

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 1 of 83

[1- Upcoming Events](#)

[2- SD News Watch: Bird flu in SD: Millions of birds dead, worry shifts to humans](#)

[6- SD SearchLight: Amid complaints about big-money ballot measures, new reports show \\$12 million spent in 2024](#)

[8- Sunday Extras](#)

[26- Gov. Rhoden's Weekly Column](#)

[27- Sen. Thune's Weekly Column](#)

[28- Rep. Dusty Johnson's Weekly Column](#)

[29- Rev. Snyder's Column](#)

[31- South Dakota Average Gas Prices](#)

[32- Drought Monitor](#)

[33- EarthTalk - China's EV Production](#)

[34- Weather Pages](#)

[38- Daily Devotional](#)

[39- Subscription Form](#)

[40- Lottery Numbers](#)

[41- Upcoming Groton Events](#)

[42- News from the Associated Press](#)



Sunday, March 30

United Methodist: Worship at Conde, 8:15 a.m.; at Groton, 9:30 a.m.; at Britton, 11:15 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:30 a.m.; Coffee hour, 10:30 a.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's, 9 a.m.; at Zion, 11 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:45 a.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.; Choir, 6 p.m.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m.; SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.

Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship, 10:30 a.m.

Monday, March 31

Senior Menu: Pork cutlet, creamy noodles, California Blend, fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Breakfast sliders.

School Lunch: Chicken breast, mashed potatoes.

First Allowable Day of Girls Golf

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

Tuesday, April 1

Senior Menu: Hamburger gravy on rice, corn, peaches, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Egg Omelets

School Lunch: Hot dogs, chips.

NSU Indoor Track Meet, 3 p.m.

City Council meeting, 7 p.m.

United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Ladies Aid LWML, 1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 2

Senior Menu: Chicken cordon blue hotdish, Capri blend, vanilla pudding with oranges, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Cereal.

School Lunch: Chicken piccata, rice.

Groton Chamber meeting, City Hall, noon

Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 4 p.m.; Sarah Circle, 5 p.m.; Soup Supper, 6 p.m. (League is host); worship, 7 p.m.

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

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

St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation 3:45 p.m.; Supper, 6 p.m.; Lent Service, 7 p.m.

© 2025 Groton Daily Independent

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



**SOUTH DAKOTA
NEWS WATCH**

Inform. Enlighten. Illuminate.

Bird flu in SD: Millions of birds dead, worry shifts to humans

Bart Pfankuch

South Dakota News Watch

BRIDGEWATER, S.D. – As bird flu ravages poultry farms across the country – including in South Dakota – fears are growing that the highly contagious avian influenza virus could mutate and begin to spread widely among the world’s human population.

The virus already has caused devastating effects in the state, which has seen the second-highest number of outbreaks in commercial poultry flocks in the nation.

The 114 commercial outbreaks in South Dakota, along with another 26 backyard flock infections, have led to the death or intentional killing of more than 6 million turkeys, chickens and other birds, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Many of the outbreaks in the state, the latest coming in January, have been at turkey farms operated by Hutterite colonies in the eastern half of the state, including at the Oaklane Hutterite Colony near Bridgewater.

But in 2024, the virus was detected in a flock of farm-raised pheasants in South Dakota, leading to the killing of about 30,000 of the birds that draw hunters from around the world each fall. As in other states, the virus has also spread to mammals in the state, causing the death of a handful of cattle and more than a dozen domestic cats.

So far, no human cases have been reported in South Dakota. Nationally, however, about 70 people have been sickened by the virus, mostly farm workers or veterinarians who were exposed to infected birds or cattle. In January, an elderly resident of Louisiana with underlying medical conditions became the first person to die of bird flu in the U.S. after being exposed to sick birds.

166 million birds destroyed

The current outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza, or H5N1 virus, began in the U.S. in February 2022. Since then, the virus has been detected in all 50 states, causing more than 1,600 individual outbreaks in commercial and backyard poultry flocks and leading to the death or euthanasia of 166 million chickens, turkeys and other birds.

While the most tangible outcome of bird flu for consumers has been the rising cost of eggs and chicken breasts, a different, more ominous concern is rising among scientists and public health officials who closely monitor bird flu and study ways to prevent its spread.

There has been no known human-to-human spread of bird flu so far in the U.S, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. And yet, numerous scientists are becoming concerned that bird flu could become the next pandemic and potentially cause devastating consequences to human populations across the world.

“We’re afraid this virus could cause a human pandemic because humans have very little immunity against



Farmer John Wipf, shown in 2019, oversees agricultural operations at the Oaklane Hutterite Colony in Hanson County. The colony has suffered two outbreaks of bird flu in the past two years. (Photo: Bart Pfankuch / South Dakota News Watch)

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 3 of 83

this particular avian flu virus," Scott Hensley, a leading bird flu researcher at the University of Pennsylvania, said in a January video presentation. "The problem is that flu viruses acquire mutations all the time. And we know that the virus is only one or two mutations away from being able to cause severe disease in humans."

The current risk to humans, especially those outside the agriculture industry, remains "very low," according to the CDC. So far, the bird flu virus has not been found to bind well to human cells or take hold in the human respiratory system.

But the virus has already shown a ready ability to mutate, not unlike how the Influenza A and B and COVID-19 viruses show slight mutations each year. Bird flu can be spread through direct contact, by breathing airborne particles or through shared water sources.

The spread of infection from wild migrating birds to captive poultry flocks, and the subsequent mutations from birds to bovines and now cats is a cause for alarm, said Todd Tetrow, the director of veterinary services at Dakota Provisions, a large turkey processing company in Huron.

"It can jump species, so anytime there's virus out there, and other species can be exposed, it can sure jump," Tetrow told News Watch. "Anytime it jumps into a new species, there's more concern and thoughts that this thing is getting to where it's scary for humans."

Turkey farms hit hard by bird flu

South Dakota has been a hotbed for bird flu infections for two reasons.

The state is along the flyway for many species of migratory birds, which are the known carriers of the virus.

Also, South Dakota is a major producer of turkeys that are mainly raised indoors within concentrated animal feeding operations. The state also has smaller chicken and pheasant breeding operations that can be susceptible to bird flu outbreaks.

The 41 Hutterite turkey producers who make up the farmer-owned Dakota Provisions cooperative have suffered so many bird flu outbreaks in the past three years that the group has purchased its own industrial firefighting foam system. Firefighting foam, which eliminates oxygen when dispensed, is the current preferred method of quickly and efficiently "depopulating" a flock of infected birds.

The Oaklane Hutterite Colony west of Sioux Falls has endured two bird flu outbreaks in the past two years, which in total required the killing of about 21,000 adult turkeys and poults, said colony director John Wipf.

On both occasions, Wipf said, he noticed that water consumption among his turkeys had fallen, and some birds showed signs of malaise and a few died. Both times, birds were sent to South Dakota State University for confirmation that bird flu was the cause.

When any bird is infected, all birds from that barn must be destroyed, he said. The USDA sends in experts to monitor the killing, which was done by a local firefighting agency.

Watching his flocks be depopulated is heart wrenching, he said.

"The smallest ones really wanted to live and they tried to climb on top of the foam, but it wouldn't hold them up," he said.

Dead birds are then composted in a landfill onsite, and the barns must then be sanitized and approved by the USDA before reopening.

The value of the lost birds was likely about \$300,000, though the federal government indemnifies farms for bird flu and pays farmers an adjusted amount to cover most losses.



BIRD FLU'S IMPACT IN SOUTH DAKOTA



By the numbers:

- 1 — Red fox infection
- 7 — Cattle infections
- 13 — Domestic cat infections
- 26 — Backyard poultry flock infections
- 114 — Commercial poultry flock infections
- 204 — Wild bird infections
- 6.1 million — Turkeys, chickens and pheasants euthanized

Source: USDA;
data current as of March 11, 2025

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 4 of 83

Wipf said he takes precautions to prevent further infection, such as requiring staff to wear boots and other protective clothing, and by keeping things clean and disinfected.

He isn't sure how his flocks became infected, but he believes migratory birds are the likely culprits.

"It's a bad luck situation for sure because it's very difficult to diagnose where it came from and how it got in here," Wipf said. "We have no clue, but I think part of it was bird migration, geese and ducks that fly over and poop on the barn and our materials. Or it could have been brought in by wild birds that get into the barns."

Pheasant farmers lose major flock

The bird flu outbreak that struck the Gisi Pheasant Farm near Ipswich, 30 miles west of Aberdeen, began with a single bird testing positive in December 2023, according to farm co-owner Loretta Omland. Ultimately, three positive tests for bird flu were confirmed, she said.

To the family members that run the farm, the flu cases appeared isolated to one of six barns at their breeding operation at nearby Craven. No other birds appeared to be sick or dying in those barns or at other locations in Wessington Springs and Miller, Omland said.

Suddenly, the family found itself embroiled in a difficult, emotionally draining effort to save their other breeders and hens. Gisi Farms in 2022 provided about 480,000 ringneck pheasants to a large number of customers that mostly include South Dakota hunting resorts and preserves.

In the days following the positive tests, they ran up against USDA officials who were unwilling to make exceptions to rules stating that entire flocks of birds must be destroyed quickly, even if only one or a few birds test positive for bird flu.

"We told them, 'We don't care about indemnification,' because those were our birds," Omland told News Watch. "I had to call all these customers and tell them that we can't get your birds, and that affects the restaurants, the grocery stores, the preserves and all these people in the hospitality and hunting industries."

The family sought the help of the South Dakota state veterinarian and the state congressional delegation to ask for an exception that would allow them to mitigate the loss of birds and investment.

"The USDA came back and said that if we didn't kill those birds, we'd be in jeopardy of losing indemnification and that South Dakota could be in violation of international trade laws," Omland said.

The family ultimately relented and agreed to the killing of about 30,000 pheasants, later receiving roughly \$1 million in indemnification that did not cover their full losses and cleanup costs, Omland said.

"It was horrible, just horrible because those were all healthy birds," she said.

Since then, Gisi Farms has enhanced its biosecurity efforts to prevent further outbreaks, Omland said.

"We test and test and test and clean and clean and clean, but you can only get so far in what you do," she said. "You do everything you can, but at the end of the day, you just say more prayers."

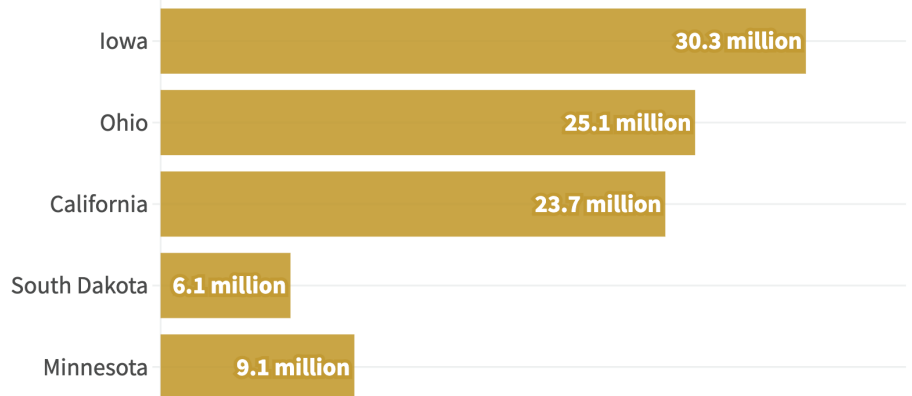
Research and prevention steps underway

News is breaking almost weekly about the impacts of bird flu and the efforts of the scientific community to slow or stop its spread and to reduce its ability to infect humans.

In January, a new strain of bird flu called H5N9 was determined to be the source of infection of a com-

Five worst states for bird flu infections

Minnesota tops the list for overall commercial flock infections, followed by South Dakota. Iowa has the highest number of birds "depopulated," or euthanized due to the flu. Across the US, 771 commercial flocks have been affected and 166.4 million birds killed.



Source Source: USDA; data current as of March 11, 2025 • Graphic: Michael Kliniski / South Dakota News Watch

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 5 of 83

mercial duck farm in California. While that new strain was not seen as more infectious or dangerous to birds or humans, scientists said it shows how quickly the virus is mutating.

In mid-March, thousands of geese were found dead in and along Lake Byron in Beadle County and state game officials said they believe bird flu was the cause of the mass die-off.

Some experts worry that if separate viruses intermingle – such as a person who has influenza A is then exposed to H5N1 – that a cross-virus mutation could occur and open the door to greater human infections or birth of a virus that can spread among humans.

In December, the USDA launched its National Milk Testing Strategy, which among other things tests milk held in silos for H5N1 prior to distribution to humans. South Dakota is one of 45 states to sign up for silo testing.

The CDC, USDA and Food and Drug Administration are all working to monitor bird flu outbreaks and spread. The USDA has created an easy-to-navigate website where bird flu data is tracked by state and the CDC has a bird flu information page.

The farm-level response to bird flu in South Dakota has centered around close monitoring of bird health and behavior and through testing of poultry flocks prior to slaughter, Tetrow said.

Some farmers in South Dakota and other states have used cannons or fireworks to scare away migratory birds or have tried to eliminate ponds where migratory birds congregate near their barns.

Tetrow said he hopes the agricultural, governmental and scientific communities can work together to take more steps to evaluate the causes and effects of bird flu and take preventative methods to slow its spread.

"I'd like to see us reevaluate what we're going to see if there are more approaches and tools we can add to our toolbox to fight this," he said.

The USDA in February gave conditional approval to a bird flu vaccine for poultry, made by the firm Zoetis. But to date, the U.S. has not followed the path of other countries such as China, Mexico and some European countries where use of poultry vaccines is widespread.

Tetrow, who spent more than a decade working in the South Dakota state veterinarian's office, said he supports the concept of vaccinating poultry in order to protect both bird and human populations.

"It won't prevent infection, but it decreases mortality and the amount of virus that is shed," he said. "If we can find a vaccine that can do those things, I think we need to figure out how to employ that."

Hensley, the University of Pennsylvania biologist, said a major goal of ongoing research is to develop a human vaccine. "We want to be able to respond if this virus acquires the mutations that are needed to effectively transmit from human to human," he said.

This story was produced by South Dakota News Watch, an independent, nonprofit organization. Read more stories and donate at sdnewswatch.org and sign up for an email to get stories when they're published. Contact Bart Pfankuch at bart.pfankuch@sdnewswatch.org.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Amid complaints about big-money ballot measures, new reports show \$12 million spent in 2024

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MARCH 29, 2025 12:32 PM

As some lawmakers complain about the amount of money influencing ballot measures in South Dakota, new numbers indicate that 2024's ballot question campaigns were among the most expensive in state history.

Ballot question committees recently filed their year-end campaign finance reports. Those and earlier reports show the total amount spent to support and oppose the seven measures in last fall's election was about \$12 million. There are no limits on contributions to ballot question committees.

South Dakota's campaign finance system makes compiling and comparing campaign finance data difficult. Rather than entering information directly into a centralized system, candidates, committees and independent spenders submit scanned forms to the South Dakota Secretary of State's Office that have to be viewed one-by-one, which is what South Dakota Searchlight did to compile its analysis.

Only the state's 2006 and 2016 elections had more expensive ballot question campaigns, reaching nearly \$13 million each of those years, according to historical data maintained by the national nonprofit Open Secrets.

Republican legislators cited last year's spending as part of their motivation to file bills this year that would tighten restrictions on citizen-initiated ballot measures.

One major bill that passed will move the deadline for submitting petition signatures from May to February, shortening the petition-gathering window by three months. Gov. Larry Rhoden vetoed a bill that would require constitutional amendment petitions to have signatures from registered voters in every state Senate district, and legislators will consider that veto on Monday. Legislators put a measure on the 2026 ballot that will ask voters to raise the approval threshold for constitutional amendments from a simple majority to 60%.

Rep. John Hughes, R-Sioux Falls, sponsor of the 60% proposal, said during the legislative session that last year's ballot measures resulted in "millions of dollars in out-of-state money coming for deceptive, emotionally charged ads stating half-truths."

Open Secrets reports that about 70% of the money contributed to last year's South Dakota ballot measures came from South Dakota residents.

Last year's most expensive ballot measure campaign in the state appears to have been Amendment G, an abortion-rights measure that voters rejected.

It's difficult to determine exactly how much was spent in the Amendment G campaign, because the main group supporting the amendment, Dakotans for Health, also supported another unsuccessful ballot question that would have repealed sales taxes on groceries. Dakotans for Health spent a combined \$1.32 million on those campaigns and did not separate expenses in its reports.

Opponents spent \$2.74 million against the abortion-rights measure.

The grocery tax measure was Initiated Measure 28. Besides the amount spent to support it by Dakotans for Health, groups spent about \$240,000 against it.

Another big-dollar campaign was Referred Law 21, a set of carbon dioxide pipeline regulations that voters rejected. Spending totaled \$3.15 million, with \$2.87 million by supporters and \$275,000 by opponents. The majority of funds in support of the measure came from ethanol producers hoping to build a multi-state

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 7 of 83

pipeline to capture and sequester carbon emitted by their production plants.

An unsuccessful effort to legalize recreational marijuana use, Initiated Measure 29, was nearly a \$2 million campaign with \$1.4 million in spending by supporters and about \$468,000 by opponents.

Constitutional Amendment F, which legislators sent to the ballot and voters approved, authorized the state to consider imposing work requirements on people eligible for expanded Medicaid benefits. All \$587,000 of spending on the amendment was by the no side.

Amendment H, which would have established open primary elections but was rejected by voters, was a \$1.95 million campaign with most of that amount spent by supporters.

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

Groton Daily Independent

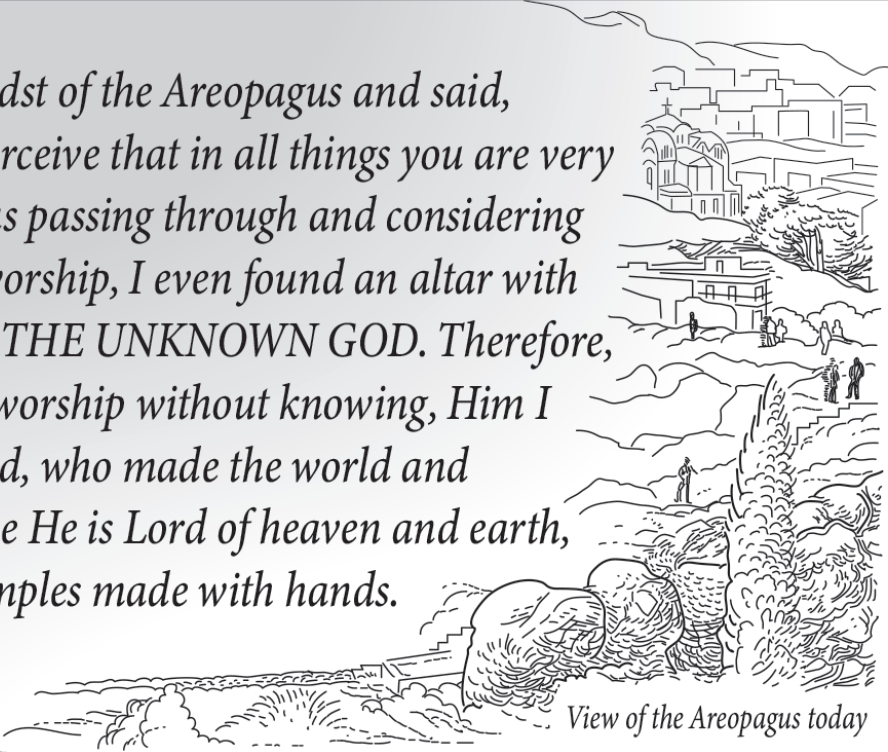
Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 8 of 83



THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE

Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said,
“Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.

ACTS 17: 22-24



View of the Areopagus today

© 2025 by King Features Syndicate, Inc. World rights reserved.



BIBLE

TRIVIA

by Wilson Casey

1. Is the book of 2 Peter (KJV) in the Old or New Testament or neither?

2. How did God identify Himself when speaking from the burning bush? *I am who I am, King of all, Jesus Christ, Lord of Jehovah*

3. Which of these was not one of the 10 plagues in Egypt? *Locusts, Wicked skins to stone, Water turned to blood, Livestock diseased*

4. 2 Kings 19 and which other book and chapter are almost alike word for word? *Jeremiah 50, Job 16, Isaiah 37, Deuteronomy 7*

5. Which judge of Israel had 30 sons? *Samson, Jair, Ephraim, Gideon*

6. What king dug wells in the desert? *Abner, Isaac, Uzziah, Abimelech*

ANSWERS: 1) New, 2) I am who I am, 3) Wicked skins to stone, 4) Isaiah 37, 5) Jair, 6) Uzziah

More than 1,200 brand-new trivia questions in Wilson Casey's latest book "Quest for Bible Knowledge" available in bookstores and online.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 10 of 83

LOWLAND STATION.

A STORM HAS TRAPPED A GROUP OF TRAVELERS IN THE KOMOK'S BRIDE PUB...

...WHERE SIX STRANGERS SHARE THEIR ENCOUNTERS WITH THE ALIEN WARRIOR

FLASH GORDON

...ONE OF WHOM IS SPRINGING A TRAP OF HER OWN.

SUDDENLY, THE BARTENDER CLAPS A MAGNA-CUFF ON WILDA'S WRIST.



BECAUSE SHE ISN'T A BARTENDER AT ALL.

SHE'S THE CAPTAIN OF A DEATH PATROL, OUT TO FINALLY CATCH THIS WARTIME DESERTER.



THEY'RE STILL FOLLOWING MING'S ORDERS...

...BUT MING ISN'T IN CHARGE ANYMORE, IS HE?



THE PEOPLE OF MONGO UNITED AGAINST HIM.

IT WENT A LITTLE SOMETHING LIKE THIS.

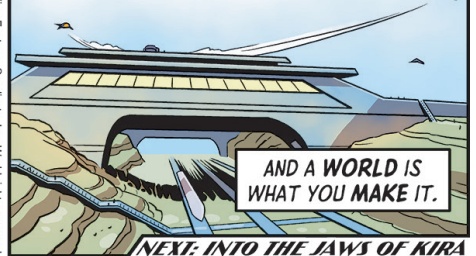


DAY BREAKS. THE STRANGERS CONTINUE ON THEIR SEPARATE JOURNEYS.



NOTHING IN COMMON BETWEEN THEM...

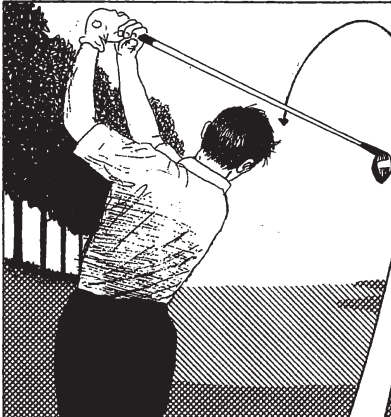
...EXCEPT THAT THEY ALL ONCE MET A MAN FROM ANOTHER WORLD.



AND A WORLD IS WHAT YOU MAKE IT.

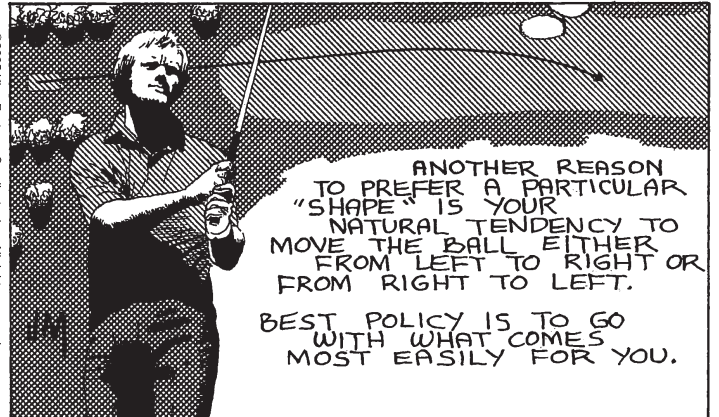
NEXT: INTO THE JAWS OF KIRA

Play Better Golf with JACK NICKLAUS



CONSISTENTLY HITTING A GOLF BALL DEAD STRAIGHT IS EXTREMELY HARD. THAT'S WHY GOOD PLAYERS EITHER FADE OR DRAW MOST OF THEIR TEE-TO-GREEN SHOTS.

©2025 King Features Syndicate, Inc. All rights reserved.



ANOTHER REASON TO PREFER A PARTICULAR "SHAPE" IS YOUR NATURAL TENDENCY TO MOVE THE BALL EITHER FROM LEFT TO RIGHT OR FROM RIGHT TO LEFT.

BEST POLICY IS TO GO WITH WHAT COMES MOST EASILY FOR YOU.



Hip and Leg Pain Persist Ever Since an Active Trip to France

DEAR DR. ROACH: In 2022, I took a trip to France to visit friends and sightsee. My hip/leg pain started after I spent my days walking around and climbing stairs in Paris. (I walked 16 miles one day!) I rested during the evening and took ibuprofen before going to bed. I did not stop my activities because this was a special trip.

Later during my vacation, I hiked trails in the Alps. There are stairs everywhere in France with very little adjustments for those who have mobility issues. It was very debilitating. When I came home, my doctor ordered an X-ray, then diagnosed me with hip bursitis on both sides.

I was in physical therapy for many weeks. Every now and then, if I pursue activities like hiking or long walks, I can feel some pain. I don't like limiting my activities because I am relatively healthy.

Now I am 60 years old and returning to France. What can I do to prevent this pain from happening again without restricting my activities? Or what can I do to alleviate the pain if it occurs? I don't want to become sedentary. -- J.M.C.

ANSWER: Greater trochanteric pain syndrome is still mostly called "trochanteric bursitis," despite the fact that the hip bursa really isn't inflamed. But this condition does sound like your diagnosis. It is caused by the overuse of the muscles and tendons in the hip, particularly those of the gluteus medius and minimus muscles.

Stair and hill-climbing are the activities that are most likely to cause a recurrence of your symptoms. However, you may be able to prevent symptoms from recurring. The muscles you want to strengthen are your hip abductors (those that move your leg away from the midline of your body).

By strengthening these muscles, the abnormal forces on your gluteal muscles and tendons can be avoided. Your physical therapist can show you how to do this, either with a spring-resisted sliding platform or an elastic resistance band. This should prevent the recurrence of GTPS.

DEAR DR. ROACH: My 84-year-old husband takes 10 mg of amitriptyline at bedtime and 100 mg of sertraline in the morning. I'm concerned about these drugs. Alzheimer's runs in his family, and he's beginning to have issues with his memory.

Are amitriptyline or sertraline used for other health issues? I don't understand why he's on antidepressants, and I am concerned about his mental health. What are your thoughts on these? -- C.W.

ANSWER: Amitriptyline can be taken as an antidepressant, but your husband is not taking it as one. The antidepressant dose of amitriptyline is usually 300-600 mg. A 10-mg dose is most commonly used for chronic pain, although there are other uses.

Sertraline (Zoloft) is commonly used for depression, and 100 mg is the typical dose. But it can also be used for anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other reasons.

The memory issue is complex. It is possible for medicines like sertraline and amitriptyline to bring on memory issues, which sounds like a major (and reasonable) concern for you. However, depression can cause symptoms that look exactly like early dementia. It's possible that his doctor is treating underlying depression, and this treatment may help, rather than hurt, his mental health.

As you see, the situation is potentially complex. If it's OK with your husband, you might go with him to visit the doctor who is prescribing these medications.

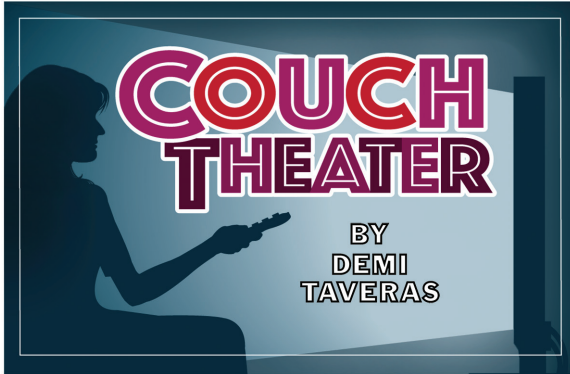
Dr. Roach regrets that he is unable to answer individual questions, but will incorporate them in the column whenever possible. Readers may email questions to ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu.

(c) 2025 North America Synd., Inc.

