

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 1 of 70

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 News Headlines](#)
- [4- 2025 GHS Commencement to be held today](#)
- [5- Jr. Legion Baseball Schedule](#)
- [6- Jr. Teener Baseball Schedule](#)
- [7- SD SearchLight: Report: Tough-on-crime policies could push prison construction costs as high as \\$2.1 billion](#)
- [10- SD SearchLight: Gold production increases at mine in South Dakota's Black Hills](#)
- [10- SD SearchLight: Trump move to deport Venezuelans violated due process, U.S. Supreme Court rules](#)
- [11- SD SearchLight: U.S. House Republicans aim to ban state-level AI laws for 10 years](#)
- [13- SD SearchLight: U.S. House right wing tanks Trump's 'big, beautiful bill' in Budget Committee](#)
- [15- Weber Landscaping Greenhouse Ad](#)
- [16- Weather Pages](#)
- [20- Daily Devotional](#)
- [21- Subscription Form](#)
- [22- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [23- Upcoming Groton Events](#)
- [24- News from the Associated Press](#)

## Saturday, May 17

GHS Graduation, 2 p.m.

## Sunday, May 18

St. John's Lutheran: Worship with communion at St. John's, 9 a.m.; at Zion, 11 a.m.

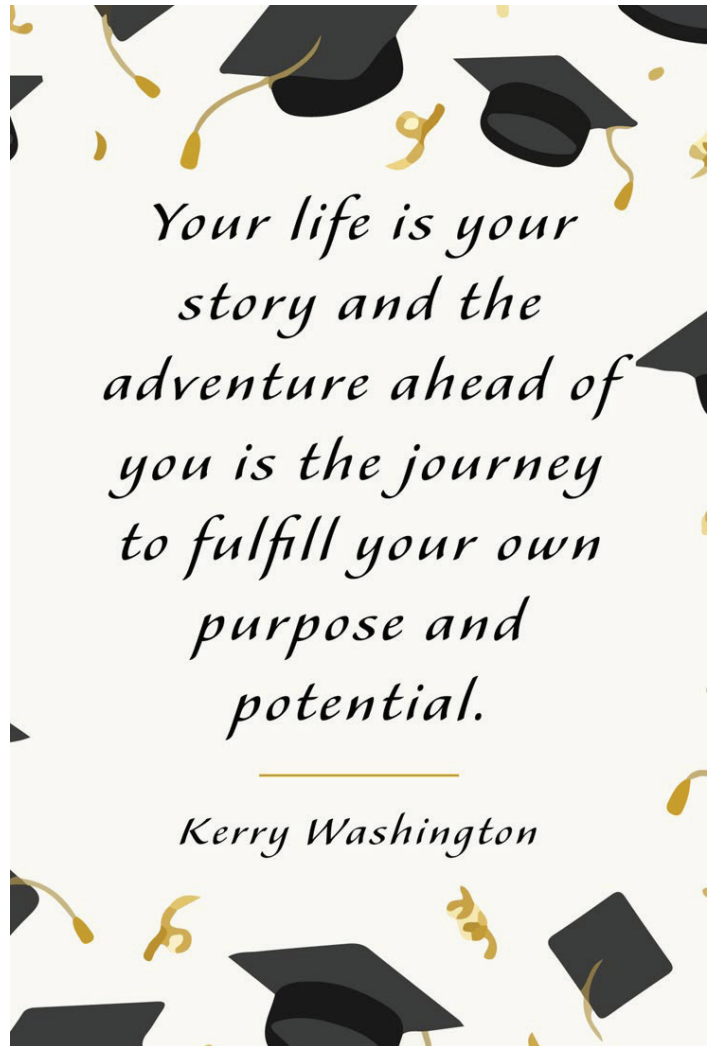
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m.; SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

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.

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

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



## Monday, May 19

Senior Menu: Chicken alfredo, broccoli, blushing pears, whole wheat bread.

Girls Golf at Milbank, 10 a.m.

Junior High Northeast Conference Track Meet, 10 a.m.

Track at Warner, 11 a.m.

Senior Citizens meet at the Groton Community Center, Potluck at Noon

St. John's Lutheran: Christian Literature Circle, 7:30 p.m.

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

## Tuesday, May 20

Senior Menu: Tatertot hot dish, green beans, pineapple, whole wheat bread.

City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Quilting, 9 a.m.

© 2025 Groton Daily Independent

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 2 of 70

# 1440

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

## **Garden State Transit Strike**

Locomotive engineers at New Jersey Transit went on strike early yesterday after negotiations between the union and officials from the state-run commuter service failed to reach an agreement on an updated wage and benefit package. The work stoppage affected an estimated 350,000 passengers who travel between Philadelphia, New Jersey, and New York City each day.

The walkout by about 450 engineers from the nation's third-largest commuter rail system is the first statewide transit strike in New Jersey in more than 40 years. The central issue revolves around a yearslong dispute over wages in a contract ostensibly meant to cover workers from July 2020 to June 2028, with union members arguing the proposed salary hikes aren't comparable to their peers at the nearby Long Island Rail Road. Transit officials claim meeting the union demands would spur wage increase requests from 14 other associated labor unions and cost \$684M between now and 2030, requiring significant fare hikes.

It is unclear when a deal will be struck—a 1983 strike lasted about a month—though rails are expected to be shut down at least through this weekend.

## **House GOP mega-bill stalls in committee.**

A sweeping tax and domestic policy bill favored by President Donald Trump failed to pass the House Budget Committee after five Republicans voted against the measure. Known as the "Big Beautiful Bill," the package has been criticized by fiscal hawks as too costly and by moderates for its cuts to Medicaid. It is expected to be reconsidered next week.

## **Two of the largest US cable companies to merge.**

Charter Communications and Cox Communications—the first- and eighth-largest cable providers in the US by subscribers—announced a merger in a deal consisting of \$21.9B in equity and \$12.6B in debt.

## **New York Knicks advance to conference finals.**

The Knicks dominated the Boston Celtics, 119-81, to advance to their first Eastern Conference Finals in 25 years. New York had four starters score more than 20 points, while guard Josh Hart turned in a triple-double. They'll face the Indiana Pacers Wednesday (8 pm ET, TNT).

## **Pharma giant Novo Nordisk ousts CEO.**

The Danish firm, maker of GLP-1 drugs Ozempic and Wegovy, has lost ground to competitor Eli Lilly in the antiobesity market over the past two years. Shares of the company have fallen more than 50% since mid-2024 amid increased competition.

## **Israeli strikes across Gaza kill at least 93 people.**

The Israeli military said an estimated 150 militant targets were struck across the territory, while Gazan officials said hundreds of additional people were wounded. The strikes come as President Donald Trump wraps up a Middle East trip that did not include a stop in Israel. See updates on the war here.

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 3 of 70**

## **Salman Rushdie attacker sentenced to 25 years in prison.**

Hadi Matar, 27, stabbed and blinded the famous author in his right eye during a public lecture in Chautauqua, New York, in 2022. Rushdie has lived under a call for his assassination issued by Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini over his 1988 novel "The Satanic Verses" for three decades.

## **Humankind(ness)**

Today, we're sharing a story from reader Jason M. in Hershey, Pennsylvania.

"My dear friend of 30 years recently lost his mother. I decided to take him to lunch to reminisce about her and help him through his grief. We went to a local brew pub and after we ordered beers for ourselves, I ordered a vodka tonic, his mom's regular cocktail, and placed it on the table between us. We went on to have great conversation, tears and laughter for the next hour and a half."

"At one point my friend excused himself to go to the restroom and the bartender came over to the table to ask if everything was ok with the drink since it obviously wasn't touched. I explained its purpose and he nodded in understanding. When the bill came, the bartender had not charged for the cocktail. It was very thoughtful of him and I was touched by his kindness."

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 4 of 70

## 2025 GHS Commencement to be held today

Forty-three seniors will be leaving Groton Area High School this year as they receive their diplomas today. The commencement ceremony will be held at 2 p.m. today in the GHS Arena. The following seniors will be graduating:

Antonsen Kellen  
Bahr Emma  
Carman Riley  
Dennert Blake  
Diegel Teylor  
Dinger Gretchen  
Ehresmann Christian  
Ekern Easten  
Feser Ashlyn  
Fliehs Brevin  
Fliehs Elizabeth  
Hansen Brooklyn  
Hansen Kennedy  
Heathcote Aiden  
Herrick Carson  
Jeschke Karsten  
Johnson Ashley  
Johnson Karrah-Jo  
Kampa Jaeger  
Kampa Kaden  
Kosel Jeslyn

Kucker Korbin  
Kutter Emma  
Lehr Kayla  
McGannon Kayleigh  
McInerney Caden  
McKane Karlie  
Mitchell Payton  
Morris Nicholas  
Nava Remigio Diego Eduardo  
Overacker Emily  
Pauli Blake  
Pearson Logan  
Poor Rebecca  
Roberts Laila  
Schwab Christopher  
Simon Carter  
Thompson Turner  
Thurston Drew  
Traphagen Faith  
Warrington Axel  
Weismantel Corbin  
Yeadon Abby



Groton  
Area  
Tigers  
Groton, SD

# GDILIVE



GHS Graduation  
Saturday, May 17, 2 p.m.

A production of the  
**Groton Daily Independent**

For more info: [GDILIVE.COM](http://GDILIVE.COM)



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 5 of 70

## GROTON JR. LEGION 2025

<b>DATE</b>	<b>OPPONENT</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>TIME</b>
May 23	Aberdeen Smitty's	Aberdeen	6:00pm
<b>May 29</b>	<b>Watertown</b>	<b>Groton</b>	<b>5:30pm (DH)</b>
May 30	Redfield	Redfield	7:30pm
June 3	Britton	Britton	5:30pm (DH)
June 5	Miller	Miller	5:30pm (DH)
<b>June 7</b>	<b>W.I.N.</b>	<b>Groton</b>	<b>3:00pm</b>
June 9	Sisseton	Sisseton	5:30pm (DH)
June 14	Platte	Platte	10:00am
	Mt. Vernon/Plankinton		12:00pm
<b>June 15</b>	<b>Redfield</b>	<b>Groton</b>	<b>7:30pm</b>
June 17	Milbank	Milbank	5:30pm (DH)
<b>June 23</b>	<b>Aberdeen Smitty's 16u</b>	<b>Groton</b>	<b>6:00pm</b>
<b>June 26</b>	<b>Britton</b>	<b>Groton</b>	<b>5:30pm (DH)</b>
<b>June 28</b>	<b>Clear Lake</b>	<b>Groton</b>	<b>3:00pm</b>
June 30	W.I.N.	Northville	7:30pm
<b>July 2</b>	<b>Big Stone City</b>	<b>Groton</b>	<b>6:30pm</b>
July 7	Miller	Miller	5:30pm (DH)
<b>July 8</b>	<b>Sisseton</b>	<b>Groton</b>	<b>5:30pm (DH)</b>
<b>July 16</b>	<b>Clark</b>	<b>Groton</b>	<b>7:30pm</b>
<b>July 17</b>	<b>Milbank</b>	<b>Groton</b>	<b>5:30pm (DH)</b>
July 19	Clear Lake	Clear Lake	3:00pm
July 28-29	Regional Tournament	TBD	TBD
Aug 8-10	State B Tournament	Milbank	TBD

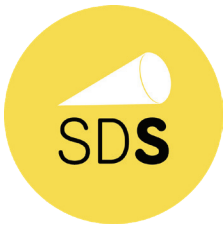
# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 6 of 70

## GROTON JR. TEENERS 2025

<u>DATE</u>	<u>OPPONENT</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>TIME</u>
May 28	Milbank	Groton	5:30pm (DH)
May 30	Clark	Groton	5:30pm (DH)
June 5	Lake Norden	Lake Norden	5:00pm (DH)
June 7	W.I.N.	Groton	1:00pm
June 9	Britton	Britton	5:30pm (DH)
June 13	Clark	Clark	5:30pm (DH)
June 16	Milbank	Milbank	5:30pm (DH)
June 20	Redfield	Groton	5:30pm (DH)
June 25	W.I.N.	Northville	5:30pm (DH)
June 26	Aberdeen 13u	Aberdeen	5:30pm (DH)
June 28	Clear Lake	Groton	1:00pm
July 1	Aberdeen 13/14	Groton	5:30pm (DH)
July 7	Lake Norden	Groton	5:00pm (DH)
July 10	Watertown 13u	Groton	5:30pm (DH)
July 14	Britton	Groton	5:30pm (DH)
July 17	Redfield	Redfield	5:30pm (DH)
July 19	Clear Lake	Clear Lake	1:00pm
	Beresford		TBD
July 21	Faulkton	Faulkton	5:30pm (DH)
July 28-30	Regional Tournament	TBD	TBD
August 8-10	State B Tournament	Britton	TBD





## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### **Report: Tough-on-crime policies could push prison construction costs as high as \$2.1 billion**

**Consultant says state will need more than 3,000 beds by 2036**

**BY: JOHN HULT - MAY 16, 2025 6:18 PM**

South Dakota will need a third more prison space than it has now by 2036, and lawmakers' choice to pass a so-called truth in sentencing bill in 2023 is a major reason why.

That's among the takeaways from a new report on the state's prison infrastructure that says the state would need to spend between \$1.9 billion and \$2.1 billion on new prisons to deal with an inmate population that's projected to swell in spite of the state's decreasing crime rate.

The state needs a 1,700-bed men's prison immediately, the report from Arrington Watkins says. Even then, it says, another 1,500 beds for men will be necessary in a little more than 10 years, when it projects a prison population of more than 5,000 people.

The state signed a \$729,000 contract with the Phoenix-based firm as part of "Project Prison Reset," a work group formed by gubernatorial fiat in the face of state lawmakers' refusal to back an \$850 million, 1,500-bed men's prison in Lincoln County in February.

Lt. Gov. Tony Venhuizen, chairman of the work group, said the report supports the group's first official vote last month, which was to conclude that the state does need at least one new prison.

Venhuizen was quick to point out that the \$2 billion price tag would only apply if the state followed the consultant's guidance to the letter and built two large prisons, but said the population projections lay bare the stakes of South Dakota's current approach to criminal justice.

The work group's job is not to address the drivers of prison population growth, he said. But he also said he's glad the report took note of those driving forces.

The truth in sentencing bill, SB 146, requires people convicted of violent offenses to serve between 85% and 100% of their sentences, depending on the category of their crime.

As a legislator in 2023, Venhuizen voted against SB 146, and its potential to impact prison populations "was part of the reason why."

"Those decisions are not free. You have to strike a balance there," Venhuizen said. "If you're sending people to prison for longer, there is a cost to that."

The bill's author and prime sponsor, Republican former Sen. Brent Hoffman, has a different take on the legislation's impact on South Dakota's correctional needs.

"The real issue isn't SB 146, which protects the public by requiring violent criminals to serve their sentences," said Hoffman, a supporter of term limits who served one term and opted against running for a second in 2024. "The underlying, systemic problems are recidivism rates, wasteful spending, misguided priorities and incompetence, and those problems won't be solved by any consultant's report or politician's rhetoric."

### **Prison population growth**

Every correctional facility in South Dakota is beyond its capacity now. The South Dakota State Penitentiary was built in 1881 to house one inmate per cell, but holds twice as many.

The proposed 1,500-bed facility in Lincoln County, mired in controversy over cost and necessity and still tied up in litigation over its location, was meant to replace the penitentiary.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 8 of 70

There are two other housing units on the penitentiary campus in Sioux Falls, however, and each of those faces its own issues with overcrowding.

The maximum-security Jameson Annex, for example, is overbooked because it houses not only maximum security inmates, but those in disciplinary segregation and those with serious mental health needs. It's also the sorting zone for every new male inmate in the state system, where inmates stay as they're assessed for longer-term placement.

The Sioux Falls Minimum Center, meanwhile, holds 245 men in a building designed for 96.

Even with a large but temporary drop during the COVID-19 pandemic, new admissions to Department of Corrections custody grew an average of 3.2% a year between 2015 and 2024, the report says.

That's in spite of a crime rate in South Dakota that's lower than the national average and on the decline. The state's total population has gone the other direction, increasing by 0.9% a year since 2010.

Much of the long-term factors built into the new report were present for its predecessor, a report from Omaha's DLR group that pointed to a 1,500-bed men's facility as one of several necessary projects for the DOC.

Senate Bill 146 is a wrinkle that didn't exist for the DLR group, some portions of which were used by Arrington Watkins in its expedited, two-month repeat assessment.

SB 146 ropes in fewer than 10% of the state's inmates, the report notes – drug offenses are the most common charge for which South Dakotans are imprisoned – but the inability of those convicted of violent offenses to be released before serving at least 85% of their sentence will have a long-term impact on prison population growth.

"Roughly half" of the 1,246 more inmates the report anticipates South Dakota will have by 2036 is attributable to SB 146.

Parole violations are another driver of population growth, the report notes. About 45% of new admissions to the DOC came by way of parole violations in 2024, the report says, and 84% of those violations "were technical in nature rather than new criminal charges."

Minnehaha County State's Attorney Daniel Hagggar cautioned that technical parole violations often involve serious misbehavior, however. Technical violations include drug use, he said, as well as absconding – losing touch with a parole officer altogether.

"When those offenders are violent offenders or sex offenders this is a threat to public safety," he said in an email to South Dakota Searchlight on Friday.

## Responses colored with skepticism of price tag, conclusions

The state has already spent more than \$50 million on the Lincoln County site, although a share of that money could be clawed back by selling land or reusing aspects of the now-stalled prison's design.

The new report's top recommendation is a 1,700-bed, Level V facility, built within 30 miles of the existing penitentiary to relieve crowding across the entirety of the men's prison system. It also recommends demolishing the 1881 penitentiary.

"Level V" is correctional nomenclature for maximum security.

Former penitentiary warden Doug Weber wrote seven letters to lawmakers during the 2025 session urging them to say no to the 1,500-bed facility in Lincoln County, essentially a smaller version of what the new report says is necessary.

The focus on the factors driving the state's prison population growth raises important questions, Weber told South Dakota Searchlight on Friday, but he disagrees strongly with its conclusions on how to remedy the situation.

"There's nobody in South Dakota, in my opinion, except a handful of people, maybe in Pierre, that would be comfortable spending \$2.1 billion on buildings for the Department of Corrections," said Weber. "There are much better ways to spend money."

Weber called a Level V facility unnecessary and too expensive in a state where the number of maximum security inmates hovers around 200.



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 9 of 70

He also bristles at the idea of knocking down the pen. Millions have been spent to maintain it in recent years, including for air conditioning less than five years ago, and Weber said it could easily serve as a minimum security facility by removing the cell doors and putting a single person in each cell.

Republican Speaker of the House Jon Hansen, a work group member and candidate for governor in 2026, said "there's absolutely no way that I will support spending that much money on prisons."

"If we needed to be building new facilities, we should be looking at the current location in Sioux Falls for a lot less money," Hansen said.

Madeline Voegeli, one of the neighbors to the Lincoln County site who sued the state over the issue, said in an email to Searchlight that the group has serious doubts about the veracity of the report's population projections.

The DLR report, completed in 2022, suggested a 1,300-bed men's prison at a cost of around \$608 million. Now, she wrote, "we're being told to swallow a nearly quadrupled cost of up to \$2.1 billion, largely driven by SB 146 and questionable population projections."

Voegeli accused the state of engaging in a "pattern of inflating proposals to make a billion-dollar plan" – the original Lincoln County proposal – "appear reasonable."

Venhuizen said arguments suggesting that the Lincoln County plan's supporters tried to tip the scale in the consultant's report are misplaced.

"It's not a strong position to assume that everyone who disagrees with you is being dishonest," Venhuizen said. "If you're doing that, you should probably examine the strength of your own arguments."

## Criminal justice reform questions

Rep. Karla Lems, a Canton Republican who's both a work group member and an avowed opponent of the Lincoln County proposal, said Friday that she's skeptical of the conclusions, as well.

The work group is meant to deliver its recommendations to a special legislative session in July. The state, she said, needs to spend more time thinking about reducing repeat offenses before it decides what to build.

Rep. Brian Mulder, R-Sioux Falls, is also a work group member. He said the state needs to think "innovatively" on how to reduce prison populations, and that the report is a clear sign of how necessary that is. Mulder was one of the prime sponsors of a bill to change the penalty for first- and second-offense drug ingestion from a felony to a misdemeanor during the 2025 session.

Too few prisoners are getting drug treatment, Mulder said, and he feels the state ought to consider partnering with nonprofits to extend treatment's reach both inside the prison and outside, for parolees.

He also has questions about parole supervision practices.

"I would ask 'what's going on now with things like remote monitoring,'" Mulder said. "It's a lot more effective for the state for someone so they can continue to be held accountable, but be held at home."

Mulder supported truth in sentencing and continues to, though. He said parole reforms make more sense.

Reforms to truth in sentencing laws ought to be up for consideration, though, according to Zoë Towns, executive director of a bipartisan think tank called Fwd.US.

Her group pushes for changes to criminal justice and immigration policy. The knock-on effects of incarceration for families and communities are heavy, Towns said, and the returns for public safety diminish significantly when inmates don't have a chance to earn credit for good behavior – even when the people earning them committed violent offenses.

"What we should be asking is 'how long is incapacitation actually helpful?'" Towns said. "What are the policies that are most likely to help people, when they come home, to contribute to their communities and local economies?"

Addressing behavioral health needs and addiction early on are more effective ways to deal with crime than incarceration, she said, but other strategies are even further removed from criminal justice.

Towns pointed to research from places like the Brookings Institute that suggest investments in youth education and public health offer long-term returns for public safety.

"It's literally after school and public school programs," Towns said. "That has a stronger homicide reduc-

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 10 of 70

tion rate than policing does. I'm not saying there's not a role for policing. I'm saying that actually, factually, in evidence, has a stronger return than sleeping in prison."

The next Project Prison Reset meeting is June 3 in Pierre.

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

## Gold production increases at mine in South Dakota's Black Hills

BY: SETH TUPPER - MAY 16, 2025 9:07 AM

Production at South Dakota's only active, large-scale gold mine climbed to its highest level in eight years, according to a new 2024 annual report.

The Wharf Mine, owned by Chicago-based Coeur Mining, is near the city of Lead and the Terry Peak Ski Area in the northern Black Hills. The mine produced 98,042 ounces of gold last year — nearly 5,000 ounces more than the prior year.

The mine also produced 232,013 ounces of silver, which is a lesser-value "co-product" of the gold mining process. Silver production was down about 36,000 ounces from an usually high level in 2023.

To extract all of those minerals last year, miners stripped away 12.9 million tons of earth to access 5 million tons of ore.

State regulators issued a warning letter to the mine in 2021 about selenium pollution in False Bottom Creek, which flows within the mine's boundaries. Selenium is a naturally occurring mineral in soil, but when it's turned loose in the environment in large amounts, it can pollute water and be harmful to people and fish.

A staff member for the state Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources said Thursday during a meeting of the state Board of Minerals and Environment that the company is building a new water treatment plant to address the problem. The plant is expected to be operational by October.

The annual report says the mine employs 255 people and paid \$12.5 million in state precious-metal severance taxes last year, plus nearly \$800,000 in state and local sales taxes.

Coeur Mining's annual report for investors says it sold \$227.6 million worth of gold from the Wharf Mine last year, and \$6.4 million worth of silver, for a total of \$234 million. That was a 25% increase from 2023.

From those proceeds, the company said it made donations to 55 Black Hills-area entities, such as non-profits and school groups, totaling \$220,000.

The company operates additional mines in Nevada, Alaska and Mexico, and reported total 2024 precious-metal sales of more than \$1 billion.

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

## Trump move to deport Venezuelans violated due process, U.S. Supreme Court rules

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - MAY 16, 2025 4:43 PM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Supreme Court on Friday kept in place a block on the Trump administration's efforts to deport 176 Venezuelans in Northern Texas under the Alien Enemies Act of 1798.

A majority of the justices found that President Donald Trump's administration violated the due process rights of Venezuelans when the administration tried to deport them from North Texas last month by invoking the 18th-century wartime law. Conservative Justices Samuel Alito and Clarence Thomas dissented.

"Under these circumstances, notice roughly 24 hours before removal, devoid of information about how to exercise due process rights to contest that removal, surely does not pass muster," according to the decision.

The justices did not determine the legality of the Trump administration using the Alien Enemies Act to

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 11 of 70

deport Venezuelans 14 and older with suspected ties to the gang Tren de Aragua.

On his social media platform, Trump expressed his disapproval of the ruling.

"THE SUPREME COURT WON'T ALLOW US TO GET CRIMINALS OUT OF OUR COUNTRY!" he wrote on Truth Social.

The justices found that the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals "erred in dismissing the detainees' appeal for lack of jurisdiction," and vacated that order, sending the case back.

The Trump administration on Monday asked the high court to remove the injunction, arguing that detaining suspected members of Tren de Aragua poses a threat to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers and staff.

In a Wednesday response, the American Civil Liberties Union, which brought the suit, warned that if the Supreme Court lifts its injunction, "most of the putative class members will be removed with little chance to seek judicial review."

In Friday's order, the justices noted that because the Trump administration has used the Alien Enemies Act to send migrants to a notorious prison in El Salvador, careful due process is needed.

"The Government has represented elsewhere that it is unable to provide for the return of an individual deported in error to a prison in El Salvador...where it is alleged that detainees face indefinite detention," according to the order, noting the wrongful deportation of Maryland man Kilmar Abrego Garcia to El Salvador.

