

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 1 of 64

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 News Headlines](#)
- [4- Good Luck at State A](#)
- [5- SDHSAA State Boys Basketball Championships Tip-Off Thursday](#)
- [6- Tina's Baskets - for Easter](#)
- [9- City Council Story](#)
- [11- SD SearchLight: South Dakota governor asks Trump to build promised statue garden and put it near Mount Rushmore](#)
- [13- SD SearchLight: Energy Transfer board chair says he sought settlement with Standing Rock in 2016](#)
- [15- SD SearchLight: Supreme Court Chief Justice Roberts pushes back against Trump call to impeach judges](#)
- [16- Weather Pages](#)
- [20- Daily Devotional](#)
- [21- Subscription Form](#)
- [22- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [23- Upcoming Groton Events](#)
- [24- News from the Associated Press](#)

## Wednesday, March 19

Senior Menu: Hot pork sandwich, sweet potato, green beans, pears.

School Breakfast: Oatmeal.

School Lunch: Cheese stuffed breadstick, Marinara sauce.

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

Groton C&MA: Kid's Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study, 7 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.; Lenten Supper, 6 p.m. (Host - Sarah Circle), worship 7 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.; Lenten Service, 7 p.m.

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton Ad Council, 7 p.m.



## Thursday, March 20

Senior Menu: Spaghetti with meat sauce, corn, apple crisp, garlic toast.

State A Boys Basketball Tournament, Sioux Falls: Groton Area vs. Sioux Falls Christian at noon.

Spring Break - No School

Emmanuel Lutheran: WELCA, 1:30 p.m. (Program - Nigeria, Host-Sarah)

## Friday, March 21

Senior Menu: Vegetable soup, egg salad sandwich, tomato spoon salad, fruit.

State A Boys Basketball Tournament, Sioux Falls  
Spring Break - No School

## Saturday, March 22

State A Boys Basketball Tournament, Sioux Falls  
Spring Vendor Fair, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., GHS Gym

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

© 2025 Groton Daily Independent

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 2 of 64

# 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.**

## Israel Renews Gaza Strikes

Over 400 Palestinians were killed and more than 500 wounded early Tuesday following Israeli airstrikes across the Gaza Strip, one of the deadliest bombardments of the 17-month war. The attack came amid stalled negotiations with Hamas to extend the war's two-month ceasefire into a second phase.

Since the ceasefire began Jan. 19, more than 1,800 Palestinians have been exchanged for 33 Israelis abducted Oct. 7, including eight who were deceased. Israeli forces exited much of Gaza aside from some buffer zones, allowing hundreds of thousands of displaced people to return to their homes. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu resumed the fighting amid pressure from his coalition not to proceed to a second phase, pointing to Hamas' unwillingness to release the remaining hostages as justification. He has long insisted the war would not end until Hamas is destroyed.

The Israeli military called for evacuations across Gaza's eastern border with Israel, prompting analysts to speculate that a new combat operation was imminent. Netanyahu also described the attacks as only the beginning.

## Astronauts Return Home

NASA astronauts Sunita "Suni" Williams and Butch Wilmore splashed down off the Florida coast yesterday, concluding an unexpected nine-month stay aboard the International Space Station. They returned on a SpaceX Crew Dragon capsule along with NASA astronaut Nick Hague and Russian cosmonaut Aleksandr Gorbunov.

Originally scheduled for a 10-day mission aboard Boeing's Starliner in June 2024, Williams and Wilmore remained on the ISS due to technical issues with the spacecraft, including helium leaks and propulsion problems. While awaiting their return, they integrated into the regular ISS crew rotation, contributing to scientific research and daily operations.

During their extended stay, the pair completed 4,576 orbits of Earth, traveling more than 121 million miles. The mission brings Williams' career cumulative total time in space to 608 days—the second most among US astronauts behind Peggy Whitson. The astronauts will undergo medical evaluations at NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston to assess the effects of their prolonged spaceflight.

## (Some) Federal Workers Reinstated

The Trump administration moved to reinstate around 24,500 probationary workers yesterday, who were previously terminated under broad reduction-in-force efforts in recent weeks. The decision spans 18 agencies and follows court decisions that found the administration violated procedural law in carrying out the firings. The long-term status of the group is unclear—the decisions have been appealed, and judges noted terminations are allowed if carried out according to law.

In related news, a federal judge ruled yesterday that the government's dismantling of the US Agency for International Development—attributed to the Elon Musk-led Department of Government Efficiency—was likely unconstitutional. The ruling stopped short of fully restarting the agency's operations.

Separately, individual departments continue to formulate longer-term plans to reduce staff, including reports the Environmental Protection Agency will largely eliminate its 1,500-person research and development office. Among other efforts, the wing helped determine how the 2014 Flint water crisis unfolded.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 3 of 64

## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Sabrina Carpenter, Olivia Rodrigo, Luke Combs, and Tyler, the Creator among headliners tapped to perform at 2025 Lollapalooza in Chicago (July 31-Aug. 3); see full festival lineup.

"Fire & Rain" stage musical using James Taylor's music in development.

"Happy Gilmore" sequel sets July 25 release date on Netflix.

NCAA men's basketball tournament kicks off with "First Four" matchups; see latest bracket ... and women's tournament begins tonight.

NCAA to allow athletes to negotiate name, image, and likeness deals with schools before their enrollment.

## Science & Technology

Meta reports global downloads of its open-source Llama AI model tops 1 billion.

China's BYD says it has developed electric vehicle charging platform capable of recharging cars as quickly as filling a gas tank.

New study finds cells lining organs and skin generate electricity when injured; discovery may lead to new wound-healing therapies.

## Business & Markets

US stock markets resume sell-off (S&P 500 -1.1%, Dow -0.6%, Nasdaq -1.7%) following two days of gains.

Tesla shares drop 5.3%, down 53% since all-time peak in December.

Google to acquire cybersecurity firm Wiz for \$32B, the largest acquisition in company history; also marks the largest-ever cybersecurity acquisition.

Pharma giant Pfizer sells remaining stake in British healthcare group Haleon, maker of brands including Advil, Sensodyne, and more.

## Politics & World Affairs

President Donald Trump, Russian President Vladimir Putin hold hourlong call; Putin agrees to 30-day suspension of attacks on Ukrainian energy infrastructure.

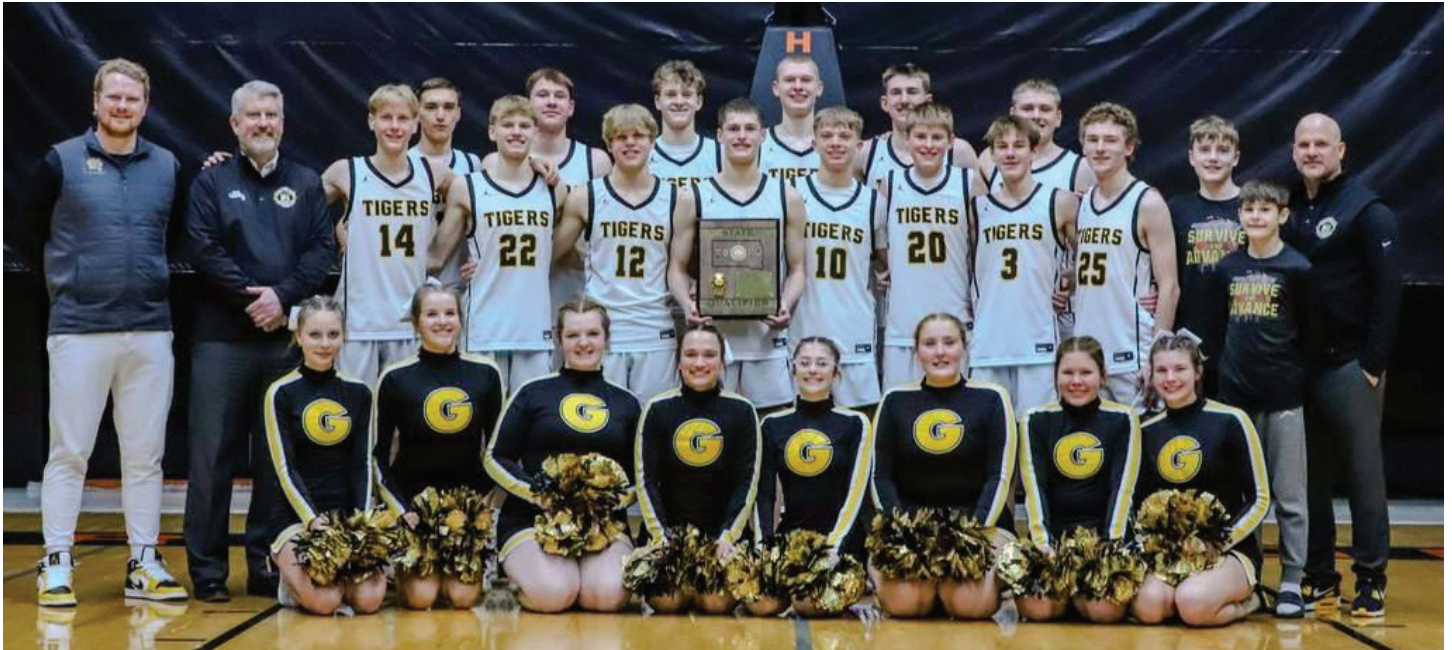
Chief Justice John Roberts makes rare public statement rebuking Trump for calls to impeach federal judge who paused deportations.

Paris police remove hundreds of migrants from downtown theater following monthslong occupation of venue.

Family of Sudiksha Konanki, a 20-year-old student who disappeared while on spring break in the Dominican Republic, acknowledge she likely drowned.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 4 of 64



**Back Row:** Jayden Schwan, Turner Thompson, Ryder Johnson, Gage Sippel, Becker Bosma, Logan Warrington

**Middle Row:** Assistant Coach Jordan Carson, Head Coach Brian Dolan, Ethan Kroll, Karson Zak, Ryder Schelle, Keegen Tracy, Easton Weber, Jace Johnson, Blake Pauli, Teylor Diegel, Manager Major Dolan, Manager Kinton Tracy, Assistant Coach Ryan Tracy

**Front Row Cheerleaders:** Rylie Rose, Addison Hoeft, Emily Overacker, Paisley Mitchell, Natalia Warrington, Mya Feser, Emma Davies, Breslyn Jeschke. (Photo courtesy Groton Area Facebook Page)

## Good Luck Tigers at the State A Tournament!

Avantara - Groton  
Bary Keith at Harr Motors  
BaseKamp Lodge  
BK Custom T's 'n More  
Blocker Construction  
Dacotah Bank  
Farmers Union Co-op of Ferney/Conde  
Fliehs Sales & Service  
Greg Johnson Construction of Bristol  
Groton American Legion  
Groton Chamber of Commerce  
Groton Chiropractic Clinic  
Groton Daily Independent  
Groton Dairy Queen  
Hanlon Brothers  
Harry Implement  
Heartland Energy

James Valley Telecommunications  
John Sieh Agency  
Ken's Food Fair  
KR Body Shop of Andover  
Krueger Brothers  
Lori's Pharmacy  
MJ's Sinclair  
ML Real Estate of Bristol  
Northeast Chiropractic Clinic  
Olive Grove Golf Course  
Poet  
Rix Farms / R&M Farms  
Ryan Likness Agency  
The Meat House of Andover  
Weismantel Insurance Agency  
of Columbia

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 5 of 64

## SDHSAA State Boys Basketball Championships Tip-Off Thursday

PIERRE –The South Dakota State High School Girls' Basketball State Championship Tournaments will take place starting Thursday, featuring the Class 'AA' Tournament in Rapid City, the Class 'A' Tourney in Sioux Falls, and the Class 'B' event in Aberdeen.

The Class 'B' field has the number 1 seed, Castlewood, as well as Lyman, Wessington Springs, Wall, St. Mary's, Aberdeen Christian, Viborg-Hurley, and Freeman, meeting in Aberdeen looking at a state championship win.

On the Class 'A' side, Sioux Falls Christian will head to Sioux Falls as the top seed in the 2025 event. Groton Area, West Central, Lennox, Hamlin, Hill City, Rapid City Christian, and Clark/Willow Lake all will be looking for a state championship title.

Mitchell returns to the State 'AA' Tournament, looking to defend its 2024 title. Challenging the Kernals will be a strong field including Sioux Falls Lincoln, Spearfish, Huron, Brandon Valley, Sioux Falls Jefferson, Harrisburg, and O'Gorman.

For more information on the tournaments, including live stats and streaming video coverage of all games, please visit [sports.sdpb.org](https://sports.sdpb.org) or [sdhsaa.com](https://sdhsaa.com).

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 6 of 64

## Tina's Baskets - for Easter 605-397-7285

**Cow basket - \$20**



Includes - green drink cup, light up football, play dough, dinosaur bubble, bubbles, and 4 filled eggs

**Paw patrol basket -\$25**



Includes- two bubbles, 7 filled eggs, a chase car, mini figures, a mystery toy, two characters clips, and a paw patrol movie

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 7 of 64

Rainbow basket - \$25



Teenager or adult Easter basket - \$25



Includes- cross word, sudoku book, word find, color pencils, three color books, pack of pens, Reese's pieces candy, solid chocolate bunny, neopolition flavored Lindt candy, and Dunkin chocolate brownie batter crème filled eggs

Includes- two color books 7 filled eggs, pink drink cup crayons, Reese's candy, egg chalk, playdough, bubbles fan bubbles and a rabbit bubble

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 8 of 64

Blue basket - \$20



Pink basket - \$20



Blue bunny includes bubble machine, bluey and his friend bingo, small Pail for the sand , bubbles, 6 filled eggs



Includes a pink bear with hugs in it , bubble machine, bubbles, side chalk bunny book, 6 eggs filled Reeses pieces candy

## Groton City Council discusses police presence in schools, weighs utility metering options

Discussion at Tuesday's Groton City Council meeting centered around enhancing police presence in local schools and exploring utility metering solutions.

Groton Area School District Superintendent Joe Schwan thanked the police department for its responsiveness, and also reminded city officials and the police about the district's open-door policy for law enforcement.

Schwan emphasized the district was not looking at having anything like a school resource officer, but rather encouraged Groton police to swing by the schools more often. He said it helps add to the physical security of the school. It also can help if the school is having an issue, as students and staff would be more used to seeing police in the halls.

With a couple of recent situations, the school could benefit from having more police presence, Schwan said.

The Groton school district went into a "stay-put" lockdown Monday afternoon out of an abundance of caution after a report was received about an upset parent on their way to the high school.

Earlier in the month, district administration sent out an email regarding a threat investigation. The district learned about threatening comments made by a student on Snapchat. District officials worked with law enforcement to make contact with the student and their parent to investigate the statement, which were deemed non-credible.

Councilman Brian Bahr encouraged Groton Police Chief Stacy Mayou to stop by the school more.

Councilman Kevin Nehls also told the superintendent not to hesitate in reaching out to the council or the police chief.

On the utility front, council members delved into specifics of Irby Utility meters, scrutinizing their capabilities and potential integration into city infrastructure.

Irby and meter manufacturer Landis+Gyr presented an overview of their proposal to replace electric meters in Groton. The information presented Tuesday included technology that would have the ability to read both the city's electric and water meters. However, a water meter would still be required as the proposed options would have a device capable of reading an already-in-place water meter and transferring that data to the city.

The price tag mentioned Tuesday neared half a million, though the project costs could be split up through a couple of city budget cycles.

The scope of work to replace the metering system might be changing, though, as council members asked about the costs of keeping the water and electric meters separate.

The council deferred a decision, opting to wait for a revised quote that excludes water metering components.

### Council approves bids for street work, gravel

The council approved contracting with Jensen Rock & Sand for street resurfacing this year. Jensen had to low bid of \$150,524. Broken out, that bid included \$4.22 per square yard for 2,200 square yards of prime coat, totaling \$9,284. It also includes \$3.21 per square yard for 44,000 square yards of seal coat, totaling \$141,240.

Two other sealed bids were opened Tuesday evening.

A bid from Midwest Coatings totaled \$171,160, which included \$4.80 per square yard for 2,200 square yards of prime coat, totaling \$10,560, and \$3.65 per square yard for 44,000 square yards of seal coat, totaling \$160,600.

Another bid came in from Bituminous Paving with a total cost of \$162,800. That included \$3 per square yard for 2,200 square yards of prime coat totaling \$6,600. It also included \$3.55 per square yard for 44,000 square yards of seal coat totaling \$156,200.

# Groton Daily Independent

**Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 10 of 64**

The council also approved Krueger Brothers Gravel & Dirt's bid to provide gravel at \$21.60 per yard. That bid was the only one the city received for gravel.

- The council held a second reading of an ordinance amending the electrical rates. The change includes a 3 percent increase in electric cost as well as a \$5 base bill. The ordinance goes into effect April 1.
- The council approved hiring a swath of seasonal summer staff.
  - o Tricia Keith was hired as swimming pool co-manager with 13 years of experience.
  - o Karla Pasteur was hired as a lifeguard with 13 years of experience.
  - o Kelli Hanson was hired as a lifeguard with 13 years of experience.
  - o Cody Swanson was hired as a lifeguard with nine years of experience.
  - o Tanae Lipp was hired as a lifeguard with seven years of experience.
  - o Anna Fjeldheim was hired as a lifeguard with two years of experience.
  - o Abby Fjeldheim was hired as a lifeguard with no previous experience listed.
  - o Gretchen Dinger was hired as a lifeguard with three years of experience.
  - o Kinsley Rowen was hired as a lifeguard with no previous experience listed.
  - o Jayden Schwan was hired as a lifeguard with two years of experience.
  - o Rylie Rose was hired as a lifeguard with no previous experience listed.
  - o Carly Gilbert was hired as a lifeguard with two years of experience.
  - o Gracie Pearson was hired as a lifeguard with no previous experience listed.
  - o Samuel Crank was hired as a lifeguard with no previous experience listed.
  - o Hannah Sandness was hired as a lifeguard with two years of experience.
  - o Rylen Ekern was hired as a lifeguard with no previous experience listed.
  - o Matt Locke was hired as baseball coordinator with eight years of experience.
  - o Jaclyn Iverson was hired as softball coordinator with two years of experience.
  - o Reilly Fuhrman was hired as U12 softball coach with two years of experience.
  - o Gavin Englund was hired as a groundkeeper with no previous experience listed.
  - o Braxton Imrie was hired as a groundskeeper with two years of experience.
  - o Nicholas Groebelinghoff was hired as a groundskeeper with one year of experience.
  - o Makenna Krause was hired as a gatekeeper with no previous experience listed.
  - o Rebbeca Padfield was hired for concessions with nine years of experience.
  - o Brian Gravatt was hired as cemetery caretaker with 10 years of experience.
  - o Aaron Severson was hired as public works laborer/park caretaker with nine years of experience.
- The council previously approved hiring Kami Lipp as swimming pool co-manager, Aaron Severson as junior legion coach, Sydney Kurtz as U10 softball coach and Kyle Gerlach as junior teener coach.



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### South Dakota governor asks Trump to build promised statue garden and put it near Mount Rushmore

BY: SETH TUPPER - MARCH 18, 2025 3:44 PM

South Dakota Gov. Larry Rhoden sent President Donald Trump an invitation Tuesday to fulfill a promise from five years ago: the creation of a "National Garden of American Heroes."

And Rhoden wants Trump to put the statue garden in South Dakota's Black Hills.

"In fact, we have a plot of land available in sight of Mount Rushmore that would be ideal for this fantastic effort," Rhoden wrote in a letter to Trump.

That plot of land, according to Rhoden, is privately owned by the Lien family, which is willing to donate it. Members of the family own and operate Pete Lien & Sons Inc., a mining, construction aggregate, and concrete company based in Rapid City.

Additional materials made public by the Governor's Office include a letter from the Lien family, which says the land "straddles the iconic Doane Robinson tunnel," although an attached map appears to depict the land as just north of the tunnel. Motorists frequently stop at the tunnel for a framed view of the mountain carving.

The Lien family has worked with Storyland Development, of California, to produce conceptual drawings of the statue garden, which are included in the materials from the Governor's Office.

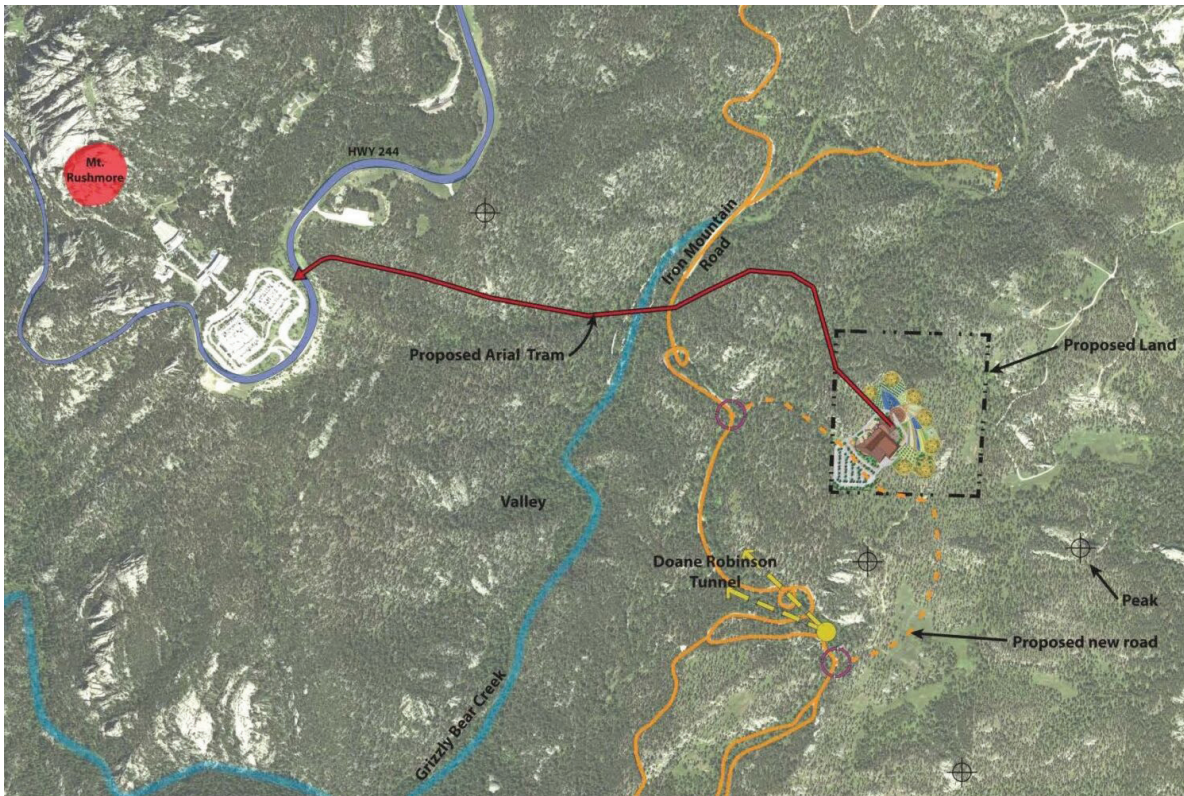
The materials also include a 2020 letter from then-Gov. Kristi Noem, who proposed at the time that the statue garden should be built "at Mount Rushmore National Memorial as an expansion of the Memorial site." She went on to mention the bronze statues of presidents in downtown Rapid City and the statues of governors in Pierre and wrote, "I am confident these organizations would be amenable to a short-term loan of statues to the National Garden."