All Rights Reserved

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 12 of 83



"Y2K" (R) -- In his directorial debut, Kyle Mooney ("Saturday Night Live") brings back 2000s-style comedy in full force. This film deemed an "apocalyptic sci-fi comedy horror" follows a group of high school students in 1999 who crash a New Year's Eve party. Expecting a night full of the usual teen-

age angst and antics, these kids receive the shock of their lives when the power goes out at midnight and technological chaos ensues! As pieces of technology from VCRs to Tamagotchis to microwaves begin to murder the partygoers, our group of unsuspecting high schoolers must fight to make it through the night. Jaeden Martell ("Mr. Harrigan's Phone"), Rachel Zegler ("The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes"), and even The Kid LAROI co-star in "Y2K," out on April 4. (Max)



From left, Rachel Zegler and Jaeden Martell star in "Y2K." (Courtesy of MovieStillsDB)

"Pulse" (TV-MA) -- Fans of "Grey's Anatomy" and medical dramas, look no further than this new series set to premiere on April 3. Taking place in a trauma center in Miami-Dade County, the show centers around Danny Simms, a third-year resident in emergency medicine. When her personal relationship with the chief resident gets him suspended, Danny receives a promotion so that she can prove herself. With a hurricane on its way to Miami and new responsibilities on her shoulders, Danny faces the biggest challenge of her entire career. Luckily, she has the help of a great staff, played by Colin Woodell ("The Flight Attendant"), Justina Machado ("The Horror of Dolores Roach"), and Jessie T. Usher ("Smile"). (Netflix)

"The Bondsman" (TV-MA) -- Kevin Bacon ("Beverly Hills Cop: Axel F") has been enjoying thrilling roles as of late, and his latest role as the titular character in this eight-episode miniseries continues to add to his repertoire in the horror genre. Premiering April 3, "The Bondsman" stars Bacon as Fred Herbert, a bounty hunter whose last mission didn't go too well and resulted in a gruesome death. However, Fred eventually wakes up and realizes that he's been resurrected ... with just a small catch. Lucifer only let Fred escape from hell on the condition that he continues his bounty-hunting job -- but this time, he'll be catching demons. (Amazon Prime Video)

"Classified" (R) -- Most notably known for his role as Harvey Dent/Two-Face in Christopher Nolan's "The Dark Knight," Aaron Eckhart leads this action thriller out on April 4. Eckhart plays Evan, a hitman who has been getting his mission instructions from the CIA through the classified section of newspapers. His MI6 analyst daughter, Kacey (Abigail Breslin), tracks him down to tell him that these coded instructions haven't been coming from the CIA and that his boss has been dead for years. Desperate to find out who he's been killing for, Evan pairs his combat skills with his daughter's analyst skills to follow this lead. Tim Roth ("Poison") co-stars. (Hulu)

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 13 of 83



1. Name the group that started as the Royal Charms, became the Gladiolas and changed to the Excellos. What name did they finally choose?

2. Which '60s singer had hits with "Don't Sleep in the Subway" and "Downtown"?

3. Neil Sedaka was a founding member of which group?

4. Whose version of "Without You" made it onto the list of 500 greatest songs of all time?

5. Name the song that contains this lyric: "I love every movement and there's nothing I would change, She doesn't need improvement, She's much too nice to rearrange."

Answers

1. Maurice Williams and the Zodiacs in 1959. They chose the name after spotting a Ford Zodiac while on the road. The group's "Stay" was used in the "Dirty Dancing" soundtrack.

2. Petula Clark. Within three years (1965 to 1968), Clark had nine Top 20 hits in the U.S. and recorded songs in four languages. Among many other awards, she was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in the U.K.

3. The Tokens.

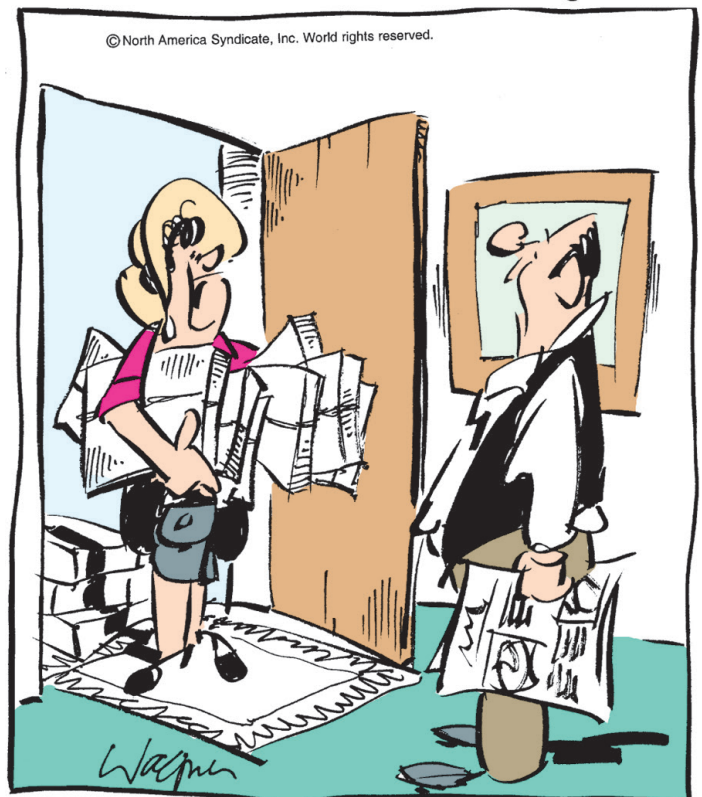
4. Harry Nilsson's 1971 cover.

5. "Poetry in Motion," by Johnny Tillotson in 1961. While others released covers of the song, Tillotson's was the more well known, charting around the globe.

(c) 2025 King Features Syndicate

GRIN and BEAR IT *Wagner*

©North America Syndicate, Inc. World rights reserved.



"Wait 'til you see how much
you saved today!"

Just Like Cats & Dogs

by Dave T. Phipps



©2025 King Features Syndicate, Inc. All rights reserved.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 14 of 83

HOCUS-FOCUS

BY
HENRY BOLTINOFF



Find at least six differences in details between panels.



Differences: 1. Plank is missing. 2. Pencil is moved. 3. Paper is added. 4. Screwdriver is longer. 5. Pan is smaller. 6. Box is missing.

©2025 King Features Syndicate, Inc. All rights reserved.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 15 of 83



* A garden manicure is what my mother calls it: When working with plants and dirt, rake your nails across a bar of soap. The soap prevents dirt particles from lodging under nails, and the soap washes away easily when you are finished. Happy gardening!

* If the string on your trimmer is always breaking or jamming, try this old trick: Give the coiled string a spray with vegetable oil before you thread it. It lubricates the line, making it less likely to pull and less likely to break.

* "If you have a spade with a long handle, you can transfer common measurements to the handle. Just lay a tape measure alongside the handle, and use a black marker to note common spacing, like feet and inches. Then, when you put in plants, you

can check quickly whether they are spaced correctly. Very handy!" -- P.E. in Arkansas

* Boiling potatoes? Plants love starch. Let your cooking water cool, then use it to water the plants in your garden.

* Here's a recipe for a quickie bird feeder or bath: Flip over a nice-size flower pot, and place the pot's tray on the top. Fill with seed or water. The birds will thank you -- maybe even by eating some nuisance bugs along with the seed.

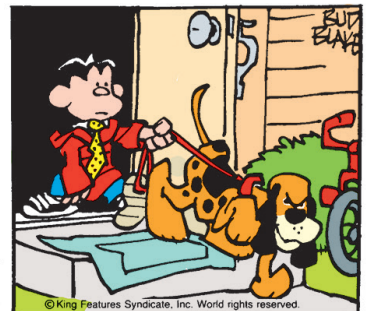
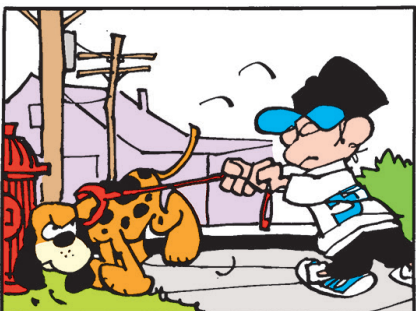
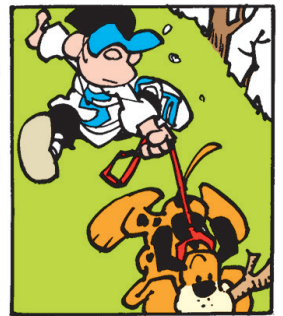
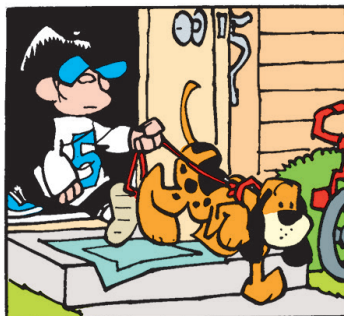
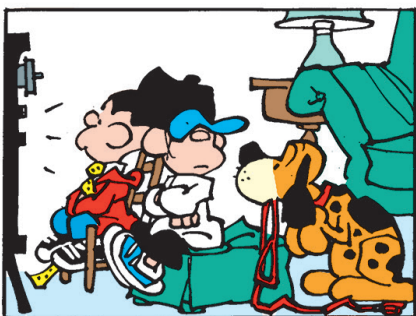
* "Garden tool storage doesn't have to be hard. Fill a wide-mouth bucket with clean sand. Add a half quart of motor oil and stir. Then use the sand to clean and store your garden tools like shovels, rakes or hoes. The sand/oil mixture helps clean the metal surfaces, and the heaviness of the container lets you stick them in the sand without fear of everything falling down, like it would if you leaned them along a wall." -- E. in North Carolina

Send your tips to Now Here's a Tip, 628 Virginia Drive, Orlando, FL 32803.

(c) 2025 King Features Synd., Inc.

 **TIGER**

by **BUD BLAKE**



© King Features Syndicate, Inc. World rights reserved.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 16 of 83

King Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 "Li'l Abner"
creator
5 Yellowstone
grazer
8 Cymbal's kin
12 Petri dish gel
13 Sturgeon
product
14 Ancient Dead
Sea land
15 Fierceness
17 Milan money,
once
18 PC alternative
19 Sheryl
Sandberg
best seller
21 Grating
24 Harangue
25 "Rhyme
Pays" rapper

- 26 With passion
30 Monk's title
31 Piquant
32 Tic-tac-toe
win
33 Hit song by
ABBA
35 Friend
36 Curved lines
37 Jiggly dessert
38 Rum cocktail
41 Pear-shaped
fruit
42 Spumante
source
43 Agitates
48 Actor
Schreiber

1	2	3	4		5	6	7		8	9	10	11
12					13				14			
15				16					17			
			18				19	20				
21	22	23				24						
25					26					27	28	29
30				31						32		
33			34						35			
			36					37				
38	39	40					41					
42					43	44				45	46	47
48					49				50			
51					52				53			

- 49 Colorful card
game
50 Sleek, in car
lingo
51 Salinger girl
52 Journey part
53 Must have

DOWN

- 1 Half- — (latte
option)
2 Candle count
3 Standard
4 On time
5 Idle or Bana
6 Parcel of land
7 Bogart/Bacall
classic

- 8 Trattoria des-
serts
9 Valhalla VIP
10 Sushi wrap-
per
11 Fed. agents
16 Low isle
20 Jealousy
21 Jazz phrase
22 Estate mea-
sure
23 Burn some-
what
24 Tears apart
26 Imaginary
27 Toy store buy
28 Lounge
29 Cellist Ma

- 31 Actress Reid
34 Indigenous
35 Sea off
Greece
37 Comic Carrey
38 Like ganders
39 Unrepaired
40 Detail
41 Toad's kin
44 Away from
WSW
45 Formerly
called
46 Three, in
Rome
47 Turf

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 17 of 83

— King Crossword — Answers

Solution time: 23 mins.

C	A	P	P		E	L	K		G	O	N	G
A	G	A	R		R	O	E		E	D	O	M
F	E	R	O	C	I	T	Y		L	I	R	E
			M	A	C		L	E	A	N	I	N
R	A	S	P	Y		R	A	N	T			
I	C	E	T		F	E	R	V	I	D	L	Y
F	R	A		T	A	N	G	Y		O	O	O
F	E	R	N	A	N	D	O		A	L	L	Y
			A	R	C	S		J	E	L	L	O
M	A	I	T	A	I		F	I	G			
A	S	T	I		F	E	R	M	E	N	T	S
L	I	E	V		U	N	O		A	E	R	O
E	S	M	E		L	E	G		N	E	E	D

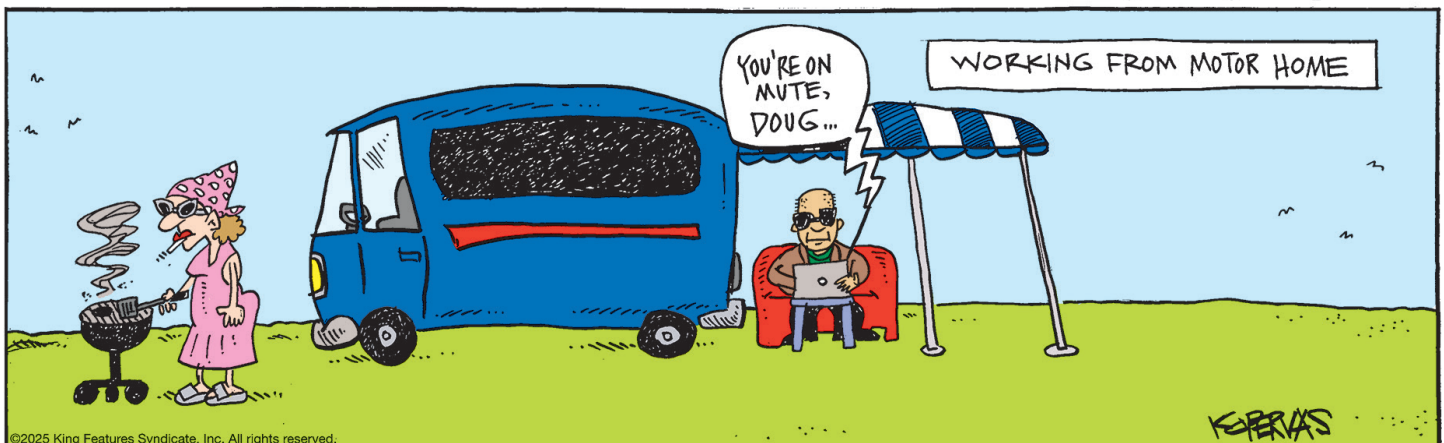
Olive



©2025 by King Features Syndicate, Inc. World rights reserved. 3/31

Out on a Limb

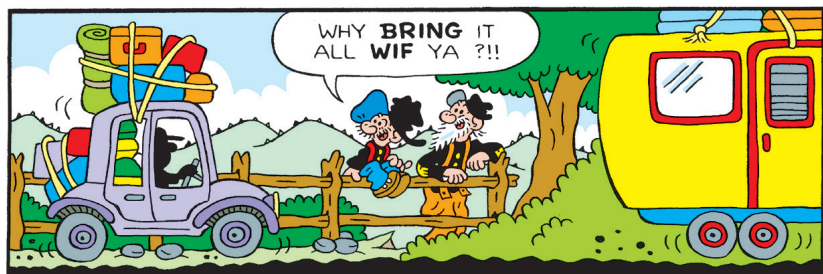
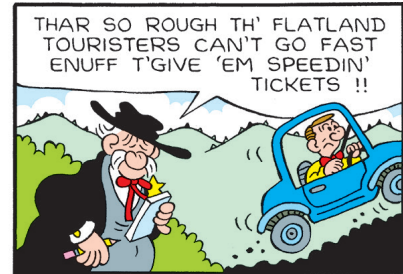
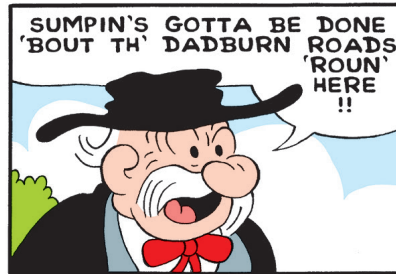
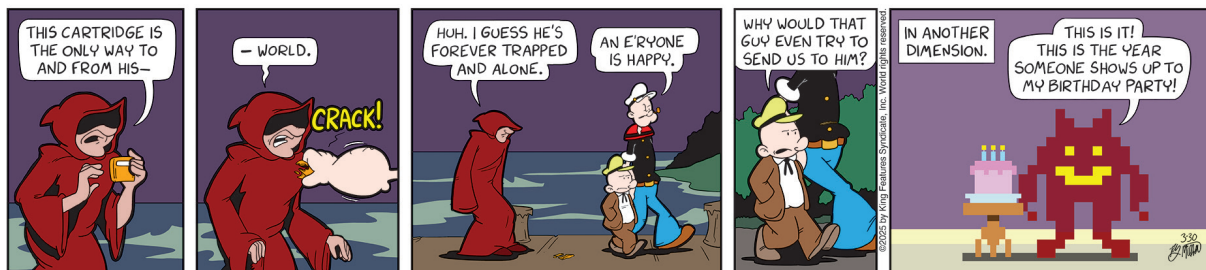
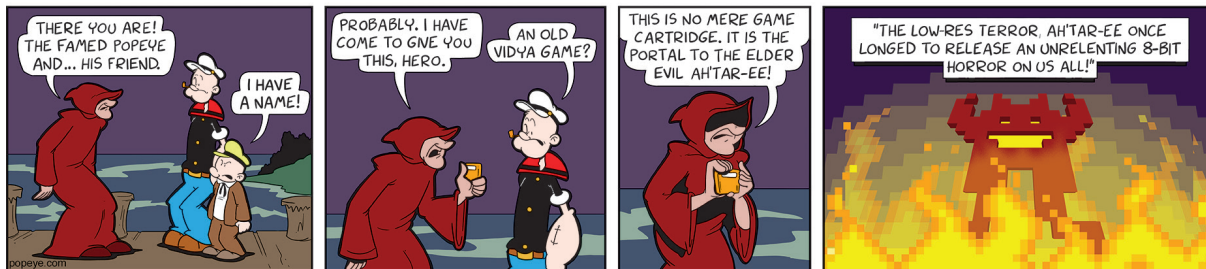
by Gary Kopervas



©2025 King Features Syndicate, Inc. All rights reserved.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 18 of 83



Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 19 of 83

HAL FOSTER'S
BY SCHULTZ
AND YEATES

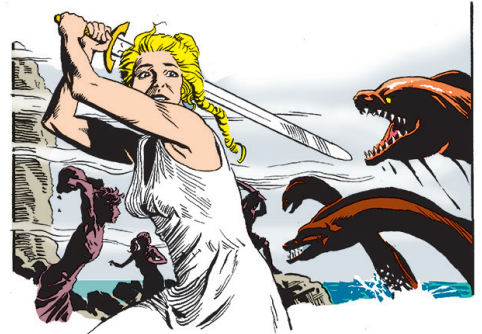
Prince Valiant®



VAL, CAPTURED AND CLAIMED BY THE LEADER OF THE MYSTERIOUS SIRENS, RECEIVES A DISCIPLINARY SMACK WHEN HE OBJECTS.



"NO, YOU ARE MINE!"
A FEVERISH LIGHT BLAZES IN HER FIERCE EYES:
"YOU DO NOT RECOGNIZE THE GODDESS QUEEN - CALYPSO?
SOON YOU WILL REMEMBER, MY BRAVE ULYSSES..."

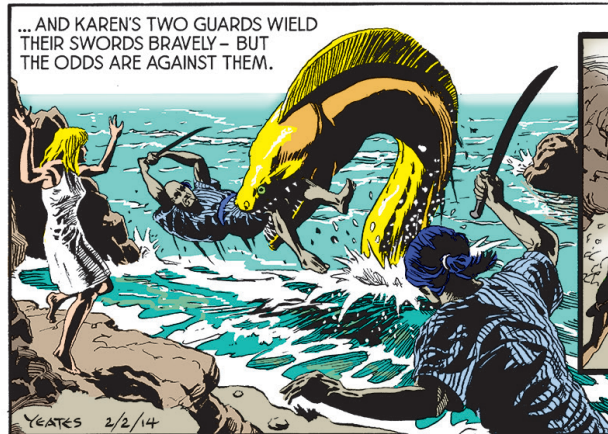


"... ONCE ALL YOUR COMPANIONS HAVE PERISHED!"
AND ON THE BEACH BELOW, ALETA AND THE SURVIVORS OF THE WRECKED ISLAND QUEEN FACE THE HORRID DENIZENS OF A RISING TIDE.

©2014 King Features Syndicate, Inc.



ALETA BY HAPPENSTANCE STILL HOLDS VAL'S SINGING SWORD. BUKOTA MAKES DO WITH THE FLOTSAM AT HAND...



... AND KAREN'S TWO GUARDS WIELD THEIR SWORDS BRAVELY - BUT THE ODDS ARE AGAINST THEM.

YEATES 2/2/14



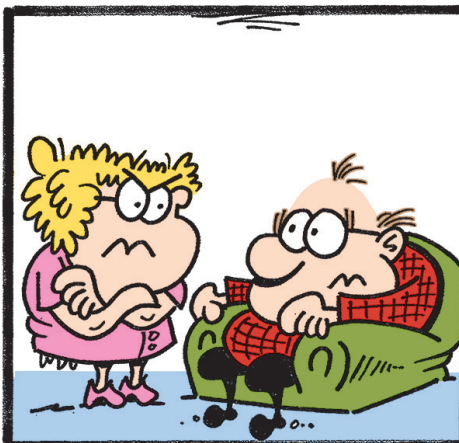
VAL HEARS THE SOUNDS OF BATTLE AND FEARS THE WORST. HOW CAN HE GET TO HIS FAMILY?

NEXT: Polyphemus!

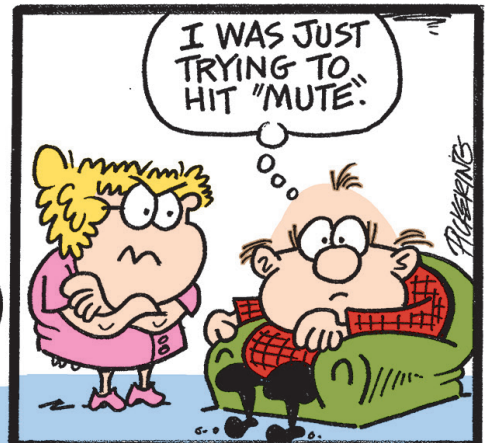
4017

The Spats

by Jeff Pickering



I DIDN'T MEAN TO PUSH ALL OF HER BUTTONS



I WAS JUST TRYING TO HIT "MUTE".

©2025 King Features Syndicate, Inc. All rights reserved.

PICKERING

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 20 of 83

SENIOR NEWS LINE

by Matilda Charles

Is a 55+ community right for you?

The first thought we have about those over 55 communities is sure, others will be like us, our every need and want will be taken care of.

But is that always true?

There is, of course, a long list of good things about living in a seniors community. In most cases there will be activities with lots of social opportunities. Depending on the community, there might be a pool, a golf course and tennis courts, a fitness center with classes, scheduled activities, excursions and trips.

For the most part, homes in these communities are smaller since many of us will be downsizing anyway and outdoor maintenance and yardwork will be done by others.

Sounds great, right?

There is another side, though, to the 55+ communities, and some of the negatives are fairly significant.

Variety in social opportunities may be very limited. After all, everyone there will be our age with few opportunities to interact with younger people. If your family situation changes and you need to move your child and grandchildren in with you, it likely won't be possible in a 55+ community, and even visits will probably have a time limit. And there's the issue of inheritance: If you want to leave your home to a child in your will, they couldn't live there.

If you ever decide to sell, your target buyer pool will be limited to other 55+ seniors. Even renting, if that's allowed in the community, will be limited to senior occupants.

Then there are the high fees to cover all the amenities, HOA and taxes -- expenses that can go up at any time. Even in the beginning, your monthly costs could be in the thousands of dollars.

Before buying into a 55+ community, get advice -- a lot of it. Ask questions, get feedback, visit a potential community more than once and talk to people who live there, if possible.

(c) 2025 King Features Synd., Inc.

15 N Main St. - Ste. 101
Downtown Groton

Call/Text Paul: 605-397-7460
Call/Text Tina: 605-397-7285



Open 24/7

Senior Citizens 65+
Physical Therapy.

\$20 a month

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 21 of 83

1. In July 2000, what Major League Baseball team held a Bob Wickman All-Star Poster Night giveaway the day after the team traded pitcher Wickman to Cleveland?

2. Great Britain's Ben Ainslie, who won four straight Olympic gold medals from 2000-12, competed in what sport?

3. What was the name of Cleveland's WNBA team that played from 1997-2003?

4. Name the Phoenix Cardinals player who threw for 973 yards and three touchdowns and also punted six times in the 1989 NFL season.

5. What is the nickname of Purdue University Fort Wayne's athletic teams?

6. In 1860, dentist William George Beers established the first set of codified rules for what sport, which Indigenous people of Canada had been playing for centuries?

7. How many goals did Manchester City's Erling Haaland score in 2022-23 to set a new record for most goals scored in a single English Premier League season?



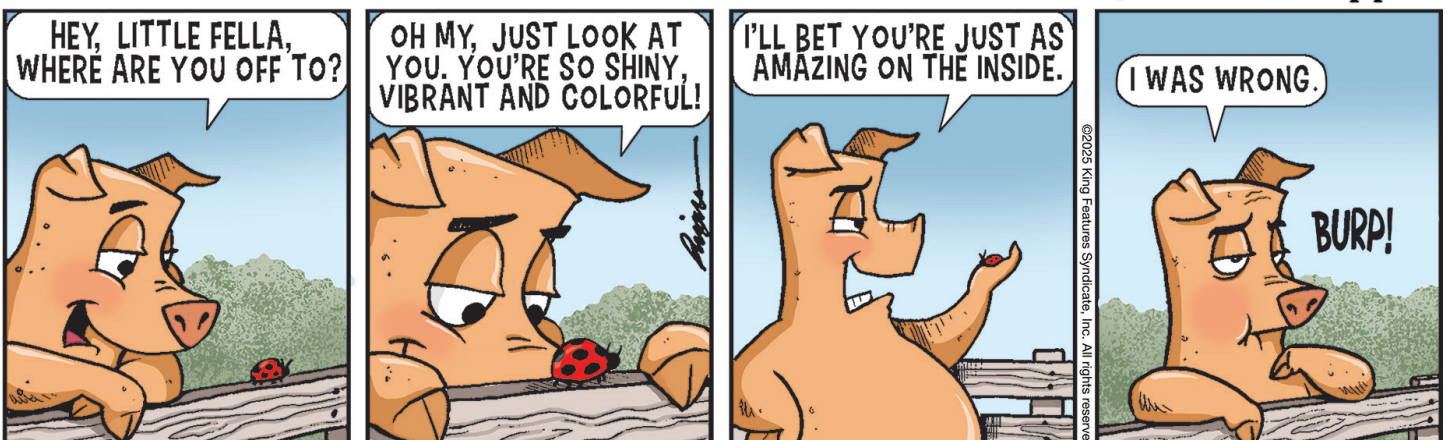
Answers

1. The Milwaukee Brewers.
2. Sailing.
3. The Cleveland Rockers.
4. Tom Tupa.
5. The Mastodons.
6. Lacrosse.
7. 36.

(c) 2025 King Features Syndicate, Inc.

Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps





Senior needs help getting cats prepared for flea season

DEAR PAW'S CORNER: The weather is getting warmer, and that means the flea invasion of my apartment will soon begin. I have two cats, and they suffer mightily through the summer -- as do I, with my legs covered in flea bites. I'm in my 70s and can't give my cats flea baths. How can I get fleas under control? -- Jim G. in Acworth, Georgia

DEAR JIM: Yep! As the weather warms, especially in the southern states, the onslaught of fleas begins. Treating your pets for fleas before their eggs begin to hatch is especially important right now.

If you have issues that keep you from beginning flea treatment -- whether giving a monthly bath using a pet-safe shampoo, placing a flea collar, or applying a monthly topical flea treatment -- please ask for help. There are resources in your community. Call your area senior center (for you, that's Cobb County, Georgia: www.cobbcounty.org/senior-services) and explain your dilemma; they can connect you with resources. You can also call your cats' veterinarian and explain the situation; they can talk with you about solutions -- such as getting a trusted friend or family member to help.

Preventing fleas also requires treating or eliminating places where they can hide. Fleas love carpet; they'll lay eggs in it, beginning the infestation cycle anew. Vacuum carpets weekly. If you have hardwood or laminate floors, run a dust mop as frequently as possible. Take up area rugs and have them cleaned. You may qualify for homemaker services -- these invaluable people handle light household chores like vacuuming, trash and laundry.

You have to make your apartment a hostile environment for fleas -- one they'll struggle to live in. To do that, you've got to enlist every organization that can help.

A new edition of "Fighting Fleas" is coming, and 10 lucky readers will get a free, signed copy! To enter, email ask@pawscorner.com.

Send your tips, comments or questions to ask@pawscorner.com.