"The detainees' interests at stake are accordingly particularly weighty," the court continued.

## Other rulings

On April 18, the ACLU made an emergency application to the high court, asking to bar any removals under the Alien Enemies Act in the Northern District of Texas over concerns that the Trump administration was not following due process.

Several federal judges elsewhere have blocked the use of the wartime law in their districts that cover Colorado, Southern Texas and Southern New York.

A federal judge in Western Pennsylvania Tuesday was the first to uphold the Trump administration's use of the Alien Enemies Act, but said those accused must have at least three weeks to challenge their removal.

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

## U.S. House Republicans aim to ban state-level AI laws for 10 years

**South Dakota's Jackley is among 40 attorneys general opposing measure**

**BY: PAIGE GROSS - MAY 16, 2025 2:35 PM**

A footnote in a budget bill U.S. House Republicans are trying to pass before Memorial Day is the first major signal for how Congress may address artificial intelligence legislation, as they seek to create a moratorium on any AI laws at the state level for 10 years.

The measure, advanced Wednesday as part of the House Energy & Commerce Committee's budget reconciliation proposal, says a state may not enforce any law or regulation on AI models and systems, or automated decision-making systems in the next 10 years. Exceptions would include laws that "remove legal impediments to, or facilitate the deployment or operation of" AI systems.

"No one believes that AI should be unregulated," said California Rep. Jay Obernolte, a Republican member of the Subcommittee on Communications and Technology, during a markup Wednesday. But he said he believes that responsibility should fall to Congress, not the states.

The AI law moratorium was packaged with a budget line item proposing to spend \$500 million modernizing federal IT programs with commercial AI systems through 2035.

This move by House Republicans is not really out of left field, said Travis Hall, director for State Engagement at tech policy and governance organization Center for Democracy and Technology. Many have been itching to create a preemptive federal law to supersede AI legislation in the states.



# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 12 of 70**

At a Senate Commerce Committee session earlier this month, Chairman Ted Cruz, a Texas Republican, said it was in his plans to create "a regulatory sandbox for AI" that would prevent state overregulation and promote the United States' AI industry. OpenAI CEO Sam Altman, once open to AI regulations, testified that the country's lack of regulation is what contributed to his success.

"I think it is no accident that that's happening in America again and again and again, but we need to make sure that we build our systems and that we set our policy in a way where that continues to happen," Altman said.

As the language of the bill stands, Congress would prohibit enforcement of any existing laws on AI and decision-making systems, and nullify any potential laws that could be put forth over the next decade, Hall said. Though they discussed AI research last year, Congress has not put forward any guidelines or regulations on AI.

"I will say what feels very different and new about this particular provision ... both in terms of conversations about artificial intelligence and in terms of other areas of tech and telecom policy, is the complete lack of any regulatory structure that would actually be preempting the state law," Hall said.

States have been developing their own laws around AI and decision-making systems — software that helps analyze and sort data, commonly used for job applications, mortgage lending, banking and in other industries — over the last few years as they await federal legislation. At least 550 AI bills have been introduced across 45 states and Puerto Rico in 2025, the National Conference of State Legislatures reported.

Many of these state laws regulate how AI intertwines with data privacy, transparency and discrimination. Others regulate how children can access these tools, how they can be used in election processes and surround the concept of deepfakes, or computer-generated likenesses of real people.

While lawmakers from both sides of the aisle have called for federal AI legislation, Hall said he thinks industry pressure and President Donald Trump's deregulated tech stance won't allow Congress to effectively act on a preemptive law — "states are stepping into that vacuum themselves."

On Friday, 40 state attorneys general signed a bipartisan letter to Congress opposing the limitation on state AI legislation. The letter urged Congress to develop a federal framework for AI governance for "high risk" systems that promotes transparency, testing and tool assessment, in addition to state legislation. The letter said existing laws were developed "over years through careful consideration and extensive stakeholder input from consumers, industry, and advocates."

"In the face of Congressional inaction on the emergence of real-world harms raised by the use of AI, states are likely to be the forum for addressing such issues," the letter said. "This bill would directly harm consumers, deprive them of rights currently held in many states, and prevent State AGs from fulfilling their mandate to protect consumers."

A sweeping AI bill in California was vetoed by Gov. Gavin Newsom last year, citing similar industry pressure. Senate Bill 1047 would have required safety testing of costly AI models to determine whether they would likely lead to mass death, endanger public infrastructure or enable severe cyberattacks.

Assemblymember Rebecca Bauer-Kahan, a Bay Area Democrat, has found more success with the Automated Decisions Safety Act this year, but said as a regulatory lawyer, she would favor having a federal approach.

"We don't have a Congress that is going to do what our communities want, and so in the absence of their action, the states are stepping up," she said.

The moratorium would kill the Automated Decisions Safety Act and nullify all of California's AI legislation, as well as landmark laws like Colorado's which will go into effect in February. State Rep. Brianna Titone, a sponsor of Colorado's law, said people are hungry for some regulation.

"A 10 year moratorium of time is astronomical in terms of how quickly this technology is being developed," she said in an email to States Newsroom. "To have a complete free-for-all on AI with no safeguards puts citizens at risk of situations we haven't yet conceived of."

Hall is skeptical that this provision will advance fully, saying he feels legislators will have a hard time trying to justify this moratorium in a budget bill relating to updating aging IT systems. But it's a clear indication that the focus of this Congress is on deregulation, not accountability, he said.

"I do think that it's unfortunate that the first statement coming out is one of abdication of responsibility," Hall said, "as opposed to stepping up and doing the hard work of actually putting in place common sense and, like, actual protections for people that allows for innovation."

*Paige Gross is a Philadelphia-based reporter covering the evolving technology industry for States Newsroom. Her coverage involves how congress and individual states are regulating new and growing technologies, how technology plays a role in our everyday lives and what people ought to know to interact with technology.*

## U.S. House right wing tanks Trump's 'big, beautiful bill' in Budget Committee

**BY: ASHLEY MURRAY AND JENNIFER SHUTT - MAY 16, 2025 12:31 PM**

WASHINGTON — Republicans suffered a major setback to their "big, beautiful bill" on Friday, when amid conservative objections the U.S. House Budget Committee failed to approve the measure, a crucial step in the process.

In a 16-21 vote, Reps. Andrew Clyde of Georgia, Josh Brecheen of Oklahoma, Ralph Norman of South Carolina, Chip Roy of Texas and Lloyd Smucker of Pennsylvania broke from their GOP colleagues to block the bill from moving toward the floor, demanding changes to several provisions.

The breakdown over the 1,116-page bill marks an escalation in the long-running feud between centrist Republicans, who have been cautious about hundreds of billions in spending cuts to safety net programs, and far-right members of the party, who argue the changes are not enough.

The committee is scheduled to reconvene Sunday at 10 p.m. Eastern. House Speaker Mike Johnson of Louisiana has said he wants the package on the floor prior to the Memorial Day recess.

### Speedier work requirements

Norman said he remains a "hard no" until new work requirements for Medicaid recipients phase in more quickly. As the bill is written, the requirements won't begin until 2029.

"To phase this in for four years — We're telling a healthy-bodied, a healthy American that you got four years to get a job. No, your payment stops now," Norman said.

Brecheen criticized the bill for not going far enough to repeal wind and solar energy tax credits, which he contends are "undermining natural gas jobs."

"We have to fix this," he said.

Clyde denounced the measure for not adhering to President Donald Trump's promise of "right-sizing government," as Clyde described it. The Georgia Republican also pleaded for lower taxes on firearms and stronger cuts that would put Medicaid on a "sustainable path."

"Unfortunately, the current version falls short of these goals and fails to deliver the transformative change that Americans were promised," Clyde said.

Smucker initially voted 'yes,' but then joined his four colleagues to oppose the measure.

Trump wrote on his social media platform shortly before the committee voted that "Republicans MUST UNITE behind, 'THE ONE, BIG BEAUTIFUL BILL!'"

"We don't need 'GRANDSTANDERS' in the Republican Party. STOP TALKING, AND GET IT DONE! It is time to fix the MESS that Biden and the Democrats gave us. Thank you for your attention to this matter!"

### 'A wrecking ball to Medicaid'

Democrats, who as expected unified in voting no against the bill, slammed it as "ugly," "cruel" and a "betrayal."

"This bill takes a wrecking ball to Medicaid, on which 1 in 5 Americans and 3 million Ohioans depend for medical care — children, seniors in nursing homes," said Rep. Marcy Kaptur, who represents northern

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 14 of 70

Ohio. "Please come with me to visit the nursing homes. ... Perhaps too many on the other side of the aisle have not had to endure a life that has major challenges."

Rep. Ilhan Omar of Minnesota said the proposed cuts to safety net programs would be "devastating." "Their changes will kick millions of Americans off their health care and nutrition assistance. That means more untreated illnesses, more hungry children, more preventable deaths," she said.

## Republican-only bill

Republicans are using the complex reconciliation process to move the package through Congress with simple majority votes in each chamber, avoiding the Senate's 60-vote legislative filibuster, which would otherwise require bipartisanship.

Reconciliation measures must address federal revenue, spending, or the debt limit in a way not deemed "merely incidental" by the Senate parliamentarian. That means the GOP proposals must carry some sort of price tag and cannot focus simply on changing federal policy.

Republicans are using the package to extend the 2017 tax law, increase spending on border security and defense by hundreds of billions of dollars, overhaul American energy production, restructure higher education aid and cut spending.

The 11 House committees tasked with drafting pieces of the legislation have all debated and approved their measures along party lines.

The Agriculture Committee, Energy and Commerce Committee and Ways and Means Committee all completed their work earlier this week, amid strong objections from Democrats.

Proposed changes to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, could shift considerable cost-sharing onto states for the first time, presenting challenges for red-state lawmakers who need to explain the bill back home.

More than \$600 billion in federal spending cuts to Medicaid during the next decade could also cause some difficulties for moderate Republicans, some of whose constituents are likely to be among the millions of Americans expected to lose their health insurance.

Republicans also have yet to reach an agreement on the state and local tax deduction or SALT, a priority for GOP lawmakers from blue states like California, New Jersey and New York.

The Budget Committee's role in the process was to package together all of the bills and then send the one massive bill to the Rules Committee, the last stop before floor debate for major legislation.

That won't be able to happen until after GOP leaders get nearly all the Republican lawmakers on the panel to support the package.

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

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



OPENING MAY 2ND  
CLOSING JUNE 2ND

## WEBER LANDSCAPING GREENHOUSE

620 WEST THIRD AVENUE

GROTON

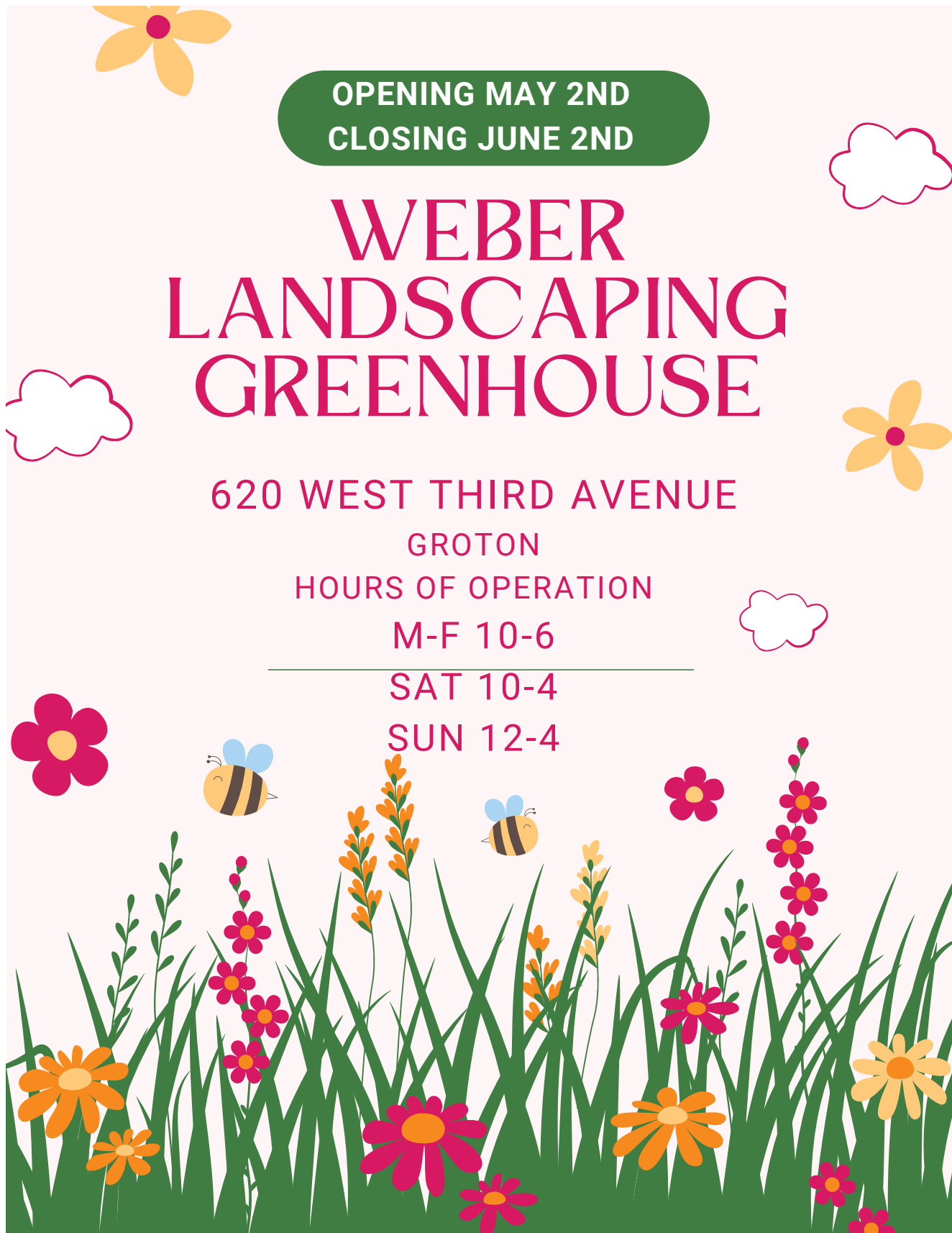
HOURS OF OPERATION

M-F 10-6

---

SAT 10-4

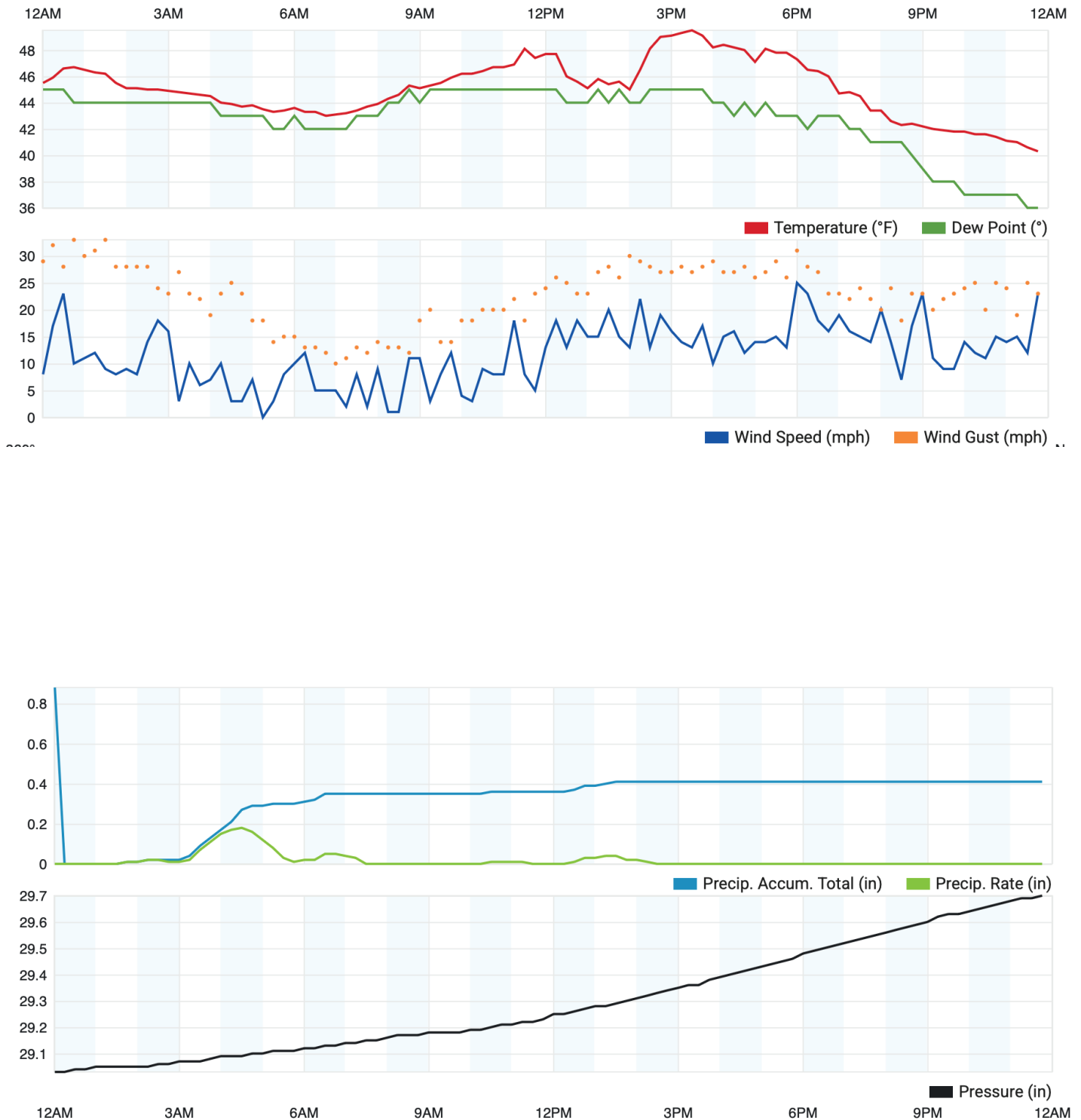
SUN 12-4



# Groton Daily Independent


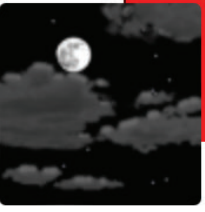

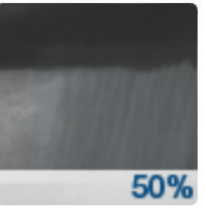
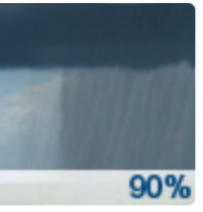
Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 16 of 70

## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 17 of 70

Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
				
<b>High: 58 °F</b>	<b>Low: 31 °F</b>	<b>High: 61 °F</b>	<b>Low: 40 °F</b>	<b>High: 53 °F</b>
Decreasing Clouds	Mostly Clear then Frost	Frost then Slight Chance Showers	Chance Showers	Showers and Breezy



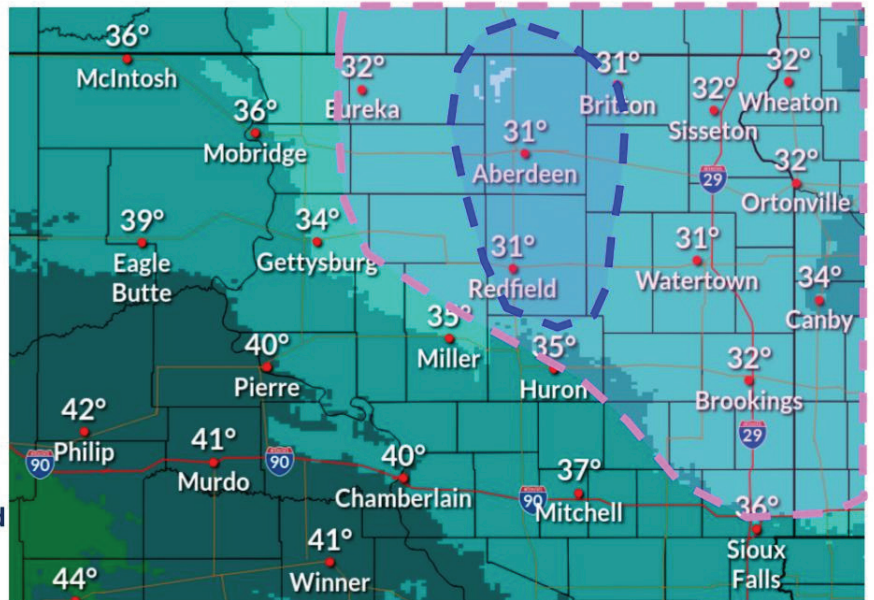
## Frost/Freeze Potential Sunday Morning

May 17, 2025  
3:20 AM

### Sunday Morning Low Temperatures

#### Key Messages:

- Chilly daytime temperatures followed by light northwest winds and dissipating clouds will allow temperatures to fall into the 30s Tonight/Sunday AM
- Main area of concern for lows in the 31 - 36 range is northeast SD & western MN
  - Areas shaded in **Pink** are the main area of concern for **patchy frost**
  - Areas outlined in **Blue** have the highest chances to see a **widespread damaging freeze**



National Oceanic and  
Atmospheric Administration  
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

With temperatures failing to warm much today, and clearing skies with light winds tonight, we have the risk for a frost/freeze across much of eastern South Dakota tonight/Sunday morning



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 18 of 70

## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 50 °F at 3:33 PM**

**Low Temp: 41 °F at 11:25 PM**

**Wind: 41 mph at 12:59 AM**

**Precip: : 2-Day Total: 1.43**

Day length: 15 hours, 03 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 103 in 1934

Record Low: 27 in 1925

Average High: 71

Average Low: 45

Average Precip in May.: 1.88

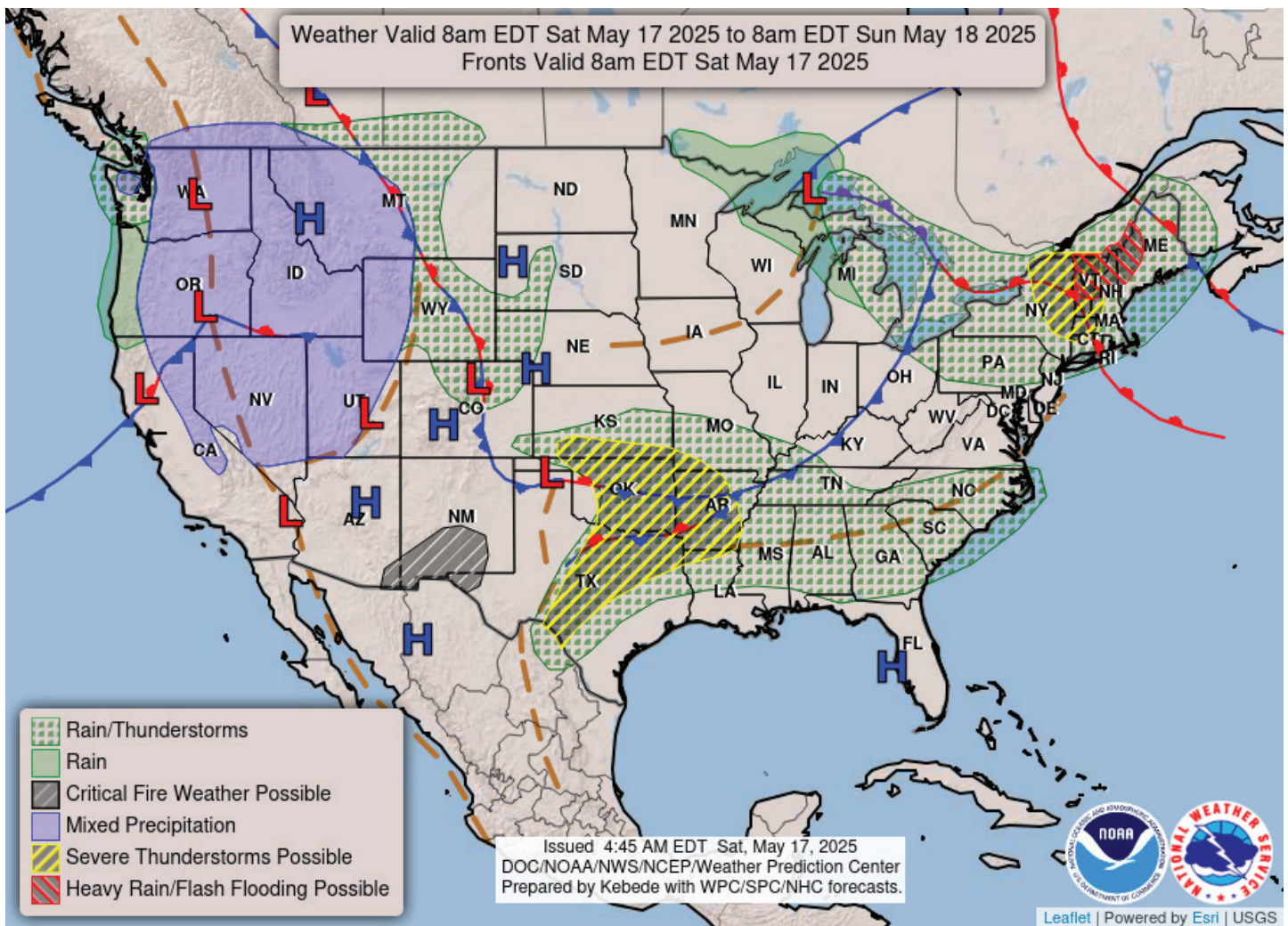
Precip to date in May.: 1.73

Average Precip to date: 5.85

Precip Year to Date: 4.36

Sunset Tonight: 9:00:21 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:56:14 am



# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 19 of 70**

## Today in Weather History

May 17th, 1902: An estimated F3 Tornado moved northeast from 6 miles southwest of Mina to south of Westport, a distance of about 25 miles. A four-year-old girl was killed in one of two farmhouses blown apart in Edmunds County. Three more homes were damaged in Brown County. There were probably two, if not three, separate tornadoes involved.