**A conceptual drawing by Storyland Studios of a National Garden of American Heroes near Mount Rushmore.** (Courtesy of South Dakota Governor's Office)

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 12 of 64



**A Storyland Studios map showing the proposed location of a National Garden of American Heroes.** (Courtesy of South Dakota Governor's Office)

Mount Rushmore is managed by the National Park Service, and much of the surrounding land is managed by the U.S. Forest Service as part of the Black Hills National Forest. Parcels of private land, many of them claimed during the gold rush era of the late 1800s, are scattered throughout the forest.

Trump made his statue garden promise at a Mount Rushmore fireworks celebration on July 3, 2020.

Rhoden has invited Trump back to Mount Rushmore next year for another fireworks display and a celebration of the nation's 250th birthday.

The 2020 announcement came during a speech in which Trump said agents of "cancel culture" were "trying to tear down statues of our Founders" and "deface our most sacred memorials."

George Floyd's murder by a Minneapolis police officer had occurred two months earlier, adding fuel to a reexamination of historic monuments and statues associated with racial injustice. That summer, numerous statues were vandalized, removed or both, including many that honored Confederate Civil War figures.

Trump said in the 2020 speech that those efforts were "erasing our heritage." He called for Americans to "speak up loudly and strongly and powerfully and defend the integrity of our country."

"So today," Trump said at the time, "under the authority vested in me as president of the United States, I am announcing the creation of a new monument to the giants of our past. I am signing an executive order to establish the National Garden of American Heroes, a vast outdoor park that will feature the statues of the greatest Americans to ever live."

Trump issued the executive order that day and another one on Jan. 18, 2021 — two days before he left office at the end of his first term — calling for the creation of the garden without identifying a site.

The second order said the National Endowment for the Arts and National Endowment for the Humanities "should target spending one-twelfth of the discretionary funds available to their agencies" on commissioning the statues. Each of those agencies received \$207 million last year. One-twelfth of that amount would be \$17.2 million apiece.

The second order also included a list of about 250 people to be honored with statues, ranging from historical figures such as George Washington and Harriet Tubman to modern names including Kobe Bryant and Alex Trebek.

*Seth is editor-in-chief of South Dakota Searchlight. He was previously a supervising senior producer for South Dakota Public Broadcasting and a newspaper journalist in Rapid City and Mitchell.*

## Energy Transfer board chair says he sought settlement with Standing Rock in 2016

**Former tribal chair says he only met with company to discuss safety**

**BY: MARY STEURER - MARCH 18, 2025 9:44 AM**

Energy Transfer Executive Chairman Kelcy Warren claimed in court testimony he traveled to North Dakota in December 2016 to discuss a settlement with then-tribal chair David Archambault II to end protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline.

"I said, 'David, I'm here to make a deal with you,'" Warren said in a video deposition shown to jurors last week during a trial involving Energy Transfer and Greenpeace. "What do you want? Money? Land?"

Warren, who was CEO of Energy Transfer at the time, said he was willing to give the tribe a ranch that the company had purchased near part of the pipeline

construction site in North Dakota. Energy Transfer just months prior had bought Cannonball Ranch, which is north of the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in an area that became the center of the anti-pipeline demonstrations.

Warren said he also offered to build a new school on the reservation.

Archambault in a Monday statement to the North Dakota Monitor said his memory of his meeting with Warren is very different. Archambault did not appear as a witness during the trial.

"From my perspective, the purpose of the meeting was not to negotiate a settlement," Archambault wrote.

Archambault said he met with Warren because he was concerned about growing violence at the protests.

"Given the growing danger, I felt it was necessary to have a direct conversation to discuss de-escalation," he wrote.

Archambault said that oil and gas magnate Harold Hamm and then-Quapaw Nation chair John Berrey helped arrange his meeting with Warren.

He said he told Warren at the meeting that he was not there to end the protests.

"He asked what it would take to stop the movement, and I explained that it was no longer in my control," Archambault said. "The fight against the pipeline had become much bigger than Standing Rock; it was about Indigenous rights and the long history of injustice faced by our people."



**Kelcy Warren, executive chairman of Energy Transfer, the company that developed the Dakota Access Pipeline, talks about pipeline security during the Williston Basin Petroleum Conference at the Bismarck Event Center in May 2021.** (Mike McCleary/Bismarck Tribune)

# Groton Daily Independent

**Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 14 of 64**

According to Archambault, Warren told him if he had been aware of the history of how infrastructure projects have affected the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe then "we might not be in this situation."

Archambault said in the statement that more than a year before his meeting with Warren, he met with another Energy Transfer executive, Joey Mahmoud, to relay his concerns about the Dakota Access Pipeline. Mahmoud was in charge of the project for Energy Transfer.

"At that time, I made it clear that the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe would resist the pipeline due to the historical and ongoing harm caused by infrastructure projects on Indigenous lands," Archambault wrote.

Archambault said Mahmoud told him that Energy Transfer is used to dealing with protests.

"I let him know I thought this was going to be different," Archambault wrote.

Warren in his video deposition speculated that Archambault rejected his offer to settle because he had already made a separate deal with a third party. Warren said he suspects someone had paid money to the tribe and that Earthjustice, an environmental law group, was "the carrier of that money."

"It was very clear to me he had struck a deal with the devil," Warren said of Archambault.

Warren acknowledged that he did not have concrete evidence that the deal took place.

"Warren has no evidence of it because it never happened," Jan Hasselman, a senior attorney for Earthjustice who previously represented the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, said in a statement to the Monitor.

Archambault said that his meeting with Warren "ended with an understanding that neither side would change course."

"Energy Transfer would attempt to push the pipeline through, and we would continue to resist," he wrote.

Warren's deposition came as part of Energy Transfer's lawsuit against Greenpeace over its involvement in protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline in 2016 and 2017. The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe started the protests to oppose the project, which it states is a pollution threat to its water and a violation of Native sovereignty. Greenpeace was one of many organizations present at the demonstrations.

In his testimony, Warren said that he was not privy to the day-to-day operations of Energy Transfer at the time of the protests. He said that he had no personal knowledge of Greenpeace's involvement in the demonstrations, and that his legal staff were heading up the lawsuit against the environmental group.

Warren said that it was his understanding that the purpose of the lawsuit was to push back against an organized effort to harm the company, which he said included "defamation" and "paid protesters."

"I did feel strongly that we've got to stand up for ourselves," Warren said.

Energy Transfer alleges Greenpeace coordinated illegal attacks against the pipeline that cost the company hundreds of millions of dollars. Greenpeace denies the claims.

The lawsuit, originally filed in 2019, went to trial in Mandan in late February. The parties presented their closing arguments on Monday, though the jury has yet to render a verdict.

*Mary Steurer is a reporter based in Bismarck for the North Dakota Monitor. A native of St. Louis, Steurer previously worked as the local government reporter for the Casper Star-Tribune newspaper in Wyoming.*

## Supreme Court Chief Justice Roberts pushes back against Trump call to impeach judges

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - MARCH 18, 2025 2:09 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice John G. Roberts on Tuesday rejected calls to impeach federal judges who issue rulings that block Trump administration policies, a rare public statement from the nation's highest sitting judge.

"For more than two centuries, it has been established that impeachment is not an appropriate response to disagreement concerning a judicial decision," Roberts said. "The normal appellate review process exists for that purpose."

The comments, provided to States Newsroom by a spokesperson for the court, came just hours after President Donald Trump vented his frustration with a federal judge on social media.

"I'm just doing what the VOTERS wanted me to do," Trump wrote. "This judge, like many of the Crooked Judges I am forced to appear before, should be IMPEACHED!!! WE DON'T WANT VICIOUS, VIOLENT, AND DEMENTED CRIMINALS, MANY OF THEM DERANGED MURDERERS, IN OUR COUNTRY. MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!!!"

The post appeared to be directed at U.S. Judge James Emanuel Boasberg in the District of Columbia, who over the weekend blocked the Trump administration from deporting certain immigrants under the Alien Enemies Act of 1798.

The American Civil Liberties Union is arguing the Trump administration violated the judge's order by not bringing back flights traveling to Honduras and El Salvador on Saturday.

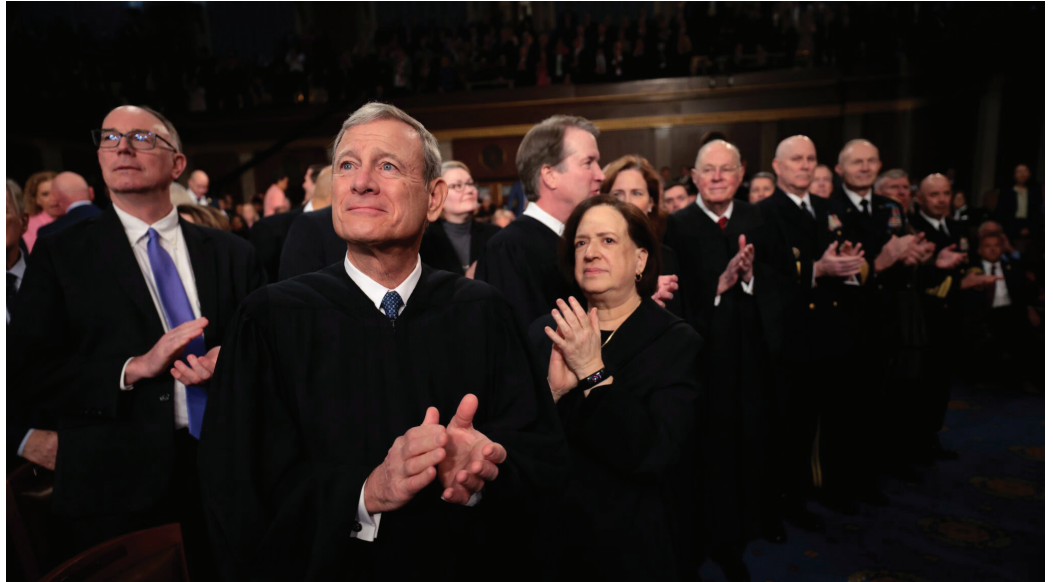
Boasberg on Monday called on attorneys from the Justice Department to provide detailed information on the deportation flights over the weekend.

The U.S. House of Representatives must vote to impeach federal officials. Trump was impeached twice by the House during his first term in office.

The Senate then holds a trial, after which at least two-thirds of the lawmakers in that chamber must vote to remove the federal official from office. The upper chamber didn't take that step during Trump's first term and he was acquitted twice.

"The House has initiated impeachment proceedings more than 60 times; roughly a third of all proceedings have led to full impeachments," according to a post by the Office of the Historian. "Just eight individuals—all federal judges—have been convicted and removed from office by the Senate."

*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.*

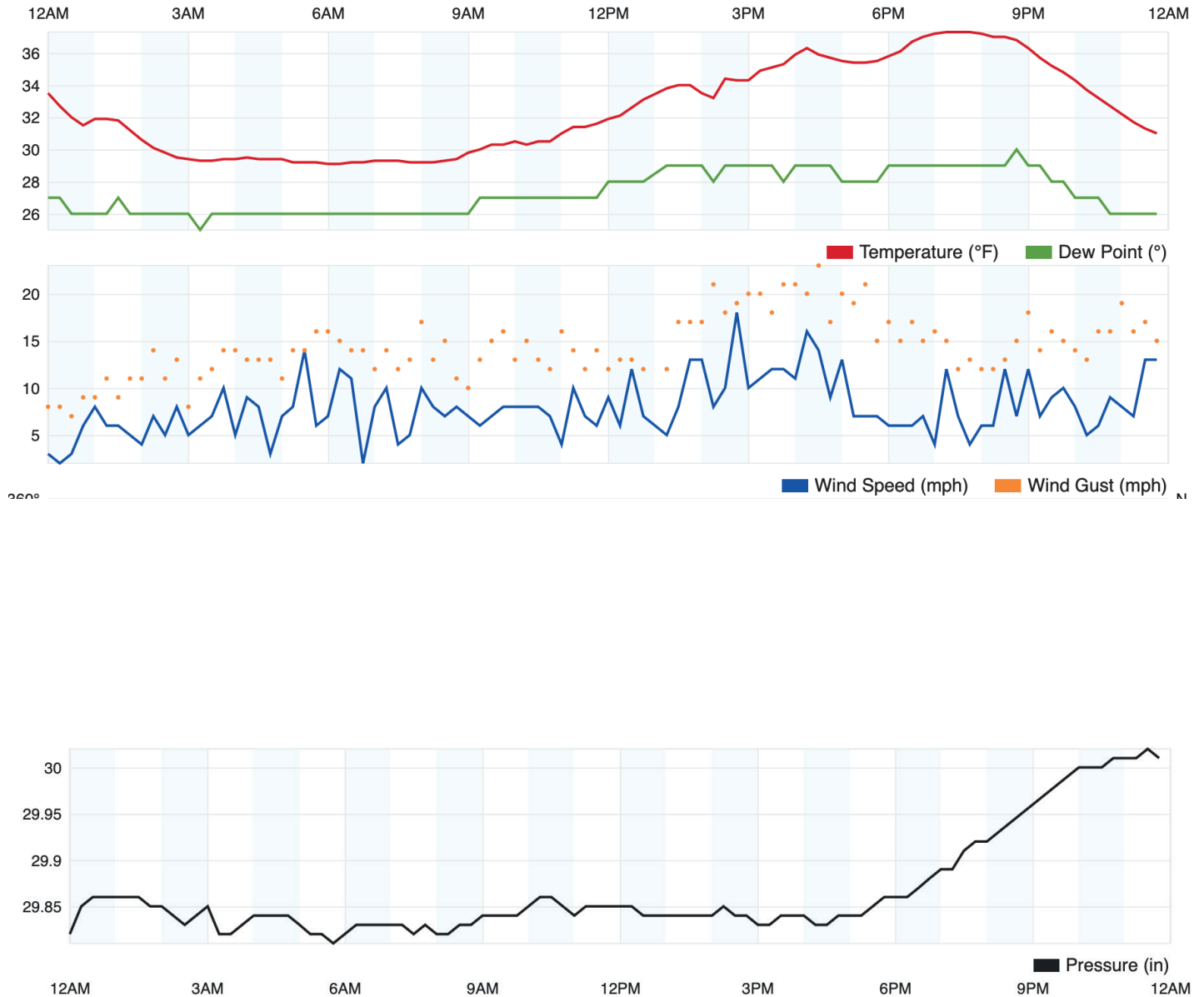


**Chief Justice of the Supreme Court John Roberts and Justice Elena Kagan attend U.S. President Donald Trump's address to a joint session of Congress at the U.S. Capitol on March 4, 2025, in Washington, D.C.** (Photo by Win McNamee/Getty Images)

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 16 of 64

## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 17 of 64

Today



High: 43 °F

Gradual  
Clearing and  
Breezy

Tonight



Low: 20 °F

Mostly Clear

Thursday



High: 58 °F

Sunny then  
Mostly Sunny  
and Breezy

Thursday  
Night



Low: 31 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Friday



High: 45 °F

Chance  
Rain/Snow and  
Breezy

March 18, 2025

1:47 PM



## NEXT FEW DAYS

WEDNESDAY



HIGHS: 39-44°F  
LOWS: 23-28°F

EARLY MORNING  
LIGHT SNOW

THURSDAY



HIGHS: 42-58°F  
LOWS: 19-22°F

FRIDAY



HIGHS: 45-53°F  
LOWS: 27-33°F

SPRINKLES -  
FLURRIES

SATURDAY



HIGHS: 53-59°F  
LOWS: 19-28°F

Mild temperatures, near to about 5-10 degrees above normal, are expected through the next several days. Little chance for moisture exists however. Wednesday and Friday will both be rather windy, at about 30 to 45 mph

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 18 of 64

## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 37 °F at 7:18 PM**

**Low Temp: 29 °F at 5:54 AM**

**Wind: 23 mph at 3:31 PM**

**Precip: : 0.00**

Day length: 12 hours, 10 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 73 in 2012

Record Low: -11 in 1965

Average High: 43

Average Low: 21

Average Precip in March.: 0.49

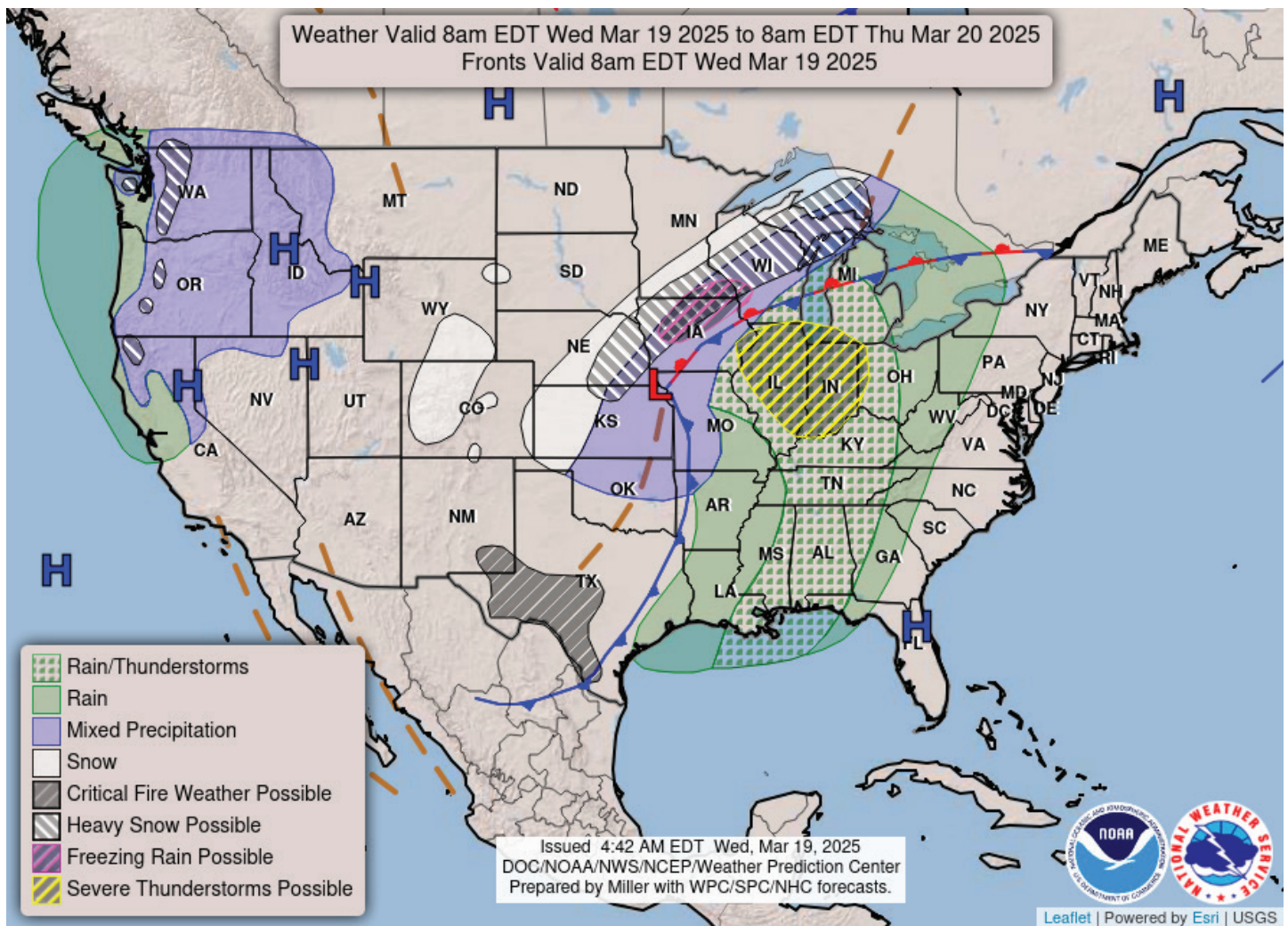
Precip to date in March.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 1.66

Precip Year to Date: 0.45

Sunset Tonight: 7:45:19 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:32:45 am



# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 19 of 64

## Today in Weather History

March 19, 1968: During a severe weather event, hail up to 1.75 inches in diameter fell 2 miles south of Brookings. Also, hail 1.00 inch in diameter fell 3 miles northeast of Sioux Falls.

March 19, 2006: Heavy snow of 7 to as much as 20 inches fell on the afternoon of the 18th until around noon on the 20th. The South Dakota Department of Public Safety issued a travel advisory for any travel but especially for the State Basketball Tournament travelers. Interstate-90 was closed on Sunday into Monday morning, with many people stranded. Many cars and trucks were stuck on the roads. Many schools and meetings were postponed or canceled. Snowfall amounts included 8 inches at Blunt, Onida, and Lake Sharpe, 9 inches at Mission Ridge, 10 inches at Pierre, 11 inches at Fort Pierre and near Stephan, 12 inches at Eagle Butte, 14 inches northwest of Presho, 16 inches at Murdo, and 20 inches near Iona.

1907: The highest March temperature in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, was set when the temperature soared to 97 degrees. Dodge City, Kansas, also set a March record with 98 degrees. Denver, Colorado, set a daily record high of 81 degrees.

1948: An estimated F4 tornado moved through Fosterburg, Bunker Hill, and Gillespie, Illinois, killing 33 people and injuring 449 others. 2,000 buildings in Bunker Hill were damaged or destroyed. The total damage was \$3.6 million.

