will be at Air Force Mortuary Affairs Operations at Dover Air Force Base in Delaware. That office coordinates the dignified transfer of fallen service members. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss details not yet announced. No identities of the crew have been released.

Flights resume at Reagan Airport

Flights resumed at the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport outside of Washington, D.C., shortly after 11 a.m. Thursday. Many flights had been canceled, and other flights were delayed until late morning or afternoon.

Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy, who was sworn in earlier this week, was asked if he could reassure Americans that the United States still has the safest airspace in the world.

"Can I guarantee the American flying public that the United States has the most safe and secure airspace in the world? And the answer to that is, absolutely yes, we do," he said.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 56 of 72

Likely the deadliest plane crash in a quarter-century

If all 64 people on board the plane were killed, it would be the deadliest U.S. airline crash since Nov. 12, 2001, when an American Airlines flight crashed into a residential area of Belle Harbor, New York, just after takeoff from Kennedy Airport, killing all 260 people aboard.

Former transportation secretary calls Trump's criticisms 'despicable'

"As families grieve, Trump should be leading, not lying," former Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg posted on the social platform X shortly after Trump sharply criticized Buttigieg and denounced what he called Democratic-led efforts to promote diversity at federal agencies.

Trump said Buttigieg at the transportation department had "run it right into the ground with his diversity."

Buttigieg noted that when he led the agency, it "had zero commercial airline crash fatalities out of millions of flights on our watch."

Schumer: Trump focus is on conspiracy theories about crash

Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer of New York said Trump spewing conspiracy theories about the crash "turns your stomach."

"It's one thing for internet pundits to spew off conspiracy theories, it's another for the president of the United States," Schumer said at the Capitol.

Schumer's remarks appear aimed at statements by Trump made Thursday. After opening a news conference with a moment of silence for the crash victims — Trump used most of his time at the podium to cast political blame.

Without evidence, Trump blamed air traffic controllers, the helicopter pilots and Democratic policies at federal agencies.

Trump says he thinks FAA diversity hiring has hurt air safety

Trump has suggested that the Federal Aviation Administration's diversity efforts had made air travel less safe.

The president asserted his opinion even though the crash has yet to be fully investigated and there has been no determination as to whether the administration did anything wrong.

Trump also suggested he might make sweeping changes at federal aviation agencies, singling out air traffic controllers. There could be firings "if we find that people aren't mentally competent," he said.

Trump blamed previous administrations' efforts to promote diversity at federal agencies for contributing to the crash. Asked why he thought that was an issue what happened, he responded, "Because I have common sense."

Trump: No one survived

Trump says there were no survivors in the collision.

"As one nation, we grieve for every precious soul that has been taken from us so suddenly," Trump said at a press briefing Thursday.

"Sadly, there are no survivors," he said.

Trump said it was still not clear what led to the crash. He said the U.S. military and the National Transportation Safety Board are investigating.

"We'll find out how this disaster occurred and will ensure that nothing like this ever happens again," he said.

Coast Guard joins in rescue and recovery effort

Coast Guard boats are helping to scour the chilly waters of the Potomac River for victims of the crash. Every "available U.S. Coast Guard resource for search and rescue" has been deployed to join other agencies, said Secretary Kristi Noem of the Department of Homeland Security.

"We are actively monitoring the situation & stand ready to support local responders," Noem said on X.

In a statement, the Coast Guard says its pollution crews have been mobilized and are ready to respond if necessary.

The Coast Guard is working with the Army Corps of Engineers and Navy's Supervisor of Salvage and Diving to coordinate removing the wreckage and keeping river traffic out of the area until it becomes safe.

Trump sends message of condolence



# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 57 of 72

Trump has sent a message of condolence to those affected by the deadly collision at a D.C.-area airport. "I have been fully briefed on the terrible accident which just took place at Reagan National Airport. May God Bless their souls," he said on Truth Social. "Thank you for the incredible work being done by our first responders. I am monitoring the situation and will provide more details as they arise."

Six killed from Boston-area figure skating club

Two young figure skaters, two of their parents and two highly regarded Russian figure skating coaches were among those killed in the crash.

"This will have long reaching impacts for our community," said Doug Zeghibe, chief executive at the Skating Club of Boston, said during a news conference where he was visibly emotional.

U.S. Figure Skating previously confirmed that several skaters, coaches and family members were on the commercial flight after attending a development camp that followed the national championships, which wrapped up Sunday in Wichita, Kansas.

Russian figure skaters are among the victims

Two Russian figure skating coaches, Evgenia Shishkova and Vadim Naumov, whose son recently finished fourth at the U.S. Figure Skating Championships, were among those killed.

They were well-known Russian skaters who coaching at the Skating Club of Boston since 2017.

Officials say they do not believe anyone survived in the Wednesday crash.

FAA joins NTSB in investigation of midair collision

Investigators from the Federal Aviation Administration will join the NTSB-led investigation of the collision. Airport to reopen at 11 a.m.

Located along the Potomac River, just southwest of Washington, D.C., the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport is a popular choice because it's much closer to the U.S. capital than the larger Dulles International Airport.

All takeoffs and landings from Reagan Airport were halted following the crash. It will reopen at 11 a.m. Thursday, the Federal Aviation Administration announced.

Fire chief confident that remains of victims will be recovered

Washington Fire Chief John Donnelly says he's confident that the remains of those killed in the crash will be recovered, but it may take some time. At least 28 bodies have been recovered.

Officials said flight conditions were clear as the jet coming from Wichita, Kansas, was making a routine landing when the helicopter flew into its path.

American Airlines has sent up centers in Washington and Wichita, Kansas, for people searching for information about family members and families.

Duffy says accident was "absolutely" preventable

Asked about Trump suggesting in an overnight social media post that the collision could have been prevented, Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy said, "Do I think this was preventable? Absolutely.

Duffy also said passengers should be "assured" that flying is safe.

"I would just say that everyone who flies in American skies expects that we fly safely. That when you depart an airport, you get to your destination," he said. "That didn't happen last night, and I know that President Trump, his administration, the FAA, the DOT, we will not rest until we have answers for the families and for the flying public. You should be assured that when you fly, you're safe."

Duffy says US has "safest airspace in the world"

"We have early indicators of what happened here and I will tell you with complete confidence we have the safest airspace in the world," Duffy said.

Duffy said that, prior to the collision, the plane and helicopter flight paths "were not unusual for what happens in the DC airspace"

"Everything was standard in the lead up to the crash. Obviously there was something that happened here," Duffy said.

27 people traveling on American Airlines jet confirmed dead

First responders have recovered the bodies of 27 passengers from the American Airlines jet, officials say.

Officials said they were still searching for other casualties but did not believe there were any other survivors, which would make it the deadliest U.S. air crash in nearly 24 years.