(c) 2025 King Features Synd., Inc.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 23 of 83

Strange BUT TRUE

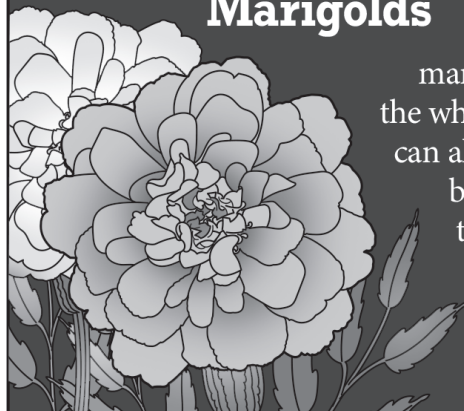
- * Rocker Chuck Berry had a degree in hairdressing.
- * The shark on the “Jaws” poster and the T. rex on the “Jurassic Park” poster were both modeled after exhibits at the American Museum of Natural History.
- * A single strand of spaghetti is called a “spaghetto.”
- * Beer cans in Japan have braille on them so blind people don’t confuse alcoholic drinks with soft drinks.
- * If you spent merely a day on each of the islands in the Philippines, it would take you nearly 21 years to visit all of

them.

- * Most Americans can buy an AR-15 rifle before they can legally buy a beer.
 - * A party boat carrying 60 men and women capsized in Texas in 2012 after all the passengers rushed to one side when the boat passed a nude beach.
 - * The world’s first underwater mailbox was installed just off the shore of Susami, Japan.
 - * Henry Heimlich used the Heimlich maneuver for the first time at age 96.
 - * Vertebrates with larger brains and more neurons, such as humans and owls, tend to have longer yawns, which help cool the brain and support cognitive function.
 - * The term “scientist” didn’t come into usage until 1834, when it was coined by University of Cambridge historian and philosopher of science William Whewell, who wanted to create a unifying noun for people engaged in various scientific fields.
 - * Citizens of the small town Kamikatsu in Japan’s Tokushima prefecture are expected to separate their recycling into no fewer than 45 different categories.
 - * The Atlantic bluefin tuna can experience such high bursts of muscular activity while fighting a fisherman that it cooks its own flesh.
 - * Reese’s Peanut Butter Cups were originally named “Penny Cups” after the amount they cost at the time.
- ***

Thought for the Day: “Age wrinkles the body. Quitting wrinkles the soul.” -- Douglas MacArthur
(c) 2025 King Features Synd., Inc.

The Garden Bug



Marigolds

Glasshouse whiteflies are destructive to tomato plants. Planting marigolds alongside tomatoes helps protect them from glasshouse whitefly infestations. Researchers from Newcastle University discovered that one of the compounds given off by marigolds is limonene, a terpene that the whiteflies find repugnant. Marigolds can also repel cabbage moths, Mexican bean beetles, nematodes, slugs and tomato hornworms. Marigolds are also a food source for pollinators.

– Brenda Weaver

Sources: cen.acs.org, The Herbalist Garden

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 24 of 83



by Freddy Groves

Rust on the surgical instruments?

Good grief. Just how many deficiencies can one Department of Veterans Affairs facility have? A recent VA Office of Inspector General report itemized just how many when they inspected one particular hospital.

Starting at the door of this facility, there was the small problem of signs leading to the emergency room, which the facility no longer had. Other outdoor signs were so faded they were difficult to read. Interior navigational signs were inaccurate. Add to that, there was no place to sit once one got in the door, only in the vending machine area down the hall, described as "dirty and disorganized."

Two employees were designated as toxic exposure navigators, staff meant to give the screenings to veterans. It was determined that over 450 screenings had not been done.

One disturbing deficiency at this particular facility concerned the delays in notifying patients of abnormal test results. The VAOIG had dinged this facility a few years ago for that same problem and saw there had been no improvement. The plan: Develop a process to ensure prompt communication of test results. Target date for that: July 31, 2025.

And then we have the areas where biohazardous materials were stored, yet there was no sink nor hand sanitizer, no warning signs about the "potentially infectious material" -- along with cracks in the floor, holes in the walls, dust on the bed rails and handbooks that were years out of date.

The biggest problem unearthed by the VAOIG concerned the continued improper sterilizing processing of reusable medical equipment, something the VAOIG had reported on the previous year. The facility claimed that improvements had been made, yet during the inspection itself, even more problems with the sterilizing process came to light -- including surgical instruments with rust.

It's gut-wrenching to read VAOIG reports like this and know that some veterans have no choice but to seek their health care at facilities with serious deficiencies like those at this VA facility.

I hope the new VA secretary reads these reports when they cross his desk.

(c) 2025 King Features Synd., Inc.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 25 of 83

Wishing Well®

3	8	7	6	2	3	6	3	7	5	3	7	4
E	C	M	Y	A	V	O	E	A	N	N	K	H
3	7	5	3	2	6	4	6	5	4	6	4	7
T	E	E	U	N	U	E	P	W	L	R	P	B
6	2	4	5	6	5	6	4	5	4	5	7	5
I	E	I	T	Z	H	E	S	O	N	U	O	G
7	5	7	3	8	5	2	5	8	4	6	4	8
L	H	D	A	H	T	L	S	A	E	F	A	N
4	8	2	8	6	3	6	8	7	3	2	3	2
R	N	O	E	R	L	I	L	M	S	Q	U	U
8	3	2	3	6	8	7	2	8	7	6	2	3
D	C	E	C	E	E	O	N	S	V	N	T	E
6	3	2	8	2	3	6	8	2	7	8	2	8
D	S	I	I	D	S	S	R	E	E	E	A	S

HERE IS A PLEASANT LITTLE GAME that will give you a message every day. It's a numerical puzzle designed to spell out your fortune. Count the letters in your first name. If the number of letters is 6 or more, subtract 4. If the number is less than 6, add 3. The result is your key number. Start at the upper left-hand corner and check one of your key numbers, left to right. Then read the message the letters under the checked figures give you.

©2025 King Features Syndicate



1. TELEVISION: In the sitcom "Modern Family," Gloria is from which country?

2. LITERATURE: Which author wrote "The Kite Thief" and "A Thousand Splendid Suns"?

3. GEOGRAPHY: What is the deepest lake in the world?

4. U.S. PRESIDENTS: Which first lady's nickname was Lady Bird?

5. ASTRONOMY: How many stars make up the Big Dipper?

6. MOVIES: Which famous Hollywood couple played lead roles in the film version of "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf"?

7. ANIMAL KINGDOM: What is a group of skunks called?

8. GEOMETRY: How many sides does a decagon have?

9. ART: Which American artist focused on women and children in her paintings?

10. ANATOMY: What substance gives skin its color?

Answers

1. Colombia.

2. Khaled Hosseini.

3. Lake Baikal, Russia.

4. Claudia "Lady Bird" Johnson, wife of President Lyndon Johnson.

5. Seven.

6. Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor.

7. A surfeit.

8. 10.

9. Mary Cassatt.

10. Melanin.

© 2025 King Features Synd., Inc.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 26 of 83

South Dakota Governor



Larry Rhoden



South Dakota: *Under God, the People Rule*

Bridging Our State

We recently cut the ribbon on the new Lt. Commander John C. Waldron Bridge over the Missouri River between Pierre and Ft. Pierre. For the next 100 years, this bridge will connect two communities. But more than that, it will connect two sides of our state.

The Pierre-Ft. Pierre community is perhaps the best example of East River and West River coming together. Pierre is a quintessential East River town – Ft. Pierre is very much a West River town. This community is strongest because it has elements of both sides of the river. In the same way, South Dakota is strongest because two sides of the river come together to form one great state.

I was born and raised a West River rancher. I've always had a lot of love for Ft. Pierre, and West River is still home to this day. In the same breath, I've worked for 20 years on the East side of the river in Pierre – in the legislature, as Lt. Governor, and now as Governor.

Seven years ago, an East River farmer and rancher asked me to be her running mate. We worked very well together because we brought perspectives from both sides of this state to our leadership. When I succeeded Secretary Noem as Governor, I took a page out of her book. I asked an East River lawyer, Tony Venhuizen, to serve alongside me.

We need perspectives from all parts of this state. We need people from all walks of life working together to make this state great. And we need bridges like this one connecting us and bringing us together.

That brings us to the new bridge. This bridge is the latest in a long history of structures connecting these two communities. Since the late 1800s, there has been some kind of bridge or another connecting Pierre and Ft. Pierre. The most recent bridge was opened in 1962. In 2002, that bridge was dedicated in honor of Lt. Commander John C. Waldron of Fort Pierre.

Lt. Commander Waldron led a squadron of torpedo bombers in the Battle of Midway during WWII. They were the first to locate and attack the Japanese fleet. They went up against impossible odds – he and all 15 aircraft with him were lost. But their sacrifice paved the way for American dive bombers to devastate the Japanese fleet.

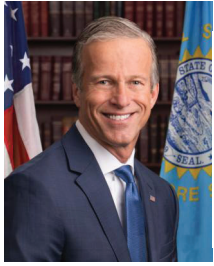
The new bridge remains dedicated to Lt. Commander Waldron. In a lot of ways, the old bridge paved the way for the new one – just as Lt. Commander Waldron paved the way for the dive bombers behind him.

We blew up the old bridge a couple weeks ago. I'm not sure if you saw the video – it was pretty awesome. You can find it on my Facebook page if you haven't seen it. Truth be told, I had hoped to push the button to blow up the bridge myself!

As the new bridge officially opens, we look forward to the next 100 years of South Dakotans from both sides of the state crossing the river and working together. We celebrate the continued growth and development that will be possible because of this modern bridge.

I am in the middle of my Open for Opportunity tour across the state of South Dakota. On the day of the bridge ribbon cutting, I prioritized being in Pierre because of how important this bridge is. It will expand the opportunity for both the Pierre and the Ft. Pierre communities.

Strong infrastructure supports a strong economy. Our economy is strong – the strongest of any state in the nation. But we still have opportunities to grow and improve. This bridge represents just such an opportunity for growth. And it also represents an opportunity for us to continue working together to connect as South Dakotans.



JOHN THUNE
U.S. SENATOR FOR SOUTH DAKOTA

Helping Law Enforcement Combat the Fentanyl Crisis

More Americans die each year from a drug overdose than Americans who died in the entirety of the Vietnam War. Many of these deaths are caused by a single pill containing a lethal dose of fentanyl, which is roughly equal to five grains of salt. We're losing young people, teenagers, and young parents – people with bright lives ahead of them.

The fentanyl crisis is affecting South Dakota as well. Last year, police in Sioux Falls seized enough fentanyl to kill 2.5 million people. Law enforcement reports that cartels have a presence in our area. And the price of a single pill has dropped from \$40 a few years ago to \$5 per pill today, largely because of increasing supply.

Most of the fentanyl in our communities – including in South Dakota – is not manufactured in the United States. Securing the border is a critical step to stopping the flow of drugs. In just a few short weeks, President Trump has made significant progress on this front, dramatically slowing the flow of illegal crossings at the southern border. And with less chaos, Border Patrol can focus on the criminals, cartels, terrorists, and traffickers that used to try to hide behind the surges of illegal immigrants.

But there's more work to do. That's why the U.S. Senate recently passed the HALT Fentanyl Act, which would provide law enforcement with critical tools to combat fentanyl. This bill would permanently classify fentanyl and fentanyl-related substances as Schedule I drugs, empowering law enforcement to keep pace with the evolving threat of fentanyl that is driving drug overdoses in our country.

Until a few years ago, these fentanyl-related substances were generally classified as Schedule II substances, meaning they were less tightly regulated and violations carried lighter penalties. If a particular substance was moved up to Schedule I, cartels would just alter the chemical composition slightly to avoid a crackdown. But those drugs were no less deadly.

That ended in 2018 when President Trump temporarily classified all fentanyl-related substances as Schedule I drugs. Congress has extended that temporary listing multiple times because it works. It's time to permanently classify fentanyl-related substances as what they are: the deadliest kind of drugs.

I'm grateful to the men and women in law enforcement and first responders who work every day to go after drug dealers and save lives. The HALT Fentanyl Act would provide law enforcement with critical tools to go after the people bringing into our country the fentanyl that is killing our fellow Americans, and I'm proud it's one of the first bills passed under the new Republican majority.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 28 of 83



Preventing Foreign Interference

BIG Update

It's important to honor the sacrifices our service members have made to protect our freedoms. Last week, I recognized 15 Vietnam-era veterans in Sturgis and thanked them for their service to our country.

Through the Vietnam Veteran Commemoration Program, I've recognized more than 1,100 veterans since 2019. This program is being phased out by the Department of Defense (DOD) this November. When Congress created the program, the funding provided to honor veterans was to be used until expended. So today, I asked the DOD for a status update. If sufficient funds remain, I would like the Secretary to consider extending the program until all resources are expended, so as many veterans as possible are honored.

If you know a Vietnam-era veteran, please submit a nomination soon to ensure they receive their much-deserved recognition. Veterans can be nominated by filling out the form at dustyjohnson.house.gov/services/vietnam-veteran-commemoration or by calling my Sioux Falls Office at 605-275-2868..

BIG Idea

America's foreign adversaries, like the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), are targeting our universities with lucrative funding. While universities are required to report these funds under the Higher Education Act, many go unreported or are incompletely reported. In 2019, up to 70% of institutions failed to comply with the reporting requirements.

Our adversaries do not share American values and through these funds, they are able to push propaganda, interfere with research, and censor free speech at universities. A congressional investigation into two research universities found nearly \$40 million in unreported contracts with the CCP and billions of foreign funding provided anonymously. This cannot be tolerated.

To remedy this, I voted to pass the DETERRENT Act to ensure our colleges disclose these funds, including any financial support from countries of concern, such as China and Russia. This will increase transparency and accountability in higher education and protecting national security. The DETERRENT Act will strengthen the ability to track foreign influence and protect our young adults from the malign influence of our adversaries..

BIG News

This week, the world found out that a journalist was inadvertently added to a Signal group chat where high-ranking government officials discussed military operations to attack the Houthi terrorists. This is a big mistake and can never happen again. While the mission was successful, if this information got into the wrong hands, U.S. military men and women could have been in big trouble and the operation could have failed.

As our national security leaders continue to protect the United States and target terrorists, I hope they will discuss these plans in appropriate settings.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 29 of 83



Dr. James L. Snyder Ministries

PO Box 831313 - Ocala, FL 34483

1-352-216-3025

Money, Money, Money, Where's All The Money

I can't keep count of all the phone calls informing me that I won millions of dollars and a brand-new Mercedes-Benz. All I have to do is send them \$15,000 to cover the income tax and processing fee, and they will be able to send me millions of dollars.

I grew up in the Pennsylvania Dutch area, and I would be the last person to fall for that kind of scam. If I won money, why do I have to pay money?

Growing up, my father was very frugal with money. If you could get money out of him, you were a magician of the top order.

When we would go to a restaurant, he was very frugal, but he did tip the waitress. The only thing about that tip was it was only \$0.25. He thought she earned every penny of that quarter.

He died in 2010, so he won't hear about this, but many times after lunch, we were going out to the car; one of us would have to go to the bathroom, and so the rest would go out to the car. Actually, the guy going to the bathroom was the one we had assigned to put a tip on the table. All of us, except for my father, contributed to that tip. As far as I know, he never found out about that.

However, I learned a lot about money from my father. He never spent a nickel if he didn't have to. He loved to get his monthly bank statement so that he could see his money and study it for days.

My father did have money. He was a successful building contractor, but very few people knew he had a dollar bill on him. If you met him, you would not know he had an extra dollar in his pocket.

They would be a genius if they could scam him out of a dollar.

Money meant a lot to my father, especially in his pocket. He was never out to scam anybody or buy a lottery ticket. In fact, he thought lottery tickets were the worst scam in the world. I lean towards that thought myself.

One of the things I learned from my father was that it's not so much how much money you have as what you do with it.

I was a small-town pastor in Maryland one year, and one of my friends spread a rumor my first year that I was the poster child for the baby Gerber. I'm not sure where he came up with that scam, but he did.

I didn't know he did it, and all of a sudden pastors came to me and told about some of the ministries they were involved in and they needed to raise money to do them.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 30 of 83

At first, I didn't understand why they were telling me this. Why did I need to know what their ministry was and how much money they needed?

After several months of this, somebody spilled the beans and told me what my so-called friend had done, why these people were telling me about their ministries, and how much money they needed for those ministries.

If I had the money he was talking about, I would probably have given money to their ministries. But all those pastors were talking to someone who was simply broke. I didn't have the money they thought I had, just enough to get by week by week.

What I do with my money is really important, but I won't let my money, which I don't have much of, define who I am.

There's nothing wrong with being frugal. I've been pretty much frugal all my life because I've never made much money. I just tried not to spend money that I don't have.

Money has a way of influencing people. If someone knows that someone has a lot of money, they're going to approach them to see how much they can get for themselves.

I have no problem giving to charities and to people who really need help. But I'm very careful about that because I want to make sure I help people who actually need help. That's a hard decision to make. Who really needs my money more than me? That's the question.

Many years ago, a friend of mine wanted me to invest in some investment program that he was involved with. He had given them well over \$65,000. According to the investment, he would be getting interest every month. The one thing that sort of ticked me off was that the \$65,000 had to be in cash. If that isn't a red flag, I don't know what is.

It turned out to be one of those Ponzi schemes. I'm not sure how they work, but I guarantee they will never work with my money.

The only investment I have made was to good old Uncle Sam. Now, I get a monthly salary from my Uncle, of which I am thankful.

I couldn't help but think of a verse of scripture that is so often misquoted.

1 Timothy 6:10, "For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

Money is NOT the root of all evil like so many people think. Rather, it's the LOVE of money that is the "root of all evil."

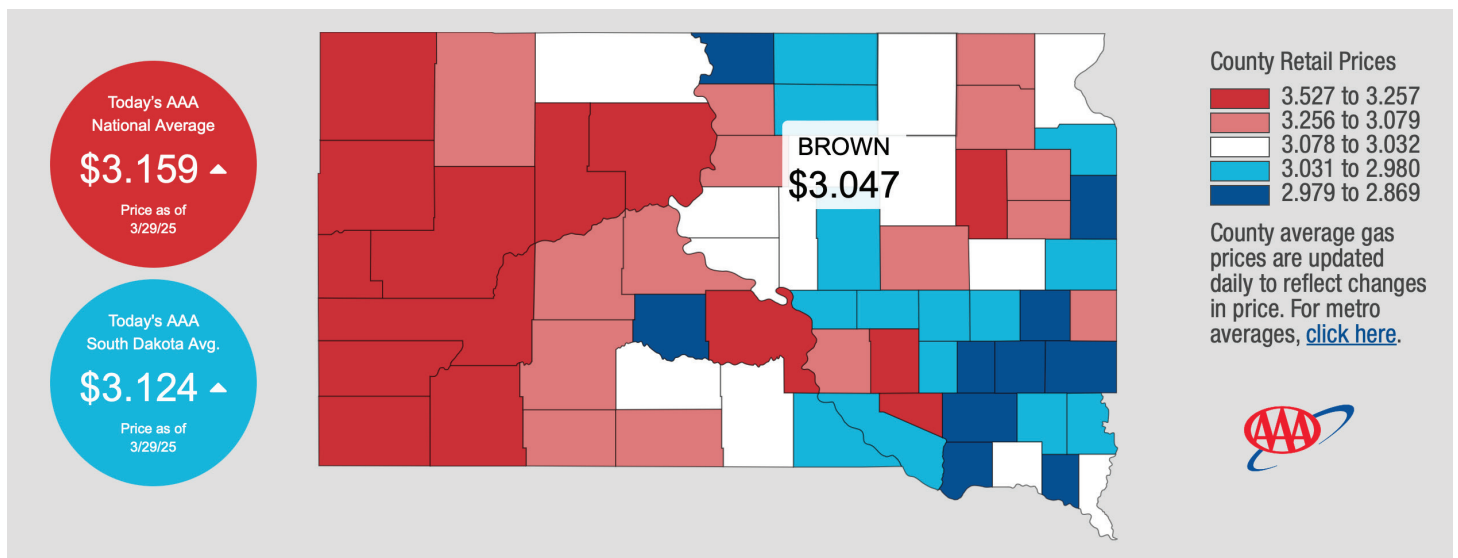
Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 31 of 83

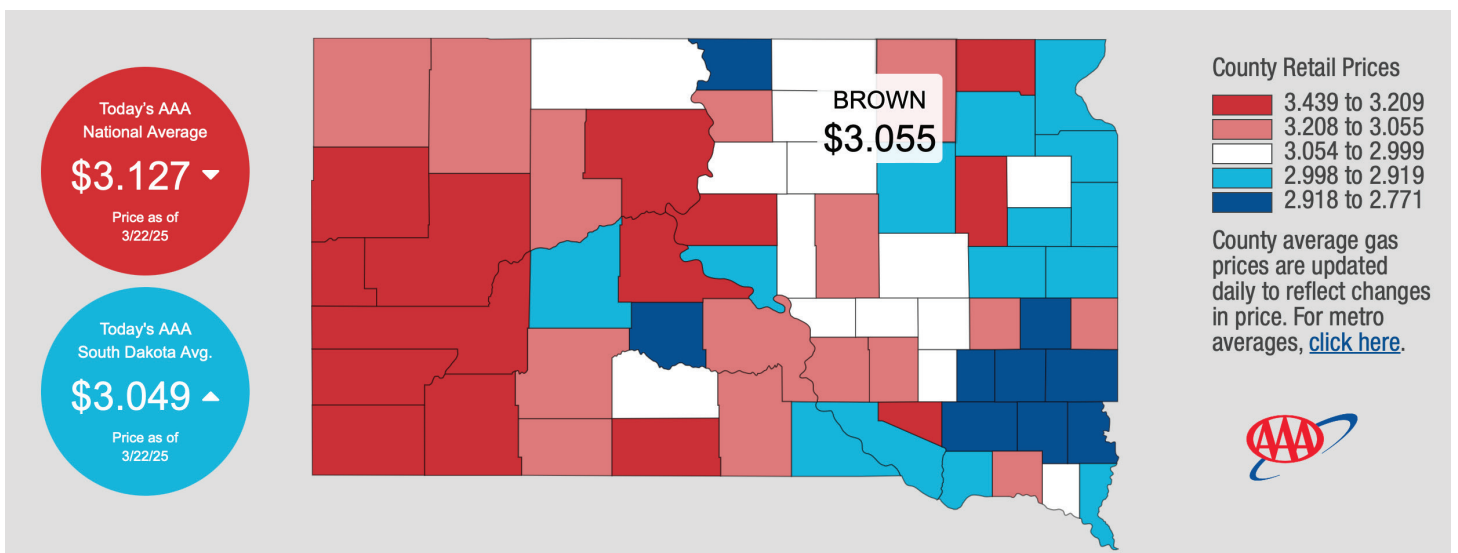
South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$3.124	\$3.296	\$3.728	\$3.342
Yesterday Avg.	\$3.119	\$3.287	\$3.741	\$3.329
Week Ago Avg.	\$3.049	\$3.226	\$3.675	\$3.285
Month Ago Avg.	\$3.012	\$3.194	\$3.630	\$3.339
Year Ago Avg.	\$3.318	\$3.470	\$3.881	\$3.717

This Week



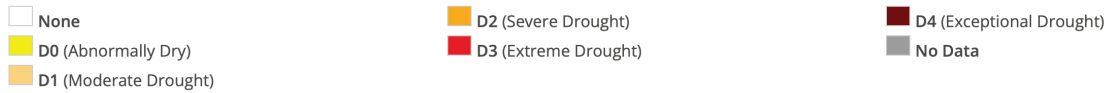
Last Week



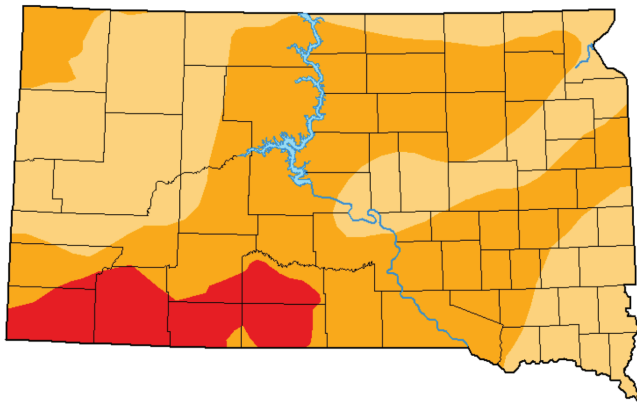
Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 32 of 83

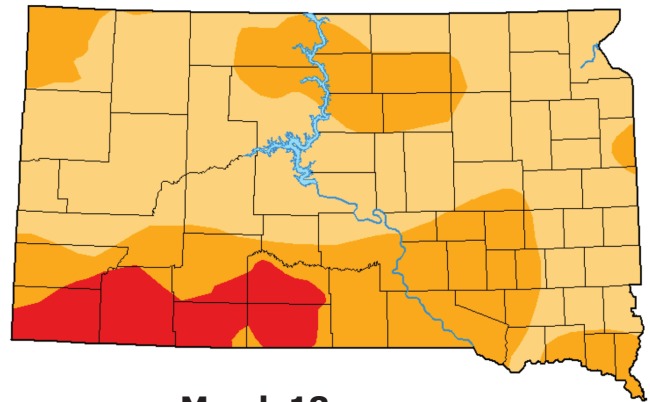
Drought Classification



Drought Monitor



March 25



March 18

Major storm systems continued to “undercut” the Dakotas and portions of neighboring states. Notably, severe drought (D2) was broadly expanded in South Dakota, where season-to-date snowfall totals were broadly at least 1 to 2 feet below average. With the northern Plains’ drought occurring at multiple time scales, current impacts include poor conditions for rangeland, pastures, and winter wheat. In contrast, late-season storminess across the northern Intermountain West, including much of northern and western Wyoming, led to improved mountain snowpack, more favorable spring and summer runoff prospects, and reductions in drought coverage and intensity.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 33 of 83

EARTHTALK

Dear EarthTalk: Are the Chinese actually way ahead of U.S., European and Japanese automakers regarding EVs? And are we ever going to see Chinese cars on American roads?

– P.L., via email

China has quickly become a dominant force in the global electric vehicle (EV) market, surpassing car makers in the U.S., Europe and Japan. Western car companies used to be the leaders in innovation, but Chinese car makers have surged ahead recently, producing affordable, high-tech EVs at record speed.

This has raised concerns in the U.S. about whether Chinese automakers will soon enter the American market and how that could affect domestic car companies. With growing competition and trade tensions, the question remains: Are Chinese EVs really ahead? And will they ever make it onto American roads?

One of the main factors that brings China's EV success is robust government support. For years, China has offered substantial subsidies, tax incentives and infrastructure investments to enhance EV sales and manufacturing. China also has control over a large part of the worldwide battery supply chain, which provides its car makers an edge regard to cost and access to crucial components. Firms such as BYD, Nio and XPeng have emerged as global leaders, providing EVs that are not only less expensive than Western options, but also equipped with advanced technology. These elements enable China to sell its EVs globally, surpassing American and European car makers in both production scale and cost-effectiveness.

Although they've achieved global success, Chinese EVs still face hurdles to enter the U.S. market. High tariffs increase the cost of export, and persistent geopolitical tensions between the U.S. and China further complicates trade. Concerns also exist about cybersecurity and intellectual property. As some lawmakers suggest, vehicles made in China may pose a security threat due to their sophisticated data collection and connectivity capabilities. Additionally, American car makers and lawmakers have opposed permitting Chinese competition, worrying it might undermine local EV manufacturing and lead to job reductions.

Because of these barriers, some Chinese carmakers are looking at different ways to enter the market. One possible strategy is making EVs in Mexico, whereby they'd benefit from the USMCA trade agreement and potentially avoid some tariffs. Others might partner with Western brands to supply batteries or technology, which would let them compete in a more indirect way. Many American EVs already have Chinese components, so even without full vehicle imports, China still plays a big role in the U.S. industry.

Competition between China and Western automakers is likely to get more intense. U.S. and European governments are giving more subsidies for domestic EV production, trying to close the gap. But if China keeps expanding fast, it may be really hard for Western automakers to catch up. Whether or not Chinese EVs show up in American dealerships, their influence on the global car industry can't be denied.