2003: One of the worst blizzards since records began in 1872, struck the Denver metro area and Colorado's Front Range started with a vengeance. Denver International Airport was closed, stranding about 4,000 travelers. The weight of the snow caused a 40-foot gash in a portion of the roof, forcing the evacuation of that section of the main terminal building. Winds gusting to 40 mph produced drifts six feet high in places around the city. Snowfall in foothills was even more impressive. The heavy wet snow caused numerous roofs of homes and businesses to collapse. The estimated cost of property damage alone, not including large commercial buildings, was \$93 million, making it the most costly snowstorm on record for the area. In Denver alone, at least 258 structures were damaged. Up to 135,000 people lost power during the storm, and it took several days for power to be restored. Mayor Wellington Webb of Denver said, "This is the storm of the century, a backbreaker, a record-breaker, a roof breaker." Avalanches in the mountains and foothills closed many roads, including Interstate 70, stranding hundreds of skiers and travelers. The Eldora Ski area 270 skiers were stranded when an avalanche closed the main access road. After the storm, a military helicopter had to deliver food to the resort until the road could be cleared. Two people died in Aurora from heart attacks after shoveling the heavy wet snow. The National Guard sent 40 soldiers and 20 heavy-duty vehicles to rescue stranded travelers along a section of I-70. The storm made March 2003 the snowiest March on record, the fourth snowiest month on record, and the fifth wettest March on record. The total of 22.9 inches is the most significant 24-hour total in March. The storm also broke 19 consecutive months of below-average precipitation for Denver. The 31.8 inches of snow was recorded at the former Stapleton Airport in Denver for its second-greatest snowstorm on record (the greatest was 37.5 inches on 12/4-12/5/1913) with up to three feet in other areas in and around the city and more than seven feet in the foothills. Higher amounts included: Fritz Peak: 87.5 inches, Rollinsville: 87.5 inches, Canin Creek: 83 inches, Near Bergen Park: 74 inches, Northwest of Evergreen: 73 inches, Cola Creek Canyon: 72 inches, Georgetown: 70 inches, Jamestown: 63 inches, Near Blackhawk: 60 inches, Eldora Ski Area: 55 inches, Ken Caryl Ranch: 46.6 inches, Aurora: 40 inches, Centennial: 38 inches, Buckley AFB: 37 inches, Southwest Denver: 35 inches, Louisville: 34 inches, Arvada: 32 inches, Broomfield: 31 inches, Westminster: 31 inches and Boulder: 22.5 inches. This storm was the result of a very moist intense slow-moving Pacific system that tracked across the four corners and into southeastern Colorado, which allowed a deep easterly upslope to form among the front-range.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 20 of 64



## MAN ON THE STREET

A late-night television host decided that he would leave his comfortable studio setting, walk out into the streets of New York and ask people some questions about the Bible.

"Can you recite any one of the Ten Commandments?" he asked the first person he met. After a few moments' thought, the young lady replied with a smile, "Freedom of speech?"

Turning to another person who was standing by, he asked, "Would you please complete this verse from the Bible: 'Let him who is without sin....'" Thinking for a moment or two, the young man responded by saying, "Have a good time!"

Then he turned to another young man who was listening and watching with great intensity. Walking to where he was standing he asked, "What is the name of the person in the Bible who was swallowed by a whale?" With no hesitation the young man responded with authority, "Pinocchio!"

No doubt the humor of these stories will bring a smile to many faces. But the tragic truth is that each of them represents the fact that not many people have any knowledge of what the Bible is all about.

Although more Bibles are purchased each year, fewer individuals seem to be reading them. Not only has the Bible become insignificant to many, but its message seems to be irrelevant and unimportant to most.

Prayer: Lord, we who are Your disciples are ultimately accountable to You for people hearing Your message. Trouble our heart until we become faithful witnesses. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Work hard so you can present yourself to God and receive his approval. Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15

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

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 21 of 64

## 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    Phone Number to Confirm: 7460

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 22 of 64



## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.18.25

27 28 31 32 33 24

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$324,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 10 Mins  
15 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.17.25

11 12 20 29 33 8

All Star Bonus: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$26,770,000**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 25 Mins 15  
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.18.25

8 20 37 39 46 15

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 40 Mins 15  
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.15.25

4 5 15 29 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$67,000**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 40 Mins 15  
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.17.25

4 19 21 38 64 26

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 9 Mins 16  
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.17.25

11 18 23 38 60 9

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$416,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 9 Mins 16  
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 23 of 64

## Upcoming Groton Events

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  
05/12/2025 High School Girls Golf Meet at Olive Grove  
05/26/2025 Memorial Day Services Groton Union Cemetery with lunch at Legion Post #39, 12pm  
06/07/2025 Day of Play  
06/13/2025 SDSU 4 Person Scramble at Olive Grove  
06/21/2025 Groton Triathlon  
06/23/2025 Ladies 2 Person Scramble at Olive Grove  
07/04/2025 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course  
07/09/2025 Legion Auxiliary #39 Salad Buffet & Dessert Bar at the Groton Legion 11am-1pm  
07/11-13/25 2025 VFW 12U Class B State Baseball Tournament  
07/13/2025 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm  
07/16/2025 Men's Pro Am Golf at Olive Grove  
07/25/2025 Ferney Open Scramble Golf at Olive Grove  
08/01/2025 Wine on Nine Fundraiser at Olive Grove  
08/09/2025 2nd Annual Celebration in the Park/Rib Cook-Off 1-9:30pm  
08/23/2025 Glacial Tournament at Olive Grove  
09/06/2025 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm  
09/07/2025 Sunflower Classic Couples Scramble at Olive Grove  
10/31/2025 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm  
11/27/2025 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1:30pm  
12/06/2025 Olive Grove Holiday Party and Silent Live Auction Fundraiser

## News from the Associated Press

### **DYXnet Launches AI Computing Solution - Accelerating Enterprises' Private DeepSeek Deployment**

HONG KONG SAR - Media OutReach Newswire - 19 March 2025 - In the midst of an AI-driven transformation, DeepSeek has emerged as the preferred high-performance, open-source large language model (LLM) for enterprises aiming to develop dedicated AI applications. Responding to the vigorous demand for tailoring AI with private LLM, DYXnet — a wholly-owned subsidiary of VNET Group (NASDAQ: VNET) and a leading enterprise network service provider in Greater China — has introduced "DeepSeek-in-a-Box", a one-stop DeepSeek AI computing solution. This offering integrates model deployment, computing power, storage, and network resources, addressing the needs of enterprises for model training and AI application deployment. Supported by DYXnet's specialized AI technical team, this solution enables businesses to utilize DeepSeek and achieve innovative advancements effectively.

**Comprehensive "DeepSeek-in-a-Box" Powered by Dedicated NVIDIA GPU**

DeepSeek has gained significant attention globally following the release of its DeepSeek-R1 model earlier this year. The model's "Deep-Think" feature excels at tasks that require logical inference, with performance comparable to OpenAI's ChatGPT-4o. Its cost-effective MoE architecture has lowered the threshold for enterprises developing dedicated AI systems. Additionally, the model's open-source nature allows for creating private LLM, enabling developers to foster innovation by tailoring the model to their specific needs while enhancing security, controllability, and compliance. According to a report from CICC Investment Bank, the total sales of China's DeepSeek AI server market are projected to reach 54 billion yuan by 2025. Approximately 5% of this demand is expected to come from sectors that handle sensitive data, such as government, finance, public services, and healthcare.

Due to the elevated demand for private DeepSeek deployments, DYXnet offers enterprise customers "DeepSeek-in-a-Box". This AI computing solution is delivered as Infrastructure-as-a-Service (IaaS), integrating DeepSeek model deployment, computing resources, storage, and network capabilities in one package, which can be delivered in as short as 48 hours. The solution not only helps enterprises avoid the upfront costs of purchasing hardware but also guarantees complete AI technical support.

DYXnet's DeepSeek AI computing solution is designed to tackle enterprises' main challenges when privatizing DeepSeek models, including model deployment, fine-tuning, and application. By aligning various DeepSeek versions with the appropriate GPU resources and optimizing them through fine-tuning, ensuring optimal performance and a ready-to-use experience. DYXnet's specialized AI team also provides professional technical support in model selection, hardware configuration, operational updates, and services such as model fine-tuning, evaluation, deployment, data management, knowledge base development, and system integration. The solution effectively meets the diverse needs of customers across different industries.

"DeepSeek-in-a-Box" is available in three packages: "Basic," "Advanced," and "Full Power," corresponding to the DeepSeek-R1-Distill-Qwen-32B, DeepSeek-R1-Distill-Llama-70B, and DeepSeek-R1 models, respectively. All utilize NVIDIA RTX 4090 graphics cards or H20 chips, allowing enterprises to leverage the performance of dedicated NVIDIA GPU.

**Enhance Data Transmission Quality and Security with Dedicated Line for AI**

DYXnet's parent company, VNET Group, is a leading player in the domestic data center industry and has actively transformed toward the development of AIDC (Artificial Intelligence Data Center) in recent years to meet the substantial demand from corporate clients for AI digital transformation. Leveraging VNET's robust infrastructure resources, along with DYXnet's 25 years of expertise in enterprise networking and its experience in integrating AI with cloud, network, and cybersecurity services, the DeepSeek AI computing solution further enriches its AI full-chain layout and responds to the urgent demand for AI innovation from enterprise customers.

DYXnet is accelerating the construction of AINet, a reliable and high-speed dedicated line for AI. With

exceptional network services and a robust backbone, DYXnet enables businesses to transmit data seamlessly. It also creates a secure private computing environment for customers, maximizing the value of their data and computing resources while ensuring data security.

DYXnet is committed to working hand in hand with customers, helping enterprises seize opportunities in a rapidly changing market and achieve business innovation and growth. In the future, DYXnet will continue to optimize and upgrade its solutions to meet the evolving market demands and promote the widespread application of AI technology.

## **Widespread license violations exposed as North Macedonia mourns nightclub fire victims**

By KONSTANTIN TESTORIDES and DEREK GATOPOULOS Associated Press

SKOPJE, North Macedonia (AP) — Authorities in North Macedonia said Wednesday they have shuttered dozens of nightclubs and entertainment venues following a deadly fire that killed 59 people at a live pop concert.

Government spokesperson Marija Miteva said that out of 50 establishments inspected in several cities, only 22 had valid licenses.

"For all premises with expired licenses or no license at all, the state market inspectorate has ordered the suspension of activities until all necessary documents are reviewed and validated," Miteva said.

The deadly fire that erupted in the eastern town of Kocani on Sunday occurred while pyrotechnics were being used at an indoor venue later found to have multiple safety and licensing violations.

Authorities said Wednesday that 16 people remain in custody for questioning, following police interviews with more than 70 individuals.

North Macedonia has declared a week of national mourning after the disaster, which has profoundly shaken this small Balkan nation of two million people and triggered protests and large outdoor vigils.

Funeral services for the mostly young concertgoers are scheduled for Thursday in Kocani, and authorities said autopsies and formal identifications have been completed. Memorial services will also be held elsewhere in the country.

"Let us be calm, let us be gentle, let us be peaceful, patient. Let our prayers and our thoughts be directed towards our deceased, but also towards our injured for their health and recovery," said Metropolitan Bishop Ilarion of Bregalnica, a region that includes Kocani.

Among the 150 injured, dozens of patients have been transferred to hospitals across Europe, primarily for burn treatment. Belgium, the Netherlands, and Greece are providing support in an EU-backed effort.

Stojance Angelov, who heads the country's crisis management agency, said the country's Orthodox Church is leading the funeral arrangements.

He added in an online post: "No words can truly capture the depth of this tragedy or express the overwhelming sadness I feel. Broken by grief, I cannot find anything strong enough to convey my condolences to the families who lost their beloved sons and daughters."

## **Takeaways from the AP's report on how USAID cuts are imperiling Agent Orange cleanup**

By DAVID RISING and ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL Associated Press

HANOI, Vietnam (AP) — At a former American air base in southern Vietnam, work abruptly stopped last month on efforts to clean up tons of soil contaminated with deadly dioxin from the military's Agent Orange defoliant.

The Trump administration's broad cuts to USAID also halted efforts to clear unexploded American munitions and landmines, a rehabilitation program for war victims, and work on a museum exhibit detailing U.S. efforts to remediate the damage of the Vietnam War.

In addition to exposing thousands of people to health hazards, the cuts risk jeopardizing hard-won dip-

# Groton Daily Independent

**Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 26 of 64**

omatic gains with Vietnam, which is strategically increasingly important as the U.S. looks for support in its efforts to counter a growingly aggressive China.

"It doesn't help at all," said Chuck Searcy, an American Vietnam War veteran who has dedicated his time to humanitarian programs in the country for the last three decades. "It is just another example of what a lot of critics want to remind us of: You can't depend on the Americans. It is not a good message."

Funding for the cleanup at Bien Hoa Air Base was frozen for about a week and then restored, but it's unclear whether funds are fully flowing or how they'll be disbursed with no USAID employees left to administer operations, said Tim Rieser, a senior adviser to Sen. Peter Welch, who drafted a letter to administration officials signed by Welch and more than a dozen other Democratic senators urging the continued funding of the programs.

Other programs remain cut.

"They have reversed a number of these arbitrary decisions, but we're far from out of the woods and we don't know how this is going to end," said Rieser, who was retired Sen. Patrick Leahy's foreign policy aide when the Vermont Democrat secured the original funding for Vietnam War remediation projects.

Cuts come as Vietnam's importance grows

The interruptions to aid comes as the two countries prepare to mark the 50th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War and the 30th anniversary of the normalization of relations between Washington and Hanoi.

The two countries have since been increasing defense and security cooperation as China has become increasingly aggressive in the region. In 2023, Vietnam elevated relations with the U.S. to a comprehensive strategic partnership, the highest level of cooperation and the same as its traditional partners Russia and China.

On Inauguration Day, Trump issued an executive order directing a freeze of foreign assistance funding and a review of all U.S. aid and development work abroad, charging that much of foreign assistance was wasteful and advanced a liberal agenda.

But Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth on Feb. 7 "underscored the department's support for ongoing efforts to collaborate on the legacy of war issues," in his introductory call with his Vietnamese counterpart, according to the Defense Department.

Just 20 days later, the administration ordered all but a fraction of the U.S. Agency for International Development, or USAID, staffers off the job and terminated at least 83% of its contracts and cut programs globally, including in Vietnam.

At Bien Hoa, that halted work to clean up 500,000 cubic meters (650,000 cubic yards) of soil contaminated with Agent Orange, a wartime herbicide that was later found to cause a wide range of health problems including cancer and birth defects.

Next steps unclear, and official answers vague

The U.S. Embassy in Hanoi and USAID referred all questions on the war legacy projects to the State Department in Washington.

In a one-line email, the State Department said that "USAID has three contracts conducting dioxin remediation at Bien Hoa in Vietnam that are active and running."

Asked to elaborate on how long the Bien Hoa project was shut down and what operations had resumed, as well as the status of other war legacy programs, the State Department said "we have nothing to share on the details of these programs at this time."

Vietnam's Defense Ministry referred questions to the Foreign Ministry, which did not respond to requests for comment.

But in a Feb. 13 press conference, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Pham Thu Hang expressed concern about what could happen if American funding for war legacy projects, which amounts to some \$200 million per year, were to end.

Cuts risk undoing decades of diplomacy to rebuild ties with Vietnam

It's too early to say exactly how the abrupt decision to then end the funding will affect relations, but it is likely to call into question whether Washington is still a reliable partner in other dealings, said Nguyen

# Groton Daily Independent

**Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 27 of 64**

Khac Giang, visiting fellow in the Vietnam Studies Program at Singapore's ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute.

"The level of trust gradually increased and it is very easy to dismantle," the political scientist said.

Leahy, who retired from the Senate in 2023, told The Associated Press that it had been a lengthy process over the last 35 years to build the relationship by working hand-in-hand with the Vietnamese to address the problems left behind.

"People in the Trump administration who know nothing and care less about these programs are arbitrarily jeopardizing relations with a strategic partner in one of the most challenging regions of the world," he said in an email.

## **Agent Orange cleanup and other efforts critical to ties with Vietnam jeopardized by USAID cuts**

By DAVID RISING and ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL Associated Press

HANOI, Vietnam (AP) — At a former American air base in southern Vietnam, work abruptly stopped last month on efforts to clean up tons of soil contaminated with deadly dioxin from the military's Agent Orange defoliant.

The Trump administration's broad cuts to USAID also halted efforts to clear unexploded American munitions and landmines, a rehabilitation program for war victims, and work on a museum exhibit detailing U.S. efforts to remediate the damage of the Vietnam War.

In addition to exposing thousands of people to health hazards, the cuts risk jeopardizing hard-won diplomatic gains with Vietnam, which is strategically increasingly important as the U.S. looks for support in its efforts to counter a growingly aggressive China.

"It doesn't help at all," said Chuck Searcy, an American Vietnam War veteran who has dedicated his time to humanitarian programs in the country for the last three decades. "It is just another example of what a lot of critics want to remind us of: You can't depend on the Americans. It is not a good message."

Funding for the Agent Orange cleanup at Bien Hoa Air Base was unfrozen about a week after it was stopped, but it's unclear whether funds are fully flowing or how they'll be disbursed, with no USAID employees left to administer operations, said Tim Rieser, a senior adviser to Sen. Peter Welch, who drafted a letter to administration officials signed by Welch and more than a dozen other Democratic senators urging the continued funding of the programs.

Other programs remain cut.

"They have reversed a number of these arbitrary decisions, but we're far from out of the woods and we don't know how this is going to end," Rieser said.

From foes to friends

The interruptions to aid comes as the U.S. and Vietnam prepare to mark the 50th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War and the 30th anniversary of the normalization of relations between Washington and Hanoi.

It was a slow road back from the war, which lasted some 20 years and saw more than 58,000 Americans, and many times that number of Vietnamese, killed before it finally ended in 1975.

Starting in the 1990s, the U.S. began helping its former enemy address wartime legacies like Agent Orange, a herbicide dropped from planes during the war to clear jungle brush, and which was later found to cause a wide range of health problems, including cancer and birth defects.

The two countries have since been increasing defense and security cooperation as China has become increasingly assertive in the region. In 2023, Vietnam elevated relations with the U.S. to a comprehensive strategic partnership, the highest level of cooperation and the same as Russia and China.

Trump cuts foreign aid, citing waste

On Inauguration Day, Trump issued an executive order directing a freeze of foreign assistance funding and a review of all U.S. aid and development work abroad, charging that much of foreign assistance was wasteful and advanced a liberal agenda.

But Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth on Feb. 7 "underscored the department's support for ongoing

# Groton Daily Independent

**Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 28 of 64**

efforts to collaborate on the legacy of war issues," in his introductory call with his Vietnamese counterpart, according to the Defense Department.

Twenty days later, the administration ordered all but a fraction of the U.S. Agency for International Development, or USAID, staffers off the job and terminated at least 83% of its contracts and cut programs globally, including in Vietnam.

Rieser, who was retired Sen. Patrick Leahy's foreign policy aide when the Vermont Democrat secured the original funding for Vietnam War remediation projects, said the idea that money was being wasted is "factually wrong."

"Our foreign aid advances our own national interests, and if the Trump administration doesn't understand that it's hard to know what to say," he said.

Agent Orange cleanup funding resumed, but project's future is uncertain

A U.S. project to clean up from the former Da Nang Air Base was successfully completed in 2018, giving rise to the Bien Hoa cleanup effort outside of Ho Chi Minh City, formerly known as Saigon.

The contamination at Bien Hoa, the busiest airport in the world during the war, was nearly four times greater than in Da Nang, with some 500,000 cubic meters (650,000 cubic yards) of dioxin-contaminated soil and sediment.

As of 2024, the province in which Bien Hoa is located had more than 8,600 people still suffering from Agent Orange-related health issues, according to local authorities.

Work began in 2020 on a 10-year project funded by USAID and the Department of Defense, with an estimated cost of \$430 million overall. Soil with low levels of dioxin contamination were to be unearthed and taken to secure landfills, while highly contaminated soil was to be taken to short-term storage for treatment.

Workers have already excavated more than 100,000 cubic meters of dioxin-contaminated soil, with 13 hectares treated. Ground was to be broken next month on the construction of a system to treat the most severely contaminated soil.

"You have to wonder if the people who made the decision to freeze these funds know anything about the tragic history of the U.S. and Vietnam ... and they must not care about the many thousands of tons of severely contaminated soil that is exposing tens of thousands of people to a very serious health risk," Rieser said.

The U.S. Embassy in Hanoi and USAID referred all questions on the war legacy projects to the State Department in Washington.

In a one-line email, the State Department said that "USAID has three contracts conducting dioxin remediation at Bien Hoa in Vietnam that are active and running."

Asked to elaborate on how long the Bien Hoa project was shut down and what operations had resumed, as well as the status of other war legacy programs, the State Department said "we have nothing to share on the details of these programs at this time."

Vietnam's Defense Ministry referred questions to the Foreign Ministry, which did not respond to requests for comment.

But in a Feb. 13 press conference, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Pham Thu Hang expressed concern about what could happen if American funding for war legacy projects, which amounts to some \$200 million per year, were to end.

"The suspension of USAID-supported projects, especially those on clearing bombs and explosives left over from the war, as well as the Bien Hoa airport detoxification project, will have a strong impact on human safety as well as the environment in the project areas," she said.

On Tuesday, a U.S. federal judge ruled that the dismantling of USAID likely violated the U.S. Constitution and blocked further cuts, but stopped short of reversing firings or fully resurrecting the agency.

Cuts risk undoing decades of diplomacy to rebuild ties with Vietnam

Sen. Leahy, who retired in 2023, told The Associated Press that it had been a lengthy process over the last 35 years to build the relationship by working hand-in-hand with the Vietnamese to address the prob-

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 29 of 64

lems left behind.

"It is through these efforts that two former enemies are now partners. If we pack up and leave without finishing what we started, it will send a message that the Americans can't be trusted," he wrote in an email.

"People in the Trump administration who know nothing and care less about these programs are arbitrarily jeopardizing relations with a strategic partner in one of the most challenging regions of the world."

It's too early to say exactly how the abrupt decision will affect relations, but it is likely to call into question whether Washington is still a reliable partner in other dealings, said Nguyen Khac Giang, a political scientist who is a visiting fellow in the Vietnam Studies Program at Singapore's ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.