Rescuers now working to recover the dead

Michael Waltz, Trump's national security advisor, said on Fox News Channel that at "about 4 a.m., we transitioned from response to recovery."

Asked if that was everyone aboard, Waltz said, "That's what it's looking like."

## **Senate confirms Doug Burgum as interior secretary after Trump tasked him to boost drilling**

By MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

The Senate confirmed Doug Burgum as interior secretary late Thursday after President Donald Trump tapped the North Dakota billionaire to spearhead the Republican administration's ambitions to boost fossil fuel production.

The vote was 79-18. More than half of Senate Democrats joined all 53 Republicans in voting for Burgum.

Burgum, 68, is an ultra-wealthy software industry entrepreneur who came from a small North Dakota farming community, where he worked at his family's grain elevator.

He served two terms as governor of the oil-rich state and launched a presidential campaign in 2023, but dropped out months later and quickly endorsed Trump.

Trump also picked Burgum to chair a new National Energy Council that's tasked with achieving American "energy dominance." He would have a seat on the National Security Council — a first for the interior secretary.

His directive from Trump is to make it even easier for energy companies to tap fossil fuel resources, including from public lands. That raised alarms among environmentalists and some Democrats as greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels bake the planet.

Burgum eagerly assisted the energy industry during his time as governor, when he was also profiting from the lease of family land to oil companies, according to records obtained by The Associated Press.

During his confirmation hearing, Burgum said the U.S. can use energy development as leverage to promote peace and to lower consumer costs.

He raised concerns about the reliability of renewable power sources promoted under former President Joe Biden, and said the U.S. needs to generate more electricity from sources such as coal and nuclear that can run constantly.

Democrats in response accused the Trump administration of abandoning an "all of the above" energy policy to favor fossil fuels.

"They said wind is dead on the offshore. They are trying to do as much of this as possible to create demand for coal, for fossil gas," Hawaii Democratic Sen. Brian Schatz said during a Thursday floor speech.

Wyoming Sen. John Barrasso, the second-ranking Republican in the Senate, said Burgum would rightfully prioritize energy innovation over regulation.

"He's going to take the common-sense action of unlocking our lands for oil and for gas production," Barrasso said. He added that more than 600,000 acres of land in Wyoming have been approved for energy production but were not offered for development by the Biden administration.

The U.S. currently produces more crude oil than any nation in history, according to the Energy Information Administration. More cost-effective technology in recent decades drove drilling booms in states including New Mexico, Texas and North Dakota, where vast expanses of rural farmland have been industrialized by oil and gas companies.

The booms brought billions of dollars in tax revenue to state and federal governments. But burning those fuels is also unleashing immense volumes of carbon dioxide that scientists say is warming the planet.

The Interior Department has jurisdiction over a half-billion acres of federal land and vast areas offshore. Those areas produce about one-quarter of U.S. oil annually.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 59 of 72

The interior secretary also oversees the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management and other subagencies.

Burgum succeeds Deb Haaland, who under Biden sharply scaled back oil and gas sales and promoted solar and wind projects on federal lands.

Trump made energy development a centerpiece of his first term and is again vowing to abolish restrictions on the industry that are intended to protect the environment and public health.

Burgum, during his hearing earlier this month before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources committee, suggested to lawmakers that carbon dioxide from fossil fuels could be captured to neutralize their contribution to global warming.

Carbon-capture skeptics say the technology is untested at scale and allows the fossil-fuel industry to continue largely unchanged even as climate change becomes increasingly urgent.

During Haaland's tenure at the Interior Department, officials also reversed actions taken during Trump's first term that weakened protections for imperiled species while making it easier for private developers to pursue projects on public lands.

Republicans in Congress have said they plan to again seek changes to rules on endangered species and they want Burgum to help.

Burgum says federal lands can be used for many purposes including recreation, logging and oil and gas production that can lift local economies.

"Not every acre of federal land is a national park or a wilderness area," he told lawmakers.

## Marianne Faithfull, singer and pop icon, dies at 78

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Marianne Faithfull, the British pop star, muse, libertine and old soul who inspired and helped write some of the Rolling Stones' greatest songs and endured as a torch singer and survivor of the lifestyle she once embodied, has died. She was 78.

Faithfull passed away Thursday in London, her music promotion company Republic Media said.

"It is with deep sadness that we announce the death of the singer, songwriter and actress Marianne Faithfull," a company spokesperson said in a statement. "Marianne passed away peacefully in London today, in the company of her loving family. She will be dearly missed."

The blonde, voluptuous Faithfull was a celebrity before turning 17, homeless by her mid-20s and an inspiration to peers and younger artists by her early 30s, when her raw, explicit "Broken English" album brought her the kinds of reviews the Stones had received. Over the following decades, her admirers would include Beck, Billy Corgan, Nick Cave and PJ Harvey, although her history would always be closely tied to the Stones and to the years she dated Mick Jagger.

"I am so saddened to hear of the death of Marianne Faithfull," Jagger wrote on Instagram. "She was so much a part of my life for so long. She was a wonderful friend, a beautiful singer and a great actress."

One of the first songs written by Jagger and Keith Richards, the melancholy "As Tears Go By," was her breakthrough hit when released in 1964 and the start of her close and tormented relationship with the band.

She and Jagger began seeing each other in 1966 and became one of the most glamorous and notorious couples of "Swinging London," with Faithfull once declaring that if LSD "wasn't meant to happen, it wouldn't have been invented." Their rejection of conventional values was defined by a widely publicized 1967 drug bust that left Jagger and Richards briefly in jail and Faithfull identified in tabloids as "Naked Girl At Stones Party," a label she would find humiliating and inescapable.

"One of the hazards of reforming your evil ways is that some people won't let go of their mind's eye of you as a wild thing," she wrote in "Memories, Dreams and Reflections," a 2007 memoir.

Jagger and Richards often cited bluesmen and early rock 'n' rollers as their prime influences, but Faithfull and her close friend Anita Pallenberg, Richards' longtime partner, also opened the band to new ways of thinking. Both were worldlier than their boyfriends at the time, and helped transform the Stones' songwriting and personas, whether as muses or as collaborators.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 60 of 72

Faithfull helped inspire such Stones songs as the mellow tribute "She Smiled Sweetly" and the lustful "Let's Spend the Night Together." It was Faithful who lent Jagger the Russian novel "The Master and Margarita" that was the basis for "Sympathy for the Devil" and who first recorded and contributed lyrics to the Stones' dire "Sister Morphine," notably the opening line, "Here I lie in my hospital bed." Faithfull's drug use helped shape such jaded takes on the London rock scene as "You Can't Always Get What You Want" and "Live with Me," while her time with Jagger also coincided with one of his most vulnerable love songs, "Wild Horses."