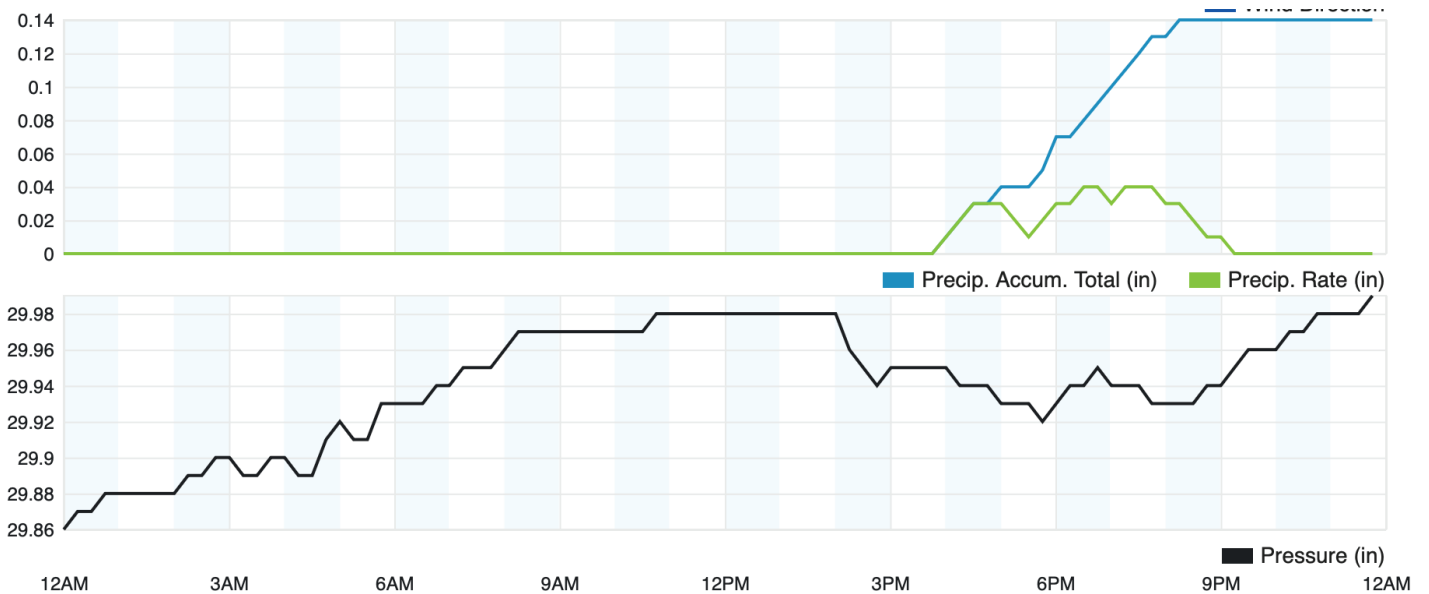
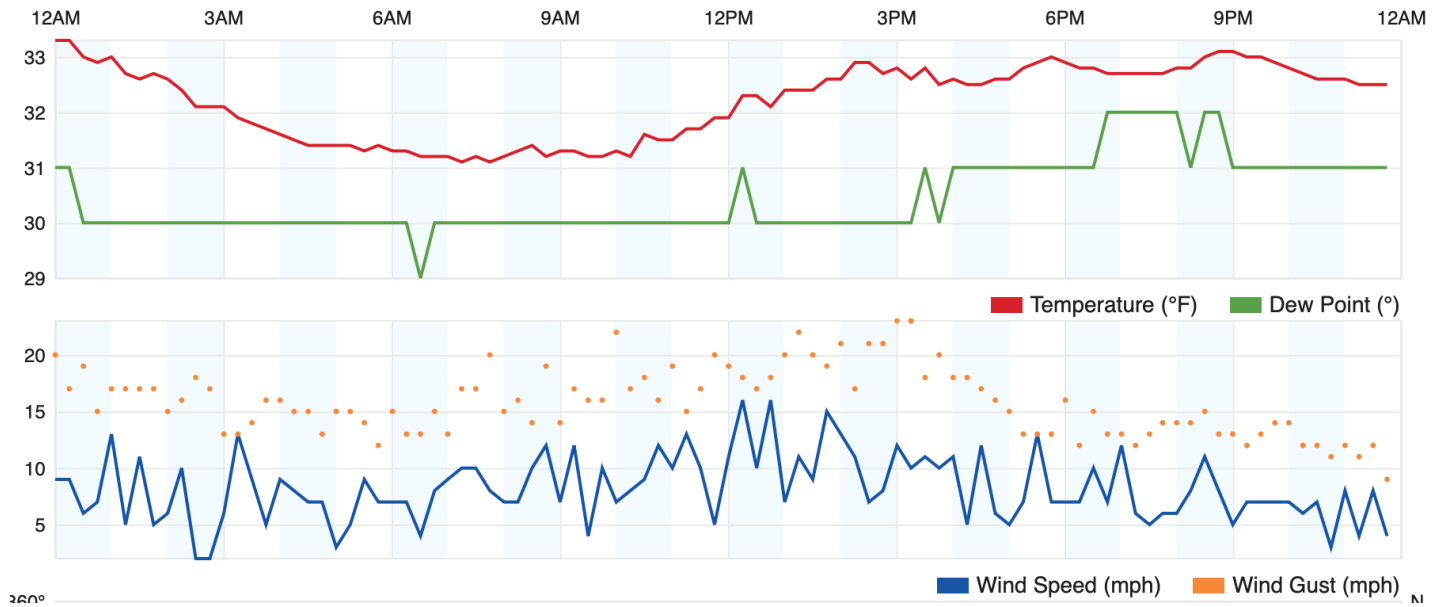


China's BYD surpassed Tesla in 2024 as the world's biggest electric vehicle (EV) manufacturer.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 34 of 83

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 35 of 83

Sunday

Sunday Night

Monday

Monday Night

Tuesday



High: 43 °F

Chance Snow
and Patchy
Blowing Snow



Low: 20 °F

Mostly Cloudy



High: 42 °F

Mostly Sunny



Low: 26 °F

Mostly Cloudy
then Chance
Snow



High: 39 °F

Rain/Snow and
Patchy
Blowing Snow



TODAY
SUN 03/30
HIGH 43 °F

[5% Precip. / 0.00 in](#)

Cloudy early with peeks of sunshine
expected late. High 43F. Winds N at 15 to
25 mph. Higher wind gusts possible.



TONIGHT
SUN 03/30
LOW 21 °F

[5% Precip. / 0 in](#)

Cloudy. Low 21F. Winds N at 10 to 20 mph.



TOMORROW
MON 03/31
HIGH 43 | 28 °F

[5% Precip. / 0.00 in](#)

Partly cloudy skies. High 43F. Winds ENE
at 5 to 10 mph.

PRECIPITATION

5%

Dry conditions for
the next 6 hours.

POLLEN

None

AIR QUALITY

Good

Air Quality Index
19

UV INDEX ▲

Moderate

Daytime UV
5

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 36 of 83

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 33 °F at 12:00 AM

Low Temp: 31 °F at 6:49 AM

Wind: 23 mph at 2:53 PM

Precip: : 0.14

Day length: 12 hours, 45 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 81 in 1943

Record Low: -14 in 1969

Average High: 49

Average Low: 25

Average Precip in March.: 0.85

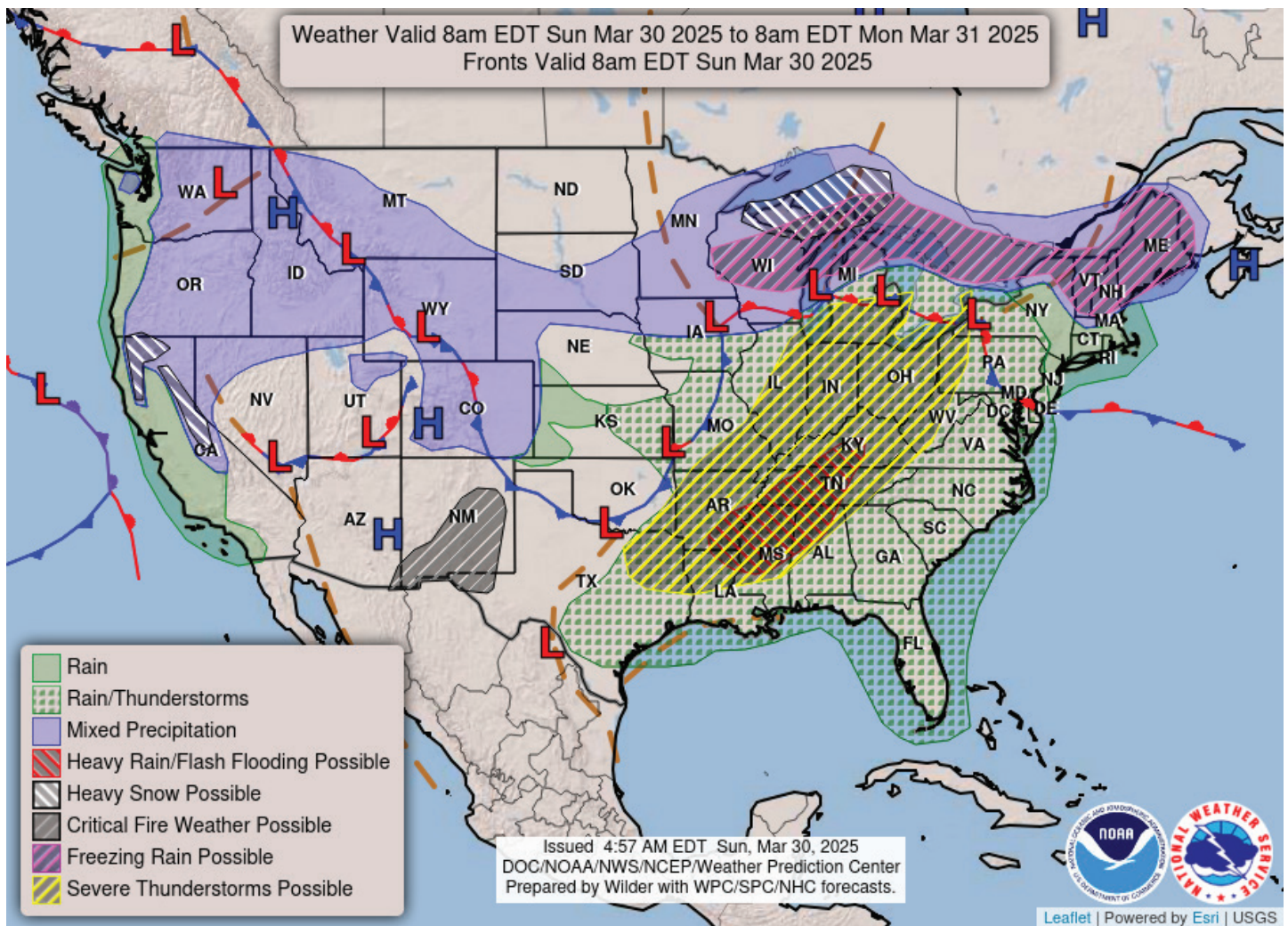
Precip to date in March.: 0.18

Average Precip to date: 2.02

Precip Year to Date: 0.63

Sunset Tonight: 7:59:38 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:11:51 am



Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 37 of 83

Today in Weather History

March 30th, 1967: Prolonged strong southerly winds of 20 to 30 mph, with gusts to 55 mph, caused areas of blowing dust in eastern South Dakota, reducing visibilities to near zero. A metal roof on a lumber shed in Vermillion was blown off. The strong winds also piled ice along the shore of Lake Poinsett to heights of 20ft, causing damage to some cabins along the lakeshore.

March 30th, 2009: A major winter storm moved across the Northern Rockies and into the Northern Plains, producing 2 to 22 inches of snowfall and widespread blizzard conditions. Most area schools and events were canceled. Travel was challenging and not advised. Interstate 29 from Watertown to the North Dakota line and Interstate 90 across Jones and Lyman counties closed during the storm. There were several vehicle accidents, but no serious injuries were reported. However, this storm took a toll on area ranchers as the calving season was underway. Storm total snowfall amounts included 6 inches in Blunt, Timber Lake, Gettysburg, and Wilmot; 7 inches in Doland and Pierre; 8 inches in Clark, Clear Lake, Leola, Hosmer, Gettysburg, southeast of McIntosh, and Kennebec; 9 inches south of Bristol, Waubay, and near Chelsea; 10 inches in Eagle Butte and Mobridge; 11 inches in Pollock and Turton. Locations with a foot or more of snowfall included 12 inches in Aberdeen, Britton, Andover, Sisseton, and Faulkton; 13 inches at Lake Sharpe, Roy Lake, and eight miles southwest of Keldron; 14 inches in Miller, Redfield, and Webster; 15 inches near Highmore and Columbia; 16 inches southwest of Stratford; 17 inches 14 miles northeast of Isabel; 20 inches in McLaughlin, Ree Heights, and 4 miles northeast of Victor with almost 22 inches northwest of Stephan.

March 30th, 2010: Scattered light rain showers falling into a very dry air mass were responsible for several heat bursts across central South Dakota from Pierre to Onida during the evening hours of March 30th. Between 853 pm and 1053 pm CDT, observations from the Pierre airport (KPIR) showed a marked increase in temperature (+10F), a decrease in dew point temperature (-4F), the pressure falls, and gusty surface winds (a peak wind gust of 48 mph). On a farm outside of Pierre, winds were estimated to be up to 70 mph as some shingles were blown off the roof, and several outbuildings were damaged. The Onida airport recorded a peak wind gust of 66 mph in the early evening.

1823 - A great Northeast storm with hurricane force winds raged from Pennsylvania to Maine. The storm was most severe over New Jersey with high tides, uprooted trees, and heavy snow inland. (David Ludlum)

1899 - A storm which buried Ruby, CO, under 141 inches of snow came to an end. Ruby was an old abandoned mining town on the Elk Mountain Range in the Crested Butte area. (The Weather Channel)

1977 - Hartford, CT, hit 87 degrees to establish a record for the month of March. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A storm spread heavy snow across the Ohio Valley and Lower Great Lakes Region. Cleveland OH received sixteen inches of snow in 24 hours, their second highest total of record. Winds gusting to 50 mph created 8 to 12 foot waves on Lake Huron. The storm also ushered unseasonably cold air into the south central and southeastern U.S., with nearly one hundred record lows reported in three days. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A winter-like storm developed in the Central Rockies. Snowfall totals in Utah ranged up to 15 inches at the Brian Head Ski Resort, and winds in Arizona gusted to 59 mph at Show Low. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms developing along and ahead of a slow moving cold front produced large hail and damaging winds at more than fifty locations across the southeast quarter of the nation, and spawned a tornado which injured eleven persons at Northhampton NC. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Low pressure produced heavy snow in central Maine and northern New Hampshire, with up to eight inches reported in Maine. A slow moving Pacific storm system produced 18 to 36 inches of snow in the southwestern mountains of Colorado in three days. Heavier snowfall totals included 31 inches at Wolf Creek Pass and 27 inches at the Monarch Ski Area. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 38 of 83



DISMOUNT!

Stories of the Knights of the Round Table are fascinating - often intriguing. There are many hidden messages in the way they did things.

For example, when they were fully dressed, they would ride a large, strong horse to bear the weight of their armor. When they went hunting, they would ride a small, swift horse that could run fast to catch up with the prey. When in a parade, they would ride a tall, high horse. This made them appear bigger than the poor peasant who had no horse at all and was forced to look up to them.

In fact, the expression "Get off your high horse" originated from their exploits. It meant to the onlookers, "Stop acting as if you are above us! Remember, you're on a horse."

Wise Solomon had some advice for those who act as if they are above others. He said, "Haughty eyes, a proud heart, and evil actions are all sin."

God wants us to develop talents carefully and use wisely the skills, talents, and gifts that He has given us. We are to be thankful for all that we can do in His name to bring Him glory and honor. We must never have an inflated opinion of our value or importance. We have what we have because of His grace. We are what we are and what we can be because of Him. We must realize at all times that we are His and are obligated to serve Him faithfully each day.

Prayer: Father, may we be ever thankful for all of the gifts You have given us and use them to honor You. May we set ourselves aside at all times and exalt only You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Haughty eyes, a proud heart, and evil actions are all sin. Proverbs 21:4

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

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 39 of 83

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

Groton Daily Independent 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

Pay with Venmo: @paperpaul Phone Number to Confirm: 7460

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 40 of 83



WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.28.25

2 9 31 60 63 23

MegaPlier: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$29,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.29.25

2 21 33 46 52 8

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$28,180,000

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.29.25

4 8 13 18 41 12

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 40 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.29.25

3 15 20 26 30

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$84,000

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.29.25

7 11 14 26 59 10

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.29.25

7 11 21 53 61 2

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 41 of 83

Upcoming Groton Events

03/22/2025 Spring Vendor Fair at the GHS Gym 10am-2pm
03/29/2025 Men's Singles Bowling Tournament at the Jungle 10am, 1pm & 4pm
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
04/12/2025 Groton Firemens Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
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
08/14/2025 Family Fun Fest, Downtown Main Street 5:30-7:30pm (2nd Thursday)
08/23/2025 Glacial Tournament at Olive Grove
09/05/2025 Homecoming Parade 1pm
09/06/2025 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
09/07/2025 Sunflower Classic Couples Scramble at Olive Grove
10/10/2025 Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am
10/11/2025 Pumpkin Fest 10am-3pm City Park
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 **AP** Associated Press

'Eid of sadness': Palestinians in Gaza mark Muslim holiday with dwindling food and no end to war

By WAFAA SHURAF and MOHAMMAD JAHJOUH Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Palestinians in the Gaza Strip had little to celebrate on Sunday as they began marking a normally festive Muslim holiday with rapidly dwindling food supplies and no end in sight to the Israel-Hamas war. Israeli strikes overnight into Sunday killed at least 19 people, mostly women and children, health officials said.

Many held prayers outside demolished mosques on the Eid al-Fitr holiday marking the end of the fasting month of Ramadan. It's supposed to be a joyous occasion, when families gather for feasts and purchase new clothes for children — but most of Gaza's 2 million Palestinians are just trying to survive.

"It's the Eid of sadness," Adel al-Shaer said after attending outdoor prayers in the central town of Deir al-Balah. "We lost our loved ones, our children, our lives, and our futures. We lost our students, our schools, and our institutions. We lost everything."

Twenty members of his extended family have been killed in Israeli strikes, including four young nephews just a few days ago, he said as he broke into tears.

Israel ended the ceasefire with Hamas and resumed the 17-month war earlier this month when the militant group refused to accept changes to the agreement reached in January. Israeli strikes have killed hundreds of Palestinians, and Israel has allowed no food, fuel or humanitarian aid to enter for four weeks.

Arab mediators are trying to get the truce back on track, and Hamas said Saturday that it had accepted a new proposal from Egypt and Qatar, the exact details of which were not immediately known. Israel said it had advanced its own proposal in coordination with the United States, which has also been mediating.

Israeli strikes on Sunday killed at least 16 people, including nine children and three women, according to Nasser Hospital in the southern city of Khan Younis. Two of the children, young girls, appeared to be wearing new clothes purchased for the holiday, according to an Associated Press cameraman.

Another three people were killed in a strike in Deir al-Balah late Saturday, according to Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital.

"There is killing, displacement, hunger, and a siege," said Saed al-Kourd, a worshipper. "We go out to perform God's rituals in order to make the children happy, but as for the joy of Eid? There is no Eid."

The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking 251 hostages. Hamas is still holding 59 captives — 24 of whom are believed to be alive — after most of the rest were released in ceasefires or other agreements.

Israel's offensive has killed over 50,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its tally. Israel says it has killed around 20,000 militants, without providing evidence, and blames civilian deaths on Hamas because it operates in densely populated areas.

Israel's bombardment and ground operations have destroyed vast areas of Gaza and at their height had displaced around 90% of the population.

Israel approves controversial road project in West Bank

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's influential security Cabinet on Sunday approved the construction of a road for Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, which critics say will open the door for Israel to annex a key area just outside Jerusalem, further undermining the feasibility of a future Palestinian state.

A statement from Netanyahu's office said the project is meant to streamline travel for Palestinians in communities near the large Jewish settlement of Maaleh Adumim.

Peace Now, an Israeli anti-settlement watchdog group, said the road will divert Palestinian traffic outside of Maaleh Adumim and the surrounding area known as E1, a tract of open land that is deemed essential for the territorial contiguity of a future Palestinian state.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 43 of 83

That will make it easier for Israel to annex E1, according to Hagit Ofran, a settlement expert with the group, because Israel can claim that there is no disruption to Palestinian movement. Critics say Israeli settlements and other land grabs make a contiguous future Palestinian state increasingly impossible.

Several roads in the territory are meant for use by either Israelis or Palestinians, which international rights groups say is part of an apartheid system, allegations Israel rejects.

Netanyahu's office said the decision to pave new roads meant only for Palestinians was based on security considerations that have increased during the war in the Gaza Strip.

Israel captured the West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem in the 1967 Mideast war. The Palestinians want all three for their future state, and a two-state solution is widely seen internationally as the only way to resolve the decades-old conflict.

2 people killed and dozens wounded in Russian attack on Kharkiv

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian drones hit a military hospital, shopping center, apartment blocks and other buildings in Kharkiv late Saturday, killing two people and wounding 35 others, Ukrainian officials said.

Regional Gov. Oleh Syniehubov said that a 67-year-old man and a 70-year-old woman were killed in the attack on Ukraine's second-largest city.

Ukraine's General Staff denounced the "deliberate, targeted shelling" of the military hospital. Among the casualties were "servicemen who were undergoing treatment," it said.

The Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russia fired 111 exploding drones and decoys in the latest wave of attacks overnight into Sunday. It said 65 of them were intercepted and another 35 were lost, likely having been electronically jammed.

Russia's Ministry of Defense, meanwhile, said its air defense systems shot down six Ukrainian drones.

According to Ukrainian government and military analysts, Russian forces are preparing to launch a fresh military offensive in the coming weeks to maximize pressure on Ukraine and strengthen the Kremlin's negotiating position in ceasefire talks.

Smell of death permeates Myanmar cities after quake kills over 1,600 and leaves countless buried

By THEIN ZAW, DAVID RISING and GRANT PECK Associated Press

MANDALAY, Myanmar (AP) — The smell of decaying bodies permeated the streets of Myanmar's second-largest city on Sunday as people worked frantically by hand to clear rubble in the hope of finding someone still alive, two days after a massive earthquake struck that killed more than 1,600 people and left countless others buried.

The 7.7 magnitude quake hit midday Friday with an epicenter near Mandalay, bringing down scores of buildings and damaging other infrastructure like the city's airport.

Relief efforts have been hampered by buckled roads, downed bridges, spotty communications and the challenges of operating in a country in the midst of a civil war.

The search for survivors has been primarily conducted by the local residents without the aid of heavy equipment, moving rubble by hand and with shovels in 41-degree Celsius (106 Fahrenheit) heat, with only the occasional tracked excavator to be seen.

A 5.1 magnitude aftershock Sunday afternoon prompted screams from those in the streets, and then the work continued.

Many of Mandalay's 1.5 million people spent the night sleeping on the streets, either left homeless by the quake, which also shook neighboring Thailand and killed at least 17 people there, or worried that the continuing aftershocks might cause structures left unstable to collapse.

Many areas still have not been reached

So far 1,644 people have been reported killed in Myanmar and 3,408 missing, but many areas have not yet been reached, and many rescue efforts so far have been undertaken by people working by hand to

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 44 of 83

try and clear rubble, said Cara Bragg, the Yangon-based manager of Catholic Relief Services in Myanmar. "It's mainly been local volunteers, local people who are just trying to find their loved ones," Bragg said after being briefed by her colleague in Mandalay.

"I've also seen reports that now some countries are sending search and rescue teams up to Mandalay to support the efforts, but hospitals are really struggling to cope with the influx of injured people, there's a shortage of medical supplies, and people are struggling to find food and clean water," Bragg added.

The organization was sending a team by road on Sunday to assess peoples' most pressing needs so that it could target its own response.

With the Mandalay airport damaged and the control tower toppled in the capital Naypitaw's airport, all commercial flights into the cities have been shut down.

Official relief efforts in Naypitaw were prioritizing government offices and staff housing, leaving locals and aid groups to dig through the rubble by hand in residential areas, the hot sun beating down and the smell of death in the air.

Foreign aid starts to arrive in Myanmar

Still, two Indian C-17 military transport aircraft were able to land late Saturday at Naypitaw with a field hospital unit and some 120 personnel who were then to travel north to Mandalay to establish a 60-bed emergency treatment center, according to the country's Foreign Ministry. Other Indian supplies were flown into Yangon, Myanmar's biggest city, which has been the hub of other foreign relief efforts.

On Sunday, a convoy of 17 Chinese cargo trucks carrying critical shelter and medical supplies was expected to reach Mandalay, after making the arduous journey by road from Yangon.

The 650-kilometer (400-mile) journey has been taking 14 hours or longer, with clogged roads and traffic diverted from the main highway to skirt damage from the earthquake.

At the same time, the window of opportunity to find anyone alive is rapidly closing. Most rescues occur within the first 24 hours after a disaster, and then survival chances drop as each day passes.

An initial report on earthquake relief efforts issued Saturday by the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs noted the severe damage or destruction of many health facilities, and warned that a "severe shortage of medical supplies is hampering response efforts, including trauma kits, blood bags, anesthetics, assistive devices, essential medicines, and tents for health workers."

China said it has sent more than 135 rescue personnel and experts along with supplies like medical kits and generators and pledged around \$13.8 million in emergency aid. Russia's Emergency Ministry said it had flown in 120 rescuers and supplies to Yangon, and the country's Health Ministry said Moscow had sent a medical team to Myanmar.

Teams from Singapore have been working already in Naypitaw. Malaysia dispatched a team of 50 personnel on Sunday with trucks, search and rescue equipment and medical supplies. Thailand said 55 of its soldiers arrived in Yangon on Sunday to help with search and rescue operations, while Britain announced a \$13 million aid package to help its locally-funded partners already in Myanmar respond to the crisis.

17 people reported dead in Thailand

In neighboring Thailand, the quake rocked much of the country, bringing down a high-rise building under construction in Bangkok, some 1,300 kilometers (800 miles) away from the epicenter.

So far, 10 people have been found dead at the construction site near the popular Chatuchak market, where 83 people are unaccounted for and the latest body was recovered from the rubble early Sunday morning. A total of 17 people have been reported killed by the quake in Thailand so far.

Rescue efforts in Myanmar complicated by civil war

In Myanmar, which is also known as Burma, rescue efforts so far are focused on Mandalay and Naypitaw, which are thought to have been the hardest hit, but many other areas were also impacted and little is known so far about the damage there.

"We're hearing reports of hundreds of people trapped in different areas," said Bragg. "Right now we're at 1,600 (known fatalities) and we don't have a lot of data coming out but you've got to assume it will be increasing in the thousands based on what the impacts are. This is just anecdotal information at this point."

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 45 of 83

Beyond the earthquake damage, rescue efforts are complicated by the bloody civil war roiling much of the country, including in quake-affected areas. In 2001, the military seized power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi, sparking what has since turned into significant armed resistance.

Government forces have lost control of much of Myanmar, and many places are dangerous or impossible for aid groups to reach. More than 3 million people have been displaced by the fighting and nearly 20 million are in need, according to the United Nations.

The government military has been fighting long-established militias and newly formed pro-democracy People's Defense Forces, and has heavily restricted much-needed aid efforts to the large population already displaced by war even before the earthquake.

Military attacks continued with airstrikes on Friday and reports of mortar and drone attacks on Saturday. Tom Andrews, a monitor on rights in Myanmar commissioned by the U.N.-backed Human Rights Council, called for the military to immediately call a ceasefire.

"Aid workers should not have to fear arrest and there should be no obstructions to aid getting to where it is most needed," he said on X. "Every minute counts."

Gaza's bakeries could shut down within a week under Israel's blockade of all food and supplies

By WAFAA SHURAF, SAMY MAGDY, SARAH EL DEEB and LEE KEATH Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Gaza's bakeries will run out of flour for bread within a week, the U.N. says. Agencies have cut food distributions to families in half. Markets are empty of most vegetables. Many aid workers cannot move around because of Israeli bombardment.

For four weeks, Israel has shut off all sources of food, fuel, medicine and other supplies for the Gaza Strip's population of more than 2 million Palestinians. It's the longest blockade yet of Israel's 17-month-old campaign against Hamas, with no sign of it ending. Many are going hungry during the normally festive Eid al-Fitr, a major Muslim holiday.

Aid workers are stretching out the supplies they have but warn of a catastrophic surge in severe hunger and malnutrition. Eventually, food will run out completely if the flow of aid is not restored, because the war has destroyed almost all local food production in Gaza.

"We depend entirely on this aid box," said Shorouq Shamlakh, a mother of three collecting her family's monthly box of food from a U.N. distribution center in Jabaliya in northern Gaza. She and her children reduce their meals to make it last a month, she said. "If this closes, who else will provide us with food?"

The World Food Program said Thursday that its flour for bakeries is only enough to keep producing bread for 800,000 people a day until Tuesday and that its overall food supplies will last a maximum of two weeks. As a "last resort" once all other food is exhausted, it has emergency stocks of fortified nutritional biscuits for 415,000 people.

Fuel and medicine will last weeks longer before hitting zero. Hospitals are rationing antibiotics and painkillers. Aid groups are shifting limited fuel supplies between multiple needs, all indispensable — trucks to move aid, bakeries to make bread, wells and desalination plants to produce water, hospitals to keep machines running.

"We have to make impossible choices. Everything is needed," said Clémence Lagouardat, the Gaza response leader for Oxfam International, speaking from Deir al-Balah in central Gaza at a briefing Wednesday. "It's extremely hard to prioritize."