"The level of trust gradually increased and it is very easy to dismantle," he said, adding that Vietnam may now think twice before deepening military cooperation ties or purchasing American weapons.

"There is good reason for Hanoi to be very cautious."

POW/MIA projects not affected, but others saw funding cut

One joint program not affected by the USAID cuts is ongoing efforts to find and identify missing American troops, the Hawaii-based Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency in Hawaii told the AP. Funding for the effort falls under the U.S. defense budget rather than foreign aid.

But funding for the effort to find and identify hundreds of thousands of missing Vietnamese war victims was cut, then reinstated, and it's still unclear whether money is again flowing, Rieser said.

And, he said, funds remain frozen for a new U.S. exhibit at the War Remnants Museum in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam's main museum on the war, which is currently focused on documenting American atrocities like the My Lai massacre and the devastating impact of Agent Orange.

The exhibit, which was to open this year to coincide with the two anniversaries, highlights U.S. efforts to address the worst legacies of the war, Rieser said.

"Right now it's a museum of American war crimes and the whole point of this is to show that we didn't just walk away from what happened, we decided to do something about it," he said.

"We want that to be part of the story for the hundreds of thousands of visitors to that museum, to show that the United States didn't just walk away."

## Police arrest Istanbul mayor, a key Erdogan rival, over alleged corruption and terror links

By MEHMET GUZEL and SUZAN FRASER Associated Press

ISTANBUL (AP) — Turkish police on Wednesday arrested Istanbul's mayor — a popular opposition leader and key rival of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan — and several other prominent figures as part of investigations into alleged corruption and terror links. It was a dramatic escalation in an ongoing crackdown on the opposition and dissenting voices in Turkey.

The state-run Anadolu Agency said prosecutors issued detention warrants for the mayor, Ekrem Imamoglu, and some 100 other people. Among those detained was Imamoglu's close aide, Murat Ongun.

Authorities also closed several roads around Istanbul and banned demonstrations in the city for four days in an apparent effort to prevent protests following the arrest. Private NTV television said two Istanbul district mayors were among those detained.

Critics say the crackdown follows significant losses by Erdogan's ruling party in local elections last year amid growing calls for early national elections. Government officials insist that the courts operate independently and reject claims that legal actions against opposition figures are politically motivated.

"We are facing great tyranny, but I want you to know that I will not be discouraged," Imamoglu said earlier in the day in a video post on social media.

The backdrop

Erdogan, a populist with increasingly authoritarian tendencies, has led Turkey as prime minister or president for more than 20 years and is now the longest-serving leader in the Turkish republic's history. His current term runs until 2028 but he has indicated he'd like to serve longer — something he could achieve with the help of a friendly parliament.

# Groton Daily Independent

**Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 30 of 64**

Imamoglu was arrested as police searched his home, but it wasn't immediately clear if anything was confiscated. His wife, Dilek Imamoglu, told the private Now television that police arrived at their residence before dawn and that the mayor was taken around 7:30 a.m.

The Istanbul Stock Exchange's main index dropped by 7% over news of his arrest, triggering a temporary halt to trading to prevent panic selling and stabilize the market. The Turkish lira lost some 7% of its value against the dollar.

Anadolu, the news agency, said that Ekrem Imamoglu and several others are suspected of extortion, money laundering and irregularities concerning tenders and procurements, among other crimes.

Imamoglu is also suspected of aiding the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, by allegedly forming an alliance with a Kurdish umbrella organization for the Istanbul municipal elections, the report said. The PKK has waged a decadeslong insurgency within Turkey and is designated a terrorist organization by Ankara, Washington and other allies.

## Silencing the opposition

A day earlier, Istanbul University invalidated Imamoglu's diploma, effectively disqualifying him from running in the next presidential race — a university degree is a requisite for running in elections under Turkish law.

The mayor's party — the main opposition Republican People's Party, or CHP — was to hold a primary on Sunday where Imamoglu was expected to be chosen for its candidate in future presidential elections.

With all the arrests Wednesday, that vote was in doubt but party chairman Ozgur Ozel told the opposition-aligned Halik TV channel that it would go ahead as planned. Ozel said Imamoglu's detention was "an attempted coup against our next president."

In a social media post in English, Imamoglu said: "The will of the people cannot be silenced through intimidation or unlawful acts. I stand resolute, entrusting myself not only to the 16 million residents of Istanbul but to the 86 million citizens" of Turkey.

Turkey's pro-Kurdish Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party condemned the detentions and called for the immediate release of all taken into custody.

The dawn raid on Imamoglu's home and his arrest was a "disgrace that will not be forgotten for centuries. This operation, which shatters faith in justice, is an attempt to redesign politics through the judiciary," Tulay Hatimogullari, the party's co-chairwoman, wrote on X.

As he was being arrested, Ongun, the mayor's aide, appealed for support on X, though he at the time did not appear to know that the mayor was also being taken into custody.

"They think they can silence us and prevent us from defending and supporting Ekrem Imamoglu," Ongun said. "I entrust Ekrem Imamoglu to the Turkish nation. Protect, watch over and support him. They cannot defeat the nation."

Separately, police also detained a prominent investigative journalist, Ismail Saymaz, for questioning, the opposition-aligned Halk TV reported.

Meanwhile, internet-access advocacy group netblocks.org reported Wednesday that access has been restricted in Turkey to popular social media platforms.

## Legal obstacles

In nullifying Imamoglu's diploma, the university cited alleged irregularities in his 1990 transfer from a private university in northern Cyprus to its Faculty of Business Administration. Imamoglu said he would challenge the decision.

Imamoglu faces multiple lawsuits, including allegations of trying to influence a judicial expert investigating opposition-led municipalities. The cases could result in prison sentences and a political ban.

He is also appealing a 2022 conviction of insulting members of Turkey's Supreme Electoral Council, a case that could result in a political ban.

Imamoglu was elected mayor of Turkey's largest city in March 2019 in a historic blow to Erdogan and the president's Justice and Development Party, which had controlled Istanbul for a quarter-century. The party pushed to void the municipal election results in the city of 16 million, alleging irregularities.

The challenge resulted in a repeat of the election a few months later, which Imamoglu also won. The

# Groton Daily Independent

**Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 31 of 64**

mayor retained his seat following local elections last year, during which his party made significant gains against Erdogan's governing party.

Devlet Bahceli, an Erdogan ally from the Nationalist Movement Party, slammed the opposition on X, saying Wednesday that to "oppose the judiciary and law, even to debate it, is an invitation to discord and violence" and adding it was "important to accept whatever decision was made by the courts."

## **Iran celebrates ancient fire festival ahead of Persian New Year as tensions with US loom**

By VAHID SALEMI Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — I've worked for The Associated Press as a photographer since 1999. A lot of what I cover involves either Iran's government or its relations with the West, but I also try to shoot on the streets of Tehran as well to show the world what life looks like here in my hometown.

The fire festival offers a great opportunity for that.

Known as "Chaharshanbe Souri" in Farsi, the festival comes in the hours just before the Wednesday before Nowruz, which is the Persian New Year.

To celebrate, people light bonfires, set off fireworks and send wish lanterns floating off into the night sky. Others jump over and around fires, chanting "My yellow is yours, your red is mine," invoking the replacement of ills with warmth and energy.

The fire festival also features an Iranian version of trick-or-treating, with people going door to door and being given a holiday mix of nuts and berries, as well as buckets of water.

It's not necessarily an easy assignment though. Here in Iran, some people remain sensitive about having their photograph taken, particularly women who aren't wearing Iran's mandatory headscarf, or hijab.

Meanwhile, the joy sometimes overcomes safety concerns as smoke fills the air and fireworks explode at random overhead. There are injuries every year and sometimes deaths. I ended up having a piece of a burning firecracker land inside my left shoe. I'm OK — it just burned a hole through my sock and left a small blister.

I used a flash for some of my photos to capture people jumping through the fire, given their speed and the low light available. One picture my photo editors especially liked shows a man holding a lit firework, his face silhouetted by its bright light. Behind him, you can see the empty branches of trees in the park I shot in.

Nowruz marks the start of spring. Soon, leaves will sprout again.

## **JFK assassination files released, sending history buffs hunting for new clues**

By JAMIE STENGLE Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — More than 63,000 pages of records related to the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy were released Tuesday following an order by President Donald Trump, many without the redactions that had confounded historians for years and helped fuel conspiracy theories.

The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration posted to its website roughly 2,200 files containing the documents. The vast majority of the National Archives' collection of over 6 million pages of records, photographs, motion pictures, sound recordings and artifacts related to the assassination have previously been released.

Larry J. Sabato, director of the University of Virginia Center for Politics and author of "The Kennedy Half-Century," said it will take time to fully review the records.

"We have a lot of work to do for a long time to come, and people just have to accept that," he said.

Trump announced the release Monday while visiting the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, saying his administration would be releasing about 80,000 pages.

"We have a tremendous amount of paper. You've got a lot of reading," Trump said.

# Groton Daily Independent

**Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 32 of 64**

Before Tuesday, researchers had estimated that 3,000 to 3,500 files were still unreleased, either wholly or partially. And just last month the FBI said it had discovered about 2,400 new records related to the assassination.

Jefferson Morley, vice president of the Mary Ferrell Foundation, a repository for files related to the assassination, said in a statement posted on the social platform X that the release is "an encouraging start." He said much of the "rampant overclassification of trivial information has been eliminated" from the documents.

The National Archives said on its website that in accordance with the president's directive, the release would encompass "all records previously withheld for classification." But Morley said what was released Tuesday did not include two-thirds of the promised files, any of the recently discovered FBI files or 500 Internal Revenue Service records.

"Nonetheless, this is the most positive news on the release of JFK files since the 1990s," Morley said.

Interest in details related to Kennedy's assassination has been intense over the decades, with countless conspiracy theories spawned about multiple shooters and involvement by the Soviet Union and mafia.

He was killed Nov. 22, 1963, on a visit to Dallas, when his motorcade was finishing its parade route downtown and shots rang out from the Texas School Book Depository building. Police arrested 24-year-old Lee Harvey Oswald, who had positioned himself from a sniper's perch on the sixth floor. Two days later nightclub owner Jack Ruby fatally shot Oswald during a jail transfer.

A year after the assassination, the Warren Commission, which President Lyndon B. Johnson established to investigate, concluded that Oswald acted alone and that there was no evidence of a conspiracy. But that didn't quell a web of alternative theories over the decades.

Oswald was a former Marine who defected to the Soviet Union before returning home to Texas.

Files in the new release included a memo from the CIA's St. Petersburg station from November 1991 saying that earlier that month, a CIA official befriended a U.S. professor there who told the official about a friend who worked for the KGB. The memo said the KGB official had reviewed "five thick volumes" of files on Oswald and was "confident that Oswald was at no time an agent controlled by the KGB."

The memo added that as Oswald was described in the files, the KGB official doubted "that anyone could control Oswald, but noted that the KGB watched him closely and constantly while he was in the USSR." It also noted that the file reflected that Oswald was a poor shot when he tried target firing in the Soviet Union.

In the early 1990s, the federal government mandated that all assassination-related documents be housed in a single collection in the National Archives and Records Administration. The collection was required to be opened by 2017, barring any exemptions designated by the president.

Trump, who took office for his first term in 2017, had said that he would allow the release of all of the remaining records but ended up holding some back because of what he called the potential harm to national security. And while files continued to be released during President Joe Biden's administration, some remained unseen.

Sabato said that his team has a "long, long list" of sensitive documents it is looking for that previously had large redactions.

"There must be something really, really sensitive for them to redact a paragraph or a page or multiple pages in a document like that," he said. "Some of it's about Cuba, some of it's about what the CIA did or didn't do relevant to Lee Harvey Oswald."

Some of the previously released documents have offered details on the way intelligence services operated at the time, including CIA cables and memos discussing visits by Oswald to the Soviet and Cuban embassies during a trip to Mexico City just weeks before the assassination.

## **CBS' '60 Minutes' is unflinching in its White House coverage in the shadow of Trump's \$20B lawsuit**

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — As CBS corporate leaders ponder settling President Donald Trump's \$20 billion lawsuit against the network's "60 Minutes," America's storied newsmagazine has produced some fast and hard-hitting stories critical of the new administration in every episode since Trump was inaugurated.

The latest was Sunday, when CBS News helped pay for a performance featuring non-white middle and high school musicians who had won a contest and with it, the right to play with the U.S. Marine Corps Band. The original concert, however, was canceled because of Trump's executive order ending diversity, equity and inclusion efforts.

Correspondent Scott Pelley narrated six of the show's seven stories since Trump's inauguration, including Sunday's. He examined the administration's policies toward Ukraine and tariffs, looked at changes in the Justice Department and reported on firings of government watchdogs. Shortly after his piece on the dismantling of USAID, Elon Musk suggested "long prison sentences" for those working on the show.

All came at a time when television's most popular and influential news broadcast was being watched to see how it would respond to a unique pressure.

"This may be a lawsuit that is designed to intimidate, but they are clearly making a statement that they will not be intimidated," said Tom Bettag, a longtime television news producer who worked under Mike Wallace and Morley Safer at the CBS show.

Pelley, meanwhile, has quickly become a polarizing figure.

"Another week, another '60 Minutes' story trying to discredit Trump policies," Brent Baker, editor of the conservative media watchdog NewsBusters, wrote on X on Sunday night.

The context surrounding the '60 Minutes' reports

Trump's lawsuit, coupled with a parallel Federal Communications Commission investigation, accuses "60 Minutes" of election interference for the way it edited Bill Whitaker's interview last fall with Trump's 2024 opponent, Kamala Harris.

Two sound bites, broadcast on "60 Minutes" and CBS' "Face the Nation," depicted Harris giving different responses to Whitaker in a discussion about Israel. CBS said Harris made both comments in her answer to Whitaker and that the two shows ended up using different parts of a long sound bite. CBS argued the apparent discrepancy was typical of editing and not, as Trump has suggested, that different remarks by Harris were used to make her look better.

CBS parent Paramount Global filed new motions in the past two weeks to get both the lawsuit and the FCC probe dismissed. Still, Shari Redstone, head of Paramount, is reportedly anxious for a settlement, much like Disney agreed to pay \$16 million in December to end Trump's lawsuit against ABC News' George Stephanopoulos. Complicating matters is Paramount's proposed merger with Skydance Media, which needs approval from the Trump administration.

Many at CBS News resist a settlement, insisting "60 Minutes" did nothing wrong. The show's executive producer, Bill Owens, told his staff last month that he would not apologize as part of any prospective settlement.

"My precious '60 Minutes' is fighting, quite frankly, for our life," correspondent Lesley Stahl said earlier this month in accepting a First Amendment award from the Radio Television Digital News Association. "I am so proud of '60 Minutes' that we are standing up and fighting for what is right."

Neither Owens nor Pelley would comment on whether the show is trying to deliver any sort of message about the lawsuit through its work. Bettag said he believed "60 Minutes" is motivated by the importance of the stories.

What the show has done during the past two months is striking, said Bettag, now a journalism professor at the University of Maryland.

"The '60 Minutes' people are such committed journalists that they'd consider it foolish to be doing these stories because of what is a frivolous lawsuit," he said. "The lawsuit pales in comparison with the monu-

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 34 of 64

mental changes Trump is trying to implement. Those correspondents and producers know that this is a moment that requires their very best work."

Some of the segments were unusually urgent for the newsmagazine, which tends to do longer-range stories that could take months to produce. Pelley's March 2 report about Ukraine came only days after the White House confrontation between Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Musk's angry comment on his X social media platform came after Pelley's Feb. 16 story about the billionaire's role in the quick shutdown of the USAID office. "The world's richest man had cut off assistance to the world's poorest families," Pelley said, noting that Musk collects "billions of taxpayer dollars" for his SpaceX company.

Hours later, Musk wrote on X: "60 Minutes are the biggest liars in the world! They engaged in deliberate deception to interfere with the last election. They deserve a long prison sentence."

Other news organizations have done admirable work under difficult circumstances, said Bill Grueskin, a Columbia University journalism professor. Besides Pelley, he cited the news staff of the Washington Post at a time the newspaper's owner, Jeff Bezos, has shown more friendliness to Trump.

'The concert that was not meant to be heard'

Sunday's "60 Minutes" story involved some elite high school students — each of them either of either Black, Hispanic, Indian or Asian descent — who had earned the right to play with the Marine band before the show was called off.

CBS worked with Equity Arc, an organization devoted to increasing the number of minority students playing classical music, to organize a show for family and friends of the students outside Washington, D.C.. Retired members of military bands were brought in to work with the students. CBS News, which wanted to interview the students, paid for the travel and lodging of 22 of them.

Pelley called it the "concert that was not meant to be heard."

"The original Marine Band concert would have been seen by hundreds," he said. "Here tonight, these musicians are being heard by millions."

Pelley's March 9 report, "Firing the Watchdogs," was about Trump's efforts to fire inspector generals and thwart others who protect whistleblowers in government agencies. He quoted Trump as saying the firings were standard for a new administration taking office. "He's wrong," Pelley said.

His story about the U.S. Justice Department examined the resistance among some prosecutors to drop corruption charges against New York City Mayor Eric Adams.

"As he continues to step up his attacks on President Donald Trump and the new administration, Pelley is elbowing aside all others to emerge as Trump's loudest TV critic," wrote Paul Bedard of the Washington Examiner.

In his stories, Pelley's deadpan voice and methodical style could not hide the sharpness of some observations. While narrating the story about USAID, Pelley noted that "It's too soon to tell how serious President Trump is in defiance of the Constitution."

## Violent attacks on Tesla dealerships spike as Musk takes prominent role in Trump White House

By JONATHAN J. COOPER and GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — Cybertrucks set ablaze. Bullets and Molotov cocktails aimed at Tesla showrooms.

Attacks on property carrying the logo of Elon Musk's electric-car company are cropping up across the U.S. and overseas. While no injuries have been reported, Tesla showrooms, vehicle lots, charging stations and privately owned cars have been targeted.

There has been a clear uptick since President Donald Trump took office and empowered Musk to oversee a new Department of Government Efficiency that is slashing government spending. Experts on domestic extremism say it's impossible to know yet if the spate of incidents will balloon into a long-term pattern.

In Trump's first term, his properties in New York City, Washington and elsewhere became a natural place

# Groton Daily Independent

**Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 35 of 64**

for protest. In the early days of his second term, Tesla is filling that role.

"Tesla is an easy target," said Randy Blazak, a sociologist who studies political violence. "They're rolling down our streets. They have dealerships in our neighborhoods."

Musk critics have organized dozens of peaceful demonstrations at Tesla dealerships and factories across North America and Europe. Some Tesla owners, including a U.S. senator who feuded with Musk, have vowed to sell their vehicles.

But the attacks are keeping law enforcement busy.

Prosecutors in Colorado charged a woman last month in connection with a string of attacks on Tesla dealerships, including Molotov cocktails thrown at vehicles and the words "Nazi cars" spray-painted on a building.

And federal agents in South Carolina last week arrested a man they say set fire to Tesla charging stations near Charleston. An agent from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives wrote in an affidavit that authorities found writings critical of the government and DOGE in his bedroom and wallet.

"The statement made mention of sending a message based on these beliefs," the agent wrote.

A number of the most prominent incidents have been reported in left-leaning cities in the Pacific Northwest, like Portland, Oregon, and Seattle, where anti-Trump and anti-Musk sentiment runs high.

An Oregon man is facing charges after allegedly throwing several Molotov cocktails at a Tesla store in Salem, then returning another day and shooting out windows. In the Portland suburb of Tigard, more than a dozen bullets were fired at a Tesla showroom last week, damaging vehicles and windows, the second time in a week that the store was targeted.

Four Cybertrucks were set on fire in a Tesla lot in Seattle earlier this month. On Friday, witnesses reported a man poured gasoline on an unoccupied Tesla Model S and started a fire on a Seattle street.

In Las Vegas, several Tesla vehicles were set ablaze early Tuesday outside a Tesla service center where the word "resist" was also painted in red across the building's front doors. Authorities said at least one person threw Molotov cocktails — crude bombs filled with gasoline or another flammable liquid — and fired several rounds from a weapon into the vehicles.

"Was this terrorism? Was it something else? It certainly has some of the hallmarks that we might think — the writing on the wall, potential political agenda, an act of violence," Spencer Evans, the special agent in charge of the Las Vegas FBI office, said at a news conference. "None of those factors are lost on us."

Tesla becomes a target for the left

Tesla was once the darling of the left. Helped to viability by a \$465 million federal loan during the Obama administration, the company popularized electric vehicles and proved, despite their early reputation, that they didn't have to be small, stodgy, underpowered and limited in range.

More recently, though, Musk has allied himself with the right. He bought the social network Twitter, renamed it X and erased restrictions that had infuriated conservatives. He spent an estimated \$250 million to boost Trump's 2024 campaign, becoming by far his biggest benefactor.

Musk continues to run Tesla — as well as X and the rocket manufacturer SpaceX — while also serving as Trump's adviser.

Tesla stock doubled in value in the weeks after Trump's election but has since shed all those gains.

Trump gave a boost to the company when he turned the White House driveway into an electric vehicle showroom. The president promoted the vehicles and said he would purchase an \$80,000 Model S, eschewing his fierce past criticism of electric vehicles.

Tesla did not respond to a request for comment. Musk briefly addressed the vandalism Monday during an appearance on Sen. Ted Cruz's podcast, saying "at least some of it is organized and paid for" by "leftwing organizations in America, funded by leftwing billionaires, essentially."

"This level of violence is insane and deeply wrong," Musk wrote Tuesday on X, sharing a video of burning Teslas in Las Vegas. "Tesla just makes electric cars and has done nothing to deserve these evil attacks."

The progressive group Indivisible, which published a guide for supporters to organize "Musk Or Us" protests around the country, said in a statement that all of its guidance is publicly available and "it explicitly encourages peaceful protest and condemns any acts of violence or vandalism."

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 36 of 64

Some Tesla owners have resorted to cheeky bumper stickers to distance themselves from their vehicle's new stigma, and perhaps deter would-be vandals. They say things like "I bought this before we knew Elon was crazy," or "I just wanted an electric car. Sorry guys."

Prices for used Cybertrucks, Tesla's most distinctive product, have dropped nearly 8% since Trump took office, according to CarGurus, which aggregates used car vehicle listings. The market as a whole remained steady over the period.