On her own, the London-born Faithfull specialized at first in genteel ballads, among them "Come Stay With Me," "Summer Nights" and "This Little Bird." But even in her teens, Faithfull sang in a fragile alto that suggested knowledge and burdens far beyond her years. Her voice would later crack and coarsen, and her life and work after splitting with Jagger in 1970 was one of looking back and carrying on through emotional and physical pain.

She had become addicted to heroin in the late '60s, suffered a miscarriage while seven months pregnant and nearly died from an overdose of sleeping pills. (Jagger, meanwhile, had an affair with Pallenberg and had a baby with actor Marsha Hunt). By the early '70s, Faithfull was living in the streets of London and had lost custody of the son, Nicholas, she had with her estranged husband, the gallery owner John Dunbar. She would also battle anorexia and hepatitis, was treated for breast cancer, broke her hip in a fall and was hospitalized with COVID-19 in 2020.

She shared everything, uncensored, in her memoirs and in her music, notably "Broken English," which came out in 1979 and featured her seething "Why'd Ya Do It" and conflicted "Guilt," in which she chants "I feel guilt, I feel guilt, though I know I've done no wrong." Other albums included "Dangerous Acquaintances," "Strange Weather," the live "Blazing Away" and, most recently, "She Walks in Beauty." Though Faithfull was defined by the 1960s, her sensibility often reached back to the pre-rock world of German cabaret, and she covered numerous songs by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill, including "Ballad of the Soldier's Wife" and the "sung" ballet "The Seven Deadly Sins."

Her interests extended to theater, film and television. Faithfull began acting in the 1960s, including an appearance in Jean-Luc Godard's "Made In U.S.A." and stage roles in "Hamlet" and Chekhov's "Three Sisters." She would later appear in such films as "The Girl on a Motorcycle," "Marie Antoinette" and "The Girl from Nagasaki," and the TV series "Absolutely Fabulous," in which she was cast as — and did not flinch from playing — God.

Faithful was married three times, and in recent years dated her manager, Francois Ravard. Jagger was her most famous lover, but other men in her life included Richards ("so great and memorable," she would say of their one-night stand), David Bowie and the early rock star Gene Pitney. Among the rejected: Bob Dylan, who had been so taken that he was writing a song about her, until Faithfull, pregnant with her son at the time, turned him down.

"Without warning, he turned into Rumpelstiltskin," she wrote in "Faithfull," published in 1994. "He went over to the typewriter, took a sheaf of papers and began ripping them up into smaller and smaller pieces, after which he let them fall into the wastepaper basket."

Faithfull's heritage was one of intrigue, decadence and fallen empires. Her father was a British intelligence officer during World War II who helped save her mother from the Nazis in Vienna. Faithfull's more distant ancestors included various Austro-Hungarian aristocrats and Count Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, a 19th century Austrian whose last name and scandalous novel "Venus in Furs" helped create the term "masochism."

Faithfull's parents separated when she was 6 and her childhood would include time in a convent and in what she would call a "nutty" sex-obsessed commune. By her teens, she was reading Simone de Beauvoir, listening to Odetta and Joan Baez and singing in folk clubs. Through the London art scene, she met Dunbar, who introduced her to Paul McCartney and other celebrities. Dunbar also co-founded the Indica Gallery, where John Lennon would say he met Yoko Ono.

"The threads of a dozen little scenes were invisibly twining together," she wrote in her memoir. "All these

people — gallery owners, photographers, pop stars, aristocrats and assorted talented layabouts more or less invented the scene in London, so I guess I was present at the creation.”

Her future was set in March 1964, when she attended a recording party for one of London’s hot young bands, the Rolling Stones. Scorning the idea that she and Jagger immediately fell for each other, she would regard the Stones as “yobby schoolboys” and witnessed Jagger fighting with his then-girlfriend, the model Chrissie Shrimpton, so in tears that her false eyelashes were peeling off.

But she was deeply impressed by one man, Stones manager Andrew “Loog” Oldham, who looked “powerful and dangerous and very sure of himself.” A week later, Oldham sent her a telegram, asking her to come to London’s Olympic Studios. With Jagger and Richards looking on, Oldham played her a demo of a “very primitive” song, “As Tears Go By,” which Faithfull needed just two takes to complete.

“It’s an absolutely astonishing thing for a boy of 20 to have written,” Faithfull wrote in her 1994 memoir. “A song about a woman looking back nostalgically on her life. The uncanny thing is that Mick should have written those words so long before everything happened. It’s almost as if our whole relationship was prefigured in that song.”

## **RFK Jr. on defensive over his vaccine views as a key confirmation vote hangs in the balance**

By AMANDA SEITZ and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Robert F. Kennedy Jr.’s bid to be the nation’s top health official is uncertain after a key Republican joined Democrats to raise persistent concerns over the nominee’s deep skepticism of routine childhood vaccinations that prevent deadly diseases.

Sen. Bill Cassidy, a Louisiana Republican, ended a three-hour confirmation hearing Thursday by telling Kennedy that he was “struggling” with his nomination and might call him over the weekend, though he did not say how he would vote.

Cassidy, a liver doctor who has regularly encouraged his constituents to vaccinate against COVID-19 and other diseases, implored Kennedy several times to reject theories that vaccines cause diseases like autism. Kennedy’s refusal to do so clearly troubled Cassidy.

“If there’s any false note, any undermining of a mama’s trust in vaccines, another person will die from a vaccine preventable disease,” Cassidy said.

The senator, who is up for reelection next year, laid out the dilemma before him, as a doctor who has seen how vaccines can save lives and as a Republican who is aware of Kennedy’s formidable support and wants to help President Donald Trump advance his policies. Cassidy is no stranger to these predicaments and the outcry they might spark — he voted to convict Trump on impeachment charges after his first term in 2021.

Kennedy’s vaccine views could jeopardize his standing with a few crucial Republicans and has certainly not helped him win over any votes among Democrats in his bid to become health secretary. If all Democrats reject Kennedy’s nomination, he can only afford to lose three Republican votes.

Kennedy will also have to win over the swing votes of Sens. Susan Collins, Lisa Murkowski and Mitch McConnell, who have raised concerns about Kennedy and also voted against Trump’s defense secretary nominee.

Any Republican considering a “no” vote will face a maximum pressure campaign from Trump to line up and confirm his nominees. When others have expressed reservations about supporting nominees, they have met a coordinated campaign of political threats from Trump’s allies. Kennedy’s “Make America Healthy Again” movement has also encouraged followers to overwhelm the inboxes and phone lines of senators who may waffle.

Kennedy and other Cabinet nominees like Tulsi Gabbard represent a new coalition built by Trump’s campaign. Kennedy last year launched his own campaign for president before joining forces with Trump in a shared vision of dismantling the status quo.

Kennedy, an environmental lawyer turned public health critic, repeatedly promised senators he is not

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 62 of 72

"anti-vaccine" and, in fact, supports inoculations. But Thursday's Senate health committee hearing questions exposed Kennedy's deep-seated mistrust in the nation's vaccine program.