Compounding the problems, Israel resumed its military campaign on March 18 with bombardment that has killed hundreds of Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to health officials. It has hit humanitarian facilities, the U.N. says. New evacuation orders have forced more than 140,000 Palestinians to move yet again.

But Israel has not resumed the system for aid groups to notify the military of their movements to ensure they were not hit by bombardment, multiple aid workers said. As a result, various groups have stopped water deliveries, nutrition for malnourished children and other programs because it's not safe for teams

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 46 of 83

to move.

COGAT, the Israeli military body in charge of coordinating aid, said the system was halted during the ceasefire. Now it is implemented in some areas "in accordance with policy and operational assessments ... based on the situation on the ground," COGAT said, without elaborating.

Rising prices leave food unaffordable

During the 42 days of ceasefire that began in mid-January, aid groups rushed in significant amounts of aid. Food also streamed into commercial markets.

But nothing has entered Gaza since Israel cut off that flow on March 2. Israel says the siege and renewed military campaign aim to force Hamas to accept changes in their agreed-on ceasefire deal and release more hostages.

Fresh produce is now rare in Gaza's markets. Meat, chicken, potatoes, yogurt, eggs and fruits are completely gone, Palestinians say.

Prices for everything else have skyrocketed out of reach for many Palestinians. A kilo (2 pounds) of onions can cost the equivalent of \$14, a kilo of tomatoes goes for \$6, if they can be found. Cooking gas prices have spiraled as much as 30-fold, so families are back to scrounging for wood to make fires.

"It's totally insane," said Abeer al-Aker, a teacher and mother of three in Gaza City. "No food, no services. ... I believe that the famine has started again."

Families depend even more on aid

At the distribution center in Jabaliya, Rema Megat sorted through the food ration box for her family of 10: rice, lentils, a few cans of sardines, a half kilo of sugar, two packets of powdered milk.

"It's not enough to last a month," she said. "This kilo of rice will be used up in one go."

The U.N. has cut its distribution of food rations in half to redirect more supplies to bakeries and free kitchens producing prepared meals, said Olga Cherevko, spokesperson for the U.N. humanitarian agency, known as OCHA.

The number of prepared meals has grown 25% to 940,000 meals a day, she said, and bakeries are churning out more bread. But that burns through supplies faster.

Once flour runs out soon, "there will be no bread production happening in a large part of Gaza," said Gavin Kelleher, with the Norwegian Refugee Council.

UNRWA, the main U.N. agency for Palestinians, only has a few thousand food parcels left and enough flour for a few days, said Sam Rose, the agency's acting director in Gaza.

Gaza Soup Kitchen, one of the main public kitchens, can't get any meat or much produce, so they serve rice with canned vegetables, co-founder Hani Almadhoun said.

"There are a lot more people showing up, and they're more desperate. So people are fighting for food," he said.

Israel shows no sign of lifting the siege

The United States pressured Israel to let aid into Gaza at the beginning of the war in October 2023, after Israel imposed a blockade of about two weeks. This time, it has supported Israel's policy.

Rights groups have called it a "starvation policy" that could be a war crime.

Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar told a news conference Monday that "Israel is acting in accordance with international law."

He accused Hamas of stealing aid and said Israel is not required to let in supplies if it will be diverted to combatants.

He gave no indication of whether the siege could be lifted but said Gaza had enough supplies, pointing to the aid that flowed in during the ceasefire.

Hunger and hopelessness are growing

Because its teams can't coordinate movements with the military, Save the Children suspended programs providing nutrition to malnourished children, said Rachael Cummings, the group's humanitarian response leader in Gaza.

"We are expecting an increase in the rate of malnutrition," she said. "Not only children — adolescent

girls, pregnant women.”

During the ceasefire, Save the Children was able to bring some 4,000 malnourished infants and children back to normal weight, said Alexandra Saif, the group’s head of humanitarian policy.

About 300 malnourished patients a day were coming into its clinic in Deir al-Balah, she said. The numbers have plunged — to zero on some days — because patients are too afraid of bombardment, she said.

The multiple crises are intertwined. Malnutrition leaves kids vulnerable to pneumonia, diarrhea and other diseases. Lack of clean water and crowded conditions only spread more illnesses. Hospitals overwhelmed with the wounded can’t use their limited supplies on other patients.

Aid workers say not only Palestinians, but their own staff have begun to fall into despair.

“The world has lost its compass,” UNRWA’s Rose said. “There’s just a feeling here that anything could happen, and it still wouldn’t be enough for the world to say, this is enough.”

Medical supplies in great need as international assistance flows into Myanmar after earthquake

By BRIAN P. D. HANNON Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Emergency aid has streamed into Southeast Asia in the two days since a massive earthquake struck Myanmar and Thailand. Relief efforts are focused on Myanmar, where the estimated death toll rose to 1,644 by Sunday afternoon.

The number of dead from Friday’s 7.7 magnitude quake is expected to increase, while the number of injured was at 3,408 and the missing figure rose was 139 on Sunday. The earthquake’s epicenter was near Mandalay, Myanmar’s second-largest city with 1.5 million people. In neighboring Thailand, the death toll rose to 17.

While food, medicine and other vital supplies have reached Myanmar, a report issued Saturday by the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said rescue efforts have been hampered by a severe shortage of medical supplies including trauma kits, blood bags, anesthetics, assistive devices, essential medicine and tents to house health workers.

“We fear it may be weeks before we understand the full extent of destruction caused by this earthquake,” said Mohammed Riyas, the IRC’s Myanmar director.

Here is a look at some of the contributions in supplies, personnel and monetary support and the nations and groups providing assistance:

Direct assistance by nations

On Sunday, a convoy of 17 Chinese cargo trucks carrying critical shelter and medical supplies was expected to reach Mandalay. China said it has sent more than 135 rescue personnel and experts along with supplies like medical kits, generators, earthquake detectors and drones while pledging around \$13.8 million in emergency aid.

Hong Kong on Saturday dispatched 51 search-and-rescue personnel including firefighters and ambulance personnel as well as two search-and-rescue dogs. The group brought 9 tons (18,000 pounds) of equipment including life detectors and an automatic satellite tracking antenna system, according to a statement on the Hong Kong government’s website. The Hong Kong government also will set aside HK\$30 million (\$3.9 million) from its Disaster Relief Fund to help Myanmar victims.

Russia’s Emergencies Ministry said it had flown in 120 rescuers and supplies to Yangon, Myanmar’s second-largest city, and Russia’s Health Ministry said Moscow had sent a medical team that includes specialists in infectious diseases, resuscitation, traumatology and psychology, as well as search and rescue teams with canine units and devices that can search in rubble with depths as much as 4.5 meters (14.7 feet).

Two Indian C-17 military transport aircraft on Saturday brought in a field hospital unit and some 120 personnel who traveled north to Mandalay to establish a 60-bed emergency treatment center, the country’s Foreign Ministry said. India previously said it planned to send five aircrafts and four ships with relief supplies including rescue team and medical teams.

Malaysia’s foreign ministry said the country would send 50 personnel to help identify and provide aid to

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 48 of 83

the worst-hit areas.

South Korea said it will provide \$2 million in humanitarian aid through international organizations.

New Zealand's Foreign Minister Winston Peters said in a post on X that his government would support relief efforts "via the International Red Cross Movement."

The European Commission said Friday it would release 2.5 million euros (\$2.7 million) in initial emergency assistance to assist with earthquake relief, bringing the European Union's total humanitarian aid for Myanmar to more than €35 million (\$37.8 million) this year.

Ireland announced Saturday the government would provide an aid package of €6 million (\$6.49 million) with €3 million (\$3.2 million) to support the International Federation of the Red Cross and the Myanmar Red Cross Society, €1.5 million (\$1.6 million) each to the Myanmar Humanitarian Fund and U.N. Refugee Agency Joint Response Plan.

President Donald Trump said Friday the U.S. would help with the response, but some experts were concerned about the promised effort given his administration's deep cuts in foreign assistance.

Aid agencies contributing

The U.N. humanitarian affairs office said it has mobilized with other groups and \$5 million has been allocated from a Central Emergency Response Fund for "life-saving assistance."

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies released 2 million Swiss francs (\$2.2 million) in emergency funds to support the organization's work in Myanmar, Jagan Chapagain, the organization's secretary general and CEO, said in a social media post Sunday.

Cara Bragg, the Yangon-based manager of Catholic Relief Services in Myanmar, said relief efforts have largely consisted of local volunteers trying to find loved ones.

Despite the influx of countries sending search and rescue teams, "hospitals are really struggling to cope with the influx of injured people, there's a shortage of medical supplies, and people are struggling to find food and clean water," Bragg said.

Pope's willingness to show his frailty provides an example to young and old alike

By COLLEEN BARRY Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis' frailty was on full view as he left Rome's Gemelli hospital last Sunday after five weeks battling pneumonia that nearly killed him. He could barely lift his arms to bless the crowd. His eyes were sunken, face bloated. And he visibly gasped for breath as he was wheeled back inside from the balcony.

Throughout history, the powerful have concealed their weaknesses. Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany, the most photographed figure of his era, took pains to hide his lame arm. Franklin Delano Roosevelt concealed the use of a wheelchair. More recently, former President Biden shook off concerns about his cognitive abilities.

By contrast, Francis, a spiritual and not political leader, has never been shy about showing his weakness. For many, his willingness to be seen in all his infirmity serves as an example to young and old alike that fragility is part of the human condition — and should be embraced.

"Who cares if he had sunken eyes, who cares if he looks bloated. It is part of his life story. He knows it is going to end. I saw him as living his life. He wants to keep doing what he does best," said S. Jay Olshansky, a gerontologist at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Francis' frailty is integral to his ministry of inclusion, which preaches against treating people on the margins as disposable, said Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, president of the Pontifical Council for Life.

"Fragility for us believers is not to be avoided or excluded. On the contrary it is a great teaching," Paglia said in an interview. "It is in sharp contrast with an efficiency-oriented culture, with a performance culture."

"This is not a state, or a company, it is a community of the faithful, a family. And in a family it is possible to give an authoritative leadership, also if not up to full physical strength," Paglia said. He added that it was an important lesson also for young people "who should understand that they too are fragile,

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 49 of 83

otherwise they close themselves off.”

Paglia this week opened a longevity summit at the Vatican, during which he underlined that as the population of elderly grows, there must be an attitude shift so that the longer life span is to be lived to its fullest.

“We need to rethink the idea of retirement. These 20, 30 years more must have also a cultural, human and spiritual weight for all the other ages. They are not disposable,” he said.

Dr. Francesco Vaia, an advocate of rights for the disabled, also said the pope’s message is especially crucial in an aging world.

“The theme is not only to get older, but to be active, that is to give more quality to our longer lives,” he said. “We are moving towards an inclusive society,” which is in contrast with a “throw-away world in which the weak, the disabled, the elderly are pushed aside.”

“Let’s overcome the superman and superwoman theory. We are men and women with our fragility, and disabilities,” Vaia said. “This pope can continue being pope.

Even the fact of seeing Francis with the nasal breathing tubes as he was driven to the Vatican normalizes a fact of life for many elderly who live with oxygen tanks. “We should not be ashamed of this,” Vaia said.

Pope John Paul II, too, was often praised for showing his suffering during his long bout with Parkinson’s disease. But the Vatican also went to great lengths to conceal his frailty. He was never seen in a wheelchair, for example, instead he was pushed on a rolling wooden chair or upon a moving platform.

Francis by contrast arrives at events in wheelchairs, and is seen lifted into a more formal seat for Masses or to address the faithful.

He did not shy away from showing his weakened state from the hospital. An audio recording of his barely audible, labored voice was played in St. Peter’s Square three weeks into his hospitalization as a first sign of life. It was followed by a photograph of him co-celebrating Mass, taken from behind in his personal hospital chapel.

While Francis’ appearance on the hospital balcony did not necessarily project vitality, the doctor who coordinated his hospital treatment saw it as a sign of his strength.

“You saw when he looked out, he is fragile. But his strength is that he could give, even with some difficulty, the blessing,” Dr. Sergio Alfieri said. “He looked at the square, and he welcomed the lady with the yellow flowers, as if to say, ‘I am maintaining a good mood.’ He is strong in this sense, a strong spirit.”

At least half of US states now outlaw devices that convert pistols into machine guns

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

In New Mexico, police and prosecutors backed an effort to outlaw devices that convert pistols into machine guns. In Alabama, the governor made it a priority.

Lawmakers in both states — one led by Democrats, the other by Republicans — responded this year with new laws making so-called Glock switches illegal.

At least half of U.S. states now have similar laws prohibiting the possession of such devices, a list that has grown over the past decade as law enforcement officers have found more of the tiny yet powerful devices attached to guns.

States are mimicking federal law, which for decades has generally prohibited machine guns and any parts that can transform semiautomatic weapons into automatic ones.

What does federal law say?

U.S. law defines a machine gun as a weapon that automatically fires more than one shot with a single pull of a trigger. The definition also includes any parts designed to convert a weapon into a machine gun.

Federal law prohibits possessing machine guns made after 1986, with some exceptions for law enforcement, the military and certain licensed dealers. Nearly all conversion devices are illegal because they were made more recently.

People convicted of possessing machine guns and conversion devices can face up to 10 years in prison.

What is a Glock switch?

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 50 of 83

A Glock switch is one type of a machine gun conversion device. It's a metal or plastic piece, about the size of a coin, that attaches to the back of Glock pistol, a brand that is popular with both police and criminals. The switch interferes with a gun's internal trigger components so that it fires continuously when the trigger is pulled back and held.

A gun outfitted with a switch can fire dozens of bullets in mere seconds, similar to a factory-made machine gun.

Other brands of pistols that mimic Glocks also can be converted to machine guns. So can some semi-automatic rifles. Such conversion devices also are referred to as auto sears, selector switches or chips.

What does the data indicate?

The use of auto sears spiked in the past decade, partly because they can be made inexpensively with 3D printers.

From 2012 to 2016, just 814 machine gun conversion parts were taken into custody by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. That swelled to 5,454 from 2017-2021.

In January, former President Joe Biden's administration said 12,360 suspected machine gun conversion devices had been recovered in the U.S. and submitted to the ATF during a roughly 34-month period ending in October 2024.

Five states including Florida, Illinois, Texas, Montana and North Dakota accounted for nearly half that total.

What have states been doing?

Alabama is the latest state to outlaw Glock switches. A law signed this month by Republican Gov. Kay Ivey makes possessing parts designed to convert pistols into machine guns a felony punishable by up to 10 years in prison.

The bipartisan push in Alabama came after police said they believed conversion devices had been used in fatal shootings, including one in September that killed four and injured 17 people outside a Birmingham lounge.

Democratic New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham signed a law in February making possession of a weapon conversion device a felony punishable by up to three years in prison.

Similar legislation passed the New Jersey General Assembly last week and now heads to the Senate. Bills also are pending in other states.

Republican Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin signed a law last year making auto sears illegal. But Youngkin vetoed legislation this past week that would have broadened an existing ban on "trigger activators" to cover additional devices that increase firing rates of semiautomatic weapons.

What do gun control advocates want?

Groups such as Everytown for Gun Safety say state laws provide a sometimes easier alternative to federal prosecution for possessing Glock switches. But they want to go further.

Everytown for Gun Safety is backing legislation in California, Maryland and New York that would make it illegal to sell pistols that could be transformed into machine guns.

"That really puts the pressure where it belongs — on the manufactures that are making money off of guns that they know can be readily turned into machine guns," said Nick Suplina, senior vice president for law and policy at Everytown for Gun Safety.

Several cities and states including Baltimore, Chicago, Minnesota and New Jersey have sued Glock for making pistols that can be converted by others to automatic weapons.

What do gun-rights groups say?

The National Rifle Association notes U.S. attorneys already can prosecute people for misusing gun conversion devices without the need for state laws.

Gun Owners of America, another gun-rights group, contends people should have a Second Amendment right to own machine guns. State laws against machine gun conversation devices are "duplicative" and "pure virtue signaling," said Aidan Johnston, federal affairs director for Gun Owners of America.

He said guns converted to fire automatically can have practical uses like eliminating large groups of feral hogs that are destroying land.

"Just because you put that on your firearm doesn't mean that you are a violent criminal or that you necessarily are a dangerous person," Johnston said.

Transgender people are about 1% of the US population. Yet they're a political lightning rod

By GEOFF MULVIHILL and JESSE BEDAYN Associated Press

On the campaign trail, Donald Trump used contentiousness around transgender people's access to sports and bathrooms to fire up conservative voters and sway undecideds. And in his first months back in office, Trump has pushed the issue further, erasing mention of transgender people on government websites and passports and trying to remove them from the military.

It's a contradiction of numbers that reveals a deep cultural divide: Transgender people make up less than 1% of the U.S. population, but they have become a major piece on the political chess board — particularly Trump's.

For transgender people and their allies — along with several judges who have ruled against Trump in response to legal challenges — it's a matter of civil rights for a small group. But many Americans believe those rights had grown too expansive.

The president's spotlight is giving Monday's Transgender Day of Visibility a different tenor this year.

"What he wants is to scare us into being invisible again," said Rachel Crandall Crocker, the executive director of Transgender Michigan who organized the first Day of Visibility 16 years ago. "We have to show him we won't go back."

So why has this small population found itself with such an outsized role in American politics?

The focus on transgender people is part of a long-running campaign

Trump's actions reflect a constellation of beliefs that transgender people are dangerous, are men trying to get access to women's spaces or are pushed into gender changes that they will later regret.

The American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association and other major medical groups have said that gender-affirming treatments can be medically necessary and are supported by evidence.

Zein Murib, an associate professor of political science and women's, gender and sexuality studies at Fordham University, said there has been a decades-old effort "to reinstate Christian nationalist principles as the law of the land" that increased its focus on transgender people after a 2015 U.S. Supreme Court ruling recognizing same-sex marriage nationwide. It took a few years, but some of the positions gained traction.

One factor: Proponents of the restrictions lean into broader questions of fairness and safety, which draw more public attention.

Sports bans and bathroom laws are linked to protecting spaces for women and girls, even as studies have found transgender women are far more likely to be victims of violence. Efforts to bar schools from encouraging gender transition are connected to protecting parental rights. And bans on gender-affirming care rely partly on the idea that people might later regret it, though studies have found that to be rare.

Since 2020, about half the states passed laws barring transgender people from sports competitions aligning with their gender and have banned or restricted gender-affirming medical care for minors. At least 14 have adopted laws restricting which bathrooms transgender people can use in certain buildings.

In February, Iowa became the first state to remove protections for transgender people from civil rights law.

It's not just political gamesmanship. "I think that whether or not that's a politically viable strategy is second to the immediate impact that that is going to have on trans people," Fordham's Murib said.

Many voters think transgender rights have gone too far

More than half of voters in the 2024 election — 55% — said support for transgender rights in the United States has gone too far, according to AP VoteCast. About 2 in 10 said the level of support has been about right, and a similar share said support hasn't gone far enough.

Nevertheless, AP VoteCast also found voters were split on laws banning gender-affirming medical treatment, such as puberty blockers or hormone therapy, for minors. Just over half were opposed to these laws, while just under half were in favor.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 52 of 83

Trump voters were overwhelmingly likely to say support for transgender rights has gone too far, while Kamala Harris' voters were more divided. About 4 in 10 Harris voters said support for transgender rights has not gone far enough, while 36% said it's been about right and about one-quarter said it's gone too far.

A survey this year from the Pew Research Center found Americans, including Democrats, have become more slightly more supportive of requiring transgender athletes to compete on teams that match their sex at birth and more supportive on bans on gender-affirming medical care for transgender minors since 2022. Most Democrats still oppose those kinds of measures, though.

Leor Sapir, a fellow at Manhattan Institute, a right-leaning think tank, says Trump's and Republicans' positions have given them a political edge.

"They are putting their opponents, their Democratic opponents, in a very unfavorable position by having to decide between catering to their progressive, activist base or their median voter," he said.

Not everyone agrees.

"People across the political spectrum agree that in fact, the major crises and major problems facing the United States right now is not the existence and civic participation of trans people," said Olivia Hunt, director of federal policy for Advocates for Trans Equality.

And in the same election that saw Trump return to the presidency, Delaware voters elected Sarah McBride, the first transgender member of Congress.

The full political fallout remains to be seen

Paisley Currah, a political science professor at the City University of New York, said conservatives go after transgender people in part because they make up such a small portion of the population.

"Because it's so small, it's relatively unknown," said Currah, who is transgender. "And then Trump has kind of used trans to signify what's wrong with the left. You know: 'It's just too crazy. It's too woke.'"

But Democratic politicians also know the population is relatively small, said Seth Masket, director of the Center on American Politics at the University of Denver, who is writing a book about the GOP.

"A lot of Democrats are not particularly fired up to defend this group," Masket said, citing polling.

For Republicans, the overall support of transgender rights is evidence they are out of step with the times.

"The Democrat Party continues to find themselves on the wrong side of overwhelmingly popular issues, and it proves just how out of touch they are with Americans," National Republican Congressional Committee spokesperson Mike Marinella said.

Some of that message may be getting through. In early March, California Gov. Gavin Newsom, a potential 2028 Democratic presidential candidate, launched his new podcast by speaking out against allowing transgender women and girls competing in women's and girls sports.

And several other Democratic officials have said the party spends too much effort supporting transgender rights. Others, including U.S. Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto, have said they oppose transgender athletes in girls and women's sports.

Jay Jones, the student government president at Howard University and a transgender woman, said her peers are largely accepting of transgender people.

"The Trump administration is trying to weaponize people of the trans experience ... to help give an archenemy or a scapegoat," she said. But "I don't think that is going to be as successful as the strategy as he thinks that it will be."

Trump says military force not off the table for Greenland after Danish FM scolds his administration

By PHILIP CROWTHER, KIRSTEN GRIESHABER and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

NUUK, Greenland (AP) — The Danish foreign minister on Saturday scolded the Trump administration for its "tone" in criticizing Denmark and Greenland, saying his country is already investing more into Arctic security and remains open to more cooperation with the U.S.

Foreign Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen made the remarks in a video posted to social media after U.S.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 53 of 83

Vice President JD Vance's visit to the strategic island. Later Saturday, though, U.S. President Donald Trump maintained an aggressive tone, telling NBC News that "I never take military force off the table" in regards to acquiring Greenland.

"Many accusations and many allegations have been made. And of course we are open to criticism," Rasmussen said speaking in English. "But let me be completely honest: we do not appreciate the tone in which it is being delivered. This is not how you speak to your close allies. And I still consider Denmark and the United States to be close allies."

Greenland is a territory of Denmark, which is a NATO ally of the United States. Trump wants to annex the territory, claiming it's needed for national security purposes.

In Saturday's interview, Trump allowed that "I think there's a good possibility that we could do it without military force."

"This is world peace, this is international security," he said, but added: "I don't take anything off the table."

Trump also said "I don't care" when asked in the NBC interview what message it would send to Russian President Vladimir Putin, who is trying to solidify his hold on Ukrainian territory three years after his invasion.

Vance on Friday said Denmark has "underinvested" in Greenland's security and demanded that Denmark change its approach as Trump pushes to take over the Danish territory.

Vance visited U.S. troops on Pituffik Space Base on mineral-rich Greenland alongside his wife and other senior U.S. officials for a trip that was ultimately scaled back after an uproar among Greenlanders and Danes who were not consulted about the original itinerary.

"Our message to Denmark is very simple: You have not done a good job by the people of Greenland," Vance said Friday. "You have underinvested in the people of Greenland, and you have underinvested in the security architecture of this incredible, beautiful landmass filled with incredible people. That has to change."

Trump on Friday released a video on his social networking site Truth Social entitled "America Stands With Greenland," showing footage of U.S. troops there during World War II.

In Greenland, Vance said the U.S. has "no option" but to take a significant position to ensure the security of the island as he encouraged a push in Greenland for independence from Denmark.

"I think that they ultimately will partner with the United States," Vance said. "We could make them much more secure. We could do a lot more protection. And I think they'd fare a lot better economically as well."

The reaction by members of Greenland's parliament and residents has rendered that unlikely, with anger erupting over the Trump administration's attempts to annex the vast Arctic island. Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen pushed back on Vance's claim that Denmark isn't doing enough for defense in the Arctic, calling her country "a good and strong ally."

And Greenlandic lawmakers on Thursday agreed to form a new government, banding together to resist Trump's overtures. Four of the five parties elected to Greenland's parliament earlier this month have agreed to form a coalition that will have 23 of 31 seats in the legislature.

The following day, Danish King Frederik X posted on Facebook: "We live in an altered reality. There should be no doubt that my love for Greenland and my connectedness to the people of Greenland are intact."

Hundreds of protesters demonstrated Saturday outside the U.S. Embassy in the Danish capital Copenhagen with some lifting signs saying, "back off, USA" Danish broadcaster TV2 reported.

Even Greenland's national dogsled race - Avannaata Qimussersu - which kicked off Saturday with some 37 mushers and 444 dogs was not left unaffected. Usha Vance, the vice president's wife, who was originally scheduled to attend the race opted out when her husband decided to join the trip and visit the military base instead, reducing the likelihood that they would cross paths with Greenlanders.

Løkke Rasmussen, in his video, reminded viewers of the 1951 defense agreement between Denmark and the United States. Since 1945, the American military presence in Greenland has decreased from thousands of soldiers over 17 bases and installations on the island, he said, to the remote Pituffik Space Base in the northwest with some 200 soldiers today.

The 1951 agreement "offers ample opportunity for the United States to have a much stronger military presence in Greenland," the foreign minister said. "If that is what you wish, then let us discuss it."

Løkke Rasmussen added that Denmark has increased its own investment into Arctic defense. In January,

Denmark announced 14.6 billion Danish kroner (US\$2.1 billion) in financial commitments for Arctic security covering three new naval vessels, long-range drones and satellites.

Myanmar quake death toll rises to 1,644 as resistance movement announces partial ceasefire

By GRANT PECK and JINTAMAS SAKSORNCHAI Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — A unilateral partial ceasefire to facilitate earthquake relief efforts was announced on Saturday by Myanmar's shadow National Unity Government, which coordinates the popular struggle against the ruling military. The country's death toll from the disaster soared to 1,644.

The figure was a sharp rise compared to the 1,002 announced just hours earlier, highlighting the difficulty of confirming casualties over a widespread region and the likelihood that the numbers will continue to grow from Friday's 7.7 magnitude quake. The number of injured increased to 3,408, while the missing figure rose to 139.

The number of dead also rises in Thailand

In neighboring Thailand, the death toll rose to 17. The quake rocked the greater Bangkok area, home to around 17 million people, and other parts of the country. Many places in the north reported damage, but the only casualties were reported in Bangkok.

Of the death toll, 10 were killed in the high rise building near famous Chatuchak market that collapsed, while the rest were killed in seven other sites. Authorities in Bangkok said 83 people were unaccounted for.

On Saturday, more heavy equipment was brought in to move the tons of rubble, but hope was fading among friends and relatives.

"I was praying that that they had survived, but when I got here and saw the ruin — where could they be? said 45-year-old Naruemol Thonglek, sobbing as she awaited news about her partner, who is from Myanmar, and five friends who worked at the site.

Aid efforts in Myanmar hindered by damage to airports

In Myanmar, rescue efforts so far are focused on the major stricken cities of Mandalay, the country's No. 2 city, and Naypyitaw, the capital.

But even though teams and equipment have been flown in from other nations, they are hindered by damage to airports. Satellite photos from Planet Labs PBC analyzed by The Associated Press show that the earthquake toppled the air traffic control tower at Naypyitaw International Airport as if sheered from its base.

It wasn't immediately clear if there had been any casualties from its collapse.

Myanmar's civil war also an obstacle

Another major complication is the civil war roiling much of the country, including the quake-affected areas. In 2001, the military seized power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi, sparking what has since turned into significant armed resistance.

Government forces have lost control of much of Myanmar, and many places are incredibly dangerous or simply impossible for aid groups to reach. More than 3 million people have been displaced by the fighting and nearly 20 million are in need, according to the United Nations.

The interplay of politics and disaster was demonstrated Saturday night, when Myanmar's shadow National Unity Government announced a unilateral partial ceasefire to facilitate earthquake relief efforts.

It said its armed wing, the People's Defense Force, will implement a two-week pause in offensive military operations starting Sunday in earthquake-affected areas and it would also collaborate with the U.N. and international nongovernmental organizations "to ensure security, transportation, and the establishment of temporary rescue and medical camps," in the areas it controls.

The resistance organization said it reserved the right to fight back in defense if attacked.

Extensive damage in cities

The earthquake struck midday Friday with an epicenter not far from Mandalay, followed by several af-

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 55 of 83

tershocks, including one measuring 6.4. It sent buildings in many areas toppling to the ground, buckled roads and caused bridges to collapse.

In Naypyitaw, crews worked Saturday to repair damaged roads, while electricity, phone and internet services remained down for most of the city. The earthquake brought down many buildings, including multiple units that housed government civil servants, but that section of the city was blocked off by authorities on Saturday.