The White House vows a crackdown

The White House has thrown its weight behind Musk, the highest-profile member of the administration and a key donor to committees promoting Trump's political interests. Trump has said Tesla vandalism amounts to "domestic terror," and Trump has threatened retribution, warning that those who target the company are "going to go through hell."

Attorney General Pam Bondi said she'd opened an investigation "to see how is this being funded, who is behind this."

"If you're going to touch a Tesla, go to a dealership, do anything, you better watch out because we're coming after you," Bondi said Friday on Fox Business Network. In a statement Tuesday, she vowed to "continue investigations that impose severe consequences," including for "those operating behind the scenes to coordinate and fund these crimes."

Colin Clarke, a senior research fellow at the Soufan Center, said left-wing political violence tends to target property rather than people. He views the rise of neo-Nazi groups as a bigger security threat at this point.

"It's not the type of act that I would prioritize," Clarke said. "Not right now compared to all the other threats that are out there."

Theresa Ramsdell is the president of the Tesla Owners of Washington state, a club for Tesla enthusiasts, and she and her husband own three of them.

"Hate on Elon and Trump all you want — that's fine and dandy, it's your choice," she said. "It doesn't justify ruining somebody's property, vandalizing it, destroying it, setting it on fire. There's other ways to get your voice heard that's more effective."

Someone recently slapped a "no Elon" sticker on the tailgate of her Cybertruck, but she said she doesn't intend to stop driving her Teslas. Other club members have taken a similar view, she said.

"I love my car. It's the safest car," Ramsdell said. "I'm not going to let somebody else judge me for the car I drive."

## Federal Reserve could still cut interest rates this year, but for 'bad' reasons

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Even as the economy undergoes what may be wrenching changes, the Federal Reserve on Wednesday is expected to signal it could cut its key interest rate twice this year — the same forecast it issued in December.

Yet the reasons for those cuts may change dramatically, depending on how the economy fares.

What were once seen as "good news" rate reductions in response to a steady decline in inflation back to the Fed's target of 2%, now could become "bad news" cuts that would be implemented to offset an economy struggling in the wake of widespread tariffs, rapid cuts in government spending, and a spike in economic uncertainty.

At the end of last year, the Fed reduced its key interest rate three times to about 4.3% from 5.3%. The Fed had rapidly raised its rate to combat inflation, and as price growth headed lower, that allowed the central bank to reverse some of those rate hikes. In September, inflation dropped to a 3 1/2 year low of 2.4%.

Yet inflation then marched higher for four straight months, before it finally fell back in February, to an annual rate of 2.8%. Partly because of that reversal, Chair Jerome Powell has underscored that the Fed is in wait-and-see mode as it evaluates the impact of President Donald Trump's policies on the economy.

# Groton Daily Independent

**Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 37 of 64**

So far, consumer sentiment has fallen sharply as Americans worry that inflation will rise in the coming months. Small business owners report a much more uncertain economic outlook, which can cause them to cut back on hiring and investment.

Retailers of both high-end and lower-cost goods have warned that consumers are turning more cautious as they expect prices to rise because of tariffs. Retail sales rose modestly last month after a sharp fall in January. Homebuilders and contractors expect that home construction and renovations will get more expensive.

On Tuesday, the Fed reported that manufacturing output jumped last month, driven higher by a spike in car production. Some of that could have reflected higher auto purchases by consumers looking to get ahead of tariffs. New home construction also grew faster than expected.

Many economists have sharply reduced their forecasts for growth this year, with Barclays, a bank, now forecasting growth of just 0.7%, down from 2.5% in 2024. And economists at Goldman Sachs now expect inflation — excluding the volatile food and energy categories — will tick higher to 3% by the end of this year, up from its current level of 2.6%.

Slower growth, if it also pushes up unemployment, and higher inflation would put the Fed in a very difficult spot. Typically, when companies start cutting workers, the Fed would reduce rates to spur more borrowing and spending and boost the economy.

Yet if inflation crept higher, it would want to keep rates elevated to slow growth and restrain inflation. When the Fed lifts its key interest rate, it tends to push other borrowing costs higher, including for mortgages, auto loans, business loans, and credit cards.

Economists will closely watch Powell's press conference Wednesday to see if he will signal how the Fed would handle such a situation.

But Powell will probably double-down on his recent efforts to underscore that the Fed can, for now, watch from the sidelines.

"The costs of being cautious are very, very low," Powell said earlier this month. "The economy's fine, it doesn't need us to do anything, really."

Separately, Christopher Waller, a member of the Fed's governing board, has previously said the Fed could still cut rates this year, even if tariffs were imposed, as long as inflation was still falling once the impact of was excluded.

Yet earlier this month, in an interview with the Wall Street Journal, he acknowledged teasing out tariffs' impact on prices would be difficult.

"You're trying to find the signal of what's fundamental, and what is maybe tariff noise," he said. "And that's tough."

## **Presidents of Congo and Rwanda meet in Qatar to discuss the insurgency in eastern Congo**

By MARK BANCHEREAU Associated Press

DAKAR, Senegal (AP) — The presidents of Congo and neighboring Rwanda met Tuesday in Qatar for their first direct talks since Rwanda-backed M23 rebels seized two major cities in mineral-rich eastern Congo earlier this year.

The meeting between Congo's President Felix Tshisekedi and Rwanda's President Paul Kagame to discuss the insurgency was mediated by Qatar, the three governments said in a statement. The state-run Qatar News Agency published an image of the two African leaders meeting with Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, the energy-rich nation's ruling emir.

Congo and Rwanda reaffirmed their commitment to an immediate and unconditional ceasefire, but the joint statement offered no specifics on how that ceasefire would be implemented or monitored.

The summit came as a previous attempt to bring Congo's government and M23 leaders together for ceasefire negotiations failed. The rebels pulled out Monday after the European Union announced sanc-

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 38 of 64

tions on rebel leaders.

Qatar has hosted peace talks between Afghanistan's Taliban and the United States, Chad and rebel forces and over the ongoing Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip.

A diplomat briefed on the meeting said both Tshisekedi and Kagame had formally requested Qatar's mediation for the talks, which the diplomat said were informal and aimed at building trust rather than resolving all outstanding issues. The diplomat spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about the matter.

Peace talks between Congo and Rwanda were unexpectedly canceled in December after Rwanda made the signing of a peace agreement conditional on a direct dialogue between Congo and the M23 rebels, which Congo refused at the time.

The conflict in eastern Congo escalated in January when the Rwanda-backed rebels advanced and seized the strategic city of Goma, followed by Bukavu in February.

M23 is one of about 100 armed groups that have been vying for a foothold in mineral-rich eastern Congo near the border with Rwanda, in a conflict that has created one of the world's most significant humanitarian crises. More than 7 million people have been displaced.

The rebels are supported by about 4,000 troops from neighboring Rwanda, according to U.N. experts, and at times have vowed to march as far as Congo's capital, Kinshasa, about 1,600 kilometers (1,000 miles) to the east.

The U.N. Human Rights Council last month launched a commission to investigate atrocities, including allegations of rape and killing akin to "summary executions" by both sides.

## **Netanyahu says Israeli strikes across Gaza that killed hundreds are 'only the beginning'**

By WAFAA SHURAF, JOSEF FEDERMAN and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israel launched airstrikes across the Gaza Strip early Tuesday that killed more than 400 Palestinians, local health officials said, shattering a ceasefire in place since January as it vowed to force Hamas to release more hostages and relinquish control of the territory.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered the strikes after Hamas refused Israeli demands to free half of the remaining hostages as a precondition for extending the ceasefire. Israel's deadliest bombardment of the territory in the 17-month war killed mostly women and children, according to the Gaza Health Ministry.

Netanyahu said the attack was "only the beginning" and that Israel would press ahead until it achieves all of its war aims — destroying Hamas and freeing all hostages held by the militant group.

Hamas said at least six senior officials were killed in Tuesday's strikes. Israel said they included the head of Hamas' civilian government, a justice ministry official and two security agency chiefs.

All further ceasefire negotiations will take place "under fire," he said in a statement aired on national television. The White House said it had been consulted and voiced support for Israel's actions.

The Israeli military ordered people to evacuate eastern Gaza and head toward the center of the territory, indicating that Israel could soon launch renewed ground operations. The new campaign comes as aid groups warn supplies are running out two weeks after Israel cut off all food, medicine, fuel and other goods to Gaza's 2 million Palestinians.

The pre-dawn barrage across Gaza struck homes and shelters and set a tent camp ablaze as families slept or prepared the "sohour," the meal Muslims eat before they start the daily fast in the holy month of Ramadan. In Gaza City, Omar Greygaa said that after the strikes, he ran out to help survivors in a nearby stricken building.

"In every room I found the dead. ... I finish in one place and go to another, and I find more dead," he said. "I don't know if we're in a state of war or truce."

The attack could signal the full resumption of a war that has already killed tens of thousands of Palestinians and caused widespread destruction across Gaza. It also raised concerns about the fate of the roughly two dozen hostages held by Hamas who are believed to still be alive.

# Groton Daily Independent

**Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 39 of 64**

A senior Hamas official said Netanyahu's decision to return to war amounts to a "death sentence" for the remaining hostages. Izzat al-Risheq accused Netanyahu of launching the strikes to save his far-right governing coalition.

There were no reports of any attacks by Hamas several hours after the bombardment.

But Yemen's Houthi rebels fired rockets toward Israel for the first time since the ceasefire began. The volley set off sirens in Israel's southern Negev desert but was intercepted before it reached the country's territory, the military said. The U.S. over the weekend launched deadly strikes against the Iranian-backed Houthis.

Israel's return to a military campaign came as Netanyahu faces mounting domestic pressure, with mass protests planned over his handling of the hostage crisis and his decision to fire the head of Israel's internal security agency. His latest testimony in a long-running corruption trial was canceled after the strikes.

The strikes appeared to give Netanyahu a political boost. A far-right party led by Itamar Ben-Gvir that had bolted the government over the ceasefire announced Tuesday it was rejoining.

The main group representing families of the hostages accused the government of "deliberately dismantling" the ceasefire. Thousands of Israelis packed a Tel Aviv square Tuesday evening to protest Netanyahu's intention to fire the country's domestic security chief and demand the government to resume negotiations for a hostage deal.

"Today Netanyahu did not open the gates of hell on Hamas. He opened the gates of hell on our loved ones," said Einav Zangauker, whose son is among the hostages.

Wounded stream into Gaza hospitals

After two months of relative calm during the ceasefire, stunned Palestinians found themselves once again digging loved ones out of rubble and holding funeral prayers over the dead at hospital morgues.

"Nobody wants to fight," Nidal Alzaanin, a resident of Gaza City, said. "Everyone is still suffering from the previous months."

A hit on a home in Rafah killed 17 members of one family, according to the European Hospital, which received the bodies. The dead included five children, their parents, and another father and his three children. Another in Gaza City killed 27 members of a family, half of them women and children, including a 1-year-old, according to a list of the dead put out by Palestinian medics.

By noon on Tuesday, Nasser Hospital had received the bodies of at least 28 children killed in recent violence, according to records shared by Ahmed Al-Farra, head of pediatrics and obstetrics.

At Khan Younis's Nasser Hospital, patients lay on the floor, some screaming. A young girl cried as her bloody arm was bandaged. Wounded children overwhelmed the pediatric ward, said Dr Tanya Haj-Hassan, a volunteer with Medical Aid for Palestinians aid group.

She said she helped treat a 6-year-old girl with internal bleeding. When they pulled away her curly hair, they realized shrapnel had also penetrated the left side of her brain, leaving her paralyzed on the right side. She was brought in with no ID, and "we don't know if her family survived," Haj-Hassan said.

Gaza's Health Ministry said the strikes killed at least 404 people and wounded more than 560. Zaher al-Waheidi, head of the ministry's records department, said at least 263 of those killed were women or children under 18. He described it as the deadliest day in Gaza since the start of the war.

In his statement Tuesday, Netanyahu blamed Hamas for civilian casualties, saying it operates among the population.

The war has killed over 48,500 Palestinians, according to local health officials, and displaced 90% of Gaza's population. The Health Ministry doesn't differentiate between civilians and militants but says over half of the dead have been women and children.

The war erupted when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking 251 hostages. Most have been released in ceasefires or other deals, with Israeli forces rescuing only eight and recovering dozens of bodies.

US backs Israel and blames Hamas

The White House blamed Hamas for the renewed fighting. National Security Council spokesman Brian Hughes said the militant group "could have released hostages to extend the ceasefire but instead chose

refusal and war.”

The ceasefire deal that the U.S. helped broker, however, did not require Hamas to release more hostages to extend the halt in fighting beyond its first phase.

An Israeli official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the unfolding operation, said Israel was striking Hamas’ military, leaders and infrastructure and planned to expand the operation beyond air attacks.

The official accused Hamas of attempting to rebuild and plan new attacks. Hamas militants and security forces quickly returned to the streets in recent weeks after the ceasefire went into effect. Hamas on Tuesday denied planning new attacks.

Israel had sought to change the ceasefire deal

Under the ceasefire that began in mid-January, Hamas released 25 hostages and the bodies of eight more in exchange for more than 1,700 Palestinian prisoners as agreed in the first phase.

But Israel balked at entering negotiations over a second phase. Under the agreement, phase two was meant to bring the freeing of the remaining 24 living hostages, an end to the war and full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. Israel says Hamas also holds the remains of 35 captives.

Instead, Israel demanded Hamas release half of the remaining hostages in return for a ceasefire extension and a vague promise to eventually negotiate a lasting truce. Hamas refused, demanding the two sides follow the original deal, which called for the halt in fighting to continue during negotiations over the second phase.

Israel says it will not end the war until it destroys Hamas’ governing and military capabilities and frees all hostages — two goals that could be incompatible.

A full resumption of the war would allow Netanyahu to avoid the tough trade-offs called for in the second phase and the thorny question of who would govern Gaza.

It would also shore up his coalition, which depends on far-right lawmakers who want to depopulate Gaza and rebuild Jewish settlements there.

## **Federal judge blocks Trump administration from banning transgender people from military service**

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal judge blocked enforcement of President Donald Trump’s executive order banning transgender people from military service on Tuesday, the latest in a string of legal setbacks for his sweeping agenda.

U.S. District Judge Ana Reyes in Washington, D.C., ruled that Trump’s order to exclude transgender troops from military service likely violates their constitutional rights. She was the second judge of the day to rule against the administration, and both rulings came within hours of an extraordinary conflict as Trump called for impeaching a third judge who temporarily blocked deportation flights, drawing a rare rebuke from Chief Justice John Roberts.

Reyes, who was nominated by President Joe Biden, delayed her order until Friday morning to give the administration time to appeal.

“The court knows that this opinion will lead to heated public debate and appeals. In a healthy democracy, both are positive outcomes,” Reyes wrote. “We should all agree, however, that every person who has answered the call to serve deserves our gratitude and respect.”

Army Reserves 2nd Lt. Nicolas Talbott, one of 14 transgender active-duty servicemembers named as plaintiffs in the lawsuit, said he was holding his breath as he waited to find out if he would be separated from the military next week.

“This is such a sigh of relief,” he said. “This is all I’ve ever wanted to do. This is my dream job, and I finally have it. And I was so terrified that I was about to lose it.”

The White House didn’t immediately respond to a message seeking comment. Trump’s deputy chief of staff, Stephen Miller, posted about the ruling on social media, writing, “District court judges have now decided they are in command of the Armed Forces...is there no end to this madness?”

# Groton Daily Independent

**Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 41 of 64**

The judge issued a preliminary injunction requested by attorneys who also represent others seeking to join the military.

On Jan. 27, Trump signed an executive order that claims the sexual identity of transgender service members "conflicts with a soldier's commitment to an honorable, truthful, and disciplined lifestyle, even in one's personal life" and is harmful to military readiness.

In response to the order, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth issued a policy that presumptively disqualifies people with gender dysphoria from military service. Gender dysphoria is the distress that a person feels because their assigned gender and gender identity don't match. The medical condition has been linked to depression and suicidal thoughts.

Plaintiffs' attorneys contend Trump's order violates transgender people's rights to equal protection under the Fifth Amendment.

Government lawyers argue that military officials have broad discretion to decide how to assign and deploy servicemembers without judicial interference.

Reyes said she did not take lightly her decision to issue an injunction blocking Trump's order, noting that "Judicial overreach is no less pernicious than executive overreach." But, she said, it was also the responsibility of each branch of government to provide checks and balances for the others, and the court "therefore must act to uphold the equal protection rights that the military defends every day."

Thousands of transgender people serve in the military, but they represent less than 1% of the total number of active-duty service members.

In 2016, a Defense Department policy permitted transgender people to serve openly in the military. During Trump's first term in the White House, the Republican issued a directive to ban transgender service members. The Supreme Court allowed the ban to take effect. President Joe Biden, a Democrat, scrapped it when he took office.

Hegseth's Feb. 26 policy says service members or applicants for military service who have "a current diagnosis or history of, or exhibit symptoms consistent with, gender dysphoria are incompatible with the high mental and physical standards necessary for military service."

The plaintiffs who sued to block Trump's order include an Army Reserves platoon leader from Pennsylvania, an Army major who was awarded a Bronze Star for service in Afghanistan and a Sailor of the Year award winner serving in the Navy.

"The cruel irony is that thousands of transgender servicemembers have sacrificed—some risking their lives—to ensure for others the very equal protection rights the military ban seeks to deny them," Reyes wrote.

Their attorneys, from the National Center for Lesbian Rights and GLAD Law, said transgender troops "seek nothing more than the opportunity to continue dedicating their lives to defending the Nation."

"Yet these accomplished servicemembers are now subject to an order that says they must be separated from the military based on a characteristic that has no bearing on their proven ability to do the job," plaintiffs' attorneys wrote. "This is a stark and reckless reversal of policy that denigrates honorable transgender servicemembers, disrupts unit cohesion, and weakens our military."

Government attorneys said the Defense Department has a history of disqualifying people from military service if they have physical or emotional impairments, including mental health conditions.

"In any context other than the one at issue in this case, DoD's professional military judgment about the risks of allowing individuals with physical or emotional impairments to serve in the military would be virtually unquestionable," they wrote.

Plaintiffs' attorneys say Trump's order fits his administration's pattern of discriminating against transgender people.

Federal judges in Seattle and Baltimore separately paused Trump's executive order halting federal support for gender-affirming care for transgender youth under 19. Last month, a judge blocked prison officials from transferring three incarcerated transgender women to men's facilities and terminating their access to hormone therapy under another Trump order.

Trump also signed orders that set up new rules about how schools can teach about gender and that

intend to ban transgender athletes from participating in girls' and women's sports.

"From its first days, this administration has moved to strip protections from transgender people across multiple domains — including housing, social services, schools, sports, healthcare, employment, international travel, and family life," plaintiffs' lawyers wrote.

Talbott, 31, of Akron, Ohio, enlisted in March 2024 as an openly trans person after fighting for roughly nine years to join the service. He said his fellow soldiers gave him some good-natured flak for being so much older than other recruits, but never treated him differently for being trans. Talbott anticipates that his colleagues will be "pretty excited that I get to stay."

"Now I can go back to focusing on what's really important, which is the mission," said Talbott, a platoon leader for a military policing unit.

## **NASA astronauts Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams return to Earth after 9 months stuck in space**

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Stuck in space no more, NASA astronauts Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams returned to Earth on Tuesday, hitching a different ride home to close out a saga that began with a bungled test flight more than nine months ago.

Their SpaceX capsule parachuted into the Gulf of Mexico in the early evening, just hours after departing the International Space Station. Splashdown occurred off the coast of Tallahassee in the Florida Panhandle, bringing their unplanned odyssey to an end.

Within an hour, the astronauts were out of their capsule, waving and smiling at the cameras while being hustled away in reclining stretchers for routine medical checks.

It all started with a flawed Boeing test flight last spring.

The two expected to be gone just a week or so after launching on Boeing's new Starliner crew capsule on June 5. So many problems cropped up on the way to the space station that NASA eventually sent Starliner back empty and transferred the test pilots to SpaceX, pushing their homecoming into February. Then SpaceX capsule issues added another month's delay.

Sunday's arrival of their relief crew meant Wilmore and Williams could finally leave. NASA cut them loose a little early, given the iffy weather forecast later this week. They checked out with NASA's Nick Hague and Russia's Alexander Gorbunov, who arrived in their own SpaceX capsule last fall with two empty seats reserved for the Starliner duo.

Wilmore and Williams ended up spending 286 days in space — 278 days longer than anticipated when they launched. They circled Earth 4,576 times and traveled 121 million miles (195 million kilometers) by the time of splashdown.

"On behalf of SpaceX, welcome home," radioed SpaceX Mission Control in California.

"What a ride," replied Hague, the capsule's commander. "I see a capsule full of grins ear to ear."

Dolphins circled the capsule as divers readied it for hoisting onto the recovery ship. Once safely on board, the side hatch was opened and the astronauts were helped out, one by one. Williams was next-to-last out, followed by Wilmore who gave two gloved thumbs-up.

Wilmore and Williams' plight captured the world's attention, giving new meaning to the phrase "stuck at work" and turning "Butch and Suni" into household names. While other astronauts had logged longer spaceflights over the decades, none had to deal with so much uncertainty or see the length of their mission expand by so much.

Wilmore and Williams quickly transitioned from guests to full-fledged station crew members, conducting experiments, fixing equipment and even spacewalking together. With 62 hours over nine spacewalks, Williams set a record: the most time spent spacewalking over a career among female astronauts.

Both had lived on the orbiting lab before and knew the ropes, and brushed up on their station training before rocketing away. Williams became the station's commander three months into their stay and held the post until earlier this month.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 43 of 64

Their mission took an unexpected twist in late January when President Donald Trump asked SpaceX founder Elon Musk to accelerate the astronauts' return and blamed the delay on the Biden administration. The replacement crew's brand new SpaceX capsule still wasn't ready to fly, so SpaceX subbed it with a used one, hurrying things along by at least a few weeks.

After splashdown, Musk offered his congratulations via X. NASA's Joel Montalbano said the space agency was already looking at various options when Trump made his call to hurry the astronauts home.

Even in the middle of the political storm, Wilmore and Williams continued to maintain an even keel at public appearances from orbit, casting no blame and insisting they supported NASA's decisions from the start.