Cassidy directly asked Kennedy if he would unequivocally reassure parents that the hepatitis B and measles vaccines do not cause autism.

Kennedy would not. Instead he avoided answering directly, saying "if the data is there, I will absolutely do that."

In a rare show of across-the-aisle cooperation, Sen. Bernie Sanders, a Vermont independent, followed up on Cassidy's line of questioning. Again, Kennedy refused to give a definitive answer.

Then, in the closing moments of the hearing, Cassidy offered Kennedy studies that have proven vaccinations do not cause autism, prodding him to accept the research. Kennedy would not, instead responding with an article — one that Cassidy said had "issues."

Saying clearly that vaccines do not cause autism "would have incredible impact," Cassidy told him. "That would have incredible impact. That's your power."

At times, questioning from other senators was intensely personal. Sen. Maggie Hassan, D.N.H., shared her anguish as a mother who has spent decades wondering what caused her 36-year-old son's cerebral palsy. She worried about whether vaccines contributed to her son's condition after an infamous study years ago falsely found a link between autism and vaccines. That study has since been roundly discredited.

Hassan said Kennedy's suggestions that vaccines could cause autism were hurting families.

"He is relitigating and churning settled science so we can't go forward and find out what the cause of autism is and treat these kids and help these families," she said, later adding, "When you continue to sow doubt about settled science, it makes it impossible for us to move forward."

Aside from Cassidy, Republicans on the health committee remained friendly to Kennedy. Republican Sen. Tommy Tuberville of Alabama, who said his two sons wanted to vote for Kennedy in the presidential election, told the hearing that his granddaughter, due in the coming weeks, would not "be a pincushion" when it came to vaccines.

Two others expressed doubts about the safety of vaccines, although both said they've vaccinated their own children.

Sen. Markwayne Mullin, an Oklahoma Republican, chided his colleagues for scrutinizing Kennedy's skeptical stances on vaccinations.

"We can't question science?" Mullin asked.

Others raised concerns about Kennedy's financial stake in lawsuits against vaccine makers.

Democratic Sen. Tim Kaine of Virginia, where the Gardasil vaccine to guard against cervical cancer is made, questioned Kennedy's financial disclosure forms, which state that he still plans to collect fees in cases referred to the law firm in a suit against that vaccine. Last year, Kennedy made \$850,000 off the deal.

"How can folks who need to have confidence in federal vaccine programs trust you to be independent and science-based when you stand to gain significant funding if lawsuits against vaccine manufacturers are successful?" Kaine asked.

Kennedy told Kaine he has given away his financial rights in the case.

Kaine also questioned Kennedy for saying on social media that he would not "take sides" as conspiracy theorists question what happened during the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

Kennedy responded that he had been taught from a young age to question authority, saying, "My father told me when I was 13 years old, he said, 'People in authority lie.'"

Democrats and Republicans alike repeatedly pressed the nominee on his plans around abortion, with Sen. Tim Scott of South Carolina asking if he would appoint "pro-life" deputies and several Democrats asking him how he would handle the abortion drug mifepristone.

The Biden administration defended lawsuits against the use of the drug, including its availability over telehealth. Kennedy said no decision had yet been made about how to handle the controversial drug, which the Food and Drug Administration approved to end pregnancies safely more than two decades ago.

"With mifepristone, President Trump has not chosen a policy and I will implement his policy," Kennedy told the committee.

Kennedy wants to lead the \$1.7 trillion agency that oversees health care coverage — Medicare, Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act marketplace — for roughly half the country, approves then recommends vaccines for deadly diseases and conducts safety inspections of food and hospitals.

The Senate finance committee, which Cassidy sits on, will ultimately decide how to send Kennedy's nomination to the Senate floor for a vote.

During a three-hour hearing with that committee Wednesday, Kennedy misstated basic facts about Medicare and Medicaid. But Republicans offered strong support for Kennedy's proposal to promote healthier foods to Americans and research the root of chronic diseases like obesity.

## Study finds India doubled its tiger population in a decade and credits conservation efforts

By SIBI ARASU Associated Press

BENGALURU, India (AP) — India doubled its tiger population in a little over a decade by protecting the big cats from poaching and habitat loss, ensuring they have enough prey, reducing human-wildlife conflict, and increasing communities' living standards near tiger areas, a study published Thursday found.

The number of tigers grew from an estimated 1,706 tigers in 2010 to around 3,682 in 2022, according to estimates by the National Tiger Conservation Authority, making India home to roughly 75% of the global tiger population. The study found that some local communities near tiger habitats have also benefited from the increase in tigers because of the foot traffic and revenues brought in by ecotourism.

The study in the journal *Science* says India's success "offers important lessons for tiger-range countries" that conservation efforts can benefit both biodiversity and nearby communities.

"The common belief is that human densities preclude an increase in tiger populations," said Yadvendradev Jhala, a senior scientist at Bengaluru-based Indian National Academy of Sciences and the study's lead author. "What the research shows is that it's not the human density, but the attitude of people, which matters more."

Wildlife conservationists and ecologists welcomed the study but said that tigers and other wildlife in India would benefit if source data were made available to a larger group of scientists. The study was based on data collected by Indian government-supported institutions.

Arjun Gopalaswamy, an ecologist with expertise in wildlife population estimation, said estimates from India's official tiger monitoring program have been "chaotic" and "contradictory." He said some of the figures in the study are significantly higher than previous estimates of tiger distribution from the same datasets. But he added that the paper's findings seem to have corrected an anomaly flagged repeatedly by scientists since 2011 related to tiger population size and their geographic spread.

Tigers disappeared in some areas that were not near national parks, wildlife sanctuaries or other protected areas, and in areas that witnessed increased urbanization, increased human use of forest resources and higher frequency of armed conflicts, the study said. "Without community support and participation and community benefits, conservation is not possible in our country," said Jhala.

Tigers are spread across around 138,200 square kilometers (53,359 square miles) in India, about the size of the state of New York. But just 25% of the area is prey-rich and protected, and another 45% of tiger habitats are shared with roughly 60 million people, the study said.

Strong wildlife protection legislation is the "backbone" of tiger conservation in India, said Jhala. "Habitat is not a constraint, it's the quality of the habitat which is a constraint," he said.

Wildlife biologist Ravi Chellam, who wasn't part of the study, said that while tiger conservation efforts are promising, they need to be extended to other species to better maintain the entire ecosystem.

"There are several species, including the great Indian bustard and caracal which are all on the edge," Chellam said. "And there is really not enough focus on that."

## Hospital nurse in Uganda dies in country's first Ebola outbreak in 2 years

By RODNEY MUHUMUZA Associated Press

KAMPALA, Uganda (AP) — A nurse in Uganda has died of Ebola in the first recorded fatality since the country's last outbreak of the disease ended in early 2023, a health official said Thursday.