May 17th, 1937: A complex of tornadoes and downbursts skipped southeast from near Roslyn and Greenville. This storm also caused \$50,000 in damage in downtown Waubay and damaged farm property about 4 miles west of Gray, Minnesota. About 20 barns were destroyed. Sheep and horses were killed. These events traveled a distance of about 70 miles. The strongest tornado was estimated at F2 strength.

May 17th, 1996: An F1 tornado touched down 20 miles southeast of Wilmot or 5 miles northwest of Ortonville, Minnesota, at Schmidts Landing on Big Stone Lake. The roof was ripped off a house, and a garage wall was blown off its foundation. Three RVs were demolished, and a trailer was overturned and destroyed. This tornado moved into Big Stone County and intensified. An F3 tornado crossed Big Stone Lake from Roberts County, South Dakota, destroying a cabin at the Meadowbrook Resort. It also blew the roof off another cabin, and the third cabin was demolished when a tree fell onto it. Several boats on Big Stone Lake were overturned. Approximately 150 buildings were damaged or destroyed as the tornado moved northeast across Big Stone County. Southwest of Clinton, a pontoon boat and a camper were destroyed. East of Clinton, a farm lost all buildings and severely damaged their home. Estimated property damage was listed at \$1.5 million.

A 90-mph wind gust blew two garage roofs off, destroyed an antenna, blew large trees down, and also blew down a grain dryer near Dumont, Minnesota.

1883 - A three day flood in the Black Hills of western South Dakota resulted in a million dollars damage at Rapid City. (David Ludlum)

1979 - A reading of 12 degrees at Mauna Kea Observatory established an all-time record low for the state of Hawaii. (The Weather Channel)

1983 - A golfer playing the Fox Meadows Course in Memphis TN was struck by a bolt of lightning that went through his neck, down his spine, came out a pocket containing his keys, and went into a nearby tree. Miraculously, he survived! (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A summer-like weather pattern continued, with warm temperatures and scattered thunderstorms across much of the nation. A cold front in the north central U.S. produced a sharp contrast in the weather across the state of Minnesota during the afternoon. At the same time Duluth was 50 degrees with rain and fog, Mankato was 95 degrees with sunny skies. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced large hail and damaging winds over the Carolinas during the afternoon and evening. A "thunderstorm of a lifetime" in northern Spartanburg County, SC, produced hail for forty-five minutes, leaving some places knee-deep in hail. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms ravaged the south central U.S. with severe weather for the third day in a row. Thunderstorms spawned another nineteen tornadoes, for a total of fifty tornadoes in three days. A strong (F-2) tornado injured 14 persons and caused two million dollars damage at Apple Springs TX. Baseball size hail was reported at Matador TX. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms developing along a cold front produced severe weather in New York State during the late morning and afternoon. A tornado injured one person at Warren, and wind gusts to 80 mph were reported at Owego. Evening thunderstorms over southwest Texas produced wind gusts to 80 mph at Marfa, along with golf ball size hail which accumulated to a depth of ten inches. Late night thunderstorms over southwest Texas produced up to seven inches of rain in western Crockett County. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 20 of 70



## Unbelievable, really, what some of us believe.

When I was a child, we had "bins" in our kitchen that contained flour and sugar. As a child, I had little use for either of them. So I thought.

One of the great memories of my childhood was the tent my Dad erected in the back yard. It was a place where many of the children in our neighborhood would gather to talk and hide, share secrets and snacks, and "get way from our parents' watching eyes and listening ears."

Sunday afternoon family "get-togethers" were a regular occurrence. Once, after a short discussion about the "fun" of smoking, we concluded that we were old enough to smoke. If it was OK for our parents to smoke, it was OK for us, too. There was only one problem: we had no tobacco, no paper to roll the tobacco in, and no matches. No problem.

I went inside for some matches and newspaper while a friend went into our garden and collected some "silk" from several ears of corn. That would serve as our tobacco. So, we carefully rolled the silk into the paper to make cigarettes. Everything was going well.

I decided to be the first to "light-up." When I tried to inhale, the paper burst into flames and singed my eyebrows. "Teeman" had the solution: "Run into the kitchen and rub sugar over your eyebrows." That, he promised, would hide the "evidence" – the singed eyebrows of my "accident."

Unfortunately, my Dad came into the kitchen - and there I was: head deep inside the sugar bin. And, of course, nothing I said made sense or hid the truth.

"A man's ways are in full view of the Lord." (As well as others!)

Today's Prayer: It's difficult, if not impossible Lord, to hide anything from anybody, and certainly not possible to hide anything from You. May we live with nothing to hide. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Today's Scripture: "For the Lord sees clearly what a man does, examining every path he takes."

-Proverbs 5:21

*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

Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 21 of 70

## The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.2% Sales Tax

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

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

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

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

City \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

Mail Completed Form to:

Groton Independent

P.O. Box 34

Groton, SD 57445-0034

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

## Groton Daily Independent [www.397news.com](http://www.397news.com) Subscription Form

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

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

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

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

City \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

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

Password \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 22 of 70



## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.16.25

2 22 42 62 66 14

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$139,000,000**

NEXT DRAW:

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.14.25

8 17 38 42 50 5

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$34,360,000**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 41 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.16.25

14 24 25 29 35 4

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 15 Mins 40 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.14.25

9 11 18 19 28

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$20,000**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 15 Mins 41 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.14.25

2 44 55 56 67 5

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 44 Mins 41 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.14.25

4 10 24 29 53 4

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$123,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 44 Mins 41 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 23 of 70**

## **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

### **Finally back in Eastern Conference finals, Knicks face Pacers team that eliminated them last year**

By BRIAN MAHONEY AP Basketball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The New York Knicks nearly ended their lengthy Eastern Conference finals drought last year, only to lose on their home floor to the Indiana Pacers in Game 7 of the second round.

With two new starters and much better health, the Knicks finally made it this season for the first time in 25 years.

The opponent will be those same Pacers, who return to Madison Square Garden for a series that begins Wednesday night.

"More to go," Knicks guard Mikal Bridges said. "We're not done."

Since their last trip to the conference finals in 2000 — another loss to the Pacers — the Knicks had reached the second round only one time until doing it each of the last two years following the arrival of Jalen Brunson.

So finally getting over that hump with their 119-81 victory over the Boston Celtics in Game 6 on Friday was a significant step, just not one the Knicks cared to celebrate.

"The goal is always to win a championship and so we've got eight wins. You need 16, right? And each one gets harder and harder, so you've got to keep fighting," Knicks coach Tom Thibodeau said.

The Knicks had a 2-0 lead in the series against the Pacers last year before they were decimated with injuries, and Indiana ran them off the floor in Game 7.

New York then traded for Bridges shortly after the season and made a blockbuster move to acquire Karl-Anthony Towns from Minnesota just before the start of this one. It didn't appear those were going to be the final moves that built a championship team, as the Knicks finished 51-31, well behind Cleveland and Boston, and went a combined 0-8 against those teams.

But they won't have to worry about the Cavaliers, who lost in five games to the Pacers, and completely turned things around against the Celtics. New York overcame 20-point deficits in the second halves of both games in Boston to open the series.

The resolve the Knicks showed in those comebacks wasn't there during the regular-season matchups against the Celtics, when the first three were blowouts. But maybe the Knicks have found it just in time.

"When you're in these situations, especially in the playoffs, we talk about that New York grit, that unrelentless belief that we will never lose," Towns said. "And I think that this series, when you want to go deeper into the playoffs, you have to have that and we showed it this series and I think that was really special for us."

The Knicks were decided underdogs going into the series after the ease with which the Celtics handled them in the regular season. Boston obviously wasn't quite the same team after Jayson Tatum's ruptured Achilles tendon late in Game 4, but the Celtics were still the defending champions and felt they had enough to win even without their leading scorer.

Instead, the Knicks were so dominant in Game 6 that Brunson was asked afterward if their victory in the series felt like an upset.

"Regardless of what anyone thinks, upset or not, we're just happy to come out of this series with a win and moving on we've got to prepare for another team," he said.



## **A Russian drone strike in northeastern Ukraine kills 9 people, officials say**

By VOLODYMYR YURCHUK and HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A Russian drone on Saturday hit a bus evacuating civilians from a front-line area in Ukraine's northeastern Sumy region, killing nine people and injuring seven, Ukrainian officials said, hours after Moscow and Kyiv had held their first direct peace talks in years that failed to yield a ceasefire.

Local Gov. Oleh Hryhorov and Ukraine's national police said the attack was in Bilopillia, a town around 10 kilometers (6 miles) from the border with Russia. The Associated Press couldn't independently verify the report and there was no immediate comment from Moscow.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy described the attack as "deliberate killing of civilians." He said in a post on Telegram messaging app that the "Russians could scarcely not realize what kind of vehicle they were hitting."

He lamented the missed opportunity from the talks on Friday, saying that "Ukraine has long proposed this — a full and unconditional ceasefire in order to save lives."

"Russia only retains the ability to continue killing," Zelenskyy added.

In Bilopillia, a period of mourning was declared through Monday, with local community chief Yuri Zarko calling the day "Black Saturday."

The local media outlet Suspilne said the passengers on the bus were being evacuated from the town when the strike happened. Authorities are working to identify some of the victims, most of them elderly women.

The injured were taken to a hospital in Sumy, the regional capital, with three people reported to be in serious condition.

On Saturday morning, Russia's defense ministry claimed its forces hit a military staging area in the Sumy region, some 50 kilometers (31 miles) southeast of Bilopillia, without mentioning any other attacks there.

According to a Washington-based think tank, Ukrainian forces have been inching forward into Russian territory in the Kursk region, just north of Bilopillia. According to the report last week by the Institute for the Study of War, Kyiv's troops had advanced south of the Russian border village of Tyotkino.

Russia said last month that its forces had fully reclaimed the Kursk region, nearly nine months after a lightning incursion by Kyiv captured more than 100 settlements there and promised to hand Ukraine a bargaining chip in possible negotiations with the Kremlin. Ukrainian officials claimed fighting in Kursk is ongoing.

It wasn't immediately clear how Saturday's strike would affect peace efforts.

Russian and Ukrainian officials met Friday in Turkey in an attempt to reach a temporary ceasefire, but the talks ended after less than two hours without a breakthrough. It was the first face-to-face dialogue between the two sides since the early weeks of Moscow's February 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

And while both sides agreed on a large prisoner swap, they remained far apart on key conditions for ending the fighting.

One such condition for Ukraine, backed by its Western allies, is a temporary ceasefire as a first step toward a peaceful settlement. The Kremlin has pushed back against such a truce, which remains elusive.

Zelenskyy said he had discussed the talks with U.S. President Donald Trump and the leaders of France, Germany, Britain and Poland. In a post on X from a European leadership meeting in Albania on Friday, he urged "tough sanctions" against Moscow if it rejects "a full and unconditional ceasefire and an end to killings."

Kyiv and Moscow agreed in Istanbul to exchange 1,000 prisoners of war each, according to the heads of both delegations, in what would be their biggest such swap. The sides also discussed a ceasefire and a meeting between their heads of state, according to the chief Ukrainian delegate, Defense Minister Rustem Umerov.

But Russian delegation head Vladimir Medinsky, an aide to President Vladimir Putin, said both sides also agreed to provide each other with detailed ceasefire proposals, with Ukraine requesting the heads of state

meeting, which Russia took under consideration.

In Tirana, Albania, Zelenskyy met with leaders of 47 European countries to discuss security, defense and democratic standards against the backdrop of the war. They included French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk.

"Pressure on Russia must be maintained until Russia is ready to end the war," Zelenskyy said on X, posting a photo of the leaders during the call, the second for the group since May 10.

## As political theater took center stage in Turkey, the war went on in Ukraine. Kyiv has few options

By SAMYA KULLAB and VOLODYMYR YURCHUK Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Since U.S.-brokered talks began in March, Ukraine's strategy has been to convince the Trump administration that Vladimir Putin is unreliable, and that Kyiv is serious about peace.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has few options, analysts and officials say, but to draw U.S. President Donald Trump's ire against Putin while depending on the united and stalwart support of European allies.

In the latest round, Zelenskyy not only accepted Putin's offer to hold direct talks in Turkey, after the United States endorsed the idea, but raised the stakes and challenged the Russian leader to a face-to-face. The gesture failed to move Putin and the Istanbul talks were demoted to a technical meeting on Friday that failed to yield substantial results on ending the war.

The U.S. has expressed frustration with the stalled talks and threatened to withdraw if results aren't achieved. On Friday, Trump told reporters after boarding Air Force One to return to Washington from Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, that he may call Putin soon.

"He and I will meet, and I think we'll solve it, or maybe not," Trump said. "At least we'll know. And if we don't solve it, it'll be very interesting."

All along, Zelenskyy's message, directed at the Trump administration, has been: The Russian leader cannot be trusted.

It's a rhetorical game of pingpong in which both Kyiv and Moscow try to outmaneuver the other vis-à-vis the U.S. But the political theatrics are underscored by stark realities on the ground. In this war of attrition against Russia's invasion, Ukraine's position is poised to grow weaker as time goes on, unless powerful sanctions are imposed against Moscow and the U.S. continues arms deliveries.

"He is in a difficult situation because behind him is a whole nation of people who are suffering," said Oleksandr Merezhko, a lawmaker in Zelenskyy's party. "We are playing (along), we are trying to do everything we can because we don't want to lose the support of the U.S. We don't want to be accused that it was our fault."

Putin's no-show did not result in a strong reaction from Trump, which frustrated Ukrainian officials.

"It looks surreal, weird when Ukraine is complying to everything required from us, and Putin ignores, rejects," said Merezhko. "It looks very imbalanced, it looks unfair for Ukraine."

Ukraine hopes for sanctions, while Russia stalls

Since March, Zelenskyy has made a point of showing Ukraine's willingness to acquiesce to U.S. demands to avoid alienating Trump, his most powerful ally.

Kyiv hoped Russia's unwillingness to do the same would, in time, provoke the U.S. to unleash powerful sanctions and cripple Moscow's war machine — the most likely scenario in which Ukraine can hope to weaken Russia and negotiate an advantageous peace deal, analysts said.

Russia's position has remained mostly consistent. The Kremlin kept repeating that it was ready for peace talks with Ukraine — while making demands that were politically untenable for Zelenskyy, and would require Ukraine to make territorial concessions, neutralize its army and vow never to join NATO.

Throughout the war, Moscow has also accused Kyiv and its Western allies of seeking to prolong the fighting and derailing peace efforts.

Most recently, the Kremlin pushed back against a proposed 30-day ceasefire, countering with two brief

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 27 of 70**

unilateral ones, and then accused Ukraine of failing to stop the fighting, painting it as unwilling to silence the guns. At the same time, Russian officials underscore the effort to resolve the conflict is complex.

"We understand that Washington wants to achieve quick success in this process, but at the same time we hope that there is an understanding that the settlement of the Ukrainian crisis is too complicated, there are many questions and details that need to be addressed before the settlement," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters last month.

Ukraine is asking for an unconditional temporary ceasefire, during which time future diplomatic talks can take shape. Zelenskyy also asked for a trust-building gesture, such as the release of prisoners of war, something the two sides agreed to Friday. The exchange of 1,000 prisoners would be their largest swap yet.

But Ukraine has also maintained flexibility in its negotiating position by accepting Trump's proposals to avoid alienating the U.S. president.

"They're desperate to keep the Americans on their side," said Balazs Jarabik, an analyst specializing in Eastern Europe and Ukraine.

In March, Kyiv agreed to the U.S. proposal for an immediate 30-day ceasefire, which Putin effectively rejected by imposing conditions impossible for Ukraine. In April, Kyiv signed a landmark minerals deal sought by Trump after months of fraught negotiations and a brief pause in military aid.

That is why agreeing to send a delegation to Istanbul, after Trump supported the idea, was a risky move for Zelenskyy. It played into Putin's aim of drawing Kyiv into talks that had been stalled since the early weeks of Moscow's 2022 invasion.

"We showed that we are for peace negotiations and support Trump's plan," said Mykola Davydiuk, a Ukrainian political scientist. "Now the ball is with Trump."

Despite verbal threats from Europe and the U.S., sanctions of the kind that could devastate Russia's energy sector have not been forthcoming.

Zelenskyy has expressed support for a sanctions package pushed in the U.S. Congress by Republican Sen. Lindsay Graham that could impose 500% tariffs on Russian energy imports. Graham has said he has enough support in the House to bring the sanctions bill to the floor.

Russia likely gearing up for summer fighting campaign

For now, Zelenskyy has few options but to continue to highlight Putin's disinclination to engage in meaningful talks and keep the U.S. engaged.

"If it turns out that the Russian delegation really is just theatrical and can't deliver any results today, the world must respond," the Ukrainian leader said at a European summit in Albania on Friday. "There needs to be a strong reaction, including sanctions against Russia's energy sector and banks. Pressure must continue to rise until real progress is made."

For Ukrainian soldiers fighting along the 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line, the theatricality of the week's political developments stood in harsh contrast with the grinding war.

"Better to call it a circus," said a Ukrainian drone operator with the 68th brigade who, like other soldiers, gave only his call sign Goose in line with military protocol.

Analysts say Russia is at a crucial crossroads in the war, where it can negotiate a truce and consolidate gains, or launch a summer military campaign to maximize wins before the onset of winter.

Ukraine has always been at a disadvantage and faces manpower and ammunition shortages. Analysts have offered estimates of six months to two years for how much longer it can hang on.

Much will depend on what kind of support Ukraine receives from partners and how quickly the country can scale up domestic weapons production.

Russian forces recently intensified offensive operations in the Ukrainian regions of Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson, according to Ukraine's Southern Defense Forces spokesperson. Soldiers said Russia has a clear aim of reaching the borders of the Dnipropetrovsk region, to be able to claim the capture of two out of four partially occupied territories.

"The feeling is that we will either hold out and allow the political leadership of the country to freeze the conflict along the contact line, or the enemy will break through," said a Ukrainian soldier with the call sign Corsair Denis in the Sumy region.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 28 of 70

## From guns to gardens: Former gangsters fight hunger in Kenya

By JACK DENTON and DESMOND TIRO Associated Press

MATHARE, Kenya (AP) — Joseph Kariaga and his friends once lived the “gangster life” in Nairobi’s Mathare slum, snatching phones, mugging people and battling police. But when Kariaga’s brother was shot dead by police, the young men took stock.

“We said, ‘We cannot live like this. We are going to lose our lives.’ Many of our friends had died,” said Kariaga, now 27. “I reflected on my life. I had to change.”

Now the men are farmers with a social mission. Nearly a dozen of them founded Vision Bearerz in 2017 to steer youth away from crime and address food insecurity in one of Kenya’s poorest communities.

Despite challenges, Vision Bearerz makes a modest but meaningful community impact, including feeding over 150 children at lunches each week. Some residents praise the group and call the men role models.

Amid cuts to foreign funding by the United States and others, experts say local organizations like this may be the future of aid.

Vision Bearerz works on an urban farm tucked away in the muddy streets and corrugated-metal homes that make up Mathare, one of Africa’s most populous slums. Estimates say about a half-million people live in this neighborhood of less than two square kilometers.

Some 2 million people, or 60% of Nairobi’s population, live in informal settlements, according to CFK Africa, a non-governmental organization that runs health and poverty reduction programs in such neighborhoods and is familiar with Vision Bearerz’ work.

Lack of infrastructure is a key challenge in these communities, which are growing amid sub-Saharan Africa’s rapid urbanization and booming youth population, said Jeffrey Okoro, the group’s executive director.

Poverty pushes youth into crime, Okoro added.

“Most folks in slums such as Mathare are not able to earn enough to buy a decent meal, and kids who are under 5 are twice as likely to be malnourished,” he said. “One of the other major challenges affecting young people is gangs, and the promise of making a quick buck.”

The farmers of Vision Bearerz know this well.

“When you are born from this land, there is not much you have inherited, so you have to make it yourself,” said Ben Njoki, 28, whose face tattoos are reminders of a gang-affiliated past. “You have to use violence.”

In 2017, not long after Kariaga’s brother was killed, Njoki and other young men made a plan to change. More than a dozen people they grew up with had been killed, and they realized they would follow if they did not find an alternative to crime, said Moses Nyoike, 32, the chair of Vision Bearerz.

To keep busy, the group began collecting garbage and would split profits from trading vegetables, buying produce in another county and reselling it locally. They noticed a gap in the supply of vegetables to Mathare, and with permission from authorities they cleaned up a garbage dump and began planting.

Polluted soil, and water rationing, made it a tough start. Then, inspired by a TikTok account that showcased farming in a Colombian slum, Vision Bearerz tried their hand at hydroponics. With the help of an NGO that supports community enterprises, Growth4Change, they were able to get materials and training in urban farming methods.

Today, Vision Bearerz grows vegetables, raises pigs and farms tilapia in a small pond. They sell a portion of what they produce, with revenue also coming from running a car wash and public toilet.

With the earnings, the group buys maize flour to make ugali, a dough-like staple food, and beans, which supplement produce from their farm in weekly lunches for children.

Vision Bearerz also runs outreach programs to warn against drug use and crime, and has sessions where women teach girls about feminine health.

“The life I was living was a lie. It didn’t add up to anything. We just lost people. Now, we are winning people in the community,” Njoki said.

Davis Gichere, 28, another founding member, called the work therapeutic.

Challenges remain. Joining Vision Bearerz requires a pledge to leave crime behind, and there have been instances of recidivism, with at least one member arrested. Lingering criminal reputations have led to



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 29 of 70

police harassment in the past, and finding money to buy food for Saturday feedings is a weekly struggle. Funding cuts across the development space, including the dismantling of the United States Agency for International Development, make the prospect of new financing dim.

At least one other group in Nairobi's Kibera slum, Human Needs Project, does similar work of urging youth away from crime and addressing food insecurity through urban farming.

It's a model that can be scaled up or copied elsewhere, said Okoro of CFK Africa.

"The future of development is locally led organizations," he said, noting they are best suited to understanding the needs of their communities.

Kariaga still feels the pain of his brother's death, but is proud of his new job.

"Farming can change the world," he said, a silver-capped tooth glinting in the sun.

## Chess grandmaster Magnus Carlsen faces showdown against 'the world.' Will it end in a draw?

By STEFANIE DAZIO Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Norwegian grandmaster Magnus Carlsen is playing a single game of chess against 140,000 people worldwide in a mega-match that could overturn expectations by ending in a draw in the next few days.

Billed as "Magnus Carlsen vs. The World," the online match began April 4 on Chess.com, the world's largest chess website, and is the first-ever online freestyle game to feature a world champion.

While Chess.com had predicted Carlsen would win by a wide margin, his Team World opposition could force a draw if it checks Carlsen's king three times.

"Right now we're heading towards a draw by perpetual check," Carlsen said in a statement on Friday. "I felt that I was a little bit better, early in the opening, then maybe I didn't play that precisely. Honestly, since then, they haven't given me a single chance. So now, I think, it's just heading towards the draw."

He added: "Overall, 'the world' has played very, very sound chess from the start. Maybe not going for most enterprising options, but kind of keeping it more in vein with normal chess — which isn't always the best strategy, but it worked out well this time."

As a freestyle match, the bishops, knights, rooks, queen and king are randomly shuffled around the board while the pawns remain in their usual spots. Freestyle chess is popular because it allows players to be more creative and avoid memorization.

Team World votes on each move and each side has 24 hours to make their play. Carlsen is playing the white pieces.

"For most of the world, it is their first chance to say they've played a chess game against Magnus Carlsen," Mike Klein, senior journalist with Chess.com, told The Associated Press. "I think 'the world' is going to be kind of tickled pink to be able to say, 'I was part of a draw against Magnus Carlsen.'"

Klein has played, and lost, to Carlsen twice in blitz matches in a hotel bar when the Norwegian was bored during some downtime in a world championship.

"He beat me twice without much effort, so I would have happily signed up for a draw in any of those games," Klein said.

Celebrity status

A grandmaster at 13, Carlsen enjoys celebrity status that few other chess players have.

The 34-year-old became the world's top-ranked player in 2011 and has won five World Championships. He achieved the highest-ever chess rating of 2882 in 2014 and has remained the undisputed world number one for more than a decade.

Last year, he garnered headlines for quitting a tournament in New York after refusing to change out of the jeans he wore to the competition. He later accepted a \$200 fine and officials agreed to loosen the dress code.

Carlsen auctioned the jeans off for charity and donated the winning \$36,100 bid to Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, a national youth-mentoring charity that carries out its mission through local chapters

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 30 of 70

across 5,000 communities nationwide.

Grandmaster vs. The World

This is the third "vs. The World" record-setting online game.