An initial report on earthquake relief efforts issued Saturday by the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said that it's allocating \$5 million from a Central Emergency Response Fund for "life-saving assistance."

The immediate planned measures include a convoy of 17 cargo trucks carrying critical shelter and medical supplies from China that is expected to arrive on Sunday, it said.

It noted the severe damage or destruction of many health facilities, and warned of a "severe shortage of medical supplies is hampering response efforts, including trauma kits, blood bags, anaesthetics, assistive devices, essential medicines, and tents for health workers."

Allies bringing in rescue crews and relief materials

Myanmar's friends and neighbors have already brought in rescue personnel and relief materials. China and Russia are the largest suppliers of weapons to Myanmar's military, and were among the first to step in with humanitarian aid.

In a country where prior governments sometimes have been slow to accept foreign aid, Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, head of the military government, said that Myanmar was ready to accept outside assistance.

China said it has sent more than 135 rescue personnel and experts along with supplies like medical kits and generators, and pledged around \$13.8 million in emergency aid. Russia's Emergencies Ministry said that it had flown in 120 rescuers and supplies, and the country's Health Ministry said Moscow had sent a medical team to Myanmar.

Other countries like India, South Korea, Malaysia and Singapore are also sending help, and U.S. President Donald Trump said Friday that Washington was going to help with the response.

The ceasefire plan announced by the opposition National Unity Government also proposed to provide health care professionals loyal to its resistance movement to work with international humanitarian organizations to deliver emergency rescue and medical services in areas under the military's control, if provided with safety guarantees.

The military has heavily restricted much-needed aid efforts to the large population already displaced by war even before the earthquake. Sympathizers of the resistance have urged that relief efforts incorporate aid freely transported to areas under the control of the resistance, so it can't be weaponized by the army.

There was no immediate comment by the military to the announcement.

Military forces continued their attacks even after the quake, with three airstrikes in northern Kayin state, also called Karenni state, and southern Shan — both of which border Mandalay state, said Dave Eubank, a former U.S. Army Special Forces soldier who founded the Free Burma Rangers, a private aid organization.

Eubank told the AP that in the area he was operating in, most villages have already been destroyed by the military so the earthquake had little impact.

"People are in the jungle and I was out in the jungle when the earthquake hit — it was powerful, but the trees just moved, that was it for us, so we haven't had a direct impact other than that the Burma army keeps attacking, even after the quake," he said.

Earthquakes are rare in Bangkok, but relatively common in Myanmar. The country sits on the Sagaing Fault, a major north-south fault that separates the India plate and the Sunda plate.

Brian Baptie, a seismologist with the British Geological Survey, said that the quake caused intense ground shaking in an area where most of the population lives in buildings constructed of timber and unreinforced brick masonry.

"When you have a large earthquake in an area where there are over a million people, many of them living in vulnerable buildings, the consequences can often be disastrous," he said in a statement.

Scientists hope hungry weevils from Louisiana can tackle South Africa's invasive water plants

By MICHELLE GUMEDE Associated Press

HARTBEESPOORT, South Africa (AP) — Dozens of tiny black weevils cling onto a fern plant as it is tossed onto a leafy green mat coating the surface of South Africa's Crocodile River.

Those weevils aren't tossed into the river by accident: scientists hope that the insects and their larvae will munch their way through the green mat, which is made up of an unwanted, invasive South American aquatic plant called *Salvinia minima*.

The plant is steadily taking over freshwater bodies in the northern region of South Africa, suffocating aquatic life, including on the Crocodile River and the Hartbeespoort Dam it flows into.

The weevils, which have been used effectively elsewhere in the world to fight water weeds, are now leading South Africa's charge against the life-sucking plants threatening ecosystems in at least three northern provinces and creeping into neighboring countries.

After the weevils helped control the spread of *salvinia* in parts of the United States, scientists from both countries worked together on a project to gather a starter population in South Africa.

The 1-millimeter-long (0.03 inches) insects were brought over 8,700 miles from Louisiana. Rearing stations are being set up near several dams to grow the weevil population.

Once released at an infested site, the beetles make themselves at home on the *salvinia*, the only thing they eat, without damaging the local ecosystem, scientists say.

"They lay eggs on this plant, feed on this plant and die on this plant. If this plant dies, they will die as well," said professor Julie Coetzee, the principal scientist at the South African Institute for Aquatic Biodiversity. "They damage certain tissues, those tissues become waterlogged and then those plants sink to the bottom."

A floating menace

Hartbeespoort Dam north of Johannesburg, the location for the pilot project, is an important source of irrigation for nearby farms and a popular recreation site.

"When we bought the property there was this beautiful little floating plant on the dam and I thought well that's quite nice," said 53-year-old resident and business operator Max Moller. "Little did I realize this little floating fern was an absolute menace."

Moller, the owner of Mogi's hiking trail, said the *salvinia* have clogged up and damaged boat engines and also hurt fishing communities over the nine years that he has lived in the area.

South Africa's already vulnerable freshwater systems face a significant threat from *salvinia*, scientists say. The plants have had two major growth spurts in 2021 and 2022, surviving on the high nitrate contents in the water.

The plant initially surfaced more than a decade ago at the dam, which has also long been battling with a water hyacinth invasion, another problematic species.

"If you pull the hyacinth away, this plant is lurking," said Coetzee. The invasive plants block out the sunlight, which means no oxygen in the water, she said.

"If there is no oxygen, there's no fish, there's no crab, there's no insects and so you completely destroy or alter the aquatic ecosystem," she said.

Salvinia has a rapid growth rate and its spread has been most notable across Gauteng province, where South Africa's biggest city of Johannesburg and its capital, Pretoria, are located. The plant is compounding existing water supply problems by depleting the oxygen and sapping the supply in a country that's already struggling with increasing demand and deteriorating water infrastructure.

Concerns over the weevils' impact

While releasing the weevils will help combat *salvinia*, experts warn that there could be unintended side-effects.

Anthony Turton, a water expert and researcher at South Africa's University of the Free State, cautioned

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 57 of 83

that their introduction could turn rivers and dams into more suitable homes for bacteria and dangerous organisms.

That includes poisonous blue-green algae, known as cyanobacteria, which flourish in nutrient-rich, contaminated waterways and already affect almost 60% of the nation's dams.

"With more light and less competition for nutrients, those cyanobacteria will go into a condition known as a bloom," he said. "This is exponential population growth that radically populates the entire water column."

Turnton said simultaneous action to repair damaged sewage systems and limit agriculture fertilizer runoff are essential for a lasting solution.

"Unless there are efforts to reduce the inflow of nutrients from sewage flows, then we are only creating space for cyanobacteria to grow without competition from floating weeds," he said.

Threat of spreading to other countries

The weevils aren't the first insects to be introduced to curb an invasive threat in South Africa. The country brought in a bug in the 1930s to control the spread of a hardy cactus native to Mexico that was hurting ecosystems. That project was viewed as a success.

The speedy growth of the salvinia has put pressure on the government to act, particularly as researchers warn that neighboring countries also now face an invasion.

Coetzee said that salvinia was popping up on the confluence of the Crocodile and Limpopo rivers in the far north of South Africa.

"That now poses a huge threat to our neighbors because this plant has been transported by our rivers onto our borders," she said. "It is likely to go all the way along the Limpopo, along Botswana and Zimbabwe's borders and into Mozambique."

"We really have a responsibility to control this plant," she added.

Protests against Elon Musk's purge of US government swarm Tesla showrooms

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Business Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Protesters against billionaire Elon Musk's purge of the U.S. government under President Donald Trump demonstrated outside Tesla dealerships throughout the U.S. and in some cities in Europe on Saturday in the latest attempt to dent the fortune of the world's richest man.

The protesters were trying to escalate a movement targeting Tesla dealerships and vehicles in opposition to Musk's role as the head of the newly created Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, where he has gained access to sensitive data and shuttered entire agencies as he attempts to slash government spending. The biggest portion of Musk's estimated \$340 billion fortune consists of his stock in the electric vehicle company, which continues to run while also working alongside Trump.

After earlier demonstrations that were somewhat sporadic, Saturday marked the first attempt to surround all 277 of the automaker's showrooms and service centers in the U.S. in hopes of deepening a recent decline in the company's sales.

By early afternoon crowds ranging from a few dozen to hundreds of protesters had flocked to Tesla locations in New Jersey, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, Maryland, Minnesota and the automaker's home state of Texas. Pictures posted on social media showed protesters brandishing signs such as "Honk if you hate Elon" and "Fight the billionaire broligarchy."

As the day progressed, the protests cascaded around the country outside Tesla locations in major cities such as Washington, Chicago, Indianapolis, Cincinnati and Seattle, as well as towns in Virginia, Pennsylvania and Colorado. Smaller groups of counterprotesters also showed up at some sites.

"Hey, hey, ho, ho, Elon Musk has got to go!" several dozen people chanted outside a showroom in Dublin, California, about 35 miles (60 miles) east of San Francisco, while a smaller cluster of Trump supporters waved American flags across the street.

A much larger crowd circled another showroom in nearby Berkeley, chanting slogans to the beat of drums.

"We're living in a fascist state," said Dennis Fagaly, a retired high school teacher from neighboring

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 58 of 83

Oakland, "and we need to stop this or we'll lose our whole country and everything that is good about the United States."

Anti-Musk sentiment extends beyond the U.S.

The Tesla Takedown movement also hoped to rally protesters at more than 230 locations in other parts of the world. Although the turnouts in Europe were not as large, the anti-Musk sentiment was similar.

About two dozen people held signs lambasting the billionaire outside a dealership in London as passing cars and trucks tooted horns in support.

One sign displayed depicted Musk next to an image of Adolf Hitler making the Nazi salute — a gesture that Musk has been accused of reprising shortly after Trump's Jan. 20 inauguration. A person in a Tyrannosaurus rex costume held another sign with a picture of Musk's straight-arm gesture that said, "You thought the Nazis were extinct. Don't buy a Swastika."

"We just want to get loud, make noise, make people aware of the problems that we're facing," said Cam Whitten, an American who showed up at the London protest.

Tesla Takedown was organized by a group of supporters that included disillusioned owners of the automaker's vehicles, celebrities such as actor John Cusack, and at least one Democratic Party lawmaker, Rep. Jasmine Crockett from Dallas.

"I'm going to keep screaming in the halls of Congress. I just need you all to make sure you all keep screaming in the streets," Crockett said during an organizing call this month.

Another Democratic lawmaker, Rep. Pramila Jaypal, showed up at a protest in Seattle, which she represents in Congress.

Musk backlash has included some vandalism

Some people have gone beyond protest, setting Tesla vehicles on fire or committing other acts of vandalism that U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi has decried as domestic terrorism. In a March 20 company meeting, Musk indicated that he was dumbfounded by the attacks and said the vandals should "stop acting psycho."

Crockett and other Tesla Takedown supporters have been stressing the importance of Saturday's protests remaining peaceful.

But police were investigating a fire that destroyed seven Teslas in northwestern Germany in the early morning. It was not immediately clear if the blaze, which was extinguished by firefighters, was related to the protests.

In Watertown, Massachusetts, local police reported that the side mirror of a black pickup struck two people at a protest outside a Tesla service center, according to the Boston Herald. The suspect was promptly identified by police at the scene, who said there were no serious injuries.

Musk maintains that the company's future remains bright

A growing number of consumers who bought Tesla vehicles before Musk took over DOGE have been looking to sell or trade them in, while others have slapped on bumper stickers seeking to distance themselves from him.

But Musk did not appear concerned about an extended slump in new sales in the March meeting, during which he reassured the workers that the company's Model Y would remain "the best-selling car on Earth again this year." He also predicted that Tesla will have sold more than 10 million cars worldwide by next year, up from about 7 million currently.

"There are times when there are rocky moments, where there is stormy weather, but what I am here to tell you is that the future is incredibly bright and exciting," Musk said.

After Trump was elected last November, investors initially saw Musk's alliance with the president as a positive development for Tesla and its long-running efforts to launch a network of self-driving cars.

That optimism helped lift Tesla's stock by 70% between the election and Trump's Jan. 20 inauguration, creating an additional \$560 billion in shareholder wealth. But virtually all those gains have evaporated amid investor worries about the backlash, lagging sales in the U.S., Europe and China, and Musk spending time overseeing DOGE.

"This continues to be a moment of truth for Musk to navigate this brand tornado crisis moment and get onto the other side of this dark chapter for Tesla," Wedbush Securities analyst Dan Ives said in a recent research note.

American woman held in Afghanistan by the Taliban has been released, AP source says

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — An American woman detained for weeks in Afghanistan by the Taliban has been released from custody, according to a person familiar with the matter and a social media post Saturday from a longtime U.S. diplomat.

Faye Dail Hall, who was detained in February on charges of using a drone without authorization, was released as part of a deal that Qatari negotiators helped broker, said the person, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the negotiations.

The person said that Hall was taken to the Qatari Embassy in Kabul, the Afghan capital, and was in good health, and that arrangements were being made for her to return to the U.S.

In a post on X, a former U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, confirmed Hall's release with a photograph of her and said she would "soon be on her way home." He posted that she was "now in the care of our friends, the Qataris in Kabul, and will soon be on her way home."

Few details about Hall's case or the release were immediately available Saturday, including why she was in Afghanistan or how long or the circumstances of her detention. The State Department did not immediately comment.

Hall is believed to be the fourth American released from Afghanistan since January.

Earlier this month, George Glezmman, an airline mechanic from Atlanta, was freed after more than two years in custody. That release follows a separate deal, executed on the final day of the Biden administration and also mediated by the Qataris, that secured the releases of Ryan Corbett and William McKenty.

Officials in Kabul said recently that the U.S. had lifted bounties on three senior Taliban figures, including the interior minister, who also heads a powerful network blamed for attacks against Afghanistan's former Western-backed government.

A Foreign Ministry official, Zakir Jalaly, has said the Taliban's release of Glezmman and the removal of bounties showed both sides were "moving beyond the effects of the wartime phase and taking constructive steps to pave the way for progress" in bilateral relations.

Plastics are seeping into farm fields, food and eventually human bodies. Can they be stopped?

By MELINA WALLING and RODNEY MUHUMUZA Associated Press

KAMPALA, Uganda (AP) — In Uganda's Mbale district, famous for its production of arabica coffee, a plague of plastic bags locally known as buveera is creeping beyond the city.

It's a problem that has long littered the landscape in Kampala, the capital, where buveera are woven into the fabric of daily life. They show up in layers of excavated dirt roads and clog waterways. But now, they can be found in remote areas of farmland, too. Some of the debris includes the thick plastic bags used for planting coffee seeds in nurseries.

Some farmers are complaining, said Wilson Watira, head of a cultural board for the coffee-growing Bama-saba people. "They are concerned — those farmers who know the effects of buveera on the land," he said.

Around the world, plastics find their way into farm fields. Climate change makes agricultural plastic, already a necessity for many crops, even more unavoidable for some farmers. Meanwhile, research continues to show that itty-bitty microplastics alter ecosystems and end up in human bodies. Scientists, farmers and consumers all worry about how that's affecting human health, and many seek solutions. But industry experts say it's difficult to know where plastic ends up or get rid of it completely, even with the

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 60 of 83

best intentions of reuse and recycling programs.

According to a 2021 report on plastics in agriculture by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, soils are one of the main receptors of agricultural plastics. Some studies have estimated that soils are more polluted by microplastics than the oceans.

"These things are being released at such a huge, huge scale that it's going to require major engineering solutions," said Sarah Zack, an Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant Great Lakes Contaminant Specialist who communicates about microplastics to the public.

Why researchers want to study plastics in farm fields

Micro-particles of plastic that come from items like clothes, medications and beauty products sometimes appear in fertilizer made from the solid byproducts of wastewater treatment — called biosolids — which can also be smelly and toxic to nearby residents depending on the treatment process used. Some seeds are coated in plastic polymers designed to strategically disintegrate at the right time of the season, used in containers to hold pesticides or stretched over fields to lock in moisture.

But the agriculture industry itself only accounts for a little over 3% of all plastics used globally. About 40% of all plastics are used in packaging, including single-use plastic food and beverage containers.

Microplastics, which the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration defines as being smaller than five millimeters long, are their largest at about the size of a pencil eraser. Some are much smaller.

Studies have already shown that microplastics can be taken up by plants on land or plankton in the ocean and subsequently eaten by animals or humans. Scientists are still studying the long-term effects of the plastic that's been found in human organs. Early findings suggest possible links to a host of health conditions including heart disease and some cancers.

Despite "significant research gaps," the evidence related to the land-based food chain "is certainly raising alarm," said Lev Neretin, environment lead at the FAO, which is currently working on another technical report looking deeper into the problem of microplastic pollution in soils and crops.

A study out this month in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences found that microplastics pollution can even impact plants' ability to photosynthesize, the process of turning light from the sun into energy. That doesn't "justify excessive concern" but does "underscore food security risks that necessitate scientific attention," wrote Fei Dang, one of the study's authors.

Climate change making matters worse

The use of plastics has quadrupled over the past 30 years. Plastic is ubiquitous. And most of the world's plastic goes to landfills, pollutes the environment or is burned. Less than 10% of plastics are recycled.

At the same time, some farmers are becoming more reliant on plastics to shelter crops from the effects of extreme weather. They're using tarps, hoop houses and other technology to try to control conditions for their crops. And they're depending more on chemicals like pesticides and fertilizers to buffer against unreliable weather and more pervasive pest issues.

"Through global warming, we have less and less arable land to make crops on. But we need more crops. So therefore the demand on agricultural chemicals is increasing," said Ole Rosgaard, president and CEO of Greif, a company that makes packaging used for industrial agriculture products like pesticides and other chemicals.

Extreme weather, fueled by climate change, also contributes to the breakdown and transport of agricultural plastics. Beating sun can wear on materials over time. And more frequent and intense rainfall events in some areas could drive more plastic particles running into fields and eventually waterways, said Maryam Salehi, an associate professor of civil and environmental engineering at the University of Missouri.

Can agriculture escape the plastic problem?

This past winter, leaders from around the world gathered in South Korea to produce the first legally binding global treaty on plastics pollution. They didn't reach an agreement, but the negotiations are scheduled to resume in August.

Neretin said the FAO produced a provisional, voluntary code of conduct on sustainable management of plastics in agriculture. But without a formal treaty in place, most countries don't have a strong incentive to follow it.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 61 of 83

"The mood is certainly not cheery, that's for sure," he said, adding global cooperation "takes time, but the problem does not disappear."

Without political will, much of the onus falls on companies.

Rosgaard, of Greif, said that his company has worked to make their products recyclable, and that farmers have incentives to return them because they can get paid in exchange. But he added it's sometimes hard to prevent people from just burning the plastic or letting it end up in fields or waterways.

"We just don't know where they end up all the time," he said.

Some want to stop the flow of plastic and microplastic waste into ecosystems. Boluwatife Olubusoye, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Mississippi, is trying to see whether biochar, remains of organic matter and plant waste burned under controlled conditions, can filter out microplastics that run from farm fields into waterways. His early experiments have shown promise.

He said he was motivated by the feeling that there was "never any timely solution in terms of plastic waste" ending up in fields in the first place, especially in developing countries.

Even for farmers who care about plastics in soils, it can be challenging for them to do anything about it. In Uganda, owners of nursery beds cannot afford proper seedling trays, so they resort to cheaply made plastic bags used to germinate seeds, said Jacob Ogola, an independent agronomist there.

Farmers hardest hit by climate change are least able to reduce the presence of cheap plastic waste in soils. That frustrates Innocent Piloya, an agroecology entrepreneur who grows coffee in rural Uganda with her company Ribbo Coffee.

"It's like little farmers fighting plastic manufacturers," she said.

Deputies won't face charges in deadly 2022 shootout on California highway, prosecutors say

By SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN Associated Press

San Bernardino County sheriff's deputies involved in a 2022 shootout along a California freeway that killed a teenage girl and her fugitive father will not face any criminal charges, state Attorney General Rob Bonta announced Friday.

Bonta released a report compiled by the California Department of Justice following an investigation that included interviews with officers, witnesses who were driving along the road that day and family members who recalled that the man and his daughter had a close relationship. The attorney general called the incident a tragic situation with a tragic outcome.

"This report was quite difficult to publish, and I sincerely hope it provides the community with the answers they've been waiting for," Bonta said in a statement. "The California Department of Justice aims to partner with law enforcement to build a just and equitable legal environment, ensuring that the rule of law is upheld, and justice is accessible to everyone."

Video and audio released by the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department showed Savannah Graziano, 15, was shot and killed as she approached deputies amid a hail of gunfire on Sept. 27, 2022. The video footage recorded by a sheriff's helicopter and witness dashboard cameras was released in 2024 in response to public records requests made by The Associated Press and other media outlets.

According to the Department of Justice review, 45-year-old Anthony Graziano drove off with his daughter after he shot and killed Tracy Martinez — his 45-year-old estranged wife — as she tried to flee from his pickup truck. Authorities said the teen was in the truck when her mother was shot, and an Amber Alert was issued.

San Bernardino County deputies spotted the truck the next day, and a 41-mile (66-kilometer) pursuit ensued on Interstate 15. As Anthony Graziano was driving, authorities said numerous rounds were fired at deputies from the rear and passenger-side windows of the vehicle. Audio from the deputies' belt recorders included the sounds of rounds hitting their patrol vehicles. One deputy sustained gunshot wounds to his arm and to fingers on both of his hands.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 62 of 83

Authorities said shots continued to be fired from Graziano's truck after he drove off the freeway and up an embankment. About 65 spent casings and four firearms were found in the truck. The investigation also determined that 21 deputies returned fire.

The report states that the vehicle came to a stop and the teen — wearing a tactical helmet and vest — got out of the front passenger door and initially crouched on the ground. She then got up and moved toward a deputy as he called out to her. She raised her right hand, and that is when other deputies opened fire, according to the report.

Anthony Graziano was found dead in the driver's seat. Autopsy results showed he died from a gunshot wound to the head and also suffered gunshot wounds to his shoulder, lower back and leg. A toxicology report showed he had methamphetamine and amphetamine as well as morphine and hydrocodone in his blood and urine.

No drugs or alcohol were found in Savannah Graziano's blood or urine. Her cause of death was listed as gunshot wounds.

Gunshot residue was present in samples taken from the hands of both the teen and her father. The report notes that gunshot residue particles can be deposited by firing a firearm, being in proximity of a discharging firearm, or by handling a firearm or ammunition.

The report states "no conclusion" can be drawn from the residue testing as to whether the teen or her father fired a firearm. But in attempting to recreate multiple shooting positions from inside the truck given the location of powder burns left by the muzzle of a rifle found in the vehicle, investigators found that the driver would not have been able to shoot the rifle and still maintain control of the gas and brake pedals.

Prosecutors noted in the report that evidence suggested that deputies believed both Graziano and his daughter — who was experienced at handling firearms and had participated in firearms training drills with her father — posed an imminent threat and that the need to use lethal force was reasonable.

Family members told authorities that Graziano had been living in his truck and that his daughter would often stay with him, sleeping in the truck next to a park. They said the teen was upset about her parents' divorce.

The report also included recommendations related to training and dash-mounted and body-worn camera policies. The attorney general's office said the sheriff's department had implemented the training recommendations following the incident.

Trump says he won't 'fire people' over Signal messages, reiterates support of national security team

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — President Donald Trump on Saturday made his clearest commitment to not fire anyone over an embarrassing accidental leak of his administration's plans for an airstrike against the Houthis in Yemen.

"I don't fire people because of fake news and because of witch hunts," Trump said in an interview with NBC News' Kristen Welker.

He also said that he had confidence in Mike Waltz, his national security adviser, and Pete Hegseth, his Pentagon chief.

Waltz inadvertently added Jeffrey Goldberg, the editor of The Atlantic magazine, to a group text using the Signal encrypted messaging service where top officials were discussing plans to attack the Houthis.

During the chat, Hegseth included details on how the strike would unfold before it took place.

Afterwards, The Atlantic published an article on the internal exchange, shocking the national security establishment.

Trump is eager to avoid repeating some of the turnover that characterized his first term. Mike Flynn, his first national security adviser, was pushed out after only a few weeks during the early phase of the Russia investigation. He's also shown resistance to bowing to outside pressure, especially if it comes from the news media.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 63 of 83

Asked if there were conversations about firing Waltz, Trump insisted, "I've never heard that. And nobody else makes that decision but me, and I've never heard it."

University of Minnesota leaders say ICE has detained a graduate student

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A University of Minnesota international student is being detained by U.S. immigration authorities, school leaders said in a statement this week.

University leadership said Immigration and Customs Enforcement detained the graduate student Thursday at an off-campus residence. They described the situation as "deeply concerning."

The student is enrolled in business school at the university's Twin Cities campus.

What prompted the student's detention is not yet known. An Associated Press email requesting comment from ICE was not immediately returned Saturday.

University officials said the school is providing the student with legal aid and other support services. University of Minnesota leaders said school officials did not share information with federal authorities and were not given advance notice about the detention.

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz in a post on the social media site X said he is in touch with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

"The University of Minnesota is an international destination for education and research," Walz wrote. "We have any number of students studying here with visas, and we need answers."

At least 1 dead after plane crashes into home in Minneapolis suburb of Brooklyn Park

BROOKLYN PARK, Minn. (AP) — At least one person in a small plane traveling from Iowa to Minnesota died after the aircraft crashed into a house in a Minneapolis suburb Saturday, a city official said.

The residents of the home were not hurt, Brooklyn Park spokesperson Risikat Adesaogun said. But the house was destroyed.

It was not yet known how many people were aboard the single-engine SOCATA TBM7, the Federal Aviation Administration said in a statement.

The agency said the aircraft departed from the Des Moines International Airport with a destination of the Anoka County-Blaine Airport, located in another Minneapolis suburb.

The National Transportation Safety Board is investigating.

A weekend ritual for Trump's Florida die-hards to get a brief glimpse of their political hero

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — The sun was shining outside President Donald Trump's West Palm Beach golf course on Saturday morning when Alan Mentser got a call letting him know that police were shutting down a road nearby. It was almost time to "show the boss a little love."

Mentser, 65, and a group of hard-core supporters have spent years gathering at the same spot to welcome Trump when he comes to play golf, and they have the routine down. They monitor flight trackers to know when Air Force One arrives and traffic cameras to see if the presidential motorcade is on the move.

It's an intense commitment of time and resources for a brief glimpse of their political hero. Mentser pointed to a gigantic banner showing Trump giving a thumbs up against an American flag backdrop. He said each one costs \$300, and he has about eight of them.

But Mentser said it's worth it at a time when supporters view Trump as a man under siege from his enemies and fabricated controversies.

"It might give him 30 seconds of seeing, 'there's my people,'" he said. "But that 30 seconds matter."

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 64 of 83

Now it was time to do it again. The cue was a siren as a police vehicle blocked the road in front of the golf club.

"Here we go!" Mentser said. When he glimpsed the motorcade in the distance, he announced, "attention on deck."

A member of the group switched the soundtrack on a portable speaker from country music to "YMCA," the Trump campaign anthem.

The convoy of black cars rolled down the street and turned into the golf club. Trump was wearing his typical red "Make America Great Again" hat and white polo shirt, and he reached across his chest to wave to the crowd with his left hand.

"President Trump! We love you!" shouted Brady Collier, 31, who wore the same hat as the president.

It was over in less than 30 seconds.

A woman with white hair pulled up shortly afterward with her windows down and a dog in the passenger seat. She waved one middle finger at the golf club and another at Trump's supporters. Someone called her a "baby killer" before she drove off.

The moment didn't dampen Collier's enthusiasm. Despite all the times that he's witnessed Trump's motorcade, he said "today was special." This time, the limo seemed to roll slower and closer to the sidewalk, giving Collier a better glimpse of the president.

"There's nothing cooler than that," he said. "Other than Jesus Christ."

Collier, 31, is from Indiana but spent the winter in Florida, where he's doing landscaping and food deliveries. It's also an opportunity to show his support for Trump as often as possible.

Jared Petry, 24, has been doing the same thing. He's from Ohio and is one of the "Front Row Joes," a group of superfans that traveled the country supporting Trump at campaign rallies. Petry was in Butler, Pennsylvania, last summer when the president was fired upon in an assassination attempt.

"I heard popping. I didn't know what was going on," he said.

Petry was near the front of the audience, and he captured video of Trump, surrounded by Secret Service agents, lurching to his feet and pumping his fist in the air.

"I knew he was OK," he said.

Now, Petry is outside the golf course every weekend.

"He never forgets his supporters," he said. "He waves at us."

The group chatted about going to a nearby restaurant where Fox News host Sean Hannity is sometimes spotted, but something different happened this time. A group of staff members from the golf club came over to invite them in for a meal.

Mentser said that had never happened before. They ate freshly made omelets and blueberry muffins and walked out to the veranda, where they could see Trump playing one of the holes on his golf course.