The 32-year-old male nurse was an employee of Mulago Hospital, the main referral facility in the capital, Kampala, Diana Atwine, permanent secretary of the health ministry, told reporters Thursday.

After developing a fever, he was treated at several locations in Uganda before multiple lab tests confirmed he had been suffering from Ebola. The man died on Wednesday and the Sudan strain of Ebola was confirmed following postmortem tests, Atwine said.

At least 44 contacts of the victim have been identified, including 30 health workers and patients at Mulago Hospital, according to Uganda's Ministry of Health.

The health authorities are "in full control of the situation," Atwine said, while also urging Ugandans to report any suspected cases.

Tracing contacts is key to stemming the spread of Ebola, and there are no approved vaccines for the Sudan strain of Ebola.

Uganda's last outbreak, discovered in September 2022, killed at least 55 people before it was declared over in January 2023.

Confirmation of Ebola in Uganda is the latest in a trend of outbreaks of viral hemorrhagic fevers in the east African region. Tanzania declared an outbreak of the Ebola-like Marburg disease earlier this month, and in December Rwanda announced that its own outbreak of Marburg was over. The ongoing Marburg outbreak in northern Tanzania's Kagera region has killed at least two people, according to local health authorities.

The World Health Organization will send an initial allocation of \$1 million from a contingency fund to support Uganda's response, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the WHO director-general, said in a brief statement posted on the social platform X.

"A full scale response is being initiated by the government and partners," the statement said.

Kampala's outbreak could prove difficult to respond to, because the city has a highly mobile population of about 4 million. The nurse who died had sought treatment at a hospital just outside Kampala and later traveled to Mbale, in the country's east, where he was admitted in a public hospital. Health authorities said the man also sought the services of a traditional healer.

Emmanuel Batiibwe, a physician who helped lead Uganda's efforts to stop the country's 2022 outbreak, told The Associated Press that he expected a swift response in tracing all possible Ebola contacts in Kampala and elsewhere.

"Our reaction should be swift, decisive and well-coordinated," he said, speaking of lessons learned from the 2022 outbreak, whose epicenter was a town in central Uganda. "We have the means of responding quickly now."

Ebola, which is spread by contact with bodily fluids of an infected person or contaminated materials, manifests as a deadly hemorrhagic fever. Symptoms include fever, vomiting, diarrhea, muscle pain and at times internal and external bleeding.

Scientists don't know the natural reservoir of Ebola, but they suspect the first person infected in an outbreak acquired the virus through contact with an infected animal or eating its raw meat.

Ugandan officials are still investigating the source of the current outbreak.

Uganda has had multiple Ebola outbreaks, including one in 2000 that killed hundreds. The 2014-16 Ebola outbreak in West Africa killed more than 11,000 people, the disease's largest death toll.

Ebola was discovered in 1976 in two simultaneous outbreaks in South Sudan and Congo, where it occurred in a village near the Ebola River, after which the disease is named.



## **U.S. economy grows solid 2.3% in October-December on eve of Trump return to White House, 2.8% in '24**

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — A humming American economy ended 2024 on a solid note with consumer spending continuing to drive growth, and ahead of what could be a significant change in direction under a Trump administration.

The Commerce Department reported Thursday that gross domestic product — the economy's output of goods and services — expanded at a 2.3% annual rate from October through December.

For the full year, the economy grew a healthy 2.8%, compared with 2.9% in 2023.

The fourth-quarter growth was a tick below the 2.4% economists had expected, according to a survey of forecasters by the data firm FactSet.

Consumer spending grew at a 4.2% pace, fastest since January-March 2023 and up from 3.7% in July-September last year. But business investment tumbled as investment in equipment plunged after two straight strong quarters.

Wednesday's report also showed persistent inflationary pressure at the end of the 2024. The Federal Reserve's favored inflation gauge — called the personal consumption expenditures index, or PCE — rose at a 2.3% annual pace last quarter, up from 1.5% in the third quarter and above the Fed's 2% target. Excluding volatile food and energy prices, so-called core PCE inflation was 2.5%, up from 2.2% in the July-September quarter.

A drop in business inventories shaved 0.93 percentage points off fourth-quarter growth.

But a category within the GDP data that measures the economy's underlying strength rose at a healthy 3.2% annual rate from July through September, slipping from 3.4% in the third quarter. This category includes consumer spending and private investment but excludes volatile items like exports, inventories and government spending.

Paul Ashworth, chief North America economist at Capital Economics, said that figure "suggests the economy remains strong, particularly given the fourth-quarter disruptions," including a strike at Boeing and the aftermath of two hurricanes.

President Donald Trump has inherited a healthy economy. Growth has been steady and unemployment low — 4.1% in December.

The economy has proven remarkably resilient after the Fed's inflation fighters raised rates 11 times in 2022 and 2023 to combat the biggest surge in consumer prices since the 1980s. Instead of sliding into a recession, as most economists predicted, GDP kept expanding. Growth has now topped 2% in nine of the last 10 quarters.

On Wednesday, the Fed left its benchmark interest rate unchanged after making three cuts since September. With the economy rolling along, Fed Chair Jerome Powell told reporters, "we do not need to be in a hurry" to make more cuts. The Fed is also cautious because progress against inflation has stalled in recent months after falling from four-decade highs hit in mid-2022.

The European Central Bank cut its benchmark rate by a quarter point Thursday, underlining the contrast between more robust growth in the U.S. economy and stagnation in Europe, which recorded zero growth at the end of last year.

The U.S. economic outlook has become more cloudy, however. Trump has promised to cut taxes and ease regulations on business, which could speed GDP growth. But his plan to impose big taxes on imports and to deport millions of immigrants working in the United States illegally could mean slower growth and higher prices.

Trump said last week that he would lower oil prices and then "demand" lower interest rates — a topic he said he'd take up with Powell. But the Fed chair deflected questions about Trump's comments Wednesday and said he'd had no contact with the president.

Trump has also tried to reshape the federal government, offering buyouts to workers and issuing a memo Monday night freezing federal grants, then rescinding the memo Wednesday after a public outcry.

Citing the "squeeze" on the federal government, Ashworth wrote in a commentary, "we wouldn't be surprised to see a reversal in the first quarter. As a starting point, we expect first-quarter GDP growth to slow marginally below 2%."

Thursday's GDP release was the first of three Commerce Department estimates of October-December growth.

## **A Russian drone strikes an apartment building in Ukraine, killing at least 6**

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A Russian drone blasted a hole in an apartment building in northeastern Ukraine during a nighttime attack, killing at least six people and wounding nine others, officials said Thursday.

The Shahed drone blew out a wall and surrounding windows in the building in Sumy, a major city, just after 1 a.m., the Sumy regional administration said. Four people were rescued from the rubble, and a child was among the wounded, it said, adding that 120 people were evacuated.