In 1999, Russian grandmaster Garry Kasparov played against more than 50,000 people on the Microsoft Network.

A few top-ranked players helped steer the world's moves, but Kasparov won after four months and hailed it as "the greatest game in the history of chess."

Klein was a summer camp chess teacher at the time.

"We would start class each day by checking out Kasparov's next move and talking about it and spending a few minutes each morning deciding what we'd reply," Klein said.

Indian grandmaster Viswanathan Anand won his "vs. The World" match last year against nearly 70,000 players on Chess.com.

The goal of the Carlsen match was to break Anand's 70,000-player mark, and ended up doubling it.

## 10 escape from New Orleans jail through hole in cell wall while lone guard left to get food

By JACK BROOK, JIM MUSTIAN and SARA CLINE Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Ten men broke out of a New Orleans jail Friday in an audacious overnight escape by fleeing through a hole behind a toilet and scaling a wall while the lone guard assigned to their cell pod was away getting food, authorities said.

Seven of the escapees, including suspects charged with murder, remain on the lam following the breakout that the local sheriff says may have been aided by members within the department.

Surveillance footage, shared with media during a news conference, showed the escapees sprinting out of the facility — some wearing orange clothing and others in white. They scaled a fence, using blankets to avoid being cut by barbed wire, and then some could be seen sprinting across the nearby interstate and into a neighborhood.

A photograph obtained by The Associated Press from law enforcement shows the opening behind a toilet in a cell that the men escaped through. Above the hole are scrawled messages that include "To Easy LoL" with an arrow pointing at the gap.

The absence of the 10 men, who also utilized facility deficiencies that officials have long complained about in their escape, went unnoticed for hours. It was not until a routine morning headcount, more than seven hours later, that law enforcement learned of the escape.

Officials from the sheriff's office say no deputy was at the pod where the fugitives had been held. There was a technician, a civilian there to observe the pod, but she had stepped away to get food, they said.

Soon after the escape, one of the men, Kendall Myles, 20, was apprehended after a brief foot chase through the French Quarter. He had previously escaped twice from juvenile detention centers.

By Friday evening, two more fugitives had been captured. Officials found Robert Moody, 21, in New Orleans thanks to a Crimestoppers tip, according to Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office. Dkenan Dennis was found near the Chef Menteur Highway, Louisiana Attorney General Liz Murrill announced on the social platform X.

Sheriff blames 'defective locks' and possibly inside help

Orleans Parish Sheriff Susan Hutson said the men were able to get out of the Orleans Justice Center because of "defective locks." Hutson said she has continuously raised concerns about the locks to officials and, as recently as this week, advocated for money to fix the ailing infrastructure.

Hutson said there are indications that people inside her department helped the fugitives escape.

"It's almost impossible, not completely, but almost impossible for anybody to get out of this facility without help," she said of the jail, where 1,400 people are being held.

The escapees yanked open a door to enter the cell with the hole around 1 a.m.

At least one of the steel bars protecting plumbing fixtures "appeared to have been intentionally cut using a tool," according to a statement from the Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office on Friday night.

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 31 of 70**

The men shed their jail uniforms once out of the facility, and it is still unclear how some of them obtained regular clothing so quickly, officials said.

Authorities did not notice the men were missing until 8:30 a.m. Authorities initially said 11 had escaped, but at a Friday afternoon news conference said one man thought to have escaped was in a different cell.

Three employees have been placed on suspension pending the outcome of the investigation. It was not immediately clear whether any of the employees were suspected of helping with the escape. Officials also didn't say if the guard who left to get food was among the three suspended.

Who are the fugitives?

The escapees range in age from 19 to 42. Most of the men are in their 20s.

One of the fugitives, Derrick Groves, was convicted on two charges of second-degree murder and two charges of attempted second-degree murder last year for his role in the 2018 Mardi Gras Day shootings of two men. He also faces a charge of battery against a correctional facility employee, court records show. Law enforcement warned that he may attempt to locate witnesses in the murder trial.

Another escapee, Corey Boyd, had pled not guilty to a pending second-degree murder charge.

Hutson said the police department was actively working with local, state and federal law enforcement agencies to search for the fugitives.

Police relied on facial recognition technology to identify and capture one fugitive, said Bryan LaGarde, executive director of Project NOLA, a nonprofit operating more than 5,000 cameras around New Orleans. His organization, which partners with Louisiana authorities, entered the escapees' images into the system and quickly found two in the French Quarter.

"They were walking openly in the street. They were keeping their heads down and checking over their shoulder," LaGarde said, adding that the other fugitive walked out of sight of the cameras.

State and local officials blast jail authorities

"This represents a complete failure of the most basic responsibilities entrusted to a sheriff or jail administrator," said Orleans Parish District Attorney Jason Williams. He blasted the sheriff's office for a multi-hour delay in notifying authorities and the public of the escape. "These inexcusable failures have put lives in danger."

Murrill, the state's attorney general, called the escape "beyond unacceptable" and said local authorities waited too long to inform the public. She said she reached out to surrounding states to alert them about the escape.

New Orleans Police Department Superintendent Anne Kirkpatrick said her agency has put "a full court effort" to respond to the escape and is working with the FBI and U.S. marshals.

Officers were focused on identifying and providing protection for people who may have testified in their cases or may be in danger. One family has been "removed" from their home, Kirkpatrick said.

"If there is anyone helping or harboring these escapees, you will be charged," Kirkpatrick added.

Turmoil at New Orleans' jail

New Orleans' jail has for more than a decade been subject to federal monitoring and a consent decree intended to improve conditions.

Security problems and violence persisted even after the city opened the Orleans Justice Center in 2015, replacing the decaying Orleans Parish Prison, which had seen its own string of escapes and dozens of in-custody deaths.

A federal judge declared in 2013 that the lockup had festered into an unconstitutional setting for people incarcerated there.

Orleans Parish Sheriff Susan Hutson said staff is "stretched thin" at the facility, which is around 60% staffed.

Bianka Brown, chief financial officer of the Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office, said they can't afford a maintenance and service contract to fix problems such as broken doors, lock replacements and other ailing infrastructure.

The jail contained numerous "high security" people convicted of violent offenses who required a "restrictive housing environment that did not exist," said Jay Mallett, Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office chief of corrections. The sheriff's office was in the process of transferring dozens to more secure locations.

## In Spain, a homelessness crisis unfolds in Madrid's airport

By SUMAN NAISHADHAM Associated Press

MADRID (AP) — Every morning at 6 a.m., Teresa sets out in search of work, a shower and a bit of exercise before she returns home. For around six months, that has been Terminal 4 of Madrid's international airport.

Teresa, 54, who didn't want her full name to be used because of safety concerns, is one of the estimated hundreds of homeless people sleeping in the Spanish capital's airport amid a growing housing crisis in Spain, where rental costs have risen especially fast in cities like Madrid, the country's capital, and Barcelona.

She and others sleeping at Adolfo Suárez Madrid-Barajas Airport — the third-busiest airport in Europe in 2023, according to Eurostat — described a situation where for months, authorities have neither helped them find other living arrangements nor have they kicked them out from the corners of the airport that they have occupied with sleeping bags unfurled on the floor as well as blankets, shopping carts and bags.

Soon, things could change.

Limits on entry

Spain's airport operator AENA this week said that it would start limiting who can enter Madrid's airport during low-travel hours by asking visitors to show their boarding passes. AENA said that the policy would take effect in the next few days, but didn't specify exactly when. It said that exceptions would be made for airport workers and anyone accompanying a traveler.

Teresa, a Spanish-Ecuadorian who said she has lived in Spain for a quarter-century, told The Associated Press on Thursday that she hadn't heard of the new policy. She and her husband would be forced to sleep outside on park benches and other public spaces if they aren't allowed back in.

"We can't make demands. We're squatters," Teresa said, using a controversial term common in Spain. "Squatters in what is private property. We are aware of that. We want help from authorities, but not a single one has come here."

Political blame game

For months, a political blame game between officials at different levels of government has meant that the homeless encampments in the airport have largely gone unaddressed. In recent weeks, videos on social media and news reports of the airport's homeless population put a spotlight on the issue.

Madrid's city council on Thursday said that it had asked Spain's national government to take charge and come up with a plan to rehabilitate every homeless individual sleeping in the airport. Spanish airports are overseen by AENA, a state-owned publicly listed company. A city council spokesperson said that Madrid's city government had recently called for a meeting with officials from AENA, the regional government of Madrid and several national ministries that declined.

"Without them, there is no possible solution," said Lucía Martín, a spokesperson for Madrid's city council division of social policies, family and equality. She said that the national ministries of transport, interior, inclusion, social rights and health declined to participate in a working group.

A day earlier, AENA accused Madrid's city authorities of providing inadequate help and said that the city government's statements about the unfolding situation confirmed its "dereliction of duty" and abandonment of the airport's homeless individuals.

"It's like a dog chasing its tail," said Marta Cecilia Cárdenas of the long list of authorities she was told could help her. Cárdenas, a 58-year-old homeless woman originally from Colombia, said that she had spent several months sleeping in Madrid's airport.

Exact numbers are unknown

It's not known how many people are sleeping in Madrid's airport, through which 66 million travelers transited last year. Spain's El País newspaper reported that a recent count taken by a charity group identified roughly 400 homeless people in the airport, many of whom, like Teresa, had previously lived in Madrid and were employed in some capacity.

AP wasn't able to confirm that number. Madrid city council officials, meanwhile, said that the Spanish capital's social service teams had helped 94 individuals in April with ties to the city, 12 of whom were rehabilitated into municipal shelters, addiction treatment centers or independent living.



# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 33 of 70**

## Word of mouth

Teresa said she had heard about sleeping in the airport by word of mouth. Before she lost her job, she said she lived in an apartment in Madrid's Leganés neighborhood, earning a living taking care of older people.

She currently earns 400 euros (\$450) per month, working under the table caring for an older woman. With the earnings, Teresa said she maintains a storage unit in the neighborhood that she used to live in. Though the work is sporadic, she said it was still enough to also cover fees for the gym in which she showers daily, pay for transportation, and purchase food.

Over the last decade, the average rent in Spain has almost doubled, according to real estate website Idealista, with steeper increases in Madrid and Barcelona. Spain also has a smaller public housing stock than many other European Union countries.

## Hope for the future

Teresa said that she hopes to find a job soon and leave the airport, whatever authorities may force her to do in the coming days and weeks. She and her husband keep to themselves, avoiding others sleeping in the brightly-lit hallway dotted with sleeping bags who were battling mental health problems, addiction and other issues, she said.

"You end up adjusting to it a bit, accepting it even, but never getting used to it," Teresa said over the constant din of airline announcements. "I hope to God that it gets better, because this is not life."

## How to watch and vote in the grand final of the Eurovision Song Contest

BASEL, Switzerland (AP) — Sprinkle on the sequins or settle down on the sofa: It's time to find out who will be crowned champion at the 69th Eurovision Song Contest.

Acts from more than two dozen countries will take the stage in Basel, Switzerland on Saturday to vie for glory through a 3-minute pop song. Millions of people across Europe and beyond will be watching and voting for their favorites.

Here's how to join them.

What time does Eurovision start?

In Europe, the grand final begins at 9 p.m. Central European Summer Time. In Britain, it airs at 8 p.m.

In the United States and Canada, the finale starts at 3 p.m. EDT.

How can I watch Eurovision?

The competition will be aired by national broadcasters in participating nations — the Eurovision website includes a list.

In some territories, it'll be watchable on Eurovision's YouTube channel.

In the U.S., Eurovision will stream live on Peacock.

How can I vote in Eurovision?

Viewers in participating countries can vote during the competition, and for about 40 minutes after, by phone, text message or the Eurovision app. Each viewer can vote up to 20 times, but not for their own nation's entry.

Voting is open all day Saturday for viewers in the U.S. and other nonparticipating countries, who can vote online at [www.esc.vote](http://www.esc.vote) or with the app. The combined "rest of the world" vote is given the weight of one individual country.

Countries are awarded points based on both viewers' votes and rankings from juries of music industry professionals. These are combined into a total score, and the country with the highest score wins.

I'm new to Eurovision. What do I need to know?

At its simplest, Eurovision is an international pop music competition in which acts representing countries across Europe, and a few beyond it, compete on live television for the title of champion, and a crystal microphone trophy.

Launched in 1956 to foster unity after World War II and test new live-broadcast technology, Eurovision has grown into a feel-good celebration of pop music and international unity. It has grown from seven

countries to 37, including non-European nations such as Israel and Australia. The number has been whittled down to 26 finalists through two semifinals this week.

Eurovision is known for electro-pop anthems and disco dancefloor-fillers — often paired with elaborate costumes and spectacular staging — and for a steady smattering of kooky novelty acts.

Past winners include ABBA, who won in 1974 with “Waterloo”; Canadian chanteuse Celine Dion, for Switzerland in 1988; and the Italian rock band Måneskin in 2021.

This year’s favorites include KAJ, representing Sweden with their ode to sauna culture “Bara Bada Bastu”; Dutch singer Claude with soulful ballad “C’est La Vie”; Austrian singer JJ’s pop-opera song “Wasted Love”; French singer Louane with “maman”; and Israel’s Yuval Raphael, with her anthemic “New Day Will Rise.”

Israel’s participation has attracted protests by Palestinians and their supporters, who say the country should be excluded from the contest over its conduct of the war against Hamas in Gaza.

## Case of brain-dead pregnant woman kept on life support in Georgia raises tricky questions

By KATE BRUMBACK, SUDHIN THANAWALA and GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — The case of a pregnant woman in Georgia who was declared brain dead and has been kept on life support for three months has given rise to complicated questions about abortion law and whether a fetus is a person.

Adriana Smith, a 30-year-old nurse and mother, was about two months pregnant on Feb. 19 when she was declared brain dead, according to an online fundraising page started by her mother. Doctors said Georgia’s strict anti-abortion law requires that she remain on life support until the fetus has developed enough to be delivered, her mother wrote.

The law, one of a wave of measures enacted in conservative states after the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade in 2022, restricts abortion once cardiac activity is detected and gives personhood rights to a fetus.

Smith’s mother says it has left her family without a say in a difficult situation, and with her due date still months away, the family is left wondering whether the baby will be born with disabilities or can even survive. Some activists, many of them Black women like Smith, say it raises issues of racial equity.

What does the law say?

Emory Healthcare, which runs the hospital, has not explained how doctors decided to keep Smith on life support except to say in a statement they considered “Georgia’s abortion laws and all other applicable laws.”

The state adopted a law in 2019 to ban abortion after cardiac activity can be detected, about six weeks into pregnancy, that came into effect after Roe v. Wade was overturned.

That law does not explicitly address Smith’s situation, but allows abortion to preserve the life or physical health of the pregnant woman. Three other states have similar bans that kick in around the six-week mark and 12 bar abortion at all stages of pregnancy.

David S. Cohen, a professor at Drexel University’s Thomas R. Kline School of Law in Philadelphia, said the hospital might be most concerned about part of the law that gives fetuses legal rights as “members of the species Homo sapiens.”

Cohen said Emory may therefore consider Smith and the fetus as two patients and that once Smith was on life support, they had a legal obligation to keep the fetus alive, even after she died.

“These are the kind of cases that law professors have been talking about for a long time when they talk about fetal personhood,” he said.

State Rep. Nabilah Islam Parkes, an Atlanta-area Democrat, said Friday that she sent a letter to state Attorney General Chris Carr asking for a legal opinion on how Georgia’s abortion law applies when a pregnant woman is brain dead.

Personhood divide within anti-abortion movement

Anti-abortion groups are divided over whether they should support personhood provisions, which are on

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 35 of 70**

the books in at least 17 states, according to the advocacy group Pregnancy Justice.

Some argue that fertilized eggs, embryos and fetuses should be considered people with the same rights as those already born. This personhood concept seeks to give them rights under the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which says a state can't "deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process or law; nor deny any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."

Some saw personhood as politically impractical, especially after personhood amendments to state constitutions were rejected by voters in Colorado, Mississippi and North Dakota between 2008 and 2014. Those who steered away sought laws and restrictions on abortion that stopped short of personhood, although they were often informed by the concept.

Personhood proponents argue this lacks moral clarity. Some personhood proponents have been sidelined in national anti-abortion groups; the National Right to Life Committee cut ties with its Georgia Right to Life affiliate in 2014 after the state wing opposed bills that restricted abortion but allowed exceptions for rape and incest.

**Unequal access to care for Black women**

The Associated Press has not been able to reach Smith's mother, April Newkirk. But Newkirk told Atlanta TV station WXIA that her daughter went to a hospital complaining of headaches and was given medication and released. Then, her boyfriend awoke to her gasping for air and called 911. Emory University Hospital determined she had blood clots in her brain and she was declared brain dead.

It's not clear what Smith said when she went to the hospital or whether the care she was given was standard for her symptoms. But Black women often complain their pain isn't taken seriously, and an Associated Press investigation found that health outcomes for Black women are worse because of circumstances linked to racism and unequal access to care.

Monica Simpson, executive director of SisterSong, the lead plaintiff in a lawsuit challenging Georgia's abortion law, said: "Black women must be trusted when it comes to our health care decisions."

"Like so many Black women, Adriana spoke up for herself. She expressed what she felt in her body, and as a health care provider, she knew how to navigate the medical system," Simpson said, noting that by the time Smith was diagnosed "it was already too late."

It's unclear whether the clots in Smith's brain were related to her pregnancy.

But her situation is undoubtedly alarming for those seeking solutions to disparities in the maternal mortality rate among Black women. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Black women had a mortality rate of 50.3 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2023. That's more than three times the rate for white women, and it is higher than the rates for Hispanic and Asian women.

**What is Smith's current situation?**

While Smith is on a ventilator and likely other life-support devices, being declared brain dead means she is dead.

Some experts refer to "life support" as "maintenance measures," "organ support" or "somatic support," which relates to the body as distinct from the mind.

Emory has not made public what is being done to allow Smith's fetus to continue to develop.

In another case in Florida, doctors successfully delivered the baby of a 31-year-old woman who was declared brain dead while 22 weeks pregnant, but not without weeks of sustained monitoring, testing and medical care. The woman's family wanted to keep the fetus, physicians with the University of Florida College of Medicine said in a 2023 paper.

On her first day of admission, doctors administered hormones to raise her blood pressure and placed a feeding tube. After she was transferred to an intensive care unit, an obstetric nurse stayed by her bedside continuously to monitor the fetus' heart rate and movements.

She was on a ventilator, regularly received steroids and hormones, and needed multiple antibiotics to treat pneumonia. Her medical team encompassed multiple specialties: obstetrics, neonatology, radiology and endocrinology.

Doctors performed surgery to remove the fetus at 33 weeks when its heart rate fell, and the baby appeared to be in good health at birth.

"We don't have great science to guide clinical decision making in these cases," said Dr. Kavita Arora, an obstetrician and gynecologist in North Carolina who raised concerns about the effect of prolonged ventilator use on a fetus. "There simply aren't a lot of cases like this."

The 2023 paper warned that "costs should not be underestimated."

It is not clear whether Smith, whose mother said she was a nurse at Emory University Hospital, had health insurance. But JoAnn Volk, a professor, founder and co-director of the Center on Health Insurance Reforms at Georgetown University, said that for people with health insurance, it's generally up to the insurer to determine whether care is medically necessary and covered under the plan.

While it is unclear how much it will cost to keep Smith on life support until the fetus can be delivered, or who will be responsible for that cost, her mother's GoFundMe page mentions Smith's 7-year-old son and notes that the baby could have significant disabilities as it aims to raise \$275,000.

## Supporters of Bolivia's ex-leader Morales clash with police in push to secure his candidacy

By PAOLA FLORES Associated Press

LA PAZ, BOLIVIA (AP) — Hundreds of supporters of ex-President Evo Morales marched toward Bolivia's top electoral court on Friday to push for their leftist leader's candidacy in presidential elections later this year, a rally that descended into street clashes as police tried to clear out a group of demonstrators.

The confrontations come in response to a ruling by Bolivia's Constitutional Court that blocks Morales, the nation's first Indigenous president who governed from 2006 until his ouster in 2019, from running again in Aug. 17 elections.

The turmoil escalates political tensions as Bolivia undergoes its worst economic crisis in four decades.

As the march arrived in Bolivia's capital of La Paz, protesters seeking to register Morales' candidacy surged toward the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, chanting, "Comrades, what do we want? For Evo to come back!"

Security forces barricading a road to the court held them back. Police reported that the clashes between rock-throwing protesters and tear gas-lobbing police forces injured two officers, a journalist and a local merchant.

"They're using firecrackers and rocks that are hurting our forces," said police Commander Juan Russo. "This is not a peaceful march."

The authorities did not report on any injuries among the protesters, who were seen being pushed onto the ground, shoved into police cars and blasted with tear gas. Morales had promised to attend the march Friday but did not show up.

The court's unanimous decision Wednesday upheld an earlier ruling that bans presidents from serving more than two terms. Morales has already served three, and, in 2019, resigned under pressure from the military and went into exile as protests erupted over his bid for an unprecedented fourth term.

Morales returned to Bolivia a year later as the 2020 elections vaulted to power his preferred candidate, President Luis Arce, from his long-dominant Movement Toward Socialism, or MAS, party.

Arce, who announced earlier this week that he would not seek re-election, insisted that the Constitutional Court had disqualified Morales, his mentor-turned-rival, from running in 2025.

But many experts doubt the legitimacy of that decision in a country where political conflicts undermine the courts and presidents have maneuvered to get their allies on the bench.

"The Constitutional Court issues unconstitutional arbitrary rulings at the whim of those in power," said Morales, who himself reaped the benefits of favorable judges while seeking to run for a fourth consecutive term in 2017.

After Morales lost a referendum seeking to do away with term limits while still in power, the Constitutional Court ruled it would be against Morales' human rights to stop him from running for another term.

That 2017 ruling allows Morales to register his candidacy, said Oscar Hassentoufel, the president of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal. "Then the tribunal will decide whether he's eligible or not."



# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 37 of 70**

In defiance of the latest court ruling, Morales called a mass march that marshaled his loyal supporters in the rural tropics. They long have championed the Indigenous coca-grower for transforming the country during his tenure — redistributing Bolivia's natural gas wealth and seeking greater inclusion for its Indigenous majority.

Although he had earlier promised to participate, it appeared that Morales remained holed up in his stronghold for fear of arrest on human trafficking charges that he claims are politically motivated.

The government confirmed that fear Friday. "We ask Mr. Morales to surrender voluntarily," said Eduardo del Castillo, a key minister in Arce's government whom the MAS party endorsed for president later Friday in place of Arce. "If we find him walking the streets, we will arrest him."

Instead, scores of his supporters walked the capital's streets on Friday wearing masks of Morales' face. "Evo Morales is each and every one of us. If they want to detain Evo Morales they would need to take every one of us, too," said David Ochoa, a representative of the marchers.

## **Key moments from first week of Sean 'Diddy' Combs' sex trafficking trial**

NEW YORK (AP) — Testimony in the sex trafficking trial of hip-hop mogul Sean "Diddy" Combs began this week, opening a window into what prosecutors say was the sordid world of group sex, drugs and violence beneath the glittering, jet set persona cultivated by the Bad Boy Records founder.

Much of the testimony was hard to watch. Combs' ex-girlfriend, Cassie, recounted being beaten and pressured into degrading sexual performances with strangers.

Here are five key moments from the trial, which resumes Monday:

Defense: Combs is a violent jerk and a swinger, but not a sex trafficker

Lawyer Teny Geragos took a novel approach to defending Combs in her opening statement.

She conceded the hip-hop impresario has a "bad temper" and is prone to violent outbursts that are often fueled by alcohol, jealousy and drugs.

But she maintained that while his actions might have warranted domestic violence charges, they aren't proof he engaged in sex trafficking and racketeering — the charges he faces.

Geragos argued that Combs' sexual habits were part of a swinger lifestyle involving consenting adults and reminded jurors that "kinky" sexual predilections don't equate to sex trafficking.

"Sean Combs is a complicated man. But this is not a complicated case," she said. "This case is about love, jealousy, infidelity and money."

Jurors sees video and photos of infamous LA hotel attack on Cassie

The packed courtroom fell silent when jurors were shown security camera video of Combs assaulting Cassie in a Los Angeles hotel in 2016.

The video depicts Cassie, an R&B singer, headed down a hallway toward the hotel's elevators just before Combs rounds a corner, strikes her and throws her to the ground before kicking her and then dragging her back toward their hotel room.

Jurors also viewed photographs of damage in the hotel hallway, including flowers strewn on the floor and soil spattered against a wall. Later, as Cassie testified about the attack, they were shown photos of the musician's swollen lip.

The trial's first witness was a former security guard at the hotel. Israel Florez testified Combs attempted to bribe him, holding out a stack of money with a \$100 on top, telling him: "Don't tell nobody."

Florez said he responded: "I don't want your money. Just go back into your room."

Cassie describes 'freak-offs' in disturbing detail

The "Me & U" singer, whose legal name is Casandra Ventura, testified that Combs was into voyeurism and dictated every aspect of sex events he dubbed "freak-offs."

The highly orchestrated affairs, which Combs also called "wild king nights" or "hotel nights," involved male sex workers, heavy drug use and copious lubrication.

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 38 of 70**

"It was his fantasy," Cassie said.

Cassie said each "freak-off" involved about 10 large bottles of baby oil -- heated up.