The group refrained from trying to get Trump's attention, Mentser said.

"You don't want to have the president post on Truth Social that 'I was lining up my putt and my supporters threw off my game,'" he joked.

The president later said on social media that he was playing in a tournament alongside Finnish President Alexander Stubb, and the two leaders talked about the possibility of the U.S. purchasing icebreaker vessels.

Inside the club, there was artwork that riffed on Trump's mugshot from a criminal case in Atlanta and an Associated Press photo of Trump after the shooting in Butler.

The whole experience, Mentser said, was "tremendous."

"It's a small way for him to say thank you, I see you," he said.

Andrew Tate's ex-girlfriend accuses him of sexual assault and battery in new lawsuit

By LEA SKENE Associated Press

Andrew Tate, a hugely successful social media influencer known for expressing misogynistic views online, is facing a new lawsuit filed by his ex-girlfriend accusing him of sexual assault and battery.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 65 of 83

It adds to existing legal trouble for Tate, who's charged with human trafficking and forming a criminal gang to sexually exploit women in Romania. His brother, Tristan Tate, is also accused in that case.

In her complaint, Tate's ex-girlfriend, Brianna Stern, argues that his abusive treatment of her follows a long pattern of making blatant misogyny part of his brand. She said he initially acted effusively loving and generous to lure her into a relationship that later turned abusive.

The lawsuit, which was filed Thursday in Los Angeles, details an encounter earlier this month at the Beverly Hills Hotel when Tate choked and beat her, according to the complaint. Stern said she was later diagnosed with post-concussion syndrome.

Tate's attorney, Joseph McBride, said his client denies all allegations of violence. McBride accused Stern and her lawyers of taking advantage of the recent controversy surrounding Tate, hoping it could win them a lucrative payout.

"This is a money grab," McBride said in a phone interview Saturday morning. "This is the weaponization of the court system against an innocent man."

The Associated Press typically does not identify people who say they are the victims of sexual abuse unless they come forward publicly with their story, as Stern has done.

The Tate brothers, who are dual U.S. and British citizens, were arrested in Romania in late 2022 and formally indicted last year. Andrew Tate was also charged with rape. They deny all the allegations against them.

Stern met Tate in July 2024 after the brothers invited her to Romania because they were looking for models to help promote their cryptocurrency meme coin, according to her lawsuit. She said he convinced her the media portrayals of him were untrue, that he was actually a supporter of women. It seemed like "a dream come true," she said in the complaint.

After she returned to the U.S., Tate's communications became threatening and manipulative, including calling her his "property," Stern alleges. He sent messages saying he wanted to beat and impregnate her: "You have an attitude because you're not hit enough," he once wrote, according to the complaint.

Tate's attorney, however, called the messages "doctored, edited and falsified," saying he doesn't believe they'll be admissible in court.

"None of it is true," McBride said. "All of it is a lie."

During their last encounter at the hotel, Stern alleges, Tate beat and choked her during sex.

"While doing so, Tate told her repeatedly that if she ever crossed him, he was going to kill her," the lawsuit says.

Tate, 38, is a former professional kickboxer and self-described misogynist who has amassed millions of followers online, many of them young men and boys drawn in by the luxurious lifestyle he projects. He previously was banned from TikTok, YouTube and Facebook for hate speech, including that women should bear responsibility for getting raped. He and his brother are vocal supporters of President Donald Trump.

The Tate brothers checked in at a police station near Romania's capital last Monday, complying with judicial control requirements in the human trafficking case that ordered them to return after weeks in the U.S. The American trip was possible because a travel ban against them was lifted last month after a Romanian court found multiple legal and procedural irregularities — a significant blow to the prosecution and a win for the Tates.

Tate has repeatedly claimed that prosecutors in Romania have no evidence against him and claimed there's a political conspiracy to silence him.

Days after they arrived in Florida, the state's attorney general opened a criminal investigation into the brothers.

Four British women are suing Tate in the U.K. after the Crown Prosecution Service decided not to prosecute him on sexual violence and other abuse charges. Last March, the brothers appeared at the Bucharest Court of Appeal in a separate case after U.K. authorities issued arrest warrants over allegations of sexual aggression dating back several years. The appeals court granted the U.K. request to extradite them, but only after legal proceedings in Romania have concluded.

Stern said in a statement posted to social media that she's terrified of how Tate will respond to her public accusations.

"I considered many times just silently leaving Andrew and saying nothing, doing nothing, because I was scared and because it was honestly hard for me to accept that I was being abused," she wrote. "But I can now see that doing so would be the cowardly approach."

Her attorney, Tony Buzbee, praised her "incredible courage to come forward and make her voice heard."

Hamas says it accepts a new Gaza ceasefire proposal but Israel makes a counter-offer

By SAMY MAGDY and JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — The Hamas militant group said Saturday it has accepted a new Gaza ceasefire proposal from mediators Egypt and Qatar, but Israel said it has made a counter-proposal in "full coordination" with the third mediator, the United States.

Egypt early in the week made a proposal to get the troubled ceasefire back on track, following Israel's surprise resumption of fighting. It was not immediately clear whether the proposal changed before Khalil al-Hayyah, the leader of Hamas in Gaza, announced it had been accepted.

Early in the week, an Egyptian official described the proposal to The Associated Press, saying Hamas would release five living hostages, including an American-Israeli, from Gaza in return for Israel allowing aid into the territory and a weeklong pause in fighting. Israel would release hundreds of Palestinian prisoners. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief media on the closed-door talks.

On Saturday, the office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu gave no details about Israel's counter-proposal, which it said was offered after Netanyahu held consultations on Friday.

Israel a week and a half ago ended its ceasefire with Hamas by launching a surprise wave of strikes that killed hundreds of people. The White House blamed Hamas for the renewed fighting.

Israel has vowed to escalate the war until Hamas returns the 59 hostages it still holds — 24 of them believed to be alive. Israel also wants Hamas to give up power, disarm and send its leaders into exile. On Saturday, Israel widened its ground operations in Gaza's southern city of Rafah near the border with Egypt.

Hamas has said it will only release the remaining captives in exchange for Palestinian prisoners, a lasting ceasefire and an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza.

Frustrated by the threat to remaining hostages in Gaza, families and others rallied again Saturday evening to call for a deal that would bring everyone home.

"The price of your war is the life of the hostages!" some protesters chanted in Tel Aviv. Minor scuffles broke out with police.

"War will not bring our hostages home, it will kill them," Naama Weinberg, cousin of deceased hostage Itay Svirsky, told a weekly gathering of families in Tel Aviv.

The war in Gaza was triggered by Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack into Israel, in which Palestinian militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted 251.

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed over 50,000 people, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not say how many were civilians or combatants. Israel's bombardment and ground operations have caused vast destruction and at their height displaced some 90% of Gaza's population of over 2 million people.

Early this month, Israel again cut off all supplies to Gaza to pressure Hamas to accept new terms to the ceasefire that started in mid-January.

Israel had balked at entering negotiations over the truce's second phase, which were meant to begin in early February. Under the agreement, phase two was meant to bring the release of the remaining 24 living hostages, an end to the war and full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza.

Most US Institute of Peace workers get late-night word of their mass firing

By GARY FIELDS and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Most employees at the U.S. Institute of Peace, a congressionally created and funded think tank now taken over by Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency, received email notices of their mass firing, the latest step in the Trump administration's government downsizing.

The emails, sent to personal accounts because most staff members had lost access to the organization's system, began going out about 9 p.m. Friday, according to people familiar with the matter who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of fear of reprisal.

One former senior official at the institute said among those spared were several in the human resources department and a handful of overseas staffers who have until April 9 to return to the United States. The organization has about 300 people.

Others retained for now are regional vice presidents who will be working with the staff in their areas to return to the U.S., according to one employee who was affected.

An executive order last month from President Donald Trump targeted the organization, which seeks to prevent and resolve conflicts, and three other agencies for closure. Board members, who are nominated by the president and confirmed by the Senate, and the institute's president were fired. Later, there was a standoff between employees who blocked DOGE members from entering the institute's headquarters near the State Department. DOGE staff gained access in part with the help of the Washington police.

A lawsuit ensued, and U.S. District Judge Beryl Howell chastised DOGE representatives for their behavior but did not reinstate the board members or allow employees to return to the workspace.

A White House spokeswoman, Anna Kelly, said in an email Saturday that the institute "has failed to deliver peace" and that Trump "is carrying out his mandate to eliminate bloat and save taxpayer dollars."

The letter to employees said that as of Friday, "your employment with us will conclude," according to one longtime employee who shared part of the communication. A second email, obtained by the AP, said the terminations were at the direction of the president.

Workers were given until April 7 to clear out their desks.

Mary Glantz, a former foreign service officer who was working as a senior adviser at USIP, said she was not surprised by the late night firings, calling it part of DOGE's playbook.

Glantz's studied how Russia has fomented conflicts around the world and analyzed options for resolving them. She hoped her research could be continued and used elsewhere. She said USIP plays a unique role because of its narrow focus on conflict resolution.

"We are the other tool in the tool box," she said. "We do this work, so American soldiers don't have to fight these wars."

George Foote, a former institute lawyer fired this month who is with one of the firms providing counsel in the current lawsuit, said lawyers were consulting Saturday to discuss possible next steps. He said employees are not part of the pending lawsuit, so they would have to file a separate case.

Ukrainians expect Russia to launch a fresh offensive to strengthen its negotiating position

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian forces are preparing to launch a fresh military offensive in the coming weeks to maximize pressure on Ukraine and strengthen the Kremlin's negotiating position in ceasefire talks, Ukrainian government and military analysts said.

The move could give Russian President Vladimir Putin every reason to delay discussions about pausing the fighting in favor of seeking more land, the Ukrainian officials said this week, renewing their country's repeated arguments that Russia has no intention of engaging in meaningful dialogue to end the war.

With the spring fighting season drawing near, the Kremlin is eyeing a multi-pronged push across the

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 68 of 83

1,000-kilometer (621-mile) front line, according to the analysts and military commanders.

Citing intelligence reports, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Russia is getting ready for new offensives in the northeast in the Sumy, Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia regions.

"They're dragging out the talks and trying to get the U.S. stuck in endless and pointless discussions about fake 'conditions' just to buy time and then try to grab more land," Zelenskyy said Thursday in a visit to Paris.

Two G7 diplomatic officials in Kyiv agreed with that assessment. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief the press.

Russia has effectively rejected a U.S. proposal for an immediate and full 30-day halt in the fighting, and the feasibility of a partial ceasefire on the Black Sea was thrown into doubt after Kremlin negotiators imposed far-reaching conditions.

Four people died and 24 were injured Friday evening after Russian drones struck Dnipro in the country's east, according to regional Gov. Serhii Lysak and Ukraine's emergency service. At least eight more people were injured when a Russian ballistic missile struck nearby Kryvyi Rih, Zelenskyy's hometown, Gov. Lysak reported.

Battlefield success is clearly in Putin's mind.

"On the entire front line, the strategic initiative is completely in the hands of the Russian armed forces," Putin said Thursday at a forum in the Arctic port of Murmansk. "Our troops, our guys are moving forward and liberating one territory after another, one settlement after another, every day."

Kremlin forces keep pressing forward

Ukrainian military commanders said Russia recently stepped up attacks to improve its tactical positions ahead of the expected broader offensive.

"They need time until May, that's all," said Ukrainian military analyst Pavlo Narozhnyi, who works with soldiers and learns about intelligence from them.

In the north, Russian and North Korean soldiers have nearly deprived Kyiv of an essential bargaining chip by retaking most of Russia's Kursk region, where Ukrainian soldiers staged a daring incursion last year. Battles have also escalated along the eastern front in Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia.

A concern among some commanders is whether Russia might divert battle-hardened forces from Kursk to other parts of the east.

"It will be hard. The forces from Kursk will come on a high from their wins there," said a Ukrainian battalion commander in the Donetsk region, who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe his concerns.

"They are preparing offensive actions on the front that should last from six to nine months, almost all of 2025," said Ukrainian military analyst Oleksii Hetman, who has connections to the military's general staff.

Fighting intensifies on parts of the front line

Russia entered negotiations with a clear advantage in the war. Now, after recapturing 80% of its territory in the Kursk region ahead of talks, its forces have intensified their fighting across other parts of the front line.

"The number of clashes on the front line is not decreasing," Hetman said. "If they wanted to stop the war, their actions certainly don't show it."

Russia ramped up reconnaissance missions to find and destroy firing positions, drone systems and other capabilities that could impede a future onslaught, two Ukrainian commanders said.

"These can be all signs that an attack is being prepared in the near future," Hetman said.

The Russian Defense Ministry on Saturday also claimed that its troops had taken a village in Ukraine's Sumy region, across the border from Kursk. Zelenskyy earlier named the province as one of the targets for a Russian spring offensive. The Russian claim could not be independently verified, and Ukraine did not comment.

Fighting also intensified in the eastern city of Pokrovsk, one of Ukraine's main defensive strongholds and a key logistics hub in the Donetsk region. Its capture would bring Russia closer to its stated aim of capturing the entire region.

"The Russians were significantly exhausted over the past two months. During 10 days of March, they

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 69 of 83

took a sort of pause," military spokesman Maj. Viktor Trehubov said of the situation in Pokrovsk. In mid-March, the attack resumed. "This means the Russians have simply recovered."

Russia increases reconnaissance missions

A Ukrainian soldier with the call sign "Italian" said Russia was conducting intensive reconnaissance in his area of responsibility in the Pokrovsk region. Radio intercepts and intelligence show a buildup of forces in the area around Selidove, a city in the Pokrovsk region, and the creation of ammunition reserves, he said.

The buildup includes large armored vehicles, and the many new call signs overheard in radio transmissions suggest that fresh forces are coming in, he said.

Farther south, a military blog run by Mikhail Zvinchuk, a former officer of the Russian Defense Ministry's press section, noted last week that Russian troops recently unleashed a new offensive west of Orikhiv in the Zaporizhzhia region.

The offensive will allow Russian forces to move toward the city of Zaporizhzhia and "force the enemy to redeploy its troops from other sectors, leaving Robotyne and Mala Tokmachka badly protected," the blog known as Rybar said, adding that the new offensive "could be the first step toward the liberation of the Zaporizhzhia region."

On Friday, Vladyslav Voloshyn, a spokesman for the Southern Defense Forces of Ukraine, said the situation in the region is fraught after Russia amassed more forces to conduct assaults with small groups of infantry.

Russian analysts project optimism that a future offensive will succeed.

"Both sides are actively preparing for the spring-summer campaign," Sergey Poletaev, a Moscow-based military analyst, wrote in a recent commentary. "There's a growing sense that the Ukrainian forces may be struggling to prepare for it adequately."

Little progress reported at negotiating table

Meanwhile at the negotiating table, Russian demands have curtailed the results of much-anticipated negotiations brokered by the U.S.

Earlier this month, after Russia effectively turned down the U.S. proposal for a complete, monthlong halt in the fighting, Moscow tentatively agreed to a partial ceasefire on Black Sea shipping routes.

But that agreement was quickly cast into doubt by Russia's insistence on far-reaching conditions that its state bank be reconnected to the SWIFT international payment system, something Kyiv and the EU rejected outright.

Along the front line, the reported ups and downs of the talks fuel frustration and worry.

"No one believes in them," said the Ukrainian soldier known as Italian, who spoke on the condition that he be identified only by his call sign in keeping with military protocol. "But there is still hope that the conflict will move in another direction. Everyone is waiting for some changes in the combat zone because it is not good for us now. We really don't want to admit that."

Critics see Trump attacks on the 'Black Smithsonian' as an effort to sanitize racism in US history

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — President Donald Trump's order accusing the Smithsonian Institution of not reflecting American history notes correctly that the country's Founding Fathers declared that "all men are created equal."

But it doesn't mention that the founders enshrined slavery into the U.S. Constitution and declared enslaved persons as three-fifths of a person for the purpose of the Census.

Civil rights advocates, historians and Black political leaders sharply rebuked Trump on Friday for his order, entitled "Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History." They argued that his executive order targeting the Smithsonian Institution is his administration's latest move to downplay how race, racism and Black Americans themselves have shaped the nation's story.

"It seems like we're headed in the direction where there's even an attempt to deny that the institution

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 70 of 83

of slavery even existed, or that Jim Crow laws and segregation and racial violence against Black communities, Black families, Black individuals even occurred,” said historian Clarissa Myrick-Harris, a professor at Morehouse College, the historically Black campus in Atlanta.

The Thursday executive order cites the National Museum of African American History and Culture by name and argues that the Smithsonian as a whole is engaging in a “concerted and widespread effort to rewrite our Nation’s history.”

Instead of celebrating an “unparalleled legacy of advancing liberty, individual rights, and human happiness,” the order argues that a “corrosive ... divisive, race-centered ideology” has “reconstructed” the nation “as inherently racist, sexist, oppressive, or otherwise irredeemably flawed.”

It empowers Vice President JD Vance to review all properties, programs and presentations to prohibit programs that “degrade shared American values” or “divide Americans based on race.”

Trump also ordered Interior Secretary Doug Burgum to determine if any monuments since January 2020 “have been removed or changed to perpetuate a false reconstruction of American history” or “inappropriately minimize the value of certain historical events or figures.” Trump has long criticized the removal of Confederate monuments, a movement that gained steam after the May 2020 murder of George Floyd.

Critics argued the order is the latest move by the Trump administration to quash recognition of Black Americans’ contributions to the nation and to gloss over the legal, political, social and economic obstacles they have faced.

Trump’s approach is “a literal attack on Black America itself,” Ibram X. Kendi, the race historian and best-selling author, said. “The Black Smithsonian, as it is affectionately called, is indeed one of the heartbeats of Black America,” Kendi argued, and “also one of the heartbeats” of the nation at large.

Congressional Black Caucus Chair Yvette Clarke, D-N.Y., suggested that Trump wants to distort the national narrative to racist ends.

“We do not run from or erase our history simply because we don’t like it,” she said in a statement. “We embrace the history of our country – the good, the bad, and the ugly.”

Trump once praised the ‘Black Smithsonian’

The African American museum, one of 21 distinct Smithsonian entities, opened along the National Mall in 2016, the last year that President Barack Obama held office as the nation’s first Black chief executive. The museum chronicles chattel slavery, Jim Crow segregation and its lingering effects, but also highlights the determination, successes and contributions of individual Black Americans and Black institutions throughout U.S. history.

Former NAACP President Ben Jealous, who now leads the Sierra Club, said museums that focus on specific minority or marginalized groups — enslaved persons and their descendants, women, Native Americans — are necessary because historical narratives from previous generations misrepresented those individuals or overlooked them altogether.

“Attempts to tell the general history of the country always omit too much ... and the place that we’ve come to by having these museums is so we can, in total, do a better job of telling the complete story of this country,” he said.

And, indeed, Trump sounded more like Jealous when he visited the African American museum in 2017, at the outset of his first term, and declared it a national gem.

“I’m deeply proud that we now have a museum that honors the millions of African American men and women who built our national heritage, especially when it comes to faith, culture and the unbreakable American spirit,” Trump said following a tour that included Sen. Tim Scott of South Carolina and then-Housing and Urban Development Secretary Ben Carson, both of whom are Black.

“I know President Obama was here for the museum’s opening last fall,” Trump continued. “I’m honored to be the second sitting president to visit this great museum.”

Trump’s war on ‘woke’ targets history

Trump won his comeback White House bid with a notable uptick in support from non-white voters, especially among younger Black and Hispanic men.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 71 of 83

He ratcheted up attacks during his campaign on what he labeled “woke” culture and diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, not just in government but the private sector. He also used racist and sexist tropes to attack Democratic nominee and Vice President Kamala Harris, the first Black woman and person of South Asian descent to hold national office, and regularly accused her and other liberals of “hating our country.”

Since his Jan. 20 inauguration, Trump has banned diversity initiatives across the federal government. The administration has launched investigations of colleges — public and private — that it accuses of discriminating against white and Asian students with race-conscious admissions programs intended to address historic inequities in access for Black students.

The Defense Department, at one point, temporarily removed training videos recognizing the Tuskegee Airmen and an online biography of Jackie Robinson. In February, Trump fired Air Force Gen. CQ Brown Jr., a champion of racial diversity in the military, as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Brown, in the wake of Floyd’s killing, had spoken publicly about his experiences as a Black man, and was only the second Black general to serve as chairman.

The administration has fired diversity officers across government, curtailed some agencies’ celebrations of Black History Month, and terminated grants and contracts for projects ranging from planting trees in disadvantaged communities to studying achievement gaps in American schools.

Warnings of a chilling effect

Civil rights advocates and historians expressed concern about a chilling effect across other institutions that study Black history.

Kendi noted that many museums and educational centers across the country — such as San Francisco’s Museum of the African Diaspora, The Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration in Montgomery, Alabama, and the International African American Museum in Charleston, South Carolina — exist with little to no federal or other governmental funding sources. Some already are struggling to keep their doors open.

“To me, that’s part of the plan, to starve these institutions that are already starving of resources so that the only institutions that are telling America’s history are actually only telling political propaganda,” Kendi said.

Doctor cites the pope’s ‘surprising improvement’ after surviving life-threatening crises

By COLLEEN BARRY and TRISHA THOMAS Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis has shown “a truly surprising improvement” since returning to the Vatican to convalesce after surviving a life-threatening bout with double-pneumonia, the doctor who coordinated the pontiff’s five-week hospitalization said Saturday.

“I find him very lively,” Dr. Sergio Alfieri said, after visiting the pope at his apartment in the Santa Marta Domus on Wednesday, three days after his release from Rome’s Gemelli hospital. “I believe that he will return if not to 100%, 90% of where he was before.”

Francis appeared frail and weak as he greeted a crowd of well-wishers from a hospital balcony on Sunday. His voice was waning as he praised a woman in the crowd for bringing yellow flowers. He was able to only partially lift his arm to bless the people and he gasped for air as he was wheeled back inside.

Alfieri said the pope’s voice was regaining strength, and that his reliance on supplemental oxygen has decreased. The limited mobility of his arm was due to an unspecified trauma he sustained before being hospitalized, and that will take time to heal, Alfieri said.

The 88-year-old pope was hospitalized on Feb. 14 after a long bout with bronchitis that left him breathless at times, and which quickly developed into double pneumonia and revealed a polymicrobial (viral, bacterial and fungal) respiratory infection. Throughout the ordeal, doctors emphasized the complexity of his condition, given his age, lack of mobility requiring a wheelchair, and the removal of part of a lung as a young man.

Alfieri repeated that he didn’t think the pope would make it after a severe respiratory crisis a week after

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 72 of 83

being hospitalized, and he informed the pope that a "decisive" treatment necessary to save him would put his organs at risk.

"He gave his consent, and then he looked a Massimiliano Streppetti, whom he named his personal health assistant who assumed the responsibility, to say, 'We approve everything,' also at the price of coming out with damaged kidneys or bone marrow that produces damaging red blood cells," said Alfieri.

Alfieri preferred to describe the treatment as "decisive," and not aggressive, and emphasized that no extraordinary, life-extending measures were ever taken. The Feb. 22 incident was one of several critical moments when the pope's life hung in the balance, the doctor said.

While Francis beat the double pneumonia in the hospital, Alfieri said he is continuing to treat the fungal infection, which he said will take months to resolve. The pope is also receiving physical, respiratory and speech therapy.

Alfieri continues to consult the pope's personal medical team daily, and will visit Francis in the Vatican every week.

The pope demonstrated his trademark humor in this week's visit, responding to a comment by Alfieri that the 88-year-old pontiff had the mentality of a 50- or 60-year-old. "As I leaned in, he said, 'Not 50, 40,'" Alfieri recalled. "So his good sense of humor is back."

Doctors have ordered the pope to rest for at least two months and to avoid crowds. But after seeing the pope's improvements and knowing his work ethic, Alfieri warned that "if he recovers so quickly, they will have to put on the brakes."

Military review of fitness standards will find array of tests, but higher requirements for combat

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The defense secretary's decision to review military standards on combat and physical fitness and appearance opens a Pandora's box of widely differing rules among the services. And it will raise a crucial question: Should there be a cookie-cutter approach, or should service differences, evolving social norms and recruiting realities play a role in policy decisions?

Pete Hegseth has been very public about his opposition to women in combat jobs and his belief that standards were lowered to accommodate women, and he warned there would be reviews to address the issues. He is a staunch proponent of making all standards the same, regardless of gender, and military officials are braced for changes as reviews continue.

In a March 12 memo, Hegseth said the undersecretary for personnel must gather information on military standards "pertaining to physical fitness, body composition, and grooming, which includes but is not limited to beards."

"We must remain vigilant in maintaining the standards that enable the men and women of our military to protect the American people and our homeland as the world's most lethal and effective fighting force," he wrote.

The effort is seen as a broadside against women serving on the front lines — which they have been doing successfully for years. Hegseth's memo calls for a review of how standards have changed and the impact of those shifts since Jan. 1, 2015 — the year the Defense Department opened all combat jobs to women.

And it raises questions about whether he wants to make all fitness tests the same for the services and make them all gender- and age-neutral or whether he will set minimum standards and allow the services to require more stringent requirements as desired.

Eliminating the current policy of scoring annual fitness tests based on age and gender could hurt retention and recruitment if troops are suddenly told to meet a new, dramatically harder requirement. Such changes are generally phased in over time.

Here's a look at the current standards.

Physical fitness tests

The military has long had what is largely a two-part system for physical fitness standards:

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 73 of 83

___ Routine annual fitness tests with different requirements based on gender and age.

___ More grueling standards for specific combat, special operations, infantry, armor, pararescue jumpers and other jobs that are the same for everyone in that occupation, and are not adjusted for age or gender.

Right now, the fitness tests are a hodgepodge.

Each service has basic tests that all service members must pass once or twice a year. For every service, the tests vary. Scoring is adjusted for gender and age. For example: A 20-year-old man must complete a run in a faster time than a woman or a 30-year-old man in order to receive the maximum score.

Fitness tests used to be simpler: a run, push-ups and sit-ups. They evolved over time and now can include options. For example, Air Force service members can do either a 1 1/2-mile run or a sprint. Other services will, at times, allow biking or rowing as a cardio substitute for the run; planks are now more widely used than sit-ups.

The Army and Marines have more extensive fitness tests.

The Army, in a major overhaul several years ago, expanded its fitness test to six events, including a dead lift, run, planks, push-ups, standing power throw and a combination sprint/drag/carry. The events were meant to mimic real-world military circumstances. An early plan to make that test gender and age neutral was scrapped after studies showed problems.

The Marine Corps has two tests a year. In the first half, Marines take a physical fitness test that includes a three-mile run, pull-ups and planks. In the second half of the year, they take a combat fitness test that includes an 880-meter run in combat boots, an ammo-can lift and an exercise that mimics troops' maneuvers under fire.

The maneuver portion includes an obstacle course with a low crawl, high crawl and sprint, as well as dragging a person and using the fireman's carry.

Job-specific courses and standards

Specific military jobs like special operations, infantry, armor and pararescue jumping require different, higher-level physical — and often mental and psychological — tests, requirements and qualification courses.

Those standards require everyone to meet the same gender- and age-neutral requirements. For example, an Army soldier who wants to be a Green Beret or a sailor who wants to be a SEAL must pass those grueling months-long qualification courses.

Also, after the Pentagon allowed women to be in all combat jobs, the Army set specific fitness standards for each military occupation that are the same regardless of sex or age. Recruits who want to serve in an infantry or armor job must pass a specific physical assessment that has higher, more significant demands, in order to sign a contract for that specialty.

Other standards

Over the years, a wide array of standards and requirements have been adjusted for reasons ranging from religious tolerance to recruiting and evolving societal trends.

In large part, they are driven by recruiting struggles and the need to woo those from a changing universe of American young people, including those with less academic schooling or people from states where marijuana is legal.

The Navy, for example, began in 2022 to enlist more recruits who score very low on the Armed Services Qualification Test. That was to help meet recruiting goals. A year later, it began to bring in people who didn't graduate from high school or get a GED. Both were shifts that the other services have largely avoided. The Navy argued that it needed those lower-scoring recruits to fill jobs that involve intense manual labor.

Hegseth has said little about that type of standard and has focused on physical rather than mental fitness.

In addition, several services have changed policies on hair and beards. They now allow different buns and ponytails for women, and beards in certain circumstances for either medical or religious reasons. And most of the services have relaxed policies on marijuana in recent years.

Similarly, they have all loosened restrictions on the size and placement of tattoos, opening the door to full-sleeve tattoos. Most now allow small ones on the neck or finger.

Trump's election order creates much confusion before the next federal election in 2026

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — President Donald Trump's executive order seeking to change how U.S. elections are run is creating uncertainty for state and local election officials and worries about voter confusion before the next federal election, the 2026 midterms.

Election officials were already dealing with the loss of some cybersecurity assistance from the federal government and now face the potential for major changes that include a new voter registration requirement, decertification of certain voting systems and stricter ballot deadlines for many states.