The dead were three older married couples, Sumy Regional Prosecutors' Office said. The regional administration announced two days of mourning in the city.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called it "a terrible tragedy, a terrible Russian crime."

The full-scale war between Russia and Ukraine, which began nearly three years ago and shows no signs of ending, has killed more than 10,000 Ukrainian civilians, according to the United Nations.

Civilians have also endured hardship caused by Russian attacks on the power grid that have denied them heating and running water. Many have been evacuated from areas along the roughly 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line where Ukrainian defenses are straining to hold the bigger Russian army at bay.

Russian forces have started using Shahed drones with an increased payload of 90 kilograms (200 pounds) of explosives and metal shrapnel to "increase the number of casualties," the head of Ukraine's Presidential Office, Andrii Yermak, said on Telegram.

Yermak published photographs of what he claimed were the Shahed warheads, with one photo showing what appeared to be small pieces of metal inside a metal cylinder casing.

The battlefield fighting has been especially fierce in recent times in the eastern Donetsk region, which Russian forces partly occupy and appear bent on capturing completely in coming months.

A Russian artillery strike on the Donetsk city of Kramatorsk wounded 13 people, including two young children, Donetsk regional head Vadym Filashkin wrote on his Telegram channel Thursday.

"Anyone who still remains in the Donetsk region is putting themselves in mortal danger," Filashkin said. "Take care of yourself! Evacuate."

Russia launched more than 80 drones at Ukraine overnight, the air force reported, in what are common nighttime barrages. Most of the drones were shot down or stopped by electronic jamming, it said.

In Ukraine's southern Odesa region, Russian drones damaged a hospital and two apartment buildings, regional head Oleh Kiper wrote on Telegram. No one was injured, he said.

## **FBI wrestles with a spike in sexual misconduct claims and male-dominated culture**

By JIM MUSTIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The FBI has recorded a sharp spike in complaints that its own agents and employees have engaged in sexual misconduct, ranging from assault to harassment, despite a pledge by bureau leaders to eliminate the longstanding problem.

An Associated Press investigation found the FBI has received nearly 300 allegations of sexual misconduct since the bureau announced in 2021 it had launched an agency-wide crackdown.

The number marked a nearly 50% increase over complaints filed during the preceding four-year period, according to bureau statistics, an increase advocates and lawmakers described as a sign the bureau is struggling to protect women in a male-dominated workplace. The FBI, for its part, said the increase shows

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 67 of 72

its reforms are making it easier to report misconduct.

"Enough is enough," Sen. Chuck Grassley, the Iowa Republican, told the AP in a statement, adding he'll be using his role as chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee "to get answers and root out further FBI misconduct." He blamed former FBI Director Christopher Wray for allowing "the problem of sexual misconduct at the FBI to fester."

FBI says spike due to crackdown

The FBI told AP it takes allegations of sexual misconduct "extremely seriously" and acts upon them "expeditiously." Bureau officials have attributed the spike in complaints, in part, to their outreach efforts.

"We have come a long way in addressing it in various ways using all the policy tools and legal means at our disposal," the FBI said in a statement, "but we absolutely have more to do in accomplishing a meaningful and long-lasting cultural evolution that honors FBI Director Wray's commitment to eradicating sexual misconduct throughout the organization."

The FBI declined to provide details about the incidents, citing federal privacy laws and internal guidelines. A monthslong AP investigation, however, revealed that the incidents ranged from sexual assault to agents paying for sex at massage parlors. Other allegations concerned agents making inappropriate sexual comments at office functions or commenting on co-workers' appearances.

Some allegations were so serious they resulted in criminal investigations or charges. Late last year, an FBI agent in Maryland, Eduardo Valdivia, 40, was charged with sexually assaulting two women he contacted through social media with a promise to give them free tattoos and modeling work. His defense attorney, Robert Bonsib, said Valdivia disputes "all allegations that he engaged in any criminal conduct and expects to be cleared of all charges."

The victims usually were agency employees, though others were women whom agents came across during investigations or met socially. At least a dozen sexual misconduct allegations involved supervisors, the AP found, including at least one top agent.

The FBI determined more than half of the claims warranted internal investigations, statistics show, though the bureau refused to disclose how many resulted in terminations or other discipline.

Time of upheaval at FBI

The AP's findings come at a moment of significant upheaval in the FBI. Wray, a Republican appointed by then-President Donald Trump in 2017, spent years under withering attacks for various investigations involving Trump. Rather than be fired, Wray stepped down a day before Trump took office on Jan. 20.

Trump has tapped Kash Patel, a strident supporter and former federal prosecutor, to take over as the next director of the FBI. Patel's spokesperson did not respond to requests for comment on how he would tackle the issue of sexual misconduct. His confirmation hearing is scheduled for Thursday.

While Trump and Patel have focused almost exclusively on claims of political weaponization and biased probes in their promises to overhaul the bureau, some lawmakers see the FBI's record on sexual misconduct as another compelling reason to clean house.

Last year, the Justice Department agreed to pay more than \$22 million to settle a class-action lawsuit alleging female FBI recruits had been routinely harassed by instructors with sexually charged comments about their breast size, false allegations of infidelity and the need to take contraception "to control their moods."

In interviews, more than a dozen current and former FBI agents said that male-dominated culture would be the hardest to change. A former analyst who once aspired to become the bureau's first female director said she intentionally gained 30 pounds hoping a harasser would stop "talking about my body."

She'd give away clothing that became triggering because she'd worn it when she was harassed. "I would throw up in the office and have panic attacks in the stairway whenever I saw him," she recalled. "I came very close to suicide twice."

Victims, several of whom spoke on the condition they not be named, and advocates told AP that many women remain reluctant to come forward for fear of retaliation. They also lack confidence in the FBI's investigations and too often have seen agents, including high-ranking ones, receive what they consider to be mild discipline. Others retire before they can be punished.

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 68 of 72

FBI reports progress in reforms

The FBI has spent the last decade seeking to address its masculine culture, in part by boosting its number of female agents. Nearly a quarter of the bureau's 13,700 agents are women, the bureau says, a number slightly higher than the percentage of women in senior agent ranks.

The FBI said it has made a series of reforms to its processes, training and disciplinary reviews, including creating a 24/7 hotline to report abuse. Those changes were implemented after the AP exposed a pattern of senior FBI officials skirting discipline and retiring even after internal inquiries determined they committed brazen misconduct, including a senior official who harassed eight female subordinates.

It's unclear whether that approach will continue under the Trump administration, which has moved quickly to halt diversity, equity and inclusion efforts across the federal government.

FBI misconduct investigations are shrouded in secrecy, and federal privacy laws obscure the public's view of which agents face discipline. The government typically will not reveal where an incident took place, even if the claims are substantiated. The AP relied on Freedom of Information Act requests and interviews with nearly two dozen current and former law enforcement officials to flesh out details about the allegations and the resulting investigations.