"It was such a mess," she said. "It was like, 'What are we doing?'"

She said Combs also asked her to perform degrading and painful sex acts with male sex workers.

Cassie said eventually she was doing "freak-offs" weekly for a decade, with the final one in 2017 or 2018.

"The freak-offs became a job," Cassie recounted.

She said she felt she couldn't refuse because she feared the videos would be made public.

Jurors also heard from Daniel Phillip, who said he was a professional stripper paid to have sex with Cassie while Combs gave instructions. He testified that he once saw Combs drag Cassie by her hair as she screamed.

Messages between Combs and Cassie show a complicated relationship

Defense lawyers, during their cross examination of Cassie, sought to cast the musician as an enthusiastic participant in the sex marathons.

"I'm always ready to freak off," she wrote in one 2009 message read in court.

Later that year, however, Cassie expressed frustration with the state of their relationship and told Combs she needed something more from him than sex.

In a 2017 text message, Cassie told Combs: "I love our FOs when we both want it," using the initials of freak-off. On the stand, Cassie explained: "I would say loving FOs were just words at that point."

Singer Dawn Richard recalled Combs beating Cassie

The former cast member on Combs' MTV reality show "Making the Band" testified that she saw Combs physically attack Cassie on multiple occasions.

During a 2009 incident in his home, Richard said Combs tried to strike Cassie in the head with a black skillet before he put his arm around her neck and dragged her up the stairs.

"I was scared for her and scared to do anything," she said. "I had never seen anything like that before."

Richard, who was later a member of the Combs' band Diddy — Dirty Money, sued the producer last year, accusing him of physical abuse, groping, and psychological abuse during the years they worked together. His representative denied the claims at the time.

## **Republicans forge their tax bill in Trump's image, with 'MAGA accounts' and more**

By MATT BROWN and LEAH ASKARINAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Days before Republicans unveiled their sweeping tax cut plan, the chairman of the powerful Ways and Means Committee had one last person to consult. He went to the White House, where he and President Donald Trump went over the legislation "line by line."

"He was very happy with what we're delivering," said Rep. Jason Smith, a Republican from Missouri.

Trump had every reason to be pleased. His imprint is all over on the bill making its way through the House, starting with its title — the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act."

The legislation realizes many of Trump's campaign promises, temporarily ending taxes on overtime and tips for many workers, creating a new \$10,000 tax break on auto loan interest for American-made cars, and even creating a new tax-free "MAGA account" — a nod to his "Make America Great Again" movement, but in this case, it means "Money Accounts for Growth and Advancement." This would contribute \$1,000 to children born in his second term.

The Trump-inspired contours of the legislative package, months if not years in the making, reflect not only the president's considerable influence over the Republican Party, but also the hard political realities in the House, where Republicans have only the barest of majorities and often find it difficult to find consensus without Trump's involvement.

Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., effectively owes his job to Trump and has kept in constant contact with him during the negotiations, including during his overseas trip this week.

"He's excited about our forward progress," Johnson said. "You know, I keep him apprised of the develop-

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 39 of 70**

ments, and he's had a busy time over there in the Middle East, and it's been good — he's in good spirits and we're in good spirits."

The Republican bill runs a whopping 1,116 pages and includes more than \$5 trillion in tax cuts, costs that are partially offset by spending cuts elsewhere and other changes in the tax code. The legislation would make permanent the tax cuts from Trump's first term while reducing funding for programs involving food assistance, college financing and environmental protection.

As talks over the bill have progressed, divisions have emerged among Republicans, particularly between fiscal hawks most concerned about federal deficits and others more focused on the impact of cuts back home.

That's where Trump usually comes in, playing the "closer" who turns no votes to yes.

"President Trump has gone out of his way to ask us: 'Are there any members you want me to call? Anybody that you want me to talk to?' And he calls them right then," said House Majority Leader Steve Scalise, R-La. "He's been incredibly hands-on and incredibly helpful at getting the bill to where it is."

Trump's involvement seems certain to grow as Johnson labors to get the tax package through the House by a self-imposed Memorial Day deadline.

Conservatives slowed the process Friday, refusing to advance the tax package out of the House Budget Committee until it includes faster implementation of Medicaid changes and a more wholesale repeal of Biden-era green energy credits. They vowed to hold firm until their demands are met.

Trump took notice, applying pressure even before the gavel went down on the failed committee vote.

"We don't need 'GRANDSTANDERS' in the Republican Party," Trump wrote on social media. "STOP TALKING, AND GET IT DONE!"

Negotiations were expected to stretch through the weekend, with the Budget Committee reconvening late Sunday night in hopes of a breakthrough.

Rep. Mike Rogers, R-Ala., chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, predicted the tax package will ultimately get over the finish line once Trump — just returning from a tour of the Middle East — starts making calls to skeptical lawmakers.

"You may have noticed he likes talking on the telephone," Rogers said.

Added Rep. Tim Burchett of Tennessee, "I think the only way we're going to get on track with it is with Trump."

The close coordination with Republican leaders stands in stark contrast to Trump's first term, when the party first enacted a slew of personal and corporate tax breaks. Republicans quickly cobbled that tax package together in late 2017 after a disastrous attempt at fulfilling their central campaign promise -- repealing and replacing the Affordable Care Act, often referred to as Obamacare.

This time, White House aides have been in regular contact with GOP lawmakers as the tax bill progresses through drafts and markups, highlighting programs they aim to overhaul and provisions they'd like to add or cut.

The president "is much more engaged in directing what happens than the first time because he and the leadership of Congress in 2017 were not seeing eye-to-eye," Scalise said. "He didn't necessarily want health care to be the first thing that was done, and yet it was. This time around we talked a lot before he was sworn in to make sure we were all on the same page."

Trump first began to set the course of the GOP's current legislative strategy back in January, when he posted to social media that Republicans should pass "one powerful bill" that would tackle all of the party's priorities instead of splitting the agenda into two packages.

Senate Republicans argued for a different approach. They urged quick passage of a bill to provide billions for the Pentagon and Trump's immigration clampdown, saying a second tax package could wait until later.

Trump wavered for a time, giving Republicans on Capitol Hill mixed signals over the best approach. But his original preference for one bill won out in the end, in part because House Republicans insisted their chamber could not do it any other way.

Democrats uniformly oppose the package but have little power to stop it from becoming law if Republicans remain unified. As they continue to grapple with the party's losses in last year's election, Democrats

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 40 of 70**

have worked to mobilize public opposition to the bill, decrying it as a giveaway to the rich paid for with cuts to healthcare and other social services.

Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., called it “one big, beautiful betrayal.”

Republicans, meanwhile, are eager to press ahead and get the tax package to the Senate, with hopes of getting it on Trump’s desk by the Fourth of July.

Burchett said that while “everybody rises up in righteous indignation” over the details, Republicans will start “coming to the table” once Trump is fully engaged.

“It’s like an NBA basketball game right now,” Burchett said. “Don’t watch the game. Just wait till the last two minutes and then turn on the TV.”

## **Bernie Sanders and AOC are popular with Democrats. Here’s a timeline of their alliance**

By JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

Among Democrats on Capitol Hill, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer wields far more power than New York Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders. But the progressive champions have the hearts of Democratic voters across the country.

About three-quarters of Democrats have a “somewhat” or “very” favorable view of Sanders, while about half have a favorable view of Ocasio-Cortez, according to a recent survey from the AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Compare them with Schumer, an establishment Democrat, who is viewed favorably by only about a third of Democrats.

Nearly the entire difference in favorability ratings between Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez can be explained by voters who said they don’t know enough to form an opinion of AOC. Their unfavorable ratings among Democrats were essentially the same, around 15% for both.

Ocasio-Cortez, now 35, was an anonymous Sanders campaign volunteer a decade ago. Now she’s perhaps the best positioned to be the 83-year-old Sanders’ successor atop his progressive movement as the Democratic Party tries to position itself in Trump’s America.

But that role comes with risks — President Donald Trump and Republicans have long made AOC a foil, and some Democrats, progressive and moderate alike, have argued she and Sanders are too disruptive and push for unrealistic policy ideas.

Sanders and AOC have long portrayed their political relationship as familial. She used to call him “Tio Bernie,” Spanish for “Uncle Bernie.” He recently held her hand onstage in front of a huge crowd and said, tongue in cheek, “I want to say a word about my daughter.”

A spokesperson for Sanders, Anna Bahr, said Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez are “allies, collaborators and friends who built their relationship around a shared vision.”

“In many ways, the congresswoman represents what Bernie has been advocating for decades: When working-class people in this country stand up against the entrenched political elite and fight to fix an economic system propelled by uncontrollable greed, they will win,” Bahr said.

2018: AOC bursts onto the scene

Ocasio-Cortez returned home to the Bronx after graduating from Boston University in 2011. She was a volunteer organizer for Sanders’ 2016 campaign, his first presidential run and one that built a national movement around his vision of democratic socialism, even as he lost to former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

When she decided to run for office herself, AOC had virtually no money but was assisted by progressive organizations, among them Brand New Congress and Justice Democrats, with ties to veterans of Sanders’ presidential campaign.

Sanders was quick to congratulate his virtually unknown protégé in June 2018 after she defeated Rep. Joe Crowley, a member of the Democratic leadership and potential future speaker, in the primary.

A month later, they campaigned together in Kansas for two progressive House candidates and sat for a joint interview on CBS’ “Face the Nation.”



# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 41 of 70**

"Just two years ago, we were both in St. Mary's Park in the South Bronx. I was in the crowd with thousands of other people across ages, races, creeds, incomes. And to be here two years later pushing that revolution in Kansas is pretty amazing," Ocasio-Cortez said during their joint Kansas appearance.

2019: AOC endorses Sanders over Warren

Ocasio-Cortez began her congressional career in 2019 by introducing the Green New Deal. The ambitious proposal called for transforming the U.S. economy by eliminating fossil fuels while creating national health care coverage and job guarantees, as well as high-quality education and affordable housing. It has been criticized by Republicans and many Democrats for its cost and the potential disruption that would be caused by a restructuring of the economy.

It was only a nonbinding resolution, but the Green New Deal became a major issue in the 2020 Democratic primary and a lightning rod for criticism on the right, further cementing Ocasio-Cortez as a power player in Democratic politics.

By late 2019, Sanders was struggling in his second White House campaign. Much of the Democratic field — notably Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren — had co-opted pieces of his agenda and split the progressive coalition.

Then, Sanders suffered an untimely heart attack while campaigning in Las Vegas. He needed a boost, and it came from Ocasio-Cortez.

She bestowed her endorsement during a rally at a park in her congressional district. She later campaigned with him in the crucial early states of Iowa and New Hampshire, and she seconded his nomination at the Democratic National Convention.

As the Sanders presidential campaign floundered, Ocasio-Cortez was conflicted about whether to endorse him, according to a book published years later. Just months into her first term in Congress and already one of the best-known members of the House, she was still uncomfortable speaking to crowds and still feeling out how to build and wield her influence, aides told the authors of "The Truce: Progressives, Centrists, and the Future of the Democratic Party." The book was published last year and excerpted in Vanity Fair magazine.

Corbin Trent, her first communications director in the House, threatened to quit when Ocasio-Cortez floated delaying the rally, according to the book. He told the authors he remembered a "big argument" about the episode. Even as she campaigned for Sanders, she worried she'd be outshined and her star power would evaporate as quickly as it arrived.

2023-24: Campaigning for Biden and then Harris

After Sanders lost the 2020 Democratic presidential primary, they continued occasional joint appearances, campaigning for progressive candidates or discussing topics such as the early response to COVID-19, union activism and climate change. As the 2024 election approached, they campaigned together for Vice President Kamala Harris, the Democratic nominee who replaced Biden after his debate performance.

2025: The 'Fighting Oligarchy' tour

Trump's return to the White House left Democrats dejected and searching for a way forward. Sanders answered with a series of rallies he called his "Fighting Oligarchy" tour, an attempt to push the rebuilding party to lead the working class in existential struggle against wealthy elites.

After a few solo rallies, he invited AOC to come along.

She introduced him, as she had years prior, as the inspiration for her own political career. But she added more depth.

"I know that one of the things that inspired me to run for office for the first time is that when I saw Sen. Sanders on television, and I was wiping tables down and saw the TV on and saying, every person in this country deserves health care as a human right," she told a crowd in Tempe, Arizona, in March. "And I know it made me feel almost for the first time that this isn't something that we should earn. This is something that should be afforded to all of us because we are human. I just want to thank him, and so let's give him the most earthshaking round of applause."

Sanders has resisted talking publicly of naming a successor while noting that he will not run for president again in 2028, when he turns 87. But holding her hand in Salt Lake City last month, he told a roaring crowd

that he considered AOC to be family.

"Now I want to say a word about my daughter. I want to say a word about Alexandria and why what she's doing is so important," he said. "Six years ago, what were you doing for a living? She was a waitress. But she looked around her and she saw a society that was fundamentally unjust and in many ways ugly to the people in the community in which she lived in New York City. She stood up and took on one of the most powerful people in the House of Representatives."

## At least 7 people dead and widespread damage left in the wake of severe Midwest storms

By MICHAEL PHILLIS, COREY WILLIAMS and JOHN HANNA Associated Press

ST. LOUIS (AP) — At least seven people died and authorities were searching from building to building for people who were trapped or hurt after severe storms including at least one possible tornado swept through Missouri.

The storms were part of a severe weather system Friday that caused severe damage in Missouri, spawned tornadoes in Wisconsin, left hundreds of thousands without power in the Great Lakes region and brought a punishing heat wave to Texas.

The storms Friday afternoon tore roofs off buildings, blew out windows, ripped bricks off siding and yanked up trees and power lines. St. Louis Mayor Cara Spencer confirmed five deaths in her city and said more than 5,000 homes were affected and about 100,000 customers remained without electricity on Friday night.

"This is truly, truly devastating," Spencer said, adding that the city was in the process of declaring an emergency and an overnight curfew Friday had been put into place in the neighborhoods with the most damage.

The number of people injured was not immediately known. Barnes-Jewish Hospital received 20 to 30 patients from the storm with some in serious condition and most expected to be discharged by Friday night, according to hospital spokesperson Laura High.

St. Louis Children's Hospital received 15 patients with two of them expected to remain in the hospital into the weekend, she said.

National Weather Service radar indicated a tornado touched down between 2:30 p.m. and 2:50 p.m. in Clayton, Missouri, in the St. Louis area. The apparent tornado touched down in the area of Forest Park, home to the St. Louis Zoo and the site of the 1904 World's Fair and Olympic Games the same year.

At Centennial Christian Church, City of St. Louis Fire Department Battalion Chief William Pollihan told The Associated Press that three people had to be rescued after part of the church crumbled. One of those people died.

Stacy Clark said his mother-in-law Patricia Penelton died in the church. He described her as a very active church volunteer who had many roles, including being part of the choir.

Jeffrey Simmons Sr., who lives across from the church, heard an alert on his phone and then the lights went out.

"And next thing you know, a lot of noise, heavy wind," he said. He and his brother went into the basement. Later, he realized it was worse than he thought. "Everything was tore up."

Downed trees and stop lights also caused traffic gridlock during the Friday afternoon commute and officials urged people to stay home.

The upper stories of the Harlem Taproom's brick building were demolished when the storm came through, leaving piles of bricks around the outside. About 20 people were inside, but they huddled in the back of the building and none were hurt, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported.

John Randle, a 19-year-old University of Missouri-St. Louis student, said he and his girlfriend were at the St. Louis Art Museum during the storm and were hustled into the basement with about 150 other people.

They could hear tree branches and hail hitting the building's windows and Randle went up a flight of stairs to the main entrance for about 10 seconds, he said.

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 43 of 70**

"You could see the doors flying open, tree branches flying by and people running," he said. "A lot of people were caught outside."

Christy Childs, a Saint Louis Zoo spokesperson, said in a text that the zoo would remain closed Saturday because of downed trees and other damage. Childs said all animals were safe and that there were no reports of significant injuries to staff, guests or animals.

"We can't definitively say whether or not it was a tornado — it likely was," National Weather Service meteorologist Marshall Pfahler said.

A tornado struck in Scott County, about 130 miles (209 kilometers) south of St. Louis, killing two people, injuring several others and destroying multiple homes, Sheriff Derick Wheatley wrote on social media.

"Our first responders acted swiftly, even while the tornado was still active, putting themselves in harm's way to provide immediate assistance and care to those injured," he said.

**Appalachia and Midwest face danger**

Weather forecasters warned severe storms with possible tornadoes, hail and even hurricane-force winds could hobble parts of Appalachia and the Midwest on Friday.

The weather service warned of a rare tornado emergency around Marion, Illinois, on Friday evening, saying a tornado had been confirmed and was life-threatening. Reports of damage and injuries were not immediately available.

A dust storm warning was issued around the Chicago area Friday night. The weather service said a wall of dust extended along a 100-mile (161-kilometer) line from southwest of Chicago to northern Indiana that severely reduced visibility.

The National Weather Service said residents in Kentucky, southern Indiana, southern Illinois, parts of Tennessee, Missouri, Arkansas and Ohio should brace for intense storms that could include baseball-sized hail.

The weather service's Storm Prediction Center said "strong, potentially long-track tornadoes and very large hail" could be expected. and the threat for damaging winds in excess of 75 mph (120 kph) would increase into Friday evening as storms grew into larger clusters.

Ahead of Friday night's anticipated storm, Appalachian Power, which serves 1 million customers in West Virginia, Virginia and Tennessee, said it requested 1,700 additional workers from neighboring utilities along with sending its own crews from unaffected areas to assist with service restoration.

Faith Borden, a meteorologist in the National Weather Service Nashville office, said Friday that middle Tennessee could expect "all types of severe weather. Winds up to 70 mph. We're talking seriously large hail up to 3 inches, which for us is big hail."

**Texas hit by heat wave**

Texas faced searing heat. A heat advisory was issued for San Antonio and Austin, with temperatures at a blistering 95 F (35 C) to 105 (40.5 C). Parts of the southern East Coast, from Virginia to Florida, battled with heat in the 90s (32-37 C).

The National Weather Service Office for Austin/San Antonio said Friday the humidity coming in over the weekend was expected to make temperatures feel hotter.

"There are concerns of heat exhaustion for people that aren't taking proper precautions when they're outdoors," meteorologist Jason Runyen said, advising those affected to take breaks and stay hydrated.

Overnight Thursday, storms accompanied by booming thunder, lightning displays and powerful winds swept through parts of Wisconsin, Illinois, northern Indiana and Michigan, leaving scores of trees down and thousands of homes without power.

Several tornadoes touched down Thursday in central Wisconsin. None of the twisters had received ratings Thursday, said Timm Uhlmann, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Green Bay.

"We're still gathering reports," Uhlmann said. "We're assessing some of the damage and still getting video and pictures. The damage that we have is fairly widespread. There was a lot of large hail. In Eau Claire was one report of softball-sized hail."

No injuries were immediately reported.

Surveys also were underway Friday of damage in Michigan to determine if any tornadoes touched down,

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 44 of 70

said Steven Freitag, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in White Lake Township, northwest of Detroit.

The storms were fueled by temperatures in the lower 80s Fahrenheit (26-29 C) stretching from Illinois into Michigan and activated by a cold front that pushed through, Freitag said.

By Friday night, customers in Michigan were seeing power return but nearly 190,000 remained without electricity. Power outages also were recorded into Friday night in more than a half-dozen other states including Missouri and Indiana.

The threat of severe weather in Chicago delayed a Beyoncé concert by about two hours Thursday at Soldier Field.

## **An alleged smuggler to Colombia's cartels had a secret ally: the DEA**

By JOSHUA GOODMAN and JIM MUSTIAN Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — In the sordid annals of Colombia's underworld, Diego Marín stood out as the ultimate survivor.

Time and again, the reputed henchman for the Cali cartel evaded capture — or worse fates — as he built a money-laundering network stretching across four continents. He did so, authorities have alleged, with ruthlessness, street smarts and a willingness to bribe a slew of South American police officers and politicians.

All the while, Marín had an even more powerful ally in his corner: the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.

For years, the elite narcotics agency claimed it was investigating the Colombian importer, telling the U.S. Justice Department he was among DEA's top targets. In reality, the relationship was more fraught, with Marín briefly signed up as an informant even as he assiduously corrupted agents with a movable feast of prostitutes, fine dining and expensive gifts, an Associated Press investigation found.

In return, at least one of those agents helped Marín launder money and smuggle contraband — throwing law enforcement off his tracks. As the DEA looked the other way, Marín's business flourished into a criminal empire that generated up to \$100 million a year, according to the Internal Revenue Service.

The AP's findings — based on interviews with current and former agents, as well as a trove of highly sensitive Justice Department files — offer an unprecedented glimpse into the fraud, shoddy oversight and profligate DEA spending that enabled Marín's ascent. The corruption was so extensive, the officials said, that it reminded them of one of the most infamous law enforcement scandals in U.S. history — the FBI's unscrupulous dealings with Whitey Bulger, the Boston mob boss.

"It's an embarrassment for the DEA," said retired Colombian Gen. Juan Carlos Buitrago, who spent years trying to take down Marín only to see his own career derailed by the pursuit. "They ended up creating a monster."

After decades in the shadows, Marín has recently become front-page news in Colombia, where he's been dubbed the "Contraband Czar" over bribery charges that led to his arrest last year in Spain. Among the revelations aired in Colombian media: Marín provided a private plane and an illegal \$125,000 campaign donation to President Gustavo Petro.

Marín attorneys declined to comment. The DEA did not respond to requests for comment.

The revelations are the latest stain for an agency at a crossroads under President Donald Trump. DEA agents already have been redirected to assist in immigration enforcement, and the Justice Department is considering merging the DEA with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives — a restructuring that could change how the U.S. fights the drug war.

'Untouchable'

Marín, 62, learned to hustle from an early age. He was raised in Palestina, a western frontier town settled by devout Catholics who eked out a modest existence from the surrounding coffee farms. To help provide for his family, as a kid he sold candies in the town's plaza.



# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 45 of 70**

It's not precisely known how he got into the drug business. But it was sometime during Colombia's bloody cocaine wars, an era popularized by drug lord Pablo Escobar's infamous phrase of "plata o plomo": money or bullets.

His first brush with the law came in 1993, when he was arrested on accusations of hiding dope money in Colombia-bound home appliances for the leaders of the Cali cartel, Gilberto and Miguel Rodríguez Orejuela, Escobar's main rivals. The evidence, obtained through wiretapped phone calls, tracked with DEA's own intelligence at the time that Marín was involved in drug trafficking, according to Colombian court records.

Colombian authorities declined to charge him and the case fell apart when a police officer — himself later convicted of leaking confidential information to the cartel — recanted his testimony against Marín.

In the ensuing years, the U.S. government records show, Marín sought to line the pockets of law enforcement. An FBI report from 2020 said Marín "paid everyone off" as he developed a niche in what's known as trade-based money laundering, a complex method of hiding and moving drug proceeds through the use of offshore shell companies and misvalued cargo shipments.

Even as he amassed a fortune, Marín was careful to eschew the narco bling of infamous drug lords. Few photographs are known to exist of him. He carefully avoided opening bank accounts and limited his electronic communications.

"He was pretty much untouchable," said Luis Sierra, a longtime U.S. criminal investigator who served as the Homeland Security Investigations attaché to Bogota. "His tradecraft was compromising and corrupting Colombian — and even a few U.S. — officials."

Buitrago, the Colombian general who investigated Marín, said he obtained reliable intelligence that Marín had offered \$5 million to officials to have him ousted. Buitrago retired rather than accept an unwanted transfer.

"The message was clear: I had to get out of the way or I had to get out of the way," Buitrago said. "It's incalculable the number of institutions he co-opted."

Over time, authorities said, those relationships helped Marín emerge as a key money launderer to remnants of the defunct Cali cartel.

In that role, they said, contraband he smuggled would end up converted into pesos at Colombia's ubiquitous "San Andresitos": informal shopping areas packed full of budget-priced electronics and appliances. The name is a play on the Colombian island of San Andres, a duty-free zone in the Caribbean.

That sophisticated system was starting to draw scrutiny from law enforcement when Marín befriended an impressionable, up-and-coming DEA agent.

The corrupt agent

Special Agent José Irizarry — a former air marshal from Puerto Rico hired by the DEA in 2009 despite failing a polygraph — landed a coveted overseas post in Cartagena, Colombia, in part because he was bilingual. He met Marín in 2011, not long after the head of Colombia's police publicly identified Marín as a major smuggler.

The DEA's elite Special Operations Division also had pegged Marín as a major player. The agency even sought to classify him as a so-called Consolidated Priority Target, reserved for the most prolific drug traffickers and money launderers, according to hundreds of pages of Justice Department reports obtained by the AP. The investigative records, which include FBI interview notes, internal DEA memos and private text messages among agents, show Marín had been on the radar of at least five federal law enforcement agencies by the time Irizarry was charged.

But Irizarry believed Marín could be more valuable as an informant. "Marín would come over and they would play cards and have girls over," according to an investigative IRS report. The meetings in Colombia were the first of many that would flout DEA rules forbidding agents from socializing with informants.

Soon, the government records show, Marín tried to compromise the DEA, showering Irizarry with expensive Hublot watches, luxury cars and a \$750,000 condo.

Instead of providing Irizarry with intelligence, Marín gave him a Tiffany ring for his Colombian wife, as well as \$5,000 in cash so the agent could buy a gift for his mistress. One internal government record said

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 46 of 70**

Marín “viewed Irizarry like a son.”