NASA hired SpaceX and Boeing after the shuttle program ended, in order to have two competing U.S. companies for transporting astronauts to and from the space station until it's abandoned in 2030 and steered to a fiery reentry. By then, it will have been up there more than three decades; the plan is to replace it with privately run stations so NASA can focus on moon and Mars expeditions.

"This has been nine months in the making, and I couldn't be prouder of our team's versatility, our team's ability to adapt and really build for the future of human spaceflight," NASA's commercial crew program manager Steve Stich said.

With Starliner still under engineering investigation, SpaceX will launch the next crew for NASA as soon as July. Stich said NASA will have until summer to decide whether the crew after that one will be flown by SpaceX or Boeing — or whether Boeing will have to prove itself by flying cargo before people again.

Both retired Navy captains, Wilmore and Williams stressed they didn't mind spending more time in space — a prolonged deployment reminiscent of their military days. But they acknowledged it was tough on their families.

Wilmore, 62, missed most of his younger daughter's senior year of high school; his older daughter is in college. Williams, 59, had to settle for internet calls from space to her husband, mother and other relatives.

"We have not been worried about her because she has been in good spirits," said Falguni Pandya, who is married to Williams' cousin. "She was definitely ready to come home."

Prayers for Williams and Wilmore were offered up at 21 Hindu temples in the U.S. in the months leading up to their return, said organizer Tejal Shah, president of World Hindu Council of America. Williams has spoken frequently about her Indian and Slovenian heritage. Prayers for their safe return also came from Wilmore's Baptist church in Houston, where he serves as an elder.

Crowds in Jhulasan, the ancestral home of Williams' father, danced and celebrated in a temple and performed rituals during the homecoming.

After returning in the gulf — Trump in January signed an executive order renaming the body of water Gulf of America — Wilmore and Williams will have to wait until they're off the SpaceX recovery ship and flown to Houston before reuniting with their loved ones. The three NASA astronauts will be checked out by flight surgeons as they adjust to gravity, officials said, and should be allowed to go home after a day or two.

## Judge rules DOGE's USAID dismantling likely violates the Constitution

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST and MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The dismantling of the U.S. Agency for International Development by billionaire Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency likely violated the Constitution, a federal judge ruled Tuesday as he indefinitely blocked DOGE from making further cuts to the agency.

The order requires the Trump administration to restore email and computer access to all employees of USAID, including those put on administrative leave, though it stops short of reversing firings or fully resurrecting the agency.

In one of the first DOGE lawsuits against Musk himself, U.S. District Judge Theodore Chuang in Maryland

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 44 of 64

rejected the Trump administration's position that Musk is merely President Donald Trump's adviser.

Musk's public statements and social media posts demonstrate that he has "firm control over DOGE," the judge found pointing to an online post where Musk said he had "fed USAID into the wood chipper."

The judge said it's likely that USAID is no longer capable of performing some of its statutorily required functions.

"Taken together, these facts support the conclusion that USAID has been effectively eliminated," Chuang wrote in the preliminary injunction.

The lawsuit filed by USAID employees and contractors argued that Musk and DOGE are wielding power the Constitution reserves only for those who win elections or are confirmed by the Senate. Their attorneys said the ruling "effectively halts or reverses" many of the steps taken to dismantle the agency.

The administration has said that DOGE is searching for and rooting out waste, fraud and abuse in the federal government, consistent with the campaign message that helped Trump win the 2024 election. The White House and DOGE did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the ruling.

Musk, his team and Trump political appointee Pete Marocco have played a central role in the two-month dismantling of USAID. In one instance in early February, the administration placed the agency's top security officials on forced leave after they tried to block DOGE workers from accessing USAID's classified and sensitive documents.

The administration, with Musk's and DOGE's support, went on to order all but a fraction of the agency's staffers off the job through forced leaves and firings, and terminated what the State Department said was at least 83% of USAID's program contracts.

The moves were part of a broader push by Musk and the Trump administration to eradicate the six-decade-old foreign assistance agency and most of its work overseas.

Trump on Inauguration Day issued an executive order directing a freeze of foreign assistance funding and a review of all U.S. aid and development work abroad, charging that much of foreign assistance was wasteful and advanced a liberal agenda.

Democratic lawmakers and other supporters of USAID have argued Trump had no authority to withhold funding that Congress already approved.

Chuang said DOGE's and Musk's fast-moving destruction of USAID likely harmed the public interest by depriving elected lawmakers of their "constitutional authority to decide whether, when and how to close down an agency created by Congress."

The lawsuit was filed by the State Democracy Defenders Fund. Norm Eisen, the nonprofit's executive chair, said the ruling is a milestone in pushback to DOGE and the first to find that Musk's actions violate the Constitution's Appointments Clause, which mandates presidential approval and Senate confirmation for certain public officials.

"They are performing surgery with a chainsaw instead of a scalpel, harming not just the people USAID serves but the majority of Americans who count on the stability of our government," he said in a statement.

Oxfam America's Abby Maxman in a statement urged all staffing and funding to be reinstated. "The funding freeze and program cuts are already having life or death consequences for millions around the world," said the chief executive of the humanitarian group.

## Roberts rejects Trump's call for impeaching judge who ruled against his deportation plans

By CHRIS MEGERIAN, LINDSAY WHITEHURST and MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In an extraordinary display of conflict between the executive and judiciary branches, Chief Justice John Roberts rejected calls for impeaching judges Tuesday, shortly after President Donald Trump demanded the removal of one who ruled against his deportation plans.

The rebuke from the Supreme Court's leader demonstrated how the controversy over recent deportations of alleged Venezuelan gang members has inflamed tensions over the judiciary's role, with a legal case challenging Trump's actions now threatening to spiral into a clash of constitutional powers.

# Groton Daily Independent

**Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 45 of 64**

"For more than two centuries, it has been established that impeachment is not an appropriate response to disagreement concerning a judicial decision," Roberts said. "The normal appellate review process exists for that purpose."

The rare statement came just hours after a social media post from Trump, who described U.S. District Judge James E. Boasberg as an unelected "troublemaker and agitator." Boasberg had issued an order blocking deportation flights that Trump was carrying out by invoking wartime authorities from an 18th century law.

"HE DIDN'T WIN ANYTHING! I WON FOR MANY REASONS, IN AN OVERWHELMING MANDATE, BUT FIGHTING ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION MAY HAVE BEEN THE NUMBER ONE REASON FOR THIS HISTORIC VICTORY," Trump wrote on his social media platform, Truth Social. "I'm just doing what the VOTERS wanted me to do. This judge, like many of the Crooked Judges' I am forced to appear before, should be IMPEACHED!!!"

Although Trump has routinely criticized judges, especially as they limit his efforts to expand presidential power, his latest post escalated his conflict with a judiciary that's been one of the few restraints on his aggressive agenda. Impeachment is a rare step that is usually taken only in cases of grave ethical or criminal misconduct.

In an interview with Fox News later on Tuesday, Trump emphasized that Roberts "didn't mention my name in his statement," suggesting that the chief justice could have been referring to other people who have said Boasberg should be impeached.

Trump said Boasberg had overstepped his authority by interfering with deportation plans.

"That's a presidential job," he said. "That's not for a local judge to be making that determination."

Trump said he would not ignore a court order, a step that his administration has already been accused of taking.

"No, you can't do that. However, we have bad judges," Trump said. He added that "at a certain point, you have to start looking at what do you do when you have a rogue judge."

The relationship between Roberts and Trump has shifted through the years. Roberts emphasized judicial independence during Trump's first term, taking issue with the president's description of a judge who rejected his migrant asylum policy as an "Obama judge" in 2018.

Before Trump was sworn in for his second term, Roberts warned against threats to the judiciary and called for even unpopular court decisions to be respected.

The chief justice also had a prominent role in a major ruling last year that said presidents have broad immunity from criminal prosecution. The decision helped Trump avoid one of his criminal trials before the election that returned him to the White House.

Trump greeted Roberts warmly earlier this month, thanking him and saying, "I won't forget," as the justices attended his address to a joint session of Congress. The president said later he was thanking Roberts for swearing him into office.

The latest dispute involving the judiciary comes after a court challenged his invocation of the Alien Enemies Act of 1798. It has been used only three times before in U.S. history, all during congressionally declared wars. Trump issued a proclamation that the law was newly in effect due to what he claimed was an invasion by the Venezuelan gang Tren de Aragua. His administration is paying El Salvador to imprison alleged members of the gang.

Boasberg, who was appointed by President Barack Obama, convened a hearing on Monday to discuss what he called "possible defiance" of his order after two deportation flights continued to El Salvador despite his verbal order that they be turned around to the U.S.

Trump administration lawyers defended their actions, saying Boasberg's written order wasn't explicit, while an attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union said "I think we're getting very close" to a constitutional crisis.

The Justice Department is also pushing in court to have Boasberg removed from the case.

The Constitution gives the House of Representatives, where Republicans hold a slim majority, the power

to impeach a judge with a simple majority vote. But, like a presidential impeachment, any removal requires a vote from a two-thirds majority of the Senate.

The president's latest social media post aligns him more with allies like billionaire Elon Musk, who has made similar demands.

"What we are seeing is an attempt by one branch of government to intimidate another branch from performing its constitutional duty. It is a direct threat to judicial independence," Marin Levy, a Duke University School of Law professor who specializes in the federal courts, said in an email.

Only one day earlier, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said, "I have not heard the president talk about impeaching judges."

Just 15 judges have been impeached in the nation's history, according to the U.S. court's governing body, and just eight have been removed.

The last judicial impeachment was in 2010. G. Thomas Porteous Jr. of New Orleans was impeached on charges he accepted bribes and then lied about it. He was convicted by the Senate and removed from office in December 2010.

Calls to impeach judges have been rising as Trump's sweeping agenda faces pushback in the courts, and at least two members of Congress have said online they plan to introduce articles of impeachment against Boasberg. House Republicans already have filed articles of impeachment against two other judges, Amir Ali and Paul Engelmayer, over rulings they've made in Trump-related lawsuits.

Leavitt is one of three administration officials who face a lawsuit from The Associated Press on First- and Fifth-amendment grounds. The AP says the three are punishing the news agency for editorial decisions they oppose. The White House says the AP is not following an executive order to refer to the Gulf of Mexico as the Gulf of America.

## **Trump and Putin agree to an immediate ceasefire for energy infrastructure in Ukraine conflict**

By AAMER MADHANI, VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed during a lengthy call Tuesday to an immediate pause in strikes against energy infrastructure in the Ukraine war, but the Russian leader stopped short of backing a broader 30-day pause in fighting that the U.S. administration is pressing for.

The White House described it as the first step in a "movement to peace" that it hopes will include a maritime ceasefire in the Black Sea and eventually a full and lasting end to the fighting. But there was no indication that Putin has backed away from his conditions for a prospective peace deal, which are fiercely opposed by Kyiv. And shortly after the call ended, air raid alerts sounded in Kyiv, followed by explosions in the city. Local officials urged people to seek shelter.

Putin during the call reiterated his demand for an end to foreign military and intelligence assistance to Ukraine, according to the Kremlin. Trump, though, denied that the subject came up during an interview with Fox News on Tuesday.

"We didn't talk about aid," Trump said. "We didn't talk about aid at all."

Russia also wants Ukraine to pull back its troops from the four regions that Moscow has annexed but never fully captured, renounce any prospect of joining the NATO military alliance and sharply cut its army.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy told reporters that Ukraine is open to any proposals that lead to a sustainable and just peace, but stressed the need for full transparency in discussions.

Zelenskyy said he was seeking more details on what Putin and Trump agreed on, but rejected Putin's demand for halting military aid and intelligence sharing to Ukraine, warning that such a move would weaken Ukraine.

"We need to understand what the conversation is about," Zelenskyy said. "What are the details? And hopefully, we will be fully informed, and our partners will discuss everything with us."

He added: "There are two sides in this war — Russia and Ukraine. Trying to negotiate without Ukraine,

# Groton Daily Independent

**Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 47 of 64**

in my view, will not be productive.”

Ukrainian officials earlier this month proposed a ceasefire covering the Black Sea and long-range missile strikes and the release of prisoners.

Trump immediately cheered Tuesday’s development as a major step toward his ultimate goal of ending the biggest land war in Europe since World War II.

“We agreed to an immediate Ceasefire on all Energy and Infrastructure, with an understanding that we will be working quickly to have a Complete Ceasefire and, ultimately, an END to this very horrible War between Russia and Ukraine,” Trump said on social media.

Putin also told Trump that Russia and Ukraine are set to exchange 175 prisoners of war each on Wednesday, and Russia will also hand over to Ukraine 23 badly wounded soldiers, the Kremlin said.

The limited pause comes as Trump still hopes to get Russia to sign off on his 30-day ceasefire proposal aimed at ending the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Ukrainian officials last week agreed to the 30-day ceasefire proposal during talks in Saudi Arabia led by Secretary of State Marco Rubio. White House special envoy Steve Witkoff then met with Putin in Moscow to discuss the proposal.

Zelenskyy, however, remains skeptical that Putin is ready for peace as Russian forces continue to pound Ukraine.

“This is not a game where only Putin dictates the rules,” Zelenskyy said, making clear he remains doubtful that Putin was serious about wanting peace.

The Trump-Putin engagement is just the latest turn in dramatically shifting U.S.-Russia relations as Trump made quickly ending the conflict a top priority — even at the expense of straining ties with longtime American allies who want Putin to pay a price for the invasion.

Trump has at moments boasted of his relationship with Putin and blamed Ukraine for Russia’s unprovoked invasion, all while accusing Zelenskyy of unnecessarily prolonging the biggest land war in Europe since World War II.

Trump has said Washington and Moscow have already begun discussing “dividing up certain assets” between Ukraine and Russia as part of a deal to end the conflict.

He said before the call that control of land and power plants would be part of the conversation, which came on the anniversary of Russia annexing Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula 11 years ago. That bold land grab by Russia set the stage for Russia to invade its neighbor in 2022.

But neither the White House nor Kremlin made any mention of land or power plants in their post-call statements.

Witkoff on Sunday suggested that U.S. and Russian officials have discussed the fate of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant — Europe’s largest — in southern Ukraine. Russian troops seized the plant early in the war and it has been caught in the crossfire, fueling fears of a potential nuclear catastrophe.

The plant is a significant asset, producing nearly a quarter of Ukraine’s electricity in the year before the war.

After a disastrous Feb. 28 White House meeting with Zelenskyy, Trump temporarily cut off some military intelligence-sharing and aid to Ukraine. It was restored after the Ukrainians last week signed off on the Trump administration’s 30-day ceasefire proposal.

In his dealings with Zelenskyy and Putin, Trump has frequently focused on who has the leverage. Putin has “the cards” and Zelenskyy does not, Trump has said repeatedly.

Trump, who has long shown admiration for Putin, has also made clear he’d like to see the U.S.-Russia relationship return to a more normal footing.

The president during his recent contentious meeting with Zelenskyy grumbled that “Putin went through a hell of a lot with me,” a reference to the federal investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election in which he beat Democrat Hillary Clinton.

Trump on Tuesday again underscored his view that Ukraine is not in a strong negotiating position. He said Russian forces have surrounded Ukrainian troops in Russia’s Kursk region — amplifying an assertion

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 48 of 64

made by Russian officials that's been disputed by Zelenskyy.

"They are nicely encircled, and that's not good," said Trump, according to excerpts of an interview on Fox News Channel's "Ingraham Angle." "And we want to get it over with."

Ukraine's army stunned Russia in August last year by attacking across the border and taking control of an estimated 1,300 square kilometers (500 square miles) of land. But Ukraine's forces are now in retreat and it has all but lost a valuable bargaining chip, as momentum builds for a ceasefire with Russia.

The White House said Trump and Putin also discussed the situation in the Middle East and agreed "Iran should never be in a position to destroy Israel."

U.S. officials have previously said that Iran has provided Russia with short-range ballistic missiles and attack drones for the war in Ukraine. The U.S. has also said that Iran has assisted Russia with building a drone-manufacturing factory.

The Kremlin said that Trump also expressed support for an idea floated by Putin to organize hockey matches in the United States and Russia between Russian and American players from the National Hockey League, which has U.S. and Canadian teams, and the Kontinental Hockey League, which includes teams from Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and China.

## Another raw pet food recall is tied to illness and death in cats

By JONEL ALECCIA AP Health Writer

A California pet food maker has recalled its raw chicken products after they were linked to bird flu infections in two cats and suspected in a third in New York City.

The recall is the latest in recent months tied to products potentially contaminated with the virus that has sickened and killed cats in several states, after racing through poultry and dairy cattle in the U.S. and causing illnesses in at least 70 people.

Savage Pet, of El Cajon, California, this week recalled one lot of large and small chicken boxes because they may be contaminated with Type A H5N1 influenza virus. The boxes are cardboard and contain individual plastic packages of products. The lot code and best-by date 11152026 is stamped on products. The pet food was distributed in California, Colorado, New York, Pennsylvania and Washington state.

New York City health officials this week urged consumers to avoid Savage Pet products because of the cats' illnesses.

One cat fell ill and died this month after eating the Savage Pet products. Final test results are pending, but a preliminary test for H5N1 was "nonnegative," which indicates that a certain amount of virus was detected, a department spokesperson said.

A second cat was diagnosed with H5N1 and died — and tests suggested it was infected with a strain related to that found in the recalled Savage Pet food. However, that cat did not eat the food; it was exposed to a third cat that fell ill after eating the food from the implicated lot. That cat survived but was not tested.

The New York cases are the latest reports of cats in several states sickened and killed by H5N1. At least 115 bird flu infections in domestic cats have been reported to the U.S. Agriculture Department since 2022, with most logged since 2024. Cats can catch the virus from wildlife or contaminated milk and food.

Earlier this month, Wild Coast Raw, of Olympia, Washington, recalled frozen boneless raw chicken cat food after it was linked to illnesses and deaths in cats in Oregon and Washington. In December, Morasch Meats of Portland, Oregon, recalled its Northwest Naturals brand of raw and frozen turkey pet food after it tested positive for the virus and was linked to the death of a local cat.

Dr. Jarra Jagne, a veterinary expert at Cornell University, said pet owners should avoid feeding their animals unpasteurized milk or raw pet food because of the risk of bird flu as well as other germs such as salmonella, listeria and E. coli.

"I wouldn't give my animals raw anything," she said. "It's all about cooking."

## Stock market today: Back down goes Wall Street as Big Tech resumes its slide

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Wall Street swung back down on Tuesday, and its former superstars once again led the way.

The S&P 500 dropped 1.1% for its latest swerve in a scary ride, where it tumbled by 10% from its record and then rallied for two straight days. The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 260 points, or 0.6%, and the Nasdaq composite sank 1.7%.

Tesla was one of the heaviest weights on the market after falling 5.3%. The electric-vehicle maker's stock has been struggling on worries that it will lose sales because of anger at its CEO, Elon Musk, who has been leading efforts to cut spending by the U.S. government. EV rivals, meanwhile, continue to chip away at its business. China's BYD on Monday announced an ultra-fast charging system that it says is nearly as quick as a gasoline fill-up.

Alphabet sank 2.2% after the owner of Google said it would buy cybersecurity firm Wiz for \$32 billion. It would be the company's most expensive purchase in its 26-year history, and it could boost the tech giant's in-house cloud computing amid burgeoning artificial-intelligence growth.

The drop for Big Tech continues a trend that's taken hold in the market's recent sell-off: Stocks whose momentum had earlier seemed unstoppable have since dropped sharply following criticism they had simply grown too expensive.

Chief among them have been stocks that zoomed higher in the frenzy around AI technology. Nvidia fell 3.3% as it hosted an event known as "AI Woodstock." Super Micro Computer, which makes servers, lost 9.6%. Palantir Technologies, which offers an AI platform for customers, sank 4%.

They've been among the biggest losers as Wall Street retrenches amid uncertainty about what President Donald Trump's trade war will do to the economy. Trump's rat-a-tat announcements on tariffs and other policies have created worries that U.S. households and businesses could hold pull on their spending, which would hurt the economy.

It all makes things more complicated for the Federal Reserve, which is beginning its latest meeting on interest-rate policy and will make its announcement on Wednesday.

The Fed could lower its main interest rate, which would make it easier for U.S. businesses and households to borrow. That in turn could boost the economy. But lower interest rates can also push inflation upward, and U.S. consumers have already begun bracing for higher inflation because of tariffs.

Virtually everyone on Wall Street expects the Fed to hold its main interest rate steady on Wednesday, as it waits for clues about how conditions play out. The job market, for the moment at least, appears relatively stable after the economy closed last year running at a solid rate.

More attention will be on the forecasts the Fed will publish after the meeting, showing where officials expect interest rates, inflation and the economy to head in upcoming years. For now, traders on Wall Street are largely expecting the Fed to deliver two or three cuts to rates by the end of 2025.

One of the reasons the U.S. stock market's sell-off in recent weeks has "so far been orderly," with the epicenter remaining within tech, may be because of faith that the Fed can protect Wall Street, according to strategists at Barclays. If conditions were to deteriorate quickly, the Fed could cut rates to support the economy.

Such faith "crucially could be put to test this week" if the Fed appears to be more concerned about inflation than a weakening economy, at least relative to the market's expectations, according to the Barclays strategists led by Venu Krishna.

All told, the S&P 500 fell 60.46 points to 5,614.66 Tuesday. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 260.32 to 41,581.31, and the Nasdaq composite fell 304.55 to 17,504.12.

In stock markets abroad, indexes rose across much of Europe and Asia. They've been largely doing better than the U.S. stock market this year, flipping a yearslong trend and forcing questions about whether the end has arrived for what was called "U.S. exceptionalism."

Japan's Nikkei 225 rose 1.2%. Investors expect the Bank of Japan to keep its benchmark interest rate unchanged at a monetary policy board meeting due to wrap up Wednesday.

Trading on Indonesia's stock exchange was suspended temporarily as the benchmark JSX tumbled as much as 6%. But it later pared the loss to 3.8%.

Investors have been sending shares of state-owned banks lower after the government launched a sovereign wealth fund, called Danantara, that so far has not proven popular. Worries over U.S. tariffs and other risks have also shaken confidence in the economy of the world's fourth-most populous nation, said Budi Frensidy, a professor at the University of Indonesia.

In the bond market, the yield on the 10-year U.S. Treasury note fell to 4.28% from 4.31% late Monday.