For scores of allegations it did not investigate, the bureau said it "lacked sufficient detail to predicate an investigation" or couldn't pinpoint a specific code of conduct violation. Other investigations resulted in suspensions, transfers or firings, FBI officials said.

Lack of transparency makes it difficult to track discipline

The FBI does not disclose how it disciplines specific agents or supervisors, but the AP reviewed internal records in a few cases that showed how some were punished.

An unidentified supervisor, for example, was fired last year for suggesting his female colleagues had become managers by performing sex acts, the records show. And an FBI boss was suspended 60 days for "unwelcome sexual conduct" at a work event.

In another case, the AP was not able to determine how a senior official was disciplined even after he admitted to wrongdoing. The official, an acting deputy assistant director, admitted he simulated anal sex on a colleague while acting out a graphic joke about predatory priests in the Roman Catholic Church, according to a 2023 report by the Justice Department's inspector general.

"This is going to be bad," the agent told colleagues before closing an office door, according to the report. He then performed two wrestling holds on the mortified coworker before landing his punch line.

The agent told investigators he only thrust his genitals once at the colleague and never touched him. He admitted it was inappropriate, the report says, telling investigators he "shouldn't have told the joke in an office setting."

Misconduct cases are difficult to investigate

Sexual misconduct investigations can be difficult to resolve, and the alleged behavior frequently happens behind closed doors.

In some instances, investigators were not able to substantiate underlying allegations but nevertheless found agents violated related policies or acted unprofessionally. That was the case involving allegations that a supervisor raped an intoxicated woman in a Washington hotel room — an accusation he denied.

The woman in that case reported to police that Shannon Fontenot met her at a bar when she was already heavily intoxicated and, even after noticing her wedding ring, invited her back to his room, where he opened his wallet and showed her his FBI identification, records show. Fontenot, an assistant special agent in charge of the FBI's Springfield, Illinois, field office, had been on assignment in Washington.

Testifying in a civil proceeding in which she unsuccessfully sought a protective order against Fontenot, the woman described the night as "every woman's worst nightmare." She said Fontenot appeared to be a "safe person" and accept her limits, only to wait until she was drunk enough to take advantage of her. She said she had more than a half-dozen drinks and was so intoxicated she nearly walked into a wall.

"I think of FBI agents as our most elite law enforcement officers in the country," she testified in that civil case. "To use your position like that is horrifically scary, and it is a huge betrayal of not only my trust, but public trust. It's awful."

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 69 of 72

The AP is not naming the woman because it does not typically identify people who say they are victims of sexual abuse.

Fontenot testified the encounter was entirely consensual and that the woman did not appear intoxicated.

Federal prosecutors decided not to charge him, saying they could not prove the woman's claim. The Justice Department's inspector general also did not substantiate the sexual assault allegations but determined he violated FBI rules in failing to disclose to his superiors that he was under police investigation, government records show.

The FBI confirmed it suspended Fontenot for 10 days and later transferred him to a non-supervisory role at its Washington headquarters. It refused to say when he was transferred.

"The incident in question was thoroughly investigated, and it was unequivocally determined that no form of sexual misconduct occurred," Fontenot's attorney, Mark Rollins, told AP.

### Highest ranks of FBI

Another misconduct investigation involved the agency's then-No. 3 official who was accused by a subordinate of having "engaged in sexual harassment," the Justice Department's inspector general reported.

The employee reported a raft of comments and actions by Jeff Sallet that she described as violating the agency's sexual harassment policies, though investigators determined, in a lengthy report, that they were not sexual in nature.

Among those the woman found most offensive: Sallet — who at the time oversaw the bureau's human resources branch — allegedly suggested her mother was disappointed she wasn't "barefoot and pregnant," according to the report. In another instance he invited her to join his friend's "harem."

In the moment insurrectionists bore down on the U.S. Capitol, the woman alleged, Sallet looked down from his FBI office window onto Pennsylvania Avenue and asked her, "How many of those guys are you thinking you'd like to date. That isn't your type is it?"

The woman also complained Sallet sexually harassed her in part by suggesting they conduct a conference call together in his hotel room on a work trip. "I felt that Sallet was pressuring me to be alone with him in a hotel room," she wrote in a declaration for an unrelated court case by a former FBI agent seeking disciplinary records related to Sallet. She added that "we did not need to be physically together for the meeting and none of our co-workers were at the hotel."

Sallet told the inspector general he did not recall where the call took place but that it would not have been "strange or odd" to have such a call in his hotel room.

Investigators concluded Sallet "violated the Department's zero tolerance policy on harassment by making five inappropriate comments to the subordinate employee," the inspector general said. "None of the allegations involved unwelcome touching, and the independent investigation did not find that any of the substantiated conduct was sexual in nature."

The report added that Sallet was also found to have acted "unprofessionally" in accordance with FBI policies.

Sallet retired in 2021 before the investigation was completed. He has denied the allegations and his attorney, Doug Brooks, noted he was "cleared of all allegations of sexual harassment."

"Jeff Sallet had an honorable and distinguished career at the FBI," Brooks wrote in an email, adding he had provided his "full cooperation" to the inspector general investigation. "It is important to highlight that there were never any allegations of unwelcome (or any) touching made against Mr. Sallet."

Advocates expressed frustration at the lack of transparency in such cases and blasted the FBI for meting out relatively light punishment to those it has found to have engaged in sexual misconduct.

"When high-ranking officials in particular face no meaningful consequences for abusive conduct, it sends the message that anyone is free to act with impunity," said Stacey Young, co-founder of the DOJ Gender Equality Network, an employee advocacy group that persuaded the Justice Department to adopt a new department-wide sexual misconduct policy.

Other advocates and female agents applauded the bureau for taking steps to address sexual misconduct. But they said it needed to go further to assure victims that their claims were being taken seriously.

Martha Johnson, a recently retired FBI agent who says she was sexually assaulted by an agent many

years ago while working in Chicago, said the bureau's internal processes for reporting sexual abuse have long been set up to doubt and punish victims.

"They're patting themselves on the back, but the environment is still the same in that women are too afraid to even use a hotline," she said. "I've seen this scenario play out over and over for 20 years. They didn't change anything."

## **Rihanna makes first court appearance at the trial of her partner A\$AP Rocky, as accuser testifies**

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Rihanna appeared for the first time at the trial of her longtime partner A\$AP Rocky, on the day of its most important testimony — the description by a former friend of the moment Rocky allegedly fired a gun at him.

The singer superstar, who has two toddler sons with the rapper Rocky, sat out of view of the courtroom's cameras, between Rocky's mother and sister, in the downtown Los Angeles criminal courthouse. Security brought her in surreptitiously to avoid crowds Wednesday morning.