Irizarry began protecting Marín and his organization, signing him up as an informant in 2013. “He would pay me,” Irizarry told the AP, “and if he ever needed me, he had me.”

Irizarry helped Marín expand his empire, the government records show, by steering undercover DEA wire transfers to his associates, providing safe passage for containers full of contraband and even seeking to throw off other federal agencies.

Once, the records show, Irizarry told a suspicious federal investigator that “people make up stories about Marín,” calling him an “open book.”

‘White Wash’

Irizarry avoided suspicion in part by exploiting a powerful Justice Department tool that long lacked proper oversight.

That tool, known as an Attorney General Exempt Operation, or AGEO, gives DEA authority to launder money on behalf of cartels with the goal of carrying out major seizures and arrests. Like actual money launderers, the DEA charges hefty commissions for the transactions — money that agents can spend more freely than government funds.

The DEA has long refused to discuss the stings, which involve setting up front companies, buying property and making wire transfers on behalf of cartels. But internal records show the number of such money laundering operations ballooned at one point to 53 around the country.

In 2011, Irizarry and other agents launched an AGEO to target Marín. In a memo spelling out the operation, they wrote to top Justice Department officials that they hoped to strike “a devastating blow” against Marín, whom they described as a “primary launderer” and investor in cocaine shipments leaving Colombia. They gave the operation a now-ironic name: White Wash.

Marín, however, was only a target on paper. And two years later, Irizarry and his Miami-based colleagues quietly converted him to an informant, a process that typically involves careful vetting and supervisory signoff.

All the while, income generated by White Wash allowed Irizarry and other agents to party around the world with Marín in what the agents described as a blur of booze, drugs, prostitutes and high-end dining.

“It was a very fun game that we were playing,” Irizarry said.

The debauchery also included tickets to premier tennis and soccer matches in Spain, Caribbean cruises on a yacht seized from drug traffickers and lap dances at a strip club in the Dominican Republic paid for by a hitman nicknamed Iguana. The same “sicario,” Irizarry told authorities, boasted of killing 15 people on Marín’s behalf.

The atmosphere was captured in a 42-second video clip obtained by the AP in which Marín can be seen lording over booze-filled revelry at a Madrid restaurant.

“It’s your birthday, bro,” an agent shouts to a colleague as a cellphone camera pans the private salon and a reggaeton beat livens the mood.

Also captured on camera is a longtime DEA informant who was charged last year in Texas with failing to pay taxes on more than \$3.8 million in snitch money.

The clip was shot in April 2018, at the apex of Marín’s power, when he had even become the godfather of Irizarry’s twins.

The agents running White Wash ultimately claimed that the operation generated 125 arrests and the seizure of \$107 million in assets and nearly 9 tons of cocaine. However, a 216-page DEA audit in 2020 found White Wash’s statistics were wildly inflated, and a memo prepared for then-DEA Administrator Anne Milgram described the operation as a “mirage.”

For instance, a large chunk of the operation’s total seized assets — some \$30 million — was attributed to two stolen Van Gogh paintings recovered by Italian investigators in the villa of notorious drug trafficker Raffaele Imperiale. In the end, the audit attributed just five convictions to White Wash.

White Wash seized only \$1.3 million in illicit funds — a little more than the \$900,000 tab DEA agents racked up in travel, according to the audit. Paid DEA informants helped hide much of the partying, as agents would falsely book unneeded hotel rooms and charge alcohol and dinners to them.

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 47 of 70

To this day, the U.S. government is unable to account for another \$19 million in DEA-laundered funds tied to White Wash.

The fall

After so many years with so little oversight, Irizarry grew overconfident.

In 2016, he tried to block authorities in Colombia from seizing a container of Marín's that was later revealed to contain \$3 million in contraband liquor, cigarettes and clothing. Irizarry falsely told U.S. customs officials the shipment was part of an undercover DEA operation, the government records show.

Within days, the U.S. ambassador to Colombia kicked him out of the country. Irizarry was indicted in 2020 and pleaded guilty to 19 counts of money laundering. He's now serving a more than 12-year federal sentence. None of his colleagues was charged, but more than a dozen were either disciplined or investigated.

"I messed up," Irizarry told the AP. "The indictment paints a picture of me, the corrupt agent that did this entire scheme. But it doesn't talk about the rest of DEA. I wasn't the mastermind."

Marín's good fortune also appears to have run out. Last year, he was arrested in Spain on a Colombian warrant over bribes he allegedly paid to three public officials to provide safe passage for dozens of containers arriving each week, some of them from China. After being released on bail, he fled to Portugal, where he was re-arrested and is seeking asylum.

The allegations tying him to Petro, the Colombian president, recall some of the darkest episodes of that country's long fight against cocaine and corruption. The money he's accused of giving Petro's 2022 presidential campaign was received by a close aide, though the president has said he later ordered it returned.

"I know how hard Marín fought to get to me," Petro said on X in February, "thinking I was like the others."

## Cassie testimony against Sean 'Diddy' Combs ends after she spent days describing abuse

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — R&B singer Cassie finished testifying in the Sean "Diddy" Combs sex trafficking trial Friday after four emotional days on the witness stand during which she was questioned about the deepest, most disturbing secrets of her sex life and described being beaten and raped by a man she once loved.

When Judge Arun Subramanian told her she could leave, saying, "You've been here a long time," Cassie glanced once toward the jury but never looked in Combs' direction as she walked out of the courtroom for the final time.

After departing, Cassie, who dated Combs for a decade, released a statement through her lawyer saying she hoped her testimony helps others "heal from the abuse and fear."

"For me, the more I heal, the more I can remember," she said. "And the more I can remember, the more I will never forget."

Combs, 55, is on trial in New York on charges that he exploited his status as an entertainment executive to force women, including Cassie, into drug-fueled "freak-offs" with male sex workers and engaged in other abusive acts against people who relied on him for their careers.

Combs has pleaded not guilty to federal sex trafficking and racketeering charges. His lawyers say that, although he could be violent, nothing he did amounted to a criminal enterprise. And Combs insists all the sex at the freak-offs was consensual.

Shortly after Cassie finished testifying, prosecutors called another witness who was once close to Combs: Dawn Richard, a singer who appeared on his reality show "Making the Band," which launched her group act Danity Kane.

Richard testified that she witnessed Combs physically attack Cassie on multiple occasions. During a visit to Combs' home recording studio in 2009, Richard said she and another woman saw Combs hit Cassie "on the head and beat her on the ground."

Combs brought them back the next day, she said, giving Richard flowers and putting a spin on what happened.

"He said that what we saw was passion and what lovers in relationships do," she testified.

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 48 of 70**

But he also locked them in his recording studio and threatened them to stay silent or else, she said.

Richard sued Combs last year, accusing him of physical abuse, groping and psychological abuse during the years they worked together. Her testimony is to resume Monday.

Throughout Friday's testimony, Combs kept lowering his head to write a steady stream of messages on small sheets of paper that he passed to his defense attorneys.

Cassie's texts to Diddy are a key part of cross-examination

Over her hours of testimony during the week, Cassie said she was ashamed and loathed taking part in "hundreds" of the freak-offs, which could go on for days. But she said she felt compelled because Combs threatened her with violence, and was physically abusive "a lot" during the encounters. He also threatened to publicly release sex videos of her if she made him angry, she said.

Combs' lawyers, however, have sought to portray her as an eager participant.

On Thursday and Friday, they had Cassie read texts and emails in which she expressed willingness to engage in the encounters.

In a 2012 exchange, Combs told Cassie he wanted to "FO one last time tonight," using initials for freak-off. Cassie replied, "What?" Combs said, "You can't read?" Then Cassie replied, "I don't want to freak off for the last time. I want it to be the first time for the rest of our lives."

Combs' lawyer, Anna Estevao, ended her questioning there, but prosecutor Emily Johnson had Cassie read more messages for context.

"I want to see you, but I'm emotional right now," Cassie wrote. "I don't want to do one last time. I'd rather not do it at all."

Cassie testified she was initially open to the encounters because she wanted to make Combs happy and spend time with him, but grew weary as the years went on.

The Associated Press does not typically name people who say they have been sexually abused unless they come forward publicly, as Cassie has.

Cassie filed a lawsuit in 2023 accusing Combs of physical and sexual abuse, but they settled within hours for \$20 million — an amount she disclosed publicly for the first time during the trial. Dozens of other people have since made similar legal claims.

Cassie's testimony ended with another disclosure: She said she recently reached an estimated \$10 million settlement with the Intercontinental Hotel in Los Angeles, where a security camera in 2016 recorded Combs hitting her, kicking her, and dragging her down in a hallway.

After that incident, Cassie texted Combs saying, "I'm not a rag doll. I'm somebody's child."

Cassie, whose legal name is Casandra Ventura, also told Combs in a text that he was out of control from drugs and alcohol that day.

Yet, days later, according to texts read at the trial, she and Combs were expressing love for each other. "We need a different vibe from Friday," she wrote.

After hotel security video of the assault was released last year, Combs apologized and said he was "disgusted" by his actions.

Scrutiny of rape claim against Combs

Estevao also questioned Cassie on Friday about her testimony that Combs raped her in 2018 after she ended their nearly 11-year relationship, noting that she gave differing descriptions of his demeanor and the timing of the alleged assault in interviews with investigators and in her trial testimony.

Cassie contends the rape happened at her Los Angeles home after she and Combs had dinner in Malibu, California, to discuss their breakup, either in August or September 2018.

While Cassie testified this week that Combs was "really nice" and "playful" at the dinner, Estevao pointed out that Cassie told investigators in 2023 that Combs had been "acting very strangely" that night. Cassie clarified, "Nice, but strangely."

Cassie also testified this week that Combs, during the dinner, was trying to get her to go to the Burning Man festival in Nevada, but previously told investigators that the dinner and rape happened after Combs returned from Burning Man.



Cassie acknowledged she stayed in touch with Combs and had consensual sex with him a few weeks after she says he raped her. She also exchanged warm messages with Combs after they broke up, even after she married Alex Fine in 2019.

The trial is expected to last well into June.

## Russia-Ukraine peace talks end after less than 2 hours with deal to swap POWs but no ceasefire

By HANNA ARHIROVA, ANDREW WILKS and LORNE COOK Associated Press

ISTANBUL (AP) — The first direct Russia-Ukraine peace talks since the early weeks of Moscow's 2022 invasion ended after less than two hours Friday, and while both sides agreed on a large prisoner swap, they clearly remained far apart on key conditions for ending the fighting.

One such condition for Ukraine, backed by its Western allies, is a temporary ceasefire as a first step toward a peaceful settlement. The Kremlin has pushed back against such a truce, which remains elusive.

"We haven't received a Russian 'yes' on this basic point," Ukrainian Foreign Ministry spokesman Heorhii Tykhii said after the talks. "If you want to have serious negotiations, you have to have guns silenced."

But Russian delegation head Vladimir Medinsky pronounced himself "satisfied with the outcome," adding that Moscow was ready to continue contacts.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he discussed the talks with U.S. President Donald Trump and the leaders of France, Germany, the U.K. and Poland. In a post on X from a European leadership meeting in Albania, he urged "tough sanctions" against Moscow if it rejects "a full and unconditional ceasefire and an end to killings."

In Istanbul, Kyiv and Moscow agreed to exchange 1,000 prisoners of war each, according to the heads of both delegations, in what would be their biggest such swap.

Both sides also discussed a ceasefire and a meeting between their heads of state, according to chief Ukrainian delegate, Defense Minister Rustem Umerov.

Medinsky, an aide to President Vladimir Putin, said both sides agreed to provide each other with detailed ceasefire proposals, with Ukraine requesting the heads of state meeting, which Russia took under consideration.

"The pressure on the Russian Federation must continue," said Serhii Kyslytsia, Ukraine's first deputy foreign minister and part of Kyiv's delegation. "We should not really relax at this point."

New, 'unacceptable conditions'

During the talks, a senior Ukrainian official said Russia introduced new, "unacceptable demands" to withdraw Ukrainian forces from huge swaths of territory. The official, who was not authorized to make official statements, spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity. The proposal had not been previously discussed, the official said.

The Ukrainian side reiterated it was focused on achieving real progress — an immediate ceasefire and a pathway to substantive diplomacy — "just like the U.S., European partners, and other countries proposed," the official added.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Tykhii confirmed the Russian delegation "voiced a number of things that we deem unacceptable," but added: "This is something that Russians usually voice, and we were keeping to our line."

The two sides sat opposite each other at a U-shaped table in the Dolmabahce Palace but remained far apart in their conditions for ending the war. Trump, who has pressed for an end to the conflict, said he would meet with Putin "as soon as we can set it up."

"I think it's time for us to just do it," Trump told reporters in Abu Dhabi as he wrapped up a trip to the Middle East.

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan opened the talks by urging participants "to take advantage of this opportunity," adding it was "critically important that the ceasefire happens as soon as possible."

In a social media post, Fidan called the POW swap as a "confidence-building measure" and said the

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 50 of 70**

parties had agreed in principle to meet again.

Zelenskyy seeks European unity

Zelenskyy was in Tirana, Albania, with leaders of 47 European countries to discuss security, defense and democratic standards against the backdrop of the war. He met with French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk.

"Pressure on Russia must be maintained until Russia is ready to end the war," Zelenskyy said on X, posting a photo of the leaders during the call, the second for the group since May 10.

Speaking to reporters after the call with Trump, Starmer said the Russian position "is clearly unacceptable."

While he didn't say what the Europeans' response might involve, some of them pressed for new sanctions, with the European Union likely to adopt new measures as soon as Tuesday.

Macron said it was "unacceptable that, for a second time, Russia hasn't responded to the demands made by the Americans, supported by Ukraine and the Europeans. No ceasefire, and therefore no meeting at a decision-making level. And no response."

Merz said diplomatic efforts so far "have unfortunately failed because of Russia's lack of readiness to take the first steps in the right direction now."

"But we will not give up," he added. All three said Kyiv and its allies in Europe will continue to coordinate their efforts.

Diplomatic maneuvering

Both countries engaged in diplomatic maneuvering this week as they tried to show Trump that they are eager to negotiate, although he expressed frustration with the slow progress and threatened to punish foot-dragging.

On Thursday, Putin spurned an offer by Zelenskyy to meet face-to-face in Turkey. Zelenskyy accused Moscow of not making a serious effort to end the war by sending a low-level delegation.

Ukraine has accepted a U.S. and European proposal for a full, 30-day ceasefire, but Putin has effectively rejected it by imposing far-reaching conditions.

Commenting on a possible Trump-Putin meeting, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov appeared to indicate that momentum for such a summit is building. He told reporters that top-level talks were "certainly needed," but added that preparing a summit would take time.

Fighting continues in Ukraine

Russia, meanwhile, is preparing a fresh military offensive, Ukrainian government and Western military analysts say.

Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov was in Minsk to discuss joint military drills in September and deliveries of new weapons to Belarus. Zelenskyy has warned that the military buildup in Belarus, which borders NATO members Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, could serve as a cover for future attacks.

A Friday drone attack on the northeastern city of Kupiansk killed a 55-year-old woman and wounded four men, said Oleh Syniehubov, head of the Kharkiv Regional Military Administration..

Russia's invasion has killed more than 12,000 Ukrainian civilians, the U.N. says, and razed towns and villages. Tens of thousands of Ukrainian soldiers have died, and likely a larger number of Russian troops, officials and analysts say.

One Ukrainian soldier told AP he wasn't hopeful about the talks.

"I don't think they will agree on anything concrete, because summer is the best time for war," said the soldier, who used the call sign "Corsair" in accordance with Ukrainian military rules. "The enemy is trying to constantly escalate the situation."

But he said many of his comrades "believe that by the end of the year there will be peace, albeit an unstable one, but peace."

Before the talks, Ukrainian officials met with national security advisers from the U.S., France, Germany and the U.K. to coordinate positions, the senior Ukrainian official told AP. The U.S. team was led by retired Lt. Gen. Keith Kellogg, Trump's special envoy to Ukraine and Russia, while Umerov and presidential office chief Andriy Yermak represented Ukraine, the official said.

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 51 of 70**

A three-way meeting between Turkey, the U.S. and Ukraine also took place, Turkish Foreign Ministry officials said. The U.S. side included Secretary of State Marco Rubio as well as Kellogg.

On Thursday, Rubio said he believed a breakthrough was only possible is a meeting between Trump and Putin.

## **Eurovision explained as the extravagant pop contest reaches its grand final**

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

BASEL, Switzerland (AP) — There has already been triumph and tears, singing onstage and in the streets, and a touch of political division, as the 69th Eurovision Song Contest approaches its grand final in the Swiss city of Basel.

Musical acts from 26 countries will take the stage at the St. Jakobshalle arena on Saturday in a spectacular, sequin-drenched competition that has been uniting and dividing Europeans since 1956.

Here's everything to know:

What is Eurovision?

Eurovision is competition in which performers from countries across Europe, and a few beyond it, compete under their national flags with the aim of being crowned continental champion. Think of it as the Olympics of pop music or the World Cup with singing instead of soccer.

It's a celebration of silly fun and music's unifying power, but also a place where politics and regional rivalries play out.

"It's Europe's biggest cultural event," said Dean Vuletic, an expert on the history of Eurovision. "It has been going on for almost 70 years and people love to watch it, not only for the show, for the glitter, the stage effects, the crazy costumes, but also because they like to see it as a reflection of the zeitgeist in Europe."

Who is in the Eurovision 2025 final?

Of 37 countries that sent performers to Eurovision, 11 were knocked out by public voting in semifinals on Tuesday and Thursday. Another six automatically qualified for the final: the host, Switzerland, and the "Big Five" that pay the most to the contest — France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the U.K.

The 26 countries competing Saturday, in order of performance, are: Norway, Luxembourg, Estonia, Israel, Lithuania, Spain, Ukraine, the U.K, Austria, Iceland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Finland, Italy, Poland, Germany, Greece, Armenia, Switzerland, Malta, Portugal, Denmark, Sweden, France, San Marino and Albania.

Favorites, according to oddsmakers, are KAJ, representing Sweden with "Bara Bada Bastu," a jaunty serenade to the sauna. Dutch singer Claude is also highly rated with soulful ballad "C'est La Vie." Other favorites include classically trained Austrian countertenor JJ with his pop-opera song "Wasted Love," and Israel's Yuval Raphael, with her anthemic "New Day Will Rise."

What is Eurovision music like?

Eurovision has a reputation for campy europop with nonsense lyrics — past winners include "La, La, La" and "Boom Bang-a-Bang." But it has also produced some enduring pop classics. And it helped make stars of performers including ABBA — winners in 1974 with "Waterloo" — Celine Dion, Austrian drag performer Conchita Wurst and Italian rock band Måneskin.

This year's finalists range from Lithuanian emo rockers Katarsis to a power ballad Spanish diva Melody and Ukrainian prog rockers Ziferblat.

Campiness, humor and double entendres abound. "Espresso Macchiato" is a comic ode to Italian stereotypes performed by Estonia's Tommy Cash. Miriana Conte sings for Malta with the double entendre-filled "Serving" -- performed on a set including a glitter ball and giant lips, it is classic Eurovision.

It was once widely accepted that the most successful Eurovision songs were in English, but that is changing. This year's contest features songs in a record 20 languages, including Ukrainian, Icelandic, Latvian, Maltese and Armenian.

Vuletic said viewers these days want "more authenticity in Eurovision entries."

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 52 of 70**

"They don't just want a standard pop song sung in English," he said. "They want to also see something about the culture of the country that the song represents."

How is the winner chosen?

Once all the acts have performed in the final, the winner is chosen by a famously complex mix of phone and online voters from around the world and rankings by music-industry juries in each of the Eurovision countries. As the results are announced, countries slide up and down the rankings and tensions build.

Ending up with "nul points," or zero, is considered a national humiliation.

Sounds fun. How can I watch and vote?

The final starts Saturday at 1900 GMT (3 p.m. EDT) and will be aired by national broadcasters in participating nations, on streaming service Peacock in the United States and in many countries on the Eurovision YouTube channel.

During and immediately after the final, viewers in participating countries can vote by phone, text message or the Eurovision app — but not for their own country. Viewers in the U.S. and other nonparticipating countries can vote all day Saturday, online at [www.esc.vote](http://www.esc.vote) or with the app. The combined "rest of the world" vote is given the weight of one individual country.

Is Eurovision a politics-free zone?

The contest's motto is "united by music," but the world's divisions inevitably intrude.

Russia was banned from Eurovision after its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and since then Ukrainian musicians — including 2022 winner Kalush Orchestra — have competed under the shadow of war in the home country.

This year's contest has been roiled for a second year by disputes over Israel's participation. Dozens of former participants, including Nemo, have called for Israel to be excluded over its conduct in the war against Hamas in Gaza. Pro-Palestinian and pro-Israel protests have both taken place in Basel, though on a much smaller scale than at last year's event in Sweden.

A handful of protesters attempted to disrupt a rehearsal by Israeli singer Raphael on Thursday with oversized flags and whistles and were escorted from the arena. Organizers say they have tightened security ahead of the final.

## **The crisis in Gaza is only growing. Here's what to know**

By JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The crisis in Gaza has reached one of its darkest periods, as Israel blocks all food and supplies from entering the territory and continues an intensifying bombardment campaign.

Humanitarian officials caution that famine threatens to engulf the strip. Doctors say they are out of medicine to treat routine conditions.

Israeli leaders are threatening an even more intense ground offensive. The military is preparing for a new organization with U.S. backing to take over aid delivery, despite alarms raised from humanitarian groups that the plans won't meet the massive need and could place restrictions on those eligible. It's unclear when operations would begin or who would fund them.

"This is the deadliest and most destructive phase of Israel's war on Gaza, yet the world has turned away," said Bushra Khalidi, policy lead for Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory at the humanitarian non-profit Oxfam. "After 19 months of horror, Gaza has become a place where international law is suspended, and humanity is abandoned."

Here's what to know about the state of affairs in Gaza.

Casualties soar from increased Israeli bombardment

Israel ended a six-week ceasefire in mid-March and resumed its attacks in Gaza, saying military pressure against Hamas was the best way to push the militant group into freeing more hostages. But ceasefire talks remain deadlocked, and scores of civilians have been killed in Israeli airstrikes.

On Friday, Israeli airstrikes killed 108 — raising the death toll over the past three days to more than 200 Palestinians. Those numbers come from the Palestinian Health Ministry, a body directed by the Hamas



# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 53 of 70**

government that does not distinguish between civilians and combatants.

The strikes — often at night, as people sleep in their tents — have directly targeted hospitals, schools, medical clinics, mosques, a Thai restaurant-turned shelter. The European Hospital, the only remaining facility providing cancer treatments in Gaza, was put out of service.

Israel says it targets only militants and accuses Hamas of using civilians as human shields.

But the death toll has reached the same level of intensity as the earliest days of the war, when Israel pounded Gaza with airstrikes in the aftermath of the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas attack, said Emily Tripp, executive director of Airwars, an independent group in London that tracks recent conflicts.

She says preliminary data indicate the number of incidents where at least one person was killed or injured by Israeli fire hovered around 700 in April. It's a figure comparable only to October or December 2023 — one of the heaviest periods of bombardment.

In the last 10 days of March, UNICEF estimates that an average of 100 children were killed or maimed by Israeli airstrikes every day.

Almost 3,000 of the estimated 53,000 dead since Oct. 7, 2023, have been killed since Israel broke the ceasefire on March 18, the ministry said.

Among those killed in recent days:

A volunteer pharmacist with the Palestine Children's Relief Fund, killed with her family in a strike on Gaza City on May 4.

A midwife from Al Awda Health and Community Association, killed with her family in another strike on May 7.

A journalist working for Qatari television network Al Araby TV, along with 11 members of his family.

Motaz Al-Bayyok, age 1. His older brother, Yusuf, 11, screamed as a shroud was parted to expose young Motaz's face.

Israeli officials threaten new ground operation

Israel shows no sign of slowing its operation in Gaza.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu promised this week to use even more force against Hamas, against the objections of families of hostages begging him to agree to a deal instead.

An Israeli official said the strikes Friday were preparatory actions for a larger operation, intended to send a message to Hamas that it will begin soon if there isn't an agreement to release hostages. The official was not authorized to brief media and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The war began when Hamas-led militants killed 1,200 people in an Oct. 7, 2023, intrusion into southern Israel. Hamas still holds 58 of the roughly 250 hostages it took during its attack, with 23 believed to still be alive, although Israeli authorities have expressed concern for the status of three.

No food has entered Gaza for 75 days, and Palestinians go hungry

Israel has blocked food, water and supplies from reaching Gaza — where the U.N. says the entire population is reliant on aid — for more than two months. Most community kitchens have shut down. The main food providers inside Gaza — the U.N.'s World Food Program and World Central Kitchen — say they are out of food. Vegetables and meat are inaccessible or unaffordable. Palestinians queue for hours for a small scoop of rice.

Food security experts said in a stark warning Monday that Gaza would likely fall into famine if Israel doesn't lift its blockade and stop its military campaign,

Nearly half a million Palestinians face possible starvation — living in "catastrophic" levels of hunger — and 1 million others can barely get enough food, according to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, a leading international authority on the severity of hunger crises.