## **Pentagon is cutting up to 60,000 civilian jobs. About a third of those took voluntary resignations**

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Roughly 50,000 to 60,000 civilian jobs will be cut in the Defense Department, but fewer than 21,000 workers who took a voluntary resignation plan are leaving in the coming months, a senior defense official told reporters Tuesday.

To reach the goal of a 5% to 8% cut in a civilian workforce of more than 900,000, the official said, the Pentagon aims to slash about 6,000 positions a month by simply not replacing workers who routinely leave.

A key concern is that service members may then be tapped to fill those civilian jobs left empty by the hiring freeze. But the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to provide personnel details, said Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth wants to ensure the cuts don't hurt military readiness.

The cuts are part of the broader effort by billionaire Trump adviser Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency Service to slash the federal workforce and dismantle U.S. agencies.

Acknowledging that "some" military veterans will be among the civilians let go, the official would not estimate how many but agreed it could be thousands.

The department is using three ways to accomplish the workforce cuts: voluntary resignations, firing probationary workers and cutting jobs as employees routinely leave. The official said the military services and Pentagon officials are going over the personnel on a case-by-case basis to ensure cuts don't affect critical national security jobs.

Officials would not say how many Defense Department civilians requested the voluntary resignation plan — also known as the "Fork in the Road" offer — but said more requested it than the number who eventually were approved.

The defense official said the "vast majority" were allowed but that in some cases, people were denied for national security reasons or to make sure that too many people in one office didn't all leave.

He added that Hegseth also has given the secretaries of the military branches and Defense Department personnel leaders the authority to grant exemptions to the hiring freeze.

An average of 70,000 civilians are hired each year, which amounts to about 6,000 a month, he said. Because the services have a good deal of latitude in determining which jobs should not be subject to the freeze, it's not clear what portion of those 70,000 would actually be eliminated.

Plans to cut probationary workers, which the Pentagon said targeted about 5,400 of the roughly 54,000 in the department, are already on hold due to court challenges. Federal judges ordered the administration to rehire thousands, if not tens of thousands, of probationary workers that had been let go, finding legal problems with the way the mass terminations were carried out.

The official added that Hegseth is confident the staffing cuts can be done without negatively affecting military readiness. The Pentagon chief last month in Germany noted that he was planning to welcome DOGE to the Pentagon, adding that "there are waste, redundancies and headcounts in headquarters that need to be addressed."

Across the government, about 75,000 federal workers are being let go through "deferred resignation program" buyouts. And at least 24,000 probationary employees were initially let go in the now-paused

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 51 of 64

mass firings across multiple agencies since Trump took office, according to lawsuits challenging the firings. The government has not confirmed that number.

The personnel reductions come as top Democrats on the House Judiciary and House Oversight committees have filed a lengthy Freedom of Information Act request questioning whether the Trump administration's DOGE Service is operating "outside the bounds of federal law," The Associated Press has learned.

In addition, President Donald Trump has ordered a large-scale reduction in force to cut jobs and reduce the overall size of the government. Defense officials could not provide any details on what that would do at the Pentagon or what proposed cuts are being discussed.

## Why did Netanyahu end the Gaza ceasefire?

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

The wave of Israeli strikes that killed hundreds of Palestinians across the Gaza Strip early Tuesday was the culmination of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's efforts to get out of the ceasefire with Hamas that he agreed to in January.

Since the start of the war, Netanyahu has faced dueling, possibly incompatible pressures: Families of the hostages want him to cut a deal with Hamas to free them, while his far-right coalition partners want to continue the war with the aim of annihilating the militant group.

On Tuesday, he appeared to cast his lot with the latter — and U.S. President Donald Trump's administration has backed Netanyahu's decision to unilaterally walk away from the ceasefire it took credit for brokering.

Both Israel and the United States blame the renewed hostilities on Hamas' refusal to release more hostages before negotiations on ending the war proceed — which was not part of the ceasefire agreement. Israel has accused Hamas of preparing for new attacks, without providing evidence. The militant group has denied those allegations.

Hamas — which has yet to respond militarily to the Israeli strikes — has spent weeks calling for serious talks on the ceasefire agreement's second phase, which calls for the release of the remaining living hostages in exchange for more Palestinian prisoners, a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and a lasting ceasefire.

Those talks were supposed to begin in early February. Now they may never happen.

What did the ceasefire agreement say?

The agreement reached in January, under pressure from the outgoing Biden administration and the incoming Trump one, called for a phased ceasefire aimed at freeing all the hostages abducted in Hamas' Oct 7, 2023, attack and ending the war it caused.

Under the first phase, which ran from Jan. 19 to March 1, Hamas released 25 Israeli hostages and the bodies of eight others in return for nearly 1,800 Palestinian prisoners, including senior militants serving life sentences for deadly attacks. Israeli forces pulled back to a buffer zone, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians returned to what remained of their homes, and there was a surge of humanitarian aid.

Each side accused the other of violations, and Israeli strikes killed dozens of Palestinians the military accused of engaging in militant activities or entering no-go zones. But the truce held.

Still, the second phase was always seen as far more difficult.

Through months of negotiations, Netanyahu had repeatedly cast doubt on it, insisting Israel was committed to returning all the hostages and destroying Hamas' military and governing capabilities — two war goals that many believe are irreconcilable.

In a TV interview last June, Netanyahu cast doubt on the possibility of a lasting ceasefire before Hamas is destroyed. "We are committed to continuing the war after a pause, in order to complete the goal of eliminating Hamas. I'm not willing to give up on that," he said.

On Jan. 18, the eve of the ceasefire, he said "we reserve the right to return to war if necessary with the backing of the United States."

Why did Netanyahu back out of the ceasefire?

Agreeing to a permanent ceasefire would almost certainly plunge Netanyahu into a political crisis that could end his nearly uninterrupted 15-year rule.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 52 of 64

Far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich had threatened to leave the coalition if Netanyahu progressed to Phase 2 instead of restarting the offensive. Opposition parties have promised to support him in any agreement that brings back hostages, but his coalition would still be severely weakened, making early elections likely.

By resuming the fighting, Netanyahu ensured Smotrich's continued support. After the strikes, the Israeli leader regained another far-right partner, Itamar Ben-Gvir, whose party had bolted in January over the ceasefire but returned to the coalition Tuesday.

Beyond the political jockeying, Netanyahu's stated goal of annihilating Hamas would have almost certainly eluded him had he stuck with the ceasefire agreement.

Hamas survived 15 months of Israeli bombardment and ground operations that killed over 48,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, and destroyed much of Gaza. When the truce took hold, the militant group immediately reasserted its rule.

There's no agreement on who should govern Gaza after the war, and even if the Western-backed Palestinian Authority were granted nominal control, Hamas would have strong influence on the ground and could rebuild its military capabilities.

For many Israelis, especially Netanyahu's hawkish base and far-right allies, that would look like defeat. It would add to the criticism he already faces over security failures surrounding the Oct. 7 attack, in which Hamas-led militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted 251.

How did Netanyahu end the truce?

After the first phase ended, Netanyahu said Israel had agreed to what he described as a new U.S. proposal in which Hamas would release half the remaining hostages in return for a seven-week extension of the truce and a vague promise to launch negotiations over a lasting ceasefire.

Hamas refused, pointing out that the new proposal was different from the one they had agreed to in January and again called for the immediate launch of talks on Phase 2.

It even offered to return an American-Israeli and the bodies of four other hostages to get the talks back on track, an offer dismissed as "psychological warfare" by Israel. Trump's Mideast envoy, Steve Witkoff, said Hamas was claiming flexibility in public while making "entirely impractical" demands.

In an attempt to impose the new arrangement on Hamas, Israel halted the import of all food, fuel and other humanitarian aid to Gaza. It later cut off electricity, affecting a vital desalination plant. Israel also said it would not withdraw from a strategic corridor on Gaza's border with Egypt, as stipulated in the agreement.

In recent days, Israel stepped up strikes across Gaza, targeting people it said were planting explosives or engaging in other militant activities. On Tuesday, at around 2 a.m., it launched one of the deadliest waves of strikes since the start of the war.

What has Trump said about the ceasefire?

Trump took credit for brokering the ceasefire in January, but since then has appeared to sour on it. He has warned that "all hell" will break loose if Hamas does not immediately release the hostages, while saying that's a decision for Israel to make.

Trump has also proposed that Gaza's roughly 2 million Palestinians be permanently relocated so the U.S. can take ownership of Gaza and develop it as a tourist destination. Netanyahu has embraced the plan, which has been universally condemned by Palestinians, Arab countries and human rights experts, who say it would violate international law.

The White House said it was consulted ahead of Tuesday's strikes and supported Israel's decision.

## Behind the story of the return of stuck NASA astronauts Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams

By HAYA PANJWANI Associated Press

NASA astronauts Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams, who were stuck in space for more than nine months, are finally on their way back home to Houston. Wilmore and Williams left the International Space Station in a SpaceX capsule early Tuesday with two others and are due to splash down in the evening off the

# Groton Daily Independent

**Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 53 of 64**

Florida coast, weather permitting.

On this episode of "The Story Behind the AP Story," Associated Press space writer Marcia Dunn discusses their space odyssey.

Marcia Dunn, AP reporter: Almost all roads to space begin here in Cape Canaveral.

Haya Panjwani, AP correspondent: That's Marcia Dunn, The Associated Press' space writer. She's following Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams' return home from the International Space Station.

PANJWANI: I'm Haya Panjwani. On this episode of "The Story Behind the AP Story," we're unpacking how the two astronauts got stuck up there in the first place and what they've done in the last few months at the station.

DUNN: So Butch and Suni became the first people, the first astronauts, to strap into a Boeing Starliner capsule and be launched into space. This was last June, June 5th, 2024. They launched aboard the Starliner on what was supposed to be an eight-day trip to the space station and back. Here we are, more than nine months later. This eight-day mission has turned into a nine-month marathon for them.

So, Butch and Suni strap in on June 5th. Launch goes off great from Cape Canaveral Space Force Station. I'm there watching, watching the rocket fly. They get to orbit safely. All is well, except the next day, as they're going into dock with the International Space Station as planned, the thrusters start to fail. Helium is leaking. There had been some helium leaks prior to liftoff, but nobody thought it would morph into something bigger and worse.

These two are test pilots. Suni's a helicopter pilot by trade. Butch is a fighter pilot, combat pilot, both military skill people. They temporarily had to take control to try to get the thrusters back in business so that they could make a fully automated docking at the space station. They got docked to the space station, and months started rolling by.

We're now into the summer of 2024. Because engineers on the ground could just not exactly figure out what had happened. Well, what went wrong with the Starliner? Why did all these thrusters malfunction? What's the deal with all the helium leaking out of it? Now, they were safe at the space station, right? And they didn't need the Starliner at this point, but to come home. And because NASA was worried that it could be dangerous for them to get aboard this craft with these troubles, they kept them up there while they kept investigating the situation here on the ground.

This dragged on for months. And finally, NASA told Boeing, that's it. Done. You know, you bring that capsule back empty. We'll see if it survives entry and it lands OK. But, Butch and Suni, we're sorry, but you're gonna have to be up there until next year. SpaceX was now the designated taxi service for Butch and Suni.

There are only three ways to get Americans back from the space station. SpaceX, the Russians, right, because they have their capsules coming and going, and also, what should have been Starliner. The next SpaceX crew to go up, was launched in September. There should have been four people for astronauts on that flight. They knocked two people off the flight so that there were two empty seats on the SpaceX Dragon capsule for the return leg of Butch and Suni. Well, then they can't leave until the replacements get there. Right? Because NASA always likes a crew handover between two crews to sort of, like, show them the ropes. And it just makes it an easier transition for everybody. So then they were told, hopefully you'll be home by the end of March. This month, the end of March.

They switched capsules in the end. The brand new capsule that was taking so long to get ready is going to be used by other people on the later this spring. A private crew. They hurried up. Friday night, this past Friday night, finally the replacements lifted off. We know that the crew, the space station crew, was up and watching via monitors and everything. And I'm sure there was a lot of hooting and hollering and a lot of smiles.

PANJWANI: Butch and Suni were chosen specifically for this mission.

DUNN: Both of them have been on military deployments. Right? So these are not your run of the mill scientists who or maybe a little more touchy feely. These two are like, you know, kick the tires. You know, fly boy, fly girl kind of people. But I have to say, I've never seen two people who seem so upbeat. They

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 54 of 64

look on the positive side.

Butch has his wife. They have two daughters, one's college age. His youngest is a senior in high school, so he's missed most of her senior year of high school. And Suni's husband, they have two Labrador retrievers, right. That's their babies. And she has an elderly mother who is and has been quite worried about all this going through all of this and this.

They told reporters recently that being in space has got its challenges. No, they didn't know that this was going to obviously take so long, but they've been busy doing experiments. They got to do a spacewalk together. Suni set a world record for most spacewalking time by any woman ever, with her latest spacewalk up there. They get to talk with their families almost every day with an internet phone. They got video hookups, but it's not the same as being there. And they have told us repeatedly that it's much harder on their families. Their families are down here on earth waiting and waiting and waiting. And while they're busy, you know, they're distracted with their mission. They're laser focused on their mission. These two are particularly upbeat, positive, optimistic people.

Butch in particular is quite a religious man. And he is an elder in his Baptist church back home in Houston, and he's even done, I understand, some, put in some calls to some of his older church members to try to give them a pep talk, right? Right. He has said he's used his faith a lot to get him through this and that there's a reason for everything, and that's what he's trying to instill in his daughters as they deal with this as well, that, you know, persevere. This will make you stronger.

PANJWANI: Now when they come back to Earth, what's next?

DUNN: NASA wants to have an overlap of at least a few days between the crew that's recently launched, the replacements and Butch and Suni, and they will come back with two others. Right. The two people, people who launched in September with two empty seats, they're coming back with them. And so they want a couple of spillover days so that the people who have been up there all this time can show them the ropes.

Then they will undock in the SpaceX Dragon capsule that's been up there since September and splash down off the Florida coast, and then they will be directly taken to Houston. You know, they have had astronauts up there as long as a year. They'll be treated the same, you know. And of course, any astronaut coming back after six months is not allowed to drive for a certain amount of period because, you know, you're wobbly when you get back. Your muscles are weak. Your bones are weak. Yes, you've been exercising two hours every day. But you know, some people do better than others coming back, right? And so they don't want you behind a wheel. They don't want you doing anything that could endanger you accidentally.

Between the two of them, of course, they've been asked, what can't... what do you miss? What can't you wait to do besides hug your families when you get back? And Suni can't wait to take her dogs for a walk and jump in the ocean, she told us recently. And Butch can't wait to get back to face to face ministering of his flock back home at his church in Houston.

PANJWANI: Launch audio courtesy of NASA.

This has been the story behind the AP story. For more on AP's space coverage, visit [APNews.com](https://apnews.com).

## Johni Broome of Auburn, Cooper Flagg of Duke unanimous picks to lead the AP All-America team

By DAVE SKRETTA AP Basketball Writer

One is a fifth-year senior who began his career at a mid-major, the other a first-year wunderkind recruited by everyone. The first is a now leading a program on the rise, while the other is the unmistakable star for a traditional power.

Johni Broome of Auburn and Cooper Flagg of Duke do have something in common, though: The forwards were unanimous first-team picks for The Associated Press men's college basketball All-America teams released Tuesday.

They were joined on the first team by Alabama star Mark Sears, Purdue's Braden Smith and Walter Clayton Jr. of Florida.

# Groton Daily Independent

**Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 55 of 64**

Only Broome, a third-team pick a year ago, and Flagg were among the first five on the ballots of all 61 national media members who vote for the weekly AP Top 25. Broome becomes the Tigers' fourth All-American and first to make the first team, while Flagg is the 19th different Blue Devils player to earn first-team recognition.

"He's doing things nobody really has ever done before," Duke coach Jon Scheyer said. "And he's not about numbers. I'm telling you, when this dude goes home, somebody says to him, 'Man, you had 42, six and seven,' he'll say, 'OK, cool.' That's not what he's about, which to me makes it even better because you can get caught up with that, especially as a young player."

Maybe that is something else that Broome and Flagg have in common: Both are eyeing a national championship. Auburn spent eight weeks at No. 1 this year, while Duke ascended to the top spot when the Tigers stumbled down the stretch.

Now, the two programs head to the NCAA Tournament as the No. 1 seed in their respective regions.

"I've proved a lot individually through my career but my main goal is a team goal, which is to win the national championship," said Broome, who played two seasons at Morehead State before spending the past three with the Tigers. "When the team shines, everyone shines individually. Coming from where I came from, it means a lot to me."

Sears was a second-team pick last season, when he helped to lead the Crimson Tide to their first Final Four. He initially declared for the NBA draft but withdrew in late May, choosing instead to return to Alabama for another run at a national title.

He's the Crimson Tide's second first-team All-American after Brandon Miller two years ago.

Smith was an honorable mention pick last year, when Purdue teammate Zach Edey was a unanimous first-team pick for the second straight season. With Edey off to the NBA, Smith became the go-to player for a bunch of Boilermakers who will be trying to return to the national championship game after losing to UConn there a year ago.

Florida had never had a first-team All-American before Clayton, who helped the Gators climb as high as No. 2 in the Top 25 this season. He's also their first All-American since 2007, when second-teamer Joakim Noah and third-team choice Al Horford led the Gators to their second consecutive national championship.

Perhaps the versatile Clayton will be able to lead Florida back to the top in March Madness.

"Whatever path, I like my guys," he said. "Me and my guys against whoever."

## Second team

JT Toppin transferred from New Mexico to Texas Tech, John Tonje from Missouri to Wisconsin and PJ Haggerty from Tulsa to Memphis, and all took advantage of a change in scenery to have breakout seasons and earn second-team All-America honors.

The trio was joined on the second team by Kam Jones of Marquette and RJ Luis Jr. of St. John's.

## Third team

Hunter Dickinson of Kansas and fellow big man Ryan Kalkbrenner of Creighton were third-team picks, making it three straight years that each appeared on an All-America team. Both were honorable mention two years ago, while Dickinson was a second-team pick and Kalkbrenner honorable mention again last season.

They were joined on the third team by Zakai Zeigler of Tennessee, Eric Dixon of Villanova and Houston's LJ Cryer, who was the Big 12 player of the year and an honorable mention All-America pick last season.

## Honorable mention

Chaz Lanier of Tennessee and Trey Kaufman-Renn of Purdue were among the next 10 (including ties) in voting who earned honorable mention recognition. Other honorable mentions included Donovan Dent of New Mexico, Drake's Bennett Stirtz and Chucky Hepburn of Louisville.

## **They worked to prevent violence and terrorism at the agency created after 9/11. Then they got fired**

By REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal program designed to prevent targeted violence and terrorism in the United States has lost 20% of its staff after layoffs hit its probationary staffers.

The Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships was a redefined version of programs created after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks as a way to identify people who could pose new terrorism threats or carry out violence and prevent tragedies by getting them help. It has a mission enlisting parents, coaches, teachers and ministers to head off trouble before it starts by training them to look for signs of trouble in advance.

That job became far more difficult after eight members of the center's staff were fired in early March as part of the Trump administration's efforts to trim the government by getting rid of probationary staffers. According to a Department of Homeland Security employee and a center employee who was fired, the staffers were rehired late Monday but were then put on administrative leave, following two March 13 court decisions ordering the Republican administration to rehire fired probationary staffers.

The administration vowed to fight the decisions. The staffers spoke on the condition of anonymity out of concerns they might be targeted for retribution.

The center's director confirmed the terminations in a statement to The Associated Press. William Braniff said that with his appointment to the director's job ending soon, he decided the best thing he could do for the staffers and for the center was to "resign alongside of them, as some agencies and departments have rehired people in mission critical offices once they were made aware of the implications of those terminations."

Braniff said there is a huge demand for the assistance provided by the center, called CP3 for short.

"CP3 is the inheritor of the primary and founding mission of DHS — to prevent terrorism," he said, adding that the center's approach "is as effective for preventing school shootings as it is for terrorism prevention."

In a post on LinkedIn before he resigned, Braniff said grant applications last year increased 82% and 27 states were lined up to work with the center to create plans to address targeted violence and prevent terrorism; 16 states already had plans in place or were creating them.

The employees terminated included former social workers, mental health professionals and state public health officials. Before the layoffs there had been more than 40 staff members at the center, with most based in Washington, D.C.

In a statement, Homeland Security spokeswoman Tricia McLaughlin said President Donald Trump is leading an effort to make "sweeping cuts and reforms" across the federal government to get rid of "egregious waste and incompetence."

She said leaders at the department "identified non-mission-critical personnel in probationary status" and added: "DHS remains focused on supporting law enforcement and public safety through funding, training, increased public awareness, and partnerships."

Tom Warrick, a former counterterrorism official at Homeland Security who's now at the Atlantic Council, said the center, launched in 2021 under the Biden administration, was intended to develop projects that try to identify people before they turn violent, regardless of ideology or motivation, and steer them toward help through community health programs.

Warrick said that the center has been doing "pioneering" work and that the payoff is "enormous" in terms of shootings and attacks averted.

"What they really need to do is to expand it, not cut it back," he said.

The grants provide funding to state, local, tribal and territorial governments, nonprofits and education institutions to help them establish or grow their own programs to address targeted violence and terrorism.

The center replaced the Trump-era Office for Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention, which itself replaced an Obama-era program called Countering Violent Extremism. Earlier iterations of the program were criticized for unfairly targeting Muslim and minority communities, and critics said it was difficult to measure results.

Some of those concerns still remain, said Spencer Reynolds, senior counsel to the Brennan Center's Liberty and National Security Program. He said the Brennan Center has long had concerns about the program's civil liberties protections. Even with the emphasis on bringing in public health providers, he said, there's still too much of an emphasis on law enforcement.

Last year, the center announced \$18 million in grant funding to 35 recipients.

Those grants included \$700,000 to the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office in Florida as it worked to "increase community awareness of the signs that someone may be on a pathway to violence." Another \$344,982 went to the Southwest Texas Fusion Center to help it expand its behavioral threat assessment and management team to cover more counties in southwest Texas, where it works to help schools reduce violence.

## Indian city sets curfew after Hindu groups demand demolition of 17th century Muslim ruler's tomb

By SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Authorities imposed an indefinite curfew in parts of a western Indian city on Tuesday, a day after sectarian clashes were sparked by Hindu nationalist groups who want to demolish the tomb of a 17th-century Muslim Mughal ruler.