Rocky, whose legal name is Rakim Athelston Mayers, has been standing trial on two felony charges that he fired a handgun at the former friend, who is known by the name A\$AP Relli and was born Terell Ephon. If convicted, Rocky could get up to 24 years in prison.

Rihanna watched Wednesday as Relli testified about the moment Rocky allegedly fired a gun at him on a Hollywood street in 2021.

He had been shouting angrily at Rocky, who was walking away after an initial confrontation and scuffle, when Rocky pulled a gun from his waistband and held it in the air, Relli testified.

"He turned around and then it was like BOOM!" he told the jury. "The whole thing was like a movie, he kind of like pointed down and he shot the first shot."

He said "I felt my hand hot" and later added, "I was hit. Or I was grazed. I didn't have a hole or nothing."

The trial's key witness said he grabbed one of their mutual friends who were with Rocky after the first shot was fired and stood behind him for protection. He said he did not see Rocky fire the second shot, and Rocky ran away moments later.

When jurors were being selected, prosecutors asked them whether Rihanna's connection to the case, especially if she appeared in court, would affect their ability to deliver a guilty verdict.

Nearly all those questioned had heard of her — far more than had heard of Rocky — and some described themselves as fans, but all said they felt it would not affect their decisions.

It was not clear whether they could see Rihanna or were aware of her presence as they watched the testimony. She wore a long black dress with buttons on the front that resembled a winter overcoat, and had a pair of glasses on her head that she put on during the prosecution's questioning.

Earlier in the trial, which began on Jan. 21, Relli said he and Rocky, members of A\$AP, a crew of creators at a New York high school, had been close but their relationship eroded after Rocky became famous.

He said their relationship had been strained for years and was getting worse in the days leading up to the incident, but he was still "furious" when Rocky pulled a gun on him after a scuffle that began the moment the two met up near the W Hotel. He dared him to use it.

When Rocky walked away, he testified that he followed and shouted after him, until the shots were fired.

Rocky's lawyer says the shots he fired were not even from a real gun — they were blanks from a starter pistol that he carried as a prop. The lawyer said Relli knew this, and that was why he was so fearless walking after him.

"Oh it was a real gun," Relli testified Wednesday, saying he knew because of his scraped hand.

He said he felt free to follow and shout at Rocky because "I felt like because he put it away and we're on a busy street in Hollywood. He's definitely not gonna shoot it."

Since the shooting, and his decision to go to police and testify, he has gotten death threats and has been

# Groton Daily Independent

Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 71 of 72

shunned as a snitch, he said, and the modest music management career he built fell apart.

"It's been a living hell," Relli said.

About an hour after the shooting, Relli returned to the scene and said he photographed and recovered two shell casings. Earlier, while responding to a report of a shooting, police did not find any.

He sent a text to Rocky that was shown in court saying "U try killing me."

Rocky denied it in his reply.

"Bro wtf is u talkin bout why u tell ppl I shot at u."

He sent Rocky photos of the shell casings and his grazed hand.

Rocky said he was making stuff up and speaking "all type of nonsense" and was trying to "extort" him.

The court day ended after just a few hours of testimony because of scheduling issues. Rihanna was shuffled out through a restricted exit by deputies, and Rocky left separately through the main courthouse doors.

The defense will begin their cross-examination of Relli on Thursday.

Raised in Harlem, Rocky's rap songs became a phenomenon in New York in 2011. He had his mainstream breakthrough when his first studio album went to No. 1 on the Billboard 200 in 2013. The second one, in 2015, did the same.

He's set to have his biggest career year as a multimedia star. This Sunday, he's nominated for a Grammy Award for best music video for his song "Taylor Swift," at the ceremony at Crypto.com Arena just two miles (3 kilometers) from the Los Angeles courthouse where his trial's being held.

He's also set to headline the Rolling Loud Music Festival, to star opposite Denzel Washington in a film directed by Spike Lee, and to co-chair the Met Gala in May.

But the prospect of a conviction and the possibility of a lengthy prison sentence casts a shadow over all of it.

Rocky and Rihanna, both 36, have two sons together: 2-year-old RZA Athelston Mayers and 1-year-old Riot Rose Mayers. She revealed she was pregnant with the younger boy after headlining the Super Bowl halftime show in 2023 with a visible baby bump.

The singer and the rapper, who are both fashion moguls, first became close when he provided a verse to her 2012 song "Cockiness (Love It)" and they performed it at the MTV Video Music Awards. They became a couple in 2020.

## Today in History: January 31, US declares public health emergency over coronavirus

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Friday, Jan. 31, the 31st day of 2025. There are 334 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Jan. 31, 2020, the United States declared a public health emergency over the new coronavirus, and President Donald Trump signed an order to temporarily bar entry to foreign nationals, other than immediate family of U.S. citizens, who traveled in China in the preceding 14 days.

Also on this date:

In 1863, during the Civil War, the First South Carolina Volunteers, an all-Black Union regiment composed of many escaped slaves, was mustered into federal service at Beaufort, South Carolina.

In 1945, Pvt. Eddie Slovik, 24, became the first U.S. soldier since the Civil War to be executed for desertion as he was shot by an American firing squad in France.

In 1958, the United States entered the Space Age with its first successful launch of a satellite, Explorer 1, from Cape Canaveral.

In 1971, astronauts Alan Shepard, Edgar Mitchell and Stuart Roosa blasted off aboard Apollo 14 on a mission to the moon.

In 1988, Doug Williams, the first Black quarterback to play in the Super Bowl, led the Washington Red-

# Groton Daily Independent

**Friday, Jan. 31, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 220 ~ 72 of 72**

skins (now Washington Commanders) to a 42-10 victory over the Denver Broncos and was named Super Bowl MVP.

In 2000, an Alaska Airlines MD-83 jet crashed into the Pacific Ocean off Port Hueneme (wy-NEE'-mee), California, killing all 88 people aboard.

In 2001, a Scottish court sitting in the Netherlands convicted one Libyan and acquitted a second in the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland. (Abdel Baset Ali al-Megrahi was given a life sentence but was released after eight years on compassionate grounds by Scotland's government. He died in 2012.)

Today's birthdays: Composer Philip Glass is 88. Blues singer-musician Charlie Musselwhite is 81. Actor Glynn Turman is 78. Baseball Hall of Famer Nolan Ryan is 78. Actor Jonathan Banks is 78. Rock singer John Lydon is 69. Actor Anthony LaPaglia is 66. News anchor Martha MacCallum is 61. Actor Minnie Driver is 55. Actor Portia de Rossi is 52. Actor-comedian Bobby Moynihan is 48. Actor Kerry Washington is 48. Singer Justin Timberlake is 44. Country singer Tyler Hubbard (Florida Georgia Line) is 38. Musician Marcus Mumford (Mumford and Sons) is 38.