Israel is preparing south Gaza for a new aid program

Satellite photos obtained by The Associated Press show what appear to be Israeli preparations for a new aid distribution program in Gaza, one that has come under heavy criticism from aid workers.

Satellite photos from May 10 show four bases in southern Gaza — two that are newly built in the last month and two that have been enhanced.

One, at the southwestern corner of Gaza, has been fortified with new walls. A new road connects the

# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 54 of 70

base to a sandy expanse of newly bulldozed land.

Another base, in the center of Gaza, appears to have been fortified with new defensive sand berms. Adjacent is a newly bulldozed lot.

The photos appear to correspond to a new aid distribution program being developed by a new group supported by the U.S.

The Gaza Humanitarian Foundation — made up of American security contractors, former government officials, ex-military officers and humanitarian officials — says it would initially set up four distribution sites, guarded by private security firms. Each would serve 300,000 people, covering only about half of Gaza's population.

The GHF proposal said subcontractors will use armored vehicles to transport supplies from the Gaza border to distribution sites, where they will also provide security. It said the aim is to deter criminal gangs or militants from redirecting aid.

## US claim of state secrets privilege in Kilmar Abrego Garcia case is 'inadequate,' judge says

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN and BEN FINLEY Associated Press

GREENBELT, Md. (AP) — A federal judge told the Trump administration Friday that its explanation for invoking the state secrets privilege in the Kilmar Abrego Garcia case is inadequate, describing the government's reasoning for withholding information as "take my word for it."

Trump administration attorneys have argued that releasing details in open court — or even to the judge in private — about returning Abrego Garcia to the United States would jeopardize national security. For example, they said it would reveal confidential negotiations with foreign countries.

But U.S. District Judge Paula Xinis in Maryland said she was at a loss for how she could independently determine the nature of the government's concerns with the information it provided.

"There's simply no details," she said. "This is basically 'take my word for it.'"

Jonathan Guynn, a Justice Department attorney, disagreed that the explanation was inadequate.

"We think we've provided significant information," he said.

The focus of Friday's hearing was primarily on the Trump administration's desire to invoke the state secrets privilege, a legal doctrine that is more often used in cases involving the military and spy agencies. But how Xinis ultimately rules could impact the central question looming over the case: Has the Trump administration followed her order to bring back Abrego Garcia?

Abrego Garcia's attorneys argued that the Trump administration has done nothing to return the Maryland construction worker. They say the government is invoking the privilege to hide behind the misconduct of mistakenly deporting him to El Salvador and refusing to bring him back.

"The government is delaying for delay's sake at the expense of someone who was wrongly removed from this country," said Andrew Rossman, an attorney for Abrego Garcia.

Rossman said he isn't arguing that there are no conceivable state secrets at play.

"The question is: 'What have you actually done?'" Rossman said. "I suspect there are no steps, and nothing has happened."

He urged Xinis to reject the notion that the government "can throw a shroud of state secrets" over her order and not comply with it, adding that "simply saying, 'national security,' is not sufficient."

Xinis appeared skeptical of the government's position, particularly after Guynn said there was no need for the judge to review the information the Trump administration deems secret.

"He has been wrongly removed," Xinis responded. "How is it not central to understand what, if anything, you've done to return him? How is it not a need?"

Abrego Garcia's attorneys have also cited recent pronouncements by President Donald Trump and others that Abrego Garcia isn't coming back. For example, Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said "there is no scenario where Abrego Garcia will be in the United States again."

Guynn, the Justice Department attorney, told the judge that such statements are not inconsistent with

the government's legal arguments when "read with the appropriate nuance."

Guynn suggested the meaning was that, "He'll never walk free in the United States."

Xinis said she reads Noem's comments as a sign that the government won't take steps to facilitate his return.

"That's about as clear as it can get," the judge said.

"I disagree," Guynn said, eliciting laughter in the courtroom.

Guynn also denied any wrongdoing by the administration.

"The removal of Mr. Abrego Garcia was inadvertent error," he said. "We don't concede that is misconduct by the government."

A portion of Friday's hearing was closed to the public, during which Xinis gave the government a week to provide more information for its state secrets claim, according to Simon Sandoval-Moshenberg, an attorney for Abrego Garcia.

The Trump administration deported Abrego Garcia to El Salvador in March. The expulsion violated a U.S. immigration judge's order in 2019 that shielded Abrego Garcia from deportation to his native country because he faced likely persecution by a local gang that had terrorized his family.

Abrego Garcia's American wife sued, and Xinis ordered his return on April 4. The Supreme Court ruled on April 10 that the administration must work to bring him back.

Xinis later lambasted the administration for failing to explain what it has done to retrieve him and instructed the government to provide documents and testimony showing what it has done, if anything, to comply. The Trump administration appealed, but the appeals court backed Xinis in a blistering order.

The debate over state secrets privilege is the latest development in the case.

Trump administration officials have said Abrego Garcia was deported based on a 2019 accusation from Maryland police that he was an MS-13 gang member. Abrego Garcia denied the allegation and was never charged with a crime, his attorneys said.

The Trump administration later acknowledged that Abrego Garcia's deportation to El Salvador was "an administrative error" because of the immigration judge's 2019 order. But Trump and others have continued to insist that Abrego Garcia was in MS-13.

## Supreme Court rejects Trump bid to resume quick deportations of Venezuelans under 18th-century law

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Friday barred the Trump administration from quickly resuming deportations of Venezuelans under an 18th-century wartime law enacted when the nation was just a few years old.

Over two dissenting votes, the justices acted on an emergency appeal from lawyers for Venezuelan men who have been accused of being gang members, a designation that the administration says makes them eligible for rapid removal from the United States under the Alien Enemies Act of 1798.

The court indefinitely extended the prohibition on deportations from a north Texas detention facility under the alien enemies law. The case will now go back to the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which declined to intervene in April.

President Donald Trump quickly voiced his displeasure. "THE SUPREME COURT WON'T ALLOW US TO GET CRIMINALS OUT OF OUR COUNTRY!" he posted on his Truth Social platform.

The high court action is the latest in a string of judicial setbacks for the Trump administration's effort to speed deportations of people in the country illegally. The president and his supporters have complained about having to provide due process for people they contend didn't follow U.S. immigration laws.

The court had already called a temporary halt to the deportations, in a middle-of-the-night order issued last month. Officials seemed "poised to carry out removals imminently," the court noted Friday.

Several cases related to the old deportation law are in courts

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 56 of 70**

The case is among several making their way through the courts over Trump's proclamation in March calling the Tren de Aragua gang a foreign terrorist organization and invoking the 1798 law to deport people.

The high court case centers on the opportunity people must have to contest their removal from the United States — without determining whether Trump's invocation of the law was appropriate.

"We recognize the significance of the Government's national security interests as well as the necessity that such interests be pursued in a manner consistent with the Constitution," the justices said in an unsigned opinion.

At least three federal judges have said Trump was improperly using the AEA to speed deportations of people the administration says are Venezuelan gang members. On Tuesday, a judge in Pennsylvania signed off on the use of the law.

The legal process for this issue is a patchwork one

The court-by-court approach to deportations under the AEA flows from another Supreme Court order that took a case away from a judge in Washington, D.C., and ruled detainees seeking to challenge their deportations must do so where they are held.

In April, the justices said that people must be given "reasonable time" to file a challenge. On Friday, the court said 24 hours is not enough time but has not otherwise spelled out how long it meant. The administration has said 12 hours would be sufficient. U.S. District Judge Stephanie Haines ordered immigration officials to give people 21 days in her opinion, in which she otherwise said deportations could legally take place under the AEA.

The Supreme Court on Friday also made clear that it was not blocking other ways the government may deport people.

Justices Samuel Alito and Clarence Thomas dissented, with Alito complaining that his colleagues had departed from their usual practices and seemingly decided issues without an appeals court weighing in. "But if it has done so, today's order is doubly extraordinary," Alito wrote.

In a separate opinion, Justice Brett Kavanaugh said he agreed with the majority but would have preferred the nation's highest court to jump in now definitively, rather than return the case to an appeals court. "The circumstances," Kavanaugh wrote, "call for a prompt and final resolution."

## **Conservatives block Trump's big tax breaks bill in a stunning setback**

By LISA MASCARO and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a setback, House Republicans failed Friday to push their big package of tax breaks and spending cuts through the Budget Committee, as a handful of conservatives joined all Democrats in a stunning vote against it.

The hard-right lawmakers are insisting on steeper spending cuts to Medicaid and the Biden-era green energy tax breaks, among other changes, before they will give their support to President Donald Trump's "beautiful" bill. They warn the tax cuts alone would pile onto the nation's \$36 trillion debt.

The failed vote, 16-21, stalls, for now, House Speaker Mike Johnson's push to have the package approved next week. But the Budget Committee plans to reconvene Sunday to try again. Lawmakers vowed to negotiate into the weekend as Trump is returning to Washington from the Middle East.

"Something needs to change or you're not going to get my support," said Rep. Chip Roy, R-Texas.

Tallying a whopping 1,116 pages, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, named with a nod to Trump, is teetering at a critical moment. Johnson is determined to resolve the problems with the package that he believes will inject a dose of stability into a wavering economy.

With few votes to spare from his slim majority, the Republicans are trying to pass it over the staunch objections of Democrats who slammed the package as a "big, bad bill," or as Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., called it, "one big, beautiful betrayal."

Ahead of Friday's vote, Trump had implored his party to fall in line.



# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 57 of 70**

"Republicans MUST UNITE behind, 'THE ONE, BIG BEAUTIFUL BILL!'" the Republican president posted on social media. "We don't need 'GRANDSTANDERS' in the Republican Party. STOP TALKING, AND GET IT DONE!"

The Budget panel is one of the final stops before the package is sent to the full House floor for a vote, which is still expected sometime next week. Typically, the job of the Budget Committee is more administrative as it compiles the work of 11 committees that drew up various parts of the big bill.

But Friday's meeting proved momentous even before the votes were tallied.

The conservatives, many from the Freedom Caucus, had been warning they would block the bill, as they holdout for steeper cuts. At the same time, GOP lawmakers from high-tax states including New York are demanding a deeper tax deduction, known as SALT, for their constituents.

Four Republican conservatives initially voted against the package — Roy and Reps. Ralph Norman of South Carolina, Josh Brecheen of Oklahoma, Rep. Andrew Clyde of Georgia. Then one, Rep. Lloyd Smucker of Pennsylvania, switched his vote to no in a procedural step so it could be reconsidered later, saying afterward he was confident they'd "get this done."

Norman insisted he was not defying the president — "this isn't a 'grandstand,'" he said — as he and the others push from Trump's priorities.

In their quest for deeper reductions, the conservatives are particularly eyeing Medicaid, the health care program for some 70 million Americans. They want new work requirements for aid recipients to start immediately, rather than on Jan. 1, 2029, as the package proposes.

Democrats emphasized that millions of people would lose their health coverage and food stamps assistance if the bill passes while the wealthiest Americans would reap enormous tax cuts. They also said it would increase future deficits.

"That is bad economics. It is unconscionable," said Rep. Brendan Boyle, the top Democratic lawmaker on the panel.

At the same time, talks are also underway with the New Yorkers have been unrelenting in their demand for a much larger SALT deduction than what is proposed in the bill, which could send the overall cost of the package skyrocketing.

As it stands, the bill proposes tripling what's currently a \$10,000 cap on the state and local tax deduction, increasing it to \$30,000 for joint filers with incomes up to \$400,000 a year.

Rep. Nick LaLota, one of the New York lawmakers leading the SALT effort, said they have proposed a deduction of \$62,000 for single filers and \$124,000 for joint filers.

The conservatives and the New Yorkers are at odds, each jockeying as Johnson labors to pass the package from the House by Memorial Day and send it onto the Senate.

At its core, the sprawling package extends the existing income tax cuts that were approved during Trump's first term, in 2017, and adds new ones that the president campaigned on in 2024, including no taxes on tips, overtime pay and some auto loans.

It increases some tax breaks for middle-income earners, including a bolstered standard deduction of \$32,000 for joint filers and a temporary \$500 boost to the child tax credit, bringing it to \$2,500.

It also provides an infusion of \$350 billion for Trump's deportation agenda and to bolster the Pentagon.

To offset more than \$5 trillion in lost revenue, the package proposes rolling back other tax breaks, namely the green energy tax credits approved as part of President Joe Biden's Inflation Reduction Act. Some conservatives want those to end immediately.

The package also seeks to cover the costs by slashing more than \$1 trillion from health care and food assistance programs over the course of a decade, in part by imposing work requirements on able-bodied adults.

Certain Medicaid recipients would need to engage in 80 hours a month of work or other community options to receive health care. Older Americans receiving food aid through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, known as SNAP, would also see the program's current work requirement for able-bodied participants without dependents extended to include those ages 55-64. States would also be required to shoulder a greater share of the program's cost.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates at least 7.6 million fewer people with health insurance and about 3 million a month fewer SNAP recipients with the changes.

While Republicans insist the package will pay for itself, partly with economic growth, outside budget analysts are skeptical and say it will add trillions of dollars to the nation's deficits and debt.

## **Israel expands attacks in Gaza and Yemen as Trump wraps up trip to region**

By WAFAA SHURAFU and BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israel launched dozens of airstrikes across Gaza on Friday that local health officials said killed 108 people, mostly women and children, and which Israeli officials described as a prelude to a stepped-up campaign to pressure Hamas to release hostages.

Israel also struck two ports in Yemen that it said were used by the Houthi militant group to transfer weapons. Local health officials said at least one person was killed and nine injured.

The strikes across the Gaza Strip followed days of attacks that killed more than 130 people, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between civilians and combatants, and came as U.S. President Donald Trump wrapped up a visit to the region that included stops in three Gulf states but not Israel.

There had been widespread hope that Trump's trip could increase the chances of a ceasefire deal or the resumption of humanitarian aid to Gaza, which Israel has prevented for more than two months. The Trump administration is also trying to negotiate a nuclear deal with Iran, which backs several anti-Israel militant groups, including Hamas in Gaza and the Houthis in Yemen.

Speaking to reporters in Abu Dhabi on the final day of his trip, Trump said he was looking to resolve a range of global crises, including Gaza. "We're looking at Gaza," he said. "And we've got to get that taken care of. A lot of people are starving. A lot of people are — there's a lot of bad things going on."

The Gaza Health Ministry said 31 children and 27 women were killed and hundreds more wounded in Friday's airstrikes.

In southern Gaza, Israel struck the outskirts of Deir al-Balah and the city of Khan Younis. It said it hit anti-tank missile posts and military structures.

Three children and their grandfather were killed as they fled bombardment in Khan Younis, said the head of pediatrics at Nasser Hospital, Dr. Ahmed al-Farra.

In northern Gaza, the attacks sent people fleeing from the Jabaliya refugee camp and the town of Beit Lahiya. Israel said it eliminated several militants who were operating in an observation compound.

Dark smoke was seen rising over Jabaliya as people fled on donkey carts, by car and foot.

"We got out of the house with difficulty, killing and death, we did not take anything," said Feisal Al-Attar, who was displaced from Beit Lahiya.

After the strikes on Yemen, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said, "There will be more to come." The Israeli military, which attacked Houthi targets earlier this month, said it had intercepted several missiles fired from Yemen toward Israeli airspace during Trump's visit to the region.

Netanyahu vows to step up war

An Israeli official said the latest strikes in Gaza were part of the lead-up to a larger operation that it warned would begin soon if Hamas doesn't release the 58 hostages still in Gaza since the group's October 2023 attack that launched the war. The official was not authorized to brief media and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Netanyahu vowed earlier in the week to escalate pressure on Hamas with the aim of destroying the militant group that has ruled Gaza for nearly two decades. In comments released by his office Tuesday, the prime minister said Israeli forces were days away from entering Gaza "with great strength to complete the mission."

Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz confirmed Friday that strikes in Gaza earlier in the week targeted the

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 59 of 70**

presumed leader of Hamas' military wing in Gaza, Mohammed Sinwar, although there has been no word on his fate. He is the brother of the slain former leader in Gaza, Yahya Sinwar — a mastermind of the Oct. 7, 2023, attack.

'Heavy hearts'

In Israel, a group that supports the families of hostages said they awoke Friday with "heavy hearts" to reports of increased attacks and called on Netanyahu to "join hands" with Trump's efforts to free hostages. On Monday, Israeli-American Edan Alexander was released after backdoor U.S.-Hamas diplomacy.

In the Oct. 7 attack, Hamas-led militants killed 1,200 people and abducted 251 others. Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed more than 53,000 Palestinians, many of them women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

Almost 3,000 have been killed since Israel broke a ceasefire on March 18, the ministry said.

Of the hostages that remain in Gaza, Israel believes as many as 23 are still alive, although Israeli authorities have expressed concern for the status of three of those.

Gaza blockade enters third month

Dozens of Palestinians in Khan Younis lined up at a charity kitchen Friday in a scene that quickly turned chaotic as the enclave entered its third month of Israel's aid blockade.

Several children behind a metal partition screamed and cried out for food. At one point, charity kitchen workers struggled to push people back into line.

Some workers were attacked as the crowd surged forward, pressing against the partition and lunging toward the large pots of rice to grab whatever they could.

Israel's blockade is preventing food, fuel medicine and all other supplies from entering, worsening a humanitarian crisis. Israel says the blockade aims to pressure Hamas to release the hostages it still holds.

"Our only hope was that Donald Trump's visit to the Middle East would result in solutions and somehow open crossings to bring in humanitarian assistance as soon as possible into the Gaza Strip," said Saqer Jamal, a displaced man from Rafah who was at the kitchen.

The United Nations announced Friday that 18 kitchens previously closed due to food shortages in Gaza reopened after community members shared remaining food stocks.

Earlier this week, a new humanitarian organization that has U.S. backing to take over aid delivery said it expects to begin operations before the end of the month — after what it describes as key agreements from Israeli officials.

A statement from the group, the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, identified several U.S. military veterans, former humanitarian coordinators and security contractors that it said would lead the delivery effort.

Many in the humanitarian community, including the U.N., said they won't participate because the system does not align with humanitarian principles and won't be able to meet the needs of Palestinians in Gaza.

## **The man who stabbed author Salman Rushdie on stage has been sentenced to 25 years in prison**

By CAROLYN THOMPSON Associated Press

MAYVILLE, N.Y. (AP) — A man who attacked Salman Rushdie with a knife in front of a stunned audience in 2022, leaving the prizewinning author blind in one eye, was sentenced Friday to 25 years in prison.

Hadi Matar, 27, stood quietly as the judge pronounced the sentence. He did not deny attacking Rushdie, and when he was invited to address the court before being sentenced, Matar got in a few last insults at the writer. He said he believed in freedom of speech but called Rushdie "a hypocrite."

"Salman Rushdie wants to disrespect other people," said Matar, clad in white-striped jail clothing and wearing handcuffs. "He wants to be a bully, he wants to bully other people. I don't agree with that."

Rushdie, 77, did not return to western New York for the sentencing but submitted a victim impact statement in which he said he has nightmares about what happened, Chautauqua County District Attorney Jason Schmidt said. The statement was not made public. Rushdie, through his agent, declined to comment after the sentencing.

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 60 of 70**

During the trial, the author described how he believed he was dying when a masked attacker plunged a knife into his head and body more than a dozen times as he was being introduced at the Chautauqua Institution to speak about writer safety.

Video of the assault, captured by the venue's cameras and played at trial, show Matar approaching the seated Rushdie from behind and reaching around him to stab at his torso with a knife. As the audience gasps and screams, Rushdie is seen raising his arms and rising from his seat, walking and stumbling for a few steps with Matar hanging on, swinging and stabbing until they both fall and are surrounded by onlookers who rush in to separate them.

A jury found Matar guilty of attempted murder and assault in February after deliberating for less than two hours.

Judge David Foley told Matar that he thought it was notable he had chosen to try and kill Rushdie at the Chautauqua Institution, a summer retreat that prides itself on the free exchange of ideas.

"We all have the right to have our own ideals; we all have the right to carry them," Foley said. "But when you interfere with someone else's ability to do that by committing a violent act, in the United States of America, that has to be an answerable crime."

The judge also gave Matar a seven-year term for wounding a man who was on stage with Rushdie, though that time will run concurrently to the other sentence.

After the attack, Rushdie spent 17 days at a Pennsylvania hospital and more than three weeks at a New York City rehabilitation center. The author of "Midnight's Children," "The Moor's Last Sigh" and "Victory City" detailed his recovery in his 2024 memoir, "Knife."

Matar's lawyer, Nathaniel Barone, had asked the judge for a sentence of around 12 years, citing his lack of a previous criminal record.

Schmidt, the prosecutor, said Matar deserved the maximum sentence of 25 years, saying Matar "designed this attack so that he could inflict the most amount of damage, not just upon Mr. Rushdie, but upon this community, upon the 1,400 people who were there to watch it."

Matar next faces a federal trial on terrorism-related charges. While the first trial focused mostly on the details of the knife attack itself, the next one is expected to delve into the more complicated issue of motive. He has pleaded not guilty. If convicted of the federal charges, Matar faces a maximum penalty of life in prison.

Authorities said Matar, a U.S. citizen, was attempting to carry out a decades-old fatwa, or edict, calling for Rushdie's death when he traveled from his home in Fairview, New Jersey, to target Rushdie at the summer retreat about 70 miles (110 kilometers) southwest of Buffalo.

Matar believed the fatwa, first issued in 1989, was backed by the Lebanon-based militant group Hezbollah and endorsed in a 2006 speech by the group's secretary-general, Hassan Nasrallah, according to federal prosecutors.

Iranian leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini issued the fatwa after publication of Rushdie's novel, "The Satanic Verses," which some Muslims consider blasphemous. Rushdie spent years in hiding, but after Iran announced it would not enforce the decree he traveled freely over the past quarter century.

## **Strike by New Jersey Transit train engineers leaves some 350,000 commuters in the lurch**

By BRUCE SHIPKOWSKI Associated Press

Train engineers in New Jersey's huge commuter rail system went on strike early Friday, leaving its 350,000 daily riders either working from home or seeking other means to transit the state or cross the Hudson River into New York City.

People who normally rely on New Jersey Transit took to buses, cars, taxis and boats for the morning rush hour after trains ground to a halt at a minute past midnight.

Some left extra early to avoid problems. A few, unaware that the strike was underway, showed up and waited for trains that weren't going to arrive.



# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 61 of 70**

Early indications were that the strike hadn't resulted in major traffic jams or epic lines to get onto buses. Friday's rail commute into New York from New Jersey is typically the lightest of the week.

But there was some confusion and extra costs as passengers tried to figure out alternate routes in a system that, besides helping New Jerseyans get to work or into Manhattan to see a Knicks game or a Broadway show, also helps New Yorkers get to Newark Airport or concerts at the Meadowlands.

David Milosevich, a fashion and advertising casting director, was on his way to a photo shoot in Brooklyn. At 1 a.m. he checked his phone and saw the strike was on.

"I left home very early because of it," he said, grabbing the bus in Montclair, New Jersey, and arriving in Manhattan at 7 a.m. "I think a lot of people don't come in on Fridays since COVID. I don't know what's going to happen Monday."

Strike comes after talks this week didn't result in a deal

The walkout comes after the latest round of negotiations on Thursday didn't produce an agreement. It is the state's first transit strike in more than 40 years and comes a month after union members overwhelmingly rejected a labor agreement with management.

"We presented them the last proposal; they rejected it and walked away with two hours left on the clock," said Tom Haas, general chairman of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen.

NJ Transit CEO Kris Kolluri appeared Friday alongside Democratic Gov. Phil Murphy at a news conference. They said they got close to what the union was seeking on wages but raised concerns about the longer-term fiscal health of the transit agency.

"What's the point of giving you a pay raise if a couple of years from now your job is not going to exist?" Kolluri said. "That's sort of what we're talking about in the most plain and simple terms."

Groups of picketers gathered in front of transit headquarters in Newark and at the Hoboken Terminal, carrying signs that said "Locomotive Engineers on Strike" and "NJ Transit: Millions for Penthouse Views Nothing for Train Crews."

BLET National President Mark Wallace walked the picket line outside New York City's Penn Station, and he said the engineers are committed to staying on strike until they get a fair deal. Union members were nearly unanimous in authorizing a strike last summer, and 87% of them rejected the latest agreement.

Wallace said NJ Transit needs to pay engineers a wage that's comparable to Amtrak and Long Island Railroad because engineers are leaving for jobs on those other railroads for better pay,

The next talks are scheduled for Sunday with the help of federal mediators. The parties met Monday with a federal mediation board in Washington, and a mediator was present during Thursday's talks.

The union has seen steady attrition in its ranks at NJ Transit as more of its members leave to take better-paying jobs at other railroads. The number of NJ Transit engineers has shrunk from 500 several months ago to about 400. The engineers are responsible for operating trains, ensuring safe and smooth transport between stations,

Strike leaves some concerned, frustrated

Many people were concerned not only with their morning commute but making sure they had a way to get home.

"When I come back home to New Jersey what do I do?" nurse Pam Watkins, of Edison, asked an NJ Transit customer service helper on her way to work on Brooklyn on Friday morning.

The worker helped her punch through a touch screen that would help her use her commuter ticket for the bus back.

"I don't want to be figuring it out on my way home," she said.

Some riders who were unaware of the strike learned what had happened as they waited at transit stations early Friday for trains that would not be coming. Others sought help to get to their destinations.