In Connecticut, Secretary of the State Stephanie Thomas is hopeful that ballot scanners the state just bought for \$20 million will be acceptable under the executive order, but she worries about other states.

"It's not like states have millions and millions of dollars that they can just upgrade their election equipment every couple of years," said Thomas, a Democrat. "Imagine people purchased new equipment and now it no longer can be used. There is no remedy for that in the order."

Because Trump's order is likely to face legal challenges, it's unclear what will be required and when. That means more uncertainty for election officials.

"I have no idea what the timeline is for things in the executive order," said Joseph Kirk, who oversees elections in Bartow County, Georgia. "I really hope we have some clarity on some of this stuff soon because no matter what the answers are, I need to take care of my voters."

Order inserts the federal government into state election operations

In the order Tuesday, Trump criticized the work of election officials across the country and praised how other nations conduct their elections. Trump has long questioned the integrity of U.S. elections, falsely claiming after his White House win in 2016, when the Republican won the Electoral College but lost the popular vote to Democrat Hillary Clinton, that his support would have been higher if not for large numbers of noncitizens voting in California.

Trump continues to claim his 2020 loss to Democrat Joe Biden was the result of a "rigged" election. There is no evidence of widespread fraud and no evidence that voting systems were manipulated, with multiple reviews in the states where Trump challenged the outcome confirming his loss.

In the years since, election officials in many parts of the U.S. have endured harassment and threats, a barrage of record requests by groups skeptical of their work and legislative changes pushed by state lawmakers who argue new restrictions are necessary to restore public confidence.

Trump's order, combined with recent decisions by his administration to pause certain cybersecurity work and pull funding for a dedicated information-sharing network for election offices, have prompted concern about the role of the federal government in elections moving forward.

"States run our elections, but the federal government has been an important partner in assisting election officials," said Larry Norden, an election security expert with the Brennan Center for Justice. "To be a partner, you have to be trusted. You have to provide consistency and certainty. The last few months have utterly destroyed that."

Concerns about requirement to prove US citizenship

One of the major changes outlined in the executive order is a requirement for people to show documentary proof of U.S. citizenship when they register to vote. That is something Republicans in Congress pushed last year at Trump's urging, but the effort stalled amid Democratic opposition in the Senate.

House Republicans plan to try again with the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility Act, known as the SAVE Act. A House committee is scheduled to discuss the bill on Monday.

After the executive order, several Republicans who are top state election officials issued statements praising provisions that direct federal agencies to help states verify voter eligibility and citizenship. Their Democratic counterparts have been more critical.

Voting rights groups are raising concerns about the citizenship requirement. They say millions of Americans do not have easy access to their birth certificates, only about half have U.S. passports, and married

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 75 of 83

women would need multiple documents if they have changed their name.

While voting by noncitizens does occur, it typically involves a tiny fraction of ballots and is more often an individual mistake rather than an intentional and coordinated attempt to subvert an election. It also can lead to felony charges and deportation. Under Trump's order, the burden would fall to election officials to implement this requirement. Experts say that would be expensive and there's no additional federal money to help pay for it.

"It's creating an entirely new bureaucracy in every single state for the collection of that data, for the storage of that data, and for the retrieval of that data," said David Becker, a former Justice Department lawyer who leads the Center for Election Innovation & Research. "You don't wave a magic wand and do that."

Increasing risk of voter confusion

Kate Sweeney Bell, who oversees elections in Indiana's Marion County, said she does not expect major problems in her state because it has restrictive voting laws that she says have resulted in some of the lowest voter turnout in the country. She worries, though, about the rest of the U.S. and the amount of public education that will be needed to ensure voters are aware of whatever changes are made.

"I feel for every other state that doesn't have the prohibitive laws that Indiana does, because it's a rough couple of election cycles when changes like this are made," Sweeney Bell said.

One challenge is the likelihood that protracted legal battles will delay clarity for both election officials and the public.

"If election officials are uncertain about the rules, there is no doubt that voters will not understand them — creating distrust in the process and ultimately in the validity of the outcome," said Ryan Macias, an election security and voting systems expert.

The uncertainty comes as election officials are preparing for the 2026 elections. Dean Logan, who oversees elections in Los Angeles County, said running a successful election depends on extensive planning, a trained workforce and proper equipment.

"Last-minute changes or unilateral mandates significantly increase the risk of voter confusion and operational inconsistencies and can erode voter confidence," he said.

Order could lead to changes in voting machines, without paying for it

Trump's order also targets voting systems in a way that could require some counties to change machines without offering additional money to help them pay for it. It directs the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, an independent and bipartisan agency created by Congress, to amend voluntary standards for voting systems to prohibit devices that use a barcode or QR code on ballots, with an exception for ones designated for voters with disabilities.

The order calls for the commission within 180 days to review, recertify where appropriate and rescind "all previous certifications of voting equipment based on prior standards." Beyond the legality of the order, experts say federal law outlines specific procedures and public comment periods for updating the standards.

While there are voting systems that do not use barcodes, the process for states to replace equipment takes time, said Mark Lindeman, policy and strategy director with Verified Voting, which focuses on election technology. Election offices must get approval to spend for new voting systems, go through a procurement process, wait for manufacturers to deliver the equipment and eventually train workers on how to use it.

"It's hard for any state to procure and obtain and test new voting systems, and if there was some mad rush for many states to replace their voting systems at once, we don't know how many systems manufacturers could supply," Lindeman said.

New Jersey's GOP primary for governor could pivot on Trump, a part-time resident

By MIKE CATALINI Associated Press

TRENTON, N.J. (AP) — The most important Republican in New Jersey's race for governor this year might well be a part-time resident of Bedminster who burnished his reputation and his brand near the Atlantic City Boardwalk.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 76 of 83

"Donald Trump is the X factor in this GOP primary," said Ben Dworkin, director of the Rowan Institute for Public Policy & Citizenship. "His endorsement right now could make or break, depending on to whom he gives it."

But in a state that has long leaned Democratic, the president's endorsement in the June 10 primary could complicate things in a general election, where the winner of a six-person Democratic field awaits.

That may explain why one Republican candidate, state Sen. Jon Bramnick, has criticized Trump over his pardons for those involved in the Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the U.S. Capitol, and why two other leading contenders have sought the president's support without much fanfare.

Still, in one of only two states with a race for governor this year — Virginia is the other — the general election will be closely watched for clues about whether blue state voters have been won over or repelled by Trump's leadership. Trump, who built his brand as an Atlantic City casino owner and still owns property in New Jersey, including the Bedminster golf club, narrowed the margin between 2020 and 2024 but still lost the state, and Democrats maintain firm control.

Some Republicans think that's changing.

The GOP field dwindled from five candidates to four this past week when Ed Durr, a former state senator and vocal Trump supporter, dropped out. Durr made national news in 2021 when he shocked state Senate President Steve Sweeney, a Democrat, by winning in their southern New Jersey district. A furniture truck driver new to elected office, Durr said in a statement he was ending his campaign so radio host and fellow Trump supporter Bill Spadea could defeat "never Trumpers" in the race.

Both Spadea and Jack Ciattarelli, the 2021 GOP nominee for governor who lost by roughly three percentage points to term-limited Democratic Gov. Phil Murphy, have said critical things of Trump in the past, but both have embraced him lately.

Ciattarelli met with the president last week. Chris Russell, his campaign strategist, declined to discuss details of the meeting, but said Ciattarelli welcomes the president's support if he should give it. A message seeking comment was left with Spadea's campaign.

Mario Kranjac, the former two-term mayor of the suburban New York City town of Englewood Cliffs and a recent entrant into the race, said he thinks he is the most Trump-aligned candidate because he never wavered in his support for Trump during the president's first term.

"The residents and citizens and taxpayers of New Jersey need a governor with fixed values and beliefs, and that's me -- in terms of everything that I stand for and that President Trump stands for," he said in a phone interview. "They shouldn't have to worry that when something happens, their candidate is going to abandon President Trump, which I would never do."

Part of the challenge for Republicans is that the value of Trump's support is a moving target. The first two months of his second term as president may have alienated some voters but won others over. Anticipating how much value Trump could add to the campaign when voters cast their primary ballots is guesswork, with circumstances changing by the day.

In the pre-Trump era, some Republicans successfully navigated the shoals between the primary and the general elections. While Republicans have not won a U.S. Senate seat in New Jersey in more than five decades, they have enjoyed more success in governor's races. The last three Republicans elected governor — Thomas Kean Sr., Christine Todd Whitman and Chris Christie — all won two consecutive terms. But their brand of politics included business-friendly conservatism, hardly the same as Trump's aggressive populism.

Democrats remain the dominant party in the state, but some Republicans say that hold is slipping. Russell, Ciattarelli's strategist, points to the registration gains the GOP has made, shaving the Democrats' advantage from 1 million more voters to 834,000 more.

He said Democrats should not be overconfident in their traditional advantages.

"I think they're missing the lesson of the 2024 election in New Jersey, which is Donald Trump did exceedingly well in New Jersey," he said.

The weight of Trump's influence lingers as one of the lessons the GOP took from 2024. That much seemed evident in Durr's withdrawal from the race.

In his statement announcing the decision, Durr said he was ending his campaign so Spadea could prevail. Soon after, Durr said his statement was not actually an endorsement. Steve Kush, a Durr spokesperson, explained the distinction and, in the process, reflected who the big dog is in the primary.

"He doesn't want to use the word endorse because he doesn't want to get ahead of President Trump," Kush said.

Trump increasingly asks the Supreme Court to overrule judges blocking key parts of his agenda

By MARK SHERMAN and LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As losses mount in lower federal courts, President Donald Trump has returned to a tactic that he employed at the Supreme Court with remarkable success in his first term.

Three times in the past week, and six since Trump took office a little more than two months ago, the Justice Department has asked the conservative-majority high court to step into cases much earlier than usual.

The administration's use of the emergency appeals, or shadow docket, comes as it faces more than 130 lawsuits over the Republican president's flurry of executive orders. Many of the lawsuits have been filed in liberal-leaning parts of the country as the court system becomes ground zero for pushback to his policies.

Federal judges have ruled against the administration more than 40 times, issuing temporary restraining orders and preliminary injunctions, the Justice Department said Friday in a Supreme Court filing. The issues include birthright citizenship changes, federal spending, transgender rights and deportations under a rarely used 18th-century law.

The administration is increasingly asking the Supreme Court, which Trump helped shape by nominating three justices, to step in, not only to rule in its favor but also to send a message to federal judges, who Trump and his allies claim are overstepping their authority.

"Only this Court can stop rule-by-TRO from further upending the separation of powers — the sooner, the better," acting Solicitor General Sarah Harris wrote Friday in the deportations case, referring to the temporary restraining orders.

Stephen Vladeck, the Georgetown University law professor who chronicled the rise of emergency appeals in his book, "The Shadow Docket," wrote on the Substack platform that "these cases, especially together, reflect the inevitable reckoning — just how much is the Supreme Court going to stand up to Trump?"

In the first Trump administration, the Justice Department made emergency appeals to the Supreme Court 41 times and won all or part of what it wanted in 28 cases, Vladeck found.

Before that, the Obama and George W. Bush administrations asked the court for emergency relief in just eight cases over 16 years.

Supreme Court cases generally unfold over many months. Emergency action more often occurs over weeks, or even a few days, with truncated briefing and decisions that are usually issued without the elaborate legal reasoning that typically accompanies high court rulings.

So far this year, the justices have effectively sidestepped the administration's requests. But that could get harder as the number of appeals increase, including in high-profile deportation cases where an extraordinary call from the president to impeach a judge prompted a rare rebuke from Chief Justice John Roberts.

Here's a look at the appeals on the court's emergency docket:

Trump's deportation order will be a critical test

Immigration and the promise of mass deportations were at the center of Trump's winning presidential campaign, and earlier this month, he took the rare step of invoking an 18th-century wartime law to speed deportations of Venezuelan migrants accused of belonging to the Tren de Aragua gang.

Lawyers for the migrants, several of whom say they are not gang members, sued to block the deportations without due process.

U.S. District Judge James E. Boasberg, the chief judge at the federal courthouse in Washington, agreed. He ordered deportation flights to be temporarily halted and planes already making their way to a prison

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 78 of 83

in El Salvador be turned around.

Two planes still landed, and a court fight over whether the administration defied his order continued to play out even as the administration unsuccessfully asked the appeals court in the nation's capital to lift his order.

In an appeal to the Supreme Court filed Friday, the Justice Department argued that the deportations should be allowed to resume and that the migrants should make their case in a federal court in Texas, where they are being detained.

Mass firings of federal workers have generated lawsuits

Thousands of federal workers have been let go as the Trump administration seeks to dramatically downsize the federal government.

The firings of probationary workers, who usually have less time on the job and fewer protections, have drawn multiple lawsuits.

Two judges have found the administration broke federal laws in its handling of the layoffs and ordered workers reinstated. The government went to the Supreme Court after a California-based judge said some 16,000 workers must be restored to their positions.

The judge said it appeared the administration had lied in its reasons for firing the workers. The administration said he overstepped his authority by trying to force hiring and firing decisions on the executive branch.

Anti-DEI teacher training cuts have been blocked, at least temporarily

Trump has moved quickly to try and root out diversity, equity and inclusion programs across the government and in education.

Eight Democratic-led states argued in a lawsuit that the push was at the root of a decision to cut hundreds of millions of dollars for teacher training.

A federal judge in Boston has temporarily blocked the cuts, finding they were already affecting training programs aimed at addressing a nationwide teacher shortage. After an appeals court kept that order in place, the Justice Department went to the Supreme Court.

The administration argues that judges can't force it to keep paying out money that it has decided to cancel.

Trump wanted to end birthright citizenship. So far, courts have disagreed

On Inauguration Day, Trump signed an executive order that, going forward, would deny citizenship to babies born to parents in the country illegally.

The order restricting the right enshrined in the Constitution was quickly blocked nationwide. Three appeals court also rejected pleas to let it go into effect while lawsuits play out.

The Justice Department didn't appeal to the Supreme Court to overturn those rulings right away, but instead asked the justices to narrow the court orders to only the people who filed the lawsuits.

The government argued that individual judges lack the power to give nationwide effect to their rulings, touching on a legal issue that's concerned some justices before.

Nostalgia, relief and loss as some Syrians mark their first Ramadan back home in years

By MARIAM FAM Associated Press

DARAYA, Syria (AP) — When Mariam Aabour learned of the ouster of Syrian leader Bashar Assad, she shed tears of joy. But as the time came to return to her homeland from Lebanon — where she fled years earlier — Aabour felt torn.

She was happy about the homecoming, but sad to leave behind a son and a stepson who remained in Lebanon to work and pay off family debts. Months before her return, Aabour's father died in Syria without her seeing him. Her Syrian home has been destroyed and there's no money to rebuild, she said.

Thus it's been bittersweet experiencing her first Ramadan — the Muslim holy month — since her return.

"We've all lost dear ones," she said. "Even after our return, we still cry over the tragedies that we've

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 79 of 83

lived through.”

As they spend their first Ramadan in years in their homeland, many Syrians who’ve recently trickled back in from abroad have been celebrating the end of the Assad family’s rule in December after a fast-paced rebel offensive. They are relishing some new freedoms and savoring some old traces of the lives they once knew.

They enjoy family reunions but many also face challenges as they adjust to a country ravaged by a prolonged civil war and now grappling with a complex transition. As they do, they grieve personal and communal losses: Killed and missing loved ones, their absence amplified during Ramadan. Destroyed or damaged homes. And family gatherings shattered by the exodus of millions.

A time for daily fasting and heightened worship, Ramadan also often sees joyous get-togethers with relatives over food and juices.

Aabour – one of the more than 370,000 Syrians the United Nations’ refugee agency, UNHCR, says have returned to the country since Assad’s ouster – delights in hearing the call to prayer from mosques signaling the end of the daily fast. In her Lebanon neighborhood, she said, there were no nearby mosques and she relied on phones to know when to break the fast.

The hardest part, she added, is sitting for the fast-breaking meal known as “iftar” without some loved ones, including her father and a son, who she said was killed before the family fled Syria.

She bitterly recalled how her child, who she said was about 10 when killed, liked a rice and peas dish for iftar and would energetically help her, carrying dishes from the kitchen.

“I used to tell him, ‘You’re too young,’ but he would say, ‘No, I want to help you,’” she said, sitting on the floor in her in-laws’ house which her family now shares with relatives.

Faraj al-Mashash, her husband, said he’s not currently working, accumulating more debt and caring for an ill father.

The family borrowed money to fix his father’s home in Daraya. It was damaged and looted, but still standing.

Many Daraya homes aren’t.

Part of Rural Damascus and known for its grapes and its furniture workshops, Daraya was one of the centers of the uprising against Assad. The conflict devolved into armed insurgency and civil war after Assad crushed what started as largely peaceful protests; this Ramadan, Syrians marked the 14th anniversary of the civil war’s start.

Daraya suffered killings and saw massive damage during fighting. It endured years of government siege and aerial campaigns before a deal was struck between the government and rebels in 2016 that resulted in the evacuation of fighters and civilians and control ceded to the government.

Today, in parts of Daraya, children and others walk past walls with gaping holes in crumbling buildings. In some areas, a clothesline or bright-colored water tank provides glimpses of lives unfolding among ruins or charred walls.

Despite it all, al-Mashash said, it’s home.

“Isn’t Daraya destroyed? But I feel like I am in heaven.”

Still, “there’s sadness,” he added. “A place is only beautiful with its people in it. Buildings can be rebuilt, but when a person is gone, they don’t come back.”

In Lebanon, al-Mashash struggled financially and was homesick for Daraya, for the familiar faces that used to greet him on its streets. Shortly after Assad’s ouster, he returned.

This Ramadan, he’s re-lived some traditions, inviting people for iftar and getting invited, and praying at a mosque where he has cherished memories.

Some of those who had left Daraya, and now returned to Syria, say their homes have been obliterated or are in no condition for them to stay there. Some of them are living elsewhere in an apartment complex that had previously housed Assad-era military officers and is now sheltering some families, mostly ones who’ve returned from internal displacement.

The majority of those who’ve returned to Syria since Assad’s removal came from countries in the region, including Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, said Celine Schmitt, UNHCR’s spokesperson in Syria.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 80 of 83

A main security fear for returnees is unexploded mines, Schmitt said, adding UNHCR provides "mine awareness sessions" in its community centers. It also offers legal awareness for those needing IDs, birth certificates or property documents and has provided free transportation for some who came from Jordan and Turkey, she said.

The needs of returnees, so far a fraction of those who've left, are varied and big – from work and basic services to house repairs or construction. Many, Schmitt said, hope for financial help to start a small business or rebuild, adding that more funding is needed.

"We're calling on all of our donors," she said. "There's an opportunity now to solve one of the biggest displacement crises in the world, because people want to go back."

Many of those who haven't returned cite economic challenges and "the huge challenges they see in Syria" as some of the reasons, she said.

In January, U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi said living conditions in the country must improve for the return of Syrians to be sustainable.

Umayya Moussa, also from Daraya, said she fled Syria to Lebanon in 2013, returning recently as a mother of four, two of whom had never seen Syria before.

Moussa, 38, recalls, at one point, fleeing an area while pregnant and terrified, carrying her daughter and clutching her husband's hand. The horrors have haunted her.

"I'd remember so many events that would leave me unable to sleep," she said. "Whenever I closed my eyes, I would scream and cry and have nightmares."

In Lebanon, she lived for a while in a camp, where she shared the kitchen and bathroom with others. "We were humiliated ..., but it was still better than the fear we've lived through."

She'd yearned for the usual Ramadan family gatherings.

For the first iftar this year, she broke her fast with her family, including brothers who, she said, as fighters against the Assad government, had previously moved to then rebel-controlled Idlib province.

Missing from the Ramadan meal was her father who died while Moussa was away.

Like Moussa, Saeed Kamel is intimately familiar with the pain of a joy incomplete. This Ramadan, he visited the grave of his mother who had died when he was in Lebanon.

"I told her that we've returned but we didn't find her," he said, wiping away tears.

And it wasn't just her. Kamel had been hopeful that with Assad gone, they would find a missing brother in his prisons; they didn't.

Kamel had vowed never to return to a Syria ruled by Assad, saying he felt like a stranger in his country. His home, he said, was damaged and looted.

But despite any difficulties, he held out hope. At least, he said, "the next generation will live with dignity, God willing."

Kamel fondly recalled how – before their worlds changed – his family would exchange visits with others for most of Ramadan and neighbors would send each other iftar dishes.

"Ramadan is not nice without the family gatherings," he said. "Now, one can barely manage."

He can't feel the same Ramadan spirit as before.

"The good thing," he said, "is that Ramadan came while we're liberated."

What is Eid al-Fitr and how do Muslims celebrate the Islamic holiday?

By MARIAM FAM Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Muslims around the world are bidding farewell to the Islamic holy month of Ramadan and will soon start celebrating the holiday of Eid al-Fitr. Eid is typically greeted with joy and excitement and is marked with congregational prayers and festivities that usually include family visits, gatherings, outings and new clothes.

For some Muslims, this year's Eid comes amid significant changes in their communities.

In Gaza, this will be the second Eid al-Fitr since the start of the Israel-Hamas war. Israel ended its

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 81 of 83

ceasefire with Hamas in Gaza by launching a surprise wave of strikes that killed hundreds of people. Israeli 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. Earlier this month, Israel halted deliveries of food, fuel, medicine and other supplies to Gaza.

The resumption of war changed the fortunes of Palestinians in Gaza who had started observing Ramadan under a fragile ceasefire. Israel's campaign in Gaza has killed more than 50,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. The war was sparked by the Oct. 7, 2023 attack on Israel in which Hamas-led militants killed some 1,200 people and took about 250 hostages.

Elsewhere in the Middle East, Syrians will celebrate their first Eid al-Fitr since the end of more than half a century of the Assad family's iron-fisted rule. The country's first Ramadan since the ouster of Bashar Assad, who was the president, saw many Syrians relieved, but has also witnessed a bloody and worrisome bout of violence amid a complex transition.

In the United States, several supporters of Palestinian causes with ties to American universities have been detained in the Trump administration's crackdown on immigrants.

What is Eid al-Fitr?

It's an Islamic holiday marking the end of Ramadan, the month when devout Muslims fast daily from dawn to sunset. Ramadan is a time for increased worship, charity, and good deeds. It also typically sees festive gatherings to break the fast.

Eid al-Fitr means the feast, or festival, of breaking the fast.

When is Eid al Fitr?

Islam follows a lunar calendar and so Ramadan and Eid cycle through the seasons. This year, the first day of Eid al-Fitr is expected to be on or around March 30; the exact date may vary among countries and Muslim communities.

What are some common Eid greetings?

Eid Mubarak, or Blessed Eid, and Happy Eid.

What are some of the traditions and customs associated with Eid al-Fitr?

In Indonesia, many people embark on an exodus to their hometowns to celebrate the holiday with loved ones in a homecoming tradition known locally as "mudik."

In recent Eid celebrations, Indonesians have packed airports or crammed into trains, ferries, buses and onto motorcycles as they poured out of major cities amid severe traffic congestion to return to their villages to celebrate the holiday with families.

Before the holiday, popular markets teem with shoppers buying clothes, shoes, cookies and sweets.

In Malaysia, Muslims also have a homecoming tradition for Eid. The first day usually begins with a morning prayer in the mosque, seeking forgiveness from family and friends, and visiting loved ones' graves.

There's an "open house" spirit that sees friends and families trading visits to celebrate Eid and enjoy traditional delicacies such as ketupat, rice cooked in a palm leaf pouch, and rendang, a meat dish stewed in spices and braised in coconut milk.

Older Muslims give money in green packets to children and guests who visit their homes.

In Egypt, families partake in Eid prayers amid a festive atmosphere. Many visit relatives, friends or neighbors and some travel to vacation spots. Children, usually wearing new Eid outfits, receive traditional cash gifts known as "eidiya."

Making or buying Eid cookies dusted with powdered sugar is another fixture of marking the holiday in the country.

In the United States, where Muslims make up an ethnically and racially diverse minority, many come together for Eid prayers and for festivals featuring fun activities for children and families. These often include such things as face painting and balloon twisting.

Korean commission finds adoption program rife with abuse, highlighting AP investigation

The Associated Press undefined

A South Korean commission found the country violated its children's human rights by facilitating a foreign adoption program rife with fraud and abuse.

The landmark report released Wednesday followed complaints from hundreds of adoptees in Europe, the United States, and Australia, and represented the most comprehensive investigation into a foreign adoption program that sent some 200,000 South Korean children abroad.

The report aligns with what The Associated Press documented in an investigation last year. That investigation described how birth mothers were pressured or deceived into giving up their children while adoption agencies bribed hospitals to route babies their way.

Fabricated documents and stolen children

Many adoptees have grown up to discover their documents were fabricated, the AP found. Some who'd been told they were abandoned learned that they had actually gone missing or been taken, and their parents back in Korea had searched for them for decades without knowing they were sent abroad.

The reporting showed that Korea's government worked to make foreign adoptions as easy as possible to offload its social welfare costs. Humanitarian workers warned in real time that adoption agencies were aggressively competing for babies. Yet Western nations ignored these problems — sometimes even pressuring South Korea to keep the kids coming — as they focused on satisfying intense domestic demands for babies.

"The commission determined that the state violated the human rights of adoptees protected under the constitution and international agreements, by neglecting its duty to ensure basic human rights, including inadequate legislation, poor management and oversight, and failures in implementing proper administrative procedures while sending large numbers of children abroad," the commission said in a statement.

Adoptees search for truth

The AP has heard from dozens of adoptees since the project published, including a documentary made with Frontline (PBS), and many of them asked for help finding their own origin story. The AP has compiled some resources here.

The search for many is an intimidating and emotional ordeal. Both the AP investigation and the commission's report this week found that children were routinely listed as abandoned, even when they had known family. Children's identities were often switched: if a child intended for adoption died, became too sick to travel or was taken back by their birth family, agencies would swap in another child to avoid starting the process from scratch.

Those practices often make family roots difficult or impossible to trace. Government data obtained by The Associated Press shows less than a fifth of 15,000 adoptees who have asked South Korea for help with family searches since 2012 have managed to reunite with relatives.

What's next

Multiple European countries have launched investigations into their own culpability in abuse in the Korean adoption system. The United States, which has taken in more children than any other nation, has not yet done so.

Sang Hoon Lee, one of the Korean commission's standing commissioners, told the AP that a more systemic evaluation would require a closer look at adoptions to the United States, which by far was the largest recipient of Korean children. U.S. adoptees accounted for a smaller number of complaints received by the commission, most of which were filed by adoptees in Europe.

The Korean commission recommended the country, among other things, apologize to the children it sent away. Some experts, including lawyer Choi Jung Kyu, who has handled various human rights lawsuits against the government, criticized the commission's recommendations as too vague and lacking specific measures for reparations.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, March 30, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 278 ~ 83 of 83

Today in History: March 30, Reagan shot in assassination attempt

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Sunday, March 30, the 89th day of 2025. There are 276 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On March 30, 1981, President Ronald Reagan was shot and seriously wounded by John Hinckley Jr. outside a Washington, D.C., hotel. Also wounded were White House press secretary James Brady, Secret Service agent Timothy McCarthy and a District of Columbia police officer, Thomas Delahanty. (Hinckley would be found not guilty by reason of insanity and held at a psychiatric hospital until his supervised release in 2016. James Brady died in 2014 as a result of his injuries.)

Also on this date:

In 1822, Florida became a United States territory.

In 1867, U.S. Secretary of State William H. Seward reached agreement with Russia to purchase the territory of Alaska for \$7.2 million, a deal ridiculed by critics as "Seward's Folly."

In 1870, the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which prohibited denying citizens the right to vote and hold office on the basis of race, was declared in effect by Secretary of State Hamilton Fish.

In 1923, the Cunard liner RMS Laconia became the first passenger ship to circle the globe as it arrived back in New York after a 130-day voyage.

In 1939, Detective Comics issue #27 was released, featuring the first appearance of the superhero character Batman.

In 1975, as the Vietnam War neared its end, Communist forces occupied the city of Da Nang.

In 2023, a Manhattan grand jury voted to indict Donald Trump on charges involving payments made during the 2016 presidential campaign to silence claims of an extramarital sexual encounter, the first ever criminal case against a former U.S. president.

Today's Birthdays: Actor John Astin is 95. Actor-director Warren Beatty is 88. Basketball Hall of Famer Jerry Lucas is 85. Musician Eric Clapton is 80. Actor Paul Reiser is 69. Rap artist MC Hammer is 63. Singer Tracy Chapman is 61. Actor Ian Ziering is 61. TV personality Piers Morgan is 60. Singer Celine Dion is 57. Actor Mark Consuelos is 54. Singer Norah Jones is 46. Country musician Justin Moore is 41. Country musician Thomas Rhett is 35.