Clashes between Hindus and Muslims in Maharashtra state's Nagpur city broke out on Monday during a protest led by Hindu nationalist groups demanding the demolition of the tomb of Aurangzeb, a Muslim Mughal ruler who has been dead for more than 300 years.

Lawmaker Chandrashekhar Bawankule said at least 34 police personnel and five other people were injured and several houses and vehicles were damaged during the violence. Senior police officer Ravinder Singal said at least 50 people have been arrested so far.

Devendra Fadnavis, Maharashtra's top elected official, said the violence began after "rumors were spread that things containing religious content were burnt" by the protesters, referring to the Quran.

Aurangzeb's tomb is in Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar city, some 500 kilometers (310 miles) from Nagpur. The city was earlier called Aurangabad, after the Mughal ruler.

Aurangzeb is a loathed figure among India's Hindu nationalists, who accuse him of persecuting Hindus during his rule in the 17th century, even though some historians say such stories are exaggerated.

As tensions between Hindus and Muslims have mounted under Hindu nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi, scorn for Aurangzeb has grown. Modi has made references to Aurangzeb in the past, accusing him of persecuting Hindus.

Such remarks have led to anxieties among the country's significant Muslim minority who in recent years have been at the receiving end of violence from Hindu nationalists, emboldened by a prime minister who has mostly stayed mum on such attacks since he was first elected in 2014.

Tensions over the Mughal ruler have intensified in India after the release of Bollywood movie "Chhaava," an action film based on a Hindu warrior who fought against Aurangzeb. The film has been lambasted by some movie critics for feeding into a divisive narrative that risks exacerbating religious rifts in the country.

While there have long been tensions between India's majority Hindu community and Muslims, rights groups say that attacks against minorities have become more brazen under Modi. They also accuse Modi of discriminatory policies towards the country's Muslims.

Modi's ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party denies this.

Hindu extremists have also targeted Muslim places of worship across the country and laid claim to several famous mosques, arguing they are built on the ruins of prominent temples. Many such cases are pending in courts.

Last year, Modi delivered on a longstanding demand from Hindu nationalists — and millions of Hindus — when he opened a controversial temple on the site of a razed mosque in northern India's Ayodhya city. The 16th-century Babri mosque was demolished in 1992 by Hindu mobs who believe Ram, one of Hinduism's most revered deity, was born at the exact spot.

## What to know about the bird flu outbreak in wild birds and what it means for backyard bird feeders

By CHRISTINA LARSON AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Bird flu has devastated poultry and dairy farms, and sent the price of eggs soaring in the United States since it was first detected in North America in late 2021.

But what has been the toll on wild birds? More than 170 species of North American wild birds – including ducks, geese, gulls, owls, eagles and others – have been infected with bird flu.

Take precautions around sick or dead wild birds, experts recommend. But you can keep your bird feeder up. Despite the spread in birds and other wild animals, scientists say the threat to the general population is currently low.

Which wild birds can get bird flu?

More than 12,000 individual birds have tested positive since the virus began spreading, according to the U.S. Agriculture Department.

The count is a “gross underestimate” because most dead birds are never taken to a lab for testing, said Bryan Richards at the U.S. Geological Survey’s National Wildlife Health Center in Madison, Wisconsin.

Dabbling ducks, such as mallards and blue-winged teal, can carry the virus with few symptoms because “these viruses co-evolved in waterfowl,” said Richards. But ducks can also shed the virus in their feces or saliva, sometimes infecting other birds or mammals like foxes.

Birds without natural immunity that migrate or roost together in large flocks, such as geese, are most likely to die in large numbers. A recent bird flu outbreak among migratory eared grebes in Utah killed between 15,000 and 25,000 birds near Great Salt Lake, state wildlife officials said in early February.

Seabirds, which tend to roost in large numbers, are also highly impacted.

Songbirds such as Northern cardinals, blue jays or chickadees — the kind of birds that might visit bird feeders — can also become infected and die, but their populations appear to fare better since they don’t gather closely in large groups where the virus could spread, said Michael J. Parr, president of the American Bird Conservancy.

What are bird flu symptoms in wild birds?

Symptoms vary, but may include lack of coordination, inability to fly and respiratory distress.

“If people see a wild bird acting weird, the best thing they can do is call their local wildlife rehabilitator” and avoid handling it directly, said Dr. Dana Franzen-Klein, a veterinarian and medical director at the University of Minnesota’s Raptor Center.

If you must handle an infected bird, it’s best to wear gloves and a mask as a precaution.

Is it safe to have a backyard bird feeder?

Experts say bird feeders are generally safe and aren’t a notable source of spreading bird flu.

But if you also keep backyard chickens, Parr of the American Bird Conservancy recommends taking the bird feeder down to prevent possible transmission to poultry. Birdfeeders and nesting boxes should also be cleaned regularly.

The risk of spread to people from bird feeders “is very, very low,” he said.

How is the bird flu outbreak affecting endangered bird species?

In the case of critically endangered California condors, scientists organized a vaccination program after some birds became infected. But that’s not a realistic option for most wild bird species.

Instead, experts recommend giving wild birds the best chance by taking other steps to protect habitats and reduce various risks that species face, such as exposure to pesticides or lead ammo.

Bald eagles, which are federally protected but no longer endangered, are scavengers that will eat dead animals. “That first year, we lost a lot of eagles” likely from bald eagles eating infected ducks or bringing them to their nests, said Richards.

Scientists also documented an unusually high number of eagle chicks that didn’t survive into adulthood

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 59 of 64

during the first breeding season after the virus appeared in North America, likely because the chicks got the virus or sick parents weren't able to adequately feed and care for them.

But over time, the number of confirmed infections in eagles nationwide has declined from 427 in 2022 to 48 last year.

That may mean that eagles that survived the first year now have some acquired immunity, said Franzen-Klein. This past migration season, researchers counted a record number of bald eagles migrating through northern Minnesota.

"There are good signs of hope" that eagles in the region are rebounding, she said.

## **FBI applauds Mexico's arrest and handover of '10 Most Wanted' gang figure**

MEXICO CITY (AP) —

FBI Director Kash Patel applauded Mexican authorities Tuesday for the arrest and handover of one of the FBI's "Ten Most Wanted" suspects, an alleged gang leader from El Salvador.

Francisco Javier Román Bardales is allegedly a senior leader of the Mara Salvatrucha or MS-13 gang. He was arrested Monday in the mountains of the Gulf coast state of Veracruz by soldiers and federal agents.

"This is a major victory both for our law enforcement partners and for a safer America," Patel wrote.

Mexico's security chief Omar García Harfuch applauded the arrest Monday, which his agency said was the result of international cooperation. The agency referred to his handover as a deportation to the United States.

Román Bardales faces charges related to violent crime, drug distribution and extortion in the Eastern District of New York.

The Mara Salvatrucha was one of eight Latin American criminal organizations declared foreign terrorist organizations by the U.S. government last month.

FBI Director Kash Patel said via X Tuesday that Roman Bardales was being transported within the U.S. He thanked Mexican authorities for their support.

The arrest and swift handover came just weeks after Mexico handed over 29 drug cartel figures, including drug lord Rafael Caro Quintero, who was behind the killing of a U.S. DEA agent in 1985.

Mexico has also stepped up operations against the Sinaloa cartel, a main trafficker of fentanyl to the United States.

President Claudia Sheinbaum has worked to show U.S. President Donald Trump that Mexico is a reliable partner on security and immigration. The results have so far kept most of Trump's tariffs at bay.

The Trump administration sent two other top members of MS-13 to El Salvador over the weekend, along with hundreds of Venezuelan immigrants.

## **French bulldog is still top US breed, but is another gaining momentum? Of corso**

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The U.S. still has a major case of French bulldog fever, but a very different breed is staunchly chasing dog lovers' hearts, according to American Kennel Club statistics released Wednesday.

For the third year in a row, the comical, controversial Frenchie tops the club's annual rundown of the nation's most prevalent purebred dogs.

Frenchies are followed by Labrador retrievers, golden retrievers, German shepherds, poodles and some other longtime faves. (Rounding out the top 10: dachshunds, beagles, Rottweilers, bulldogs and German shorthaired pointers.)

Yet keep an eye on the cane corso. The powerful, protective breed vaulted from nearly 50th to 14th in the rankings in just a decade.

Popularity is seen as a mixed blessing among dog breeders and as an outright scourge by their critics.

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 60 of 64

Some animal welfare activists say the AKC rankings drive fads that fuel puppy mills. The AKC says the list documents, not promotes, dog-ownership trends, and the nonprofit club notes that it conducts thousands of breeder and pet store inspections per year.

Amid the arguments, there's no disputing that there are plenty of lovable dogs in the nation's animal shelters.

Here's a look at the trends and what they mean.

The Frenchie phenomenon

The AKC ranking reflects purebreds, mostly puppies, that were added last year to the nation's oldest dog registry. Nearly 74,500 were Frenchies.

That's down from 98,500 in 2023 and 108,000 in 2022, but the AKC isn't saying that the wave has crested. Registration is voluntary, and spokesperson Brandi Hunter Munden notes that the numbers can fluctuate year-to-year.

The small, pointy-eared bulldog breed with a big personality is still way ahead of the once-dominant Lab, which logged 58,500 new registrations last year.

French bulldogs have existed in the U.S. since at least the 19th century, but they've been on a tear in the 21st, fueled partly by celebrity owners and social media.

"They are fabulous companions," the AKC's Gina DiNardo said.

Frenchie folk praise the dogs' modest grooming and exercise needs, generally confident and friendly demeanor and, of course, those smushy mugs that fans find irresistible — but critics call irresponsible. There can be health problems associated with squished faces and other features, and both detractors and devotees lament that the breed has become too hyped for its own good, attracting unprincipled breeders, unprepared owners and sometimes violent thieves.

The can-do cane corso

If a Frenchie is sometimes described as "a clown in the cloak of a philosopher," a cane corso is a protector with no use for a cloak.

Big, strong and athletic, the cane corso (pronounced KAH'-neh KOHR'-so) served as a Roman war dog and later a farmer's helper, boar hunter and household guardian.

Today's cane corsi (the proper plural) are prized as loyal, rather august companions and adept dog-sports competitors. But breeders worry that social media is spreading misconceptions about the dogs, which they say are not suitable for everyone.

Breeder Vickie Venzen insists that would-be puppy buyers visit her Maryland home, where she introduces them first to an outgoing, easygoing corso and explains that such a temperament isn't standard for the breed.

Then she will bring out a corso with a classic and desirable demeanor: likely to greet an invited visitor peacefully, but without tail-wagging effusiveness. After its greeting, the dog may walk off and watch with cool vigilance.

Next comes one of her "hard dogs": one that's a bit too quick to display its protective instincts.

The point is to show the spectrum of corsi temperaments and make clear that they're neither lapdogs that just look tough nor rough-and-tumble creatures that can be left outside to guard. They're very sensitive to their families, Venzen said.

"They're very good dogs, and they're very versatile, and they can be taught a lot," said Venzen, who was delighted to learn recently that a dog she bred mastered paddleboarding. "But you can't be so foolish as to think you can put it in any situation and the dog will understand."

New dogs

The newest breed to be counted, the Lancashire heeler, came in at 189th out of AKC's 201 recognized breeds last year.

The next-newest, the bracco Italiano, sprang last year from 152nd to 132nd, and some longtime aficionados already are concerned about its trajectory, said owner Deb Pereira of North Stonington, Connecticut. She stresses that the substantial, handsome and sociable hunting dogs need a good deal of physical and mental exercise. Quite a few still hunt; Pereira's bracco, Elvira, is an agility champion, and her daily walks

cover about four miles (6.5 kilometers).

Few dogs

The five rarest AKC-recognized breeds are the sloughi, the Norwegian lundehund, the grand basset griffon Vendéen, the Bergamasco sheepdog and, at 201st, the English foxhound.

Doodle doings

To date, the AKC hasn't recognized any sheepadoodles, Havapoos, borgis or other "designer" hybrids. The club said it has gotten some inquiries, but no doodle or other designer breed fanciers have formally begun the often yearslong process of seeking recognition.

And about the everydogs ...

There's no census of everyday mixed-breed dogs in the U.S., but the American Veterinary Medical Association estimates the country has about 90 million dogs — purebreds, designer mixes and others.

After animal shelters cleared out during COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns and then filled to overflowing, last year's data from advocacy groups Shelter Animals Count and Best Friends Animal Society differ as to whether dog arrivals and adoptions rose or fell and by how much. That's not inexplicable, as the two groups count different sets of organizations.

But both emphasize that purebreds and mixed-breeds come up for adoption.

"Really, if you find it in your heart to rescue or adopt a pet, that's the way to go," Best Friends Animal Society CEO Julie Castle said.

## **Shohei Ohtani, Japan's other baseball stars shook their nerves and delivered in MLB's Tokyo opener**

By DAVID BRANDT AP Baseball Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Yoshinobu Yamamoto had a little extra zip on his fastball. Shohei Ohtani even admitted to some nerves.

There was little doubt this was no ordinary baseball game.

But the Japanese players who were playing in front of their home country at the Tokyo Dome on Tuesday night handled any jitters they had quite well, delivering in clutch moments as the Los Angeles Dodgers beat the Chicago Cubs 4-1 in Major League Baseball's season opener.

"I was actually pretty nervous," Ohtani said through an interpreter. "It's been a while since I was nervous, but today, definitely felt it."

Ohtani finished with two hits in the Dodgers' win, including a single in the fifth and a double in the ninth. Both hard-hit balls brought roars from the roughly 42,000 fans at a packed Tokyo Dome and were instrumental in helping the Dodgers get off to a good start this season.

"I don't think I've ever seen Shohei nervous," Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said. "One thing I did notice is how emotional he got during the Japanese national anthem. That was something very telling."

Yamamoto pitched five quality innings to earn the win, giving up just one run on three hits and a walk while striking out four. The right-hander's fastball touched 98 mph and consistently sat in the 96-97 range, which is a few ticks higher than last year.

It was the first time Yamamoto had been on the mound in a regular season game since his fantastic performance in Game 2 of the World Series, and the results carried over to the Tokyo Dome.

"What I experienced in October, I learned a lot of things," Yamamoto said through a translator. "What I should and what I shouldn't do in certain situations. Based on that, I feel more confident."

Yamamoto said he wasn't trying to overthrow on his fastball. Instead, he said better mechanics have allowed him to throw a little harder. Roberts said there's no reason the 26-year-old can't compete for the NL Cy Young award if he pitches like he did against the Cubs and stays healthy.

"Great outing, I thought he commanded the baseball really well tonight," Roberts said. "The fastball was as good as we've seen. Competed really well. There was some soft contact in there and he just navigated the game really well."

Even in a losing effort, Cubs left-hander Shota Imanaga was fantastic through four scoreless innings,

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 62 of 64

giving up no hits while walking four. The Imanaga vs. Yamamoto matchup was the first all-Japanese starting pitching duel on opening day in MLB history.

"Imanaga and Yamamoto did a really good job handling the nerves of the start of the game," Cubs manager Craig Counsell said.

Imanaga said he was pleased with his outing, even if the final result wasn't what he wanted. The lefty retired Ohtani twice, once on a groundout and another time on a lineout. He said the experience from Tuesday's game should serve him well throughout the season.

"One of the lessons regarding the fastball was it felt really good," Imanaga said through an interpreter. "Once I go back to the US — obviously there's differences in humidity, environment and how far the ball goes — but bottom line if I can throw the fastball I did today all the time and have confidence in it, I'll be good."

The only Japanese player who had a quiet night was Cubs slugger Seiya Suzuki, who finished 0 for 4 at the plate. With a runner on second in the eighth inning, he hit the ball fairly hard, but Dodgers third baseman Max Muncy was there to snag the line drive.

Japanese rookie Roki Sasaki will make his MLB debut on Wednesday night when the teams meet against at the Tokyo Dome for the finale of the two-game set.

## What to know about why Israel launched dozens of attacks across Gaza, raising fears of all-out war

By DAVID RISING and TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — The relative calm of a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas came to an abrupt end on Tuesday when Israel launched dozens of attacks on targets across the Gaza Strip. Palestinian medical officials say more than 400 people have been killed, mostly women and children. Israel says the operation is open-ended and expected to expand, raising fears of the 17-month-old war fully reigniting.

Here's what to know about how the strikes came about and what might come next.

What happened to the ceasefire?

The ceasefire agreed to in mid-January was a three-phase plan, the first of which actually ended two weeks ago. Israel balked at entering substantive negotiations over the second phase, which were meant to lead to a long-term ceasefire, a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and the return of all hostages taken by Hamas in its Oct. 7, 2023 attack on Israel that started the war.

The ceasefire was supposed to continue as long as talks over the second phase went on, according to the agreement reached after more than a year of negotiations mediated by the United States, Egypt and Qatar.

During the first phase, Hamas returned 25 living hostages and the remains of eight others in exchange for the release of nearly 1,800 Palestinian prisoners. Israeli forces also withdrew to buffer zones inside Gaza, and hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians returned to northern Gaza. No further hostage releases were called for under the agreement until the second phase.

Hundreds of aid trucks had been entering daily. But two weeks ago, Israel cut off all food, medicine, fuel, electricity and other supplies to the territory's around 2 million people to pressure Hamas to accept a new proposal.

The new plan would require Hamas to release half its remaining hostages — the militant group's main bargaining chip — in exchange for a ceasefire extension and a promise to negotiate a lasting truce. Israel made no mention of releasing more Palestinian prisoners — a key component of the first phase.

Hamas refused the new proposal, accusing Israel of trying to sabotage the existing agreement.

Is the ceasefire over?

Unless mediators step in, Israel's surprise attack could mean a full return to fighting in a 17-month war that has killed tens of thousands of Palestinians and caused widespread destruction across Gaza.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has repeatedly threatened to resume the war, said he ordered the strikes because of Hamas' rejection of the new proposal. He said Israel "will, from now on, act against

# Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 63 of 64

Hamas with increasing military strength.”

The White House said it had been consulted and voiced support for Israel’s actions.

Hamas accused Netanyahu of upending the ceasefire agreement and exposing the remaining hostages “to an unknown fate.” In a statement, it called on mediators to hold Israel “fully responsible for violating and overturning the agreement.”

The attack came during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. No major fighting has occurred in Gaza since the ceasefire took hold on Jan. 19, but Israeli strikes have killed dozens of Palestinians who the military said had entered unauthorized areas, engaged in militant activities or otherwise violated the truce.

What is Netanyahu’s situation?

Netanyahu has come under mounting domestic pressure, with mass protests planned over his handling of the hostage crisis and his decision to fire the head of Israel’s internal security agency.

Families of hostages still held in Gaza expressed concern Tuesday over their loved ones. “We are shocked, angry, and terrified by the deliberate dismantling of the process to return our loved ones from the terrible captivity of Hamas,” the Hostages Families Forum said.

But Netanyahu has also faced demands from his hard-line allies not to allow any deal in Gaza that falls short of Hamas’ destruction. Negotiations with Hamas over a second phase could have brought pressure for compromises over how Gaza will be ruled in the future.

Netanyahu needs to meet an end-of-the-month deadline for passing a budget or his government will collapse and the country would be forced into early elections. He has struggled to reach an agreement with coalition partners.

Following Tuesday’s strikes, the far-right Jewish Power party of Itamar Ben-Gvir announced it was returning to Netanyahu’s coalition. Ben-Gvir had quit the government in January over the ceasefire.

Netanyahu’s critics have also alleged his decision to fire the head of Israel’s internal security agency and a string of other dismissals are part of a broader campaign aimed at undermining independent government institutions.

They say he’s doing this to maintain power while on trial for alleged corruption and facing public pressure to accept his own responsibility for policy failures in the lead-up to Hamas’ surprise attack on Oct. 7, 2023.

What else is happening?

A resumption of fighting in Gaza could have repercussions around the region.

Yemen’s Iran-backed Houthi rebels denounced the Israeli strikes, saying “the Palestinian people will not be left alone in this battle” — indicating a possible resumption of the Houthis’ strikes on shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

The United States launched a new airstrikes over the weekend targeting the Houthis in Yemen in retaliation for its attacks on shipping. At least 53 people were reported killed.

U.S. President Donald Trump on Monday warned Iran would “suffer the consequences” for any further Houthi attacks, threatening to widen the conflict further.

New Gaza violence could also shake the ceasefire that Israel reached with Hezbollah in November, which stopped months of deadly exchanges of fire over the Israeli-Lebanon border.

## Today in History: March 19, Bush announces Iraq invasion

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Wednesday, March 19, the 78th day of 2025. There are 287 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On March 19, 2003, in a televised address, President George W. Bush announced that coalition forces had begun an invasion of Iraq. (Bush would declare victory just over five weeks later in his “Mission Accomplished” speech.)

Also on this date:

In 1931, Nevada Gov. Fred B. Balzar signed a measure that made the state the first to legalize gambling.

In 1945, during World War II, more than 800 service members were killed when a Japanese dive bomber

# Groton Daily Independent

**Wednesday, March 19, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 267 ~ 64 of 64**

attacked the carrier USS Franklin near Japan.

In 1953, the 25th Academy Awards ceremony was the first to be televised; "The Greatest Show on Earth" would win the Oscar for Best Picture.

In 1965, archeologist E. Lee Spence discovered the wreckage of the SS Georgiana, a Confederate ship that had sunk near Charleston, South Carolina, exactly 102 years earlier.

In 1966, Texas Western (now the University of Texas at El Paso) became the first team to start five Black players in the NCAA basketball tournament's championship game; they defeated top-ranked Kentucky in the final, 72-65.

In 1987, televangelist Jim Bakker resigned as chairman of his PTL ministry organization amid a sex and money scandal involving Jessica Hahn, a former church secretary.

In 1995, 17 months after announcing his retirement from basketball, Michael Jordan returned to play in the NBA with his former team, the Chicago Bulls. (He would go on to win three more NBA championships alongside the three he and the Bulls had already won.)

Today's Birthdays: Actor Ursula Andress is 89. Singer Ruth Pointer (The Pointer Sisters) is 79. Actor Glenn Close is 78. Actor Bruce Willis is 70. NFL coach Andy Reid is 67. Actor Ebon Moss-Bachrach is 48. Comedian-podcaster Theo Von is 45. Facebook co-founder Eduardo Saverin is 43. MLB pitcher Clayton Kershaw is 37.