"How do I get to Newark (Liberty Airport)?" entrepreneur Vishal Gunday, with a large red suitcase in tow, asked a reporter after trying to get a train ticket at an automated terminal. "It has kind of messed up my plans" he said, adding he was trying to get a flight to India.

One frustrated commuter, who works on a in a train yard for a rail freight company, had no sympathy for the engineers on strike, who he called "greedy."

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 62 of 70**

"They are not appreciative of what they have," said David Lopez, a track worker in a train yard as he was, trotting off the PATH train from New Jersey.

"Trains are never on time and they still complaining about funding," he said. Riders like him suffered the consequences of delays, he said, calling the striking workers "greedy, greedy, greedy."

NJ governor says deal needs to be fair to employees and affordable

Murphy said it was important to "reach a final deal that is both fair to employees and at the same time affordable to New Jersey's commuters and taxpayers."

The announcement came after 15 hours of nonstop contract talks, according to the union.

NJ Transit — the nation's third-largest transit system — operates buses and rail in the state, providing nearly 1 million weekday trips, including into New York City. The walkout halts all NJ Transit commuter trains, which provide heavily used public transit routes between Penn Station on one side of the Hudson River and communities in northern New Jersey on the other, as well as the Newark airport, which has grappled with unrelated delays of its own recently.

The agency had announced contingency plans in recent days, saying it planned to increase bus service, but warned riders that the buses would only add "very limited" capacity to existing New York commuter bus routes in close proximity to rail stations and would not start running until Monday.

Amid uncertainty ahead of the strike, the transit agency canceled train and bus service for Shakira concerts Thursday and Friday at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey.

## **Trump suspends asylum system, leaving immigrants to face an uncertain future**

By TIM SULLIVAN Associated Press

They arrive at the U.S. border from around the world: Eritrea, Guatemala, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Ghana, Uzbekistan and so many other countries.

They come for asylum, insisting they face persecution for their religion, or sexuality or for supporting the wrong politicians.

For generations, they had been given the chance to make their case to U.S. authorities.

Not anymore.

"They didn't give us an ICE officer to talk to. They didn't give us an interview. No one asked me what happened," said a Russian election worker who sought asylum in the U.S. after he said he was caught with video recordings he made of vote rigging. On Feb. 26, he was deported to Costa Rica with his wife and young son.

On Jan. 20, just after being sworn in for a second term, President Donald Trump suspended the asylum system as part of his wide-ranging crackdown on illegal immigration, issuing a series of executive orders designed to stop what he called the "invasion" of the United States.

What asylum-seekers now find, according to lawyers, activists and immigrants, is a murky, ever-changing situation with few obvious rules, where people can be deported to countries they know nothing about after fleeting conversations with immigration officials while others languish in Immigration and Customs Enforcement custody.

Attorneys who work frequently with asylum-seekers at the border say their phones have gone quiet since Trump took office. They suspect many who cross are immediately expelled without a chance at asylum or are detained to wait for screening under the U.N.'s convention against torture, which is harder to qualify for than asylum.

"I don't think it's completely clear to anyone what happens when people show up and ask for asylum," said Bella Mosselmans, director of the Global Strategic Litigation Council.

Restrictions face challenges in court

A thicket of lawsuits, appeals and countersuits have filled the courts as the Trump administration faces off against activists who argue the sweeping restrictions illegally put people fleeing persecution in harm's way.

In a key legal battle, a federal judge is expected to rule on whether courts can review the administra-

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 63 of 70**

tion's use of invasion claims to justify suspending asylum. There is no date set for that ruling.

The government says its declaration of an invasion is not subject to judicial oversight, at one point calling it "an unreviewable political question."

But rights groups fighting the asylum proclamation, led by the American Civil Liberties Union, called it "as unlawful as it is unprecedented" in the complaint filed in a Washington, D.C., federal court.

Illegal border crossings, which soared in the first years of President Joe Biden's administration, reaching nearly 10,000 arrests per day in late 2023, dropped significantly during his last year in office and plunged further after Trump returned to the White House.

Yet more than 200 people are still arrested daily for illegally crossing the southern U.S. border.

Some of those people are seeking asylum, though it's unclear if anyone knows how many.

Paulina Reyes-Perrariz, managing attorney for the San Diego office of the Immigrant Defenders Law Center, said her office sometimes received 10 to 15 calls a day about asylum after Biden implemented asylum restrictions in 2024.

That number has dropped to almost nothing, with only a handful of total calls since Jan. 20.

Plus, she added, lawyers are unsure how to handle asylum cases.

"It's really difficult to consult and advise with individuals when we don't know what the process is," she said.

Doing 'everything right'

None of this was expected by the Russian man, who asked not to be identified for fear of persecution if he returns to Russia.

"We felt betrayed," the 36-year-old told The Associated Press. "We did everything right."

The family had scrupulously followed the rules. They traveled to Mexico in May 2024, found a cheap place to rent near the border with California and waited nearly nine months for the chance to schedule an asylum interview.

On Jan. 14, they got word that their interview would be on Feb 2. On Jan. 20, the interview was canceled.

Moments after Trump took office, U.S. Customs and Border Protection announced it had scrubbed the system used to schedule asylum interviews and canceled tens of thousands of existing appointments.

There was no way to appeal.

The Russian family went to a San Diego border crossing to ask for asylum, where they were taken into custody, he said.

A few weeks later, they were among the immigrants who were handcuffed, shackled and flown to Costa Rica. Only the children were left unchained.

Turning to other countries to hold deportees

The Trump administration has tried to accelerate deportations by turning countries like Costa Rica and Panama into "bridges," temporarily detaining deportees while they await return to their countries of origin or third countries.

Earlier this year, some 200 migrants were deported from the U.S. to Costa Rica and roughly 300 were sent to Panama.

To supporters of tighter immigration controls, the asylum system has always been rife with exaggerated claims by people not facing real dangers. In recent years, roughly one-third to half of asylum applications were approved by judges.

Even some politicians who see themselves as pro-immigration say the system faces too much abuse.

"People around the world have learned they can claim asylum and remain in the U.S. indefinitely to pursue their claims," retired U.S. Rep. Barney Frank, a longtime Democratic stalwart in Congress, wrote last year in the Wall Street Journal, defending Biden's tightening of asylum policies amid a flood of illegal immigration.

An uncertain future

Many of the immigrants they arrived with have left the Costa Rican facility where they were first detained, but the Russian family has stayed. The man cannot imagine going back to Russia and has nowhere else to go.

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 64 of 70**

He and his wife spend their days teaching Russian and a little English to their son. He organizes volleyball games to keep people busy.

He is not angry at the U.S. He understands the administration wanting to crack down on illegal immigration. But, he adds, he is in real danger. He followed the rules and can't understand why he didn't get a chance to plead his case.

He fights despair almost constantly, knowing that what he did in Russia brought his family to this place. "I failed them," he said. "I think that every day: I failed them."

## **US cable giants Charter and Cox, under assault by streaming services, pursue \$34.5 billion merger**

By MICHELLE CHAPMAN AP Business Writer

Charter Communications has offered to acquire Cox Communications, a \$34.5 billion merger that would combine two of the top three cable companies in the U.S.

Cox is the third largest cable television company in the country, with more than 6.5 million digital cable, internet, telephone, and home security customers. It has a strong foothold in states spanning from California to Virginia. Charter Communications, known more widely as Spectrum, has more than 32 million customers in 41 states.

The cable industry has been under assault for years from streaming services like Disney, Netflix, Amazon and HBO Max, as well as internet plans offered by mobile phone companies. Comcast, which is of nearly equal size to Charter, spun off many of its cable television networks in November as consumers increasingly swap out their cable TV subscriptions for streaming platforms.

So-called "cord cutting" has cost the industry millions of customers and left them searching for ways to successfully compete.

Charter said Friday that it will acquire Cox Communications' commercial fiber and managed IT and cloud businesses. Cox Enterprises will contribute Cox Communications' residential cable business to Charter Holdings, an existing subsidiary partnership of Charter.

Cox Enterprises will own about 23% of the combined company's outstanding shares.

The transaction, which needs approval from Charter shareholders as well as regulators, includes \$12.6 billion in debt.

"This merger exemplifies the strategic consolidation reshaping media and telecom," Scott Purdy, KPMG U.S. Media Industry Lead, Strategy, said in a statement. "By pooling resources, these companies will create scale, drive significant cost synergies, and strengthen their competitive positioning in a challenging market."

The proposed deal is one of the largest in over a year. Mars' announced a \$30 billion deal with Kellanova last summer and Exxon Mobil's approximately \$60 billion acquisition of Pioneer Natural happened in late 2023.

The combined company will change its name to Cox Communications within a year after closing. It will keep Charter's headquarters in Stamford, Connecticut, and have a significant presence on Cox's Atlanta, Georgia campus following the closing.

After the deal is complete, Charter CEO Chris Winfrey will become president and CEO of the combined company. Cox CEO and Chairman Alex Taylor will serve as chairman.

Cox will be able to keep two directors on the 13-member board. Advance/Newhouse, which is part of Charter, will retain its two board members.

The transaction is expected to close at the same time as Charter's merger with Liberty Broadband, which was approved by Charter and Liberty Broadband stockholders in February.

Shares of Charter rose slightly in afternoon trading. Cox is a private company.



## Trump says Iran has a proposal from the US on its rapidly advancing nuclear program

By ZEKE MILLER and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

ABU DHABI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — U.S. President Donald Trump said Friday that Iran has an American proposal over its rapidly advancing nuclear program as negotiations between the two countries go on.

Trump's remarks represent the first time he's acknowledged an American proposal is with Tehran after multiple rounds of negotiations between U.S. Mideast envoy Steve Witkoff and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi.

Negotiations have gotten into the "expert" level — meaning the two sides are trying to see if they can reach any agreement on the details of any possible deal. But one major sticking point remains Iran's enrichment of uranium, which Tehran insists it must be allowed to do and the Trump administration increasingly insists the Islamic Republic must give up.

Trump discusses proposal on Air Force One

Trump made the comment aboard Air Force One as he ended his trip to the United Arab Emirates, the last stop on his three-nation tour of the Middle East that also included Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

At nearly every event he attended in the region, he insisted that Iran could not be allowed to obtain a nuclear bomb — something American intelligence agencies assess Tehran is not actively pursuing though its program is on the cusp of being able to weaponize.

A reporter asked Trump: "On Iran, has the U.S. given them a formal proposal? Has Steve Witkoff handed that over?"

"They have a proposal," Trump responded. "But most importantly, they know they have to move quickly, or something bad is going to happen."

Trump did not elaborate on the substance of the proposal and Iran did not immediately acknowledge having it.

On Thursday, Araghchi spoke to journalists at the Tehran International Book Fair and said that Iran did not have any proposal from the Americans yet.

Araghchi also criticized what he called conflicting and inconsistent statements from the Trump administration, describing them as either a sign of disarray in Washington or a calculated negotiation strategy. Witkoff at one point suggested that Iran could enrich uranium at 3.67%, then later began saying that all Iranian enrichment must stop.

Friday night, Araghchi wrote on the social platform X: "Iran has not received any written proposal from the United States, whether directly or indirectly."

"In the meantime, the messaging we—and the world—continue to receive is confusing and contradictory," he added. "Mark my words: there is no scenario in which Iran abandons its hard-earned right to enrichment for peaceful purposes."

Talks have been held in Oman and Rome

Iranian and American officials have been in Oman and Rome for the negotiations, always mediated by Oman's Foreign Minister Badr al-Busaidi, a trusted interlocutor between the two nations. The talks seek to limit Iran's nuclear program in exchange for the lifting of some of the crushing economic sanctions the U.S. has imposed on the Islamic Republic, closing in on half a century of enmity.

Trump has repeatedly threatened to unleash airstrikes targeting Iran's program if a deal isn't reached. Iranian officials increasingly warn that they could pursue a nuclear weapon with their stockpile of uranium enriched to near weapons-grade levels. Meanwhile, Israel has threatened to strike Iran's nuclear facilities on their own if it feels threatened, further complicating tensions in the Mideast already spiked by the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip.

## ICC prosecutor Karim Khan steps aside pending outcome of sexual misconduct investigation

By MOLLY QUELL Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — The chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court has stepped down temporarily pending the outcome of an investigation into allegations of sexual misconduct, the court announced Friday.

Karim Khan has categorically denied accusations that he tried for more than a year to coerce a female aide into a sexual relationship and groped her against her will.

The ICC's announcement was welcomed by women's rights groups, who had called for Khan to step down after the allegations emerged last year.

"In any other professional setting, someone facing such serious allegations would have been expected to step down months ago," said Eimear Shine, a spokesperson for The Hague-based Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice.

An investigation by The Associated Press last year found that two court employees, in whom the alleged victim confided, reported the alleged misconduct in May 2024 to the court's independent watchdog. That was a few weeks before Khan sought arrest warrants against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, his defense minister and three Hamas leaders on war crimes charges.

The watchdog said it interviewed the woman and ended its inquiry after five days when she opted against filing a formal complaint. Khan himself wasn't questioned at the time.

While the watchdog could not determine wrongdoing, it nonetheless urged Khan in a memo to minimize contact with the woman to protect the rights of all involved and safeguard the court's integrity.

The ICC statement on Friday said Khan "communicated his decision to take leave until the end" of an external investigation being carried by the Office of Internal Oversight Services, the U.N. internal watchdog.

The court's deputy prosecutors will be in charge of managing the prosecutor's office while Khan is on leave, the statement said.

The work of the court will continue, according to Danya Chaikel, the ICC representative from the International Federation for Human Rights. "The cases and investigations have been carried out by professionals," she told the AP.

U.S. President Donald Trump's administration filed sanctions against Khan in February in relation to his Israel warrants. The sanctions are hampering work on a broad array of investigations at the court.

## Singer Chris Brown's tour in question as UK judge orders him into custody on assault charge

By BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Grammy-winning singer Chris Brown's upcoming tour was thrown into question Friday as a British judge ordered him held in custody while facing allegations that he beat a music producer with a bottle in a London nightclub in 2023.

Brown, 36, appeared in Manchester Magistrates' Court to face one count of causing grievous bodily harm and was ordered held until his next hearing June 13 in London — the same day he's due to take the stage in Frankfurt, Germany, on the third date of his world tour.

Judge Joanne Hirst rejected Brown's bail request after prosecutor Hannah Nicholls said that the crime was "extremely serious."

Brown was on tour in the U.K. in February 2023 when he launched an unprovoked attack on producer Abe Diaw, striking him several times with a bottle at the Tape nightclub in the swanky Mayfair neighborhood in London, Nicholls said. Brown then chased Diaw and punched and kicked him in an attack caught on surveillance camera in front of a club full of people, she said.

Defense attorney Grace Forbes argued that the American performer wasn't a flight risk and should be released.

Brown was flanked by court officers in the dock. His hair was bleached blonde and he wore sweatpants

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 67 of 70**

and a black T-shirt. He confirmed his name and birth date, and said that his address was the local Lowry Hotel, where he was arrested early Thursday and taken into custody.

His case was transferred to Southwark Crown Court in London, where he is expected to enter a plea to the charge.

Brown's representative didn't immediately respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press.

Brown, often called by his nickname Breezy, burst onto the music scene as a teen in 2005 and has become a major hitmaker over the years with notable songs such as "Run It," "Kiss Kiss" and "Without You."

He won his first Grammy for best R&B album in 2011 for "F.A.M.E." and then earned his second gold trophy in the same category for "11:11 (Deluxe)" earlier this year.

The singer is due to launch an international tour next month with artists Jhene Aiko, Summer Walker and Bryson Tiller, opening with a European leg on June 8 in Amsterdam before starting North America shows in July.

## **54 people killed in overnight airstrikes on southern Gaza city, hospital says**

By MOHAMMAD JAHJOUH and TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip (AP) — Multiple airstrikes hit Gaza's southern city of Khan Younis overnight into Thursday, killing more than 50 people in a second consecutive night of heavy bombing, while another airstrike in the north of the Palestinian territory left more than a dozen people dead, authorities said.

The strikes come as U.S. President Donald Trump visits the Middle East, visiting Gulf states but not Israel. There had been widespread hope that Trump's regional visit could usher in a ceasefire deal or renewal of humanitarian aid to Gaza. An Israeli blockade of the territory is now in its third month.

An Associated Press cameraman in Khan Younis counted 10 airstrikes on the city overnight into Thursday, and saw numerous bodies taken to the morgue in the city's Nasser Hospital. It took time to identify some of the bodies due to the extent of their injuries. The hospital's morgue confirmed 54 people had been killed.

The Israeli military had no immediate comment on the strikes.

It was the second night of heavy bombing, after airstrikes Wednesday on northern and southern Gaza killed at least 70 people, including almost two dozen children.

Another strike in Jabaliya in northern Gaza hit a complex including a mosque and a small medical clinic, killing 13 people, said the Civil Defense, a first responder agency operating under Gaza's Hamas-run government.

Mourning for the dead in Khan Younis

In Nasser Hospital, Safaa Al-Najjar, her face stained with blood, wept as the shroud-wrapped bodies of two of her children were brought to her: 1 1/2-year-old Motaz Al-Bayyok and 1 1/2 month-old Moaz Al-Bayyok.

The family was caught in the overnight airstrikes. All five of Al-Najjar's other children, ranging in ages from 3 to 12, were injured, while her husband was in intensive care.

One of her sons, 11-year-old Yusuf, his head heavily bandaged, screamed in grief as the shroud of his younger sibling was parted to show his face.

"I gave them dinner and put them to sleep as usual, it was a normal day. Suddenly I don't know what happened, the world went upside down," she said as others tried to comfort her. "I don't know, I don't know ... what is their fault? What is their fault?"

Outside the hospital, mourners gathered to pray as the dead, laid out in rows in white body bags, were loaded onto a truck to be taken for burial.

Israel has vowed to escalate the war

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed earlier in the week to push ahead with a promised escalation of force in Israel's war in the Gaza Strip to pursue his aim of destroying the Hamas militant group, which governs Gaza.

In comments released by Netanyahu's office Tuesday, the prime minister said Israeli forces were days

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 68 of 70**

away from entering Gaza "with great strength to complete the mission ... It means destroying Hamas."

International rights group Human Rights Watch said Thursday that Israel's stated plan of seizing Gaza and displacing hundreds of thousands of people "inches closer to extermination," and called on the international community to speak out against it.

The war began when Hamas-led militants killed 1,200 people in an Oct. 7, 2023 intrusion into southern Israel. Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed more than 53,000 Palestinians, many of them women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not say how many were combatants. Almost 3,000 have been killed since Israel broke a ceasefire on March 18, the ministry said.

The Health Ministry said Thursday morning that the bodies of 82 people killed in Israeli strikes, including the 54 in Khan Younis, had been brought to hospitals in the past 24 hours. The overall Palestinian death toll rose to 53,010, with another 119,998 people wounded.

Hamas still holds 58 of the roughly 250 hostages it took during its Oct. 7 attack on Israel, with 23 believed to still be alive, although Israeli authorities have expressed concern for the status of three of those.

Gaza's only hospital providing cancer treatments out of service due to Israeli strikes

Gaza's Health Ministry said Thursday that Israeli strikes have rendered the European Hospital Khan Younis — the only remaining facility providing cancer treatments in Gaza — out of service due to severe damage to its infrastructure and access roads.

The shutdown halts all specialized treatments, including cardiac surgeries and cancer care, the ministry added.

The Israeli military conducted two airstrikes against the European Hospital on Tuesday, saying it was targeting a Hamas command center beneath the facility. Six people were killed in the strike.

European Hospital director Imad al-Hout told AP there had been 200 patients in the hospital at the time of Tuesday's strikes. They were all gradually evacuated, with the last 90 transferred to other hospitals, including Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis, on Wednesday morning. Efforts were now underway to coordinate repairs to the facility, he added.

Israeli blockade of aid into Gaza in its third month

Palestinians in northern Gaza lined up Thursday near areas under Israeli bombardment in a desperate attempt to obtain food, as Israel's aid blockade entered its third month.

At the charity kitchen set up atop piles of rubble in Beit Lahia, dozens of Palestinians stood in a crowded line, pressing against one another, holding empty pots and plastic containers high in the air in hopes of receiving vegetable soup.

Um Abed, who is displaced with 20 family members, waited in line from 9 a.m. and went home empty-handed for the second day in a row as the number of people far exceeded the available food.

"I have a 3-year-old child who's crying all day because he wants to eat ... we want them to stop the war and to allow food in," Um Abed cried and yelled as she held up her empty pot to the camera.

Israel's offensive has obliterated vast swaths of Gaza's urban landscape and displaced 90% of the population, often multiple times. It halted the entry of all aid, including food and medication, into the territory on March 2, and international food security experts have warned that Gaza will likely fall into famine if Israel doesn't lift its blockade and stop its military campaign.

Nearly half a million Palestinians are facing possible starvation while 1 million others can barely get enough food, according to findings by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, a leading international authority on the severity of hunger crises.

Israeli government spokesman David Mencer on Thursday denied there was a food shortage in Gaza and claimed Hamas was "holding onto it ... they need to open up the food to the people."

Human Rights Watch said Israel's plan to seize Gaza and remain there, coupled with the "systematic destruction" of civilian infrastructure and the block on all imports into the territory, were cause for signatories to the Genocide Convention to act to prevent Israel's moves. The group also called on Hamas to free the hostages it still holds.

Israel vehemently denies accusations that it is committing genocide in Gaza.



# Groton Daily Independent

Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 69 of 70

## After Putin is a no-show at talks in Turkey, Trump says he'll meet the Russian leader soon

By ZEKE MILLER and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

ABU DHABI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — President Donald Trump said Friday he's moving to set up direct talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin as soon as he can, after Putin opted to skip peace talks between Russia and Ukraine in Turkey.

"I think it's time for us to just do it," Trump told reporters as he wrapped a four-day visit to the Middle East.

Trump later told reporters after boarding Air Force One to begin the journey back to Washington that he may call Putin soon.

"He and I will meet, and I think we'll solve it or maybe not," Trump said. "At least we'll know. And if we don't solve it, it'll be very interesting."

Trump reiterated that he wasn't surprised that Putin skipped out on the talks set for Friday in Turkey. Putin didn't want to go because he's not there, Trump said.

The Republican president added that he would hold a meeting with Putin "as soon as we can set it up."

"I would actually leave here and go," said Trump, who noted his daughter Tiffany just gave birth to her first child. "I do want to see my beautiful grandson."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy agreed to take part in the talks as Trump pressed for the leaders to find a solution to the war, ongoing since Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. But Putin spurned the call to meet face-to-face with Zelenskyy.

Trump has pressed both sides to quickly come to a war-ending agreement. Zelenskyy has agreed to an American plan for an initial 30-day halt to hostilities, but Russia has not signed on and has continued to strike at targets inside Ukraine.

Still, Russia and Ukraine were holding their first direct peace talks in three years Friday, gathering in Istanbul for negotiations. Officials and observers expect them to yield little immediate progress on stopping the more than 3-year-old war.

"He didn't go, and I understand that," Trump said. "We're going to get it done. We got to get it done. Five thousand young people are being killed every single week on average, and we're going to get it done."

Trump on Thursday told reporters that a meeting between himself and Putin was crucial to breaking the deadlock.

"I don't believe anything's going to happen, whether you like it or not, until he and I get together," Trump said. "But we're going to have to get it solved because too many people are dying."

## Today in History: May 17

### Supreme Court strikes down school segregation

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Saturday, May 17, the 137th day of 2025. There are 228 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On May 17, 1954, a unanimous U.S. Supreme Court handed down its *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision, which held that racially segregated public schools were inherently unequal and therefore unconstitutional.

Also on this date:

In 1792, the Buttonwood Agreement, a document codifying rules for securities trading, was signed by 24 New York stockbrokers, marking the formation of the New York Stock Exchange.

In 1875, the first Kentucky Derby was held; the race was won by Aristides, ridden by jockey Oliver Lewis.

In 1946, President Harry S. Truman seized control of the nation's railroads, delaying — but not preventing — a threatened strike by engineers and trainmen.

In 1973, a special committee convened by the U.S. Senate began its televised hearings into the Water-

# Groton Daily Independent

**Saturday, May 17, 2025 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 70 of 70**

gate scandal.

In 1980, rioting that claimed 18 lives erupted in Miami after an all-white jury in Tampa acquitted four former Miami police officers of fatally beating Black insurance executive Arthur McDuffie.

In 1987, 37 American sailors were killed when an Iraqi warplane attacked the U.S. Navy frigate Stark in the Persian Gulf. (Iraq apologized for the attack, calling it a mistake, and paid more than \$27 million in compensation.)

In 2004, Massachusetts became the first U.S. state to allow same-sex marriages.

In 2015, a shootout erupted between members of motorcycle clubs and police outside a restaurant in Waco, Texas, leaving nine of the bikers dead and 20 people injured.

Today's Birthdays: Musician Taj Mahal is 83. Boxing Hall of Famer Sugar Ray Leonard is 69. Sports announcer Jim Nantz is 66. Singer-composer Enya is 64. TV host-comedian Craig Ferguson is 63. Musician Trent Reznor (Nine Inch Nails) is 60. Actor Sasha Alexander is 52. Basketball Hall of Famer Tony Parker is 43. Screenwriter-actor-producer Lena Waithe is 41. Dancer-choreographer Derek Hough is 40. Former NFL quarterback Matt Ryan is 40. Actor Nikki Reed is 37.